

GUIDELINES ON LITURGICAL MUSIC IN THE DIOCESE OF MANGALORE

Composition, Approval and Singing during the Eucharistic Celebration

Introduction

Sacred music is not merely an ornament added to the Eucharistic celebration; it is an integral part of the liturgy, serving the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful. The Second Vatican Council describes the Church's musical tradition as a treasure of inestimable value (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 112).

Liturgical music expresses the Church's faith, unites the assembly in prayer, enhances the dignity of the sacred rites and fosters the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful. It must serve the liturgy, never becoming a performance in itself.

With the new Konkani Roman Missal having come into use on 15 August 2026, these guidelines seek to bring liturgical music

into harmony with its texts, melodies and rubrics, fostering uniformity, reverence and meaningful participation throughout the Diocese.

1. Religious Music, Sacred Music, and Liturgical Music

Religious music expresses religious beliefs, biblical themes, Christian values and spiritual experiences. For example, a song about the birth of Jesus, God's love or the life of a saint may be considered religious music. **Sacred music** is intended for worship, prayer and devotion to God, such as hymns sung during Eucharistic Adoration, Praise and Worship gatherings or songs used in personal prayer. **Liturgical music** is sacred music specifically intended for use in the Church's liturgical celebrations, especially the Holy Mass. Examples include the *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy), the *Gloria*, the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy), the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God), and suitable hymns for the Entrance, Offertory and Communion.

These categories overlap because the same song may belong to more than one category. For example, a hymn praising God may be both religious and sacred; if it is also suitable and approved for use in the liturgy, it may serve as liturgical music. Thus, all liturgical music is sacred music, and it generally expresses religious faith; however, ***not all sacred or religious music is suitable for the liturgy***.

A song may be appropriate for a prayer meeting, a devotional gathering or a celebration in honour of a saint, yet may not be suitable for use as a Communion hymn during Holy Mass. Music chosen for Mass must be in harmony with the Church's teachings, the purpose of the particular part of the celebration, and the dignity of the liturgy. It must also conform to the approved liturgical texts and the directives of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Religious or devotional content alone does not qualify a song for use during Holy Mass. Its suitability depends on its theological content, musical character, liturgical function and conformity to the approved liturgical books and the directives of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

2. Musical Settings in the New Konkani Roman Missal

The new Missal provides musical settings for the priest's parts and the assembly's responses, enabling both to pray together through a common musical language. Priests, choir directors, choir members and the faithful should become familiar with these settings. Priests, in particular, must know the entire Order of Mass, including its musical notations and directions.
Particular attention should be given to:

- ***Penitential Act*:** Priests are encouraged to learn and use all three forms of the Penitential Act, choosing Form I, II or III according to the liturgical provisions and pastoral circumstances, rather than routinely using Form I alone. This will bring appropriate variety to the celebration.
- ***Ordinary of the Mass*:** The Roman Missal provides musical settings in Konkani and Latin for the *Kyrie* (Latin version, p. 503), *Gloria*, *Sanctus* (p. 513), Memorial Acclamation, *Pater Noster* (p. 617) and *Agnus Dei* (p. 620). Priests and choirs should help the faithful learn and sing these settings during the Eucharistic celebration.
- ***Priest–assembly Dialogues*:** The dialogues between the priest and the assembly, together with the corresponding responses, throughout the Mass, from the Introductory Rites to the Concluding Rites, should be practised carefully and sung consistently to the approved melodies. Particular attention should be given to the dialogue introducing the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer, ensuring that both the priest and the assembly sing the prescribed melodies correctly and faithfully.

The introduction of the new Missal calls for familiarity not only with its revised texts but also with the melodies provided for them. As the Lord teaches, "New wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Lk 5:38). Similarly, the new musical settings of the Missal should be embraced and practised consistently, rather

than mixed with older tunes for the same dialogues and responses. When priests use the new melodies while the congregation continues with the old ones, the resulting mismatch disrupts the harmony and unity of the celebration. Parish priests should therefore ensure that priests, choirs and congregations learn and use the same approved settings, allowing the music to become a unified and prayerful expression of the liturgy.

