

Pueri Cantores Festival to Bring Young Voices to Cathedral

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By [Karen Mahoney](#) | Jan 17, 2023 | [Around the Archdiocese](#), [Entertainment](#), [Local](#), [News](#)

Paul French believes it is important to evangelize young Catholics through the medium of beauty.

That includes the beauty of sacred choral music, magnificent Church architecture, and the beauty of the Mass celebrated elegantly and with great care.

Students from across the Archdiocese of Milwaukee will gather at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on Saturday, Feb. 18, to perform at the first Pueri Cantores Milwaukee Youth Choral Festival and Mass.

“Young singers look around and see that the Church is broader than at their own parish school,” said French, the president of the American Federation of Pueri Cantores and music director at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Chicago. “Friendships are made and renewed each year. Festivals offer an opportunity for choirs to learn a new and practical repertoire, and we hear time and again that choir directors tell us that bringing their choirs to these festivals is a real shot in the arm when it comes to recruitment and retention of their youth singers.”

In Milwaukee, approximately 150 musically gifted students in grades 4 through 12 from area Catholic schools and parishes, as well as a few from surrounding dioceses, will represent a small part of the thousands of youth singers from around the world in the American Federation of Pueri Cantores festivals.



Pictured: Paul French

Pueri Cantores, which means “young singers,” consists of 32 federations worldwide and is the office student choral organization of the Roman Catholic Church.

The American Federation of Pueri Cantores reaches more than 2,600 children annually through 12 festival Masses organized across the country. Each of these events brings together several hundred young students who, under the direction of a nationally recognized Catholic choral director, rehearse and perform sacred liturgical music together. These festivals provide a unique opportunity to educate and engage these young singers in their faith and the arts, and through them, enrich the lives of their families and communities.

French will serve as guest conductor for the event. In planning for the event, he has received support from Kim Mandelkow, the director of the archdiocesan Office of Worship, and Cathedral

Director of Liturgy and Music James Grzadzinski. French is confident a Pueri Cantores Choral Festival will become an annual tradition in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

"(I believe) that the numbers will grow annually as more parish choir directors and school music teachers witness the great benefit of bringing their choristers to the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist," French said.

According to Grzadzinski, the upcoming festival will help to empower church youth to celebrate the rich traditions of sacred music and liturgy.

"This serves as a wonderful vehicle for evangelization as well as a beautiful, profound spiritual experience in which youth may come to experience Christ in a Eucharistic celebration while ministering with tremendously inspirational sacred music," Grzadzinski said.

Pueri Cantores Program Administrator Kathleen Prina said the group has organized choral festivals and Masses for young singers across the country since 2003.

"The festival Mass will include the usual number of parishioners from the Cathedral vigil Mass, plus the 100-150 singers and around 200 additional people, such as families of singers, friends, and school and parish community members," Prina said.

Additionally, the concluding Mass generally occurs with the local cardinals and bishops presiding and providing them the opportunity to interact with the youngest members of their flock, French said.

"We are instituting partnerships with local seminaries to bring seminarians to festival days, both for the practical boost in tenors and basses from the older voices, but also to offer some time to hear vocation stories and provide time for the choristers and seminarians to interact at the final rehearsal of the day," French said. "This is a win-win for the Church."

Grzadzinski, who serves as the USCCB Region Seven representative for the Conference of Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians, said he enjoyed the conversations while preparing for the festival with many of his colleagues who serve as directors of music and liturgy throughout the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, as well as some school principals.

"I invited my Cathedral musician colleagues in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin to share the good news of this festival with their dioceses," he said.

The Mass will begin at 5:15 p.m. Feb. 18, Bishop Jeffrey R. Haines celebrating.