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Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington

GUIDE FOR ENGAGED COUPLES CONCERNING THE USE OF LITURGICAL MUSIC DURING THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

In the Sacrament of Christian Marriage, the Church celebrates one of God's great gifts to His people - the gift of faithful love. It is more than the simple celebration of a love shared by two individuals. It is a joyous celebration of God's own faithfulness, a profound celebration of His intimate union with two individuals and with His entire Church.

The Sacrament of Christian Marriage is a communal celebration which takes place in God's house, witnessed by family and friends. It is a public promise of faithful love by both the couple and the Church. In the exchange of vows, two individuals pledge their undying and steadfast love to each other. In so doing, they transform their shared love and unite it with the love of the Creator and Savior. In so doing, they transcend their individual identities and are united in the spiritual realities of creation and salvation which the Church symbolizes.

Music is another of God's great gifts. It enhances the expression of our deepest emotions. Appropriate music for this spiritual celebration is of the utmost importance and must be chosen thoughtfully. The music which is shared in the Sacrament of Christian Marriage expresses not just the love of the couple for each other but, just as importantly, the love of God for them and for all His people.

Most couples feel unprepared to choose from among the wealth of beautiful wedding music available to them. This brochure has been prepared to advise you of the help which your parish musician can provide and to answer some typical questions concerning music for your wedding liturgy.

1. How can we be sure that the music we choose for our wedding will be appropriate?

Your parish musician is a valuable resource and will help you to plan the music for your wedding liturgy. He or she can guide you through all aspects of choosing music which will express the gift of faithful love you celebrate in your marriage.

2. How far in advance should we consult our parish musician to plan our wedding music?

Your parish musician should be contacted as soon as you have confirmed the date for your wedding with your pastor. Initially, he or she will assist you in the selection of a vocalist and, if you wish, instrumentalists. Specific decisions concerning the selection of songs and other instrumental music will be done at a later date.

3. Is it appropriate to use other instruments besides the organ during our wedding liturgy?

Other instruments (such as trumpet, flute, harp or guitar) are often used at wedding liturgies and can add to the musical dimension. Your parish musician will give you advice concerning how best to use other instruments and also make suggestions about individual instrumentalists.

4. We have a song which is "special" for us. May we request that it be sung at our wedding liturgy?

The wedding liturgy is concerned with the spiritual dimension of love. Songs sung at this liturgy must be religious in nature expressing not only your love for each other, but also the love of God - the source of all love. Secular music (music which was composed for Broadway or a top-40 song) is not permitted for the wedding ceremony.

5. Could our "special" song be sung before the wedding liturgy begins or played as prelude music?

Prelude music and songs before the wedding liturgy set the tone for the Sacrament of Christian Marriage which is about to take place. Secular music which is not permitted during the wedding liturgy would also not be permitted for prelude music.

6. But our "special" song was sung at my cousin's wedding. Why can't it be sung at ours?

While secular music has been used at times in some parishes, it has never been permitted. Church guidelines do not permit the use of secular music in the wedding liturgy.

7. Is it possible to have a friend or relative sing at our wedding?

The musical demands of a Catholic wedding liturgy are quite complex, requiring considerable expertise to be done well. Your parish musician can advise you concerning parish policy on this matter and whether this person is the best choice.

8. May we hire another organist or musical group not associated with our parish?

Some parishes have contractual agreements and/or policies concerning the use of anyone other than your parish organist or parish musicians at weddings. Your pastor can advise you in this matter.

July 1, 2006

The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Burlington

Reverend John J. McDermott
Chancellor