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Director's Message

Through my experience working with priests, ministers, seminarians, music directors, and organists, I recognized a need for quality sacred music in every church. Throughout my career, I have been able to identify and implement excellent music composed on every level, which allows for dignified, quality programs in any church.

Did you know that Bach was the third choice for his position at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig because he didn't have a degree in music? That was 300 years ago, but many churches continue to require degrees for their part-time music directors today, which is an unrealistic expectation.

Since 2018 we have offered online educational opportunities in sacred music, before many other organizations went online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sacred Music Institute of America melds the longstanding tradition of individualized, personal instruction with modern technology. Through online study, our students can work with top-level instructors and faculty anywhere the internet can reach.

I know that some are a bit skeptical about online lessons, and I must admit that I was too in the beginning. But what I have found is that those students who use our approach of incorporating self-recorded videos into their practice routine helps them not only accelerate their progress, but also helps them grow in confidence. They are able to analyze challenges more effectively which leads to greater critical skills and more rapid improvement than through traditional in-person study only.

Our certification programs encompass many of the same subject areas as a bachelor's degree in music, including theory, music history, repertoire surveys, and applied lessons; however, they are specifically tailored towards church music.

We are not a one size fits all program. Mentoring to musicians and their parish's specific needs is at the root of our mission here at the Sacred Music Institute of America, and this is provided by our lesson and curriculum faculty. This innovative one-on-one approach sets us apart from everyone else and allows the student to get the most out of this program.

I believe that excellent sacred music is possible in every church, and that all church musicians can benefit from our practical education to attain their musical achievements.

Dr. Jason J. Keefer

Founder & Director, Sacred Music Institute of America

Professor & Director of Sacred Music, Pontifical College Josephinum

Online Organ Lessons

Before the advent of online learning technology, a good organ teacher– or any organ teacher at all– could be difficult to find in many geographic areas. The Sacred Music Institute of America brings top-level organ instructors into your church or home– anywhere the internet can reach!

Our organ faculty tailor their teaching to the personal needs of each student in their studio. Develop a strong manual and pedal technique, study diverse repertoire, learn to improvise, accompany choirs, and foster congregational singing through your gained knowledge of accompanying chant and creative hymn playing. See how our Online Organ Lessons are an integral part of our certification tracks.



Online Voice Lessons

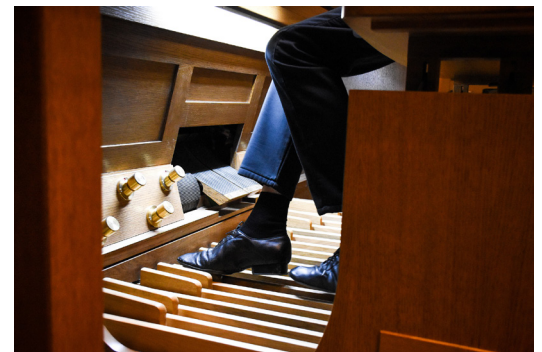


Many voice teachers specialize in opera, musical theatre, or contemporary styles, but the Sacred Music Institute of America's vocal faculty is uniquely qualified to work with clergy, cantors, music directors, choir directors, and choir members on chant and sacred repertoire as well as vocal technique. Whether you are a beginner or an accomplished and experienced soloist, our practical and personalized online lessons will help you hone your skills and develop your unique vocal instrument.

Online Piano to Organ Transition Lessons

Many churches are desperate to find organists and, with guidance from an experienced organ teacher, you can learn the skills necessary to find part-time or even full-time employment as a church musician. Our experienced teachers understand the similarities and differences between piano and organ technique and will help guide you to play the organ idiomatically.

At the Sacred Music Institute of America, our organ teachers are skilled in transitioning musicians from the piano to the organ for employment in church positions. It can be an exciting journey, and a student familiar with piano techniques will find that many skills are directly transferable. Playing the organ opens up a whole world of new tonal colors to a pianist as well as a treasury of repertoire both with and without pedals.



