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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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One of the greatest liturgical challenges today is to facilitate the full participation of children in the liturgies of the church, without diminishing the participation of other members of the assembly. This issue reflects on the theological meaning of childhood and the importance of symbol and faith-development, and considers Sunday and other liturgies, children as liturgical ministers, and resources for the liturgy of the word.
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Introduction

The question of children and the liturgy is urgent, challenging, and complex. We need to appreciate who children are from social, psychological, educational and cultural, as well as theological points of view. We need to take into account the great developmental and individual differences that exist within the group of human beings we call children. Even when we divide them into preschool, elementary, junior high, and high school categories, great diversity remains within each group.

The liturgical side of the question also has many facets. One is the Sunday parish eucharist, with or without any special accommodations for children such as "family masses" and "children's liturgies of the word." Others include liturgical celebrations in individual classrooms and the school as a whole, special parish liturgies for children or for families, and liturgical celebrations in the home. Confirmation, first eucharist, first penance and other special liturgical events in children's lives and in the lives of their families and the parish also need to be considered. The participation of baptized children in the rite of baptism for children (younger siblings, for example), funerals, weddings and possibly anointing of the sick and viaticum also need to be taken into account.

In addition, religious education programs teach about liturgy and the sacraments, help to prepare children for the celebration of the sacraments, and include liturgical celebrations of various kinds.

This issue of the Bulletin touches on just a few aspects of the question of children and the liturgy, and much more could be said on each topic. This is an area of liturgical scholarship and liturgical experience that is still developing. No one yet has all the answers.

Several previous issues of the Bulletin have also dealt with this subject:

• "Children and Liturgy," vol. 11, no. 63, March – April 1978
• "Children Learn to Celebrate," vol. 16, no. 89, May – June 1983
• "Gestures and Symbols," vol. 17, no. 94, May – June 1984
• "Youth and Liturgy," vol. 19, no. 106, November – December 1986
Theological Reflections on Childhood

Sister Marjorie Moffatt has advanced degrees in music and in liturgy, and holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Catholic University of America. She has served parishes in Quebec, Ontario, and at present, in Labrador. She was coordinator of a joint liturgy office for the English regions of the dioceses of Montreal and St. Jean-Longueuil, and served on the National Council for Liturgy, the Catholic Book of Worship II working committee, and the psalter subcommittee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. She has published resources for children's word liturgies, and this was the area of her doctoral dissertation.

The Place of Children at Liturgy

Special needs: In The Directory for Masses with Children (1974), the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship takes the position that children have special needs regarding the liturgy (n. 24). This concern on the part of church leaders reflects an evolution in our understanding of the child in general and of the Christian child in particular, especially as a participant in worship.

Childhood in its own right: Formerly, the child was seen as a provisional adult, a "mini-adult," an incomplete person who must constantly be trained and formed in the ways and attitudes of adults. The church of today invites us to discover the advantages of being a child, to wonder at the qualities of the period in life called childhood, not as adulthood in its germination – to be left as quickly as possible – but as childhood in its own right. We are becoming aware of "the unique and unrepeatable value attached to childhood in particular."

Children are precious because they are children, not because they are potential adults. They are a treasure not because they will one day grow up and be like us, but because they force us – like parables – to confront the unexpected, to deal with a God who chooses to behave in an un-God-like manner.

A unique capacity to teach: Children have an important place in our worship not only because of their own need to be fully initiated but because they have a unique capacity to teach and challenge us adults, both humanly and spiritually.

Everyone a child: Another important dimension of our relationship with God that children remind us of is our Christian bondedness into one family. Children reflect

a relationship among human beings and between human beings and God that is shared by all. "Not everyone is wife or husband; not everyone is sister or brother; but everyone is someone’s child."3

**Open to past and future:** One dimension of childhood that children invite us to realize at liturgy is that mysterious openness of the child to both the past and to the future. This has great theological and spiritual significance for us. It is an openness, not only to change and conversion, but also to death and to the transcending of death.

As God’s "child," Jesus redefined both God and childhood. Being a child is not a temporary stage ... but an enduring aspect of all that it means to be God and all that it means to be human. Nowhere is Jesus more a child – and more God – than on the cross . . . . On the cross, Jesus reveals that being God no longer means being "big"; it means being as small and vulnerable as someone’s dying child.4

**Total openness:** This reversal of roles that the crucified Jesus embodies is a result of total obedience and openness to the Father. This "ungodlike" behavior of God is difficult to accept and has implications for the Christian life that we might prefer to forget.

Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness. The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves. Such openness, infinite and maintained in all circumstances, yet put into practice in the actual manner in which we live our lives, is the expression of [our] religious existence.5

**Openness to the future:** Nathan Mitchell elaborates on this theme of Rahner’s when he writes that "The child, therefore, is a sacrament of that radical openness to the future."6 Children thus are very important members of the church and of our worshipping communities because they are witnesses of that openness that is a quality of Christian faith:

I believe this is why, from earliest times, the Christian community has taken children seriously. Children are significant for the Christian life of faith and grace not primarily because they are symbols of innocence or nostalgic reminders of what we once were or ‘potential soldiers of the church,’ but because every Christian believer must be a once and future child. In children the Christian recognizes both the origins of life and the future of life; he affirms both what he has been and what he is destined to become; he discerns the power of human past and the pull toward a human future in the presence of God.7

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3 Ibid., 7
4 Ibid, 8
5 Rahner, 48
7 Ibid., 247
A nurturing environment: In the apostolic writings, the church is a community of people who are sojourners, always on a journey of growth in faith. We recognize today, with the witness of the children in our midst, that the church strives to be a nurturing environment for this growth, encouraging an on-going openness to being ever transformed as individuals and as groups, a process commonly known as conversion.

In essence, the biblical evidence tells us that the experience of being a child is both gift and challenge. On the one hand, children are the privileged ones of God. Their simplicity and spirit of trust are to be imitated as the model of our relationship with God. On the other hand, to be a child is to be unfinished, immature, and in need of formation. It is precisely this creative tension between the child as faith model and the child in need of growth that lies at the heart of the biblical perspective.\(^8\)

The child in scripture: In the scriptures, we see our relationship with God often depicted as that of the child to a parent. The qualities of childhood are singled out to describe our relationship with God. For example:

- The child as gift: Ps 128: 1-3; Prov 17: 6; Gen 15: 5
- The child as the privileged one of God: Exod 22: 21; Ps 68: 5; Joel 2: 16; Ps 8: 2; Matt 21: 16; Isaiah 66: 13
- The child as chosen one of God: 1 Sam 16: 1-13; Dan 13: 44-50
- Exhortations to childlikeness: Ps 131: 2; Job 1: 8; Phil 2: 14-15; Matt 11: 28-19
- The child as unfinished: Prov 22: 15; Matt 11: 6-17; 1 Cor 3: 1-2.

Our relationship to God: These passages show us how the child is a sign of how we can relate to God. This dignity and contribution of the child to the church is recognized by the bishops of the region of Montreal in their joint message of 1980:

By holding up the child as a prototype of all to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18: 4; 19: 14, etc.), Jesus no doubt evoked the following qualities of childhood: its confidence in life and in [human beings], its openness and its availability to all without prejudice or discrimination, its joyful spontaneity, its overflowing creativity, the transparency and honesty of its judgements, its simplicity and surprising perspicacity, its capacity for wonder before the most humble of things. The church believes that the values conveyed by childhood are authentic gospel values and that children witness, through their very manner of being, to the freedom and to the salvation brought to the world in Jesus Christ.\(^9\)

A witness to gospel values: This is by no means an idealization of the child in some unrealistic way any more than it is when Jesus holds a child and says: "Unless you become . . ." It simply means that the child, because of being

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\(^8\) John Heagle, "When Israel was a child," *Liturgy* 1 (June 1981) 39

\(^9\) "Pour qu'ils vivent pleinement leur vie d'enfant," Message des évêques de la région de Montréal. (*Documentation Catholique*, No. 77 (6 Avril 1980) 336
child, helpless, dependent, eager to grow, etc., witnesses to values that are evangelical and that should be upheld by all Christians. Matthew's use of this saying (18: 4; 19: 4) emphasizes that not only does the kingdom of heaven belong to little children, but that we all must become like little children. Joachim Jeremias explains that being a child is the distinctive characteristic of the kingdom of God.10

Trust ing dependence on God: Adults may be even more disturbed by the child’s imaging of the playfulness and vulnerability of God than by the child's simplicity and dependence that call us to trusting dependence on the will of God. As a kind of parable about God, this sometimes shocks us.

Children are parables of God’s way of working in the world not because they are docile, innocent, sweet and submissive . . . but because they reveal among us the playfulness and the vulnerability of God . . . . Perhaps that is why we react to children the way we react to all parables: with mingled frustration and admiration, annoyance and delight, shock and wonderment.

Children are also parables that signal the presence and power of a God who chose to behave in an un-God-like manner. In Jesus, God's unique child, we acknowledge One whose divinity is most manifest in weakness, vulnerability, incomprehensible suffering, and powerlessness.11

Liturgy and conversion: The Directory of Masses with Children is concerned that if children experience liturgy in a negative way (passively), this can have a detrimental effect on their faith growth. In the same way, positive experiences of liturgy (in which they participate fully) will have a positive effect on faith growth.

