

*Lord, be in my heart and on my lips,  
that I may worthily announce your words of salvation.*

### ***Introduction***

*The Christian faithful who come together as one in expectation of the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (cf. Colossians 3.16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2.46). Thus St. Augustine says rightly, "Singing is for one who loves," and there is also an ancient proverb: "Whoever sings well prays twice over." — GIRM no.39*

It is not good enough to sing the right notes or have a beautiful voice. In order to fulfill the ministry of psalmist, you must become a lover of the Word. As a lover of the Word you strive to know and live the meaning of

the Scriptures. Your diligent preparation and example of discipleship is needed to effectively transmit the Word of God to others through the singing of the psalm. Only through reflection, study, and practice, can you lead the faithful into a deeper understanding of the Word.

As psalmist you will negotiate the spectrum of performance and prayer. Liturgy has a performative dimension but as prayer, it demands deep authenticity and sensitivity to the assembly. This document is a guide to help you develop in your ministry as a psalmist.

### ***Who Can Serve as a Psalmist?***

*It is the psalmist's place to sing the Psalm or other biblical canticle to be found between the readings. To carry out this function correctly, it is necessary for the psalmist to be accomplished in the art of singing Psalms and have a facility in public speaking and elocution. — GIRM no. 102*

As mentioned above, your goal is not to deliver a musical performance but to lead and sustain the congregation in sung prayer. You are enhancing the Word of God through song and encouraging full, conscious, and active participation from the

people assembled. Spiritual and musical preparations are essential to fulfill this ministry effectively. Prior to acting as a psalmist consider whether you are:

- technically and spiritually ready to act in this role
- comfortable and poised leading a large group of people
- willing to learn and practice music in advance
- open to coaching and critique
- familiar with the music ministry of your parish

### ***The Liturgy of the Word***

*After the First Reading follows the Responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and which has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God. —GIRM no. 61*

The mass can be divided into the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The responsorial psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and its proper text is found in the lectionary. It bridges the first reading and the Gospel: In the lectionary the readings are arranged so that there is usually a harmony between the selection from the Old Testament and the Gospel. The responsorial psalm, especially the antiphon/refrain, summarizes the theme of the Word for the day. God speaks to us in the Word proclaimed and the psalm provides a way for the assembly to respond to the Word of God in words from God. As human prayers, the psalms help us to claim our part in the story of salvation history.

It is preferable for the responsorial psalm to be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. Hence, the psalmist sings the psalm verses at the ambo, while the whole congregation sits and listens, normally taking part by means of the response, except when the psalm is sung straight through without a response. In order that the people may be able to sing the psalm response more easily, a seasonal or common psalm may be chosen from among those options in the lectionary. If the psalm cannot be sung, it should be recited in a way that is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the Word of God.

### ***How to Prepare to Sing the Responsorial Psalm***

It is necessary that those who exercise the Ministry of Word be qualified and carefully prepared so that the faithful who listen may develop a warm and living love for Scripture. Preparation as a reader must be spiritual, scriptural, liturgical, and technical.

### ***PSALMIST'S WEEKLY PREPARATION***

Consider developing a routine that helps you prepare spiritually for the singing of the responsorial psalm. Below is a structure for you to consider:

#### **MONDAY**

Read the Gospel in a reflective way.

#### **TUESDAY**

Read the Gospel once more and consider any new understanding you have gained.

#### **WEDNESDAY**

Read the first reading. During the Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter seasons also read the Second Reading. Pray the psalm aloud and reflect on the connection between the psalm and the readings.

#### **THURSDAY**

Read this psalm again. How does the psalm invite you to enter into the Paschal Mystery?

#### **FRIDAY**

Read the Gospel and psalm once more. Reflect on the way this psalm has helped you live the Paschal Mystery during the week.

#### **SATURDAY/SUNDAY**

Before mass, pray the psalm and when singing, use all of the insights you have gained to lead the assembly into a deeper understanding.

*(Based on Ministry of Cantors,  
pp. 19 - 20 by Kathleen Harmon)*

### **SPIRITUAL PREPARATION**

As poetry, the psalms move us from hearing to participation. The assembly needs to participate in the text as personal experience. The responsorial psalm does not just explain the liturgy of the Word; it is one way through which the liturgy of the Word connects to our lives. We are not just hearing stories from long ago, we are taking up our own place in the ongoing narrative of the relationship between God and humanity.

The psalm was chosen to relate to the first reading. The response, however, not only relates to the first reading but also to the Gospel, which the assembly has yet to hear. As the psalmist, you need to know where this liturgy of the Word is going and be that bridge.

Remember:

- Use the lectionary. You are a minister of the Word and this is your book. You need to know how it is put together and what is inside of it
- The psalm is a summation of the Word of the day.
- The greater your scriptural formation, the better prepared you will be.

Finally, after completing your scriptural preparation, consider the psalm as a piece of literature.

