



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS
Office of Sacred Worship

LITURGY NOTES



The Historical Development of The Liturgy of the Hours in the Roman Catholic Church

For nearly two millennia, the Church has sanctified the passage of each day through the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Rooted in the prayer of Israel, enriched by the witness of the early Christian community, and treasured by generations of bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful, the Divine Office remains one of the Church's greatest spiritual gifts.

As the Archdiocese of St. Louis prepares for the introduction of the newly revised English edition of the Liturgy of the Hours, the Office of Sacred Worship is pleased to offer this newsletter as a resource for understanding and embracing the Church's daily prayer. Within these pages, you will find a brief history of the Liturgy of the Hours, information on obtaining the new breviary, and the liturgical calendar for the upcoming liturgical year to assist all who desire to unite their voices with the prayer of Christ and His Church.

The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH) teaches: "Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven" (GILH 3).

Thus, the Church's prayer is a participation in the eternal prayer of Christ.

"The purpose of the Liturgy of the Hours is to sanctify the day and the whole range of human activity" (GILH 10).

Jewish Roots of the Liturgy of the Hours

The roots of the Liturgy of the Hours lie in the prayer traditions of ancient Judaism. Israel offered daily sacrifices in the temple and prayed at regular times during the day.

Morning and evening prayer, in addition to the chanting of the Psalms, formed the foundation of Jewish worship. As prayed in Psalm 119:164, "Seven times a day I praise you." These fixed hours taught the people that all time belong to God. As state in the GILH: "The Liturgy of the Hours extends to the different hours of the day the praise and thanksgiving, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation, and the petitions and foretaste of heavenly glory that are present in the eucharistic mystery" (12).

The Prayer of the Apostles

The first Christians continued many Jewish practices while understanding them in the light of Christ's Paschal Mystery (death, resurrection, ascension). For example, in Acts 3:1 we read that Peter and Paul went to the Temple at the hour of prayer, while in 16:25, we see Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in prison.

From the beginning, Christians recognized prayer united them with Christ Himself. "Christ

Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven" (GILH 3).

Development in the Early Church (Second-Fourth Centuries)

Fixed Hours of Prayer

As Christianity spread, believers developed regular hours of prayer associated with the events of Christ's Passion.

For example:

- The Third Hour recalled Pentecost.
- The Sixth Hour commemorated Christ upon the Cross.
- The Ninth Hour remembered His death.

Morning and evening prayer became universal throughout the Church.

The General Instruction explains: "In the Liturgy of the Hours the Church exercises the priestly office of her Head and offers to God unceasingly a sacrifice of praise" (GILH 15).

Thus, the Church fulfills Saint Paul's exhortation to "pray without ceasing."

The Importance of the Psalms

Very early Christians adopted the Psalms as the heart of their prayer; Saint Athanasius called the Psalter "a mirror of the soul" because every human experience can be found within it.

The General Instruction states: "The Psalms are not readings or prose prayers but poems of praise. Although they can sometimes be recited, they are naturally suited to being sung" (GILH 103).

Because Christ Himself prayed the Psalms, Christians hear His voice within them.

The Monastic Influence and Saint Benedict

Beginning in the third century, monks in Egypt and the East sought to live lives of communal prayer. As a result, communities of monks and nuns arranged their days around the recitation of the psalms. These monks and nuns preserved the tradition of the Divine Office in times of both political and social upheaval.

It was Saint Benedict of Nursia (d. March 21, 547) who gave Western Monasticism its enduring structure. His rule organized prayer into eight canonical hours and distributed the Psalms over the course of a week.

The Benedictine motto *Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work) showed that prayer and daily activity are not opposed to each other, but are mutually enriching. The GILH affirms this understanding: "The purpose of the Hours is to consecrate to God the whole day and night" (10).

