

Music in the Cursillo Movement

Canadian Anglican Cursillo

MUSIC IN THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT

Purpose of Music

Music is mentioned frequently in the Bible, from the "Song of Miriam" in Genesis; through the Psalms, to the "Song of the Redeemer" in Revelation. Music has been called a window into the soul. It has the power to reach into places within us and draw out a response. It can be used to enhance a verbal message, and as a way to help the words of Scripture stay with us, because of the power of rhythm to aid memory. When people sing together it is a way of strengthening the bond of common purpose. Music can be used to set the atmosphere for a talk or discussion. It also has a purely "functional" purpose, such as helping to change the focus, provide a "bridge" between different sections of a meeting, or "gather" people together. All of these purposes of music apply to any music in the Church, not just to music in Cursillo. In fact, there is no such thing as "Cursillo music." Music is a ministry offered to God, not a personal performance.

Selection of Music

Selection of music is an awesome responsibility, because if it is done well, it can greatly enhance the verbal messages that are being presented; if done poorly, it can detract from the intent of a gathering.

Discernment is extremely important in selecting music. On Cursillo Weekends, the music should reflect the theme, but even more importantly, the flow of the talks throughout the weekend. Have plans for what music you will use during different parts of the weekend but be flexible and prepared to change those plans if your prayerful discernment shows that something else is called for. In Ultreyas, there should be a balance of music reflecting piety, study, and action themes, which will be discussed further below.

New songs should be made as easy as possible to learn. Don't introduce too many new songs at once. Play a new tune ahead of time. Have a strong song leader who clearly enunciates the words. The "step" method, using hand gestures to indicate when the melody goes up or down, is one way of teaching a new melody line.

Always remember that the music is not for the musicians. It's for the "congregation" on weekends, the candidates; at Ultreyas, the whole community. If something isn't easy to "sing" - don't use it. Don't choose rhythms that are too complex. Save those for choirs. Don't choose songs that are pitched too high for most people to sing.

Some good rules of thumb:

- The tune should be "good music" - not the same melody line over and over, but not too complex.
- The words should be based on scripture or sound theology, neither trite nor sensational.
- Songs should be singable by the average person and not require musical training.

"Balanced" Music

The Cursillo method includes the balance of piety, study, and action. Similarly, music in Cursillo should also be balanced.

Strive for a balance of “old” and “new” music

Don't lose sight of the old hymns that have sound Biblical teaching and uplifting tunes.

Use some "contemporary" music, but don't use it exclusively. Remember that there is no such thing as "Cursillo music"—the music of Cursillo is the music of the Church (the suggestions here are applicable to parish music as well). Not all music used in Cursillo should lead to hand-holding, swaying, clapping, or other actions. In particular, be cautious not to use subtle pressure to almost "force" people into participating in actions that may make them uncomfortable, such as taking their hands without permission and raising them, or subtly implying that they are less "spiritual" if they don't raise their hands — be respectful of individual's choices. There are many styles of worship, all of them legitimate, and the Cursillo community should be able to embrace them all at different times.

Select music that reinforces the balanced method of piety, study, and action.

Specific music can be selected to emphasize each of these areas. Imbalance in any one leaves a void.

Piety

There is a wide selection of music available which relates to piety. This kind of music creates a response of adoration of God, or creates an atmosphere to go inward to a quiet place within and be reflective or meditative, or invites confession to God. Always remember that the purpose of such music is not just to create an emotional "feeling" of being spiritual - that is quite different from actually "being" spiritual. Therefore, avoid overuse of songs that repeat the same phrase endlessly or repeating the same song many times. Such uses tend generally to create a "spiritual high" that mesmerizes more than it opens us to God. There are far more possibilities than can possibly be explored here, so for the sake of illustration, only one song that could be used to achieve each of these purposes of piety is included:

To lead in adoration of God: Father, We Adore You

To invite reflection: Be Still

To lead to openness to confession: Create in Me a Clean Heart

To praise God: Majesty

Study

When looking for music that reinforces the Cursillo method of study, in particular look for lyrics that SAY something. This might include songs whose words are taken directly from Scripture. Because music has "penetration ability," singing words from Scripture is an easy way to commit them to memory, because the rhythm of the music makes it easier to learn. It's a good idea to include the Biblical reference when using such music, so people will know it comes from Scripture. Look for songs with words that are theologically sound. There are good and bad examples of this in both old and new music! Sometimes putting new words to an old familiar tune in the Public Domain, or an alternate tune from the hymn book helps people to focus on the words, which they might otherwise almost sing by rote because they have become so familiar. An example is a lovely musical setting to the Collect for Purity, Almighty God, which gives new meaning to words that we say Sunday.

