

# *A Preliminary Syllabus for the Formation of Church Musicians*

Prepared by the Church Music Committee  
of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Approved by the Department for Christian Life and Worship  
Low Week 1998

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Singing is one of the most delightful of the signs and symbols that make up the liturgy. Song has been called ‘the sign of the heart’s joy’, and an old proverb says ‘the one who sings well, prays twice’.<sup>1</sup> All the liturgical books and instructions published since Vatican II have strongly emphasised the value of singing, especially singing by the whole assembly.

These are some of the ways in which music and song contribute to the celebration: they give a more noble and emphatic form to the Word of God; they help to strengthen the unity of the assembly; they give shape to the rite, emphasising its high points; they create festivity; and they point to something beyond the present, towards the ‘hymn that is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven’.<sup>2</sup>

The assembly sings the liturgy. But it is generally recognised that the key to successful singing lies in the leadership provided for the assembly by cantors, organists and instrumentalists, members of singing groups and so on. These people exercise a ministry, one which requires not only musical ability but also a clear understanding of the liturgy itself. However, many people find themselves persuaded to lead parish music, or are simply involved in it, without having received formal musical or liturgical formation, and would like to remedy this. They are fired with enthusiasm and generosity, but recognise that a lack of basic skills limits both their musical repertoire and their liturgical effectiveness.

## The Syllabus

The Church takes seriously the needs of the liturgy and responds to the lack of formation by providing training opportunities for pastoral musicians. Eucharistic Ministers and, increasingly, Readers, are given formal training courses. The ministry of the musician should receive the same attention.

This syllabus is the work of the Church Music Committee of the Bishops’ Conference. It is, we hope, a first step towards this. Its aim is to provide the framework for a programme of study which can be developed into a study course at a local level by Diocesan Liturgy Commissions or Liturgy Centres.

To help diocesan commissions and liturgy centres a **Music Syllabus Board** has been set up by the Church Music Committee to both manage and monitor the use of the syllabus. Those wishing to use the Syllabus will need to apply to the Council for accreditation. It is hoped that this will lead to both a consistency of standards and act as pool for resources developing ideas for both assessment and validation<sup>3</sup>.

## Churches’ Initiative in Music Education (CHIME)

The syllabus is based upon the preliminary level programme of study suggested in the Guidelines for the Development of Courses by the Churches’ Initiative for Music Education (CHIME).<sup>4</sup> This ecumenical project provides the framework for an accredited and

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<sup>1</sup> GIRM 19

<sup>2</sup> SC 83

<sup>3</sup> The Council can be contacted through the Liturgy Office.

<sup>4</sup> The CHIME Guidelines for the development of courses (October 1993, revised March 1995) can be obtained from the CHIME Secretary, Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury SP1 2EE

## *Introduction*

progressive programme of formation in Liturgical Music. Various bodies, including the RSCM and the Guild of Church Musicians, have developed courses that complement this syllabus.

## **Content and Method**

The CHIME guidelines offer a clear modular structure and educational approach which have been adapted to meet our particular needs.

## **Study Areas**

Recognising the need to form the 'whole church musician', the CHIME guidelines propose that a balance be struck between the acquisition of musical skills and an understanding of the theological context of music and worship. CHIME lists five Study Areas, and these were used as the basis of the first draft of this syllabus (September 1995). The five areas are:

- General music skills
- Musical skills in a church context
- Applied musical and pastoral skills
- Worship/Liturgy
- Christian understanding

Note the progression from purely musical skills towards an exploration of the musician's own response of faith. However, as a result of views expressed at a national consultation on the syllabus at Fawley Court, Henley (3-4 Nov. 1995), attended by nearly fifty musicians, the working party of the Church Music Committee decided on a radical re-casting. The Study Areas have been organised as follows:

- Liturgical Understanding and Skills
- Pastoral Understanding and Skills
- Musical Understanding and skills

This, incidentally, corresponds to the 'threefold judgement' of liturgical music proposed in the US Bishops' seminal document of 1972, *Music in Catholic Worship*.

Pilot courses around the country have led to further refinement of the syllabus leading to this edition which was approved by the Department for Christian Life and Worship at the Low Week 1998 meeting of the Bishops' Conference.

## **Modules and Learning Outcomes**

Each study area is divided into modules, each headed by a Learning Outcome, which summarises what the student should hope to gain from studying the module.

This allows for local, indeed individual adaptation of the study programme. By creating courses around the learning outcomes, tutors will be able to use the syllabus imaginatively with students and groups of different experience and ability. Having reflected on the learning outcomes in the light of needs or capacities of a particular student or group, it may be decided to omit or radically re-structure a particular Module. Indeed, gifted students may be of great help to those who are struggling in a particular area.