Mentorship

A mentor sees more talent and potential in you than you recognize yourself, and they can help you uncover it. Mentorship uniquely accelerates growth and unlocks potential. It involves a relationship that transcends simple advice; it is about guidance, empowerment, and shared wisdom. The Sacred Music Institute of America faculty draws on their real-world experiences and insights to bridge the gap between knowledge and application. They can inspire you to achieve more and hold you accountable for your progress.

Curriculum

Classes are taught on a ten-week basis. During the fall and winter semesters, this allows students to dedicate the last five weeks of each semester exclusively to their lessons.

Music Theory I

This course provides an overview of music's foundational components, including notation, intervals, key signatures, harmonic analysis and realization, and figured bass.

Music Theory II

This course builds upon the fundamental skills and concepts explored in Theory I; therefore, some prior knowledge of the subject matter is required. Topics include: harmonic analysis, seventh chords, harmonization of melodies, transposition, modulation to closely related keys, non-harmonic tones, modes and neumes, basics of counterpoint, and musical forms.

Music Theory III

This course provides a more advanced exploration of musical form and analysis, as well as practical aural skills training specifically developed for church musicians.

Beyond the Notes

This three-part class assists the sacred musician to be successful in their work. Each unit is self-contained, but together, they will provide you with tools and knowledge to address many common extra-musical challenges that arise within church music programs.

- Interpersonal Skills
- Church Documents Pertaining to Sacred Music and Organic Development of Music in the Church
- Liturgical Music Resources and Planning

History of Sacred Music

This course provides a survey of the historical role of music in worship from its roots in the Old Testament to the present day, exploring landmark repertoire within the framework of turning points in ecclesiastical history. While the class will focus primarily on Christian music in the western world, cross-cultural influences will also be explored.

Hymnology

The primary goal of this course is to honor the work of the Holy Spirit in over three thousand years of congregational song. The secondary goals are to help us grow as worshipers and select appropriate songs in various settings. To achieve this, the student will explore the history, theological themes, and literary structure of hymns, focusing on the interaction between text and tune. Students will be expected to memorize the first stanza of an assigned hymn each week to establish a foundation of historical references.

Organ Literature

This course introduces a wide variety of organ repertoire through various historical periods. The focus will be on organ repertoire from the 17th century through today. Aspects of performance such as style, ornamentation, and registration will also be focused on, with special attention given to registration on smaller instruments. This course aims to introduce both the pillars of the repertoire and lesser-known examples. Accessible, high-quality repertoire will be introduced to hopefully aid students in the selection of voluntaries for church services.

Choral Literature

The course intends to demonstrate the vast riches of the patrimony of church music available to music directors in any size church according to the liturgical year. Emphasis is placed on the correct informed historical performance and the liturgical positioning of the pieces covered in the course.

Conducting/Vocal Pedagogy

This class offers an introduction to choral conducting techniques. Students will explore conducting gestures, diction for the church musician, choral technique, basics of vocal pedagogy, and choral repertoire.

Curriculum

Choral Conducting Practicum

This advanced course in choral conducting encompasses score study and practical experience as a conductor and a member of a choral ensemble. This practicum class will emphasize accessible and masterwork pieces for choirs. The course concludes with a concert performed by the students, accompanied by a professional choral ensemble. This course may be taken either in person or online.

Gregorian Chant for Beginners

This course is designed for novices in singing and reading chant. It will introduce students to the historical and musical significance of Gregorian Chant, describe its function in the liturgy, explore modes and neumes, and discuss resources and strategies for implementing chant in parishes that are unaccustomed to its use. The course will include both prerecorded lectures and live discussion/practice sessions.

Intermediate Chant

This course in Gregorian chant will begin with the reading and singing of the simplest chants and the study of their liturgical function, incorporating chants of increasing difficulty for the priest, congregation, and choir in both English and Latin. In all of these areas, the study will progress through chants of increasing complexity, including prayers from the priest, versicles and responses exchanged between the priest and congregation, chants for the Ordinary of the Mass in English and Latin for the congregation, and chants for the proper of the Mass in English for the choir.

