

Question: Why is our parish now doing pieces of music that utilize the choir alone?

Answer: In short, because the authoritative documents on the matter from the Roman Catholic Church give us the authority and the responsibility to do so. We have a responsibility to bring our best to serve Him through song. Below is cited materials which walk you through how we are charged as a music ministry to serve.

Plainly stated, the role of the Assembly in singing is first and foremost to participation the parts of the Mass which are called the "Ordinary of the Mass". This includes the following:

- Kyrie
- Gloria
- Credo
- Sanctus (Including Benedictus and Hosanna)
- Agnus Dei

The role of the choir is to lead or to sing alone the Propers of the Mass which include:

- Introit
- Tract
- Offertory
- Communion

For example, this is exactly what was done at the Easter Vigil as all parts of the Proper were covered by the choir (and congregation) with 3 of the 5 choral anthems having congregational parts which were distributed to the assembly so that they could participate.

Here is additional information on the function of the Catholic Church Choir as stated by 4 of the most authoritative sources for our faith:

The 4 current major authorities on the role of Music of the Catholic Church in America have this to say about the purpose of choir:

1- The Bible

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. – Colossians 3:16

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." – Revelation 5:11-12

2- The GIRM

GIRM 95. In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people whom God has made his own, a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the spotless Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, and so that they may learn to offer themselves.<sup>[83]</sup> They should, moreover, endeavor to make this clear by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.

Thus, they are to shun any appearance of individualism or division, keeping before their eyes that they have only one Father in heaven and accordingly are all brothers and sisters to each other.

GIRM 103: Among the faithful, the schola cantorum or choir exercises its own liturgical function, ensuring that the parts proper to it, in keeping with the different types of chants, are properly carried out and fostering the active participation of the faithful through the singing.(footnote to Musicam Sacram 19) What is said about the choir also applies, in accordance with the relevant norms, to other musicians, especially the organist.

### 3- The Second Vatican Council

- MUSICAM SACRAM

Congregation for Divine Worship

INSTRUCTION ON MUSIC IN THE LITURGY

Sacred Congregation of Rites

5 March, 1967

9. In selecting the kind of sacred music to be used, whether it be for the choir or for the people, the capacities of those who are to sing the music must be taken into account. No kind of sacred music is prohibited from liturgical actions by the Church as long as it corresponds to the spirit of the liturgical celebration itself and the nature of its individual parts,<sup>[7]</sup> and does not hinder the active participation of the people.

10. In order that the faithful may actively participate more willingly and with greater benefit, it is fitting that the format of the celebration and the degree of participation in it should be varied as much as possible, according to the solemnity of the day and the nature of the congregation present.

11. It should be borne in mind that the true solemnity of liturgical worship depends less on a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial than on its worthy and religious celebration, which takes into account the integrity of the liturgical celebration

itself, and the performance of each of its parts according to their own particular nature. To have a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial is at times desirable when there are the resources available to carry them out properly; on the other hand it would be contrary to the true solemnity of the liturgy if this were to lead to a part of the action being omitted, changed, or improperly performed.

16. (c) Some of the people's song, however, especially if the faithful have not yet been sufficiently instructed, or if musical settings for several voices are used, can be handed over to the choir alone, provided that the people are not excluded from those parts that concern them. But the usage of entrusting to the choir alone the entire singing of the whole Proper and of the whole Ordinary, to the complete exclusion of the people's participation in the singing, is to be deprecated.

19. Because of the liturgical ministry it performs, the choir—or the Capella musica, or schola cantorum—deserves particular mention. Its role has become something of yet greater importance and weight by reason of the norms of the Council concerning the liturgical renewal. **Its duty is, in effect, to ensure the proper performance of the parts which belong to it**, according to the different kinds of music sung, and to encourage the active participation of the faithful in the singing.

4- Sing to the Lord (from the USCCB)  
- Page 18

**30. At times, the choir performs its ministry by singing alone.** The choir may draw on the treasury of sacred music, singing compositions by composers of various periods and in various musical styles, as well as music that expresses the faith of the various cultures that enrich the Church. **Appropriate times where the choir might commonly sing alone include a prelude before Mass, the Entrance chant, the Preparation of the Gifts, during the Communion procession or after the reception of Communion, and the recessional.** Other appropriate examples are given in the section of this document entitled “Music and the Structure of the Mass” (nos. 137 199). The music of the choir must always be appropriate to the Liturgy, either by being a proper liturgical text or by expressing themes appropriate to the Liturgy.