It was Saint Benedict's system that became the foundation for the Western Church's liturgical prayer

Medieval Development

Cathedral and Monastic Offices

During the Middle Ages, two principal forms for the Liturgy of the Hours developed. The monastic office was lengthy and highly developed, while the cathedral offices were somewhat simpler and intended for the clergy and the faithful gathered in local churches.

Both offices preserved the essential elements: Psalms, Scripture, Hymns, and Intercessions

As the liturgical year developed, feasts and seasons helped to enrich the Office.

The Development of the Breviary

Oftentimes, priests had to travel and exercise pastoral ministry away from monasteries. As a result, it became necessary to gather the many liturgical texts into one volume. This collection became known as the Breviary. The benefit of this was that the Breviary allowed clergy to maintain the Church's prayer even while serving and ministering in distant places.

The Council of Trent and the Roman Breviary

By the sixteenth century, many local variations of the Breviary existed. It was the Council of Trent (December 13, 1545, to December 4, 1563) that sought greater liturgical unity throughout the Church.

Pope Saint Pius V (d. May 1, 1572), in 1568, promulgated the Roman Breviary. This reform standardized texts, reduced regional variations, and strengthened discipline among the clergy. Now, the Divine Office became one of the defining obligations of priestly ministry.

Reforms of the Breviary Before Vatican Council II

Pope Saint Pius X undertook various liturgical and canonical reforms during his pontificate. In 1911, he reformed the Psalter because centuries of additions had caused many psalms to be repeated excessively, while other psalms were seldom used. This reform restored a more balanced distribution of the Psalms in the Breviary.

Twentieth-Century Liturgical Renewal

The twentieth-century liturgical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church was a movement that sought to restore the liturgy as the living prayer of the entire People of God.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and gaining momentum through the work of theologians, monks, and pastors, the movement encouraged more conscious and active participation by the faithful, a deeper appreciation for Sacred Scripture, and a renewed understanding of the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life.

This renewal did not aim to create a new liturgy, but to deepen the Church's participation in the Church's ancient liturgical tradition and foster most faithful celebration of the sacred mysteries.

Both Popes Pius XII and John XXIII introduced further revisions that prepared the way for the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and the Renewal of the Liturgy of the Hours

The Second Vatican Council described the Divine Office as the prayer of the whole people of God.

Sacrosanctum Concilium states: "Pastors of souls should see to it that the chief hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts. And the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually" (100).

The theological foundation, however, is found earlier in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which describes the nature of the Divine Office:

"Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the whole community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise" (83).

The Council continues by teaching that:

- the Divine Office is the prayer of Christ with His Body, the Church (84);
- it is the voice of the Bride addressing her Bridegroom and the prayer of the whole Mystical Body (84);
- those who pray the Office fulfill the Church's priestly office on behalf of all humanity (85).

The Council sought the following: simpler structures, a richer use of Sacred Scripture, greater participation by the laity, and the restoration of Morning and Evening prayer as the principal (hinge) hours.

The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours teaches: "The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours is truly the voice of the Bride addressed to her Bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ Himself together with His Body addresses to the Father" (15).

Pope Saint Paul VI and the Modern Liturgy of the Hours

In 1970, Pope Saint Paul VI promulgated the revised Liturgy of the Hours. The major reforms included the following:

- The Office of Readings, formerly Matins, now contained extensive biblical and patristic readings.
- Morning and Evening Prayer were restored as "hinge" hours "Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are the two hinges on which the daily Office turns; hence they are to be considered the principal Hours" (GILH 37).
- Daytime Prayer was simplified to better accommodate contemporary life.
- Night Prayer was both revised and simplified for prayer before sleep.
- Prime, one of the principal hours, was suppressed.



The Structure of the Modern Liturgy of the Hours

The current structure of the Breviary consists of the following:

- Office of Readings: meditation on Sacred Scripture and writings of the Fathers and Saints.
- Morning Prayer (Lauds): Consecrates the beginning of the day.
- Daytime Prayer: Sanctifies the working hours.
- Evening Prayer (Vespers): Offers thanksgiving for the day.
- Night Prayer (Compline): Commends the soul to God before sleep.