Children invite us to play, to celebrate, to waste time with our God with whom we have a love relationship, and to accept the consequences. The church urges us to ensure that every member of the worshipping community, including the child, be invited to fully participate in the celebration. Therefore, every attempt to give children their rightful place at liturgy with their family is to be encouraged.

Children invite us to do liturgy rather than to read it. They invite us to experience liturgy more as an art form than as an intellectual exercise. Children invite us to play at liturgy rather than to suffer through it. If we allow their way of participation to touch us, we just might “have fun” at liturgy sometimes. This does not mean that liturgies will manipulate adults to behave like children. Children suffer as much as adults do in daily life, and they need as much as adults to celebrate the suffering and death of Jesus as a victory over evil. Therefore celebration can have a very serious note to it. But such a mystery is best celebrated through rite, ritual, symbol, myth, poetry, music, texture, gesture — in ways that words alone simply cannot express.

11 Mitchell, “The parable . . .” 12-14
Children and Symbols

Children are "natural" at celebration and imagination. A study of children's reactions and instinctive interpretation of symbol leads to these conclusions:

The symbol in the religious context seems to have more resonance in the life of the child than symbol on the natural plain. The phenomenon is most noticeable for the 'light' symbol. This symbol directly manifests the presence of God, it is the symbol of the majesty of divine explosion.12

Rich in symbol: Thus liturgy with children should never be shy and minimal with symbol for fear of being obscure. On the contrary, liturgy should be rich in symbol and allow symbols to speak for themselves directly to the heart of the worshipper; there is no need to explain them to death.

Symbol and ritual: When we speak of the eucharist, we speak of having real bread that can be broken and shared, we use wine - lots of it - to be poured and shared with all. We prepare the table with flair and set the gifts on it to be clearly seen by all. We pray with arms outstretched and we invite the assembly's acclamations at frequent intervals during the eucharistic prayer; we own the prayer as our own. We stand together, we bow together, and we join together in song. At communion we offer peace, we process, savouring the goodness of the Lord as we eat and drink. There is so much that children can connect with during the eucharist, especially if they can see what is going on.

Liturgy of the word: It is easy to regard the liturgy of the word as a "catechetical" or "classroom" sort of activity, thinking that it is more intellectual and verbal than other parts of the celebration. The symbols here, however, are also very rich: the word in sacred scripture is icon of God, sign of God's presence, with power to move hearts. The symbolic language of the scriptures has power to speak to our experience today, to remind us who we are in relation to one another and to God, to call us to fidelity in our commitments, to express the grief and quest for meaning common to all humankind through the ages.

The word is sacrament and those proclaiming and preaching it, listening and responding to it, become instruments of the word. For this to be a dynamic sacrament, the word is proclaimed by nonverbal and verbal elements that allow it to have its full power as symbol: body-language, art, imagery, storytelling. In this way, its richness as symbol can communicate its nature as dialogue with God.

Scripture is therefore proclaimed rather than simply read. The book is beautifully decorated and there is ritual in the way it is surrounded with light, approached, picked up and used to tell the story of our God. Christ himself is being proclaimed through the person of the lector. "In fact, one can speak of the 'real presence' of Christ in the reading of the scriptures in much the same way that some Christian traditions speak of Christ's real presence in holy communion."13

12 Guy Fournier and Georges Dechambre, "Signification de gestes et d'objets pour les enfants et les adolescents," La Maison Dieu 91 (3e trimestre 1967) 170
13 David Power, "The mystery which is worship," Living Light 16 (Summer 1979) 174
**Good reading, good listening:** From a human point of view, the degree of Christ's presence in the proclamation depends on the quality of the reading and on the quality of the listening. That is why both the lectors and the listeners need to exert effort during the liturgy of the word.

**Use of the arts:** The liturgy of the word may be an opportune time for the use of the arts to help proclaim the word — the elements of graphic arts, plastic arts, dance, mime, gestures, procession with the sacred book, music. The symbols then "work on" those who respond so that their lives become more and more congruent with the mystery they celebrate; but the first response at liturgy is prayer in all its forms. Naturally, we will never resort to "gimmicks," or activities that are more suitable for the classroom.

Liturgies for the young, like all of us in a consumer culture, tend to look for and to want to create novelty, not depth of significance. Ritual redundancy and repetition are not of themselves inherently boring unless they are the activities of boring people who lack both memory and imagination.¹⁴

**Use of All the Senses**

The prayer of children — and adults as well — during the liturgy of the word can involve all the senses.

**What the children see:** "The total visual scene — a scene that impresses people, whether they know it or not, at least as much as anything that is said,"¹⁵ will set the tone for the whole experience.

Quality is no less important for children's celebrations than it is for adult or general ones. Perhaps it is even more important when dealing with children, because children are open and in the process of formation. Children still have a chance of achieving a greater appreciation of beauty, authenticity, craftsmanship, skill, color and shape, texture, etc. . . . Most adults are profoundly affected by our culture's general insensitivity and even blindness with regard to quality.¹⁶

**Posture, gesture, movement and touch** all are important as we celebrate with children. They are part of the visual scene, and "they are things we do and they involve us in a total way."¹⁷

**What the children hear** must also be of quality. The sound system, if one is necessary, needs to be a good one. Music enhances the words, giving them power beyond themselves. In singing, those celebrating are joined into one voice, and the very singing together is symbolic of spiritual unity in Christ.

**What the children smell** at liturgy is also important: the flowers, the wax, incense, other people. These all speak of sacred space and of sensual beauty, of a gathered community made up of human beings called by God and led

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¹⁵ Robert Hovda, "Eucharistic prayer is more than words," *Living Worship* 11 (April 1975)


¹⁷ Ibid.
by Jesus Christ in a common act of worship in anticipation of the heavenly banquet.

**What is good for children is good for everybody.** This is the striking fact that we realize as we examine the needs of children at liturgy.

Our first task is not to tailor the liturgy to fit children, but to develop it in such a way that it is fit, not only for children, but for everybody, to engage in a kind of worship which is truly catholic—a liturgy which worships with the body as well as with the mind, a liturgy which respects ceremonial as it respects word and music.

Children teach us, if we allow them to, how to pray with our entire being, and they then shock us into the responses demanded by that prayer. Not just a response of the mind and intellect, but of our bodies as well; not just believing a set of ideas, but living a faith life. Symbol, verbal and nonverbal, has the power to touch the heart and to change individuals and groups, penetrating mind and heart like a sword.

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**Liturgy and Children's Growth in Faith**

**The eucharist is a family meal** at which all members of the community are invited to participate, as they are able. If faith growth means growing in a love relationship with God, then it is very important that the children participate with the adult community in the ritual of the eucharist. Faith growth is not only a matter of catechesis and intellectual understanding, but rather formation in a faith life that includes regular time for relating to God in and with a worshipping community. It is very important for children to feel part of that worshipping community.

**Ongoing formation:** The worshipping community as a whole is responsible for its own ongoing formation and for the formation in faith of its young. When the community celebrates the eucharist, it is celebrating a life of faith that involves hospitality, forgiveness, listening, sharing, loving, serving, thanking in the name of Jesus, dying and rising with Jesus. The children need to witness this and experience this dimension of their faith life. Aidan Kavanagh has described this kind of formation as not just instructing minds, but of “transmuting lives.” The following statement is particularly appropriate when thinking about children at Sunday liturgy:

Catechumens are to be practically engaged not only in their brain cases but throughout their whole personality in the reality of day-to-day Christian life. They must learn not only about concepts, but must learn to pray, to witness the faith in their own lives, to expect Christ constantly, to follow God's urging in all their deeds, and to love even to the point of self-renun-

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18 Ralph Kiefer, "Celebrating the eucharist," in Signs, Songs and Stories, 68
19 Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian initiation for those baptized as infants," Living Light 13 (Fall 1976) 389

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ciation. These things cannot be taught: they can only be learned. In short, the catechumens must begin to become not only knowledgeable but wise in what faith costs. They must begin in a palpable way to die and rise in Christ.²⁰

Still growing in faith: The children at Sunday liturgy are like “catechumens,” people learning the faith and very much the responsibility of the entire assembly for their faith growth. They need to participate in vibrant liturgy which in turn invites them to participate in vibrant communal apostolic life. No matter how active the children are at liturgy on Sundays, no matter how thorough their catechesis is during religion classes at other times, their faith growth depends on training into a life. The Sunday liturgy needs to help the children become more and more aware of who they are as Christians and to whom they belong as Christians. It is through real dialogue with the word of God and full participation in the ritual action of the eucharist that the child will experience the power that changes people’s lives and changes the world.

Our rituals can be dangerous. They can act to bless and sustain the way things are in the world . . . . Our rituals are to aid us in critically judging the world, to provide us with visions of the world God intends and to motivate us to live in God’s world as strangers and pilgrims. Our rituals in the Christian church are meant to induct us into a community which is willing to live and die for the transformation of the world.²¹

The Sunday assembly is the most powerful expression of who we are as church. Let it reach the children with the full impact of word and symbol; let it invite the children to more fully savour and respond to the presence of God. Above all, let it challenge the children to lay down their lives as Jesus did only to live a much more abundant life.

