

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Serving the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend



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## Pueri Cantores Youth Choir Sings for Solemnity of St. Joseph

With their performance at Mass about to begin, members of the Pueri Cantores youth choir were finishing up their final rehearsal when conductor Jeremy Hoy took the time to calm their nerves and give the young singers an important, non-logistical reminder: “Make sure you pray with the music, and be joyful.”

St. Pius X Catholic Church in Granger hosted the diocese’s annual Pueri Cantores Mass on Tuesday, March 19 – the solemnity of St. Joseph. More than 130 grade school and high school students from across the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend sang a repertoire of choral and chant pieces for the Mass, which was celebrated by Bishop Rhoades, who said after the Mass that their singing was “a little taste of heaven.”



Lexie Wasinger

The entire 2024 Pueri Cantores choir of the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese poses with Bishop Rhoades and conductor Jeremy Hoy.

Pueri Cantores is an organization based at the Vatican that brings students together to sing choral music from the Church's rich musical history. More than 70,000 young people participate worldwide. According to the organization's website, the mission of Pueri Cantores is "to evangelize and catechize choristers through the medium of sacred music, aiding them in growing in their faith and rooting them ever deeper to the Church."



Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

Jeremy Hoy, Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Pius X Parish, conducts the Pueri Cantores during their festival Mass on Tuesday, March 19, in Granger.

This is the 12th year the diocese has had a Pueri Cantores festival Mass. Participants this year came from 21 Catholic schools across the diocese.

One of the participating schools was St. Vincent de Paul School in Elkhart. The adjoining parish's Director of Sacred Music, Brad Todorovich, teaches a fifth-to-eighth-grade choir at the school.

Todorovich said only a set number of students per school are chosen to participate in Pueri Cantores.

The chosen students then have short, regular rehearsals during recess, as well as rehearsals with other participating students from schools in their region, before traveling to Granger to rehearse with all participants before the Mass.





“It’s a long process, but I always tell the kids that the more effort they put into learning the music, the more they will benefit from the experience,” Todorovich said.

Todorovich said the benefits of participating in Pueri Cantores goes beyond the excitement and experience the student singers have. “I know that our diocesan festival is bearing good fruit because many pieces from Pueri Cantores have become staples of parish repertoire around the diocese,” Todorovich said. “I have also seen the general quality of parish music programs much improved since we began offering these festivals back in 2011.”

Hoy, Director of Music and Liturgy at the host parish, St. Pius X, said he was “honored” to be asked to conduct. He conducted Pueri Cantores in 2022 when a conductor had to back out at the last minute, but he has been involved with the choir since it came to the diocese in 2011.

“This year’s festival was an amazing experience,” Hoy said. “The children were so attentive, and their choral sound was so beautiful. I was so proud of them, and it was a privilege to work with all of them.”

Hoy also had the opportunity to take the youth choir from St. Pius X to the International Pueri Cantores Congress in Rome this past winter, where the students sang for Pope Francis. Hoy remembers Pope Francis' opening words from a talk to the choir: "What you do is very important because your voices help communities to pray, to open their hearts to the Lord, and this is fundamental for the life of the Church."





The setlist for the festival at St. Pius X Church reflected the fact that this year's Pueri Cantores Mass coincided with the solemnity of St. Joseph. The offertory piece was French composer Gabriel Fauré's *Ecce Fidelis Servus*, Op. 54 – the title of which translates to “Behold the faithful servant” – very fitting for St. Joseph. The lyrics of the piece also mention the lily, a classic attribute of Jesus' foster father.

The music during the Mass comprised pieces written in English and in Latin, and the music also stretched across different time periods, nations, and styles. Fauré, for instance, was a 19th-century composer. The Mass ended with a rousing version of the *Te Deum* composed by contemporary American organist Michael Bedford. And at the end of Mass, Bishop Rhoades thanked the singers for performing one of his favorite musical pieces: Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*.

Bishop Rhoades' homily focused not on music but on the saint of the day – St. Joseph.

“Imagine the great honor God bestowed upon Joseph to be the husband of the woman He chose to be the mother of His Son,” Bishop Rhoades said. “God chose this humble carpenter, one whom the Scriptures call ‘a just man,’ which means he was a righteous man who obeyed God, a man of great faith and devotion to Him. God, the eternal Father of God the Son, called Joseph, as the husband of Mary, to be the earthly father of Jesus, His Incarnate Son, to watch over, to protect, and to teach and guide Him. What an awesome vocation! Joseph lived that vocation faithfully. With tender love, St. Joseph protected Mary and Jesus from danger, especially when Herod sought to kill the child Jesus. St. Joseph took them to safety in Egypt. He saved Jesus. That's why he is called ‘the savior of the Savior.’ That's also why the Church invokes St. Joseph as the guardian and protector of the Church. All of us can turn to St. Joseph to guard and protect us, not only from physical dangers, but from the spiritual danger of sin.”

During the Mass, Bishop Rhoades wore a vestment bearing the image of St. Joseph. He mentioned to those in attendance that one of his favorite paintings of St. Joseph is located nearby at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. The painting depicts the death of St. Joseph, with Jesus and Mary at his side. “Looking at the painting, you can see and even feel the deep love of the Holy Family,” Bishop Rhoades said. “The Church looks to St. Joseph as the patron saint of a happy death, because what greater happiness than to die with Jesus and Mary at our side.”



Bishop Rhoades urged everyone in attendance to become close to St. Joseph, “to go to him with your prayers, especially you who are fathers and husbands. All of us can go to him with confidence in his loving protection. And, to all of you, young students, some of you the same age or around the same age as Jesus was in today’s Gospel, 12 years old: may you also have devotion to St. Joseph, like Jesus had. St. Joseph’s goodness and love as Jesus’ earthly father is an image of the goodness and love of God the Father. May St. Joseph intercede for all of us and watch over our families with his love!”