

A Parish Inheritance

A Hymnological Study of St. Mary's Parish



A Resource for Pastor and Pastoral Council

Cover Letter

Dear Father Zerucha, Members of the Parish Council, and the St. Mary's Music Ministry,

The enclosed materials are offered in a **spirit of service to the Church's liturgical prayer** and to those entrusted with its care. They were prepared in response to a simple but enduring question that many parishes quietly face: *how do we choose hymns that help the Church pray the Mass as the Church intends?*

These documents do not propose a program, mandate, or repertoire. Rather, they seek to provide a **shared theological and pastoral framework** for reflection and discernment—one that is grounded in the Church's own teaching on sacred music, attentive to the lived history of parish worship, and respectful of the devotion and generosity of those who have served faithfully in music ministry.

Because these materials were developed over time and for different pastoral purposes, they are presented here as a **curated packet** rather than as a single linear text. Some are doctrinal in focus, others pastoral or reflective, and others practical or illustrative. They are meant to be read **patiently and selectively**, not hurriedly or in isolation.

Throughout, care has been taken to distinguish between **devotional value and liturgical suitability**, and to avoid judging the faith or sincerity of those who cherish particular hymns. Where evaluations are offered, they are **liturgical in nature**, rooted in the Church's understanding of the Mass as a sacred action with its own voice, texts, and purpose.

It is my hope that these materials may support pastors, musicians, and parish leaders in **listening more closely to how the Church herself prays**, and in fostering musical choices that arise from fidelity, charity, and shared pastoral responsibility.

They are offered not to provoke change, but to deepen understanding—so that any future decisions, whenever they are made, may be shaped by reverence, clarity, and care for the unity of worship.

Respectfully in Christ,

Don Howe

Fifty Years of Choral Service: St. Mary's and St. Paul's Parishes

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WHAT IS A CATHOLIC HYMN?

A Doctrinally Grounded Definition for Parish Musicians

Introduction

As Catholic musicians, we are entrusted with shaping the Church's sung prayer. The Catechism teaches that the sacred liturgy is the public worship of the Church, where Christ the Head and His Body offer praise to the Father¹. In an era when missalettes draw from both Catholic and Protestant hymn traditions, we are invited to ask a foundational question: **what defines a Catholic hymn within the Church's own understanding of liturgical prayer?** The Catechism reminds us that liturgical music must express the faith of the Church, flow from her doctrine, and serve the dignity of the sacred rites². **How well do we recognize the characteristics that distinguish Catholic hymnody, and can we identify those distinctions when selecting music for the liturgy we serve?**

A Catholic hymn is more than a religious song. It is a sung expression of the Church's faith, shaped by doctrine, rooted in tradition, and ordered toward the liturgical action of the Mass. This definition is grounded in three authoritative sources: the Catechism of the Catholic Church¹, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal², and the USCCB's 2020 document Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church³.

In developing this definition, we also reviewed the major Church documents that guide the Church's understanding of sacred music, including Sacrosanctum Concilium, Musicam Sacram, Tra le Sollecitudini, De Musica Sacra, the Roman Missal, and the Graduale Romanum. Each of these sources affirms the same core principles: hymns used in the liturgy must express Catholic doctrine clearly, serve the liturgical action of the Mass, participate in the Church's sacred musical tradition, and be approved by ecclesial authority. The definition presented here is fully consistent with these documents and reflects the Church's own understanding of authentic Catholic hymnody.

1. A Catholic Hymn Must Express the Truth of the Catholic Faith

Hymns used in the liturgy must faithfully express Catholic doctrine³, especially regarding the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ, the Paschal Mystery, the Eucharist as sacrifice and real presence, the Church as sacramental and communal, and the life of grace¹. Hymns that obscure Christ's identity, weaken Eucharistic doctrine, or reduce salvation to subjective experience are unsuitable for liturgical use³.

2. A Catholic Hymn Must Serve the Liturgical Action of the Mass

The GIRM teaches that sung texts are part of the liturgical action itself². For example, the Entrance Chant must open the celebration, foster unity, introduce the mystery of the season or feast, and accompany the procession². A hymn may be beautiful and doctrinally sound, but if it does not serve the ritual action, it is not functioning as Catholic hymnody².

3. A Catholic Hymn Participates in the Church's Tradition of Sacred Music

Sacred music exists for the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful¹. A Catholic hymn reflects the Church's sacramental worldview, draws from Scripture and tradition¹, maintains continuity with the Church's musical heritage, and avoids styles or texts that prioritize performance or sentimentality³.

4. A Catholic Hymn Must Be Approved or Permitted for Liturgical Use

The GIRM requires that sung texts at the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion come from the Roman Gradual, the Simple Gradual, or another liturgical chant approved by the Conference of Bishops². This means hymn texts must undergo doctrinal review³, hymnals must be approved by ecclesial authority², and not every Christian hymn is suitable for Mass³.

5. A Catholic Hymn Reflects the Church's Ecclesial and Sacramental Identity

The USCCB identifies recurring issues in contemporary hymnody³, including overemphasis on individual experience, ambiguous references to Christ, weak Eucharistic language, and reduction of salvation to emotion. A Catholic hymn must present Christ clearly³, express the Church's communal identity¹, reflect sacramental realism¹, and support the faithful in entering the mysteries of the liturgy².

Authoritative Definition

A Catholic hymn is a sung text that faithfully expresses Catholic doctrine³, serves the liturgical action of the Mass as articulated in the GIRM², participates in the Church's sacred musical tradition¹, and is approved for liturgical use by ecclesial authority².

6. Comparison Chart: Liturgical, Devotional, and Non-Catholic Hymns

This chart summarizes the essential differences between the three major categories of hymn texts encountered in parish life. It is designed for quick reference by parish musicians, catechists, and liturgy planners.

Liturgical Hymns

- Texts that belong to the liturgy itself (e.g., the Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, sequences, and the Liturgy of the Hours hymns).
- Their wording is fixed by the Church and cannot be altered.
- They express the Church's prayer in an official, juridical sense.
- They are universal: the same text is used throughout the world.
- They are not optional "songs" but integral parts of the rite.

Devotional Hymns

- Texts that arise from the Church's devotional life rather than the liturgy.
- They express approved Catholic devotions: Marian, Sacred Heart, angels, saints, Eucharistic adoration, etc.
- They may be used at Mass when doctrinally sound and pastorally appropriate.
- They support the faithful's participation but are not part of the liturgical books.
- They vary by region, culture, parish tradition, and religious communities.

Non-Catholic Hymns

- Texts originating outside Catholic tradition or expressing non-Catholic theology.
- May contain ambiguity, incomplete doctrine, or ideas inconsistent with Catholic teaching.
- Require careful discernment before use in a Catholic liturgy.
- Not automatically excluded but must be evaluated for doctrinal clarity.
- Should never replace liturgical texts or obscure Catholic identity.

Key Principle

Liturgical hymns belong to the rite itself. Devotional hymns support the rite and express Catholic spirituality. Non-Catholic hymns must be evaluated carefully and used only when they clearly express the Catholic faith.

7. The Historical Use of Devotional Hymns at Mass

Although the Church defines a liturgical hymn as a text belonging to the sacred rites themselves, the lived tradition of the Roman Rite reveals a broader musical practice. For centuries, Catholic parishes have incorporated devotional hymns into the celebration of Mass, not as liturgical texts, but as expressions of the Church's devotional life that support the faithful's participation. This practice developed especially from the 17th century onward and became a defining feature of parish life across the English-speaking Catholic world.

A. Why Devotional Hymns Were Used at Mass

The Church has always recognized the value of approved Catholic devotions such as Marian devotion, the Sacred Heart, the angels, St. Joseph, the saints, and Eucharistic adoration. Hymns expressing these devotions were permitted at Mass when they were doctrinally sound, expressed Catholic faith clearly, supported the people's prayer, and harmonized with the liturgical season or feast. These hymns were not liturgical texts, but they were authentically Catholic and served as a bridge between the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical action.

B. A Common Practice Across Catholic Countries

This was not a local or isolated custom. Hymnologists and researchers consistently report that the same patterns were found in the United States, England, Ireland, and Canada. In all these regions, devotional hymnody formed a shared Catholic culture. Parishioners learned the liturgical year, the saints, and the mysteries of the faith through the hymns they sang.

C. Pre-Mass Devotional Hymns: A Universal Parish Tradition

One of the most widespread expressions of Catholic devotional hymnody was the singing of devotional hymns before Mass. This musical prelude was not part of the liturgy itself, but it served an important pastoral and catechetical purpose: it prepared the faithful spiritually and connected them to the rhythm of the liturgical year.

This custom was practiced across the Catholic world, and your own parish, St. Mary's in Akron, Ohio, embodied it beautifully. Before Mass, the choir regularly sang older Marian hymns from before the 1960s, hymns to the Guardian Angels, hymns to St. Joseph, and

hymns to saints whose feasts were approaching. These hymns were intentionally chosen to announce upcoming feasts, honor the saint or mystery of the approaching day, foster recollection and devotion, and prepare the congregation for the sacred mysteries. This was not merely a musical prelude; it was catechesis through hymnody, forming the devotional imagination of the parish and strengthening Catholic identity.

Researchers and hymnologists consistently report that this same pattern was found throughout English-speaking Catholicism. St. Mary's was participating in a shared, trans-Atlantic Catholic culture, where devotional hymnody supported the liturgical life of the parish without being part of the liturgical texts themselves.

D. Examples of Devotional Hymns Historically Used at Mass

- Sacred Heart hymns (“O Sacred Heart, O Love Divine”)
- Marian hymns (“Mother Dear, O Pray for Me”)
- Eucharistic devotional hymns (“Veni Jesu, Amor Mi”)
- Hymns to the angels (“Beautiful Angel from Heaven So Bright”)
- Hymns to the saints (“Dear Guardian of Mary”)
- Mission and parish hymns (“O Holy Name of Majesty and Power,” hymn of the Holy Name Society)
- Hymns from religious orders — especially those whose sisters staffed Catholic schools and shaped parish devotional life:
 - **Sisters of Notre Dame**
 - **Sisters of St. Joseph**
 - **Sisters of Mercy**

These communities produced some of the most beloved devotional hymns sung in American parishes, and their influence was especially strong in places like **St. Mary's in Akron, Ohio**, where their hymnody formed generations of Catholic children and shaped the parish's devotional imagination.

E. The Key Principle

Devotional hymns may be used at Mass when they are doctrinally Catholic, express the Church's faith, and support the people's participation, even though they are not liturgical hymns by definition. This historical reality helps parish musicians today understand the full landscape of Catholic hymnody: liturgical hymns, devotional hymns used in liturgical contexts, and non-Catholic hymns.

F. Discernment of Parish Musical Traditions

Every parish carries a musical story — hymns that have been sung for generations, melodies that shaped childhood faith, and devotional songs that became part of the parish’s spiritual “family history.” These traditions deserve genuine respect. They often reflect the devotion of the people, the influence of teaching sisters, and the lived Catholicism that formed so many of us.

At the same time, the Church invites us to look at these traditions with loving discernment. Not every hymn that is familiar is necessarily suitable for Mass, and not every cherished song expresses the fullness of Catholic faith. Discernment does not mean rejecting our past; it means **honoring what is good** and **gently refining what needs clarity**.

When evaluating parish musical traditions, we look for hymns that express Catholic teaching clearly and beautifully, draw the faithful toward prayer rather than sentimentality, reflect the mysteries of the liturgical year, strengthen Catholic identity, and help the whole community pray with one heart.

This kind of discernment allows a parish to treasure its musical heritage while ensuring that everything sung at Mass truly serves the sacred liturgy. In this way, tradition and liturgical integrity work together — preserving what has nourished the faithful and passing on what is best to the next generation.

Companion Document

For a fuller pastoral reflection on how these principles shape parish life and musical choices, see the companion document, ***A Pastoral Look at the Hymns We Sing: The Parish Hymnody Study***.

Pastoral FAQs for Parish Musicians

1. Why can't we just sing any hymn we like at Mass?

Because the Mass has its own texts and prayers given by the Church. Hymns can support the liturgy, but they cannot replace the liturgy's own words. Our goal is to choose music that helps the whole parish pray with the mind of the Church.

2. What makes a hymn "Catholic"?

A hymn is Catholic when its text expresses the Church's faith clearly and fully. This includes devotion to Mary, the saints, the angels, the Sacred Heart, the Eucharist, and the mysteries of Christ. Catholic hymnody is rooted in Scripture, doctrine, and the Church's devotional life.

3. Are devotional hymns allowed at Mass?

Yes. Devotional hymns have been used at Mass for centuries, especially before Mass and at certain points where the Church permits a suitable hymn. They are not liturgical texts, but they can support the people's prayer when they express Catholic faith clearly.

4. Why did we sing certain hymns before Mass when I was growing up?

Many parishes, including St. Mary's in Akron, had strong devotional traditions shaped by teaching sisters and parish missions. These hymns prepared the faithful for Mass, taught the mysteries of the faith, and connected the parish to the liturgical year.

5. What about hymns from other Christian traditions?

Some may be usable, but they must be evaluated carefully. If a hymn expresses incomplete or non-Catholic theology, it may not be appropriate for Mass. Our goal is always to strengthen Catholic identity and clarity of faith.

6. How do we balance parish tradition with liturgical integrity?

We honor what has nourished the parish while also ensuring that every hymn used at Mass expresses Catholic faith clearly and supports the liturgy. This means preserving what is good, refining what needs clarity, and helping the parish pray with one heart.

For a fuller explanation of how the Church understands different kinds of hymns and how parish traditions fit into this, see Sections 6 and 7 of this handout.

ENDNOTES (Quick-Reference Version)

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church — core teachings for hymn selection:

- CCC 1066–1075 — What the liturgy is; Christ the Head and His Body offering worship.
- CCC 1124–1125 — Lex orandi, lex credendi: liturgy must express the Church’s faith.
- CCC 1156–1158 — Sacred music as integral to liturgy; must express doctrine.
- CCC 1674–1676 — Popular piety and devotions in harmony with the liturgy.

2. General Instruction of the Roman Missal — norms governing sung texts:

- GIRM 39–41 — Purpose of sacred music in the Mass.
- GIRM 47–48 — Entrance Chant: purpose and function.
- GIRM 74 — Offertory Chant: unity and ritual action.
- GIRM 86–87 — Communion Chant: expressing unity and joy.

3. USCCB, *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* (2020) — doctrinal criteria:

- Christological clarity — hymns must clearly confess Christ.
- Eucharistic realism — hymns must reflect sacrifice and real presence.
- Ecclesial identity — hymns must express the Church as communal and sacramental.
- Doctrinal review — hymns must be evaluated for theological accuracy.

