

Chant in Worship

Vespers at St. John Brebeuf Church, 1707 John Brebeuf Place, Winnipeg
Commencing on Sunday evenings: October 1st, 8th, and 15th, at 7:00 PM.
On Sunday October 22nd we shall have Vespers, also at 7:00 PM.

For the sake of argument, chant can be defined as unison singing of tunes, wherein the rhythm is related to the flow of text. Christians have likely been using chant in worship as long as the Church has existed. It may be called Gregorian in deference to Gregory the Great (pontiff 590 – 604), who is known to have organized and codified liturgy apart from its musical aspects. In Medieval and Renaissance times, chant was notated and elaborated, singing in harmony was developed, and regular rhythms, only partially related to textual flow, became the norm. In the nineteenth century the monks of Solesmes researched and revived the use of chant, which Pope St. Pius X championed during his papacy (1903 – 1914), recommending the universal use of chant in worship.

Following the Second Vatican Council which encouraged newer and more popular styles of music in worship, the use of chant has, accordingly, become less common in parish churches and cathedrals. It survives and flourishes in monasteries such as Solesmes in France, Burgos in Spain, and St. Meinrad in Indiana. Chant enjoyed a remarkable surge in popularity with the release of Canto Gregoriano recordings by the monks of Burgos about thirty years ago.

Having recently returned from an intensive workshop at St. Meinrad's Abbey, Father Wayne Morrissey has kindly provided me with some chant materials for possible use in worship at St. John Brebeuf. Specifically, we are thinking of a Sunday Vespers service consisting of typical Evening Prayer, entirely in chanted English. Although the timing has not been established, we are considering 7:00 PM. If you are interested in participating, please e-mail eviejohnt@shaw.ca or phone 204 488 4076.

John Tanner