



CLARIFICATION ON LITURGICAL DANCE

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

Office of Worship

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From time to time, the Office of Worship receives inquiries regarding the appropriateness of liturgical dance in a church. While there are a variety of opinions regarding liturgical dance, we must turn to the Church's teaching and guidelines. To assist in this matter, the Office of Worship has contacted the Secretariat for Liturgy of the United States of Conference of Catholic Bishops for a definitive and clear answer to help bring resolution to this concern.

The USCCB Secretariat for Liturgy gave the following response.

Recalling the recently revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), it is important to be conscious of the need to take "due regard for the nature and the particular circumstances of each liturgical assembly, [so that] the entire celebration is planned in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful both in body and in mind." (GIRM, no. 18) Particular attention should be paid to the provisions of the new Roman Missal regarding gestures and movements at the Mass, which "ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered." (GIRM, no. 42)

The "nature and the particular circumstances" (GIRM, no. 18) of certain ethnic communities is also a consideration, particularly by Catholic immigrants from Zaire, where dance by the entire gathered assembly has been approved as a part of the liturgical books of their native land. The importance of a careful observance of the rubrics of such books for liturgical assemblies made up primarily of immigrants from Zaire must always be borne in mind.

The place of dance in the liturgy in other parish Masses, however, must always be examined in the light of the 1975 "qualified and authoritative sketch" published by the Holy See in the journal *Notitiae*. As you know, the article prescribes that in western cultures, dance "cannot be introduced into liturgical celebrations of any kind" and that when dances outside of the liturgy are envisioned, they may take place only "in assembly areas that are not strictly liturgical."

In a follow up conversation with the Secretariat for Liturgy, we asked for a specific definition of what is meant by "may take place only 'in assembly areas that are not strictly liturgical.'" They clarified that this is officially interpreted as the entire church proper (sanctuary and nave). Specifically, dance may not take place during the Sacred Liturgy or in the church. Certainly it could be used in prayer services other than the Sacred Liturgy that would occur outside the church.