

CANTOR

The cantor leads and sustains the singing of the assembly. The cantor may also sing solos or alternate with everyone else.

The cantor is one of the ministers assigned to parts of the Mass. When the priest, deacon, cantor, servers, assembly and others accept their respective roles, we all celebrate Mass with more understanding. The cantor may lead the psalm at the ambo, assuming the same position as the reader of Scripture. The cantor may read or sing the petitions of the penitential rite and of the general intercessions. The cantor may lead other music such as the Alleluia, the Lamb or God and the communion song. Thus the cantor adds a degree of solemnity to the Eucharist. A cantor will also provide encouragement and example for others to join in singing.

A well-trained cantor blesses the community. Cantors should possess enough musical ability to execute their ministry, but they need something more. They need to be men and women with religious understanding, who can not only sing a text accurately but also share their faithful soul and inspire the prayer of others. A good cantor will invite participation in song and spirit.

Since the cantors sing praise, prayer, petition and sorrow, the ministry demands someone experienced with life. Cantors who share their struggles and joys in song will help us meet ours.

A CANTOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Leading Assembly Singing. Cantors help to make people feel welcome to sing and comfortable doing so. This is done through words, gestures, and personal presence. An attitude of openness and encouragement is important. In leading us in song, cantors can bring us together as that gathered assembly we profess to be. Cantors are to lead, but not over power, the assembly.

Solo Singing. "Solo" singing, i.e., singing alone, is an important way that a cantor can serve the assembly. The most primary time for this is the singing of the verses of the psalm. Other examples of appropriate singing by the cantor, i.e., alternating with the whole assembly, include the penitential rite, antiphonal settings of the Gloria, the general intercessions, and the litany for the breaking of the bread.

Teaching. The teaching process is crucial. It is a mistake to expect people to sing music that they don't know or don't have some familiarity with. The cantor needs to be a comfortable teacher of songs of the assembly.

Psalmist. Good vocal performance is critical in this role. Clean, understandable diction and good interpretation of the psalm is needed. PRAY the text.

Ministry ... or Performance? The role of cantor is a very visible one. A cantor is expected to sing well. A good cantor is also going to be a good performer. "Performance" will distract from effectiveness in ministry only if the cantors are unable to communicate themselves as fellow-members of the assembly who have accepted a special ministry because they are trained to handle it. A cantor's task is to assist the people in praying together in song. A good cantor provides visual and aural leadership but does not dominate. Ministry has to be supported by solid

performance skills. The skills of ministry and performance need to complement each other, working together for the good of the whole community.

A CANTOR'S SKILLS

VOCAL SKILLS: Diction—Consonants. Clarity of consonants is very necessary. If the words cannot be understood, the cantor cannot communicate the full message of the text.

LITURGICAL AWARENESS. It is important to know the official structure of the Order of Mass very well. If something goes wrong (order changed, prayer is skipped, power failure, etc.) the cantor needs to make good decisions on the spot about how to proceed.

PREPARATION. It is important to prepare well for each liturgy.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS – Verbal. Most spoken communications are of the practical, “how-to” variety. Comments should be kept to a bare minimum. When song or hymn announcements need to be made, do them clearly and concisely, with sufficient volume. Give people enough time to find a page before beginning. Be pleasant and inviting in tone.

COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS – The Microphone. There is the temptation to let the microphone do all the work. Speech and song done with proper projection and appropriate amplification will sound more natural than a soft tone that relies totally on electronic amplification. Adjust the microphone as needed.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION.

- 1) Stance. Comfortable erect posture is the norm.
- 2) Facial Expression. An open, pleasant expression will convey hospitality and genuineness. People will be influenced by how you feel and express yourself.
3. Eye Contact. This contact with the assembly assists in developing and maintaining a rapport.
- 4) Gesture. Hand and arm gestures are basic tools of the trade. These are probably the clearest ways to signal to the assembly to sing.

BE YOURSELF

Each person must find that unique way to doing things which is personal and natural. Ten good cantors will do things ten different ways. Even with the best preparation, mistakes will happen... because of last-minutes changes of plans, or simple forgetfulness (by anyone at all!). Cantors must be ready to “roll with the punches” and make the best of the situation in a dignified way. The cantor at the liturgy and other times of celebration can surely help people pray in song. It is hard work... a challenge... and a privilege.