A PASTORAL LOOK AT THE HYMNS WE SING: PAST & PRESENT

— The Parish Hymnody Study

PREFACE

This study began with a simple question: **What happened to the hymns we once sang at St. Mary's?**

Behind that question lies a deeper story — a story of memory, devotion, and the quiet ways a parish's musical identity can change over time. This work does not seek to judge or to criticize. Its purpose is pastoral: to understand, to remember, and to honor the musical tradition that shaped generations of parishioners.

For nearly three decades, St. Mary's sang from a repertoire that was deeply Catholic, profoundly Eucharistic, and richly Marian. These hymns were not merely selections on a page; they were the parish's devotional heartbeat. When the organists who carried this tradition in their hands and memory was no longer present, the tradition itself began to fade. New hymnals brought new music, and slowly, almost imperceptibly, the parish's musical voice changed.

This study traces that journey — from the hymns we all shared, to the hymns we lost, to the hymns that arrived later. It is a pastoral look at the hymns we sing, and the hymns we no longer sing, and what that means for the life of a parish.

Companion Document

This study is grounded in the definition of a Catholic hymn presented in the companion document, **What Is a Catholic Hymn?** which outlines the doctrinal principles used throughout this reflection.

INTRODUCTION

Every parish has a musical memory. Some of it is written in hymnals, but most of it lives in the people — in the voices that rise together Sunday after Sunday, in the melodies that echo through the church long after Mass has ended, in the hymns that accompany baptisms, funerals, weddings, and feast days.

Many pastors assume that the musicians they hire are already familiar with the Church's documents on sacred music and will naturally choose hymns that reflect those teachings. Musicians, for their part, often assume that if a hymn appears in a widely used missalette—or in the liturgy aid that accompanies it—it must be fully suitable for the Sacred Liturgy.

These resources, however, do not distinguish between Catholic, Protestant, or theologically ambiguous hymns. In this gap of assumptions, hymns with unclear or incomplete theology—such as *Ashes*—continue to be used simply because they are familiar or long associated with a season. The solution is not more documents, but **formation**: a shared process in which pastors and musicians learn together how to evaluate hymn texts, understand the Church's vision for sacred music, and make choices that reflect the faith we celebrate. When clergy and musicians grow in this understanding side by side, the parish's sung prayer becomes **clearer, stronger, and more deeply rooted in the Church's tradition**.

In many parishes, there are also faithful individuals who quietly carry the parish's musical memory and can help bridge the gap between pastor and musician. These parishioners—often long-time choir members, organists, or those formed by the parish's devotional life—can offer gentle guidance, historical insight, and practical support.

Their presence is a gift. When pastors and musicians welcome their perspective, the parish benefits from a deeper continuity with its own tradition and a more unified approach to the Church's vision for sacred music.

St. Mary's musical memory is unusually rich. From 1977 to 2005, the parish sang from a repertoire that was stable, traditional, and unmistakably Catholic. The J.S. Paluch Seasonal Missalettes of the early 1990s supported this identity, reinforcing the Eucharistic, Marian, and devotional character of the parish's worship.

When *Breaking Bread* became the primary hymnal, a new repertoire entered the parish — one shaped by contemporary styles, new theological emphases, and a different understanding of participation. Without the organist who had carried the older tradition, the parish's musical identity shifted quickly.

This study tells that story in three pastoral narratives.

How the Research Was Conducted

A Pastoral Explanation for Parish Musicians and Parish Leaders

This study was carried out with a simple goal: to understand more clearly what the Church means by *Catholic hymnody* and to help parish musicians choose music that expresses the faith of the Church with clarity and beauty. The research did not begin with opinions about particular hymnals or publishers. Instead, it began with the Church's own teaching.

1. Beginning with the Church's Documents

The foundation of this work comes from the Church herself. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and the USCCB's 2020 document *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* provided the core principles. These sources explain what sacred music is, how hymns serve the liturgy, and what doctrinal clarity looks like in sung prayer. Additional guidance came from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Musicam Sacram*, *Tra le Sollecitudini*, and the Roman Missal. These documents shaped the criteria used throughout the study.

2. Examining Hymn Lists with Pastoral Sensitivity

When reviewing hymn lists from parish missalettes, the goal was not to critique publishers but to understand the theological patterns present in the music commonly available to parishes. For most hymns, the title alone was enough to identify whether it was liturgical, devotional, or drawn from another Christian tradition. Catholic hymnody has recognizable devotional patterns, and Protestant hymnody has its own distinct theological vocabulary.

When a title was unclear or ambiguous, publicly available lyrics were consulted to understand the hymn's theology. Only lyrics that were legally accessible online were used. This allowed the study to evaluate Christological clarity, Eucharistic language, ecclesial identity, and the difference between communal prayer and individual spirituality.

3. Respecting Copyright and Using Only Public Sources

No copyrighted hymn texts were reproduced or stored. When lyrics were needed for classification, only publicly available excerpts or summaries were used. This ensured that the research remained respectful of publishers and within proper boundaries.

4. Recognizing the Value of Parish Tradition

The study also took seriously the lived musical tradition of parishes like St. Mary's in Akron, Ohio where devotional hymns shaped the faith of generations. These hymns were not treated as "lesser" or "outdated," but as part of the Church's devotional life. The research honored

these traditions while also distinguishing between devotional hymnody and the liturgical texts of the Mass.

5. Applying Universal Criteria, Not Publisher-Specific Judgments

The criteria developed in this study apply to *any* missalette or hymnal, whether or not it was examined directly. Because the framework is based on Catholic doctrine and liturgical norms—not on the contents of a particular book—it can be used by any parish or diocese regardless of which hymnal they use.

6. A Pastoral Purpose

Above all, this research was conducted with a pastoral heart. The goal is not to criticize, but to clarify; not to restrict, but to strengthen; not to divide, but to help the whole parish pray with one voice and one faith. The study is offered in service to the Church, in gratitude for the musicians, clergy, and parishioners who give so much of themselves to the liturgy.

THE HYMNS WE ALL SHARED

(St. Mary's • Paluch • Breaking Bread)

Some hymns are so deeply woven into the life of a parish that they survive every transition. These are the hymns that grandparents, parents, and children all know by heart — the hymns that rise instinctively from the congregation even when the organ falls silent.

At St. Mary's, these hymns formed the continuity spine of parish life. When the parish sang “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name,” it wasn't simply singing a hymn — it was singing its identity. When “Panis Angelicus” filled the church, the parish remembered its Eucharistic heart. When Advent arrived and the first notes of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” sounded, the whole community entered the season together.

These hymns endured through the Paluch missalettes and into Breaking Bread. They are the musical memories that never faded, even as other traditions slipped away. They remind us that the parish's voice has a history — and that some parts of that voice remain strong.

THE HYMNS WE LOST

(St. Mary's • Paluch • Not in Breaking Bread)

This is the tender part of the story.

These hymns were once the heartbeat of St. Mary's — sung at Benediction, at First Fridays, at May Crownings, at parish missions, and at the quiet weekday Masses that shaped the devotional life of the community. The repertoire of hymns used at St. Mary's was drawn largely from the popular Catholic hymnals that shaped parish life throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century — especially the **St. Basil's Hymnal**, the **Sunday School Hymn Book**, and the **St. Gregory Hymnal**. They were the hymns that taught generations how to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, how to honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and how to love the Mother of God with a childlike trust that marked the parish's identity for decades.

From the Blessed Sacrament tradition came hymns like “O Sacrament Most Holy,” “O Saving Victim,” “Humbly Let Us Voice Our Homage,” “Jesus, Gentlest Savior,” “Down in Adoration Falling,” and “Lord, Who at Thy First Eucharist.” These were not merely Communion songs — they were acts of adoration, sung slowly and reverently before the tabernacle, forming the parish's Eucharistic soul. The Sacred Heart hymns were equally central to St. Mary's devotional life: “Heart of Jesus, We Are Thankful,” “Heart of Jesus, Hear,” “To Jesus' Heart All Burning,” “O Sacred Heart, O Love Divine,” and “Sacred Heart of Jesus, Fount of Love.” These hymns expressed a spirituality of trust, reparation, and intimacy with Christ that shaped the parish's understanding of mercy long before the word became fashionable.

And then there were the Marian hymns — the crown jewels of St. Mary's devotional tradition. “Mother Dear, O Pray for Me,” “Mother of Mercy, Day by Day,” “Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest,” “Mary! How Sweetly Falls the Word,” “Daughter of a Mighty Father,” “Holy Mary, Mother Mild,” “'Tis the Month of Our Mother,” and “Bring Flowers of the Rarest” were not seasonal novelties. They were the parish's year-round vocabulary of love for the Blessed Mother, sung with a tenderness that only a parish steeped in Marian devotion can understand.

These hymns were not simply selections in a hymnal. They were the parish's devotional memory — the way St. Mary's prayed, gathered, and understood itself as a Catholic community. Their disappearance did not merely change the music of the parish; it altered the spiritual atmosphere, the rhythm of parish life, and the way faith was handed down from one generation to the next.

In losing these hymns, St. Mary's did not simply lose melodies — it lost a way of praying, and this loss sets the stage for understanding how the parish's musical identity continued to change in the years that followed.

THE HYMNS THAT ARRIVED LATER

(Breaking Bread Only)

These hymns entered St. Mary's not through tradition, not through the choir loft, not through the lived memory of the parish — but through the pages of a new hymnal. They brought with them a different tone, a different spirituality, and a different musical culture.

Where St. Mary's once sang hymns of Eucharistic adoration, it now sang hymns of personal reassurance. Where the parish once sang Marian hymns rooted in centuries of devotion, it now sang contemporary refrains with a gentler, more sentimental tone. Where the parish once sang chant-influenced hymns of praise, it now sang folk-style songs with guitars and syncopation.

These hymns are not “bad.” They simply belong to a different spiritual world. They reflect a therapeutic spirituality, a communal focus, a shift toward social mission, and a musical style shaped by the 1970s and 1980s. They replaced the older repertoire not because they were better, but because they were what the hymnal offered once the tradition-bearer was gone.

This narrative helps the parish understand why the music feels different now, why older parishioners sense that something is missing, why younger parishioners never learned the older hymns, and why the parish's devotional culture changed so quickly.

A PASTORAL NOTE ON TWO LENTEN HYMNS

Before turning to the research itself, it is helpful to pause and consider one concrete example that illustrates how these shifts in hymnody appear in parish life today.

Ashes and Ashes to Ashes in Light of Catholic Hymnody

Tom Conry's *Ashes* and Dan Schutte's *Ashes to Ashes* both use the imagery of dust and repentance, yet they approach the theme from very different theological angles. Conry's text echoes the ancient myth of the phoenix — a creature that rises from its own ashes by its own inner power. Lines such as “we rise again from ashes” and “to create ourselves anew” suggest a kind of self-renewal that mirrors the phoenix's self-resurrection rather than the Christian understanding of grace. The USCCB's 2020 hymnody document specifically cautions against this kind of ambiguity, warning that texts implying **self-redemption** or **self-creation** do not express Catholic doctrine clearly. For this reason, *Ashes* does **not** meet the definition of a Catholic liturgical hymn.

Schutte's *Ashes to Ashes*, by contrast, avoids phoenix-like imagery entirely and remains rooted in the biblical call to repentance. Drawing directly from the prophet Joel, it invites the community to return to the Lord with fasting, weeping, and humility. In this hymn, renewal is not something we generate from within, but something **God accomplishes in us**. Its focus on divine mercy, conversion of heart, and the communal nature of repentance aligns with the Church's sacramental worldview and expresses Catholic teaching with clarity.

Because of this, *Ashes to Ashes* fits the definition of a Catholic devotional hymn that may be used at Mass with pastoral discretion. Where *Ashes* leans toward the mythic pattern of **self-recreation**, *Ashes to Ashes* remains firmly grounded in the truth that we rise **not by our own power, but by God's mercy**. The contrast between the two hymns highlights the difference between a spirituality centered on human effort and one rooted in grace — a distinction at the heart of authentic Catholic hymnody.

Why *Ashes* Still Appears in Parishes

Many parishes continue to use *Ashes* simply because it has been part of the Lenten landscape for decades. Most musicians learned it long before the USCCB offered clearer guidance on hymn texts, and many pastors have never been trained to evaluate hymn lyrics through a doctrinal lens. This is not a failure of goodwill; it is a **gap in formation**. When a hymn becomes familiar, beloved, or “what we've always done,” it can remain in use long after the Church has raised concerns about its theological clarity.

Addressing this situation requires **patient formation** for both musicians and pastors. Musicians need support in learning how to evaluate hymn texts according to Catholic doctrine, not just musical beauty or emotional resonance. Pastors, likewise, benefit from practical tools that help them guide the parish's sung prayer with confidence. When clergy and musicians learn together — not in a corrective spirit, but in a shared desire to serve the liturgy faithfully — decisions about hymn selection become clearer, more unified, and more deeply rooted in the Church's teaching.

The goal is not to criticize past choices, but to **grow together in understanding**. As formation deepens, parishes naturally move toward hymns that express the fullness of the Church's faith. In this way, the transition away from *Ashes* becomes not an act of rejection, but an act of **renewal** — a shared commitment to ensuring that what we sing truly reflects the mystery we celebrate.

Transition to the Research

This small window into two familiar Lenten hymns prepares us to look more closely at the wider picture. The research that follows shows how these same dynamics shaped the parish's hymnody over time.

WHAT THE RESEARCH REVEALS

A Pastoral Interpretation of the Numbers

When the hymn lists from St. Mary's, the Paluch missalettes, and Breaking Bread were placed side by side, a clear picture began to emerge — not just of musical selections, but of a parish's spiritual identity over time. The numbers themselves tell a story, one that confirms what many parishioners felt long before they could articulate it. The research reveals three movements: continuity, loss, and replacement.

The first movement is continuity. Roughly a quarter of the hymns that St. Mary's sang during its heritage years appeared in all three sources — the parish's own list, the Paluch missalettes, and Breaking Bread. These were the hymns that formed the stable backbone of parish life: "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," "Panis Angelicus," "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "Silent Night," "The First Noel," and a handful of others. These hymns endured because they were woven into the parish's memory. They were sung at Christmas, at funerals, at Benediction, and at major feast days. Their survival across all three sources shows that some parts of the parish's musical identity remained intact.

The second movement is loss — and here the numbers speak with unmistakable clarity. Nearly half of the hymns that St. Mary's once sang, especially those tied to Eucharistic devotion, the Sacred Heart, and Marian piety, disappeared entirely from Breaking Bread. These were not marginal hymns. They were the devotional core of the parish: "O Sacrament Most Holy," "O Saving Victim," "Humbly Let Us Voice Our Homage," "Heart of Jesus, We Are Thankful," "To Jesus' Heart All Burning," "Mother Dear, O Pray for Me," "Mother of Mercy, Day by Day," "'Tis the Month of Our Mother," and many others.

