



Bishops to Vote on Norms for Hymns at Mass

WASHINGTON (October 18, 2006) — The U.S. bishops will vote to establish norms for hymns at Mass during their annual November meeting in Baltimore, November 13-16.

The new norms, which will require a two-thirds vote by the bishops and subsequent *recognitio* by the Holy See, are to ensure that liturgical songs will be doctrinally correct, based in the scriptural and liturgical texts and relatively fixed.

The norms are part of a new "Directory for Music and the Liturgy for Use in the Dioceses in the United States of America." The directory responds to a recommendation of *Liturgiam authenticam*, the fifth Vatican instruction on correct implementation of liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council.

Specific norms state that

1. The approval of liturgical songs is reserved to the Diocesan Bishop in whose diocese an individual song is published. He is supported in his work by this directory and by the USCCB Secretariat on the Liturgy.
2. The Diocesan Bishop is assisted in his review of individual texts through the formation of a committee for the review of liturgical songs consisting of theologians, liturgists, and musicians. The committee shall assure that each text is suitable for liturgical use based on the principles articulated in this directory.
3. Within three years, the Committee on the Liturgy will formulate a Common Repertoire of Liturgical Songs for use in all places where the Roman liturgy is celebrated in the United States of America. While songs outside the core repertoire may also be used in the Liturgy, this core repertoire will be included in all worship aids used in the dioceses of the United States of America.

The directory is to serve not so much as a list of approved and unapproved songs as a process by which bishops might regulate the quality of the text of songs composed for use in the liturgy.

According to the proposed directory, theological adequacy may be judged in two ways:

- Individual songs should be consonant with Catholic teaching and free from doctrinal error
- The repertoire of liturgical songs in any given place should reflect a balanced approach to Catholic theological elements.

The directory warns of doctrinal compromise. For example, it notes:

- Liturgical songs must never be permitted to make statements about the faith which are untrue
- The doctrine of the Trinity should never be compromised through the consistent replacement of masculine pronominal references to the three Divine persons
- Any emphasis on the work of the members of the Church should always be balanced by an appreciation of the doctrine of grace and our complete dependence of the grace of God to accomplish anything
- The elimination of archaic language should never alter the meaning and essential theological structure of a venerable liturgical song.

The document also emphasizes that care should be taken that hymns and songs should take their inspiration and vocabulary chiefly from the Scripture and Liturgy.

The document said that the large number of liturgical songs that exist in the United States have benefited the liturgy, but also said that "a certain stable core of liturgical songs might well serve as exemplary and stabilizing factor."

More information on the November meeting can be found at www.usccb.org (<http://www.usccb.org>).