Transmitting values: It is important for the adults in a community to transmit a set of values and a faith-life to the next generation. They do this at several levels, finding ways of passing on what they values and what they live, what they proclaim, what they accomplish in the world, and what they symbolize. Only then is the Sunday liturgy authentic, and only then will the child know and experience it as such.

When a church tries to proclaim its faith only in words, it dies from hypocrisy. When the church tries to communicate its faith only through experience it dies from abstractness. When the church tries to live out its faith only through actions, it dies from rootlessness. When the church, as a community in history, writes its heritage – its memory and vision – with reflected upon experience and planned action around social and personal issues, it lives. Such life is expressed in the constant grappling for solidarity among telling the good news, teaching persons how to live that good news, and enabling the community to act out that good news in the world.²²

²⁰ Ibid., 393
Mutual faith formation: In all that we do, therefore, to include children in our Sunday liturgy, we must keep in mind that we are forming them in the faith and they are forming us as well, offering us the constant challenge to live what we profess. As adults are challenged in their own faith, they stimulate the faith of the children. In this sense, the adults and children in the Sunday assembly are ministering to each other, witnessing to each other, proclaiming the transforming power of word and sacrament to each other. Liturgy with children is not adults teaching children but a dynamic interrelationship between adults and children in which the child expresses a unique capacity to call forth the worshipping community to attentive presence and to live the gospel.

Selected Reading

Church Documents

Directory for Masses with Children, prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1985)

Les Enfants Célébrent (Ottawa: Service des Éditions de la Conférence Catholique Canadienne 1975)

Manifesto and Letter of the Bishops of Quebec on the Family (Montréal: Le Secrétariat de L'Assemblée des Évêques du Québec, April 1975)

Pour qu'ils vivent pleinement leur vie d'enfant, by the Bishops of the region of Montreal. Documentation Catholique, no. 77 (April 1980) 336-339

Books


Christiane Brusselmans, Religion for Little Children (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor 1980)


Joan Halmo, Celebrating the Church Year with Young Children (Collegeville: Liturgical Press and Ottawa: Novalis 1988)

Edward Matthews, Celebrating Mass with Children (New York: Paulist Press 1978)


**Articles**


“Blessed are those . . . who Gather the Children,” *Pastoral Music*, vol. 12, no. 2 (December – January 1988) (issue)


“Celebrating Liturgy with Children,” *Pastoral Music*, vol. 5, no. 1 (October – November 1980) (issue)


Mary Collins, “Ritual symbols: something human between us and God,” *Living Light* 12 (Fall 1975) 438-448


Andre Hanguin, "Le Directoire romain pour les messes d'enfant," *La Maison Dieu* 119 (3e trimestre 1974) 112-123

John Heagle, “When Israel was a child,” *Liturgy* 1 (June 1981) 39-44


Robert Hovda, “The eucharist is more than words," *Living Worship* 11 (April 1975)
Peter A. Judd, "Children and the art of worship," Liturgy, vol. 4, no. 4 (Spring 1985) 43-48


Paul J. Leblanc, "Directory for Masses with Children: ‘Purpose’ of elements should correspond," Living Worship 10 (Mary 1974)


"Liturgy and Catechesis," Modern Liturgy, vol. 10, no. 7 (October 1983) (issue)

"Liturgy and Youth," Modern Liturgy, vol. 5, no. 6 (September – October 1978) (issue)


Nathan Mitchell, "The parable of childhood," Liturgy 1 (June 1981) 7-12


David Power, "The mystery which is worship," Living Light 16 (Summer 1979) 168-178


Theodora Ressetar, "The liturgical life of the child," Liturgy, vol. 6, no. 1 (Summer 1986) 79-84

Sheila Roberts, "Young people and the liturgy," Liturgy (England), vol. 11, no. 6 (August - September 1987) 233-237

Barbara Schmich, "The catechesis of the Good Shepherd," Liturgy, vol. 8, no. 2 (Fall 1989) 73-80


Gail Ramshaw Schmidt, "To fear and love God: children and the liturgy," Liturgy 24 (July - August 1979) 21-24


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Julia Upton, “Why do they bring those kids to church?” *Liturgy* 24 (July – August 1979) 25-27


Participation of children in liturgical celebrations rests upon two pillars. One is formation in faith and in the basic movements of liturgy in the home and family. The second is an acceptance by local communities that children of all ages really are members of the church.

Good liturgical celebration by children is fostered and supported — or weakened and undermined — by their lives at home with their families. Though Vatican Council II proclaimed that liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life, it also said that liturgy is not the whole of one's life as a Christian. It builds on daily life prior to the celebration and leads back to daily life afterward. The quality of the daily life one leads has important consequences for liturgical celebration.

Basic patterns of life: Ideally, in their homes children learn, practice and come to value basic patterns that are common to both liturgy and ordinary human life. These include:

- living in a community of love, affection, and respect
- living in a community whose members care for one another, forgive each other, and challenge one another
- telling the stories of one's daily life
- listening to the life stories of others
- sharing in all aspects of the family's life (to the extent that is possible and appropriate)
- engaging in dialogue — conversation — as the basic form of human communication
- living in a spirit of thankfulness, joy and hope
- being hospitable to friends, other guests, and strangers
- sharing food, time, gifts, and material goods with other members of the family and with persons outside the family
- singing (everyone at least sings “Happy Birthday”)
- valuing silence.
Christian faith: Ideally as well, in their home children learn, practice, and come to value basic attitudes and experiences of Christian faith. These include, for example:

- being confident that there is a God
- being aware that God is revealed especially in Jesus Christ, that God loves us, is present to us (though transcendent), and desires a close relationship with us
- praying regularly
- reading scripture, learning about the bible, and reflecting on its meaning for us today
- eating meals surrounded by thankful prayer and celebration
- engaging in the service of others
- worshipping with the parish community on Sundays
- resisting encroachments on Sunday by sports and employment
- learning about God, the church, and the Christian life
- hearing parents and older siblings talk about their relationship with God.

Good celebration: These practices and values are so important for good liturgical celebration! If these are weak or lacking, the Sunday parish eucharist will be the poorer. Where home life is vibrant and faith-filled, the celebration of the eucharist will be the stronger. The Sunday eucharist, no matter how well celebrated, cannot entirely make up for or overcome serious deficiencies in the weekday lives of families. Parishes that care deeply about their Sunday eucharistic celebrations — and other liturgies as well — need to care about the home lives of their members as well as the liturgy itself.

Serious challenges: It is all too apparent that families today face many serious challenges. So many aspects of contemporary culture put pressures on families to live in ways that are neither Christian nor even fully human. Increasingly, families are divided, single parents struggle to cope economically, emotionally and socially. Children live with greater stress and often are cared for alternatively by each parent.

Problems of faith and practice: The Christian faith and practice of many parents is weak. Though they may continue to think of themselves as Catholics, and may desire the religious education and Catholic upbringing of their children, they themselves seldom worship and are unable to provide the kind of home life outlined above.

Others can help: Individual Christians, parish communities, and Catholic schools and other catechetical programs need to do what they can to support the religious life of children under these circumstances, while respecting the role and authority of the parents. Neighbors and friends, for example, might offer to take children to the Sunday eucharist, teach them prayers, talk to them about their own relationship with God, and encourage them in their faith.

Always loved: Above all, families that drift to the edges of the church should know that they are loved and always welcome to come back.
Liturgies in the Home

The home is a place for liturgical celebration, as well as for liturgical foundations. This topic has been masterfully dealt with in Joan Halmo's recent book, *Celebrating the Church Year with Young Children,* and considered at length in several previous issues of the Bulletin:

- “Helping Families to Pray,” vol. 14, no. 80 (September - October 1981)
- “Advent in Our Home,” vol. 15, no. 85 (September - October 1982)
- “Lent in Our Home,” vol. 15, no. 86 (November - December 1982)
- “Easter Season in Our Home,” vol. 19, no. 103 (March - April 1986).

Children in the Church

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin,
given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit,
and welcomed you into his holy people.
He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation.
As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King,
so may you live always as members of his body,
sharing everlasting life. Amen.²

Baptized children are members of the church. They are members of God's holy people and members of Christ's body. They are adopted daughters and sons of God, adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit. God has welcomed them into the church.

Complete initiation: Of course children need to complete the process of Christian initiation as they grow older. In the course of time they will celebrate confirmation and first eucharist, receive continuing catechesis, and grow in prayer and other aspects of the Christian life. But they are truly members of the church even before this process is completed.

Adults grow too: Adults need to remember that their own Christian life is one of growth as well.

Adults need to take this very seriously. Baptized children are truly members of the church, just as we adults are. Baptized children are truly our sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. Just as children are members of a human family from the moment of their birth, so too baptism brings them into the family of the church.

Abused and neglected: In contemporary society children sometimes are valued in theory, but considered burdensome in practice; they can be honored at

¹ (Collegeville: Liturgical Press and Ottawa: Novalis 1988) ² Anointing after Baptism, Rite of Baptism for Children
a distance, but abused and neglected at home. They can be exploited by those who control entertainment and sports, and by those who view children and their parents primarily as consumers.

**Valued for their own sake:** Adult Christians need to make sure that the devaluing and abuse of children that can occur in our society does not creep into the church and its corporate worship. As persons created by God, redeemed by Christ, consecrated in baptism, and as members of the church, children are to be valued for their own sake and never considered to be a nuisance. (Neither should they be idealized or idolized in unrealistic ways.)
Children and the Sunday Eucharist

The Sunday parish eucharist is an especially important challenge and opportunity with regard to the participation of children. It is the principal weekly liturgy celebrated by the parish, and its assembly includes many adults with (usually) a smaller number of children. The Sunday eucharist is sometimes considered to be difficult for children to participate in, and attempts to facilitate their participation may be inappropriate, and may lead to divisions between parents of small children and other adults.

A basic principle: Before trying to see how children can and do participate in the Sunday eucharist and how their participation might be improved, it seems well to examine the principle of liturgical participation itself.

Participation in the Liturgy

The fundamental principle of the contemporary liturgical renewal is stated by Vatican Council II as follows:

The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"... is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.¹

For children too: This principle applies to baptized children as well as to baptized adults. Nowhere does the Council say, "except for children." But what does participation really mean? What does it mean for children?

A matter of growth: Participation is not an all-or-nothing sort of thing. During the whole of our lives we gradually but continually grow toward the full participation of which the Council speaks. The pattern and pace of this growth in participation is different for each of us, with ups and downs in the course of our lives. Some parts of the liturgy are easier to participate in than others even for adults. For example, certain scripture readings, the eucharistic prayer, and sometimes the homily are challenges even for the best of us. Adults and children travel on the same path of progressive growth in liturgical participation, though they generally are at different places on that path.

Never achieved: At a certain level, in fact, truly "full" participation is beyond our grasp during this life. It will be enjoyed only when we arrive at the heavenly liturgies.

Obstacles for adults and children: The greater the participation of adults is in the Sunday eucharist, the better the liturgy will be for the children. Obstacles to

¹ Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 14
full participation of adults are almost always difficulties for children as well. Such problem areas may be architectural (access, seating, visibility), the music, how well the scriptures are proclaimed, the quality of preaching, etc. If these difficulties are cleared up for the adults, children will be better able to participate as well.

The example of adults: In addition, the example of parents, other adults, and older children, is an extremely important mode of learning for children. If the adults around them show a spirit of celebration, sing joyfully, respond vigorously, listen carefully, see and hear, and obviously consider the Sunday eucharist to be of great importance in their lives, then this will be communicated to the children. They will respond with greater participation on their own part.

Children and adults interact: The converse is also true. Adults, through their own lack of participation, can inhibit the participation of the children. (Sometimes, though, children foster the participation of the adults; however, they have to have learned the skills and spirit of liturgical participation elsewhere, probably in the school.)

Participation has many facets and dimensions: verbal, nonverbal, musical, ministry – and each of these can be subdivided further. Liturgy is a holistic experience – one involving the whole person – and participation should never be reduced to the intellectual understanding of its verbal components.

Different facets of liturgical participation will be found more accessible, attractive or suitable at different stages of the journey toward fuller participation. At certain ages, the nonverbal dimensions of the eucharist will be more important than the text. At other ages, the musical aspects of liturgy may acquire a special significance.

Facilitates growth: Participation in liturgical celebration should be transformative experiences for both children and adults. It should facilitate the growth of Christians in their Christian identity. Thus efforts to facilitate the participation of children should not only respect their age and stage of development today, but should also promote their growth into whom they will be tomorrow. We do children no favor if we do not help them grow. Children outgrow childish things, and look forward to acting as adults.

Children bring life: If we are serious about the participation of children in the Sunday eucharist, then we will accept their shorter attention spans, their need for movement, some extra noise and disturbance (by adult standards, and always within reason). Children seek life in our liturgies, and they will contribute life as well.

Encouragement: Children need to be regularly encouraged to participate, and they need some help in doing so. They inevitably will have questions about the liturgy. If these cannot be dealt with satisfactorily by their parents, then opportunities should be provided (for example, right after the liturgy) for them to question a priest or another parish minister, a member of the parish liturgy committee, or a catechist. As well, some way should be found to help parents whose children pose questions they cannot handle, without making the parents feel stupid.

Tours of the church: From time to time tours of the church might be given to the children. Some qualified person would show and name the different parts
of the building, the furniture, vessels, vestments, etc., explain their purpose, and answer questions.

The home – at its best – is a good model for thinking about children's participation in the Sunday eucharist. Children participate in the life of their family at every age, but exactly how they do this varies from year to year. Their verbal skills increase gradually, and for some time intellectual comprehension plays a smaller role than nonverbal aspects of communication and learning. For many years they cannot understand everything that is said around them, or do everything that their parents and older siblings can do. Yet they are real members of the family none the less. They learn a great deal by example, are addressed directly and taught explicitly from time to time, and are always held in the love and the care of the family. The "family model" is holistic and experiential, and does not overvalue intellectual understanding.

The Presence of Christ

Keep goals in mind: In considering the question of children and liturgy, the basic goals of liturgical celebration and participation should always be kept in mind: experiencing the presence of Jesus Christ, thanking and praising God, being transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit.

Four modes: Today we think of four modes of Christ's presence in the liturgy: in the worshipping assembly, in the word proclaimed and preached, in the eucharistic meal of bread and wine, and in the presiding minister. Is the presence of Jesus Christ experienced by children in the Sunday eucharist?

Growing into participation: We accept that children grow into their experiences of Jesus Christ in the liturgy. Our practice of excluding children from sharing in communion until age seven obviously is a limitation placed in their full participation. They also grow into the verbal and intellectual skills required for full participation in the liturgy of the world.

Assembly and presider: At first, therefore, children will experience Christ in the liturgy primarily through the gathered assembly and through the presider. The priest will communicate Christ to children by who he is as a person, by how he speaks, acts, gestures and moves, by his spirit and his care for the liturgy, and by his regard for the children themselves.

The assembly will communicate Christ through its hospitality to the children and to one another, mutual love, a spirit of joy and hope, and through the depth and fervor of its verbal, nonverbal, musical and ministerial participation. These experiences should touch and enfold even the youngest children, and this is quite enough – for a while.

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2 Other Western churches are seriously debating this practice, and some are admitting children to communion at increasingly early ages. See, for example: Louis Weil, "The practice of infant communion," Liturgy, vol. 4, no. 1 (Winter 1983) 69-74; and Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, editor, . . . And Do Not Hinder Them. An Ecumenical Plea for the Admission of Children to the Eucharist (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1982).

The Eastern Churches of course communicate (and confirm) children at the time of their baptism.
As children grow older, their experiences of Christ in the eucharistic meal and in the word will increase, and these will continue to grow throughout their lives. Because these rites are Mystery – the actions of God – we can never experience them fully, nor comprehend them adequately.

A challenge: At certain ages the liturgy of the word poses a particular challenge for children. They have achieved a certain level of verbal ability and understanding, but the readings still are beyond them. Furthermore, the preaching often does not touch them either. As a result, they experience both frustration and boredom.

Perceived difficulties with respect to the liturgy of the word need attention from several points of view. First, preparation before the Sunday eucharist can be very helpful. The more children listen to the great bible stories, especially from the gospels, the better. This is to be encouraged both at home and in school. The more religious education programs are focused on and built around the lectionary and church year, the better. Growth in biblical literacy outside the liturgy will aid participation in the liturgy of the word.

Dynamic and life-giving: In addition, the actual celebration of the word in the parish liturgy should be as dynamic and life-giving as possible – for the sake of the adults no less than the children. Some suggestions are made below.

Special liturgies: Finally, there might be special liturgies of the word for the children alone. This matter will be considered later.

The Eucharistic Liturgy

How to facilitate participation: How, specifically, can we facilitate the participation of children in the Sunday eucharistic liturgy, keeping in mind the general principles just considered? This might best be done by considering each part of the liturgy, one by one. Furthermore, the verbal, nonverbal, musical and ministerial dimensions of the eucharistic liturgy might well be considered separately. As each part of the liturgy is named, think of how one participates in it, and evaluate how easy or difficult participation is for children of different ages. Then ask what help, training, example, or education will facilitate the children's participation.

Nonverbal Aspects of the Liturgy

Our whole selves: All of us, children and adults, alike, participate by seeing, hearing, touching, moving and smelling – we use all our senses, all our bodies. Of those, seeing and hearing are especially important in the eucharistic liturgy. We see the other members of the liturgical assembly, lay and ordained alike; we see the congregation and those who have special ministerial responsibilities. We see the ambo, the presider and the chair, the altar and the bread and wine upon it. We see the processions, the cross, the decorations, light and color.
Visibility: In some churches, visibility is a problem even for adults; in almost all churches it is a challenge for children. How this is to be dealt with will depend on the architecture of the church and the age (actually, the height) of the children. Sitting on parent's laps, standing on kneelers or the pews themselves, sitting or standing in the aisles, having families sit in the front rows, gathering children in front of the first pew, rearranging the seating, sitting at the end of pews, sloped floors - all these may be appropriate solutions in particular circumstances.