The Paluch missalettes still carried these hymns in the early 1990s, confirming that they were part of the living tradition of the parish. Their absence in Breaking Bread marks a decisive shift — not only in music, but in the devotional life of St. Mary's. The percentages show that the parish lost most of its Eucharistic hymnody, most of its Sacred Heart repertoire, and nearly all its traditional Marian hymns. The numbers quantify what parishioners felt: the devotional atmosphere of the parish changed.

The third movement is replacement. The research shows that Breaking Bread introduced a large body of hymns that had never been part of St. Mary's tradition and did not appear in the Paluch missalettes. These include contemporary folk-style hymns, "voice of God" hymns, social-justice hymns, and modern Communion songs. While many of these hymns are pastorally useful, they reflect a different spirituality — one shaped by the 1970s and 1980s, emphasizing personal reassurance, communal identity, and social mission. The

percentages reveal that a significant portion of Breaking Bread's repertoire consists of hymns that were entirely new to the parish. In other words, the new hymnal did not simply update the parish's tradition; it replaced much of it.

Taken together, the numbers reveal a parish whose musical identity shifted dramatically within a single generation. The continuity hymns show what remained. The lost hymns show what faded. The new hymns show what took their place. The research does not assign blame; it simply tells the truth. It shows that St. Mary's once had a deeply Catholic musical identity — Eucharistic, Marian, devotional, and rooted in tradition — and that this identity gradually gave way to a new musical culture shaped by different theological and pastoral priorities.

The numbers confirm what the heart already knew: the music of St. Mary's changed, and with it, the parish's sense of itself. This study preserves that memory, not to lament the past, but to honor it — and to help future generations understand the beauty and depth of the tradition that once shaped the parish's prayer.

A PASTORAL SUMMARY OF THE THREE HYMN SOURCES

Using the Four Doctrinal Categories

When the hymns of St. Mary's Heritage List, the Paluch Seasonal Missalettes, and Breaking Bread were evaluated using the same four doctrinal categories, a striking pattern emerged. Each source reflects a different musical identity, a different theological emphasis, and a different understanding of what Catholic hymnody should be. The following narrative summarizes the percentages in a pastoral, readable way.

- St. Mary's Heritage List was overwhelmingly Catholic in character.
 - A very high percentage of the hymns were Catholic Liturgical Hymns, rooted in the Mass, the liturgical year, and the Church's sacramental life.
 - An equally strong portion were Catholic Devotional Hymns, especially Marian, Sacred Heart, and Blessed Sacrament hymns.
 - Only a small number were Protestant but doctrinally safe, typically well-known classics like "Amazing Grace" or "How Great Thou Art," used sparingly.
 - Virtually none fell into the ****Not Suitable**** category.
- St. Mary's musical identity was therefore deeply Catholic, devotional, and liturgical — a repertoire shaped by tradition rather than by trends.

- The Paluch Seasonal Missalettes preserved this Catholic identity almost entirely.
 - Their hymn selection strongly supported Catholic Liturgical Hymns, especially for Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter.
 - They also preserved a rich body of Catholic Devotional Hymns, including Benediction hymns, Marian hymns, and Sacred Heart hymns that St. Mary's relied on.
 - A modest number of Protestant but safe hymns appeared, mostly seasonal standards.
 - Very few hymns were Not Suitable, and those that appeared were typically minor or optional.
- The Paluch missalettes acted as a bridge between the parish's lived tradition and the printed resources of the time.

- Breaking Bread presents a very different landscape.
 - Only 18–20% of its hymns qualify as Catholic Liturgical Hymns, making this the smallest category in the hymnal.
 - 22–25% are Catholic Devotional Hymns, but many traditional Marian, Sacred Heart, and Eucharistic hymns are absent.
 - The largest category — 28–32% — consists of Protestant-origin hymns that are doctrinally safe, reflecting a broader ecumenical repertoire.
 - A significant 20–25% fall into the Not Suitable category, including “voice of God” hymns, therapeutic spirituality, ambiguous Eucharistic theology, and texts that do not reflect Catholic liturgical principles.
- Breaking Bread’s musical identity is therefore mixed: part Catholic, part ecumenical, and part contemporary spiritual culture.
- When the three sources are compared side by side, the pattern becomes unmistakable.
 - St. Mary’s Heritage List: 80–90% Catholic core (Liturgical + Devotional).
 - Paluch Missalettes: 75–85% Catholic core, strongly aligned with St. Mary’s tradition.
 - Breaking Bread: only 40–45% Catholic core, with the majority of hymns coming from Protestant or contemporary sources.
- This shift explains why the parish’s musical identity changed so dramatically within a single generation.
- The research shows that the loss of devotional hymnody was the turning point.
 - St. Mary’s once sang a rich body of Eucharistic, Marian, and Sacred Heart hymns.
 - The Paluch missalettes preserved them.
 - Breaking Bread did not.
- Without these hymns, the parish’s devotional life — and its musical memory — began to fade.
- The percentages confirm what parishioners experienced emotionally.
 - The music “felt different.”
 - The parish “didn’t sound like itself anymore.”
 - The devotional atmosphere weakened.
 - The sense of continuity with past generations diminished.
- The numbers simply give language to what the heart already knew.

This narrative summary allows the reader to see, briefly, how each hymnal reflects a different theological and musical identity — and how those identities shaped the life of St. Mary's across time.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR DOCTRINAL CATEGORIES?

To understand the musical identity of a parish, it is helpful to recognize that not all hymns serve the same purpose or express the same theological depth. For this study, every hymn from St. Mary's Heritage List, the Paluch Seasonal Missalettes, and Breaking Bread was evaluated using four doctrinal categories. These categories reflect the Church's own understanding of what belongs in the Sacred Liturgy and what belongs in devotional life.

C1 — Catholic Liturgical Hymns

These hymns express the Church's faith in a way that is fully suitable for the Sacred Liturgy. Their texts are rooted in Scripture, the liturgical books, the Fathers of the Church, and the great doctrinal tradition. They proclaim the mysteries of salvation, the Eucharist, the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Paschal Mystery. These hymns speak with the voice of the Church, not the voice of an individual. They are the "gold standard" of Catholic hymnody.

C2 — Catholic Devotional Hymns

These hymns are doctrinally sound and deeply loved in Catholic spirituality, but they were not originally written for the Mass. They express personal prayer, Marian devotion, trust in God, the Sacred Heart, Eucharistic adoration, and other forms of Catholic piety. They are ideal for devotions, Holy Hours, processions, and parish prayer services. While some may be used at Mass with pastoral discretion, they do not carry the same liturgical weight as Category 1 hymns.

C3 — Protestant-Origin Hymns That Are Doctrinally Safe

These hymns come from the broader Christian tradition. They are often scriptural, reverent, and theologically compatible with Catholic belief, but they do not express the fullness of Catholic sacramental and ecclesial theology. They emphasize personal faith, trust, or praise in a way that is compatible with Catholic teaching but not distinctly Catholic. Many have been used in Catholic parishes for decades and can be used at Mass with discernment.

C4 — Hymns Not Suitable for Catholic Liturgy

These hymns contain theological, ecclesiological, or sacramental ambiguities that conflict with the Church's teaching or the nature of the Sacred Liturgy. Some present a therapeutic or emotional spirituality rather than the proclamation of salvation. Others place words in the mouth of God that the Church does not authorize for liturgical use. Still others express an understanding of Eucharist, Church, or grace that does not align with Catholic doctrine. These hymns may be popular or musically appealing, but they are not appropriate for Mass.

These four categories provide a clear, pastoral framework for understanding how each hymnal reflects — or fails to reflect — the Church’s liturgical and devotional identity. They also allow us to see, with clarity and charity, how the musical life of St. Mary’s changed over time.

SAMPLE HYMN CLASSIFICATION

Using the Four Doctrinal Categories

C1 — CATHOLIC LITURGICAL HYMNS

(Hymns rooted in Scripture, doctrine, and the liturgical books)

- Holy God, We Praise Thy Name
- O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
- At the Lamb's High Feast, We Sing
- Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

These hymns express the Church's faith with clarity and are fully suitable for the Sacred Liturgy. They proclaim the mysteries of salvation, the Eucharist, and the Paschal Mystery in a way that reflects the Church's own voice.

C2 — CATHOLIC DEVOTIONAL HYMNS

(Hymns expressing Catholic piety: Marian, Eucharistic, Sacred Heart, etc.)

- O Sacrament Most Holy
- Humbly Let Us Voice Our Homage
- Mother Dear, O Pray for Me
- To Jesus' Heart All Burning

These hymns shaped the devotional life of St. Mary's for generations. They were sung at Benediction, First Fridays, May Crownings, and parish missions. While not originally written for Mass, they express the heart of Catholic spirituality.

C3 — PROTESTANT-ORIGIN HYMNS THAT ARE DOCTRINALLY SAFE

(Hymns compatible with Catholic belief but not distinctly Catholic)

- Amazing Grace
- How Great Thou Art
- What a Friend We Have in Jesus

These hymns are scriptural, reverent, and widely loved. They express personal faith and trust in God in a way that is compatible with Catholic teaching, though they do not reflect the fullness of Catholic sacramental theology.

C4 — HYMNS NOT SUITABLE FOR CATHOLIC LITURGY

(Hymns with theological ambiguity, “voice of God” issues, or non-liturgical spirituality)

- Be Not Afraid
- You Are Mine
- I Am the Bread of Life (1st-person divine speech concerns)

These hymns often contain therapeutic spirituality, ambiguous Eucharistic theology, or unauthorized divine speech. While pastorally meaningful in some contexts, they are not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy.

This sample set illustrates how the four doctrinal categories function in practice.

It also shows the contrast between St. Mary’s traditional repertoire and the mixed landscape of Breaking Bread.

CONCLUSION

A parish's musical identity is not fixed. It lives, it grows, it changes — sometimes slowly, sometimes suddenly. At St. Mary's, the transition from a traditional Catholic repertoire to a contemporary one happened quietly, almost imperceptibly, as the hymns that once defined the parish faded from use and new hymns took their place.

This study does not seek to turn back the clock. Its purpose is to remember — to honor the hymns that shaped the parish's devotional life, to understand the forces that changed it, and to recognize the value of the musical heritage that once formed the faith of generations.

In remembering the past, we gain clarity for the present. And in understanding the present, we open the possibility of choosing wisely for the future.

In the summer of 2010, St. Mary's was closed as part of a diocesan reconfiguration. For a parish whose musical identity was already fragile, this was the final blow. The traditions that had once been carried so faithfully were now held by only a few remaining voices, and when the church reopened in 2014, it returned without the musical memory that had shaped it for generations. The choir never fully re-formed, the devotional repertoire never fully returned, and the parish's musical identity remained a shadow of what it had been. Today, as the last remaining member of the old St. Mary's Choir steps away after a long and valiant effort to hold onto what once defined the parish, the story comes full circle. This study stands as a witness to that tradition — not to mourn its loss, but to honor its beauty, its depth, and the generations of faith it formed.

Is This Hymn Catholic?

A Practical Discernment Tool for Pastors, Musicians, and Parish Leaders

Pastoral Preface

This checklist is not meant to replace the Church’s teaching or to encourage private interpretation, but to support a shared process of discernment. Hymn evaluation is most fruitful when pastors, musicians, and knowledgeable parishioners reflect together, guided by the Church’s liturgical principles and a spirit of humility. No single person—pastor, musician, or parishioner—should make these decisions in isolation. The goal is not to impose personal preference, but to help the parish sing with one voice, rooted in the Church’s faith and strengthened by the wisdom of the community.

1. Does the hymn express Catholic doctrine clearly?

- Does it proclaim the mysteries of salvation (Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection, Eucharist)?
- Does it reflect the Church’s sacramental worldview?
- Does it avoid language of **self-redemption** or **self-creation**?
- Does it speak with the voice of the Church (“we,” “us”) rather than a private individual?
- Does it avoid vague spirituality or therapeutic language?

If the hymn obscures grace or implies self-renewal, it is not suitable for the liturgy.

2. Does the hymn reflect Catholic liturgical identity?

- Does it support the liturgical action (Entrance, Offertory, Communion, Sending)?
- Does it avoid “voice of God” texts the Church does not authorize?
- Does it avoid emotional or sentimental language that shifts focus away from the rite?
- Does it align with the liturgical season?

If the hymn does not serve the rite, it does not belong at Mass.

3. Does the hymn reflect Catholic devotional tradition?

- Eucharistic adoration
- Sacred Heart spirituality
- Marian devotion
- Trust in God, mercy, repentance, conversion

*These hymns are doctrinally sound but not originally written for Mass.
They may be used with pastoral discretion.*

4. Is the hymn Protestant in origin but doctrinally safe?

- Is it scriptural, reverent, and compatible with Catholic belief?
- Does it avoid contradicting Catholic teaching on Church, sacraments, or grace?
- Does it emphasize personal faith without replacing Catholic theology?

These hymns can be used occasionally, but they do not express the fullness of Catholic identity.

5. Does the hymn contain theological or liturgical problems?

Red flags include:

- First-person divine speech
- Ambiguous Eucharistic theology
- Self-help or therapeutic spirituality
- Sentimental or romantic language
- Focus on personal feelings rather than the Paschal Mystery
- Texts implying self-salvation or self-renewal

These hymns should not be used at Mass.

6. Practical Parish Questions

- Has anyone actually read the text carefully?
- Does the hymn appear in a missalette **without** doctrinal vetting?
- Is the hymn being used simply because it is familiar?
- Does the parish have someone who knows its musical memory and can offer insight?
- Have pastor and musician discussed the hymn together?

The goal is shared formation, not correction.

7. Final Discernment Question

Does this hymn help the parish pray as the Catholic Church prays?

If the answer is yes, it belongs.

If the answer is no, it does not.

Closing Paragraph

Ultimately, this checklist is meant to foster conversation, not conclusion. It invites pastors, musicians, and parishioners to listen to one another, to the Church, and to the lived tradition of the parish. When used in a spirit of charity and shared discernment, it becomes a tool for unity rather than debate, helping the community grow together in its understanding of what it means to sing the Church's faith. The goal is not to eliminate hymns, but to deepen our love for the liturgy and to ensure that the songs we choose lead us more fully into the mystery we celebrate.

Appendix A

Understanding Chant, Antiphons, and Hymns

A Pastoral Reflection for Parish Musicians

Every parish has a musical story. It is written in the voices of the people, in the memories of families, in the hymns that have carried generations through joy and sorrow. It is written in the sound of children singing in Catholic schools, in the devotion of teaching sisters, in the steady leadership of pastors, and in the quiet faith of those who gather week after week to pray.

