

CHARTER FOR SACRED MUSIC IN THE MISSION OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

'Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God.' (Col.3.16)

I. PREAMBLE

The worship of God is the most radical and fulfilling act we human beings can undertake. It opens for us not only the truth of God but also the full depth of human dignity, inherent in each person, lived in relationship with God and with others and destined for eternal fulfilment. Through the worship of God we regain our sense of proportion and purpose. We come away from worship restored in our inner selves and renewed in our relationships.

The mission of the Church is to 'proclaim and spread among all peoples the kingdom of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom' (Lumen Gentium 5). Through her teachings and traditions, the Church tutors us in the ways of prayer and discipleship. All who come into the ambit of the Catholic Church at prayer, come both to find and express themselves and to be tutored and shaped through her Liturgy.

Westminster Cathedral is a place in which all are welcomed and invited to take part in the worship of God, to find peace within their heart and inspiration for their daily lives. The Cathedral strives to offer to both its regular attenders and to its many casual and curious visitors, a glimpse of the glory and majesty of God, who is at once both totally Other and intimately close. In this mission, every aspect of the beauty of the Cathedral has a key part to play, its architecture, its art and especially its music, for music rises in and enriches the soul of humanity whenever our greatest endeavours and aspirations are being contemplated and expressed.

As Saint Augustine puts it, 'How I wept when I heard your hymns and canticles, being deeply moved by the sweet singing of your Church. Those voices flowed into my ears, truth filtered into my heart, and from my heart surged waves of devotion. Tears ran down, and I was happy in my tears.' Indeed, it is through singing that we express sentiments within the depths of our hearts.

2. WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

Westminster Cathedral is constituted as a parish within the Diocese of Westminster. It shares the mission of every parish, defined by Pope Benedict as being 'a beacon that radiates the light of faith and thus responds to the deepest and truest desires of the human heart, giving meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families' (10 December 2006, in Instruction from the Congregation for the Clergy, 29 June 2020). In this mission 'evangelisation is the cornerstone of all pastoral action, the demands of which are primary, pre-eminent and preferential' (Pope St John Paul II, 20 Oct 1984).

Westminster Cathedral is the mother church of the Archdiocese and much beloved by Catholics everywhere. It is the place where the Liturgy of the Church is celebrated daily 'through which the work of our redemption is

accomplished, most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist; the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.¹

Indeed, 'the cathedral church should be regarded as the centre of the liturgical life of the diocese' and that it "should be a model for the other churches of the diocese in its conformity to the directives laid down in liturgical documents and books ... with the full, active participation of all God's people' (The Ceremonial of Bishops 44,46).

3. DIRECTIVES FOR MUSIC IN THE CHURCH'S LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

Celebrations In the Catholic Church the tradition of sacred music, particularly Gregorian Chant and not excluding Polyphony, has a special place: 'The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1156). The eminence of that musical tradition is celebrated particularly in Cathedral choirs, through which 'the treasure of sacred music is preserved and fostered with great care' (SC 114) ensuring that this music 'adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds and confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites' (Sacrosanctum Concilium 112). In this way, the fostering and creation of music of the highest standard constitutes a critical part of the mission of a Cathedral which is to be a sign and instrument of the Body of Christ present in this world.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, 'Liturgy is an "action" of the whole Christ.' The norms of the Church are established in order to achieve this rightful participation of all in the Sacred Liturgy. The Second Vatican Council established the following principal consideration that underpins her celebration of the Liturgy:

'The Church earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.' (SC 48).

In applying these instructions to the place of music in the liturgy, the right balance must be found between the necessity for 'active participation' and the conservation and growth in the patrimony of sacred music. Thus active participation, with regard to music, includes the conscious and spiritual understanding and participation in the music sung by a Choir. However, a liturgical celebration in which only the Schola sings would be more akin to a concert. On the other hand, to entrust all the singing to the people would be to deny the possibility of authentic artistic expression enriching the Liturgical action.

4. MUSIC IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

i) Westminster Cathedral will strive to offer the finest liturgy according to the expectations and norms of the Catholic Church, in continuation and development of its traditions, especially through the excellence of its music for the enrichment of the worship of God and the inspiration of the people.

¹ The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, §2

ii) The Master of Music and Cathedral Music Department, in collaboration with the Cathedral Precentor, will pursue this musical excellence, drawing on the full repertoire of Catholic sacred music and enriched by those elements of other traditions of sacred music, found especially in the treasury of Anglican sacred music.

iii) The Westminster Cathedral Choir will be at the heart of this provision of excellence, continuing and developing its musical enrichment of the Cathedral Liturgies, always in accordance with the mind of the Church. In this endeavour, Westminster Cathedral Choir is to understand itself as being fully engaged in the Liturgy, and not an occasional contributor. The integrity of its choral tradition, understood in this way, is to be respected by both clergy and congregation, when celebrating the Liturgy.

iv) The Music Department will also devote significant attention to fostering participation by the congregation in singing, both where appropriate in Solemn Masses, and at services where the choir is not present, but music is provided.

v) The Music Department and the Westminster Cathedral Choir will also use its abilities and resources to extend more widely the evangelical appeal of sacred music, through concerts, tours and outreach to schools.

vi) Westminster Cathedral will also strive to contribute to the composition of new sacred music, in order to enrich the Church's life of prayer and praise and bring to it the creativity of the present times, finding new ways in which to point towards the great mystery of God's compassion and mercy, the nobility of the human person and the tragic consequences of human evil.

In the words of Cardinal Hume, we must always recognise our 'special responsibility to preserve and enhance the musical tradition of this Cathedral in order to give honour and glory to God and to raise people's hearts to Him.' (Quotation taken from *The Voice of Westminster Cathedral*.)

'For it is not ourselves that we are preaching, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is the same God that said, "Let there be light shining out of darkness", who has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4.6).

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster
