The Day on Which We Gather
Guidelines for Sunday Eucharist

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Archbishop of Los Angeles

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The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist the clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the promotion of pastoral liturgical renewal in the parishes and other worshipping communities of the Archdiocese. These guidelines reflect an attitude of respect for liturgical law and principles. They are based upon official Church documents and the writings of recognized scholars in the field of liturgical and sacramental theology.

It is recommended that Pastors and those responsible for the Sunday Eucharist give careful attention to Church documents on Liturgy. These include the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, The Order of Mass, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' documents "Music in Catholic Worship", "Liturgical Music Today", and "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship".

These principles are not meant to be interpreted as unbending rules. Nor are they to be read in a legalistic manner. Rather, they are to be understood as fundamental principles which, if implemented, would lend to the development of the liturgical life of the Archdiocese. Realizing the great diversity which exists among our parishes in terms of personnel, financial resources, and other variables, these principles will be helpful to greater or lesser measure depending upon local needs and aspirations.

Pastors, primarily, and those responsible for the liturgical life of the parish are to give serious consideration and careful attention to these principles, and work toward their gradual implementation.

These guidelines are not intended to be the final word on every aspect of the Sunday Eucharist. Rather, it is hoped that they will provide a useful framework for the ongoing development of the liturgical life of the Archdiocese. Though these guidelines pertain primarily to the Sunday Eucharist, they will be of assistance in the preparation and celebration of any Eucharistic liturgy.

I. The Centrality of Liturgy

The documents of the Second Vatican Council describe the liturgy as "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all the Church's power flows" (SC, no.10). Perhaps the single most
important factor influencing the well-being of our parish life is the quality of the Sunday liturgy.

A. The Service of Hospitality

Liturgy is the action of the entire assembly united with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Hospitality is an essential characteristic of authentic Christian community. Therefore, its exercise is the responsibility of all those gathered for worship.

1. A fitting expression of hospitality is the presence of designated greeters who, together with the priest, create an atmosphere of genuine welcome and care.

2. Hospitality includes care with the spoken Word. Thus, while we cannot recommend changing liturgical and scriptural texts, we strongly encourage the use of inclusive language in all forms of expression that are within the competence of local authority, e.g., song texts, general intercessions, homilies and commentaries.

3. Sensitivity to handicapped persons and their needs is part of the assembly's witness of hospitality. This includes such things as the provision of ramps, special places for those in wheelchairs, adequate restroom facilities, and assistance for the hearing impaired, without creating an atmosphere of segregation.

4. The assembly needs to be especially sensitive and hospitable to Catechumens and/or candidates in the RCIA process, as well as to visitors, especially those from other religious traditions.

5. Hospitality includes care for the sick of the community. It is appropriate to remember them in the bulletin and general intercessions. A more effective sign of the assembly's care would be to publicly send special ministers of the Eucharist to them from at least some Sunday liturgies.

B. Liturgy Preparation

Because liturgy celebrates the saving mysteries of God's love in Christ and is the prayer of God's holy people, it demands careful preparation. The time given to the preparation of the Sunday liturgy by all the liturgical ministers, especially the Priest-Presider, should reflect its central position in the life of the Church.

1. Liturgy committees/boards and liturgy preparation teams are beneficial to the liturgical life of the parish and, as such, are strongly recommended. Where they do exist, the Presider's participation in their work is essential.

2. In order to reduce the rush and busyness that often precede the liturgy and detract from the needed preparation of the liturgical ministers, the presider, and the assembly, it is recommended that a trained sacristan be responsible for the immediate details of preparation and/or that a coordinator of liturgical ministers be present.
3. Because of its importance in the liturgical celebration, preparation of the homily deserves special attention.

C. Finances

The allocation of necessary financial resources for liturgy should reflect liturgy's central position in Catholic life, while maintaining a balance with other needs of the parish and the broader Church, particularly the needs of the poor.

1. Most liturgical ministers serve as volunteers. However, it is necessary for parish budgets to provide for some skilled liturgists, musicians, and artists/environmentalists (possibly on a part-time basis, or shared with neighboring parishes).

2. Parish budgets need to ensure an adequate allocation of funds for the musical, artistic, and architectural quality necessary for effective liturgy.

3. Each church should have a quality sound system which permits all present to hear clearly and distinctly the prayers, scriptures, homily and liturgical music.

II. Liturgical Ministries

While acknowledging that the whole community of the Church is actively involved in the liturgical rites, specific "liturgical ministries" are distinguished by reason of their service to the entire worshiping assembly. Parishes are encouraged to provide for the full array of liturgical ministries.

A. Certification/Formation

Effective ministry demands proper formation and training. This entails both the development and deepening of the skills necessary for the performance of a particular ministry, as well as ongoing spiritual formation.

1. For effective liturgical ministry, participation in and completion of the Archdiocesan Program for Certification in a particular liturgical ministry is essential.