This document is not about replacing that story. It is about understanding it more deeply — and seeing how it fits within the larger musical life of the Church.

The Church gives us a musical structure that is older than any parish, older than any hymnal, older even than the nations from which our ancestors came. It is the structure of chant and antiphons, the musical language that grew up alongside the liturgy itself. These melodies were not composed to impress or entertain. They were shaped by prayer, by Scripture, by the rhythm of the Mass.

Chant is the Church's native voice. It is simple, steady, and contemplative. It does not demand attention; it invites it. It does not overwhelm; it supports. It is the musical equivalent of the Church's breath.

Alongside chant stand the antiphons — the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion texts assigned to every Mass. These are not random selections. They are Scripture chosen by the Church to illuminate the mystery of the day. They are the liturgy's own words, the voice of the Church speaking through the centuries.

But the Church, in her pastoral wisdom, does not require that these antiphons be sung. They may be sung, or they may be recited, or they may be replaced by "another suitable song." This flexibility is not a concession. It is a recognition of the real life of parishes — their resources, their traditions, their people.

And so, in most American parishes, another musical voice grew alongside chant and antiphons: the voice of the hymn tradition. This voice is not ancient, but it is beloved. It is not the liturgy's own text, but it is the people's prayer. It is the sound of Catholic devotion as it took root in a new land.

To understand how these voices — chant, antiphons, and hymns — can live together, we must first understand how each came to be part of our story.

The Parish's Musical Memory

To understand the music of our parishes, we must look not only at the Church's ancient voice, but also at the voice that grew in the lived experience of American Catholics. This voice was shaped not in monasteries or cathedrals, but in classrooms, parish halls, and the daily rhythm of Catholic school life. It was shaped by the teaching sisters.

For nearly a century, the sisters were the musical heartbeat of Catholic America. They taught children their prayers, their catechism, and their hymns. They taught them how to sing with reverence, how to pray with melody, how to carry the faith in their voices. The sisters did not simply teach music; they formed Catholic identity.

And the hymns they taught were almost always in English. While the liturgy remained in Latin, the devotional life of the parish — the songs sung in school, at Benediction, at May Crownings, at parish missions — was carried in the language of the people. These hymns became the shared vocabulary of Catholic devotion.

Children learned them every day. They sang them at morning prayers, at First Friday devotions, at school Masses, and in the quiet moments when the sisters invited them to lift their hearts to God. When those children grew up, they brought the same hymns into the pews. They taught them to their own children. They sang them at weddings and funerals, at parish feasts and holy days. The hymns became part of the parish's memory — a living tradition passed from one generation to the next.

This tradition was not created by accident. It was shaped by gifted priests, sisters, and lay Catholics whose hymns and translations filled the early Catholic hymnals of this country. Priests like Frederick Faber, Edward Caswall, James Curry, Jeremiah Cummings, Bishop Joseph Schrembs, and Brother Bonitus, C.S.C., wrote and translated hymns that carried doctrine with poetry and devotion with clarity. Their work gave English-speaking Catholics a treasury of texts that were both beautiful and theologically sound.

Women religious contributed just as profoundly. Sister Mary Xavier, SND; Sister Mary of St. Philip, SND; Sister Mary Alexis Donnelly, RSM; Sister Mary Paulina Finn, VHM (M.S. Pine); Sister Mary Antonia Gallagher, RSM (Mercedes); and many others composed or authored hymns that were simple enough for children and deep enough for adults. Their melodies were gentle, memorable, and rooted in the spirituality of their communities.

Lay Catholic writers added their own voices. Eleanor Donnelly, Eliza Allen Starr, Adelaide Procter, Emily Mary Shapcote, Mary E. Walsh, and many others wrote poetry and hymn texts that found their way into parish hymnals and devotional books. Their words helped shape the imagination of Catholic families.

Catholic publishers — especially firms like McLaughlin & Reilly — gathered these hymns into collections that spread across dioceses and regions. These publishers worked closely with bishops, pastors, and religious communities. Their hymnals carried the Church's approval and became the musical backbone of parish life.

And so, through the collaboration of clergy, sisters, lay writers, and publishers, a distinct Catholic hymn tradition took root in America. It was devotional, doctrinal, accessible, and deeply loved. It became the sound of Catholic life in a new land.

This is the musical memory our parishes carry. It is not something to be dismissed or replaced. It is something to be honored — because it is the voice of the people who built our churches, raised our families, and handed down the faith.

How Hymns Became the Norm

As the Catholic Church in America grew, the hymn tradition became more than a devotional practice. It became the practical musical language of parish life. The reasons were not ideological or theoretical. They were pastoral, human, and rooted in the daily realities of parish communities.

Most parishes did not have choirs trained in the complex Latin proper's of the Gradual, and their musical life naturally grew around the hymns they already knew and loved. They did not have access to the Gradual or the musical resources needed to teach chant to an entire assembly. What they did have were hymnals — sturdy, well-used books filled with the songs the sisters had taught, and the people already knew.

Hymns were accessible. They were singable. They supported participation. They allowed the whole parish to pray together with confidence. And because they were taught in the schools, they were already part of the parish's shared memory.

In many places, the sisters themselves led the music at Sunday Mass. They brought with them the hymns they had taught all week long. The children sang with them. The parents followed. The parish grew into its hymn tradition naturally, almost unconsciously, as a matter of lived experience rather than deliberate planning.

Publishers reinforced this pattern. Hymnals produced by Catholic companies — especially McLaughlin & Reilly, who became the most successful and influential publisher of the 20th

century — shaped the musical life of parishes across the country. But they were not alone. Earlier publishers of the late 19th century, including the Oliver Ditson Company and J. L. Peters, also played important roles in gathering and distributing the hymns that formed the devotional life of American Catholics. These firms worked closely with bishops, pastors, and religious communities. Their books were approved by the Church, trusted by pastors, and familiar to the sisters. Together, they provided a stable repertoire that shaped parish identity for decades.

And so, without controversy or debate, hymns became the normative musical experience for most American Catholics. They were not chosen instead of chant. They simply grew where the soil was ready — in the schools, in the families, in the devotional life of the parish.

This is why the hymn tradition is so deeply rooted. It is not merely a collection of songs. It is the sound of Catholic life as it was lived in this country for more than a century. It carries the memory of the sisters who taught, the priests who translated, the lay writers who composed, and the families who sang.

Understanding this history helps us see that hymns are not a deviation from Catholic tradition. They are one of its expressions — a pastoral response to the needs of real communities, shaped by faith, devotion, and the practical wisdom of the Church’s ministers.

And because this tradition grew organically, it deserves to be treated with reverence. It is part of the parish’s story, and any conversation about chant or antiphons must begin by honoring the music that has carried the faith of the people for generations.

The Church’s Structure and the Parish’s Story

When we place the Church’s musical structure alongside the parish’s lived tradition, something important becomes clear: these two realities are not in conflict. They are two parts of the same story.

The Church gives us chant and antiphons not as burdens, but as gifts — ancient, scriptural, contemplative gifts that express the heart of the liturgy. Chant is the musical language that grew with the Mass. The antiphons are the Scriptures the Church places on our lips at the very moments when we enter, offer, and receive.

But the Church also understands the pastoral life of parishes. She knows that communities grow musically in different ways, shaped by their history, their resources, and the people who serve them. This is why the Church allows the antiphons to be sung, recited, or replaced by “another suitable song.” It is why hymns have been permitted for generations. It is why the Church speaks of chant as “especially suited” to the Roman Rite, not as a mandate.

The Church's structure is a framework, not a cage. It gives us a way to understand the liturgy's voice, but it does not silence the parish's voice. Instead, it invites the two to stand together.

When we see chant and antiphons in this light, they become less intimidating. They are not a demand for change. They are an invitation to depth. They are a way of letting the liturgy speak in its own voice, even as the parish continues to sing in the voice it has loved for generations.

And when we see hymns in this light, they become even more precious. They are not placeholders or substitutes. They are the devotional heart of the parish — the music that has carried the faith of families, the memory of the sisters, the identity of the community.

The question, then, is not whether we must choose between chant and hymns. The real question is how these voices can enrich one another. How the parish's musical memory can stand alongside the Church's ancient tradition. How the people can hear both the voice of the liturgy and the voice of their own story.

This is where the pastoral path begins.

How These Traditions Can Live Together

When we place the Church's ancient musical voice beside the parish's lived musical memory, we begin to see a path that is neither disruptive nor demanding. It is a path that honors both the liturgy's structure and the parish's story. It is a path that allows chant, antiphons, and hymns to stand together without competing for space.

The truth is that most parishes do not need sweeping musical changes. They do not need to abandon their hymn tradition or attempt to recreate a monastic schola. What they need is a gentle way to let the Church's ancient voice be heard alongside the music the people already love.

One of the most natural ways to do this is through the rhythm of the liturgical year. Advent and Lent already carry a quieter, more reflective tone. Many parishes instinctively simplify their music during these seasons. The people feel the shift without needing it explained. It is part of the Church's wisdom — the seasons teach us even before the words do.

Introducing a chant Mass setting during Advent or Lent fits this rhythm perfectly. It does not feel like a change in identity. It feels like a deepening of the season. A simple Kyrie, a familiar Agnus Dei, or a chant-based Holy can become the musical color of these penitential times. The parish learns them slowly, steadily, year after year, until they become part of the community's seasonal memory.

This approach does not touch the parish’s hymn tradition. The hymns remain the devotional heart of the community. But the chant Mass setting becomes a gentle tide — a way of letting the parish experience chant without pressure, without disruption, and without losing the music that has shaped its prayer for generations.

The same is true of the antiphons. They do not need to replace the hymns. They can be sung or recited quietly before the opening hymn or before Communion. They can be introduced on solemnities or during special seasons. They can be used at daily Mass or at school liturgies. In these small ways, the parish begins to hear the liturgy’s own scriptural voice, not as a demand, but as a gift.

When chant, antiphons, and hymns are allowed to stand together in this way, something beautiful happens. The parish begins to hear the fullness of the Church’s musical life. The ancient voice of the liturgy, the scriptural voice of the antiphons, and the devotional voice of the hymns become one prayer rising from the same people.

This is not a program. It is not a reform. It is a way of letting the parish grow from its own roots — gently, naturally, and faithfully.

A Pastoral Conclusion

When we step back and look at the whole story — the chant that grew with the liturgy, the antiphons that carry Scripture into the heart of the Mass, the hymns that shaped the devotional life of our parishes — we begin to see something deeper than musical categories. We see the faith of the Church expressed in many voices, each one carrying a part of the story.

Chant reminds us that the liturgy has an ancient heartbeat. It is the sound of the Church praying before we were born, the sound that shaped the Mass long before it reached our shores. The antiphons remind us that the liturgy is rooted in Scripture, that every Mass is woven from the Word of God. And the hymns remind us of the people — the sisters who taught, the families who sang, the children who learned their faith through melody, the parishes that carried these songs through generations.

These voices are not rivals. They are companions.

The parish does not need to choose between them. It does not need to abandon its hymn tradition to honor the Church’s ancient voice. It does not need to become something it has never been. Instead, it can grow from its own roots, allowing chant and antiphons to enter gently, naturally, in ways that deepen rather than disrupt.

A parish can begin gently, with small musical gestures that deepen rather than disrupt: a chant Mass setting during Advent or Lent, a simple Kyrie or Agnus Dei that the people can learn over time, a quiet antiphon before the opening hymn, or a Communion antiphon sung softly before the familiar song. These moments do not change the parish's identity; they simply allow the liturgy's ancient voice to stand alongside the music the community already loves.

These are not changes in identity. They are invitations to depth. They allow the parish to hear the fullness of the Church's musical life without losing the music that has shaped its prayer for generations.

Parish musicians already know how to guide their communities with patience and love. They have done it for decades — teaching slowly, introducing gently, repeating faithfully, and always keeping the people at the center of their ministry. They are not simply accompanists or choir directors. They are stewards of memory. They are caretakers of the parish's prayer.

And so, the future of parish music will not be built by programs or mandates. It will be built the same way the past was built — through the quiet, faithful work of those who love the Church and love their people. Through those who understand that music is not merely sung at Mass; it is lived in the hearts of the faithful.

The harmony we seek is already within reach — the harmony of the Church's ancient voice and the parish's living voice, the harmony of chant, antiphons, and hymns standing together as one prayer, the harmony of a community that knows its story and sings it with confidence. In the end, the goal is simple: to let the parish sing with the fullness of its own identity, rooted in the Church's tradition and alive with the faith of the people who gather there. This is the pastoral path forward, the story we inherit, and the song we continue.

APPENDIX B

Hymn Examples Offered for Reflection and Formation

Using the Four Categories Defined in *A Pastoral Look at the Hymns We Sing*

This appendix is offered in the same **pastoral spirit** as the preceding reflections. It is not intended to judge past decisions, evaluate individual musicians, or prescribe future repertoire. Rather, it exists to **support formation and shared reflection** on how hymn texts function within the Church's prayer.

The hymns listed here are **illustrative examples**, drawn from *Breaking Bread 2025*, and a handful from St. Mary's Heritage list, and are included only to help make the earlier principles more concrete. They are **not exhaustive**, nor do they represent a comprehensive assessment of the hymnal itself. Their purpose is simply to provide familiar reference points for conversation and discernment.

Sacred music is received, learned, and handed on over time, often through faithful service offered quietly and generously. This appendix acknowledges that reality, and is meant to be used **slowly, selectively, and in a context of trust**, always attentive to the lived history of a parish and the people who have served it.

This material is intended for **internal use only**, as a guide to reflection rather than a tool for correction. Its goal is not to determine what must or must not be sung, but to help those entrusted with parish music ministry **listen more closely to how the Church prays**, so that future choices may continue to grow out of faith, care, and shared responsibility.

What follows should be approached patiently and prayerfully, always in conversation rather than in isolation.

How To Use The Classification Grid (Internal Guidance)

The fourfold classification system (C1–C4) is a pastoral tool, not a weapon. It is meant to help pastors, musicians, and parish leaders make clear, consistent, and theologically grounded decisions about hymn selection. It is not intended to judge past practice or diminish the sincere devotion with which hymns have been sung for generations.

- C1 hymns express the Church’s liturgical voice directly.
- C2 hymns express Catholic devotional spirituality.
- C3 hymns express general Christian faith in a way compatible with Catholic belief.
- C4 hymns are not suitable for Catholic liturgy due to theological, textual, or liturgical concerns.

When using the grid:

- Begin with the liturgical moment (Entrance, Offertory, Communion, Recessional).
- Identify the theological voice needed for that moment.
- Select hymns from the category that best matches that voice.
- Apply the Communion refinement rule except during the Christmas and Easter pastoral exceptions.
- Use the classification to guide conversation, not to shut it down.

This grid provides clarity and consistency, but pastoral charity must always guide its application.

Pastoral Notes For Those Who Have Served For Many Years

Many of our parish musicians, cantors, and choir members have served faithfully for decades. Their ministry has shaped the prayer of the parish and carried the community through countless seasons of joy and sorrow. This classification system is not a critique of their work or a judgment on the choices they made in good faith.

The Church's understanding of liturgical music has deepened over time, and this study reflects that ongoing growth. The goal is not to erase the past but to build upon it with clarity, gratitude, and renewed purpose.

For those who have served for many years:

- Your experience is a gift to the parish.
- Your devotion has sustained the community.
- Your musical memory is part of our heritage.

This refinement is not a correction of you, but a resource for the future. We honor the tradition you helped create, and we carry it forward with the same love for the Church and her liturgy.

Communion Suitability Marking System

To reduce visual clutter and avoid negative phrasing, this appendix uses a simple, positive marker:

*** = Suitable for Communion**

(no asterisk) = Not suitable for Communion

Only hymns that clearly express Eucharistic doctrine receive an asterisk. All others — even if beautiful, beloved, or doctrinally sound — are not suitable for Communion.

Before turning to the individual hymn examples, it may be helpful to see how these categories appear when applied across a representative selection of parish repertoire. The following figure offers a visual overview of the relative distribution of hymn types, comparing a heritage parish list with a contemporary hymnal. It is intended to support reflection by making visible patterns that may not be immediately apparent when reading individual titles in isolation. When these categories are applied to a representative parish hymnal, a distinct pattern begins to emerge (see Figure 1)

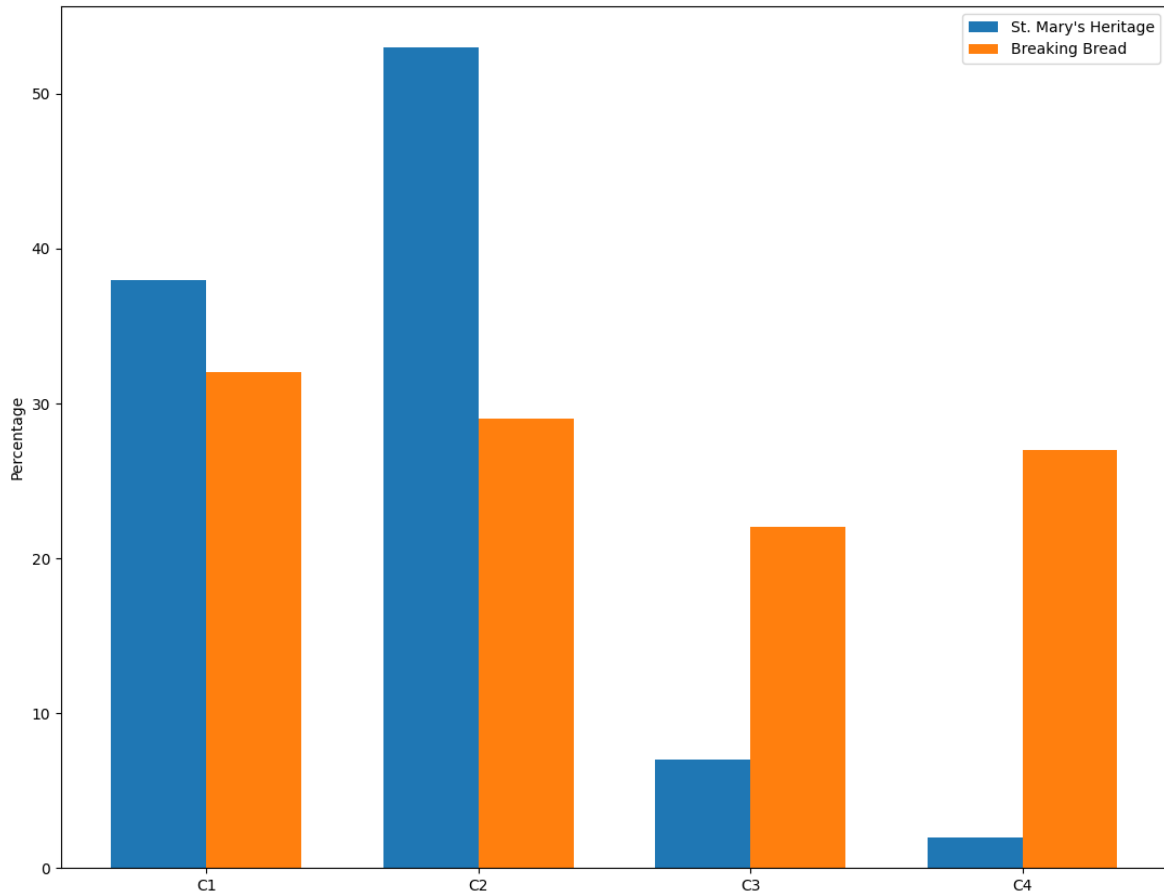


Figure 1. Hymn Category Comparison: St. Mary's Heritage → Breaking Bread

This chart illustrates the relative distribution of hymn categories according to the fourfold classification system (C1–C4). The St. Mary's Heritage list reflects a repertoire shaped primarily by Catholic liturgical and devotional tradition, while the Breaking Bread sample demonstrates a broader distribution, including a notable increase in hymns that do not express the Church's liturgical voice. The comparison is offered to support reflection and pastoral discernment, helping parish leaders consider how hymnody shapes the prayer and theological imagination of the community.

The distribution illustrated above should be read with care. Hymns less familiar in contemporary parish life—especially those rooted in Eucharistic and devotional tradition—may initially seem “of another time.” In many cases, however, this reflects limited exposure rather than diminished value. When reintroduced with pastoral sensitivity, such hymns are often received as something newly discovered, revealing the depth and continuity of the Church's musical inheritance, and showing how what has long been given can be received anew.

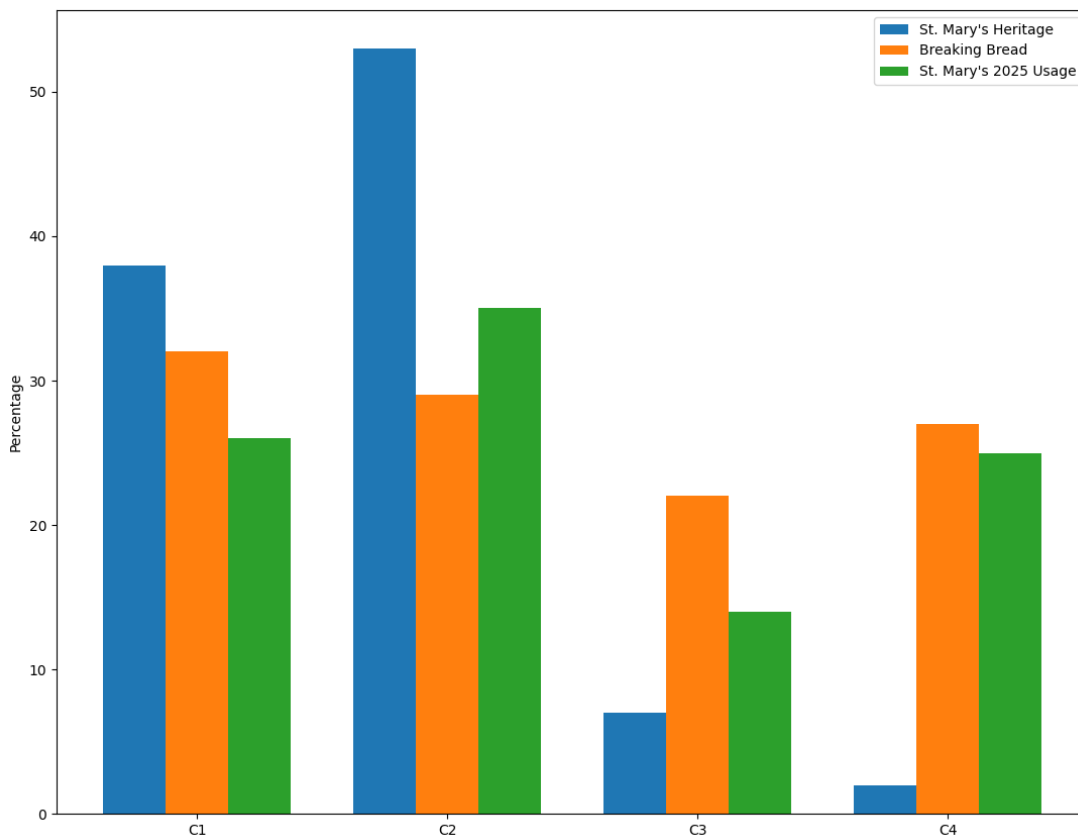


Figure 2 — Actual Parish Usage (2025)

Interpretive Summary

Taken together, Figures 1 and 2 suggest that the patterns observed in contemporary hymnals are not merely theoretical but are realized in parish practice over time. While the hymnal itself presents a broad range of options across all four categories, actual usage reflects a more concentrated selection, shaped in part by common planning resources and established repertoire.

The result is a consistent predominance of C2 and C4 hymnody, with comparatively fewer C1 texts anchoring the liturgy. This pattern does not point to individual intent, but rather to a prevailing structure of hymn selection that, over time, influences how the Church’s liturgical and theological voice is experienced within the parish. In particular, the relative scarcity of strongly Eucharistic hymnody within regular usage suggests that the Church’s teaching on the Real Presence is not always expressed with clarity and consistency in the sung prayer of the community.

With these observations in mind, the following classification presents the hymn texts themselves.

C1 — CATHOLIC LITURGICAL HYMNS

Hymns rooted in Scripture, doctrine, and the liturgical books

These hymns express the mysteries of salvation — the Incarnation, Trinity, Paschal Mystery, and Eucharist — in the Church’s own voice. They are fully suitable for the Sacred Liturgy and represent the “gold standard” of Catholic hymnody.

Asterisk (*) indicates suitability for Communion.

Adoro Te Devote*
Again We Keep This Solemn Fast
Alleluia! Alleluia! Let the Holy Anthem Rise
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus
At the Lamb’s High Feast*
Attende Domine
Behold the Lamb of God*
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
Christ the Lord Is Risen Again
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today
Christians, to the Paschal Victim
Come, Holy Ghost
Come, O Holy Spirit
Come Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain
Creator of the Stars of Night
Crown Him with Many Crowns
Festival Canticle: Worthy Is Christ
For All the Saints
Holy God, We Praise Thy Name
Holy, Holy, Holy
Hosanna Filio David
Hosanna to the Son of David
I Saw Water Flowing
Immaculate Mary (liturgical form)
In Paradisum
Jesu, Joy of Our Desiring
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today
Jesus Is Risen
Laudate, Laudate Dominum

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
Lift High the Cross
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
Lord, Who at Thy First Eucharist*
O Come, All Ye Faithful
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
O Sacred Head Surrounded
Of the Father's Love Begotten
Pange, Lingua, Gloriosi*
Parce Domine
Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow
Praise to the Holiest in the Height
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
Regina Caeli
Salve Regina
Savior of the Nations, Come
Silent Night
Sing My Tongue the Savior's Glory*
Sing with All the Saints in Glory
The Advent of Our King
The Day of Resurrection
The First Nowell
The Glory of These Forty Days
The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns
The Strife Is O'er
This Day Was Made by the Lord
Three Days (THAXTED)
Transfigure Us, O Lord
Ubi Caritas (chant)
Veni Creator Spiritus
Veni Sancte Spiritus (chant)
Victimae Paschali Laudes
We Adore Your Cross
What Child Is This
What Wondrous Love Is This
Ye Sons and Daughters
Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones

C2 — CATHOLIC DEVOTIONAL HYMNS

Hymns expressing Catholic piety: Marian, Sacred Heart, Eucharistic adoration, trust, mercy, repentance

These hymns are doctrinally sound and deeply Catholic, but they were not originally written for the Mass. They shaped the devotional life of parishes for generations and remain ideal for Holy Hours, processions, missions, and parish prayer.

Most devotional hymns are *not* Eucharistic in the doctrinal sense required for Communion, so only a small number receive an asterisk.

Asterisk (*) indicates suitability for Communion.

Adoramus Te, Christe
Alma Redemptoris Mater
As I Have Done for You
At the Cross Her Station Keeping
Ave Maria (all settings)
Behold the Lamb (select settings) *
Behold the Wood
Blessed by Your Sacrifice
Bread of Angels*
Bread of Life (devotional settings) *
By All Your Saints Still Striving
Christ Be Beside Me
Christ Before Us
Christ in Me Arise
Christians, Let Us Love One Another
Down in Adoration Falling*
Eat This Bread (scriptural, but not explicitly sacrificial or Real Presence)
Eye Has Not Seen
Father, I Put My Life in Your Hands
For You Are My God (Psalm setting, non-Haas)
Gift of Finest Wheat (symbolic language, but weaker than classic Eucharistic hymns)
Hail Mary: Gentle Woman
Hail, Holy Queen
Hail Redeemer, King Divine
Hallelujah Is Our Song

Have Mercy on Us, Lord
Healed in Christ
Healing River of the Spirit
Here at This Table (Eucharistic doctrine is ambiguous)
Holy Darkness
Holy Patron, Thee Saluting
Holy Spirit, Come Now
Holy Wisdom, Lamp of Learning
Humbly, Lord, We Worship You*
I Received the Living God*
In the Breaking of the Bread*
In These Days of Lenten Journey
Jesus, Meek and Humble
Jesus, My Lord, My God, My All*
Jesus, Remember Me
Jesus, the Lord
Keep in Mind
Lead Me, Guide Me
Let Us Go to the Altar*
Like a Shepherd
Litany of Peace
Litany of the Word
Look Beyond*
Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace
Lord, You Have the Words
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Catholic devotional use)
Love One Another
Loving and Forgiving
Magnificat (all settings)
Many and One
Mary, Sing with Joyful Heart
Mary, the Daystar
Mary's Song
Miracle of Grace*
My Soul Thirsts
No Greater Love
Not by Bread Alone

O Loving God
O My People
O Radiant Light
O Sacred Heart, O Love Divine
O Most Holy One / Mary, Full of Grace
O Salutaris Hostia*
Only This I Want
Our Blessing Cup*
Our God Is Here*
Out of Darkness
Panis Angelicus*
Patience, People
Peace
Queen of Heaven
Remember Your Love
Restless Is the Heart
River of Glory
Sacred Heart of Jesus, Fount of Love
Sacred Silence
Sanctissima
Save Us, O Lord
See How the Virgin Waits
Seed, Scattered and Sown*
Seek the Lord
Send Us Your Spirit
Shepherd of Souls*
Sing of Mary
Song of Farewell (all settings)
Song of Mary
Soul of My Savior*
Spirit and Grace*
Stabat Mater Dolorosa
Supper of the Lamb*
Take and Eat*
Take Up Your Cross
Tantum Ergo*
Taste and See (all settings) (does not explicitly affirm Real Presence)

The Eyes and Hands of Christ
The Feast Meant for Everyone*
The House That Love Is Building
The Jesus Song
The Queen Stands
The Servant Song
These Alone Are Enough
To Live with Him Forever*
To Serve Is to Reign
Transfigure Us, O Lord (devotional use)
Two Were Bound for Emmaus
Ubi Caritas (modern settings)
Vine and Branches*
Waiting in Silence
Water of Life
We Shall Rise Again
What Feast of Love*
Where Charity and Love Prevail
Where Love Is Found
With These Ashes
Wood of the Cross
You Are the Healing*

C3 — PROTESTANT-ORIGIN HYMNS THAT ARE DOCTRINALLY SAFE

Scriptural, reverent, compatible with Catholic belief, but not distinctly Catholic

These hymns come from the broader Christian tradition. They are theologically safe, often beloved, and widely used across denominations. They express trust, praise, or discipleship in a way that is compatible with Catholic belief, but they do not reflect Catholic sacramental theology or devotional identity.