3. The Place of Latin and Gregorian Chant

While permitting the vernacular, the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the importance of preserving Latin in the Roman Rite. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 54, states that the faithful should be able to sing together in Latin the parts of the Ordinary belonging to them. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*) 41, similarly recommends that they know at least some parts of the Ordinary in Latin, using simpler melodies. This is particularly valuable when people from different linguistic backgrounds gather for worship.

The Latin settings in the new Konkani Roman Missal should therefore receive due attention. Latin remains part of the living heritage of the Roman Rite, within which Gregorian chant holds a place of honour. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 116, gives Gregorian chant pride of place in the Roman liturgy while recognising other forms of sacred music that accord with its spirit.

Latin and Konkani can enrich one another: Konkani promotes understanding and participation within the local community, while Latin expresses the continuity and unity of the Roman Rite across cultures and generations.

Parishes are encouraged to introduce the simple ***Latin settings provided in the Missal***, as mentioned above, gradually through catechesis, choir practice and congregational singing, according to local pastoral circumstances and musical abilities. The aim is to preserve the Church's musical heritage and foster unity with the universal Church, without displacing the legitimate use of Konkani or placing an unnecessary burden on the faithful.

4. The Importance of Congregational Singing

Congregational singing expresses the faithful's full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. The choir serves the assembly by leading, supporting and encouraging its singing; it must not replace the congregation in the parts intended for all. The beauty of liturgical music lies not only in musical excellence but also in the united prayer of the faithful.

In accordance with *Musicam Sacram*, no. 16, the following principles shall govern liturgical singing in parishes: (a) The priest, choir and congregation should sing their respective parts in accordance with the liturgical books and in proper coordination. (b) The choir should lead and support the congregation's singing, particularly the responses and acclamations, without replacing the assembly in the parts assigned to it. (c) Simple, dignified and easily singable melodies suited to the liturgy and the congregation's abilities should be preferred. (d) Approved melodies should be practised regularly to promote familiarity and confident participation. (e) While choral music may enrich the celebration, it should not unnecessarily displace congregational singing.

The Celebrant's Role in Singing: The celebrant shall sing his assigned parts clearly and confidently, using the microphone appropriately. When the choir or congregation sings, he shall reduce his voice and microphone volume so that their singing is heard distinctly and is not overpowered by his voice. When the congregation sings, its voice shall come to the fore, and the celebrant's voice shall recede. The celebrant shall not dominate or unnecessarily amplify his voice over the choir or congregation, as this can disrupt the balance of singing and distract the faithful from prayer. Inspired by the words of St John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30), the priest should exercise humility, allowing the voices of the faithful to take prominence. His role is not to dominate the singing but to encourage and enable the congregation to participate fully and prayerfully in the liturgy.

5. Temporary Restriction on New Musical Settings for the Ordinary of the Mass

a) To promote stability and familiarity following the introduction of the new Missal, a one-year implementation period shall apply from the date these guidelines are issued. During this period, no new musical settings shall be introduced for the following parts intended for congregational singing: the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, Memorial Acclamation, *Pater Noster* and *Agnus Dei*.

b) The settings printed in the new Missal shall have priority. Alternatively, ***settings already in use before its publication*** may continue, provided they are adapted to the revised liturgical texts and approved by the Bishop.

c) This measure gives priests, choirs and the faithful time to learn the new settings and participate confidently. It does not discourage creativity but ensures that new compositions are introduced prudently and in keeping with the needs of the liturgy.

d) After the one-year period, new settings shall remain subject to the Bishop's approval and applicable liturgical norms. The expiry of this period does not automatically authorise any new composition for liturgical use.

6. Norms for the Composition of Liturgical Music

Composers, like all liturgical ministers, serve the prayer of the Church. In composing liturgical music, a clear distinction shall be made between prescribed liturgical texts, which must be taken from the approved liturgical books and set to music, and songs that may be composed or selected for those parts of the Mass where the liturgical norms permit such options. No one, not even a priest, may on personal initiative add, remove or change anything in the liturgy (*GIRM*, 24).

The prescribed prayers, responses and acclamations of the Mass shall retain their approved texts. The texts of the Ordinary of the Mass, including the *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*,

shall not be paraphrased, altered or replaced by newly composed texts. Composers may create suitable musical settings for these texts, but the words shall remain faithful to the approved liturgical books, except where alternatives are expressly permitted by the liturgical norms (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 22; *GIRM,* 24 and 53).