2. Parishes are encouraged to provide ongoing meetings, training, spiritual development and social programs for liturgical ministers.

B. Eligibility

Liturgical ministries are open to all of the faithful to the extent permitted by the Church's official directives.

1. Equality of men and women in carrying out functions of liturgical ministry should be promoted.
2. Normally, liturgical ministry is exercised by adults. Whenever for sound pastoral reasons children exercise a liturgical ministry extra care must be taken to ensure that the assembly is truly served by them. Liturgical ministry is not a "training ground" or a "reward" or an "honorary position."

3. Young people of mature age should be encouraged to participate in parish liturgical ministry.

C. Ministerial Attitude and Practice

Liturgical ministry is exercised from the assembly for the service of the worshiping assembly.

1. Liturgical ministry is rooted in a call to service. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to regulate its exercise and duration in light of local needs.

2. Presuming that a parish could have a sufficient number of trained liturgical ministers, each minister (exclusive of liturgical coordinators and music coordinators) should serve only once on a Sunday.

3. Ordinarily no one person should perform more than one liturgical ministry at a given Mass.

4. Normally, the liturgical ministers should be present for and participate in the entire celebration. This also applies to the ministry of preaching.

5. Concerning the placement and garb of liturgical ministers, a parish policy should reflect the following values: a) liturgical ministers are first and foremost members of the worshiping assembly, and should appear as such; b) flexibility in these areas, in keeping with an attitude of reverence and service, is desirable.

III. Full Liturgical Participation

The goal of the Church's liturgical renewal is: full, conscious, and active participation of the entire assembly (see SC, no. 14).

A. The principle of progressive solemnity recognizes that there are degrees of solemnity in liturgical celebration. This pertains to the participation of ministers, the use of ritual movement, the selection of optional rites, and music. Its implementation offers the possibility of a rich and pleasing variety in the Sunday celebration. The components of this principle are: a) the degree of solemnity of the particular day or occasion; b) the character of the individual elements that make up the celebration; c) the size and composition of the community; d) the resources available.
B. Liturgical Aids

1. Parishes should provide satisfactory musical aids to assist the assembly in full participation. Provision needs to be made for a variety of musical styles. As far as possible, music aids need to provide not only musical text but also musical notation. A worthy parish hymnal is recommended.

2. Though Missalettes with scripture and prayer texts printed in them may be intended to facilitate communal liturgical prayer, they can lead to a privatized experience of liturgy which often negates true liturgical participation. It is recommended that those responsible for parish liturgy should a) ensure the proper reading of scripture and prayer texts so that the assembly listens to them; b) consider alternate worship aids which include only those parts necessary for the assembly's genuine and full participation.

IV. The Quality of Liturgical Symbols

"The celebration of the Eucharist, like the entire liturgy, involves the use of outward signs that foster, strengthen, and express faith. There must be the utmost care therefore to choose and to make wise use of those forms and elements provided by the Church which...will best foster active and full participation and serve the spiritual well-being of the faithful" (GIRM, 5).

1. Attention to sacramental symbol applies not only to the 11things" used at liturgy, but to the full ritual action which is the Church's liturgy. Minimalism in ritual and an unyielding concern for practicality thwart the liturgy's fruitfulness.

2. Primary symbols of the liturgy, i.e., the assembly, the architectural focal points of altar, ambo, and chair, and the elements of bread and wine should appear primary. Care should be given that each part of the liturgy takes place at the properly designated focal point.

a. The assembly's seating arrangement should facilitate a sense of gathering, hospitality, visual contact and active participation.

b. The altar's placement should facilitate a sense of gathering and should be in visual and artistic unity with the ambo and the presider's chair.

c. The ambo is reserved solely for the proclamation of the Word of God in the scriptures and for the homily. Another "lectern" is to be used by the cantor or song leader, for announcements, and ordinarily for the General Intercessions.

d. The presider's chair should stand alone; it is not to be flanked by other chairs. When a deacon is assisting, a chair for him should be placed next to the presider's.
3. Church architecture should reflect the distinction between the Eucharistic action (liturgy) and the reserved Sacrament. The reserved Sacrament, kept for the distribution of Communion to the sick and dying and for Eucharistic Adoration, is best placed in a special Eucharistic chapel easily accessible to the faithful.

4. Church design should also reflect the primary place of Baptism in Christian life. Parishes need to give careful attention to the Church's call to appropriate the fuller baptismal symbolism of immersion.

5. For the Eucharist, there should be one bread (i.e., one ciborium containing all the hosts necessary for the assembly's Communion as well as one large host able to be broken up) and one cup. Empty ciboria and cups needed for the distribution of Communion are to be prepared during the Breaking of the Bread.

6. Communion under both kinds for Sunday Eucharist is to be encouraged. Communion from the cup is the normal method for the distribution of the consecrated wine.