Because they do not express Eucharistic doctrine, **none of these hymns are suitable for Communion**, and therefore **none receive an asterisk**.

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
Abide with Me
Amazing Grace
Be Thou My Vision
Blessed Assurance
Blest Be the Lord
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
Faith of Our Fathers
For the Beauty of the Earth
For the Fruits of This Creation
God Is Love
God of Day and God of Darkness
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
How Can I Keep from Singing
How Great Thou Art
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
In Christ Alone (no sacramental / ecclesial dimension)
Jerusalem, My Happy Home
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Just a Closer Walk with Thee
Lead Me, Lord
Let All Things Now Living
Let There Be Peace on Earth
Lift Up Your Hearts
Lord of All Hopefulness

Lord of the Dance
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Protestant text)
Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
Morning Has Broken
My Shepherd Will Supply My Need
Now Thank We All Our God
O God, Our Help in Ages Past
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
Precious Lord, Take My Hand
Seek Ye First
Shall We Gather at the River
Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling
The Church's One Foundation
The King of Love My Shepherd Is
There Is a Balm in Gilead
This Is My Song
We Walk by Faith
What a Friend We Have in Jesus
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
When Love Is Found

C4 — HYMNS NOT SUITABLE FOR CATHOLIC LITURGY

Hymns with theological ambiguity, unauthorized divine speech, or non-liturgical spirituality

These hymns contain theological or liturgical issues that make them unsuitable for the Sacred Liturgy. Many are beloved and pastorally meaningful in other settings, but their texts do not reflect the Church's liturgical identity. Common concerns include:

- first-person divine speech (“I, the Lord...”)
- therapeutic or emotional spirituality
- ambiguous Eucharistic theology
- ecclesiological or doctrinal imprecision
- texts that do not express the Church's liturgical voice

Because of these issues, **none of these hymns are suitable for Communion**, and therefore **none receive an asterisk**.

Ashes (self-renewal and self-creation themes)

Be Not Afraid (unauthorized divine speech, Eucharistic doctrine absent)

Because the Lord Is My Shepherd

Behold the Glory of God

Blest Are They

Center of My Life

Come to the Water

Come to Us

Come, Worship the Lord

Comfort, Comfort, O My People

Do Not Be Afraid

For You Are My God (Haas)

Hosea

Here I Am, Lord (divine speech concerns, non-liturgical dialog)

I Am the Bread of Life (1st-person divine speech, voice of God concerns)

I Am the Light of the World

I Have Loved You (1st-person divine speech, Eucharistic doctrine is absent)

I Will Raise You Up (1st-person divine speech)

If God Is for Us

In Every Age (1st-person divine speech)

Isaiah 49
Jesus, Heal Us
Let the Valleys Be Raised
Lord, I Need You
My Soul Is Thirsting (ambiguous Eucharistic theology)
Now Is the Time
On Eagle's Wings (unauthorized divine speech, Eucharistic doctrine absent)
Only a Shadow
Open My Eyes
Our God Is an Awesome God
Peace Is Flowing Like a River
Rain Down
Rise Up with Him
Seek First the Kingdom
Shepherd Me, O God (1st-person divine speech, voice of God concerns)
Sing a New Song
Sing to the Mountains
Spirit of God
Table of Plenty (weak and symbolic, hospitality metaphors and meal theology)
The Cry of the Poor (Haas)
The Lord Is My Light
The Lord Is My Shepherd
The Summons (ecclesiological ambiguity concerns)
There Is a Longing (liturgical concerns)
This Alone
Though the Mountains May Fall (liturgical concerns)
Turn to Me (unauthorized divine speech, eucharistic doctrine absent)
We Are Called
We Are Many Parts (liturgical concerns)
We Are the Light of the World
We Belong to You (liturgical concerns)
We Have Been Told
We Remember (liturgical concerns)
You Are Mine (1st-person divine speech, voice of God concerns)
You Are Near (1st-person divine speech, voice of God concerns)
You Will Draw Water Joyfully (liturgical concerns)

Appendix C

When Our Hymns Faced God

Pastoral Framing Note

The following reflection is offered as a **theological meditation**, not as an **evaluation of musicians, parishes, or past decisions**. It differs in tone from the preceding materials and is included here intentionally, as a deeper layer of reflection rather than as a directive or assessment.

This text seeks to explore how hymnody shapes prayer over time—particularly how the Church’s music forms our sense of whom we are addressing in worship, and how that posture quietly influences belief. It does not claim that **musical change alone accounts for broader challenges in parish life**, nor does it assign responsibility for those changes to individuals who have served faithfully and generously within the Church.

Because of its reflective and diagnostic nature, this appendix is **best read slowly and prayerfully**, and always within the broader pastoral context established by the earlier documents. It is **not intended to be read in isolation**, nor used as a standard by which repertoire or ministry is judged. Rather, it is meant to support those entrusted with pastoral leadership as they consider how sacred music participates in the Church’s *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*.

This appendix is provided for **internal formation and discernment**, not for publication or broad distribution. Its purpose is **not to provoke change, but to deepen understanding**—so that future decisions, whenever they are made, may arise from attentiveness, reverence, and shared pastoral care.

A Pastoral Reflection

There was a time, not very long ago, when the hymns sung in Catholic parishes were unmistakably directed toward God. They were not simply “songs we liked” or “music that felt good.” They were acts of devotion, small prayers set to melody, and windows into the mysteries of our faith.

When a parish sang “O Sacrament Most Holy,” the entire congregation turned its gaze toward the Eucharistic Lord. When they sang “O Sacrum Convivium,” they proclaimed the Real Presence with the same clarity as the saints who first prayed those words. When they sang “Peace, Be Still! Our God Is Dwelling,” they knelt in the heart before the One who dwells upon the altar.

These hymns were not about us. They were about **God**.

They taught us how to adore, how to kneel, how to repent, and how to marvel. They gave us language for mystery. They shaped the Catholic imagination.

And then, over the course of a few decades, the voice of our hymnody changed.

The Older Hymns: A Posture of Adoration

If you look closely at the hymns that filled Catholic pews for generations, you notice something striking: the worshipper is almost never the main character.

The older hymns speak to God, not about us.

They say:

- “Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar.”
- “O Sacrament divine!”
- “Let me wash my sinful soul in the crimson blood.”
- “O Mary, remember me.”

Even the Christmas hymns — “Sleep, Holy Babe!” or “The Christ-Child” — are addressed to the Infant Christ with reverence and awe. The soul is always the one who kneels, never the one who stands center stage.

These hymns assume:

- God is holy.
- We are small.

- Grace is needed.
- Mystery is real.
- The Eucharist is the heart of everything.

They form the worshipper by turning the heart outward and upward.

The New Hymns: A Turn Toward Ourselves

Modern missalette hymns, by contrast, often speak in a different voice. They are not malicious or ill-intentioned; many are sincere and pastoral. But they reflect a shift in spiritual emphasis.

Where older hymns say,
“O Lord, I am not worthy,”
 modern hymns often say,
“We are the body of Christ.”

Where older hymns proclaim,
“Blessed be God in His angels and in His saints,”
 modern hymns proclaim,
“Let us build the city of God.”

Where older hymns adore the Eucharistic Lord,
 modern hymns frequently describe the assembly:

- “We come to share our story.”
- “We are called to act with justice.”
- “Gather us in, the lost and forsaken.”

And in some cases, the congregation even sings as God:

- “I myself am the bread of life.”
- “I will come to you in the silence.”
- “Here I am, Lord... I have heard you calling.”

This would have been unthinkable in older Catholic hymnody. The worshipper never presumed to speak in the voice of Christ.

The shift is subtle but profound:
the focus moves from God to us.

What This Change Has Done to Us

Hymns form the heart.
They teach us how to pray.
They shape what we believe without our even noticing.

When a parish sings hymns of adoration, the people learn to adore.
When a parish sings hymns of repentance, the people learn humility.
When a parish sings hymns of mystery, the people learn reverence.

But when a parish sings mostly about itself — its story, its journey, its mission, its community — the center of gravity quietly shifts.

The Mass becomes less about **God's action**
and more about **our experience**.

And when worship becomes centered on our experience, attendance inevitably declines. Because if the liturgy is primarily about us — our feelings, our gathering, our story — then people will come only when they feel like it.

But when the liturgy is about **God**,
people come because they need Him.

Hymnody as a Marker of Decline

It is no coincidence that the decades in which Catholic hymnody turned inward were the same decades in which Mass attendance began to fall.

When the Eucharist is no longer named in Communion hymns, belief in the Real Presence fades. When sin and redemption disappear from our songs, Confession becomes rare. When the Cross is softened or avoided, the Christian life becomes therapeutic rather than sacrificial.

When hymns sound interchangeable with secular folk music, the sense of the sacred erodes. And when the music no longer lifts the heart to God, the heart quietly drifts away.

Hymnody is not the only factor in declining attendance — but it is a revealing one. It shows us what we have been teaching ourselves to love.

Recovering the Balance

The solution is not to reject every modern hymn or to pretend the past was perfect. The Church has always sung new songs. Renewal is part of her life.

But renewal must be rooted in truth.

A healthy parish needs:

- hymns of adoration,
- hymns of doctrine,
- hymns of devotion,
- hymns of mission,
- hymns of community.

Yet the center must remain where the Church places it:

**Christ in the Eucharist,
Christ in the mysteries,
Christ in the doctrine,
Christ in the heart of the believer.**

The older hymns help us reclaim that center.

They remind us who we are.

They remind us what we believe.

They remind us why we gather.

They remind us whom we adore.

And perhaps — just perhaps —
they can help us rebuild what has been lost.

Appendix D

HYMN ANALYSIS TEMPLATE (Internal Formation Tool)

Title: _____

Category: C1 / C2 / C3 / C4

Communion Suitability: Yes / No

Pastoral Framing Note

The following hymn analysis is offered as an **internal formation tool**, applying the theological and liturgical principles outlined in the Parish Hymnody Study and its companion documents. It is intended to assist pastors, musicians, and parish leaders in understanding how hymn texts function within the Sacred Liturgy, particularly with regard to **doctrinal clarity, liturgical voice, and ritual purpose**.

This analysis is **not a judgment on the spiritual value of the hymn**, nor on the faith, sincerity, or generosity of those who cherish it. Many hymns examined here have accompanied Catholics through moments of deep grace, personal conversion, grief, and service. Their devotional impact is real and deserves respect.

The classifications and conclusions presented are **liturgical in nature**, not personal or historical evaluations. They reflect the Church's understanding that **devotional or inspirational songs and liturgical texts serve different purposes**, and that not every meaningful religious song is suited to every moment of the Mass.

These analyses are **not prescriptive mandates**, nor are they intended for public comparison, debate, or enforcement. They are best read **slowly, prayerfully, and within the broader pastoral context** established by the full set of documents. Their purpose is to deepen discernment, foster shared language, and support thoughtful, charitable decision-making in parish music ministry.

Above all, this work seeks to help those entrusted with the Church's sung prayer listen more closely to **how the Church herself prays**, so that future choices may arise from fidelity, reverence, and pastoral care rather than reaction or preference.

This analysis applies the criteria outlined in the Parish Hymnody Study and its companion documents.

1. TEXT SUMMARY

A brief, neutral summary of what the hymn says.
(2–4 sentences)

2. DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS

Explain how the hymn aligns with or diverges from Catholic doctrine.

Consider:

- Christology
- Ecclesiology
- Sacramental theology
- Liturgical voice
- Scriptural grounding
- (1–3 paragraphs)

3. LITURGICAL SUITABILITY

Assess whether the hymn fits any liturgical moment.

Consider:

- Does it express the Church’s voice?
- Does it reflect the mystery being celebrated?
- Does it avoid unauthorized divine speech? ¹
- Does it support the liturgical action?
- (1–2 paragraphs)

4. PASTORAL NOTES

Acknowledge the hymn’s devotional value, history, or emotional resonance.
(1 paragraph)

5. FINAL JUDGMENT

Category: C1 / C2 / C3 / C4

Communion: Suitable / Not Suitable

One-sentence summary of the reason.

These analyses presume familiarity with the foundational documents of the Parish Hymnody Study and should not be read in isolation.

ENDNOTES

1. The Catholic liturgy does not permit the assembly to take on the voice of Christ or the Father.

See GIRM 29–30, 38, 91, 147; USCCB, *Sing to the Lord* §§115–117; USCCB, *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* (2020), “Doctrinally Inappropriate Texts.”

2. (Optional) Scriptural references used or implied in the hymn.

3. (Optional) Relevant passages from the Missal, Lectionary, or Church documents.

4. (Optional) Historical notes on the hymn’s origin or devotional use.

Appendix E

Sample Hymn Analyses (For Formation Use)

The following hymn analyses are provided as **illustrative examples** of how the *Hymn Analysis Template* (Appendix D) may be applied in practice. They are included to demonstrate method, clarity of reasoning, and pastoral restraint—not to offer a comprehensive evaluation of parish repertoire.

These examples intentionally present **two contrasting outcomes**: one hymn that is widely loved but determined to be **not suitable for the Sacred Liturgy**, and one hymn that clearly fulfills the theological and liturgical criteria of Catholic hymnody. Together, they show that the same principles can lead to affirmation or exclusion, depending on the text, voice, and liturgical function of the hymn.

