

2016

## Tradition of the Red Mass

Notre Dame Law School

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/redmass\\_ndls](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/redmass_ndls)



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Notre Dame Law School, "Tradition of the Red Mass" (2016). *The Red Mass*. 12.  
[https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/redmass\\_ndls/12](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/redmass_ndls/12)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences, Events and Lectures at NDLScholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Red Mass by an authorized administrator of NDLScholarship. For more information, please contact [lawdr@nd.edu](mailto:lawdr@nd.edu).

## THE TRADITION OF THE RED MASS

The Red Mass is an ancient custom dating back to the 13th century, when the solemn votive Mass began being celebrated annually at the opening of the judicial year. From the earliest of times, the Mass has been attended by the judiciary, attorneys at law, law professors, high ranking government officials, distinguished guests, and others who work in the legal arena. The Mass was intended to gather those from the noble legal profession for the purpose of seeking divine guidance and strength for the coming term of court.

The Red Mass is celebrated in honor of the Holy Spirit, from whom flows the wisdom, understanding, counsel, patience, energy, and courage necessary for the administration of justice. Those who work in the legal profession prayerfully seek these virtues, which are essential to the courtroom, law practice, and public post.

Originating in the great cities of Europe, the Red Mass tradition continues in Westminster Cathedral in London, and in other preeminent cathedrals of Paris, Rome, and other European capitals. The Red Mass came to America in October of 1928, where it was first celebrated in New York's old St Andrew's Church, located in the shadow of the towering state and federal courthouses. The tradition is celebrated annually in Washington, D.C. at the start of the Supreme Court term, where the justices are joined by members of the bar, presidents, members of Congress, law faculty, diplomats and other such officials. The Red Mass has further spread throughout this country, to venues such as Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Indianapolis and New Orleans, to name a few.

The venerable custom derives its name from the red vestments of the celebrant, representing the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit, and from the brilliant scarlet robes worn by the Lord High Justices of the middle ages. The Mass is attended by those of Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, and all religious beliefs who work in the legal arena, as they come together for this annual public celebration of faith and the law.

Invoking this ancient tradition, Bishop John M. D'Arcy has invited those who strive for the cause of justice to the inaugural Fort Wayne area Red Mass at the beautiful and recently restored Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.