

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Sacred Song Cycle *Through the Flames* to Receive World Premiere on All Saints Day at Holy Cross Catholic Church

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — On Sunday, November 1, 2026, at 3:00 p.m., Holy Cross Catholic Church will present the **world premiere** of *Through the Flames*, a new song cycle for soprano and organ by composer Samuel Backman, created in collaboration with poet and soprano Elena Zolnick. Premiering on the Solemnity of All Saints, the work explores the lives and witness of saints and martyrs whose stories span nearly two thousand years of Christian history.

Written for the uncommon pairing of soprano and organ, *Through the Flames* gives musical voice to six figures whose lives span continents, cultures, and centuries: Saint Joan of Arc, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Little Li, Saint Perpetua, Blessed Miguel Pro, and Saint Maria Goretti. Together, their stories illuminate themes of courage, sacrifice, suffering, hope, and the transformative power of faith.

The work takes its title from its opening movement depicting the martyrdom of Saint Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake in 1431. More broadly, *Through the Flames* reflects the Christian understanding of faith refined through trial, echoing the biblical image of gold tested in fire. The cycle reaches its spiritual center in the words of Revelation:

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14)

Composer Samuel Backman, Director of Sacred Music at Holy Cross Catholic Church, conceived the work as a dramatic exploration of the diverse experiences of the saints.

"These were not distant figures preserved behind stained glass," says Backman. "They were living women and men whose stories were marked by courage and fear, suffering and hope, sacrifice and triumph. Those stories continue to speak across the centuries."

Works conceived as extended song cycles for soprano and organ remain remarkably rare within today's concert repertoire. In *Through the Flames*, the organ functions not merely as accompaniment but as an equal dramatic partner, capable of everything from whispered intimacy to thundering grandeur.

Zolnick's contributions as poet and soprano helped shape the dramatic vision of the work.

"I became fascinated by the idea of martyrdom as I began to realize that martyrs are not simply figures of the distant past," says Zolnick. "Their witness is very real today, and, sadly, will continue to be in the future."

The choice of All Saints Day for the premiere reflects the central vision of the work: that the saints are not merely remembered as historical figures, but celebrated as members of the living communion of saints whose witness continues to inspire the faithful today.

Premiere Information

World Premiere of *Through the Flames*

Sunday, November 1, 2026

3:00 p.m.

Holy Cross Catholic Church

1621 University Avenue NE

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Admission information and additional details will be available through Holy Cross Catholic Church.

About the Creators

Samuel Backman is a composer, conductor, organist, and Director of Sacred Music at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Minneapolis. More information is available at www.samuelbackman.com.

Elena Zolnick is a conductor, soprano, and poet, serving as Director of the University of Saint Thomas Liturgical Choir and Director of Sacred Music at The Saint Paul Seminary and School of Divinity. More information is available at www.elenatbird.com.