



Encouraging Liturgical Participation Through Music

Building and Maintaining a Music Ministry

Introduction

The Disciple Maker Index Survey offers parishioners the opportunity to provide their feedback on their parish and the Sunday experience. These questions can help your parish understand opportunities to develop in creating a vibrant liturgy experience. One of these statements is: “My parish helps me grow spiritually by offering music that deepens my desire to participate more fully in the Sunday liturgy”. The survey is asking how strongly we feel about this statement from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The keys to a vibrant Sunday experience are the three “H’s”: Hospitality, Homilies and **Hymns**. The music portion is grounded in scripture and in tradition. In fact, through the Holy Spirit we are compelled to lift our voices. As song leaders, our objective is to be drowned out by the singing of the congregation. Unfortunately, the music ministries at many parishes are struggling with a lack of congregational participation.

The following provides an overview and specific strategies for **Building & Maintaining a music ministry** that encourages liturgical participation and spiritual growth.

Build ensembles based on talents

Catholic Parishes generally offer multiple weekend Masses. As a result, there is an opportunity to introduce a variety of musical styles across the weekend. Consider building ensembles based on the talents God presents rather than putting people into boxes that may not fit.

Benefits:

- More parishioners may participate in the Music Ministry if their talents are recognized.
- Parishioners often connect with different styles of music.

Model:

One model for varied ensembles that evolved across time:

❖ **Chancel Choir (Traditional Adult Ensemble)**

- The *Chancel Choir* serves at the 11:00am Sunday Mass. The core musical style is traditional in nature.

❖ **Sacred Sound (Adult Contemporary Ensemble):**

- *Sacred Sound* serves at the 5:30pm Saturday Mass. This vocal/instrumental group’s core musical style is Contemporary Christian Music. Members are also featured for



solo and ensemble preludes and reflection moments during the Mass.
Instrumentation includes: guitars, bass, keyboard, and percussion.

❖ **Grace Band (Young Adult Contemporary Ensemble):**

- *Grace* serves at the 5:30pm Sunday Mass. This group is comprised of teens and young adults with a core musical style of Contemporary Christian Music. Band Members are featured for solo and ensemble preludes and reflection moments during the Mass. Instrumentation includes: keyboards, percussion, guitar, violin, and cello.

❖ **Joy (Youth Ensemble):**

- The *Joy Youth Ensemble* serves at the 9:00am Sunday Mass. These talented youth sing and play Contemporary Christian Music, as well as Traditional Church Repertoire. Youth K through 6th grades are welcome.

❖ **The Son-Risers:**

- This group serves at the 7:30am Sunday Mass. Music is Traditional Church Repertoire. Instrumentation is piano/organ and guitar.

❖ **Ensemble Naming:**

- For team-building, promotional, and motivational purposes, consider discerning an ensemble name. For instance, at one of our parishes we had a parishioner family who lost a teenaged daughter. The Dad would come to the 5:30 pm Sunday Night Youth Mass because his daughter loved the music. When he came up to thank the group, he mentioned that his daughter's name was Grace. The group looked at each other and agreed that the ensemble's name had to be "Grace".

How-To's:

- ❖ Get to know your parishioners through meetings, social events, retreats and liturgies. What kind of music do they connect with? As Music Director, one set of experiences that shaped our decision on Contemporary Christian Music was the Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) Retreats. Each retreat had a Sacristan who selected and offered music for various elements of the weekend. At my parish, the majority of music played was Contemporary Christian. Attendees were various ages. We subsequently served on two travel teams bringing CRHP to other parishes and contemporary music remained a constant.
- ❖ Advertise through word of mouth and other media what you are looking for.
- ❖ Identify core volunteers/musicians that can direct and inspire.
- ❖ Ensure that the Pastor is on-board.
- ❖ Start slowly and build. Be patient.
- ❖ Be ready for push-back from the "we have always done it this wayers".
- ❖ Be sure that **you** are on-board. You may need to challenge yourself to be open.



Recruiting

Personal invitation has been most effective. Service at the Masses is the best advertisement. Appreciate other Liturgical Ministries identifying possible musicians during Masses and referring them.

Walk-ups after Mass are lovely moments of affirmation and encouragement.

How To's:

- ❖ Develop a brief communication of who you are looking for (e.g., singers, instrumentalists, voice part, etc.).
- ❖ Share your communication with the Music Ministry Members, as well as other ministries.
- ❖ Advertise through multi-media, including pulpit announcements.
- ❖ Be creative. Think about a short video invitation to the ministry on social media.
- ❖ Communicate testimonials from existing Music Ministry Members.
- ❖ Pray (always) for the Lord to provide.

Ministry Management & Development

How are you communicating with your Music Ministry Members? How are you supporting them in their faith and musically?

The experience you provide is crucial to attracting and retaining volunteers.

How To's:

- ❖ Apps like Planning Center for scheduling members and sharing music can be very helpful (<https://planning.center/>).
- ❖ Retreats for vocal development are motivating and beneficial to the overall balance and sound of the ensembles. Inviting local Music Directors and reciprocating can be an economical and motivating resource.
- ❖ The major Publishers like GIA, OCP and ILP also provide workshops and speakers.
- ❖ The National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) is an excellent resource for repertoire selections and musical development.
- ❖ **Musical Development:**
 - Erol Singer's Studio - <https://www.erolstudios.com/singers-studio-voice-and-ear-training/>
 - [Musictheory.net](https://www.musictheory.net/) - <https://www.musictheory.net/>
 - Piano & Guitar apps - there are a number of free piano & guitar apps that will allow you to rehearse pitches and intervals. Simply key in "free piano apps" or "free guitar apps" within your App Store.
 - YouTube - so many of you are using this robust resource for rehearsal of our hymns.



Be a Servant to the Servant of the Servants

So often, Priests and Pastors cringe when they think about working with Music Directors. Why, because many Music Directors come from an academic background and were trained to be precise, controlled, strive for excellence, be in control and the like.

We need to have a heart for priestly care. Our Pastor is our boss.

Make it a priority to build a solid relationship with your clergy, especially the Pastor. Your ministry values will play a huge role in your persona toward and in support of your priests. It can be challenging with Pastor styles ranging from indifference to music through micro-managing. However, it is crucial to build understanding, show respect and at the end of the day, reduce the number of complaints to the Pastor (at least related to music).

How To's:

- ❖ Pray for your priests.
- ❖ Be supportive.
- ❖ Do more listening than speaking. Silent and Listen have the same letters.
- ❖ If the Pastor has a musical request prayerfully consider it.
- ❖ Be patient when the Pastor is not always available to you and learn the best way and timing to communicate.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to use the phrase "I Need" with the Pastor. Don't assume he knows what you need.