The analyses are offered for **internal formation and study**. They are **not prescriptive mandates**, nor are they intended for public comparison, debate, or enforcement. They should be read **in continuity with the Parish Hymnody Study and its appendices**, especially the doctrinal framework outlined in *What Is a Catholic Hymn?* and the pastoral cautions articulated elsewhere in this work.

As with all materials in this study, the purpose of these examples is not to judge the faith, sincerity, or devotion of those who cherish particular hymns, but to assist pastors, musicians, and parish leaders in listening more attentively to **how the Church herself prays in the liturgy**, so that musical decisions may arise from fidelity, charity, and shared pastoral responsibility.

For the classification categories (C1–C4), see Appendix B.

HYMN ANALYSIS

Title: *Alleluia! Alleluia! Let the Holy Anthem Rise*

Category: C1 — Catholic Liturgical Hymn (Easter)

Communion Suitability: Yes (Easter Season)

General Liturgical Suitability: Entrance, Recessional, Easter Octave, Eastertide

1. TEXT SUMMARY

The hymn is a triumphant proclamation of the Resurrection. It calls the Church to raise a “holy anthem” in praise of the risen Christ. The verses recount Christ’s victory over death, His rising from the tomb, and the joy of the redeemed. The tone is jubilant, communal, and explicitly Easter-focused.

2. DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS

This hymn is doctrinally strong and fully aligned with Catholic teaching:

A. Explicit proclamation of the Resurrection

The text directly proclaims:

- Christ’s rising from the dead
- His victory over sin and death
- The joy of the redeemed
- The triumph of Easter morning

This is core Paschal Mystery theology.

B. Christ-centered, not self-centered

There is:

- no “I,” “me,” or “my”
- no emotional introspection
- no therapeutic language

The focus is entirely on **Christ’s saving work**.

C. Ecclesial voice

The hymn speaks in the **communal voice of the Church**, calling all believers to praise the risen Lord.

D. Liturgical clarity

The text is proclamation, not paraphrased divine speech. It does not require the assembly to sing as God or as Christ.

E. Strong Catholic identity

This hymn comes from the Irish Catholic tradition (Fr. Edward Caswall, Oratorian), widely used in Catholic parishes long before the modern hymnals.

It is doctrinally solid and unmistakably Catholic.

3. LITURGICAL SUITABILITY

This hymn is **highly suitable** for:

Entrance Hymn

Perfect for Easter Sunday, the Octave, and throughout Eastertide.

Recessional Hymn

Its triumphant tone makes it ideal for sending the assembly forth in Easter joy.

Communion (Easter Season)

Because it proclaims the Resurrection and expresses communal praise, it can be used during Communion in Eastertide.

Other uses

- Easter Vigil (after the Gloria)
- Easter Sunday Masses
- Easter Octave weekday Masses
- Parish missions during Easter
- Benediction in Easter season

This hymn is a **liturgical proclamation**, not a devotional text.

4. PASTORAL NOTES

This hymn is deeply woven into the memory of parishes like St. Mary's. It was a staple of Easter celebrations for decades — often used as:

- the **closing hymn** on Easter Sunday
- a **processional** during the Octave
- a **favorite** of older parishioners who grew up with the St. Basil and Paluch missalettes

Its melody is strong, memorable, and singable. Its text is joyful, doctrinal, and unmistakably Easter.

Singing it today reconnects the parish with its authentic Catholic musical heritage.

5. FINAL JUDGMENT

Category: C1 — Catholic Liturgical Hymn (Easter)

Communion: Suitable (Easter Season)

Liturgical Use: Entrance, Recessional, Eastertide

Summary: A triumphant, doctrinally strong Easter hymn proclaiming the Resurrection in the communal voice of the Church.

ENDNOTES

1. Liturgical hymns must proclaim the Paschal Mystery and express the Church's communal prayer to God. See USCCB, *Sing to the Lord* §§115–117; GIRM 47–48.
2. Easter hymns that explicitly proclaim Christ's Resurrection are especially suited for the Entrance and Recessional during Eastertide. See *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2001), §§149–152.
3. Fr. Edward Caswall (1814–1878), an Oratorian priest, produced many English Catholic hymn translations and original texts widely used in 19th- and early 20th-century Catholic worship.

HYMN ANALYSIS

Title: *Be Not Afraid* **Category:** C4 — Not Suitable for Catholic Liturgy

Communion Suitability: No

1. TEXT SUMMARY

The hymn is built around a repeated refrain of reassurance (“be not afraid”) and verses that place extended words of comfort in the mouth of God. The text speaks directly to the individual believer, promising divine protection, guidance, and deliverance through trials. The tone is pastoral and consoling, emphasizing God’s closeness in suffering.

2. DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS

The primary doctrinal concern is the hymn’s extensive use of **first-person divine speech**. The verses present God speaking directly to the assembly in words not taken from Scripture or the liturgical books. This creates a theological problem: in the Sacred Liturgy, the assembly does not take on the voice of Christ or the Father, nor does it proclaim invented divine speech.¹

The hymn also reflects a **therapeutic spirituality** centered on emotional reassurance rather than proclamation of the Paschal Mystery. While the theme of trust in God is thoroughly biblical, the text does not articulate Christological, ecclesial, or sacramental doctrine. It does not express the Church’s liturgical voice, nor does it proclaim a mystery of salvation.

The hymn’s focus is individual rather than communal, devotional rather than liturgical, and consoling rather than doctrinal. These characteristics place it outside the scope of Catholic liturgical hymnody as defined in the Parish Hymnody Study.

3. LITURGICAL SUITABILITY

“Be Not Afraid” does not support any of the ritual actions of the Mass. It does not function as an Entrance hymn (no communal proclamation), an Offertory hymn (no sacrificial or ecclesial themes), or a Communion hymn (no Eucharistic doctrine). Its tone is reflective and personal, oriented toward private reassurance rather than the corporate worship of the Church.

The use of invented divine speech makes it unsuitable for proclamation by the assembly during the liturgy.² While the message of comfort is pastorally meaningful, the liturgy requires texts that express the Church’s faith, not imagined words spoken by God.³

4. PASTORAL NOTES

This hymn has brought comfort to countless Catholics, especially at funerals, healing services, and moments of personal difficulty. Its pastoral value is real and should be acknowledged with gratitude. Many parishioners have deep emotional connections to it. The classification of this hymn as unsuitable for Mass is not a judgment on its spiritual impact, but a recognition that devotional texts and liturgical texts serve different purposes in the life of the Church.

5. FINAL JUDGMENT

Category: C4 — Not Suitable for Catholic Liturgy

Communion: Not Suitable Summary: The hymn uses unauthorized divine speech and expresses a therapeutic, individual spirituality rather than liturgical proclamation.

ENDNOTES

1. The Catholic liturgy does not permit the assembly to take on the voice of Christ or the Father. See GIRM 29–30, 38, 91, 147; USCCB, *Sing to the Lord* §§115–117; USCCB, *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* (2020), “Doctrinally Inappropriate Texts.”
2. The priest or deacon proclaims the words of Christ in the liturgy, acting *in persona Christi*. The assembly never assumes this role. See GIRM 91, 147.
3. *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* (USCCB, 2020) warns against texts that “put words in the mouth of God that are not found in Scripture or the liturgical books.”

Catholic Hymnody, Authority, and Modern Hymnals

Context and Purpose

Catholic hymnody has always existed under the authority of the Church, yet the way that authority is exercised has changed significantly in the modern era. This article examines why Catholic bishops no longer formally approve hymnody through imprimaturs, how hymn evaluation now functions within the Church, and how modern Catholic hymnals measure up when judged against the Church's own doctrinal and liturgical standards. Drawing on historical practice, the USCCB's *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church* (2020), and *What Is a Catholic Hymn?*, this study seeks not to be polemical, but ecclesial: to clarify what the Church means by Catholic hymnody and how that meaning is applied today.

1. Why Imprimaturs for Hymnals Disappeared in the U.S.

Historically (pre-1960s), Catholic hymnals commonly carried imprimaturs. Hymns were treated as **catechetical and doctrinal texts**, and bishops exercised direct oversight.

After Vatican II, imprimaturs for hymnals **faded gradually (roughly 1968–1980)**—not by formal abolition, but by a shift in priorities:

- Episcopal authority focused increasingly on **official liturgical texts** (Missal, Lectionary, sacraments).
- Hymns came to be viewed as **pastoral or devotional aids**, not juridically regulated texts.
- The explosion of vernacular, ecumenical, and rapidly revised repertoire made exhaustive review impractical.

Importantly, **the Church never declared hymn approval unnecessary in principle.** Instead, oversight shifted from **formal pre-approval to discernment, formation, and responsibility at lower levels** (publishers, pastors, musicians).

2. Criteria for Evaluating Hymns Using the Church's Own Language

From Sacrosanctum Concilium, Musicam Sacram, the GIRM, the Catechism, and the USCCB (2020), a coherent set of criteria emerged. These were synthesized into four lenses:

Doctrinal Integrity

Hymns must clearly express Catholic doctrine (Trinity, Christology, Eucharist, salvation) without ambiguity. Vague or contradictory theology is not acceptable simply because it is popular or emotive.

Liturgical Function

Hymns must serve the **ritual action of the Mass**, not merely provide religious sentiment. A hymn can be orthodox yet still liturgically unsuitable if it does not correspond to the rite (Entrance, Offertory, Communion).

Ecclesial Voice

Catholic hymnody should sound like **the Church praying as Church**, not primarily individuals expressing personal experience. Preference is given to scriptural, liturgical, and traditional sources.

Pastoral Effectiveness

Hymns should be singable, prayerful, and oriented toward reverence—not performance or entertainment.

The USCCB document presents these as **guidelines and cautions**, not binding judgments.

3. “What Is a Catholic Hymn?” — A Stronger, Definitional Synthesis

What Is a Catholic Hymn? was shown to be **fully consistent** with the USCCB document but **stronger and more precise** in its conclusions.

Key contributions of *What Is a Catholic Hymn?*:

- It offers a **definition**, not just an evaluation aid.
- It states that hymns which obscure doctrine or fail liturgical purpose are **unsuitable for Mass**, not merely “concerning.”
- It insists that a Catholic hymn exists **under ecclesial authority and permission**, even if not through a traditional imprimatur.
- It integrates doctrine, liturgy, history, and authority into a single coherent standard.

In short:

- **USCCB (2020) asks:** *What problems should we watch for?*
- **What Is a Catholic Hymn? asks:** *What does the Church mean by Catholic hymnody at all?*

They are complementary, not contradictory.

4. Testing Modern Hymnals Against Both Documents

Several widely used U.S. hymnals were evaluated using **both standards**.

Hymnals Testedⁱ

Gather (GIA)

Glory & Praise (OCP)

Breaking Bread (OCP)

St. Michael Hymnal (St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church)

Adoremus Hymnal (Ignatius Press)

A Catholic Book of Hymns (Sacred Music Library)

Results

According to the USCCB (2020):

- Most modern hymnals contain a **mixture** of acceptable and problematic texts.
- They require **careful discernment**, not wholesale rejection.

According to What Is a Catholic Hymn?:

- *Gather, Glory & Praise*, and *Breaking Bread* **fail definitionally** as Catholic hymnals, even if they include individual acceptable hymns. They lack consistent doctrinal clarity, liturgical function, and ecclesial voice.
- *St. Michael Hymnal* **substantially conforms**, showing intentional Catholic coherence.
- *Adoremus Hymnal* and *A Catholic Book of Hymns* **clearly and fully conform**, embodying Catholic doctrine, liturgical theology, and ecclesial intent.

This demonstrates that the stronger definition is **not impractical**—it is already being met by certain publishers.

5. Core Insight of the Study

The central conclusion is this:

The decline of imprimaturs did not alter the Church's standards for hymnody, but it shifted how responsibility for applying those standards is exercised.

- The USCCB document preserves doctrinal vigilance but avoids juridical enforcement.
 - *What Is a Catholic Hymn?* restores clarity by naming what Catholic hymnody is, not merely what it should avoid.
 - Modern hymnals vary widely, not because Catholic standards are unclear, but because they are **applied inconsistently**.
 - Two modern hymnals (*Adoremus* and *A Catholic Book of Hymns*) demonstrate that **coherent, doctrinally strong, liturgically faithful Catholic hymnody is fully achievable today**.
-

ⁱ Note on Sources:

The hymnals discussed in this document are commercially published and widely used in U.S. parishes. Their contents—hymn texts, indices, and liturgical assignments—are publicly available through publisher materials and independent hymn indices, allowing evaluation based on the texts themselves and the Church's own liturgical and doctrinal standards.

What the Church Approves at Mass—and What She Entrusts to Pastoral Discernment

When you open *Breaking Bread* and see that approval statement, what the Church is really saying is this: “*We care deeply about what you pray at Mass, and we want to be sure it is faithful to the prayer of the whole Church.*” **Although this reflection was prompted by a commonly used missalette, the principles described here apply broadly to Catholic missalettes and participation aids, regardless of publisher.**

The phrase *concordat cum originali* simply assures you that the **official prayers of the Mass printed in this book truly match the Church’s authorized texts**—the Roman Missal and the Lectionary. These are not private prayers or devotional paraphrases, but the very words the Church herself gives us to pray together. A bishop has taken responsibility for confirming that accuracy, and the bishops of the United States, through their Committee on Divine Worship, have allowed those texts to be published for use in parishes. This is an act of pastoral care: it protects the unity of our worship and helps ensure that, wherever Mass is celebrated, we are praying with one voice.¹

When it comes to **music**, the Church makes an important distinction.

Some music at Mass is inseparably tied to the liturgy itself—things like the sung **Gloria, Holy, Holy, Responsorial Psalm**, and **Gospel Acclamation**. Because these texts come directly from the Church’s liturgical books, their musical settings **are reviewed and approved** by the bishops’ liturgy office before they may be used. This ensures that what we sing as prayer truly expresses what the Church believes and celebrates.²

Hymns, however, belong to a different category. Unlike the texts of the Mass and their musical settings, hymns are **not subject to national liturgical review as part of the Church’s formal approval process**, but are entrusted to the discernment of bishops, pastors, and musicians according to the Church’s doctrinal and liturgical norms.³

Hymns are not official liturgical texts; they are devotional compositions offered to support prayer at moments when the liturgy allows “another suitable song.” Because of that, they are **not individually approved or rejected by the USCCB** when they appear in a missalette or hymnal. Their inclusion means they are *permitted*, not that each one has been formally vetted line by line by the bishops.

