

Liturgy Committee Guidelines

Role of Parish Liturgy Committee

The responsibilities of the Parish Liturgy Committee can be grouped into four areas: preparation, coordination, formation and evaluation.

Preparation

For Sunday Mass and other celebrations, the liturgical books set out the order of service, opening prayer, prayer over the gifts and prayer after communion, and the readings for the day. On certain occasions there is also a set preface to be used.

Other parts of the Mass, however, are more flexible. Among the variable aspects are the introductory rites, intercessions, Eucharistic Prayer and the music. Even among the "fixed" parts there is often a choice of opening prayer or the option of using a shorter form of a reading. Liturgical ministers need to be rostered and instructed.

In addition to immediate preparation for celebrations, the liturgy committee also needs to undertake long-term planning. This involves oversight of the "big picture" of parish liturgies across the entire liturgical year, establishing parish policy on matters of worship and setting goals for the liturgical life of the parish. A long-term goal might be to improve the standard of proclamation of the scriptures at Mass over the next six months or to overhaul the parish music repertoire in the coming year.

Co-ordination

Specialist liturgical ministries are planned and performed by those who have the necessary knowledge and skills. For example, musicians select appropriate music and artists shape the liturgical environment. It is the responsibility of the liturgy committee to co-ordinate these various ministries and to ensure that they are carried out with a common understanding of the spirit and structure of the celebration.

The liturgy committee is the avenue for communication between the different liturgical ministry groups in the parish. For example, it needs to ensure that rosters for readers and ministers of communion are drawn up in such a way that an individual performs only one liturgical ministry at a particular Mass.

Formation

Inservice training is as important for those involved in liturgical ministry as it is in any job. Another role of the parish liturgy committee is to provide opportunities for spiritual and practical formation for its own members, for the various liturgical ministers and for the parish as a whole. This can be done by arranging guest speakers, making use of the excellent audio visual training resources that are available (such as "Powerful Points for Liturgical Ministers") and by including information about liturgy in parish bulletins and handouts (copies of the "Liturgy Lines", for example!)

Evaluation

Looking back at the way feasts and seasons were celebrated is an important learning experience for liturgy planners. What worked well that should be retained? What needs to be revised, improved or eliminated in the future?

Some of the big questions that a liturgy committee might ask include: Are our liturgies life-giving? Are parishioners able to participate easily in the liturgies? What criticisms are people making and how do we address these?

Some suggestions for setting up a liturgy group

1. Approach the parish priest to ask permission to hold a gathering aimed at forming a liturgy team. Explain what process will be used to invite people, the agenda for the gathering itself, and what tasks such a group would undertake. (See above.)
2. Prepare invitations worded along these lines:
You are invited to attend a brief gathering over wine and cheese, tea and coffee, to share your suggestions on how to make our parish liturgy more “vibrant, meaningful and inclusive” (Synod Priority #1)
on _____ (day and date)
from _____ to _____ (start and finish times)
at _____ (venue)
RSVP _____ (name and contact details) by _____ (date)
3. Give invitations to:
 - (a) Those involved in liturgical ministry (music coordinator, people who roster readers and communion ministers, sacristan(s), school APRE, pastoral associate, sacramental coordinator, RCIA team leader, children’s liturgy coordinator, hospitality minister, communion to the sick coordinator, presiders (priests, deacons)
 - (b) Other people who have appropriate skills/experience from another parish, through their job (eg interior decorator, florist), through an interest (eg public speaking group like Toastmasters), because of study/courses they have done.
4. Place a general invitation in the newsletter.
5. Include a general invitation in the announcements at Mass.

Suggested agenda for meeting

1. Hospitality
2. Welcome and Introductions
3. Open Forum:
 - (a) positive aspects of parish liturgy (list on whiteboard)
 - (b) areas that need work (list on whiteboard)
4. Prioritise (b) above
5. Brainstorm possible strategies to deal with top 2 priorities:
what? why? how? who? when?
6. Draw up a list of tasks, people responsible, action dates and follow-up.
7. Float idea of a standing committee to take responsibility for coordinating parish liturgy. Outline areas of responsibility (see above). Take names of volunteers. Ask them to stay briefly to set date for a meeting.
8. Thank people for attending and contributing. Invite them to say on for more refreshments and socialising.

Principles of Good Liturgy

- Liturgy is *always* an act of praise of and to God.
- The 'theme' of every liturgy is the paschal mystery, that is, the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
- Liturgy (all liturgy, not only Mass) is the peak activity of the Church.
- The aim to be considered before all else when preparing and celebrating liturgy is that everyone present can participate fully, consciously, and actively. Liturgy is not a performance or entertainment.
- Christ is present whenever liturgy is celebrated in the people assembled for worship, in the scriptures proclaimed, in the consecrated elements, and in the person of the ordained presider.
- Liturgy is a ritual activity; there are set patterns and familiar cues and responses.
- Liturgical symbols should be large and clear.
- Liturgy is more than only words.
- Liturgy has a beginning, end and middle (*Gather/ Listen/ Do/ Go*)
- Liturgy is connected to real life
- Liturgy is a dialogue – pieces of paper get in the way and waste time and paper!