The central symbols of the eucharistic liturgy should be as authentic as possible, capable of expressing their full meaning and of communicating the presence of Christ in the midst of the community. Thus the bread and wine should look and smell and taste like real food and the altar look like a real table. The word should be proclaimed using a large, dignified book and from an appropriate piece of furniture. The presider's vestments should be joyful, neat and clean, and his chair should be appropriate for a presider-servant of the liturgy; never a throne. The assembly should be a gathering of those fully engaged in the liturgy, never spectators or consumers.

Hospitality is extremely important. Warm greetings will be extended to all the children, as well as to adults, by the parish ministers of hospitality. All the members of the assembly should be hospitable to one another, and the children should greet the adults as well.

The presiding priest should find opportunities to be hospitable to the children as well. The Directory for Masses with Children recommends that he speak to the children directly in the introductory comments, at some point in the homily, and again at the end of mass (n. 17). If he is at the door as they enter or leave, so much the better.

For parents too: Hospitality will also be shown to parents, especially those of small children. They will never be made to feel uncomfortable or unwanted. They should feel free to take small children in and out of the church if this seems necessary, to stand at the side or in the back holding their children when this is called for, to nurse infants, etc. If the parents feel welcome and at ease, this will be communicated to the children, who then are less likely to fuss. A hospitable climate also means that the parents themselves will be better able to worship, rather than spending the hour worrying what people think about their children and whether the children are disturbing others. Very small children might be cared for in a nursery.

The architecture of churches sometimes is unfriendly to children. Access may be difficult: many stairs can be a difficulty for children and parents as well as for persons in wheelchairs or elderly members of the parish.

Pews are uncomfortable for small children, and do not meet their need to move about, at least a little. Kneelers, pews placed close together, and hard floor surfaces, may make it difficult or uncomfortable for small children to get down on the floor. The scuffing of small feet could be muffled by the use of appropriate flooring or floor covering. Being able to see the faces of fellow members of the assembly is as valuable for children as for adults; seating should be arranged accordingly.

The art and decoration of the church should also be attractive to children, as well as adults. Banners, statues, windows and other decorations and furnishings can be ways of participating in the liturgy.
The processions are dynamic actions that children are attracted to — if they can see them. Being able to see the color and drama of the entrance and final processions, with priest and other ministers; the procession of the gifts; the communion procession all can be important means of participation. The music that accompanies them is also important.

Sign of the cross: Children can also participate through the sign of the cross, as it is used at the beginning and end of the liturgy, and just before the gospel is proclaimed. This is a gesture that can be learned at an early age, together with the words that usually accompany the signing.

Sign of peace: Many children value the sign of peace and are anxious to participate in it. Appropriate words to accompany this action, and its meaning, can be taught even to young children.

Water: The rite of blessing and sprinkling with water, which can be used at the beginning of the liturgy in place of the penitential rite, is also attractive to children because of the concreteness of feeling water on one's face.

Postures: Finally, the different postures adopted in the course of the liturgy can incorporate the whole body in participation. Standing, sitting, kneeling all can be meaningful to children. Some postures, however, make it difficult for children to see; visibility usually is the more important value.

Verbal Elements of the Liturgy

Growing in verbal participation: Of the many different liturgical texts used in the course of the Sunday eucharist, some are simple and easy for children to participate in, while others are more difficult. Children should grow into the verbal dimensions of the liturgy, as their abilities permit.

Dialogues: The Catholic liturgy contains many dialogues between ministers (presider, reader, communion minister) and the rest of the assembly. There is the opening greeting, the dialogues after the first and second readings and before and after the gospel, the preface dialogue, the dialogues at communion, and at the final blessing. Most of these are simple and accessible to children. The dialogue that precedes the prayer over the gifts is more complicated, but accessible to older children.

Responses to prayers said by the priest are also part of the normal participation of the people; most of these are simple. These include the “Amen’s” with which so many prayers conclude, and the “Blessed be God forever” at the preparation of the altar and gifts. Children can be taught to listen for the cues that lead to “Amen” and to recognize the preparation prayers as well.

As already mentioned, the words that accompany actions such as the sign of peace are also quite simple.

Litanies generally have simple congregational responses, such as “Lord, have mercy” or “Lord, hear our prayer.” Within the eucharistic liturgy, the third form of the penitential rite is a litany, and the general intercessions often take this form. These responses are easily learned by children.

Short prayers that are said in unison may be considered next. These include the Lord's Prayer, which surely will be among the first prayers memorized by chil-
dren; their participation in this part of the eucharistic liturgy is very important and to be encouraged. In addition, there is the first form of the penitential rite, the "I confess," which is not very difficult either. A longer text that is said by all is the Apostles' Creed, which can be learned by older children.

Praying in silence: Children can also be taught to listen for the invitations to silent prayer that come at the beginning of the penitential rite, rite of blessing and sprinkling water, and the opening prayer. During the periods of silence that follow these invitations, children can, in accordance with their age, be taught to pray silently to God in their own words.

Children should also be taught to pray during the periods of silent reflection that follow the first and second readings and the homily.

Prayers of the priest: The other part of the verbal dimension of the eucharistic liturgy is listening to prayers said by the priest. Some of these are short (collects, prayers at the preparation, etc.), and the presider can help children to participate in them by proclaiming them well.

Eucharistic prayer: The greatest challenge to participation is the eucharistic prayer, which is a longer text, and which is a challenge to adults as well. Participation is aided by the several sung acclamations, considered below. The gestures and movements used by the priest are also helpful, if the children can see them: praying with hands lifted up, the gesture used at the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the holding of the plate and cup, and the final elevation. It should be possible to participate quite well in the eucharistic prayer simply through its visual and musical dimensions. Again, the skill of the presider in proclaiming the eucharistic prayer is a key factor.

Readings and homily: The other verbal elements that involve listening on the part of the congregation are, of course, the scripture readings and homily. In addition to what has been said above, it needs to be emphasized that the participation of all members of the assembly is much aided by the skill and preparation of the readers and priest (or deacon). If these are meaningful to the readers, that will be communicated to the listeners. If the readings are stories, especially with dialogue, this should be communicated by the way they are read. While overemphasis is to be avoided, the readings should be read with life and vigor.

Gospel procession: A strongly visual part of the liturgy of the word is the gospel procession.

Speak to the children: The Directory for Masses with Children recommends that the preacher speak to the children at some point in the homily. In addition, examples and stories from daily life can be meaningful to children as well as adults. This part of the liturgy remains a great challenge, however.

Children should come to appreciate that the basic dynamic of the liturgy of the word is dialogue: proclamation and response.

Musical Participation

The music of the liturgy is an especially important mode of participation by children. The general expectation that liturgy is a musical action fosters the importance of musical participation.
To be encouraged: Children need to be encouraged to sing, need to be taught the songs that are used in the liturgy, and need to be taught to read music. If schools do not encourage singing and teach musical notation, the parish might provide an alternative educational program.

More skilled: Children generally are more skilled and sophisticated musically than adults give them credit for. They can learn quite difficult tunes, even if they do not completely understand the words. Their musical potential should not be underestimated by restricting their music to extremely simple – and often poor – music; they deserve to learn music that is of high quality, even though not too complicated.

Music ministry: Children may also be able to participate in the music ministry of the parish, for example, through a children’s choir, membership of older children in another choir, or through a teenage ensemble. Sometimes the leader of song will be accompanied by other members of his/her family, including children. Groups of instrumental accompanists may include children of various ages.

In thinking about the participation of children in music, it is well again to consider each possible musical element individually.

Short and simple: A number of musical elements have invariable and short texts, and relatively simple melodies. These include the Lord, have mercy of the penitential rite, the Alleluia of the gospel acclamation, the responses of the preface dialogue. In addition, there are the three acclamations of the eucharistic prayer: Holy Holy, memorial acclamation, and great Amen. Finally, there is the Lord’s prayer and its doxology, and the Lamb of God. Children should be taught these texts and the melodies that are most commonly used in the parish, and encouraged to sing them.

Psalm refrain: The text of the psalm refrain is relatively short, but may be different each Sunday; the tune will also be different. Older children may be able to learn the refrains, though this may be more difficult for the younger ones. Participation in the psalm refrain is promoted by use of the seasonal refrains, so that the same one is used for several Sundays.

The Glory to God has an invariant, though longer text; probably a limited number of melodies will be used in any one parish.

The final group of songs, from the point of view of difficulty and participation, include the opening song, the song if any at the preparation of the altar and gifts, the communion song, and the concluding song; in any one celebration, of course, not all of these may be sung. These have longer and more complex texts, and variable melodies.

Spirit and mood: Younger children will participate in these through listening. They will hear and feel their spirit and mood, and experience joy, peace, and unity in this way. Older children, as their verbal and musical skills increase, will come to be able to read the texts and music and participate through singing them.

Children in Liturgical Ministries

As mentioned above, children minister to the assembly simply by being children. In addition, however, and more specifically, they might participate in at least some of the usual lay liturgical ministries.
All children can minister: Some liturgical ministries can be exercised by almost all children, and others by children who have the requisite gifts and, if necessary, training. Children should be brought up expecting to participate ministerially in the Sunday eucharist, though understanding that these ministries are shared by many members of the community. Participation in ministry should not be seen as something for children to do to keep them busy, nor should it exclude adults. Liturgical ministries are to be shared among qualified members of the parish as a whole.