Advanced Chant

This is an advanced course in Gregorian chant for singers, directors, and enthusiasts of the liturgy and its music. It will presume a rudimentary knowledge of reading Gregorian notation and will proceed from the reading and singing of chants in Latin from the antiphons of the Divine Office to the chanted Propers of the Mass. A review of notation and Latin pronunciation will be the foundation for textual and musical analysis of the chants: mode, tessitura, contour, density, text expression, and coordination with liturgical action. Beginning with the simpler chants, musical, liturgical, and spiritual aspects of each genre will be studied in turn: introits, communions, offertories, graduals, alleluias, and tracts. Some chants of the Ordinary of the Mass will be included as well.

Chants of the Mass

This course is an exploration of the Gregorian chants of the Ordinary and Proper of the Mass. How the kinds of chant differ in musical style and liturgical purpose, how the modes give variety within each kind, and how the complexity of all the chants adds up to a beautiful liturgical whole. There will be a modicum of musical and liturgical history with study and singing of a representative variety of chants through the year. It will also cover the historical development of the Mass.

Organ Improvisation

Dr. Jason Keefer presents a variety of practical liturgical improvisation techniques to encourage creativity in student organists. This capstone course is designed for experienced musicians at the end of the certification process.

Online Video Library

The Online Video Library from the Sacred Music Institute of America is a collection of educational videos presented in seminar format. This exceptional monthly subscription-based resource is continually adding essential content and serves as an invaluable tool for individuals and parishes. Seminar topics include:

- Organ Music for Manuals
- Organ Improvisation
- Anthem Accompaniment
- Conducting from the Console
- Implementing Sacred Music in the Parish
- Conducting Renaissance Polyphony
- Gregorian Chant
- The Role of Chant in the Liturgy
- The Psalms in the Liturgy
- Lorenzo Perosi, Forgotten Cecilian

Certification Tracks

Music Director Certification

Below is the semester breakdown for the Music Director Certification. Each semester includes mentoring and an assessment of progress. The semester breakdown is a suggested course of study. This can be adjusted individually based on each student's needs. Upon completing the certification, the student will have a video resume demonstrating competence in sacred music.

SEMESTER 1

Music Theory I*
History of Sacred Music
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 2

Music Theory II*
Beyond the Notes
Organ Lessons
Voice Lessons***

SEMESTER 3

Music Theory III
Conducting/Vocal Pedagogy
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 4

Choral Conducting Practicum
Organ Literature
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 5

Hymnology
Gregorian Chant for Beginners**
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 6

Organ Improvisation
Choral Literature
Organ Lessons



**Students who excel at the theory placement exam may substitute an advanced topics-based directed study or chant course*

***More experienced students may substitute Intermediate and/or Advanced Gregorian Chant*

****At least 15 voice lessons are required. Students must pass a proficiency for this portion of the certification.*

Choir Director Certification

Below is the semester breakdown for the Choir Director Certification. Each semester includes mentoring and an assessment of progress. The semester breakdown is a suggested course of study. This can be adjusted individually based on each student's needs. Upon completing the certification, the student will have a video resume demonstrating competence in sacred music.



SEMESTER 1

Music Theory I*
History of Sacred Music
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 2

Music Theory II*
Beyond the Notes
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 3

Music Theory III
Conducting/Vocal Pedagogy
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 4

Choral Conducting Practicum
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 5

Hymnology
Gregorian Chant for Beginners**
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 6

Intermediate Chant
Choral Literature
Voice Lessons

**Students who excel at the theory placement exam may substitute an advanced topics-based directed study or chant course*

***More experienced students may substitute Intermediate and/or Advanced Gregorian Chant*

Certification Tracks

Organist Certification

Below is the semester breakdown for the Organist Certification. Each semester includes mentoring and an assessment of progress. The semester breakdown is a suggested course of study. This can be adjusted individually based on each student's needs. Upon completing the certification, the student will have a video resume demonstrating competence in sacred music.

