



GUIDELINES FOR CONCERTS IN CHURCH

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

Office of Worship

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Church holds a vast and wonderful treasure of sacred and religious music that continually lifts the mind and heart to God. Sacred music, whether vocal or instrumental, has an integral place in our history and worship. The recent documents of Vatican II, namely, the Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Instruction *Musicam Sacram*, the Instruction *Liturgicae Instaurazione*, as well as the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law, Canons 1210, 1213 and 1222 treat of the integrity and importance of music in the life of the Church.

Some types of sacred music do not always have a proper place within the liturgical celebration. Gounod's "Sanctus" from the Mass of Saint Cecilia is certainly a beautiful and spiritually moving piece, but no longer has a place during the Sunday Mass. It is not only lengthy but does not allow for the active participation of the faithful during the prominent acclamation. The "Gloria" by John Rutter, a contemporary composer and conductor, another marvelous piece of sacred music, would not have an appropriate place in the liturgy because of its length (more than seventeen minutes).

Yet such magnificent music deserves to be fostered and preserved. This is done not only in recordings, but also in concerts held in public places.

The increase in the number of concerts in general has given rise to a more frequent use of churches for such events. Churches are considered to be in many ways apt places for holding a concert especially because of their size, acoustics, aesthetics and even practicality (e.g., as facilities for organ recitals).

THE UNIVERSAL LAW OF THE CHURCH

In an effort to ensure the proper use of sacred spaces for concerts, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship released a letter on November 5, 1987 regarding concerts in churches.

The letter first considers the character and purpose of churches. The church must overall be a "house of prayer" (Lk 19:46), "the temple of God built with living stones" (from the *Rite for Dedication of a Church and Altar*) set apart in a permanent way for divine worship by their dedication and blessing. Church buildings must maintain their specific identity. The sacredness of the church must be preserved.

Secondly, the letter acknowledges the importance of sacred music. Any sacred music that is no longer in harmony with a liturgical celebration may be performed outside the context

of the liturgy in a concert of sacred music. Sacred organ music of past composers is given special consideration in the letter.

The regulation of the use of churches is stipulated by Canon 1210 of the Code of Canon Law:

In a sacred place only those things are to be permitted which serve to exercise or promote worship, piety and religion. Anything out of harmony with the holiness of the place is forbidden. The ordinary may, however, for individual cases permit other uses, provided they are not contrary to the sacred character of the place.

The principle that must be adhered to is that the use of the church must not offend the sacredness of the place. Sacred religious music may be performed in a church concert. “The definition of sacred or religious music depends explicitly on the original intended use of the musical pieces or songs, and likewise on their content. It is not legitimate to provide for the execution in the church of music which is not of religious inspiration and which was composed with a view to performance in a certain precise secular context, irrespective of whether the music would be judged classical or contemporary, of high quality or of a popular nature. On the one hand such a performance would not respect the sacred character of the church, and on the other would result in the musical being performed in an unfitting context”. (Paragraph 8 of the *Letter*) Every other type of music, even beautiful symphonic music that is not in itself religious in character, is excluded from such concerts. Secular music has no place in a church concert and is therefore not allowed to be part of the program.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS IN THE DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

The following practical directives, in order that the sacred character of a church be conserved in the matter of concerts, are given in the letter. These directives are to be followed in the Diocese of Harrisburg:

- 1) *Permission is to be requested, in writing and in good time from the Ordinary for proposed concerts. The date and time are to be provided along with the program, giving the titles of the works to be performed and the names of the composers. (This directive does not apply to concerts of sacred music that are presented by parish choirs and organists or combined parish choirs. It applies mainly to visiting professional or amateur musicians.*
- 2) *Even though parish music personnel or maintenance staff will take on the responsibility of arranging equipment and access to buildings, the pastor is to be apprised of the particular arrangements.*
- 3) *Entrance to the concert must be free and open to all. Freewill offerings are permitted. Donations for the purpose of defraying the expense of the concert may be requested from donors; however, the concert itself must be open to the public free of charge.*

- 4) *The performers and audience must be dressed in a manner fitting to the sacred character of the place. This applies to rehearsals as well as performances.*
- 5) *Respect is to be shown to sanctuary furnishings, especially the altar, the president's chair, the lectern and the altar of reservation.*
- 6) *If the Blessed Sacrament is in the immediate area of the performers, it is to be removed to a more suitable place for the duration of the performance.*
- 7) *The concert should be presented or introduced not only with historical or technical details, but also in a way that fosters a deeper understanding and an interior participation on the part of the listeners.*
- 8) *The organizer of the concert should declare in writing that expenses for the concert will be assumed by the organization sponsoring the concert, that the church will be left in order following the concert, and that any expenses incurred due to damages in the preparation, execution, or dismantling of equipment will be assumed by the sponsoring organization.*
- 9) *Note well that only music, which is sacred in character, is allowed to be performed in a church concert.*

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