The Responsorial Psalm shall correspond to the reading and, as a rule, be taken from the approved Lectionary. The alternatives expressly permitted by *GIRM*, 61, may be used where applicable. A devotional song or hymn shall not replace the Responsorial Psalm. The Gospel Acclamation and its verse shall likewise conform to *GIRM*, 62–63 and the approved liturgical books.

For the Entrance, Offertory and Communion, suitable chants or hymns may be selected or composed only in accordance with the options permitted by the applicable liturgical norms (*GIRM*, 48, 74 and 87). Their texts and musical character shall be appropriate to the particular liturgical action.

A. Composition of Texts

a) Biblical and doctrinal fidelity: Texts should draw primarily from Sacred Scripture, approved liturgical books and the Church's spiritual tradition. They must express authentic Catholic faith without ambiguity or distortion (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 121).

b) Fidelity to prescribed texts: The texts of the Mass, including the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, Memorial Acclamation, *Pater Noster* and *Agnus Dei*, must follow the approved liturgical books and must not be altered at the discretion of composers or performers.

c) Clarity and dignity: Texts must be grammatically correct, clear, prayerful and appropriate for communal worship.

d) Liturgical suitability: Texts must correspond to the purpose of the particular part of the celebration and, where applicable, to the liturgical season or feast.

B. Composition of Music

a) Service to the text: Melody, rhythm and arrangement must illuminate the text, respect its natural accents and phrasing, and support prayer without overshadowing its meaning.

b) Liturgical suitability and functionality: Music must serve its intended liturgical function and reflect the sacred character of the Eucharistic celebration. Every hymn must serve a defined liturgical function within the rite. Music is not decorative but functional, accompanying processions, preparation of gifts, communion, and dismissal in a manner consistent with the structure of the liturgy (*GIRM* 48–74).

c) Singability and accessibility: Melodies should be dignified, memorable and suited to the language, vocal range and musical abilities of the intended singers. Rhythm, phrasing and breathing points should facilitate confident singing.

d) Congregational participation: Music intended for the assembly must enable communal singing. The choir should support rather than displace the congregation.

e) Musical quality and seasonal character: Compositions should demonstrate sound musical craftsmanship while retaining simplicity, dignity and a prayerful character appropriate to the liturgical season or celebration.

7. Criteria for Evaluating Liturgical Music and Texts

A composition may be artistically attractive without being suitable for liturgical use. All new compositions and arrangements intended for liturgical use shall be evaluated according to three complementary criteria.

***a) Liturgical Suitability*:** Is the composition faithful to Catholic doctrine, approved liturgical texts and Church norms? Is it appropriate to the particular part of the Mass and the liturgical season or celebration? Does it respect the dignity and communal character of liturgical prayer without replacing or

obscuring prescribed texts or rites? Does it serve the sacred action and help the faithful enter more deeply into the mystery being celebrated?

b) ***Textual Quality*****:** Is the text theologically sound and rooted in Scripture, approved liturgical books or the authentic spiritual tradition of the Church? Is the language clear, grammatically correct, dignified and suitable for communal worship? Does it express the Church's faith through meaningful imagery and appropriate expressions of praise, thanksgiving, petition or remembrance of God's saving deeds? Is it coherent and appropriate to the linguistic and cultural context of the congregation?

c) ***Musical Quality and Pastoral Suitability*****:** Is the music artistically worthy, dignified and appropriate to the sacred character of the liturgy? Does it illuminate the text through suitable melody, phrasing and musical structure? Is it singable, memorable and accessible, with an appropriate melodic range and manageable rhythm? Are the accompaniment and arrangement suited to the liturgical occasion and the parish's musical resources? Does it encourage congregational participation and reflect the character of the liturgical season or celebration?

A composition's artistic appeal or popularity alone does not make it suitable for liturgical use. Its true merit lies in sound doctrine, liturgical appropriateness and musical excellence: the text must express the Church's faith, the music must illuminate the text, and both must serve the worship of God and the prayerful participation of the faithful.

