

For Immediate Release

## The New Benedict XVI Institute Schola and Teaching Choir Teaches Inmates Gregorian Chant

*First Traditional Latin Mass to Be Celebrated at San Quentin in Three Generations on August 25th*

**San Francisco, Calif – August 17, 2018** – The Benedict XVI Institute for Sacred Music and Divine Worship teamed up its new Benedict XVI Institute Schola and Teaching Choir with San Quentin State Prison inmates to help celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass at the prison on August 25, 2018 for the first time in three generations. In preparation for this celebration, earlier this month the Benedict XVI Institute Schola and Teaching Choir, headed by music director Rebekah Wu and consisting of four very talented professional singers, held a concert introducing Gregorian chant to the prisoners. At the end of the concert, 25 inmates volunteered to form a prison schola in support of the upcoming Latin Mass.

“This level of response was a totally unexpected gift from God,” said Maggie Gallagher, Executive Director of Benedict XVI Institute. “Archbishop Cordileone and I were warmly welcomed by Father George Williams, Catholic Chaplain at San Quentin. We were encouraged to get acquainted with everyone attending this evening of sacred music.”

“We met many men who work hard in the prison to make the community better,” added Gallagher. “Dwight, the sound guy, introduced himself and started asking about how we wanted to be miked for the Latin Mass. Bobby, an old hand, told me he used to sing the Latin Mass at St. Peter’s in the Mission district with the ‘Christian brothers.’ Sam, who sat behind me, was a Protestant curious about this new music. He’s only been in San Quentin for a few weeks, ‘but the church scene is popping!’ he told me.”

The concert began with Frank La Rocca’s Ave Maria and ended with Hail Holy Queen. The choir mesmerized 60 San Quentin prisoners with a mix of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony old and new. Rebekah Wu gave testimony to God’s healing power in her own life, mentioning the good thief who ended up in paradise with Jesus. Father George then pointed to a huge painting hung on the wall and explained, “That is Saint Dismas, the good thief who repented and whom Jesus saved. That painting was gifted to us by a death row inmate who died last year, Fernando Caro.”

Out of evil, God can rescue beauty and give hope, if we let him.

““From the large turnout in the Chapel it was clear that the men at San Quentin have a hunger for beauty and prayer. The concert by the Benedict XVI Institute was clearly enjoyed by those who attended. They also appreciated the support and presence of Archbishop Cordileone who has made it a point to visit the prison often,” notes Fr. George Williams, SJ, who is the Catholic Chaplain at San Quentin State Prison.

"I saw these men, who humanly speaking are in a dire situation that may seem hopeless, be lifted up to God by sacred beauty and given new hope," Archbishop Cordileone said. "They love to sing, and they worship well. So, the response of the men to the invitation to form a Latin Mass schola was overwhelming but not surprising." He added: "The Benedict XVI Institute teaching choir is clearly fulfilling an important need in ordinary parishes but also for those at the margins of society."

#### **About Benedict XVI Institute for Sacred Music and Divine Worship**

Under the direction of Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, The Benedict XVI Institute aims to open the door of beauty to God for more people, by providing practical resources for more beautiful and reverent liturgy and by energizing a Catholic culture of the arts. We offer, free of charge to parishes and religious orders, chant workshops for teachers and choir directors, children's chant camps, and a teaching choir that travels to parishes to help ordinary Catholics reclaim sacred music. The San Quentin Schola is one of the first projects of that teaching choir. [Catholic Arts Today](#), a new online magazine published by Benedict XVI Institute, focuses on the life and work of living Catholic artists. In its first 6 months, the magazine has generated more than 13,000 Facebook likes building a community of artists and art-lovers. In addition, the Benedict XVI Institute sponsors special events, such as the San Quentin Schola, Mass of Americas and Solemn Requiem Masses, open new opportunities for Catholics to experience sacred music, in some cases, for the first time, as prayer and not performance. For more information, visit [www.benedictinstitute.org](http://www.benedictinstitute.org)

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