The Study Areas do not need to be tackled in a particular order. They may, for instance, be undertaken concurrently, with two or three strands being studied in one evening session.

## Preparing for Worship

Those participating in courses based on this syllabus will be better prepared to take part in the worship of their community. Opportunities for reflection on their community's worship through the use of journal and/or within the group, and active participation in preparing and celebrating liturgies during the course of the Syllabus are vital ingredients.

## Entrance Requirements

The syllabus may be undertaken by anyone. There are no entrance qualifications, and no previous academic experience is necessary. Emphasis is placed upon the students' continuing experience of music-making within their own celebrating communities. Similarly, participants are invited to reflect upon and evaluate their local liturgical celebrations.

## Length of the Course

The principle of flexible adaptation applies here as well. The pilot courses were each run over a year and this would appear to be the norm but other patterns both shorter and longer are possible. Whatever the length it is hoped that the student will have matured in his/her understanding of music and liturgy and the quality of liturgical celebrations of his/her community will have been affected.

*Given the nature of Sunday Mass and its importance in the lives of the faithful, it must be prepared with special care. In ways dictated by pastoral experience and local custom in keeping with liturgical norms, efforts must be made to ensure that the celebration has the festive character appropriate to the day commemorating the Lord's Resurrection. To this end, it is important to devote attention to the songs used by the assembly, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. Care must be taken to ensure the quality, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church's tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> (*Dies Domini*—Apostolic letter on keeping the Lord's Day holy 1998: 50)

## *Introduction*

# SUMMARY

## **A: Liturgical Understanding and Skills**

### 1. Shape of the Eucharist

*to understand the shape of the Eucharist*

through a study of:

- a. the relationship between liturgy and human experience – story, symbol, ritual, music;
- b. the vision of Vatican II: the eucharist as source and summit of the Christian life.
- c. the celebration of the eucharist today – its shape and origins– the place of music;

### 2. Liturgical Cycles

*to recognise the liturgical year  
as the celebration of Christ's paschal mystery*

through a study of:

- a. the human experience of time;
- b. the Church's celebration of time.

## **B: Pastoral Understanding and Skills**

### 1. Ministry

*to begin to explore the gift of ministry  
within the Church's ongoing mission*

through the consideration of:

- a. the assembly as the principal celebrant of the liturgy;
- b. liturgical ministry and the role of music;
- c. working together in a parish context.

## **C: Musical Understanding and Skills**

### 1. The Role of Music

*to recognise the role of music within the liturgy*

through the study of

- a. music in the Christian tradition;
- b. forms and function of music in the Mass;
- c. planning and preparing music for the assembly.

### 2. General Music Skills

*to develop basic music skills for the liturgy*

through the practice of:

- a. listening;
- b. literacy;
- c. communicating.

# A Preliminary Syllabus for the FORMATION OF CHURCH MUSICIANS

## **A: Liturgical Understanding and Skills**

### 1. Shape of the Eucharist

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through a study of:

- a. the relationship between liturgy and human experience - story, symbol, ritual, music;
- b. the vision of Vatican II:  
the eucharist as source and summit of the Christian life;
- c. the celebration of the eucharist today  
– its shape and origins– the place of music.

### **1. Shape of the Eucharist**

*to understand the shape of the Eucharist*

*through a study of:*

- a. the relationship between liturgy and human experience – story, symbol, ritual, music
  - i. consider the ways in which we use story-telling, symbols, rituals and music in marking or celebrating key human events, anniversaries or celebrations.
  - ii. explore the way in which these fundamental human characteristics are also found in the liturgy, in which the stories of God’s saving relationship with humankind is communicated in various ways.
- b. the vision of Vatican II:  
the eucharist as source and summit of the Christian life
  - i. Relate the eucharist to the story of Jesus—the Paschal Mystery  
Relate the eucharist to the life of the Christian—how are the joys and sorrows reflected in it? What demands flow from it?

- c. the celebration of the eucharist today
  - its shape and origins– the place of music
- i. Explore Justin Martyr’s account of the eucharist.
- ii. Compare the current Mass with Justin’s account.  
Identify the overall structure of today’s celebration.
- iii. Explore the structural role played by music in the Eucharist today.
- iv. Explore music’s integral role in the ritual of liturgy.

## 2. Liturgical Cycles

*to recognise the liturgical year  
as the celebration of Christ’s Paschal Mystery*

through a study of:

- a. the human experience of time;
- b. the Church’s celebration of time.

