

# World & Nation

## Vatican letter bars secular concerts from functioning churches

By Agostino Bono.  
**Vatican City (NC)** — Functioning Catholic churches cannot be used for concerts featuring secular music, according to a new Vatican ruling.

The ruling came in the form of a letter to the world's bishops after controversies emerged in several Italian dioceses over concerts in churches.

The letter said churches can be used on a limited basis for sacred or religious music shows. It also said approved musical programs in churches must be free to the general public.

"The increased numbers of concerts held in churches has given rise to doubts in the minds of pastors and rectors of churches as to the extent to which such events are really necessary," stated the letter, issued by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship.

The congregation's letter was made public December 5 in the wake of controversy between conservative Italian Catholic groups, music lovers and some church officials over the growing performance of classical concerts in churches.

Bishops should prohibit music "which was composed with a view to performance in a certain precise secular context, irrespective of whether the music would be judged classical or contemporary, of high quality or of a popular nature," said the congregation. "The most beautiful symphonic music, for example, is not in itself of religious character."

The letter allows occasional concerts of sacred or religious music, but prohibits churches to be used for a series of concerts.

Sacred music is defined as "music which was composed for the liturgy." Religious

music is defined as "music inspired by the text of sacred Scripture or the liturgy, and which has reference to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the saints or to the church."

Such concerts are a way to "keep alive the treasures of church music" which are no longer used because they "cannot in any way be conveniently incorporated into liturgical celebrations in modern times," said the letter.

The congregation said the norms are based on canon law, which requires bishops to protect the "sacred character" of churches.

The norms for approved concerts say that "the singers and musicians should not be placed in the sanctuary."

The letter also allows bishops to designate a church no longer used for liturgical services as an "auditorium" for the performance "of music not specifically religious but in keeping

with the character of the place."

Other norms include:

- "The Blessed Sacrament should be, as far as possible, reserved in a side chapel or in another safe and suitably adorned place."

- "The organizer of the concert will declare in writing that he accepts legal responsibility for expenses involved, for leaving the church in order and for possible damage incurred."

The letter has immediate application in the controversy over use of churches in the Vicariate of Rome and Archdiocese of Bologna by small choirs and music groups often unable to afford professional halls for their performances.

Conservative Catholic groups protested that the use of churches for such concerts was inappropriate. Music lovers and some church officials argued the concerts were a good means of drawing people to church.



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