

A SCHOOL'S GUIDE TO MUSIC AT MASS

WHY IS MUSIC IMPORTANT?

Singing brings a richness to our worship. As St Augustine said 'singing is for one who loves'. The different energy required makes singing a sign of personal commitment, and the beauty and dignity of the hymn add to the importance of what is taking place. It wouldn't be right to say the words of 'Happy Birthday to you' instead of singing them, and we should also encourage the feeling that there is something wrong if the key texts of the Mass are said and not sung.

MAKE YOUR SINGING REAL

In order to make our worship more truly authentic the Church urges us to avoid pre-recorded music. If your school does not already have staff or students capable of accompanying your singing, you might find that there is a parish musician available and willing to support you with music for Mass. In the meantime, it is generally more honest and true to the liturgy to sing unaccompanied rather than to use pre-recorded backing tracks.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR SINGING AT MASS?

The most important things for us to sing are the key acclamations of the Mass.

In the Liturgy of the Word we should sing:

- the Acclamation before the Gospel.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we should sing:

- the Sanctus (Holy, Holy);
- the Memorial Acclamation;
- the Great Amen;
- the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

This means that, in the first place, we should focus on singing the given parts of the Mass, before we think of singing anything else. The other hymns – entrance, offertory and communion, and the final hymn if there is to be one – are easier to do (because they are often well known) but the parts of the Mass should be pre-eminent.

The revision of the English words of the Mass has meant that teachers and those who provide music in school Masses have to use settings which they did not themselves learn at school. This is one reason why the Mass texts are often not sung. Looking around the diocese we have found that the most popular settings in schools are:

- **Mass of Christ the Saviour** (Dan Schutte);
- **Stella Mass** (Chris Walker, available from the Clifton Diocese Music Service);
- **The Gathering Mass** (Paul Inwood, but make sure you have the new words).

If your school is attached to a parish church it is worth finding out what settings the church uses, as you will be able to share resources and both children and congregation will be able to sing. Other texts which have priority over hymns include the Gloria (Glory to God) - when appropriate - and the Responsorial Psalm. You can choose a setting from the collection of Common Psalms if you have not learnt a setting of the Psalm of the day. **Don't substitute a song which is not a psalm.**

The Roman Rite of Mass does not envisage a final hymn. The dismissal is taken seriously! On the other hand, music here can help maintain prayer and reverence as people leave. Why not experiment and see what works best for you?

SCHOOLS & PARISHES CAN HELP EACH OTHER

As we've already said, schools and parishes can have a shared repertoire of the hymns and Mass settings. Schools generally sing these hymns less regularly than parishes do, so children attending the local parish will already know the hymns. Most primary schools have a dedicated prayer and praise time when they can learn new hymns, so schools can help parishes prepare to introduce new hymns and settings. Secondary schools might find other opportunities for hymn practice such as school or class assemblies. Collaboration shows that Church is bigger than school or parish alone.