Process for Preparation

- Begin with Scripture readings, liturgical texts and the feast/season
- Since the source of our worship is the Word of God, the readings given in the *Lectionary* are the starting point for all liturgical preparation.
- The liturgical texts found in the *Sacramentary* (the presidential prayers, preface, blessings) should also be consulted.
- All preparation needs to be located within the context of the *feast/season* of the liturgical year.
- The team ought to aim at a common understanding of the key elements or major focus of the celebration. The aim of this exercise is not to come up with a 'theme' for the celebration as the theme of every liturgical celebration is nothing more nor less than the *paschal mystery* of Jesus Christ (his life, death and resurrection)
- Make selections from optional texts and compose variable texts where required
- Communicate decisions to the appropriate liturgical ministers and the assembly
- Keep a record of decisions, tasks and person responsible

(For more detail, see **Some Tips for Preparing Liturgy** below)

Checklist

- Order of service (Outline of Liturgy)
- Texts: readings & prayers
- Music and song
- Worship environment, liturgical art
- Symbol
- Gesture and movement
- Times of silence
- Assembly
- Liturgical Ministers
- Worship aids (booklets, PP slides, copyright, etc)
- Overall rhythm & flow

Some Tips for Preparing Liturgy

- **Check the Church's calendar for the day of the celebration.**

We belong to a universal Church and celebrate feasts and seasons over the cycle of the liturgical year in unison with Catholics Christians around the world. Appropriate scriptural texts and prayers have been selected by the Church for use in the liturgy each day.

Following this first principle simply involves looking up the date of the planned celebration in the *Ordo* which sets out the liturgical calendar for the year. Readings and Mass prayers are found in the *Lectionary* and *Sacramentary* (Missal) respectively. Understanding the “givens” – the rites and the readings – gives the liturgy committee the basis for the planning which remains to be done. It is not a matter of planning something new and exciting each week but of doing the basics well and trusting the rite to offer our living sacrifice of praise.

- **Singing of acclamations, processional songs (entrance and communion) and the responsorial psalm takes priority.**

Rather than immediately looking for four hymns to slot into the Mass (the infamous “hymn sandwich”!), time should be spent finding simple musical settings of the psalm of the day (or at least the refrain), Gospel acclamation, *Holy, Holy*, communion acclamation and Great Amen that everyone present can join in. Most hymnbooks currently in use in parishes contain suitable psalm and Mass settings.

- **Only gifts are brought forward in the Procession of Gifts.**

This statement may seem self-evident, but often people want to carry books, banners, candles, etc to the altar with the bread and wine and to take them back after Mass. At the Procession of Gifts the community offers its gifts of money for the poor and the upkeep of the Church and bread and wine for the Eucharist. Other items, if carried in at all, should be brought in during the entrance procession.

The only items on the altar, which is a symbol of Christ, are bread and wine, cross, book and candle. Other significant objects and symbols can be displayed in another, suitably decorated part of the worship space.

- **Ensure that the language used applies to everyone present and incorporates a variety of images for God.**

Check the words of hymns to ensure that they are inclusive of all people. It is not appropriate to use “all men” or “brothers” to refer to both women and men. There are many ways to address God besides “Our Father” – Loving God, Creator God, God our Light, God of Peace are just a few examples.

- **The Prayer of the Faithful allows all the faithful to pray**

The reader simply announces to the assembly what we will pray about, for example, “Let us pray for those suffering the effects of drought across this country”. A time of silence follows so that the ‘Faithful’ can make their ‘Prayer’. If there is no silence, then there is no prayer. Only after there has been a substantial time of silence does the reader give a cue, such as ‘Lord, hear us’, to bring the assembly’s separate prayers to a close with a common response, ‘Lord, hear our prayer’.

- **Don't give everyone the script!**

Printed orders of service should provide only an outline of the liturgy, the words of hymns and any unfamiliar prayers that the people will join in. The words of scripture readings and of prayers said by the presider are NOT included!

Resources

The Basics

- ◆ *The Sacramentary*
- ◆ *The Lectionary* 3 volumes
- ◆ *The Rites of the Catholic Church* Volumes I and II (New York: Pueblo)
These are compilations for study and preparation purposes of the rites of the Church which are also published in separate, hard covered versions for ritual use.
- ◆ *Book of Blessings* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989)
All are accessible through *LabOra Worship*, the software resource published by The Liturgical Commission in Brisbane.

Other Essential Reference Books

- ◆ *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, Volumes I & II (Chicago: LTP)
Most of these documents are available on *LabOra Worship*.
- ◆ *Ordo: The Celebration of Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours in Australia and New Zealand* (Brisbane: The Liturgical Commission, annually.)

Resource Books

- ◆ **Lay Led Liturgy**
Pastoral Handbook for the Dioceses of Australia
Lay Leaders of Liturgy with Sample Rites
Remaining Faithful
(Brisbane: The Liturgical Commission, 2004)
- ◆ **Liturgical Ministry**
Break Open the Word: the book for reader, annual
One Bread One Cup: complete rites for special ministers of communion, 1996
(Brisbane: The Liturgical Commission)
- ◆ **Historical Sources**
James F White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*
(Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992)
- ◆ **Children's or School Liturgy**
Lectionary for Masses with Children (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993)
Julie Moran, John Fitz-Herbert *We Pray as One: Daily Liturgical Prayer* (Brisbane: The Liturgical Commission, annual)
- ◆ **Liturgy Committees**
Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, annual)
Preparing for Liturgy Series (Ottawa: Novalis)
The 101 Most-Asked Questions about Liturgy by Nick Wagner, 1996
The Catechumenate Answer Book by Paul Turner, 2000
The Liturgical Music Answer Book by Peggy Lovrien, 1999
The Lent, Triduum and Easter Answer Book by Paul J Niemann, 1998
(all four from San Jose: Resource Publications)
Q and A: The Mass by Dennis C Smolarski, 2002
Q and A: Seasons, Sacraments and Sacramentals by Dennis C Smolarski, 2003
(both Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications)