

# New music director for Christ Cathedral is ready to start creating beautiful sounds

By **DEEPA BHARATH** | dbharath@scng.com | Orange County Register  
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John Romeri can't wait to get his hands on Hazel.

"Hazel" is how he refers to the fifth-largest pipe organ in the world. And Romeri is the newly hired music director for Christ Cathedral.

When the \$29 million renovation of the glass cathedral, originally designed by architect Philip Johnson for Robert H. Schuller's megachurch in Garden Grove, is complete in about two years, the cathedral will be the flagship of the Catholic Church in the United States and the Hazel Wright organ will occupy the four corners of the 75,000-square-foot sanctuary.

Romeri, who left his job as music director at the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to take this prestigious position, is looking forward to that day when he and other churchgoers will get to experience Hazel's majesty.

"My hope is that everyone – Catholic or otherwise – can come to hear the finest of sacred music on our campus," Romeri said.

As the diocese's first director of music ministries at Christ Cathedral, Romeri's responsibilities will include developing Christ Cathedral Parish's music program, the liturgical music program supporting major diocesan celebrations such as ordinations, and overseeing the musical direction of parish choirs. He also will oversee the multilingual choirs within the diocese's fold, including the Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese vocal groups.

Romeri is now holding auditions for Christ Cathedral's English choir, which will perform during Sunday morning Mass at the renovated cathedral. He is also forming a diocesan choir, which will perform during special occasions, and a children's choir, with participants from parishes countywide.

Visitors to Christ Cathedral, he says, can expect to hear a variety of music during Mass – from Gregorian chants to folk and contemporary music.

"A majority of music in Catholic churches today is music from the last 15 or 20 years," he said. "But the Catholic Church's musical tradition goes back 2,000 years. I hope to incorporate pieces from different eras because it's all beautiful."

Romeri says not to expect rock music anytime soon at Christ Cathedral. But, he says, he'll consider contemporary music "with text that is appropriate" for Mass.

Monsignor Art Holquin, who was responsible for bringing Romeri to Orange County, said the diocese is fortunate to have a music director of his caliber.

"He is a skilled organist, a choral conductor and exceptional musician," Holquin said. "On top of that he's an excellent communicator. And he brings a sense of joy and exuberance to this position."

The sacred music performed under Romeri's leadership also will reach millions across the world through programs broadcast by the EWTN Global Catholic Network.

This music ministry will serve the needs not only of the cathedral parish, but also the greater Church. That's why it can't be developed overnight, Bishop Kevin Vann said in a statement.

"It is necessary for us to begin developing this program well in advance of the dedication and opening of the cathedral," he said.

Romeri started that process even before his first day at Christ Cathedral, Tuesday. A week ago, he was in Padua, Italy, visiting Hazel at the location where the Ruffatti company was repairing the organ pipe by pipe. The entire console also has been rebuilt.

The Hazel Wright organ features 270 sets of pipes – from 4 inches to 32 feet long – five keyboards and the largest draw-knob console in the world to control the sound.

Holquin said the tab for resuscitating this masterpiece is about \$2 million. It will be in pristine condition when shipped to Orange County in a couple of months. The parts will remain in storage until they can be assembled, he said.

A significant portion of the \$2 million was raised through donations, Holquin said.

"It was money well-spent," he said. "We are all very excited."

**Contact the writer:** 714-796-7909 or

[dbharath@ocregister.com](mailto:dbharath@ocregister.com)

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## Deepa Bharath

Deepa Bharath covers religion for The Orange County Register and the Southern California Newspaper Group. Her work is focused on how religion, race and ethnicity shape our understanding of what it is to be American and how religion in particular helps influence public policies, laws and a region's culture. Deepa also writes about race, cultures and social justice issues. She has covered a number of other beats ranging from city government to breaking news for the Register since May 2006. She has received fellowships from the International Women's Media Foundation and the International Center for Journalists to report stories about reconciliation, counter-extremism and peace-building efforts around the world. When she is not working, she loves listening to Indian classical music and traveling with her husband and son.

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