- Identify the feel or mood of the psalm: praise, lament, thanksgiving, repentance, encouragement, etc.
- Do you notice anything about the literary structure? Repetition? Rhythm? Psalms are known for parallelism. Instead of rhyme it is a rhythm, a rhythm of sense rather than sound.
- Look for metaphors. Also, where is God? Where are we? Who stands before whom?
- Look for repeated words or words that mean similar things.
- Review the relationship of the refrain to the verse. Whose voice is speaking when?

## TECHNICAL PREPARATION

Your voice is your instrument. Just as any instrument needs proper care and maintenance so does your voice. Consider developing a warm up and practice routine for your voice in preparation for fulfilling your role as psalmist. Practice and preparation are essential for singing well in front of others.

### *Practicing the psalm*

- Organize your music and make meaningful performance notes.
- Review and clarify pronunciation, practice proper diction.
- Highlight words or passages which will be difficult or will require ongoing practice.
- Consider practicing on your own, with your accompanist, and in the church.
- Consider recording yourself as well as having a critical listener assist you.

### *Be aware of your body*

- Be aware of your health and mood so that you can best communicate the message you wish to deliver when you are singing.
- Stay hydrated and consider what you are eating and drinking prior to singing. Sugar and caffeine will impact your delivery.

### *Warm up and listen to your voice*

- Consider beginning with stretching, breathing, and vocal range exercises. Give thought to how your voice feels and sounds as you warm up. Consider the range that will be required for the music you will be singing.
- Be aware how long it takes your voice to warm up.

### *Setup*

- Organize your resources.
- Check microphones and make adjustments as required.
- Confirm your church's protocol: when to get up, what path to take to the ambo, etc.
- Be prepared to think on your feet if something happens beyond your control.

### *Comportment*

- It is important to connect with the congregation as you introduce the psalm refrain.
- Consider gestures, postures, and your facial expression.

## SELECTING A PSALM SETTING

Care should be taken when choosing a musical setting for the responsorial psalm. It should foster a better understanding of the spiritual meaning of the psalm. Consider the following elements:

- Does the music use the proper and current liturgical texts? Is it the right psalm for the day or a common psalm for the season? How does the psalm bridge the reading and the Gospel of the day?
- It is important to be sensitive to the needs of the particular community. Think about the people who will hear the psalm: their needs, cultures, abilities, and how they express their faith. Would they relate well to the music? Can the assembly sing this refrain easily? Is it useful to teach the assembly this particular psalm setting?

The absence of printed music for the psalm (especially during weekday masses) should not be a barrier to singing the psalm. Simple chanted tones can be used by the psalmist and assembly. Some of the advantages of singing simple chanted tones are:

- Chant can bring a much needed focus to the texts.
- Chant requires no accompaniment and can be sung in any vocal range.

You do not need special training in Gregorian chant to chant the psalms. Many simple psalm tones exist that work beautifully with the English language (see pg. 8).

### *Installation Prayer for Psalmists*

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all created things,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
 Divine Musician, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ,  
 to teach us a new song,  
 a song of merciful love and salvation for all nations.

You invited us to join your choir,  
 on earth and in heaven, to praise you with music.

Direct our voices and instruments so that, with gratitude,  
 we may fill the air with heavenly sound  
 and gladden the hearts of all.

May we be one soul and one voice,  
 singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs  
 to you now and forever. Amen.

(Source: *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition*. Conacan Inc. 2005)

## Resources

### 1. **ORDO**

Annual Liturgical Calendar & pastoral liturgy guidelines. Contains liturgical guidelines for the day (lectionary page numbers, Roman missal, divine office and other pastoral liturgical notes). <http://www.cccbpublications.ca>

Monthly Liturgical Calendar available online:

<http://nlo.cccb.ca/index.php/liturgical-calendar>

### 2. **LECTIONARY**

Lectionary gives you access to all the readings for Sundays/Solemnities in the Church Year, as well as the Common Psalms selected for each liturgical year, and the Introduction to the Lectionary <http://www.cccbpublications.ca>

- Lectionary for Weekdays - available online.
  - Weekday A: <http://nlo.cccb.ca/images/stories/pdfs/weekday-a-1993.pdf>
  - Weekday B: <http://nlo.cccb.ca/images/stories/pdfs/weekday-b-1993.pdf>

### 3. **FULLY COMPOSED PSALM SELECTIONS**

- **Psalms for the Church Year” A, B, C**, Novalis (Composed by Gordon Johnston). Order at [www.novalis.ca](http://www.novalis.ca) Congregation unison melodies are available in **Living With Christ Missal by Novalis**. <http://www.livingwithchrist.ca>
- **CCCB Psalms for the Liturgy**, CCCB Publications. More information: <http://nlo.cccb.ca/index.php/nclm>

### 4. **PSALM TONES**

- **Mundelein Psalter**  
Audio files: <http://www.usml.edu/the-liturgical-institute/special-projects/the-mundelein-psalter/mundelein-psalter-resource-page>
- **St. Meinrad Psalm Tones**  
Psalm Tones for English based on the Gregorian modes. Music for piano/organ accompaniment is available for download at their website. <http://saintmeinradmusic.org/Pages/Products1.html>
- **Conception Abbey Psalm Tones** | GIA Publications  
Accompaniments available for high, medium and low voice. [http://www.giamusic.com/search\\_details.cfm?title\\_id=18959](http://www.giamusic.com/search_details.cfm?title_id=18959)
- **Christian Prayer: Liturgy of the Hours**  
Psalm Tones (pg. 1715 - 1720). Featuring psalm tones by Dom

Gregory Murray, Rev. Percy Jones, and Dom Laurence Bevenot. This book is available at any Catholic bookstore, or online at Amazon.

