

# Cantor Etiquette

**The ministry of the cantor is a gift from God and every cantor should give thanks always to our Lord for this gift.**

From this statement the cantor should always consider this as his/her vocation and embrace etiquette of MIND, BODY and SPIRIT.

## MIND.

- **Be prepared.** The cantor should know the services they are about to sing. Practice all melodies and tones. Mark all pages and readings, and NEVER “wing it” with the readings. Sacred Scripture is the Word of God.
- **Know yourself, including your limitations.** Never take on a service or melodies of which you have little or questionable knowledge.
- **Pre-think** every service where you are cantor, the movement of the service and the melodies involved.
- **Be on time.** Make it a point to arrive not less than 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the service. Last minute arrival sets a bad example. If you have to ascend stairs, you could be short of breath and it will show.
- **Proper Deportment.** Show respect to every person in attendance at all times. It is never acceptable for a cantor to correct or admonish the celebrant, the faithful and other cantors during liturgical services or immediately afterwards. If discussion or clarification is necessary, it must be done in private, and only with the persons who are involved.
- **On the Parish Level.** The pastor is the final authority. When the pastor is absent and there is a substitute, as cantor you may be asked how a given service is taken at your parish. Your duty is to inform them of what is done at your parish. That’s all. The cantor does not become involved in setting liturgical policies and procedures.
- To be a cantor is a **vocation**, a **gift**. It is not a right.
- **Humility.** If Cantor Etiquette is described in one word, it is: HUMILITY.

## BODY.

- **Appearance.** Be groomed at all times. The cantor’s attire should show respect to God and to God’s people. While much has changed now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a good maxim is that the cantor’s attire should be, at the minimum, dressy business casual. Never wear shorts, tee-shirts, sandals/flip-flops, or other “sporty” attire.
- **Prohibited.** Never, never, never try to serve as cantor while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (prescription or illegal recreational).

- **Electronic Distractions.** Although these devices are commonplace today, cell phones, pagers and similar devices should be turned off before entering the church. Furthermore, it is NOT acceptable to text, check messages or do anything whatsoever with these devices. Leave those devices in your car.
- **Leadership.** The cantor leads the parish singing. He/she should project their voice and then allow the congregation time to join in. Continue to sing in a lively but not hurried manner. Divine services are not an open forum for a “round robin” microphone rodeo where everyone gets their opportunity. Avoid “passing the microphone.” This is a source of confusion to the faithful and a disruption to the liturgical flow.
- **Health & Wellness.** It is the cantor’s duty to be of “sound mind and sound body” on all occasions.
- **Actions.** No food or beverages, it’s that simple. While it may be necessary to have a drink of water or to take a lozenge to keep the throat passages clear, this should be done discreetly, in a manner as subtle and invisible as possible.
- **Conversation.** Never engage in chatter or conversation of any kind during liturgical services.
- **Family Members.** Unless your immediate family members are an assistant cantor or part of your parish’s singers who accompany you, they should NOT be in your cantor stand. This is especially true with children. While dear to you, they can become a source of distraction and irritation if allowed to play, meander or disrupt while you are leading the singing.

**SPIRIT.** “Now set aside all earthly cares.” –*Cherubic Hymn*

- **Humility.** It is important enough to repeat this statement: “If Cantor Etiquette is described in one word, it is: HUMILITY.”
- In many cases, after the pastor parish members see the cantor as the “**next most significant**” person in church.
- **You are a leader.** Do not disappoint the people in your parish or wherever you cantor.
- The cantor’s actions, in a word, should be “**prayerful.**” Liturgical services are not the time to let the faithful and other cantors know who is in charge. Leadership is shown by example.
- **Cantor is Vocation.** This continues even after you exit the church. People know who you are. They are watching your actions. Always conduct yourself as God’s servant—as your parish’s cantor.