

Bishop W. Shawn McKnight of Jefferson City decreed Oct. 28 that a [dozen hymns](#) no longer be used at churches in his mid-Missouri diocese. The most familiar of these: Marty Haugen's "[All Are Welcome](#)."

The decree marks the first such hymnal blacklist since a 2020 [document](#) from the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine [tagged certain songs](#) as doctrinally deficient or incorrect. The document cited "deficiencies in Eucharistic doctrine" and other issues in the hymns.

The news that "All Are Welcome" is no longer welcome in mid-Missouri hymnals was greeted with sadness locally and alarm nationwide among some music directors.

"I am disappointed to see when favorites go, but ... with all that's going on in our world, it's not something for me to get all up in arms about or get upset," said Meredith Stidham, pianist and music director at Holy Spirit Parish in Centralia, Missouri.

"It doesn't take away from the celebration of the Eucharist. It doesn't take away from my faith."

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Choir members perform at Sacred Heart Catholic Church during morning Mass in Columbia, Missouri, on Sunday, Nov. 3. (Artem Baidala)

It is unknown if other dioceses nationwide will follow McKnight's lead, but it was alarming to some liturgical music veterans.

"I have never, ever in my life, had anyone say to me that a hymn is inappropriate — never on a theological or scriptural basis," said Bob Batastini, a Michigan pastoral musician who has played music in Catholic churches for seven decades.

The dirty dozen list of prohibited songs represents just a few out of thousands that pass theological muster, liturgists and church officials said.

The decree prohibiting the use of "All Are Welcome" is not meant to send any particular message, said Fr. Daniel Merz, chair of the diocesan liturgical commission and pastor of two parishes in Columbia, Missouri.

"It's not there because the church isn't welcoming," Merz said. "The problem is the language; is it eucharistic teaching? It's a help for writers and composers to say the

Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith and we want all the dimensions — not just one dimension — and certainly not problematic dimensions."

The U.S. Catholic Church is unusual among Christian denominations in that it does not publish its own hymnal to be used in its churches. Instead, private companies assemble hymnals whose texts are scrutinized by reviewers in the publishers' home dioceses.



Fr. Daniel Merz leads evening Mass at the St. Thomas More Newman Center in Columbia, Missouri, on Nov. 3. Merz is chair of the Jefferson City Diocese's liturgical commission. (Artem Baidala)

Kate Williams, vice president of sacred music for one of those publishers, GIA Publications, said the concern with "All Are Welcome" might be related to the use of the words "water, wine and wheat" at the beginning of one verse, without any further mention later that they will be changed into the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The decree is "obligatory" for Catholics in the diocese effective Nov. 1. Dated Oct. 24, it was distributed in the "Monday Morning Memo," a weekly chancery newsletter sent to parishes and ministries.

"The hymns and composers listed on the Prohibited Hymns list are absolutely forbidden from being used in the Diocese of Jefferson City," McKnight said in the decree. "Pastors, Administrators, and Chaplains are obliged to see that the norms of this policy are implemented in their parishes and institutions."

Three liturgical music composers' works were banned entirely: [David Haas](#), [Cesáreo Gabaráin](#) and [Ed Conlin](#). All three have been [credibly accused](#) of sexual abuse. GIA pulled Haas' music and books from its catalog after credible accusations surfaced in 2021, Williams said.

[OCP](#), based in Portland, Oregon, and an arm of the Portland Archdiocese, published eight of the 12 songs on the list. The oldest and perhaps best-known of these is "[Ashes](#)" by Tom Conry.

Other hymns were written by longtime liturgical musicians in OCP's stable: Bob Hurd, Christopher Walker, M.D. Ridge and Bernadette Farrell, like Walker a onetime member of the St. Thomas More Group in England; she married OCP's then-publisher, Owen Alstott.

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Two other composers with one hymn each on the list have been ordained to the priesthood: Paulist Fr. [Ricky Manalo](#) and [Dan Schutte](#), a former Jesuit priest and a composer-in-residence at the University of San Francisco. (Schutte is on the board of the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Co.)

The U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine began looking at liturgical music texts in the late 2010s. A committee document, "[Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church](#)," listed songs considered doctrinally problematic under provided guidelines. One song on the doctrine committee's list, but not on McKnight's, was the Black spiritual "Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees."

"That document from the bishops four years ago was in the form of a memo," GIA's Williams said. "Not all of the bishops weighed in on it or ratified it." McKnight's

decree, Williams said, marks the first time a banned list has been codified.

A bishop has the right to make such decisions on music, just as any parish music director or liturgist, Williams said.

"All Are Welcome," Williams said, "has been in all of our hymnals and periodicals since the 1990s." Cardinal Blase Cupich had it sung as part of his installation ceremonies in 2014.

Moreover, each hymnal receives an imprimatur and a nihil obstat from the Chicago Archdiocese, where GIA is headquartered, Williams said, and GIA's materials are "regularly vetted and approved for inclusion."

It's unlikely that Haugen, who is not a Catholic, will make lyric tweaks to "All Are Welcome," which is used by many denominations, Williams said. Haugen could not be reached for comment.



Students and community members attending evening Mass at the St. Thomas More Newman Center in Columbia, Missouri, on Nov. 3. (Artem Baidala)

Batastini, a consultant for GIA Publications, said McKnight is "imposing his own interpretations. He's free to do that, but I think he's a lone ranger, frankly. There are a lot of dioceses in this country, and hymnals in this country. So one bishop comes up and makes objections."

By contrast, Batastini said, Bishop David Walkowiak of Grand Rapids, Michigan, has taken a hands-off approach while working with Batastini, who is director of the local chapter of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

"I've never known him [Walkowiak] to interfere in any way, shape or form with the music in the diocese," said Batastini, who has played music since he was 13, before the Second Vatican Council. "No pastor has ever said to me, 'I don't want you to use that hymn.' "

The Jefferson City diocesan decree also instructs parishes to promote certain Mass settings in both English and Spanish, and to cultivate familiarity with 130 listed hymns, Merz said

The diocese includes Columbia, a college town, and serves mostly small and rural communities such as Centralia, where Stidham has played piano at Holy Spirit Parish for 30 years.

The decree removes a couple of parish favorites, Stidham said, "but that's OK. We will adapt. There's always plenty of great selections to choose from, and we are fine with that."