8. Procedure for Submission and Approval

a) ***Submission of Compositions*****:** All new compositions and adaptations intended for liturgical use shall be submitted in **three copies** to the Director of Mangala Jyothi (DBCLC). Each submission must include the complete text and musical score, with harmonisation and voice parts where applicable, together with: (i) The names of the composer, lyricist, translator

and arranger, as applicable. (ii) The intended liturgical use, such as Entrance, Responsorial Psalm, Offertory, Communion or another appropriate part of the celebration. (iii) The source of the text and details of any adaptation or translation.

The Director shall forward the submission to the Commission for Liturgical Music for evaluation and recommendation.

***b) Initial Evaluation and Feedback*:** The Commission shall examine the text and music according to the criteria in these guidelines and other applicable liturgical norms. Its observations, recommendations and required corrections shall be communicated in writing to the Director, who shall convey them to the composer.

***c) Revision and Resubmission*:** The composer shall address the Commission's observations and correct identified errors before resubmitting the revised composition through the Director for final scrutiny.

***d) Recommendation and Ecclesiastical Approval*:** Following final scrutiny, the Commission shall submit its recommendation to the Director, who shall forward the composition to the Bishop for a decision on its *approval for liturgical use*.

***e) Imprimatur and Publication*:** Ecclesiastical approval for liturgical use and permission to publish are distinct matters. An *imprimatur* authorises publication in accordance with canon law; it does not, by itself, constitute approval for liturgical use. Therefore, materials intended for use in the liturgy must obtain the specific approval required by the competent ecclesiastical authority, in accordance with applicable Church law.

***f) Communication of the Decision*:** The Bishop's decision on approval for liturgical use, including any conditions attached, shall be communicated in writing to the Director, who shall inform the composer. Any separate decision regarding permission to publish shall likewise be communicated, where applicable.

***g) Observance of Approval Requirements*:** No composer, choir, parish or individual may substitute personal judgement for approval required from the competent ecclesiastical authority. The necessary approval must be obtained before a composition is introduced into liturgical celebrations. Local origin or previous performance does not, by itself, establish approval or suitability for liturgical use.

9. Formation and Preparation

Parish Priests shall take personal responsibility for implementing these guidelines and ensuring that choir directors, cantors and musicians are adequately instructed in the musical settings of the new Konkani *Roman Missal*. Where necessary, practice sessions shall be organised for priests, choirs and the faithful, with particular attention to the Preface dialogue, acclamations and congregational responses. The prescribed or approved melodies shall be used consistently throughout the parish.

In accordance with *Musicam Sacram*, no. 24, choir members shall receive appropriate liturgical and spiritual formation so that their ministry enhances the beauty of the liturgy, sets an example for the faithful and deepens their own spiritual lives. The choir is not a group of performers separate from the congregation, but a ministry within the praying assembly, called to foster unity, support congregational singing and lead the faithful into deeper prayer through reverence, humility and service.

Mangala Jyothi (DBCLC) is preparing **audio recordings of the musical parts of the new Missal**, including those sung by the priest and the assembly, as well as Gregorian chant settings of the Latin texts included in the Missal. These will be particularly helpful to those who find musical notation difficult to follow. Once available, parishes are encouraged to use them regularly to practise the prescribed melodies, promote consistency and foster fuller participation in the Eucharistic celebration.

10. Ecclesiastical Approval and Copyright Compliance

Ecclesiastical approval and copyright compliance are separate requirements. Compositions intended for liturgical use must receive

the approval required by these guidelines and applicable Church law. Where an *imprimatur* (cann. 826–829) or other permission for publication is required, it must be obtained from the competent ecclesiastical authority in accordance with canon law.

The rights of composers, lyricists, translators, arrangers and publishers must be respected. Prior permission or an appropriate licence shall be obtained, where required by law, for the reproduction, translation, adaptation, publication or other use of copyrighted material.

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Conclusion

Liturgical music is a ministry of faith and service that helps the Church pray through song. All who compose, teach, lead or sing must ensure that music remains faithful to the Church's faith, worthy of the sacred celebration and conducive to the participation of the entire assembly. By implementing these guidelines with care and unity, may our liturgical music lead the faithful into deeper prayer and make every Eucharistic celebration a worthy offering of praise and glory to God.

These guidelines, issued on 1 November 2026, the Solemnity of All Saints, shall come into force with immediate effect.

✠ Peter Paul Saldanha
Bishop of Mangalore