

PRESS RELEASE

To: religion/general assignment editors

Re: local angle on the Pope's new *motu proprio* concerning the traditional Latin Mass

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While Pope Benedict XVI's new *motu proprio* "Summorum Pontificum," published on July 7th, will make the traditional form of Mass more accessible to Catholics around the world, a group of New Haven faithful has worked for over twenty years to keep alive the ancient ceremonies.

The Saint Gregory Society was founded soon after limited access to the so-called Tridentine Mass was restored by Pope John Paul II in 1984, some fifteen years after the promulgation of the reformed liturgy that will be forever associated with the Second Vatican Council. By January 1986, the Society had secured a parish in downtown New Haven willing to host the services, and it has remained at Sacred Heart Church ever since.

Its primary aims are to advocate the preservation of the "old" Latin Mass, to work for its local celebration on a regular and unrestricted basis, and to disseminate information about and sustain interest in the traditional Roman liturgy and its central importance for Christian faith and culture. More specifically, and in line with these aims, it seeks to cultivate the musical arts that grew up alongside this venerable form of worship for nearly two millennia and form its most natural mode of expression, though they are widely neglected today.

The leadership of the Society and the vast majority of its formal members are lay Roman Catholics, more than one hundred men and women of a surprising variety of ages and walks of life, all of whom share a sincere and legitimate attachment to the time-honored liturgical traditions of the Catholic Church that were displaced in the late 1960s. It also counts some 500 or so "friends," who sympathize with its objectives and support its work through many sacrifices of time and money, but who do not pay yearly membership dues.

"The older rituals and customs to which our members and friends are devoted involve majestic prayers of great antiquity that are sung in Latin to the mysterious melodies of the Gregorian chant, or whispered quietly by the priest at the altar who offers them to God on behalf of the worshippers in the pews," says Britt Wheeler, a founder and co-chairman of the Society. "The priest rarely faces the congregation, of course, but in fact this fosters an even greater sense of the purpose and communal nature of Catholic worship: priest and people are walking together as pilgrims toward heaven. We all firmly believe that this traditional way of worshipping helps us to build a deeper relationship with God than we would otherwise be able to do." Despite such seemingly oldfangled convictions, the future is looking increasingly bright for the group. It enjoys good relations with Hartford Archbishop Henry Mansell, with whose explicit approbation it carries out its mission, as well as with the local clergy with whom it interacts; and new faces are seen at Sacred Heart every week. "The word must be getting out," adds Mr. Wheeler. "We are very hopeful of making a big contribution to the life of the Church today."

The Society is perhaps most well known for its considerable efforts to preserve the musical patrimony of Roman Catholicism, above all the immemorial Gregorian chant and the sacred polyphony of the Renaissance masters. From the very beginning it has supported a professional Schola Cantorum, which provides the proper music for all sung liturgical functions at Sacred Heart Church. Also, over the years it has produced a series of recordings of the traditional Latin Mass that have garnered critical acclaim in the classical music industry, enriched the collections of some of the finest University libraries in America, and gained for it an international reputation in traditional Catholic circles.