Action

It is somewhat harder to find songs that exhort us to act on our faith, and live the fourth day, but with a little effort, we can find them. These include songs that encourage us to support one another, and songs with a "mission" flavour. Songs that encourage Christian community include examples such as The Servant Song; Life is a Journey, and For I'm Building a People of Power. Songs which exhort us to follow the Great Commission, and share the message of Christ with our world include, for example, Go, Sent Forth by God's Blessing, and Will You Come and Follow Me.

Consider Balance in Technical aspects of the music

Musicians should always remember that they are not "performing" - they are "leading" the group in worship through song. Instruments should not be so loud that they overwhelm the voices. Consider a balance of loud and soft songs and parts of songs. Lead in a way that encourages the singers to think about the meaning of the words, simply by the volume and tempo by which you lead. Some songs are most effective with many instruments and loud voices, while others are most meaningful sung very softly, or even acappella.

Don't overuse "De Colores."

De Colores is simply a Spanish folksong. It has become a "musical mascot" of Cursillo and can be overdone!

Music on Weekends

When selecting music for Cursillo Weekends, all of the selection principles above apply. The flow and progression of the weekend should be considered, and the music should relate to the focus of the talks throughout the weekend. It is wise to be prepared, with a plan of music for the entire weekend, but also be prepared to be flexible! Weekend opening music should be low-key. Candidates are unfamiliar with the setting, each other, and likely somewhat nervous. Stick to familiar songs, including some traditional hymns, to create a comfort level and help people relax.

The first five talks focus on what is fundamental for being a Christian, emphasizing the importance of a personal relationship with Christ. Music on Friday should still be low-key, largely reflective, presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The next five talks focus on how to live a life of grace. The musical focus here should invite a personal response and involve the individual. Songs that relate to piety and study would predominate. As the talks focus on action and leadership, more upbeat music with those themes can be introduced.

The theme of the last talks are how to structure Christian life and be an apostle. There is also an emphasis on living and working in community with other Christians. The focus is action, and the Church on the move to change the world for Christ. Music on Sunday needs to reinforce this message.

Music at Ultreyas

Again, the general principles for selection apply. A balance of music related to piety, study and action would be a good approach for Ultreyas. Opening music might be largely related to piety, perhaps starting with rousing praise, and leading into adoration and focus on Jesus. Music prior to the Witness Talk should be action focused. While music is important at Ultreyas, the music should not "take over" or predominate.

Organizational Issues Secretariat

Someone on Secretariat should have accountability for music in the Cursillo Movement. This responsibility includes keeping songbooks updated and ensuring that copyright laws are obeyed. Those who write music rely on the royalties as their livelihood. Using either tunes or lyrics without permission is a form of theft. The Cursillo Movement should have its own copyright license, not simply use a license that belongs to one of the parishes. There are two major sources of copyright licenses, which between them cover a wide variety of music and allow copies in local songbooks and power point presentations. The Movement must have in possession at least one copy of the original published work in a book or downloaded, for copying to be legal or have paid for one reproducible download. The two most common licenses are:

CCLI

www.ccli.com

One License

www.onelicense.net

When designing songbooks, you should consider a format which allows for easy addition and subtraction of songs. If using projected lyrics, make sure they are big enough to read, include composer and publisher credits.

Ultreya

There should be someone responsible for overseeing music at Ultreyas. This might include actually leading the music or ensuring that there is a music leader at each Ultreya, planning the focus of music with them, and ensuring that the leadership is effective. It might also include having songbooks or a computer with power point, the songs either already uploaded or on memory storage, a projector and extension cord and power bar physically available and set up at the Ultreya site. Collaborative effort between Ultreya Leader and musician is most effective.

Weekends

One person should have overall accountability for music to the Weekend Lay Leader. Again, a collaborative effort between music leader, lay director, and clergy makes for the best selection of music.