No child is too young to participate in the ministry of hospitality, though they will exercise this minister in different ways as they grow older. Small children will of course be with their parents (or other adults) in carrying out this ministry, while older children might occasionally do this as a group.

Teenagers might well minister through helping to take up the collection, and this can appropriately be carried out by parent-child pairs (which need not be only males).

The gifts: Children can also participate in bringing the gifts to the altar. Small children need not carry anything themselves, but will accompany parents or other adults. Older children, of course, can themselves carry the bread, wine and money.

The ministry of reader requires appropriate gifts and training, but some older children are able to proclaim the scriptures very well. Older children might also share in the ministry of leading the general intercessions.

Altar server: One ministry that for a long time was exercised exclusively by children but today is shared with adults, is that of mass server. Even though it is desirable that adults participate in this ministry, that does not mean that children should be excluded from it. There is a place for both.

Children can also participate through a ministry of art and environment, for example, by helping make banners.

Many Modes of Participation

Provide help and encouragement: The Sunday eucharistic liturgy calls for, and offers opportunity for, many modes of verbal, nonverbal, musical and ministerial participation. Many of these are accessible to children, though this varies with their age. Those responsible for liturgy in the parish should remove any obstacles to participating in these ways, should encourage children to participate, and should provide whatever help children and their parents may need in this regard.
Children's Liturgies of the Word

The Directory for Masses with Children states:

> Sometimes . . . , if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. Then, before the eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word. (n. 17)

This recommendation has been greeted with enthusiasm by some, but with serious reservation by others. Individual liturgists, pastors, parents – and children – put different weight on the two values that are involved:

- respecting children as a special group with its own needs and capabilities;
- accepting children as members of the whole community and integrating them into a united liturgical assembly.

The balance between these two values needs to be evaluated in light of the actual worship practices of individual parishes, as Sunday celebrations vary so much from place to place. The implementation of children's liturgies of the word also requires that the parish examine and improve its other liturgical practices and make the whole of the Sunday eucharist better for children and adults as well. Such special liturgies should never be an excuse for poor liturgical practices by adults, or for inadequate liturgical formation at home and in the school. Finally, the children's celebrations must be done well (see below).

Separate children's liturgies of the word are valued in order to respect the distinct nature of childhood and respond to the special capacities and needs of children. Such liturgies allow the word to be proclaimed at their own level, and allow the children to respond in ways that are appropriate for them. Preaching is related to their own experiences, and the children feel that they have a greater and more active role to play in the Sunday liturgy as a whole.

Expectations

If it is discerned that a children's liturgy of the word is an appropriate practice for the parish, then the expectations and requirements that this decision leads to need to be considered carefully.

Sometimes: Children's liturgies of the word should not be celebrated every Sunday, but should be occasional events. This is the position of the Directory for Masses with children, and is related to the need to embody the unity of a church which includes children as well as adults, and the task of leading children to an adult participation in the Sunday eucharist of the parish.
Age groups: In order to address the needs of individual children, they need to be divided into appropriate age groups. There will be a separate liturgy of the word for each group.

Leadership: Children's liturgies of the word need adult leaders, and these leaders should have appropriate gifts, skills, training, and resources. Usually there will be a team of leaders, and individuals will carry out this ministry only at intervals.

A real liturgy: A primary requirement is that children's liturgies of the word be real liturgies. This is not the time for child care, for just amusing the children, or even for catechesis. As in any celebration of the word, scripture will be proclaimed, it will be applied to contemporary life, and the participants will respond in various ways. It should be a time of challenge as well as comfort, and it should be an experience of the presence of Jesus Christ with his sisters and brothers. It should be an experience of prayer, of dialogue with God.

Space and other nonverbal dimensions: Even a liturgy of the word is not simply a verbal experience. The room in which children's liturgies of the word are celebrated should have color, light (including candles), a dignified book of the scriptures, a place for the enthronement of the word, etc. The children should be gathered around the word in community, and not, for example, seated in school desks arranged in rows.

Music: Liturgies are musical celebrations, and in children's liturgies of the word at least the gospel acclamation should be sung. The children's response to the proclamation and preaching of the word may incorporate other music.

Preaching: The homily of children's liturgies of the word should be real preaching, and not simply religious education or moralistic stories. It should help the children appreciate that God is present and active in their lives, and that they are called to witness to that presence in their own lives.

Resources: Space does not permit a longer discussion regarding children's liturgies of the word, and this is not an appropriate place to provide resources for their celebration. Some published resources in use today are listed below, together with some helpful guidelines. Each needs to be evaluated, and most contain lists of other relevant publications.

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Resources

Guidelines and General

Children within the Worshiping Community on Sunday, 1988. (Worship Commission, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 100 East Eight Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202)

Marjorie Moffatt, Children's Word Liturgy (New Parish Ministries series) (Ottawa: Novalis 1984)

Liturgical Resources


Celine Graf, *Let the Little Ones Come. Liturgy of the Word for Children* (Muenster, SK: St Peter’s Press 1989) (Obtainable from The Abbacy Center, Box 193, Muenster, SK S0K 0Y0)


Alison Travers, *Liturgy of the Word for Children* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons 1986)
Liturgy and Life

The liturgies of the Christian people affirm, celebrate and promote human life. This is true of marriage, anointing of the sick, penance, and especially baptism and eucharist. Here we will focus on the Sunday celebration of the eucharist and ask: How does our liturgy affirm human life? Is our liturgical practice entirely consistent with our theory in this regard?

Life-giving Eucharist

God of life: Eucharistic liturgy promotes human life because the God we worship is a God of life — “not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12: 27). We pray, “you alone are God, living and true.” The trinity is a model of living persons who relate to one another in mutual love and respect. God is the “creator of all life” and “source of life and goodness;” we acclaim, “all life, all holiness comes from you,” and “in you we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). We also profess the Holy Spirit as “the giver of life,” and Jesus Christ as “the bread of life” (John 6: 35 ff).

Co-creators: Living human beings are created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1: 27); “men and women fully alive are the glory of God.” In baptism human beings are incorporated into the very life of God, as sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ, children of God, enlivened by the Spirit. Both in creation and in baptism each individual is conferred with a great dignity and enabled to be a co-creator of life with God.

1 Marriage affirms a healthy sexuality, an openness to giving life and nurture, and healthy interpersonal relationships. Anointing of the sick celebrates the wholeness and integration of the bodily and spiritual dimensions of human life. Penance/reconciliation promotes healthy relationships within oneself, among persons, between humanity and the rest of creation, and between persons and God. Space does not permit further consideration of these liturgies, or of baptism.
2 Eucharistic Prayer 4, preface; cf Eucharistic Prayer 1
3 Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water; cf Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed
4 Eucharistic Prayer 4, preface
5 Eucharistic Prayer 3
6 Also: Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time 6
7 Nicene Creed
8 Also: Eucharistic Prayer 1
9 St Irenaeus of Lyons
10 The dignity of human persons is a major theme of the 1988 “Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici of John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World.” Three sections refer to human dignity in their title: “The human person: a dignity violated and exalted,” “The dignity of the lay faithful in the Church as mystery,” and “Promoting the dignity of the person.” The dignity of every human person is considered in sections 5 and 37; the dignity of baptized persons in sections 8-16.

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Christ is present: Our Sunday eucharist celebrates human life because it is a celebration of Jesus Christ with his disciples and sisters and brothers: the church. Christ is present with us in the assembly as a whole, in the word of God, in the eucharistic sacrament, in the ordained minister. All of these modes of presence speak to us of real human life, and not merely a pious idealization. The assembly is made up of real people, imperfect in many ways, living with the ambiguities and inconsistencies of actual human life. The word of God too is about real people, living all kinds of lives; some of its stories are not exactly edifying. When the bread and wine are actually made by human hands rather than by machine, and really look and taste like food, they too share in the variety and ups and downs of real life. The ordained minister is no more likely to be perfect than any other member of the community.

The living Christ said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11: 25), and “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14: 6). We pray, “dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life,” and refer often to “this life-giving bread.” He gave his life for the life of the world and wishes the fullness of life for everyone. He raised from the dead the little girl, the widow's son, and Lazarus.

Paschal mystery: We celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the paschal mystery: his passing from life through death to a new form of life. We share in this life through the Spirit of Christ, and in the eucharist we celebrate and sacramentally enter into his paschal mystery.

Reconciliation: In the eucharist we proclaim the “new and everlasting covenant” founded in the shedding of Christ's blood. We announce as well the good news that he entered into his death and resurrection “so that sins may be forgiven.” In the eucharist we celebrate reconciliation with our God and with our sisters and brothers. Relationships that are strained or broken are first named and acknowledged, and then healed and restored.

The Eucharistic Liturgy

The living church: The gathering rites bring the living community, formed of many individuals, to a special visibility so that the living church can worship God. Hospitality, song, and being close to one another all proclaim the common life of God's people. We name the trinity to profess that we are children of the living God and made in the image of the life-giving Creator. We sign ourselves with the cross, the instrument through which Jesus Christ gives life. Sometimes we remind ourselves of the Spirit-life and dignity that we have through baptism. At other times we confess that we have not always been faithful to God's gift of life.

