



Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora

Diocesan Policy for the Use of Church Buildings/Designated Sacred Spaces for Activities Other than Worship

1. Rationale

- 1.1. These norms for the use of churches or other blessed sacred spaces for purposes other than worship are based on the Code of Canon Law (1984) and the document “Concerts in Churches,” Congregation for Divine Worship (1987).
- 1.2. The Code of Canon Law states: “In a sacred place, only those things are to be permitted which serve to exercise or promote worship, piety, and religion. Anything discordant with the holiness of the place is forbidden. The Ordinary may, however, for individual cases, permit other uses, provided they are not contrary to the sacred character of the place.” (Can. 1210)
- 1.3. A church is not a public gathering space or hall. “They are sacred places ‘set apart’ in a permanent way for divine worship by their dedication and blessing.” (“Concerts in Churches,” Congregation for Divine Worship, 1987)
- 1.4. As such, anything out of harmony with the sacred nature of the church building and its curtilage is strictly forbidden.
- 1.5. Concerts of sacred music, productions of a sacred nature, and non-liturgical activities of a religious nature may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, they may be valuable in enhancing the spiritual life of those who participate and attend or in inviting contemplation on the mystery of the divine and the richness of the Christian Tradition.

2. The Granting of Occasional Permission

- 2.1. Such non-liturgical concerts/productions/non-liturgical activities of a religious nature must be occasional in nature.
- 2.2. In such instances, lyrics of songs, poetry, and any other form of content should be in harmony with the nature of the sacred space.
- 2.3. Concerts or activities with the primary purpose of fundraising should be avoided.
- 2.4. On each such occasion, the Parish Priest or equivalent in Canon Law must request in writing from the organisers a full programme of the sacred music to be performed or a full description of the production/activity to take place, along with the names of the authors/composers. This should be done before the event is publicised and at least two months in advance of the concert/performance date.
- 2.5. The Parish Priest or equivalent in Canon Law is to make a judgement of the programmed concert/activity in accordance with this policy. Once satisfied that the concert/activity complies with this policy, he may grant permission in writing.
- 2.6. Should the Parish Priest or equivalent in Canon Law have queries in this regard or require any further assistance, he should refer the matter to a specially appointed diocesan commission to adjudicate such matters for a final decision.

3. During an Approved Sacred Concert/Activity

- 3.1. No charge should be made for access to the concert/activity.
- 3.2. A request for a donation is permitted. No one should be denied entry to the concert/activity if they do not wish to donate.
- 3.3. No advertising banners or boards should be installed either inside or outside the church building. Only the Papal Flag, the Irish Flag, the County Flag, the Provincial Flag, the Diocesan Flag, and the Parish Flag are allowed to be flown on church property.
- 3.4. Selling of raffle tickets or the drawing of tickets is forbidden.
- 3.5. The focus of the concert/production/activity should be on raising the minds and hearts of those present to God – it should be prayerful rather than performance-focused.

- 3.6. Concerts and rehearsals should be scheduled to minimise disruption/conflicts with regular sacramental and devotional schedules.
- 3.7. Those taking part must remain outside the sanctuary area.
- 3.8. The Blessed Sacrament should be removed and reserved in a suitable place during both rehearsals and the actual activity itself.
- 3.9. The Altar, Chair, or Ambo must not be moved or removed and should at all times be treated in a manner that respects their sacred nature. Nothing should be placed on them or used as a prop or storage space.
- 3.10. Participants and the audience must at all times be dressed in a manner appropriate for the sacred nature of the space.
- 3.11. Excess lighting, sound, and special effects should be avoided.
- 3.12. No refreshments should be served either during or after the event within the church building.
- 3.13. The sale of merchandise may not take place within the church building itself and should be confined to the foyer area.

4. Insurance and Safeguarding Matters for Non-Parish Organised Activities/Groups

- 4.1. Those organising the activity must assure the Parish Priest/Moderator or equivalent in Canon Law in writing that they have appropriate public liability insurance for the entire event, including rehearsals.
- 4.2. If minors are involved, the Parish Priest/Moderator or equivalent in Canon Law must have assured himself that those organising the activity have completed the necessary Safeguarding Children Declaration Forms for an outside body using church property (SG07).
- 4.3. If the event is being relayed by means of the Parish Webcam or live-streamed, this must adhere to the Diocesan Guidelines for Parishes on the use of Parish Webcams/live-streaming and CCTV.

4.4. Copyright compliance with regard to music/production material used during the event or transmitted by webcam/live-streaming is entirely the responsibility of the organisers.

5. Parish Expenses and the Care of Parish Property for Non-Parish Organised Activities/Groups

5.1. It is expected that an appropriate donation be made to parish finances to cover the costs of heating, lighting, and sound, along with any other expenses incurred. This should be agreed in writing with the Parish Priest/Moderator or equivalent in Canon Law in advance of the concert.

5.2. The Parish Priest/Moderator or equivalent in Canon Law must make it clear in writing that any damage to parish property as a result of the activity will need to be made good by the event organisers in an appropriate and timely manner.

6. Reposing of a Body in the Church

6.1. The reposing of a body in the church for public viewing and condolences is forbidden.

6.2. In a parish where the practice is already in place, it is to be discouraged if at all possible.

6.3. No parish is to introduce this practice as a novelty.

30th of May, 2024