



LEADING SINGING WITHOUT ACCOMPANIMENT

A resource to help parish musicians
lead singing without accompaniment
when they need to



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Introduction

Many parishes have difficulties in finding instrumentalists to accompany the singing at Mass. As an alternative, it is possible to have the congregation sing without accompaniment provided there are competent leaders to support them.

This resource explains why it is important for the people to sing at Mass and discusses some of the practical issues associated with singing without accompaniment.

There is a list of examples of music that are suitable for singing without accompaniment at the end of the resource. These have been chosen because they are simple to sing and do not depend on an accompaniment to support the singing.

There are pieces of music (both traditional and contemporary) where the accompaniment is an essential piece of the music. Such pieces are not effective when they are sung without accompaniment, and examples of these have not been included.

The examples included are taken from the wide repertoire of liturgical music (and offer examples of music that are suitable to be sung unaccompanied and are easy enough for a cantor or choir to lead a cappella).

Why do we have singing in the Liturgy?

The following passages from *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explain the importance of singing in the liturgy and the roles of the ministers of music.

- *Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, ... every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on Holydays of Obligation. (The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 40)*
- *It is fitting that there should be a cantor or a choir director to direct and support the people's singing. Indeed, when there is no choir, it is up to the cantor to direct the different chants, with the people taking the part proper to them. (The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 104)*
- *By Mass with the people is meant a Mass celebrated with the participation of the faithful. Moreover, it is appropriate, insofar as possible, and especially on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation, that the celebration take place with singing and with a suitable number of ministers. (The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 115)*
- *Furthermore, it is desirable that an acolyte, a reader and a cantor should usually be there to assist the Priest Celebrant. (The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 116)*

Why Sing Without Accompaniment?

It may be necessary to sing without accompaniment because no accompanist is available to play, either on a particular occasion or all the time and the use of recorded is not an option. It can also happen that a power outage may occur and make it impossible to play an instrument.

Problems With Using Recorded Music

Technology is not always reliable and can fail unpredictably. There can be problems with the recording, for example, the musical range of the recording may be too high or too low for the people, or the tempo (speed) of the music may be too slow or too fast for the people. In some cases, the words of the recording may be different from the words you want to sing.

Problems With the People

If the people are not used to it, they may find singing without accompaniment difficult, because they are not used to following an unaccompanied voice or voices.

Preparing The Congregation

Singing without accompaniment cannot be a one-off event; it will need to be introduced gradually. The people will need to be educated about the practice of singing without accompaniment so that they understand why it is necessary.

Practical Issues that need to be considered

The leader(s) must know the music very well. They can change the key up or down to suit the assembly, but they have to make sure they start on the right note. If microphones are used, the leaders need to be loud enough to be heard but not so loud that the assembly cannot hear themselves.

If someone is going to conduct the singing, the hand movements need to be able to be followed easily.

Some pieces of music are better suited to singing a cappella than others, it will help for the leaders to learn songs with accompaniment before they lead the songs without accompaniment.

The Parts of the Mass

Priority should be given to singing the parts of the Mass. In order of importance, they are:

- Gospel Acclamation, Holy, Holy, Holy, Memorial Acclamation, the Great Amen;
- the Entrance Song, the Communion Song;
- the Responsorial Psalm;
- Lord, have mercy, Lamb of God, Our Father.

Singing Gospel Acclamations

The Gospel Acclamation is important and ought to be sung. The Alleluia is sung by the Cantor, then repeated by all. The verse is sung by the Cantor and then the Alleluia is sung by all. The verse may be chanted.

Seasonal Gospel Acclamations may be used and the tune of the Alleluia may be changed each liturgical season. The Alleluia is not used during Lent.

Singing Responsorial Psalms

The Responsorial Psalm ought to be sung. It should be sung from the ambo. The verses may be chanted. To make things easier for the people Seasonal Psalms and Responses may be used. Two cantors may be used for the Responsorial Psalm and for any other song in responsorial form.

Examples of Music that is suitable for singing without accompaniment

1. Chants from The Roman Missal

- Lord, have mercy (CWB II #4)
- Holy, Holy, Holy (CWB II #11)
- Memorial Acclamation (CWB II #12a, #12b or #12c)
- Great Amen (CWB II #13)
- Lord's Prayer (CWB II #14/15)
- Lamb of God (CWB II #17)

2. Gospel Acclamation

- CWB II #49
- Taize (CWB II #53)
- Lenten Gospel Acclamation (CWB II #54 or #59)

3. Taize Chants

Title	AOV1	AOV2	CWB	CWBII	GA
In the Lord I'll be ever thankful		109		522	
Jesus, Remember Me	152			526	
Kyrie	2				149
Laudate Dominum				531	
O Lord, Hear My Prayer	17				431
There is One Lord					346
Ubi caritas				634	
Wait for the Lord				251	283

4. Other hymns

Title	AOV1	AOV2	CWB	CWBII	GA
Abide with me		128		444	
Amazing Grace	29			450	437
A New Commandment			615	443	318
All the earth proclaim the Lord	184		611	447	534
A Trusting Psalm	115			293	455
Christ, be our Light		3		540	404
For the fruits of all creation				488	426
Humbly we adore thee			709	507	
Lord, to whom shall we go?	6			549	189
Lord, we come to your table				547	
May God bless and keep you	177			189b	441
O God, you search me		31		572	
Open my eyes	166			582	
Strong and constant	110		812	515	
The Servant Song		169		461	487
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord				610	
This is my will, my one command			842	626	465

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOV1	As One Voice (Volume 1)
AOV2	As One Voice (Volume 2)
CWB	Catholic Worship Book (out of print)
CWBII	Catholic Worship Book II
GA	Gather Australia (out of print)