The word of life: In the liturgy of the word the living church enters into dialogue with the living God. The biblical stories proclaim the myriad ways in

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11 Memorial acclamations; cf Eucharistic Prayer 4
12 Eucharistic Prayer 2
13 Institution Narrative, Eucharistic Prayers
14 Institution Narrative, Eucharistic Prayers
which life was given to God's beloved people in the past - both the Jewish people and the early Christian communities. Christ is present, especially when the good news of his life-giving ministry is proclaimed. The preacher points out how our God "renew[s] the living springs of . . . life within us" in our lives today, and challenges and invites us to live more fully tomorrow.

Response: Living persons cannot help but respond to God's word. In the liturgy we respond to the proclamation of the living word of God in the silence of our hearts, by joining in song with our sisters and brothers, by professing our faith, and by praying earnestly for the lives and needs of others. We are given new life by being comforted, challenged and stimulated to dream new dreams.

Real food: The liturgy of the eucharist begins when we bring forward real food - bread and wine - made by the hands, creativity and energy of living women and men. It is made from wheat and grapes provided by God to support human life. And we bring forward the money gifts that come from the labor of living men and women as well.

The bread of life: We give praise, blessing and thanks to our life-giving God in prayer and song in the eucharistic prayer, and pray that the Spirit of life transform the gifts into the bread and wine of life: the body and blood of the risen Christ. We pray also that the Spirit transform us so that we truly become living christs for others. We share with one another a sign of Christ's peace, and share as well his very body and blood. We pray that our lives in future days and years will continue to be full of his life.

Going forth: Finally, we again name the God of life and sign ourselves with the cross, as we are sent forth to carry the life and peace of Christ wherever we go. Our celebration of life, joy, hope, praise and thanksgiving continues through the week.

Liturgy and the Real World of Life and Death

Issues of life and death: Clearly the Sunday eucharist is intended to give life. What, however, is the relationship of our liturgical celebrations to the issues of life and death that actually confront us in the world? Some of these issues are the following.

War, the threat of nuclear destruction, terrorism, capital punishment, famine, natural disasters (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes), accidents and death related to travel (cars, trains, airplanes), stillbirth, abortion, and childbirth-related illness, violence in the home against children and spouses, disease, inadequate medical care, poor nutrition or public health, pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment or assault, drug or alcohol dependence, slavery, torture, inhuman conditions of imprisonment, economic or political injustice, racial or ethnic intolerance, violation of basic human rights and freedoms, unjust arrest and detention, economic poverty, inadequate support for women who are pregnant and/or raising children — especially when alone or poor, lack of love and
respect for children, youth, persons with disabilities and the elderly, injury or
death in the workplace or related to sports, destruction or pollution of our envi­
ronment, the abandonment or kidnapping of children.

**How does our liturgy deal with these human experiences?** Five general
statements may be made by way of introduction.

- Ideally, our worship affirms life, but at the same time it is not afraid of or
embarrassed by death. Our hope in a new way of living after death lets us
confront and accept this aspect of human life – without in any way denying the
value of human life here and now.

- Ideally, our worship affirms life, but not simply at the level of minimal human
subsistence. It promotes life in all its fullness: human life that expresses the
dignity, liberty, justice and respect that God intends. Jesus quoted the prophet
Isaiah to describe the life-affirming nature of his mission: "The Spirit of the
Lord . . . has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, . . . to proclaim
release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty

He healed, released from the power of evil spirits, made a great wedding feast
possible. He restored broken relationships: when the prodigal son returned the
father said, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15: 24). He
also said, "Is not life more than food" (Matthew 6: 25), "one's life does not con­
sist in the abundance of one's possessions" (Luke 12: 15), and "he who loses
his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10: 39). Jesus announced, "I came
that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10: 10).

- Ideally, our worship affirms life wherever it is threatened or diminished, and
does so in a consistent manner. There is no liturgical basis for picking and
choosing among the numerous issues of life and death listed above – for
deciding that we can be interested in some issues and not others. Liturgy
affirms a consistent ethic of life.¹⁶

- Ideally, our worship also accepts the ambiguities and complexities of human
existence, and recognizes that tensions sometimes exist among distinct life­
related issues. For example, many – but not all – Christians traditionally have
accepted the self defense of societies, nations and individuals as justification
for capital punishment, "just" wars, and the killing of an individual, respectively.
Human fertility may be in tension with other values. Social and economic pres­
sures of varying kinds and degrees may affect the judgment, freedom, and
moral responsibility of individuals; this may be involved in some cases of
domestic violence, abortion, drug dependence, prostitution and other threats
to life. Sinful structures and institutions are part of the picture as well.

¹⁶ A prominent proponent of the idea of a consistent ethic of life is Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of
Chicago. Among his addresses on this subject are the following. "A consistent ethic of life: an
of life: 'Morally correct, tactically necessary,'" Origins 14 (1984) 120; "The value of the consistent­
sicent ethic after 'Webster': opportunities and dangers," Commonweal 117 (20 April 1990) 242.
Ideally, our worship affirms life by challenging and empowering us to live and act — individually and corporately — every day of the week to protect life in all the areas listed above. This requires sensitivity, discernment, determination, perseverance, and conviction.

Liturgical Practice

What is our actual practice like? Are the liturgies that we celebrate each Sunday as life-affirming as they are supposed to be? We have to say “no” simply because we are imperfect human beings.

Three issues: We may consider the practice of liturgy from three points of view. First, sometimes our liturgies are simply of poor quality; what are the consequences? Second, our liturgies may be good by certain criteria, but the connections between the liturgy and real human life in our world may not be apparent. Third, our liturgies may be inconsistent with respect to life.

Failure to promote life: Some have experienced liturgies that have not affirmed life. Lack of hospitality, poor architecture, feeble participation, weak singing, ill-prepared readers and preachers, minimalized symbols, rushing to get to it over with — these and other bad practices certainly fail to promote and celebrate life.

Poor liturgical celebrations do more than simply fail to affirm life; they are not neutral in this regard. Instead, they are life-threatening events themselves — they can be harmful and destructive of life. To give but a few examples:

If we fail to be hospitable to one another or take an individualistic approach to the liturgy, we show a lack of care and concern for the other persons with whom we worship. This may signal a similar disregard of women and men around the world.

If our preaching and general intercessions do not refer to the real, everyday, hurting world, we become self-centered and isolate ourselves from society around us. This may suggest that we ignore the world in the rest of our personal and communal lives as well.

If our prayers and songs refer exclusively to heaven and fail to mention the world we live in, we show an indifference to the pains and joys of our present world. This may also lead us to accept life-threatening and life-diminishing situations and not work to change them.

If we act as spectators and consumers in the liturgy instead of participating fully, consciously and actively, we are failing to accept responsibility for the life of the Christian community. This may signal failure to take responsibility in society as well.

A powerful discussion of one concrete example of possible negative consequences of poor liturgy is given in Marjorie Procter-Smith's article, "Reorganizing victimization: The intersection between liturgy and domestic violence," Perkins Journal (October 1987) 17-27.
• If the liturgy is the action of the priest rather than of the community as a whole, we may be showing an acceptance of the system of patriarchy.¹⁸ This may indicate that we are unwilling to challenge this pattern of human relationships in society as well.

• If our liturgical celebrations lack joy, hope or thankfulness, we fail to affirm life – in and out of the church.

• If we fail to respect creation in the course of our liturgies, this may allow or promote lack of concern for the land, waters and sky that surround us.

The church’s responsibility: To the extent that our Sunday liturgies fail to celebrate and promote life in the way they are celebrated, to that extent the church bears some responsibility for the life-threatening circumstances of our society. To the extent that our celebrations of the Sunday eucharist fail to live up to their potential, to that extent the church allows and accepts life-diminishing realities in our world.

Failure to Make Connections

Even if our Sunday liturgies are reasonably good by many criteria, connections between the liturgy and real life may not be made. For example:

• We may not make connections between the eucharistic celebration and the life-issues of our weekday experience.

• We may choose to focus on one or two life-issues and ignore others, instead of embracing a broad and consistent ethic of life.

• We may fail to recognize or take seriously the tensions, ambiguities and complexities that surround some life-issues.

• We may fail to love those who view some of these issues differently than we do, or who are unable to act perfectly all the time because, like ourselves, they are human. We may ignore our shared brokenness.

• We may fail to show concern, through our prayers and our money offering, for those whose lives are threatened or diminished.

• We may preach, sing and pray in ways that exclude, ignore or put down members of the worshipping community that do not fit in to the mainstream view of things. Those who are anguished may be unnamed; those who are in despair may be unacknowledged; those who are alone in spirit may be discouraged; those who are torn about decisions they have made or will have to make may be marginalized. The experiences of God these sisters and brothers of ours have in their difficulties may not be recognized or valued.

¹⁸ See Violence en Heritage? Réflexion pastorale sur la violence conjugale (Montréal: Comité des affaires sociales de l'Assemblée des évêques du Québec 1989) 31, 33, 35. This document states that the church has played a role in promoting patriarchy, a system which has promoted violence against women.
Inconsistencies in Liturgical Practice

Our liturgies may not always be consistent. What we preach and celebrate on one occasion may be forgotten on other occasions.

Children: For example, our Sunday celebrations may not always fully affirm the lives of children.