7. Enough bread and wine should be consecrated at each liturgy for the entire, gathered assembly. If this is done, the practice of using already consecrated hosts from the tabernacle can be avoided. Moreover, altar breads should be of size and texture worthy of primary sacramental symbols.

8. Liturgical art and appointments are to be characterized by quality and appropriateness.

9. The value of personal and cultural devotions is to be maintained and encouraged. Yet, care should be taken that the placement and proliferation of devotional images do not diminish Liturgy's central role.

10. Silence is a significant aspect within the Liturgy. Attention needs to be given to the importance of silence at the times designated within the celebration, such as at the Penitential Rite, after the invitations to prayer, throughout the Liturgy of the Word and after Communion. A proliferation of words, even if intended as commentary or instruction, as well as superfluous actions, detract from the Liturgy.

11. Posture is another significant aspect of the Liturgy. From the Church's ancient tradition, standing has been the appropriate posture to reflect the assembly's prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Thus, a) standing is the customary posture for the community's reception of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese; b) standing after the Breaking of the Bread ("Lamb of God") can avoid unnecessary noise and distraction.

V. Integrity of the Parish as One Worshipping Assembly

The Sunday Eucharist is the focal point of the life of the parish in all its diversity. The pastoral reality of the parish--age, ethnic, socio-economic and educational composition--is a primary consideration for Sunday Eucharist.
A. Schedule

In establishing the schedule for Sunday liturgies, the basic principle is to maintain the integrity of the Sunday worshiping assembly. Matters of convenience are secondary.

1. Parish staffs would do well to evaluate the necessity of any Sunday Mass at which the attendance is consistently less than 50% of the seating capacity of the Church.

2. The length of time between Masses should ensure a full celebration, and that no one is rushed before, during or after the liturgy. It is recommended that normally there be a minimum of one hour and thirty minutes between the starting times of Masses.

3. Parish Mass schedules should allow enough time for the proper celebration of other Rites within the Sunday liturgy, e.g., infant Baptism, Anointing of the Sick, Rites of the Catechumenate, Commissioning of Ministers.

4. It may be desirable that parishes in a given area cooperate in planning their Sunday schedules, especially in providing Masses at early or late hours on which a small number of the faithful depend to fulfill their Sunday obligation.

5. Each and every Sunday Mass should receive sufficient attention in preparation and celebration. A so-called "quiet Mass" is ordinarily not in keeping with the spirit of liturgical renewal. Thus, every Sunday Mass should include, as much as possible, full participation through at least some use of music and liturgical ministers.

6. To maintain the proper focus on Sunday as the day of gathering for the Eucharist, it is recommended that each parish ordinarily have only one Saturday evening liturgy.

7. It is desirable that only one Mass be scheduled at any given time on parish grounds.

B. Cultural and Multi-lingual Implications

Where there is a multi-lingual or multi-cultural population in a parish, it is important to aim for integration while recognizing the particular character and needs of each group.

1. Balanced against the scheduling principles and norms enunciated above, special sensitivity should be accorded those in the parish with multi-cultural and multi-lingual needs.

2. Parishes with a multi-lingual population need to schedule a sufficient number of Masses, and at convenient hours, in accord with the language needs of parishioners.

3. In parishes where Sunday Mass is celebrated in more than one language, multi-lingual liturgies, which strive to unify the community by incorporating diverse languages and expressions of cultures, should be celebrated on great feasts.
C. Special Group Liturgies

Parishes with children, teen, family and other special group liturgies would do well to evaluate them in light of the preference that all participate in the mainstream of parish liturgical life.

1. It is ordinarily more desirable for children to attend a regular parish Sunday liturgy than to provide a special liturgy for them. However, providing a distinct Liturgy of the Word for children is a recommended alternative.

2. The celebration of occasional family liturgies based on sound liturgical principles is supported. These liturgies are to be celebrated within the mainstream of the liturgical life of the parish.

D. Special Theme Liturgies

Sunday Liturgy celebrates and makes present the saving mystery of Christ and the authentic nature of the Church within a cycle of seasons and feasts. The integrity of the liturgical calendar (scripture readings, texts, etc.) should be preserved.

1. Liturgical leaders are encouraged to exercise care in implementing authorized special Church observances such as Mission Sunday, Vocation Sunday, Catechetical Sunday, etc., so as to respect the nature of Sunday Eucharist and the integrity of the liturgical calendar.

2. Civil observances which fall on Sunday, (e.g., Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc.) need to be addressed with pastoral sensitivity but without obscuring the Church's liturgical calendar.

3. Personal celebrations, such as anniversaries, have no proper place within the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. They are better celebrated on weekdays or apart from the Sunday gathering. More specific guidelines for the preparation of Eucharistic liturgies are available upon request from the Office for Liturgy and Worship. These will facilitate the preparation of particular aspects of the Sunday liturgy, the preparation of multi-lingual or multi-cultural liturgies, and other specific concerns.