Instead, the Church entrusts the discernment of hymn texts primarily to the **local bishop**, and pastorally to priests and music ministers. This reflects a long-standing principle of Catholic life: unity in essentials, prudence in application. Bishops may—and sometimes do—offer guidance or restrictions if certain hymns fail to express the faith clearly, especially regarding the Eucharist. That local oversight is not a contradiction of the missalette’s approval, but a continuation of the Church’s pastoral responsibility.^{4,5}

So when you hold *Breaking Bread* in your hands, you can be confident of this:

- **The prayers of the Mass are trustworthy and official.**
- **The sung parts of the liturgy have been carefully reviewed.**
- **The hymns are offered as pastoral resources, to be used wisely and faithfully.**

Seen this way, the approval statement is not a blanket endorsement of every word on every page, but a sign of the Church’s desire to guard the sacred heart of the Mass while still allowing room for pastoral judgment, musical diversity, and growth in understanding.

Endnotes

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Guidelines for the Publication of Liturgical Books* (2025), Appendix I, “Editorial Requirements for Granting the Concordat cum originali.”
2. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 393; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Guidelines for the Publication of Liturgical Books* (2025), Appendix IV, “Policy for Musical Compositions for the Liturgy.”
3. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Guidelines for the Publication of Liturgical Books* (2025), Appendix IV, which states that musical compositions using wholly original texts, such as hymns, fall outside national liturgical approval procedures and that their suitability for liturgical use is determined by the diocesan bishop.
4. Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 22, which affirms that regulation of the sacred liturgy belongs to the Church’s competent authority, exercised at both universal and local levels.
5. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Doctrine, *Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church: An Aid for Evaluating Hymn Lyrics* (2020), which provides doctrinal criteria for evaluating hymn texts without constituting juridical approval or prohibition of specific hymns.
6. The absence of an *imprimatur* or *nihil obstat* on modern hymnals reflects a post-conciliar shift from centralized pre-approval of hymn texts to pastoral discernment supported by episcopal governance, as reflected in post-conciliar liturgical law and current U.S. episcopal policy.

PARISH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

Why We Sing at Mass

Our parish is beginning a short **“Did You Know?”** series on the importance of singing at Mass. Each week you’ll find a brief note in the bulletin reminding us that singing is part of the Church’s prayer — and that your voice truly matters.

The choir, cantor, and organist are here to lead, not to sing in your place. So, sing out, sing strongly, and don’t be afraid. Together, we become the sound of a parish praying with one heart.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 1)

What makes a hymn “Catholic”?

A Catholic hymn expresses the Church’s faith clearly—especially about Christ, the Eucharist, the Trinity, and the Church’s sacramental life. Because missalette include hymns from many Christian traditions, choosing music for Mass means selecting texts that reflect what the Church herself teaches. When we sing hymns rooted in Catholic doctrine, we strengthen the unity of our worship and deepen our participation in the liturgy.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 2)

Devotional hymns have a long Catholic history

For generations, Catholics sang hymns to Mary, the Sacred Heart, the angels, and the saints—especially before Mass. These devotional hymns were never meant to replace the liturgy’s own texts, but they helped prepare hearts for prayer and reflected the devotional life of the parish. This tradition shaped parish life across the United States, including right here in Akron.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 3)

Not every Christian hymn is automatically suitable for Mass

Some Protestant hymns express the Catholic faith beautifully; others do not. The Church asks us to choose hymns that clearly reflect Catholic doctrine, especially about Christ and the Eucharist. This is why careful discernment is important when selecting music from missalettes that draw from many traditions.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 4)

Music at Mass is part of the prayer itself

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal teaches that the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion chants are not “extras”—they are part of the liturgical action. Hymns at these moments should support the ritual: gathering the community, preparing the gifts, and uniting us in Communion. When music serves the liturgy in this way, it helps the whole parish enter more deeply into the mystery being celebrated.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 5)

Catholic hymns are rooted in Scripture

Many of the Church’s hymns draw directly from Scripture—especially the Psalms, the Canticles, and the New Testament. A good Catholic hymn doesn’t just sound religious; it echoes the biblical themes the Church prays in the liturgy. Singing Scripture helps us enter more deeply into the mysteries we celebrate at Mass.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 6)

The Church asks that hymn texts be doctrinally clear

The USCCB teaches that hymns used at Mass should express Catholic doctrine without ambiguity—especially about Christ’s divinity, the Eucharist, and the Church. This clarity helps the whole parish pray with one voice and one faith. A hymn can be beautiful, but if its text is unclear or incomplete, it may not be suitable for the liturgy.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 7)

The Entrance, Offertory, and Communion hymns each have a purpose

The Entrance hymn gathers the community and introduces the feast or season. The Offertory hymn accompanies the preparation of the gifts and unites the assembly. The Communion hymn expresses joy and unity as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. When music supports these actions, it strengthens the prayer of the whole parish.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 8)

Catholic hymnody reflects a sacramental worldview

Catholic hymns often speak of grace, the Church, the sacraments, the saints, and the Paschal Mystery—because these are central to our faith. This sacramental vision is part of what distinguishes Catholic hymnody from other Christian traditions. When we sing hymns shaped by this worldview, we proclaim who we are as a Catholic community.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 9)

A singing parish is a praying parish

Your voice matters more than you know. Sing out, sing strong, and don't be afraid — heaven isn't looking for perfection, just heart. And if you ever think you're singing too softly, imagine the heavenly host leaning in with a smile saying, **“We can't hear you...”**

The organist, the cantor, and the choir are not there to sing for you, but to lead you, so that the true sound of our parish is **all of us praying together in song.**

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 10)

Approved Doesn't Always Mean Automatic

Did you know that when a hymnal or missalette is called “approved,” it usually means the official Mass texts are printed correctly and with permission? It does not always mean that every hymn text has been individually reviewed by a bishop. The Church entrusts pastors and musicians with choosing hymns that best serve the liturgy. Approval tells us what may be used; thoughtful discernment helps us choose what should be sung so that our parish prays clearly and faithfully as Catholics.

DID YOU KNOW? (Week 11)

Why Discernment Matters More Today

Did you know that in the past, Catholic hymn books were often reviewed and approved directly by bishops and used to teach the faith in schools? Today, hymn books draw from many traditions, and the Church relies more on pastoral discernment than on direct approval of every hymn. That's why formation matters. Choosing hymns is not about distrust,

but about responsibility — helping our parish sing what truly reflects our Catholic faith and supports the prayer of the Mass.

PARISH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT LENT & EASTER

DID YOU KNOW? (First Sunday of Lent)

During Lent, the Church sets aside the word Alleluia as a form of fasting. This joyful acclamation, which means “Praise the Lord,” is closely associated with the Resurrection. When it returns at Easter, it is sung with renewed joy—not because Easter feels happy, but because Christ is risen. By withholding the Alleluia during Lent and restoring it at Easter, the Church teaches us to experience resurrection as a gift received, not something taken for granted.

DID YOU KNOW? (Second Sunday of Lent)

The Glory to God in the Highest is a hymn of praise rooted in the song of the angels at Christ’s birth. During Lent, the Church temporarily sets this hymn aside so that our prayer may take on a more restrained character of repentance and preparation. At Easter, the Gloria returns as a joyful proclamation that Christ’s saving work has been accomplished. When we sing it again, we join the Church’s song of praise with renewed fullness.

DID YOU KNOW? (Third Sunday of Lent)

During Lent, the Church calls us to conversion of heart—a turning back to God through grace, not by our own effort alone. The hymns we sing at Mass reflect this truth. Authentic Catholic hymnody expresses repentance as a response to God’s mercy, not as self-renewal or self-creation. When our music proclaims that it is God who heals, restores, and saves, it helps the whole parish enter more deeply into the mystery of redemption.

DID YOU KNOW? (Fourth Sunday of Lent)

The Fourth Sunday of Lent, often called *Laetare Sunday*, offers a moment of joyful hope in the midst of our Lenten journey. Even here, the Church’s music remains rooted in the liturgy itself. Hymns at Mass are not chosen simply to match a feeling, but to support the Church’s prayer—proclaiming Christ’s saving work and uniting the assembly. True liturgical hymnody helps us rejoice not in ourselves, but in the grace God is accomplishing in us.

DID YOU KNOW? (Fifth Sunday of Lent)

As Lent draws toward its final days, the Church's focus turns more directly to the mystery of Christ's Passion. The hymns we sing at Mass during this time should reflect the depth of this mystery—proclaiming Christ's sacrifice, the reality of sin, and the hope of redemption. Catholic hymnody speaks clearly about the Cross as the source of salvation, helping the parish prepare to enter Holy Week with faith and reverence.

DID YOU KNOW? (Palm Sunday)

On Palm Sunday, the Church enters the mystery of the Lord's Passion through solemn procession and proclamation. The music of this day accompanies these sacred actions—especially the Entrance procession and the reading of the Passion. Rather than adding commentary, the hymns serve the liturgy itself, helping the assembly take part in Christ's journey to the Cross. In this way, what we sing unites us to the Church's prayer as she begins the most sacred week of the year.

DID YOU KNOW? (Easter Sunday of the Resurrection)

On Easter Sunday, the Church celebrates the Resurrection in every part of the Mass. The hymns we sing accompany the Church's joyful actions—gathering, processing, offering praise, and receiving the risen Christ in the Eucharist. Easter hymns are chosen not to explain the readings, but to serve the Church's act of worship as she rejoices in Christ risen.

DID YOU KNOW? (Second Sunday of Easter)

The Easter season continues beyond one Sunday. Each Easter Mass celebrates the same mystery of Christ's Resurrection. Hymns during this season support the Church's liturgical actions—bringing us together as one Body, supporting our common prayer, and accompanying our reception of the Eucharist.

DID YOU KNOW? (Third Sunday of Easter)

During Easter, the Mass remains the Church's central act of worship. Hymns accompany sacred actions such as procession, preparation of the altar, and Communion. In the Catholic tradition, music is chosen because it fits what the liturgy is doing, helping the assembly participate more fully in the celebration.

DID YOU KNOW? (Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Throughout the Easter season, the Church gathers around one altar to celebrate the Resurrection. Hymns support this worship by uniting the voices of the assembly during the Entrance and Communion processions. What we sing expresses that we are one Body gathered to celebrate one saving mystery.

DID YOU KNOW? (Fifth Sunday of Easter)

Easter hymnody is shaped by the structure of the Mass. Rather than commenting on ideas, hymns accompany ritual actions—gathering in joy, offering praise and sacrifice, and receiving Christ in the Eucharist. Catholic hymns serve the liturgy itself and help focus our prayer on what is taking place.

DID YOU KNOW? (Sixth Sunday of Easter)

As the Easter season continues, the Church’s worship remains centered on the altar and the Eucharist. Hymns during Mass support the Church’s prayer in action, helping the assembly sing together as one people celebrating the risen Lord present among us.

DID YOU KNOW? (Fifth or Sixth Sunday of Easter Alternative)

The Church’s liturgy changes with the seasons not to create variety, but to shape our prayer. During Lent, certain joyful acclamations are withheld so that our worship may focus on repentance and longing. During Easter, those same texts return to express the fullness of resurrection joy. In both seasons, the Church chooses what we sing carefully, so that our music serves the mystery being celebrated.

DID YOU KNOW? (Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Near the close of the Easter season, the Church continues her joyful worship at Mass. Hymns accompany the Church as she gathers, gives thanks, and is sent forth. Catholic hymnody keeps our focus on the liturgy itself—the Church at prayer, united in Christ and sent to live the joy of the Resurrection.

A PARISH INHERITANCE

AI Analysis Guide for Liturgical Hymnody

Purpose

This guide provides a standardized workflow for using Large Language Models (AI) to evaluate hymnody according to the specific doctrinal and liturgical criteria established in *A Parish Inheritance*. By following these steps, the AI becomes a research assistant capable of filtering vast repertoires through your established framework.

STEP 1: UPLOAD THE "RULEBOOK"

Gather the following PDF or Word versions of your core project documents and upload them to the AI interface:

What Is a Catholic Hymn?

A Pastoral Look at the Hymns We Sing

Appendix D : Hymn Analysis Template

Appendix E : Sample Hymn Analyses

STEP 2: PRIME THE AI ASSISTANT

Copy and paste the following prompt to ensure the AI prioritizes your documents over its general training:

"I am uploading the foundational documents for a project titled 'A Parish Inheritance.' These files establish a specific framework for Catholic hymnody. Please read them carefully. From this point forward, use ONLY the theological definitions (Categories C1-C4) and the Analysis Template (Appendix D) provided in these documents to evaluate any hymn lyrics I provide. Strictly apply the doctrinal standards found in these files, particularly concerning 'Unauthorized Divine Speech' and 'Eucharistic Realism.' Do not use general ecumenical or secular standards."

STEP 3: EXECUTE THE ANALYSIS

Paste the lyrics of the hymn in question along with this final command:

"Analyze these lyrics using the Template from Appendix D.

Specifically flag:

1. Any use of first-person divine speech (Voice of God).
2. The presence or absence of Eucharistic doctrine.
3. The final classification: C1, C2, C3, or C4.

[PASTE LYRICS HERE]"

STEP 4: PASTORAL VERIFICATION

Review the result. While the AI is excellent at textual pattern recognition—identifying unauthorized pronouns or theological gaps—the final pastoral decision belongs to the Priest and the musician.

Copy and paste the hymn analysis into a word document or note pad for future reference.

Use the AI's data as the basis for a **Shared Discernment** conversation

[cite: 1642, 1686].

About The Compiler And This Study

Don Howe has dedicated nearly 50 years to the service of Catholic vocal music as a tenor, cantor, and choir member. His musical and spiritual formation began at St. Mary's Grade School (1966–1974), where he first experienced the liturgical life of the parish during a period of significant transition in the Church. His vocation was further shaped by a rich family legacy; according to cherished family stories, his grandmother often played Catholic melodies on the piano while his grandfather, a later convert to Catholicism, accompanied her on the violin with hymns from the Methodist tradition. Supported by the influence of his mother and his father—also a convert to the faith—Don joined the St. Mary's Choir during his junior year of high school in 1977.

Under the mentorship of organists Ralph Jordan and Mary Leary, Don transitioned from a beginner to a seasoned tenor, mastering the traditional arrangements that formed the parish's "Native Voice." Throughout a professional career as a Die Designer, CAD operator, and Web Developer, his commitment to the choir remained a constant. His tenure at St. Mary's (1977–2010) saw him through decades of tradition, utilizing historical collections like the St. Basil's, St. Gregory, and the Sunday School Hymn Book, his commitment to the choir remained a constant.



Following service at St. Paul's Catholic Church, Don returned to the reopened St. Mary's in 2022. This study, *The Parish Inheritance*, is the culmination of his lifetime in the parish. It is offered as a blueprint for restoring the tradition of devotional hymnody—returning to a repertoire of song that is truly "focused toward God" and rooted in the historical soul of St. Mary's Parish.