As noted in the General Instruction: "The Office is so arranged that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God" (10).

Final Thoughts

Fundamentally, the Divine Office is Christ's own prayer continued through His Church. As the General Introduction makes clear: "Those who take part in this prayer are brought into contact with the source of holiness and nourishment for personal prayer" (GILH 14). Since Christ remains the High Priest, His Church participates in His eternal praise of God the Father.

The Liturgy of the Hours teaches that every aspect of life can become holy. Work, rest, joy, sorrow, and ordinary duties are all offered to God through prayer. Thus, the Church transforms chronological time into sacred (Kairos) time.

As noted earlier, the Divine Office belongs to the entire People of God. By virtue of their ordination, priests and deacons have a special obligation to the Liturgy of the Hours because, as ordained ministers, they represent the Church in a public manner.

Religious communities often celebrate the Hours communally.

The lay faithful, also, are strongly encouraged to participate.

As the Instruction makes clear:

- “Pastors should see to it that the principal Hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sunday and more solemn feasts” (40).
- “The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually” (27).

Today, the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed by clergy, religious, and an increasing number of laity. In this, “The Church fulfills the Lord’s command to pray without ceasing” (10).

The history of the Liturgy of the Hours is steeped in an unbroken tradition stretching from ancient Israel to the modern Church.

As stated in the GILH, “The Liturgy of the Hours extends the praise and thanksgiving, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation, and the petitions of the Eucharistic celebration to the different hours of the day” (12).

Liturgy of the Hours New Translation

“The wait is over.”

The Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has approved the English translation of the Liturgy of the Hours. On November 10, Archbishop Broglio signed a Decree of Publication with the expectation that Volume II, Lent and Easter, will be the first volume to go into production, and will be available by Ash Wednesday 2027.

This moment brings great joy to the life of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours—our shared prayer throughout the day—continues to stand at the heart of our worship. As we look forward to the new English translation of the Roman Breviary, may it draw us closer in prayer and inspire us to sanctify each moment of daily life. In gratitude for your faithful service and prayerful ministry.

Click [HERE](#) for The General Instruction to the Liturgy of the Hours.

DEADLINE EXTENSION: LITURGY OF THE HOURS SECOND EDITION

The publication of the revised English translation of the *Liturgy of the Hours* marks a significant moment in the liturgical life of the Church. This long-awaited edition offers a more faithful translation of the Latin texts and invites clergy, religious, and laity alike to renew their commitment to the Church's daily prayer. As we prepare for its gradual introduction, now is the time to consider obtaining the new volumes so that individuals and parish communities will be ready to begin using them as they are released. The information below outlines the publication schedule, ordering options, and important dates for implementation within the dioceses of the United States.



Please be sure to include an accurate parish name and contact information in order for us to contact you for pickup when the books arrive at the Cardinal Rigali Center. Volumes will be available for pickup as they are received. Note that the volumes will be shipping individually as they become available. **Please be sure to check the “Important Information” box for details about the shipping timeline.** You may bring your previous editions with you to pickup for proper disposal. You may also bury or burn them.

All orders are due **Thursday, August 30, 2026**. The large bulk order will not be placed until after this due date.

Click [HERE](#) For the order form.

A TIME OF TRANSITION IN OUR OFFICE

By: Maggie Dapron and Olivia Underwood

Greetings in the Lord!

By the time you are reading this, I will have had my last day with the Office of Sacred Worship serving as Office Coordinator. Exactly three years ago, I stepped into this role, thanking God for His provision as I was newly married, living in a new city. I was received with love and excitement by all those who I worked alongside. It was a deep gift to work in the beautiful Cardinal Rigali Center and care for the St. Vincent De Paul Chapel. Thankfully, I got to work alongside MANY of you on various projects pertaining to all things liturgy. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for what you do to serve the Church and people of Christ.