- Psalmist Workshop (cheat sheet). **See next page.**

## 5. PSALMIST FORMATION

- **Living Liturgy for Cantors 2014 – Paperback & E-book (Liturgical Press).** Thoughtful exploration of the meaning of the text and suggestions for spiritual preparation. <http://www.litpress.org>
- **The Ministry of Cantor**, by Kathleen Harmon (Liturgical Press). <http://www.litpress.org>
- **Guide for Cantors, by Paul Turner & Jennifer Kerr (LTP)**
- **When Christians pray the Psalms**, by Lucien Deiss (World Library Publication). <http://www.wlp.jspaluch.com>

**To request a Psalmist Workshop** for your parish/area, please contact the Office of Liturgy at (403) 218-5511 or (403) 218-5524, or e-mail us at [liturgy@calgarydiocese.ca](mailto:liturgy@calgarydiocese.ca)

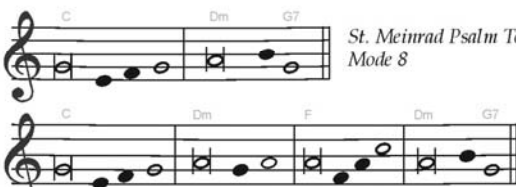
# Psalm Tone CHEAT SHEET

## Praise, Thankfulness, Joy

1  *St. Meinrad Psalm Tones Mode 5*  
Copyright © Saint Meinrad Archabbey. All rights reserved. LicensingOnline# E-802780  
 Use for both antiphon and verses (repeat pattern).

2  *Rev. Percy Jones Tone 1*  
The Reverend Percy Jones, for psalm tones by The Reverend Percy Jones.  
 Use for both antiphon and verses (repeat pattern)

3  *Conception Abbey Mode 6*  
Copyright © 2010 Conception Abbey Admin. by GIA Publications, Inc. www.giamusic.com All rights reserved. Used with permission from GIA Publications, Inc.  
 Use first line for antiphon, second line for the verses.

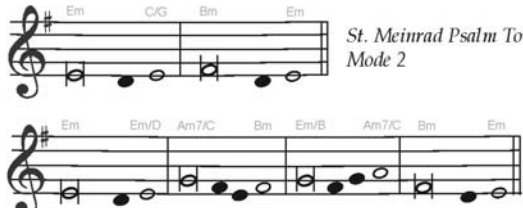
4  *St. Meinrad Psalm Tones Mode 8*  
Copyright © Saint Meinrad Archabbey All rights reserved. LicensingOnline# E-802780  
 Use first line for antiphon, second line for the verses.

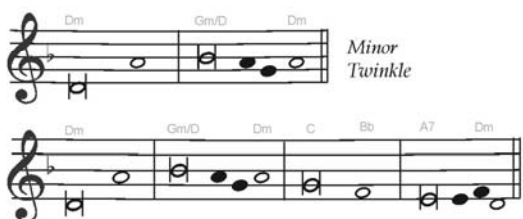
5  *Gordon Johnston's Psalm 16*  
From Psalms for the Liturgical Year, volume B, © 2010 Novaks Publishing, Inc. Music: Gordon Johnston © 2010 Novaks Publishing Inc. & Gordon Johnston. All rights reserved. Used with permission.  
 Use first line for antiphon, second line for the verses.

## Lamentation, Sorrow, Longing

1  *Murray Tones Tone 2*  
Chappell & Co. Ltd. for "Gregorian Psalm Tones" by Dom Gregory Murray, OSB  
 Use for both antiphon and verses (repeat pattern)

2  *St. Meinrad Psalm Tones Mode 3*  
Copyright © Saint Meinrad Archabbey All rights reserved. LicensingOnline# E-802780  
 Use for both antiphon and verses (repeat pattern)

3  *St. Meinrad Psalm Tones Mode 2*  
Copyright © Saint Meinrad Archabbey All rights reserved. LicensingOnline# E-802780  
 Use first line for antiphon, second line for the verses.

4  *Minor Twinkle*  
Psalm tone adapted from the melody of "Ain vous dras-je, Maman," 1761.  
 Use first line for antiphon, second line for the verses.

*Psalm 95*  
**O that today you would listen to his voice, harden not your heart.**

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
 Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
 Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

*Psalm 51*  
**Have mercy O Lord, for we have sinned.**

Create in me a clean heart, O God  
 and put a new and right spirit within me.  
 Do not cast me away from your presence  
 and do not take your holy spirit from me.



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 Sacred Music Committee  
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary