



SIMBANG GABI GUIDELINES 2025 *Archdiocese of Los Angeles*

Introduction - What is *Simbang Gabi*?

1. Advent is the start of the Church's liturgical year and it is the season of preparation leading up to the celebration of Christmas. It is a time of preparation that directs our hearts and minds to Christ's second coming at the end of time, and the celebration of His first coming, when the Word became flesh. Therefore, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight (*Roman Missal*, Ch. 1, No. 39).
2. For Filipino Catholics, Advent is a time of gathering for friends, family, and prayer in celebration of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the history of 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, *fiestas* honoring the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Lord Jesus have grown and developed out of popular piety and devotion. *Simbang Gabi*, for example, is one of the longest and most popular religious traditions in the Philippines.
3. With migration of Filipinos around the world, their culture and their strong, lively Catholic faith is present in many corners of the world. In the Philippines and worldwide, Filipino Catholics express the hope of their faith when they celebrate *Simbang Gabi* within their local parishes and dioceses.
4. For nearly four decades, *Simbang Gabi* has been a cherished part of the rich religious and cultural traditions of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Because of the multicultural reality of many parish communities, care should be taken so that the planning of the *Simbang Gabi* Mass not only preserves its religious and cultural essence, but also seamlessly integrates into the celebration connections with other nationalities and generations present in the community. The *Simbang Gabi* Mass can serve as a testament to the power of religious and cultural exchange and the unifying strength of our diverse parish communities.
5. *Simbang Gabi*, *Misa de Gallo* (*Rooster's Mass*) or Dawn Masses is a nine-day novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Expectant Mother of God. It normally begins on December 16 (or December 15, when Masses are celebrated in the evening), and culminates on the morning of December 24. This tradition started in the early days of Christianity between Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines. In the 1600s, The Holy See granted permission for the celebration of these early dawn Masses to accommodate the farmers and fisherman working in the fields and on the seas. Hence, the name *Misa de Gallo* was given because when the rooster crows at the start of the day at dawn, it signaled that it was time to go to Mass before the beginning of the workday.
6. In 1953, the First Plenary Council of the Philippines applied for a *papal indult* under the following conditions: "On the nine days preceding the Nativity of our Lord, i.e., from December 16 to 24, the solemn votive Mass *Rorate Caeli Desuper* is sung with great solemnity and with a big attendance of the faithful."



Therefore, the *Simbang Gabi* Masses celebrated in the Philippines are *festive* in character: white vestments, the singing of the *Gloria*, Creed and Christmas carols are allowed.

7. However, the Dioceses of the United States has not been given the same *papal indult*. Therefore, *Simbang Gabi* Masses in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, observed from December 15th to the 24th, adhere to the liturgical guidelines appropriate to the Season of Advent. For the proper liturgical celebration of each day of *Simbang Gabi*, please refer to the *Roman Missal* of the United States, 3rd Edition, and to the ORDO for the Ecclesiastical Province of Los Angeles.
8. Careful consideration should be made when choosing the base language for the Mass, being especially sensitive to the various languages and dialects of the faithful within the worshipping community. In the Philippines, *Simbang Gabi* is celebrated mostly in Tagalog and/or English, but other regions use different dialects (*Visayan, Ilocano, Cebuano, Kapampangan, Bicolano*, and much more) for the celebration of the Mass.

General Liturgical Guidelines Pertaining to Advent

9. **Color:** The proper color vestments for the United States, during the season of Advent is Violet/ Purple or Rose (*Gaudete* Sunday/3rd Sunday of Advent).
 - a. Traditional *barong* vestments may be used due to the nature of the festivities (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 346, g).
 - b. When there is a large number of concelebrants and a lack of vestments of the proper color, the concelebrants other than the principal celebrant may wear white vestments (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 124, “[Guidelines for Large Concelebrations](#)”, no. 14).
10. **Creed:** The Creed is only recited when prescribed by the ORDO for the Province of Los Angeles, such as at Sunday Masses and Solemnities.
11. **Offertory:** During the offertory, “the gifts which will become Christ’s Body and Blood are brought to the altar” (GIRM, 73); these gifts are **bread** and **wine**. Other gifts for the poor or the Church and even money may be brought by the faithful, however “they are to be put in a suitable place away from the Eucharistic table” (GIRM, 73).
 - a. The dressing of an altar only takes place during the Celebration of the Eucharist when the altar is dedicated or blessed (see *The Order of the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*), and also at the Good Friday Liturgy (see *Roman Missal*, No. 22).



- b. The altar needs to be already dressed **before** the Celebration of the Mass. The altar should be covered by at least one white altar cloth (GIRM, 304). It should, at the very least, cover the entire top of the altar table and preferably hang down on either side. It may also have a hanging fringe on the front and/or back of the *mensa*, but this is not obligatory. It may be plain or adorned, in accordance with local tradition. If other cloths are used, the white altar cloth is always the uppermost one.
12. **Environment:** Decoration of the church during Advent should use the colors violet and rose; any semblance of Christmas colors (white and gold; however, red is not a liturgical Christmas color) should be avoided, and a Christmas tree should not be placed in the church before the season of Christmas.
- a. The Advent wreath may be displayed in the narthex or in the sanctuary. It is customarily “constructed of a circle of ever-green branches into which are inserted four candles” (*Book of Blessing*, 1510), three violet and one rose.
- b. The Advent wreath should be visible to the congregation, but “should not interfere with the celebration of the liturgy, nor should it obscure the altar, the lectern, or the chair” (*Book of Blessing*, 1512). The wreath should have real candles, not electric ones. Flowers are permitted during Advent, but only in moderation (GIRM, 305). The character of Advent is one of waiting and expectation for the full joy of Christmas, and decoration should express this. Gaudete Sunday, however, is meant to convey an expectant joy, and more flowers could be used (without a resemblance to Christmas decorations, including poinsettias).

Liturgical Table for the Mass Proper

December 15 – 24, 2025 (Evening Masses after 4pm)
○ Dec. 15, 16, 17, 18 & 19 – Mass Proper from the Weekdays of Advent
○ Dec. 20 – Anticipated Mass for the 4 th Sunday of Advent
○ Dec. 21 - Mass for the 4 th Sunday of Advent
○ Dec. 22 & 23 - Mass Proper from the Weekdays of Advent
○ Dec. 24 – Masses after 4pm are celebrated for the Nativity of our Lord.



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December 16 – 24, 2025 (Dawn/Morning Masses)
○ Dec. 16, 17, 18, 19 & 20 - Mass Proper from the Weekdays of Advent
○ Dec. 21 - Mass for the 4 th Sunday of Advent
○ Dec. 22 & 23 - Mass Proper from the Weekdays of Advent
○ Dec. 24 – Wednesday of the 4 th Week of Advent (Morning Masses only) ▪ Masses after 4pm are celebrated for the Nativity of the Lord.

Music Guidelines

13. Liturgical documents such as the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), and *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (STTL), to name a few, give guidance on what is musically appropriate within the Mass. It is of benefit therefore, to refer to our liturgical documents in making good judgements on what selection of music best accompanies the Liturgy within the appropriate liturgical time. STTL for example, offers the “The Three Judgments” as a tool to make such evaluations: The Liturgical, Pastoral, Musical Judgment (STTL, Nos. 126 – 136).
14. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that while human creativity is able to produce a wide range of beautiful music, liturgical music fulfills a very specific role in sacred worship and is not equal to secular music. For example, not all music that speaks about love, God, or Jesus Christ is theologically sound and appropriate for use within the Catholic Mass. Additionally, while there is a wide selection of Christian music that is inspired by Sacred Scripture, not all is appropriate for use within the Catholic Mass which is Eucharist-centered.
15. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* further pushes our evaluation of sacred music in our Catholic Mass by helping us understand that in the celebration of the Eucharist, the community of Christ’s faithful enjoy the right of having true and suitable sacred music (no. 57). Making true and suitable music available to the faithful will involve planning and conscientious surrender to each liturgical season, and to the texts being used at each Mass.



16. Specifically, for the musical planning of the Liturgies being held during *Simbang Gabi* in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the following points are general principals to keep in mind:

- a. All music rendered during the Eucharistic Celebration within the *Simbang Gabi* liturgies *must* be liturgically appropriate to the season of Advent. The selection of hymns and songs should not reflect or imply Christmas, including the Offertory and Communion hymns. However, at the conclusion of Mass, the traditional *Ang Pasko Ay Sumapit* or other equivalent song may be used to reflect the preparation of the coming of Jesus.
- b. The use of the organ and other musical instruments should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of Advent, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. (GIRM, no. 313; STTL, no. 114)
- c. The *Glory to God* is sung or said on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent, on Solemnities and Feasts, and at particular celebrations of a more solemn character (GIRM, no. 53). Although *Simbang Gabi* is a special Liturgy that occurs within Advent, the *Glory to God* should not be included since its inclusion would prematurely express the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. Although it is common practice for the *Glory to God* to be sung or said within the *Simbang Gabi* liturgies in the Philippines, it should not be included here in the United States due to the liturgical norms that have been established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).
- d. If a parish is planning to make use of songs and hymns that were composed and authorized in the Philippines, it is the responsibility of the parish's pastoral musicians to:
 - I. Discern the texts to ensure that they are liturgically appropriate.
 - II. Obtain licensing permission from the original publishers prior to placing them in worship aids, on projection screens, or sharing via livestream or podcast.

17. *Simbang Gabi* Masses and their connection to Mary's anticipation for the Birth of Jesus can be integrated into the liturgy in various ways to enrich the celebration. Here are some suggested accommodations:

- a. **Introduction after the Greeting:** A brief explanation or welcome can be given to introduce *Simbang Gabi*, its significance, and its Marian devotion.
- b. **Marian Invocations in the Act of Penitence:** Please see *Roman Missal*, Appendix VI, no. II.
- c. **Homily:** The homily can focus on themes pertinent to *Simbang Gabi*, such as the anticipation of Christ's birth, the virtues of Mary, and the spirit of preparation and hope during Advent.



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- d. **General Intercessions:** The Prayer of the Faithful can include petitions related to *Simbang Gabi*'s themes—especially the concluding prayer, which can emphasize Marian devotion, the coming of Christ, and the intentions of the community.
- e. **Singing the *Magnificat* or a Similar Song after Communion:** The *Magnificat*, Mary's song of praise from the Gospel of Luke, can be sung after Communion, connecting the liturgy to the Blessed Virgin's response to God's promise.
- f. **Concluding Remarks after the Prayer after Communion:** Final comments or blessings can highlight the importance of *Simbang Gabi* in the spiritual preparation for Christmas, possibly encouraging continued participation throughout the novena.

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