My husband and I have discerned that the Lord is calling us, particularly me, to a new chapter: staying home with our children. In our three years of marriage, we have been blessed with two children. My daughter, Magdalena will turn two in October on our shared birthday (birthday buddies!). My son, who is still in my womb, will be born within the next month. We know that life with Christ is a great adventure and we are looking forward to seeing His grace in this new season.

As bittersweet as it is to close this chapter, I know I am leaving the office in great hands. Olivia Underwood joined our office a little over a year ago in a job-share partnership with me. Olivia has graciously agreed to take on the full-time responsibilities of the Office of Sacred Worship. I know many of you will enjoy the opportunity to work with her. I will still plan to help out and be around when the opportunity arises. May the Lord cross our paths as He wills it.

I would be remiss if I didn't use this opportunity to thank Father Nicholas Smith, Director of the Office of Sacred Worship, for his leadership, compassion, and sense of humor he brings to our office. I will miss working alongside him. Thank you, Father Smith.

In Christ,
Maggie Dapron

Grace and peace in Christ!

It is a privilege to write to you as I begin serving full-time with the Office of Sacred Worship. Over the past year, I have had the blessing of working part-time alongside Maggie, and I have been deeply grateful for the warm welcome I have received from so many of you. Thank you for making me feel at home as part of this ministry.

Maggie has served the Archdiocese with kindness and generosity, and I know firsthand how much care and dedication she has brought to this office. While no one can replace the unique gifts she has shared over the past three years, I am grateful for the opportunity to build upon the foundation she leaves behind.

As I learn the many responsibilities that come with this position, I ask for your patience and understanding. I look forward to getting to know many of you better and to working together in service of the Church's sacred liturgy. I am thankful for your collaboration and support as I continue to grow into this role.

Please know that I am eager to serve you in whatever way I can. I ask for your prayers as I begin this new chapter, and I assure you of mine. May the Lord continue to bless our shared work for His glory and the sanctification of His people.

With gratitude,

Olivia Underwood

NEWS



2027 LITURGICAL CALENDAR

Please see below for the 2027 Liturgical Calendar for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. If you have any questions, please email us at worship@archstl.org

MEMORANDUM

CALENDAR

RECLAMATION



RECLAMATION CENTER

Formed in Clay

By: Deacon John Stoverink, Director of the Reclamation Center

Numerous books and papers have been written on Saint Ambrose and The Hill. The focus of this book is on the Saint Ambrose Catholic Church itself and its' parishioners. Many people have come to this Italian parish for various reasons. From its early beginnings, Italian immigrants came to the outskirts of Saint Louis seeking a better life. They united to establish a community, working collaboratively as a family to construct Saint Ambrose and develop The Hill.

Saint Ambrose Catholic Church reflects their faith, values and commitment.

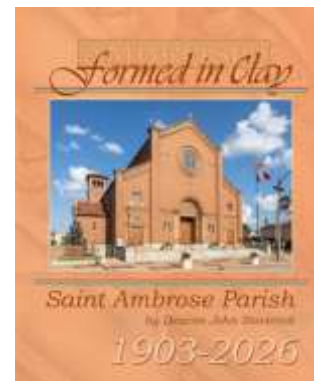
Looking at the church and stepping into it you are not only seeing beautiful objects, the church is speaking to you. We explore each of these and provide a little background. The church tells you its rich history and what it means to be community and family.

Copies of the book can be purchased from Amazon or the St. Ambrose Parish rectory office for fifteen dollars. All proceeds (about ten percent) go to the parish. We have also developed a docent program providing group tours of the church. Tours can be scheduled through the parish office 314.771.1228.

Click [HERE](#) to purchase the book!

Come visit the Reclamation Center on Wednesday's between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm or at our online catalog [HERE](#).

Thank you for subscribing to our Office of Sacred Worship Liturgy Notes Newsletter! If our office can do anything to support you, your parish, or your ministry, please contact us at worship@archstl.org





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