

ST BRIGID OF KILDARE

A HANDBOOK

For

CANTORS

And

CHOIR MEMBERS

“In performing or in hearing music, many people experience a momentary uplifting of the soul to heavenly heights where the beauty and peace of God eternally reign. This transcendence of self is one of the aims of the sacred liturgy, and music is certainly meant to aid us in raising our souls to God - or better, allowing Him to raise us. The lesson we should learn is one of self-forgetfulness, self-effacement, the humility of those who reverently assist at the Holy Sacrifice: non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam: not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name give glory. If all the people were lifted to meditation on divine things because our music gave wings to their souls, then we musicians should thank God that they are no longer thinking of the melodies and the singers. ‘I must decrease, He must increase,’ said John the Baptist, forgetting himself, guiding his followers solely to Jesus Christ.”

From “Reflections on Sacred Music and Liturgy” by Peter Kwasniewski

*To You...The Cantors and Choir Members of
St. Brigid of Kildare Parish*

When you were baptized, God called you by name to give Him praise and to serve His people. You, the cantors and choir members of St. Brigid of Kildare, are answering that call. The clergy and the people of St. Brigid thank you for your commitment and your dedication to this ministry. This handbook is for you ... it comes with a prayer that the guidelines and suggestions contained in its pages will enable and enhance the wonderful work that you do.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

THE CANTOR

The cantor is the visual leader of song ... encouraging and assisting the assembly in the singing of the hymns and liturgy.

THE CHOIR MEMBER

In the celebration of the liturgy, the choir assumes several roles. One of these is supportive. Support: “to give strength to, to enable to last or continue,” is exactly what the choir does. It adds strength, “body,” and continuity to the celebration of the liturgy. It also provides filigree ... it beautifies with harmony, descant, and plaintive melody. The choir is a facilitator...the demeanor and bearing of the choir must be conducive to and inspire prayer and worship.

THE ORGANIST/PIANIST

The organist/pianist has a dual role. When the assembly is participating in the singing of hymns and liturgy, the organist/pianist becomes leader. When the cantor is intoning a psalm or the choir is singing an anthem, the organist/pianist becomes the accompanist.

THE PRELUDE AND POSTLUDE

The organ prelude sets the tone for the Mass. The pieces played are chosen to compliment the scriptures, the theme of the day, and/or the hymns.

The purpose of the prelude is to help people to pray. During the prelude, please enter the choir loft quietly and observe prayerful silence while the prelude is being played. For Masses in which the organ is the instrument being used, the prelude begins ten minutes prior to the Mass.

The postlude is not part of the Mass but can be a nice addition at the end of the celebration. Music for postludes is usually fairly intricate, requiring intense concentration. Loud conversation, shouting to be heard above the organ, attempts at conversation with the organist, all make concentration nearly impossible, resulting in frustration for the musician who has practiced for many hours. If you are in the choir loft and would like to listen to the music, please stay and quietly enjoy.

THE USE OF MICROPHONES AND THE CHOIR

In the choir loft, microphones are used when the choir sings anthems or when solos are being sung. The microphones are turned off when the congregation participates in the singing.

SCHEDULES FOR CANTORS

Cantors are scheduled three times per year: September through December; January through May, and June through August. Schedules will be posted on the web page (www.stbrigidofkildare.org) and mailed to those who do not have access to the Internet.

Each cantor will receive a list of cantors with contact information. If you are unable to keep your scheduled date, please find a substitute from the list. Sending a “blanket” email (with a copy to the music director) is probably the fastest and easiest way of finding a substitute. Music schedules are sent with the cantors’ schedules.

CHOIR SCHEDULES

Music schedules, a calendar, and music packets are issued twice yearly (September and January) at the first rehearsal. Music schedules and the choir calendar are also posted on the Internet.

REHEARSALS

Attendance at choir rehearsals is expected. If you are unable to attend a rehearsal, please contact the music director and the choir director as soon as you know. If you need extra assistance in learning parts, don’t panic! To arrange an individual rehearsal: Cantors, contact the Music Director. Choir members, contact the Choir Director.

MUSIC AND PREPARATION

Make sure that you check the music schedules several weeks prior to the Mass for which you are singing. If there are pieces that are unfamiliar to you, and you would like assistance in learning them, the music director will be happy to rehearse with you. Be sure to make the arrangements at least one week prior to the Mass date for which you are scheduled. Please do not ask that hymns be changed.

THE HYMNS

Tempos: The tempo is set and maintained by the Organist/Pianist

Between Verses: In most cases, the following applies: Complete the last measure, 1 full measure in between, breathe, second verse.

Many contemporary hymns have “built-in” extra measures, usually tied notes following the last sung measure. When in doubt, please follow the lead of the organist/pianist.

SINGING IN PARTS AND USING DESCANTS

The use of parts and descants in hymns and sung liturgy can enhance the music and text and make them more meaningful to the congregation. Treat these options as a painter’s palette, and use them judiciously. The practice of singing parts and descants on every single verse of every hymn is akin to having chocolate cake for every single course of every meal! When parts are sung, make certain that the melody predominates.

