

Sing to the Lord: An Examination of Conscience for Pastoral Musicians

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA asked his companions to spend some time each day reflecting on the positive aspects of how the day went before considering any negative parts. They were to ask first: “Where did I see or reveal the presence of Jesus today?” Only then were they to ask: “Where did I miss seeing Jesus or miss an opportunity to reveal Jesus, or where did I reveal what was not Jesus today?” The Jesuit practice called the “examination of conscience” is based on this custom.

In November 2007, the Latin Church Bishops in the United States gave us *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STL), a revision and expansion of the 1972 document *Music in Catholic Worship*, “to guide and oversee liturgical song in each particular church [and to] draw all who worship the Lord into the fullness of liturgical, musical prayer” (Foreword). A reflective, critical, and careful reading of this document offers a kind of examination of conscience for all of us who participate in, direct, and support sung worship. Because, as the bishops observe, “no other single fact affects the Liturgy as much as the attitude, style, and bearing of the priest celebrant” (STL, 18), NPM has offered such an examination to its clergy members. Here we offer a similar reflective guide for all pastoral musicians, whether we are members of the singing assembly; cantors, choirs, organists, and instrumentalists whose ministry serves the assembly; or directors of music ministry who “oversee the planning, coordination, and ministries of the parish or diocesan liturgical music program” (STL, 45). References in parentheses are to the appropriate paragraph(s) in *Sing to the Lord*.

For All Music Ministers

- Do I view my ministry as “a valued and integral part of the overall pastoral ministry of the parish or diocese” (52)?
- Do I serve with the sense of professionalism and of ministry that complement one another (48–53)?
- Do I value collaboration with the other music ministers in my parish as well as with the pastor, pastoral staff, and congregation (47)?
- Do I foster the active participation of the liturgical assembly (45)?
- Do I develop my musical skills and those of other liturgical musicians (50, 56)?
- Do I take time to practice and put resources into my continuing

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“Where did I miss seeing Jesus or an opportunity to reveal Jesus today?”

“Where did I reveal what was not Jesus today?”

Do I understand my service as a ministry rooted in baptism?

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Do I understand that as psalmist I proclaim the Word of God?

formation as a musician (43, 50, 56)?

- Do I promote a variety of musical styles—chant, music from our past, and music of contemporary composers—along with the music of various cultures (55, 57–60, 72–75, 81–83)?
- Do I promote the use of Latin in the liturgy and the singing of Gregorian chant (61–63)?
- Do I make judgments based on the ability of the congregation, willing to invite their growth and accept their limitations (60, 64, 82)?
- Do I understand the teachings of the Church and the structure of the liturgy (50, 110ff.)?
- Am I willing to be stretched to deepen my pastoral skills (50)?
- Do I understand my service as a ministry rooted in baptism (49, 52)?
- Do I take time to seek holistic formation in human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions (51)?

For Directors of Music Ministries

- Do I understand my role as working with the bishop, pastor, or liturgy director to oversee the planning, coordination, and ministries of the parish or diocese (45)?
- Do I value collaboration both with the ordained and with the community of the faithful (47)?
- Do I understand myself as a lay ecclesial minister (47)?
- Do I “coordinate the preparation of music to be sung at various liturgical celebrations” (45)?
- Do I view my ministry as “a valued and integral part of the overall pastoral ministry of the parish or diocese” (52)?
- Do I promote the ministries of choirs, psalmists, cantors, organists, and all instrumentalists in the liturgy (45)?
- Do I foster the active participation of the liturgical assembly and empower the musicians with whom I serve to do the same (45)?
- Do I see my ministry as rooted in the sacraments of initiation, as part of the communion of the Church, and in service of the Church’s mission (46)?

For Psalmists and Cantors

- Do I understand that the role of “psalmist” or “cantor of the psalm” is distinct from that of cantor (35)?
- Do I understand that as psalmist I proclaim the Word of God (35)?
- Do I proclaim the text with “clarity, conviction, and sensitivity” (35)?
- Do I proclaim the text with sensitivity not only to the text but also to the musical setting and to those who are listening (35)?
- Do I understand why the responsorial psalm is sung “from the

- ambo or another suitable place” (36)?
- Do I understand the difference between serving as cantor and as leader of congregational song (37)?
 - Am I familiar with the several duties of the cantor (37)?
 - As leader of congregational song, do I sing with the entire gathered assembly (38)?
 - Do I understand that my voice should not be heard above the congregation (38)?
 - Do I lead from a place where I can be seen and in ways that help the assembly find its voice (38–39)?
 - Do I use the microphone only when needed for the assembly to hear the verses of a psalm or song (38)?
 - Do I step away from the microphone when the assembly is singing and is the voice to be heard (38)?
 - Am I visible to the assembly when needed, without drawing attention away from the liturgical action (39)?
 - Do I understand why the cantor leads “from a conveniently located stand, but not from the ambo,” when exercising my ministry (40)?

For Choir Directors

- Do I understand that choral music must always be “appropriate to the Liturgy,” that is, drawn from a proper liturgical text or “expressing themes appropriate to the Liturgy” (30)?
- Am I conversant with the ritual and spiritual dimensions of liturgical music and the cultural context necessary for determining the appropriateness of music to serve the liturgy (67–71)?
- Do I use the “three judgments—one evaluation” to determine the appropriateness of music for the liturgy (126–136)?
- Am I familiar with the “structural and textual requirements of music set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite”—the liturgical judgment (127)?
- Do I ask whether a musical composition will draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration—the pastoral judgment (130)?
- Do I ask whether or not a composition is “technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy”—the musical judgment, which requires musical competence and is not the same as a judgment about musical style (134–135)?
- Do I affirm the value that the Church has placed on accepting styles of music from every period and culture (136)?

For Choirs

- Do we see our primary role as “enriching the celebration by adding musical elements beyond the capabilities of the congregation alone” (28)?

Do I understand that choral music must always be “appropriate to the Liturgy,” that is, drawn from a proper liturgical text or “expressing themes appropriate to the Liturgy”?

Do we understand that we are to participate in the entire liturgical celebration as “servants of the Liturgy and members of the gathered assembly”?

Do I see my primary role as leading and sustaining the singing of the assembly, choir, psalmist, or cantor without overpowering them?

- Do we join with the congregation in song when not exercising our particular role (31)?
- Do we understand that we are to participate in the entire liturgical celebration as “servants of the Liturgy and members of the gathered assembly” (32)?
- Do we minister in ways that do not “minimize the musical participation of the faithful” (28)?
- Do we understand one of our important ministerial roles as singing “various parts of the Mass in dialogue or alternation with the congregation” (29)?
- Do we “enrich congregational singing by adding harmonies and descants” (29)?
- Do we draw on the treasury of sacred music when we sing without the congregation in order to enrich the celebration by singing music in various styles and by composers of various periods that expresses the faith of various cultures (30)?
- Do we understand the times appropriate for singing choral anthems or other pieces for the choir alone are at the prelude before Mass; during the entrance, offertory, or Communion chants; after the reception of Communion; and at the recessional (30)?

For Organists and Instrumentalists

- Do I see my primary role as leading and sustaining the singing of the assembly, choir, psalmist, or cantor without overpowering them (41)?
- Do I understand that musical instruments in the liturgy are “best understood as an extension of and support for the primary liturgical instrument, the human voice” (86)?
- Am I able to improvise in ways that continue music until a ritual action is completed or that provide a prelude or meditation during the preparation of the gifts, a recessional if there is no closing song, or a postlude following the closing song (43–44)?
- If I am not able to improvise, do I learn quality published literature, according to my ability, for use in the liturgy at these times (43)?

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