

MUSIC FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE BODY AT THE CHURCH

(Advisory Committee on Church Music)

Good Practice Guideline for Music Ministers

INTRODUCTION

When Christians die, the Church intercedes on their behalf, confident that 'life is changed not ended'. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist. During the funeral rites, the Church on earth unites with the Church in heaven to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life. The ceremonies also bring hope and consolation to the living.

MINISTRY OF CONSOLATION

As a cantor, musician or organist, you are part of the ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Your music allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to uplift the mourners, to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love and to create a spirit of hope.

PLANNING

You may be involved with members of the family in planning sacred music and song for the funeral rites. In so doing you can console the mourners with words of faith and support. You are in a position to explain to the family the meaning and significance of the rites. The readings and prayers, psalms and songs that you choose, should be proclaimed or sung with understanding, conviction and reverence. Your music should be truly expressive of the texts and at the same time simple and easily sung. A member of the family may wish to become involved in the music. It is important not to ask loved ones to assume a role that their grief or sense of loss may make too burdensome.

SENSITIVITY

Take care to exercise your ministry of consolation in a reverent way, always keeping in mind the life of the deceased and the circumstances of death. Since music can evoke strong feelings, it should be chosen with great sensitivity. If you are thinking of including a piece of non-religious music, it is important that it is in harmony with our faith in the Lord's death and resurrection and will contribute to the atmosphere of Christian worship. Secular music should not replace the sacred music which is part of the rite. Prayerful silence is also important and can permit the assembly to reflect upon the word of God and the meaning of the celebration.

RITE OF RECEPTION

Since the Church is the place where the community of faith assembles for worship, the rite of reception of the body at the Church has great significance.

Music is possible at four points in this simple liturgy.

The **Entrance Song** accompanies the Procession from the door of the Church and is complete when all are in place to continue with the liturgy. Participation in this may be helped by allowing, after the sprinkling of holy water, a large part of the congregation to get to their seats before the chief mourners, the coffin and the priest. If singing is not possible instrumental music is played (organ, harp, guitar etc. depending on availability of musicians) which can continue during the placing of Christian symbols.

The **Responsorial Psalm** is sung after the First Reading and many settings of appropriate psalms are available. The psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the readings, to express its grief and to praise the God. The psalms are rich in imagery, feeling and symbolism. They powerfully express the suffering and pain, the hope and trust of people of every age and culture. Above all the psalms sing of faith in God, of revelation and redemption. Since the psalms are songs, whenever possible, they should be sung.

The **Litany or Prayer of Intercession** is spoken or sung after the homily. The Litany used has a 'Lord have mercy' response. This will be enhanced if sung, using, for example, one of the Penitential Rite settings with which you, and your congregations, are familiar.

A Marian Hymn or the Salve Regina might be appropriate if the option of inclusion of the Hail Holy Queen is taken up during the Concluding Rite according to local custom.

The use of instrumental music as the assembly offer their sympathies is always appreciated and contributes to the warmth of the ceremony.

RESOURCES

The music at this celebration can be effectively led by a Cantor with the support of an instrumentalist. Parishes are encouraged to put this kind of structure in place so that the bereaved can then make choices from the availability repertoire of the parish community without too much difficulty.

Full music resources and laminated cards for congregational participation are offered in **Music for the Reception of the Body at the Church** published by Veritas in 1998. This project was undertaken by the National Advisory Committee on Church Music.