## 2. Liturgical Cycles

*to recognise the liturgical year  
as the celebration of Christ’s Paschal Mystery  
through a study of:*

- a. the human experience of time
  - i. Consider the structuring of time according to the day, week and the year
    - note that it is experienced as cyclical.
  - ii. Explore the human need to mark the passage of time:
    - the pattern of the day/week;
    - seasonal changes;
    - life’s changing-points and anniversaries.
  - iii. Identify the way that the Church celebrates these times:
    - in the liturgy of the hours;
    - liturgical seasons in church—specifically the Lent/Easter cycle;
    - rites of passage—birth, marriage, death, anniversaries.
- b. the Church’s celebration of time
  - i. explore the Lectionary—ABC Cycles—seasonal changes—shape of the Liturgy of the Word
  - ii. How is music used in the Liturgy of the Word:
    - what references to music are there in the Lectionary?
  - iii. how can music be used to mark the seasons of the Liturgical Year
    - explore the seasonal psalms and gospel acclamations
  - iv. in what way is music used in the church’s rites of passage—what effect does it have?
  - v. in what way is music integral to the ritual of liturgy?

## B: Pastoral Understanding and Skills

### 1. Ministry

*to begin to explore the gift of ministry  
within the Church's ongoing mission*

through the consideration of:

- a. the assembly as the principal celebrant of the liturgy;
- b. liturgical ministry and the role of music;
- c. working together in a parish context.

### 1. Ministry

*to begin to explore the gift of ministry  
within the Church's ongoing mission:*

- a. the assembly as the principal celebrant of the liturgy
  - i. The student is to look at his/her own parish and begin to describe it in terms of location, population, make up and particular concerns.
  - ii. What understanding does the gathered assembly have of itself and the liturgical role that it has?
  - iii. Explore the presence of Christ in the local assembly and the assembly as the principal celebrant of any liturgy and principal minister of music.
- b. liturgical ministry and the role of music
  - i. What ministries are evident in the gathered assembly of the student?
  - ii. Explore the variety of roles and gifts of those ministries outlined in the Sacramentary:
    - Priest Celebrant
    - Deacon
    - Reader
    - MINISTERS OF MUSIC:
      - Psalmist
      - Cantor
      - Choir director/ music leader
      - Instrumentalists
      - Choir
    - Ministers of Communion – Ordinary and Special
    - Servers
    - Ushers
  - iii. Explore which of these ministries has a musical dimension and discuss what it is.
  - iv. Recognise the ministerial role of music. (cf C:1:a:ii)

## *B: Pastoral Understanding and Skills*

- c. working together in a parish context
  - i. Explore the criteria and pastoral considerations involved in selecting music for the liturgy.
  - ii. Develop skills of musical management:
    - the need to work within a general parish diary;
    - scheduling skills (rehearsals);
    - planning music for liturgy;
    - repertoire planning;
    - awareness of Resources/Agencies;
    - copyright Issues;
    - exploring recruitment strategies.
  - iii. Discuss the significance of different liturgical styles even within the one parish.

## C: Musical Understanding and Skills

### 1. The Role of Music

*to recognise the role of music within the liturgy*

through the study of

- a. music in the Christian tradition;
- b. forms and function of music in the Mass;
- c. planning and preparing music for the assembly.

### 1. The Role of Music

*to recognise the role of music within the liturgy  
through the study of:*

- a. music in the Christian tradition
  - i. To recognise music as an integral part of Jewish and Christian worship as described in scripture.  
*song-forms within the scriptures, eg the psalms;  
music in Temple worship and in Jewish society;  
music in domestic worship;  
the importance of singing in the early Church.*
  - ii. To recognise the ministerial role of music:  
music is integral to the liturgy of the Church because of it combines sacred words and music,  
*hence liturgical music must be truly expressive of the text;*  
music has power of to engage the emotions, unite the congregation and communicate the Christian mystery.  
singing shows the congregation's active participation;  
Christian worship has a nobler form when the rites are celebrated with singing;  
liturgical song flows out of Christ's life and mission and into the eternal Song of Praise.

## *C: Musical Understanding and Skills*

- b. forms and function of music in the Mass
  - i. To recognise the integral role of music within the Eucharistic liturgy:
    - in the main liturgical units (Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Concluding Rites). Distinguishing primary (eg Eucharistic Prayer) and secondary rites, (eg Presentation of Gifts);
    - in moments where the primary focus of the liturgy is the song of the whole assembly: Gospel Acclamation and Eucharistic Acclamations as priorities.
  - ii. To be aware of the variety of musical forms within Catholic worship and their relationship to ritual and prayer:
    - litanies, acclamations, songs, hymns, chants;
    - instrumental music and its place within the liturgy.
  - iii. Revise the variety of musical roles within the liturgical assembly [B: Pastoral Understanding and Skills - b ii].
    - Assembly
    - Priest celebrant, Deacon
    - Psalmist, Cantor
    - Instrumentalist
    - ChoirExplore their relationship to one another at a deeper level and consider the implications for the design of liturgical space.
  
- c. preparing music for the assembly—theory and practice
  - i. to be familiar with the liturgical year, lectionary and the shape of the eucharist [see b(i) above], in order to choose music most appropriate to the day, season or ritual.
  - ii. to be familiar with the make-up of a particular assembly, in order to choose music of a quality, style and character which will enable the people to participate readily.

**2. General Music Skills**

*to develop basic music skills for the liturgy*

through the practice of:

- a. listening
- b. literacy
- c. communicating

**2. General Music Skills**

*to develop basic music skills for the liturgy*

*through the practice of:*

- a. listening
  - i. To make a personal verbal response to music heard:  
perceiving and analysing pitch, rhythm, tempo, timbre, texture, structure, dynamics and tonality.
  - ii. To identify the scope and variety of instruments, voices and styles and their use within worship:  
exploring the range and possibilities of the human voice, breathing and projection;  
recognising the main accompanying instruments in the liturgy: pipe and electronic organ, piano, synthesizer, guitar;  
and the possibilities offered by each;  
distinguishing the qualities of other instruments used alone or in combination: strings, woodwind, brass, percussion;  
understanding the range of those instruments in common use within liturgy as well as basic tuning methods for ensemble playing;  
varying the sound within a given piece/song according to the resources available.
- b. literacy
  - i. To perceive the relationship between sound and symbol:  
note-values, rests, pitch in treble/bass clefs, time signatures (simple and compound), key signatures up to 4 sharp/flats, dynamics, phrasing, guitar chord symbols (major, minor, seventh, sus4, added bass note), awareness of basic transposing instruments.

## C: Musical Understanding and Skills

- ii. To develop notational skills:
  - recognising the pulse of the music and beating time in simple and compound time signatures;
  - reading and writing note values/rhythms;
  - composing and notating a simple melody with a satisfactory musical structure and with an understanding of the range and technical possibilities of the voice or instrument;
  - writing a simple rhythm to a short text.
  
- c. communicating
  - i. To develop an ability to play, sing or direct in a liturgical context as a soloist or as part of an ensemble - the following are guidelines.
    - Psalmist: sing one unaccompanied and one accompanied song, psalm (or similar) having attention to intonation, rhythm and diction.
    - Cantor: teach two short responses;  
sing and lead the assembly in a song/psalm with solo verses.
    - Instrumentalists:
      - Guitarists:*  
accompany two contrasting songs demonstrating ability to strum/pluck rhythmically,  
change chord on the correct beat,  
start and finish a piece clearly,  
demonstrate the correct use of a capo.
      - Organists/keyboard players:*  
play a solo piece of Grade 3 (AB) standard, suitable for liturgical use,  
and demonstrate a hymn/psalm accompaniment.
      - Melody instrument:*  
play a solo piece suitable for liturgical use (Grade 3) and one piece accompanied by at least one other instrument.
    - Choir leader: direct two simple pieces in different styles.
    - Music group leader: direct two contrasting pieces, using at least two instruments in combination, with clear introductions.
    - Composers: produce and direct a psalm with a response; other short song/chant (16 bars minimum).
  - ii. To recognise the enabling role of the musician in worship:
    - the importance of leadership and the ministry of the cantor;
    - identifying the skills and qualities needed to encourage and develop the voice and gesture;
    - understanding how to present new music to the assembly, simply and clearly, before the liturgy begins;
  - iii. To have an awareness of basic acoustic principles:
    - understanding sound in differing spaces; reflecting and absorbent surfaces;
    - differing acoustic characteristics of rooms when empty or full of people; time lag;
    - natural, amplified and electronically produced sound; the difference between singing with and without a microphone; relative audibility and effect of different instruments or voices in particular spaces.

## *Addresses*

# ADDRESSES

*For further copies of this document and applications to use the Syllabus:*

**Liturgy Office**  
39 Eccleston Square,  
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*For information about the CHIME Guidelines and details of other courses:*

**CHIME**  
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*For details of courses based on the next level (Foundation) of the CHIME guidelines*

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