SEMESTER 1

Music Theory I*
History of Sacred Music
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 4

Organ Literature
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 2

Music Theory II*
Beyond the Notes
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 5

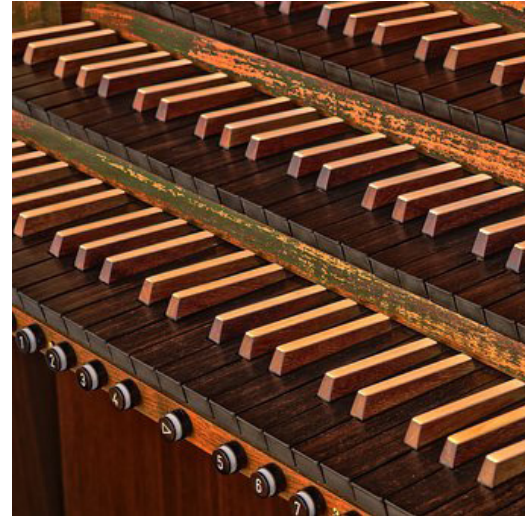
Hymnology
Gregorian Chant for Beginners**
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 3

Music Theory III
Organ Lessons

SEMESTER 6

Organ Improvisation
Organ Lessons



**Students who excel at the theory placement exam may substitute an advanced topics-based directed study or chant course*

***More experienced students may substitute Intermediate and/or Advanced Gregorian Chant*

Cantor Certification

Below is the semester breakdown for the Cantor Certification. Each semester includes mentoring and an assessment of progress. The semester breakdown is a suggested course of study. This can be adjusted individually based on each student's needs. Upon completing the certification, the student will have a video resume demonstrating competence in sacred music.



SEMESTER 1

Music Theory I*
History of Sacred Music
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 2

Music Theory II*
Beyond the Notes
Voice Lessons

SEMESTER 3

Hymnology
Gregorian Chant for Beginners**
Voice Lessons

**Students who excel at the theory placement exam may substitute an advanced topics-based directed study or chant course*

***More experienced students may substitute Intermediate and/or Advanced Gregorian Chant*

Meet Our Faculty



Dr. Jason J. Keefer

Program Director
Organ
Organ Improvisation
Sacred Music Topics

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. Katherine Meloan

Organ

[Read Bio](#)



Prof. Brendan Conner

Organ
Organ Literature

[Read Bio](#)



Prof. Sharon Silleck

Organ

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. Brent Nolte

Organ

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. Jason Hiester

Voice
Conducting

[Read Bio](#)



Prof. Emily Lapisardi

Assistant Director
Voice
Core Courses

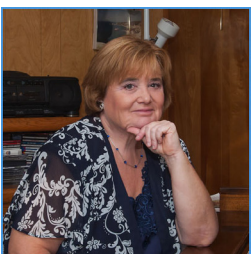
[Read Bio](#)



Prof. Rachel Parfenchuk

Voice

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. Maureen Miller

Voice

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. Rebecca Abbott

Hymnology

[Read Bio](#)



Dr. William Mahrt

Gregorian Chant

[Read Bio](#)



Prof. J. Michael Thompson

Choral Literature

[Read Bio](#)

Trimester System

We operate on a trimester system – fall (15 weeks), winter (15 weeks), and summer (10 weeks). The fall trimester typically begins the week before Labor Day; winter is the second or third week of January, and summer is the first week of June.

You will complete 40 weeks of lessons during the academic year, which runs from September to August. If you are enrolled in a certification program, you must complete the required number of lessons to satisfy the certification criteria. Breaks occur between trimesters in May and August, with a longer break from December to January.

Online Learning

A primary benefit of online learning is the flexibility and convenience of learning from home. Students can fit lessons and classes into their busy schedules without the need to travel, making it easier to maintain consistency and make progress.

Each course includes ten recorded lectures offered on-demand, allowing students to complete the week's classes at their convenience. Additionally, online courses offer “live” study and practice sessions via Zoom, scheduled to accommodate both the student's and faculty's availability.

Registration

Registration deadlines for classes and lessons are 10 days prior to the scheduled start date. Payment is due at the time of registration. Invoices are emailed to students with an online portal to pay. A 5% administrative fee is attached to the invoice for each semester.

Contact Us

If you would like to learn more about our programs, classes, or lessons, please feel free to call us at 614.395.7783 or email us at administrator@sacredmusicinstitute.org.

