

Singing and cantoring at Canadian Martyrs

The role of the Cantor and of the choir is to help the congregation to sing well and confidently. We must sing in a way that encourages people to sing, but not so loudly that it covers their singing. In my experience when someone sings loudly into a microphone, congregants tend not to sing—it is as if people in the church feel that since someone else is already singing loudly, they do not need to participate.

Text and music flow

When singing, the text must always be very clear and the voice must be just loud enough without being overwhelming.

When singing the psalm and the gospel acclamation, the text is of the utmost importance. During the verses, the text must flow in a natural way, respecting the tonic accents and punctuations. The speed of delivery shall remain constant and not slow down on note changes.

As the psalms are not available in print for the congregation, the organist will first play the melody once, the cantor will then sing it alone once, after which the congregation will join for the first refrain.

To illustrate my thinking on text flow in the mass setting and the psalm I prepared two recordings, which are available at the links below. Please note, this was not my best singing day but it should illustrate my ideas anyway. Visit www.spotvin.ca/cm

Microphone(s)

Microphones are installed in the choir loft to help the voice(s) carry in the sanctuary. The proper volume must be set to provide audible support without overpowering the congregation's singing.

The cantor will sing close to the microphone for the psalm and the gospel acclamation, however s/he will sing slightly further away for the hymns to encourage the congregation to sing instead of only listening.

Start then back off

I have found the most effective method for congregational participation is to sing at the beginning of the Mass Ordinary or hymn then move away from the microphone once the assembly sings. If the music is new it may take a few times to teach the melody(ies).

Hymn announcements

The cantor or a member of the choir will invite the congregation to join in singing by announcing the hymns at communion and recession using the following format:

Please join in our *[specific]* hymn
In/from the *[book name]*
number *[spoken]*
[hymn title]
Number *[spelled out]*

Please join in our *recessional* hymn
in the *Catholic Book of Worship*
number *Two hundred and eleven*
On Eagles Wings
Number *Two, One, One*

Scores and references

Scores, mass settings, hymn listings, and reference documents are posted at www.spotvin.ca/cm

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Psalm and Gospel acclamation

Both the psalm and Gospel acclamation shall be sung from the front of the church. The psalm is sung from the ambo (where the Epistles are read) while the Gospel acclamation is sung from the lectern (where the announcements are made).

To ensure a smooth flow of readings and singing, the cantor will walk to the first left pew at the time of the opening prayer. When the first reading is completed, on the words *the word of the Lord/thanks be to God* slowly walk to the bottom of the stairs to meet the reader and bow together, then walk up to the ambo to sing.

Once the psalm is concluded, please descend the stairs, meet with the lecture at the bottom of the stairs and bow together, then go sit on the right side of the church. Following the same procedure as before, walk to the lectern to be ready to sing the Gospel acclamation.

At the end of the Gospel acclamation, the cantor can either remain at the lectern during the reading go the Gospel or return to the nave and return to the balcony after the reading of the Gospel.

Inviting the congregation to sing

To invite the congregation to sing, simply raise your hand, and with one gentle gesture, indicate to take a breath to sing, then put it down. Do not leave your hand and arm up.

Flow and tempo

As there is a slight delay between the organ playing and the sound reaching the front, pick the tempo given by the organist and simply move along. Do not wait for the next notes to reach you, sing in tempo and everything will meet perfectly in the nave.

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Mass order

Processional hymn Congregation

Lord have mercy Priest or cantor & congregation

Gloria (except during Advent and Lent) Congregation

Psalm Cantor & congregation

Gospel acclamation Cantor & congregation

Offertory hymn Congregation

Preface Priest

Holy, holy, holy Congregation

Memorial acclamation Priest & congregation

Great thanksgiving & Amen Priest & congregation

Lamb of God Congregation

Communion hymn Congregation

Recessional hymn Congregation