HELPING THE CONGREGATION TO SING

At St. Brigid the congregation is encouraged to participate in singing the hymns and liturgy. The key word is “encourage.” Therefore, some suggestions:

- Know your music, so that you can maintain eye contact with the assembly. Looking down constantly at the music communicates a lack of confidence and a sense of separation from the assembly.
- If you perceive that the assembly is not singing, try backing away from the microphone. Remember...the cantor’s role is to encourage and assist the assembly. If the cantor voice is predominant, it will be perceived as performance, and the assembly will listen, rather than participate.
- If there is more than one vocalist, and a descant is sung, make sure that the descant does not overpower the melody.

The Celebration In Word and Song

BEFORE THE MASS BEGINS

Please arrive at least 20 minutes prior to the Mass start time. If you have not warmed up please go directly to the undercroft to do so. (Warmup for the choir is 8:15 Sundays, or 45 minutes prior to the scheduled Mass).

If you have questions for the music director/organist/pianist, please ask them at this time. Conferencing during the Mass will cause the organist/pianist to lose concentration, resulting in errors that interrupt the flow of the Mass. Be sure to check the cantor's book, on the music stand next to the piano. If you prefer to use your own music, that is very acceptable. However, there may be additional notes in the cantors' book which you will need to transfer.

THE ENTRANCE RITE

The priest or deacon will signal for the start of the Mass. After the Commentator has completed the opening announcement, announce the opening hymn: "Please join in singing (Example) Hymn number 527 in the Music Issue, "Gather Your People"...number 527.

- Speak slowly and distinctly into the microphone. A good rule of thumb: If your speech sounds slightly too slow to you, it is probably just about right for the congregation.
- Note: Occasionally, additional announcements (for example, "Please join in singing all of the Gloria, including the verse") are necessary. These should be made before announcing the opening hymn.

THE PENITENTIAL RITE

The Kyrie (Lord have mercy) is spoken. If the presider uses the **Confiteor** ("I confess to almighty God"), the Kyrie immediately follows.

THE GLORIA

The Gloria follows the Kyrie except during Advent and Lent. At St. Brigid, the congregation is encouraged to sing the entire Gloria, not just the refrain.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

THE PSALM

- One of the key roles of the cantor is that of psalmist. The psalms are songs of the Bible. That is why they are to be sung. Because they are the word of God, they are to be sung from the ambo.
- After the first reader returns to his/her seat, walk to the top of the sanctuary steps, bow in front of the Gospel Book on the altar and take your place at the ambo. The music will have been placed there prior to the Mass. Please do not take it with you. If you do not see it on the ambo, there is an extra copy inside the ambo.
- Take time to adjust your microphone and music. The organist/pianist will begin the introduction when you are ready. If there is more than one vocalist, only the one at the ambo will bring the assembly in.
- When the psalm is completed, proceed back to your seat by walking to the front of the altar, bow, walk to the bottom of the steps and return to your seat.

THE GOSPEL

- The Gospel Acclamation includes a sung Alleluia, except during Lent. This is happy music...let your joy be contagious!
- If there is more than one vocalist: Descants and parts should be limited to the final Alleluia.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

THE PREPARATION HYMN

During this time, a hymn or choir anthem may be sung, or an instrumental piece played. It is important to allow this ritual to be whole.

Therefore, timing is important. The music may need to be lengthened or shortened, so that it is completed by the time the presider washes his hands. Follow the lead of the pianist/organist.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER/ACCLAMATIONS

During this time, the cantor should remain at the microphone, but stay turned toward the altar and focused on the liturgy. The Lamb of God begins when the presider returns to the altar and begins breaking the bread.

THE COMMUNION

- The cantor and instrumentalists may receive Communion with the Eucharistic ministers. During the Lamb of God, choir members will proceed from the choir loft, down the center aisle, receiving communion immediately after the Eucharistic ministers receive.
- The organist/pianist will begin the communion hymn when the presider partakes of the Cup, improvising softly until the Eucharistic ministers have received communion, and distribution to the assembly begins. At that time, announce the hymn.
- When possible only one hymn will be sung during communion. In order to extend the hymn for the duration of the communion ritual, the organist/pianist will improvise softly on the hymn between verses. The communion hymn ends when the last communicant receives. * Soft instrumental music continues until the altar is cleared, and the presider returns to his chair.
- If a communion reflection hymn or a hymn of praise is to be sung, it will take place at this point. These are sung with the assembly.
- When the choir is present, an anthem replaces the reflection hymn or hymn of praise.

- When a hymn of praise/ reflection hymn or choir anthem is sung, the closing hymn is replaced with instrumental music or silence. There is no postlude. *
- * In compliance with diocesan directives for implementing the new GIRM

Housekeeping

- Make sure that the cantor's book is on the stand.
- Following 10:45 Mass: If more than one microphone has been used please put away all but one microphone.
- Put away extra music stands. Move the podium to its usual place.
- If you have borrowed music pages, please replace them in the correct books in the proper places.

... "Worship the Lord with cries of gladness;
 Come before him with joyful song.
 Know that the Lord is God,
 Our maker to whom we belong,
 Whose people we are, God's well-tended flock,
 Enter the temple gates with praise,
 It's courts with thanksgiving."
Psalm 100:2-4