- We profess great regard for children before birth and at the time of their baptism; thereafter practice sometimes falters. Small children may not really be considered members of the church: they are denied communion (and confirmation) and often are considered unable to minister to others (yet they are wonderful ministers of hospitality, can help present the gifts, and can be ministers of music as well).

- The architecture of many church buildings is unfriendly to children; they cannot see well, and their need to move around is frustrated. They are uncomfortable in pews.

- Though some members of the congregation affirm and value the presence of children in worship, others may view small children more as real or potential sources of noise, disturbance and distraction. Sometimes our young sisters and brothers are exiled to cry-rooms; child care is rarely provided.

- We may fail to learn from our children: from their sense of awe, their need to be involved, to move and to worship with their whole bodies, their sensitivity to story and symbol.

- Children are again made much of when they reach the time for first communion, and later on the occasion of their confirmation. But otherwise they may rarely be addressed in preaching, often are not brought into the liturgical ministries, not provided with liturgies of the word adapted to their needs and gifts (when this is appropriate), and ignored as well by those who choose the music. Presiders and other ministers sometimes do not know how to speak with children, and small children may be treated in childish ways; teenagers may find the liturgy to be boring.

Women: A second inconsistency has to do with women. Liturgically, we devote special prayers to women at the time of their marriage, at the baptism of their children, when they profess the vows of religious life, are make abbesses, and when they consecrate their lives as virgins. However, these prayers tend to place women in a subordinant relationship to men,19 and need to be reworked. Lay women appear to be valued only when wives and mothers; single women and even married women without children appear to be of less worth.

- Prayers and family liturgies for use during pregnancy and after childbirth are not widely known or encouraged.20 Language may exclude women from full

19 See Janet Walton, "Ecclesiastical and feminist blessing: women as objects and subjects of the power of blessing," in Blessing and Power, edited by D. Power and M. Collins (Concilium 178) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1985) 73-80. Regarding the marriage liturgy, see Procter-Smith, "Reorganizing victimization."

participation, the experience of women may not be referred to in preaching or song, and in some places they are denied participation in liturgical ministries.

- Mothers – and fathers too – of small children sometimes do not feel entirely welcome at Sunday liturgies, and may feel pressured to keep their children quiet. When pregnant or as mothers, they may receive little support from the parish community for their spiritual, social and material needs. Unwed or single mothers may be shunned or made to feel unwanted, for example, when the traditional nuclear family is overstressed.

- Sexual abuse or physical violence within families is rarely spoken about, and victims may be often ignored or made to feel guilty; rarely are they helped. Patriarchy expressed within the church and the liturgy may be a contributing factor, but is seldom examined critically.²¹

- Those who seek public reconciliation after an abortion may not receive it. They may not be helped to come to terms with their experience, compassion may not be shown to them, they may not be allowed to offer what they have learned to the church community, they may not be accepted. Their experience may remain hidden and not spoken of; they may be made to feel unwanted in the church.

Improvements to be Made

To better affirm life: Finally, we may consider ways in which our Sunday liturgies can better affirm life. First, all of the problems and inconsistencies spoken of above need to be dealt with.

- Seating can be rearranged to better bring people together rather than separate them, and to be more accommodating to children and persons with disabilities.

- Generous and outgoing hospitality can be exercised by everyone as well as by those designated for this ministry; hospitality means caring for other people and letting them be themselves.

- Music will be hopeful and joyful and sung by all at a good tempo.

- Both beauty and silence will be valued.

- The liturgy will be well planned, and all ministers well prepared.

- The language of the penitential rite and reminder of baptism will speak about real life, not pious abstractions.

- The preaching will speak to the real lives of those present and to the real world they live in, a world full of both life and threats to life. It will avoid judgments and language that exclude persons; it will acknowledge the ambiguities and inconsistencies of real life.

- The general intercessions will be concrete and caring prayers for the real needs of individuals, our society, the world, and the church.

²¹ See Violence en Heritage? and Procter-Smith, "Reorganizing victimization."
• A substantial portion of the collection will go to concrete efforts to alleviate the threats to life listed above, and all will know how it is to be spent.

• Language will be inclusive, and the full participation of children and of women will be promoted.

• The sign of peace will be exchanged with warmth and genuine mutual care.

• The symbols will truly speak of life. The bread and wine will look like real food, and all will be offered the cup. Communion will be shared in a communal rather than individualistic manner.

• Announcements will indicate how the weekday life of the community affirms life.

• The sending forth will strengthen and affirm the real lives to which members of the congregation are returning, just as the gathering affirms the weekday lives they bring to the liturgy.

**Immense potential:** The Sunday worship of the Christian people has immense potential to affirm and promote life in a consistent way in the face of the myriad threats that surround human life today. We are called to be faithful to this gift of God and to celebrate our liturgies well.
The General Intercessions

In the general intercessions or prayer of the faithful, the people, exercising their priestly function, intercede for all humanity. It is appropriate that this prayer be included in all Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the Church, for civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all people, and for the salvation of the world.¹

Awareness of need: Do we live with our eyes and hearts open – or closed? Do we, individually and as a church community, see the needs of the church and world around us? Do we name the needs of the diverse members of the church, those of its many ministers, or its communal needs? Do we recognize the needs of the people with whom we come in contact daily, or those whom we hear or read about in the newspapers or on the radio/television news? Do we acknowledge the needs of our earth, sky, rivers, oceans?

Do we care? And if we do live with our eyes open, do we, as individuals and as church communities, really care? Does our heart go out to those burdened and in pain? Do we stand in solidarity with those who suffer economic, political or societal injustice? Do we minister to others in need? Do we commit ourselves and our community to do something about the needs we name?

We answer these questions, in part, through the general intercessions of our Sunday eucharistic liturgies.² These prayers have to do with seeing needs and responding to them. They constitute a vital part of our eucharistic celebration.

Importance of the Intercessions

The great importance of the general intercessions is shown by the way they are described as the people's priestly ministry, and by the location they have within the structure of the mass.

A Priestly People

The laity, the people of God, are described as "priestly" in two sections of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. One, quoted above, has to do with the general intercessions: "the people, exercising their priestly function, intercede for all humanity."

¹ General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), n. 45
Offering the eucharist: The second comes in a section entitled “Office and function of the people of God”: “In the celebration of Mass, the faithful are a holy people, a people God has made his own, a royal priesthood: they give thanks to the Father and offer the victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves.” Though this sentence begins by referring to the eucharistic liturgy as a whole, in the second part it refers more specifically to the eucharistic prayer.

Pinnacles of participation: The use of the language of priesthood for the laity in these two sections is very significant, and draws a parallel between the general intercessions and the eucharistic prayer. Both are pinnacles of the participation of the laity in the eucharistic liturgy as a whole.

Link between Word and Eucharist

Link, bridge, hinge: Within the structure of the eucharistic liturgy, the general intercessions come at the end of the liturgy of the word and immediately before the liturgy of the eucharist. They constitute a link between the two major parts of the mass, a bridge between them, a kind of hinge that joins them together. Their position also demonstrates that the general intercessions are an intrinsic part of the eucharistic liturgy, and not an intrusion or addition. Furthermore, because they are explicitly related to life outside the liturgical celebration, they place a link between liturgy and daily life right at the centre of the liturgy.

Integral to the Eucharistic Liturgy

The general intercessions are related to all four major parts of the eucharistic liturgy: gathering, word, eucharist, sending forth.

Gathering

The general intercessions are a response to the daily lives we live as Christians and as a Christian community. During the week we see and touch and talk with persons in need; we read and hear about such persons; we experience the common needs of our society and those of our environment. As ministering people, we also try to meet the needs of others, often knowing that we are unable to do all that is required. When we come to the eucharist on Sunday, we bring these experiences with us. In the general intercessions, we place them at the center of our liturgical celebration.

\[\text{GIRM, n. 62}\]
Word

Most immediately, the general intercessions are a response to the proclama­

tion and preaching of the word of God. Thus they are related to the other litur­
gical responses to the word: the periods of silent reflection that follow the first
and second readings and homily, the responsorial psalm after the first reading,
and the profession of faith. As the last response and indeed the conclusion of
the entire liturgy of the word, the general intercessions have a privileged place.

In the readings God speaks to us and Christ is present with us. We are com­
forted, challenged, called to love God and neighbor ever more faithfully, given
new vision to see life and the world in the way God intends. In the gospel sto­
ries we identify with the persons ministered to by Christ, with the disciples
whom Christ is training for ministry, and with Christ the servant of God himself.

The homily shows us that the ancient stories of God and humankind are our
stories today as well; the homily also invites and urges us to respond to God's
presence in our daily lives. We respond by trying to see the world, all of
humanity, and individual children, women and men as Christ did: with discern­
ment of their needs, with love, and with deep care. We respond, first of all, in
prayer: the general intercessions.

Presentation of the Gifts

Relationship to the collection: The general intercessions are closely related
to the collection, which immediately follows these prayers. Though convention­
al­ly one is part of the liturgy of the word and the other part of the liturgy of the
eucharist, it is also valid to view the intercessions and the collection as a sin­
gle liturgical unit that bridges these two major elements of the liturgy. In the
general intercessions we name and pray for the needs of the church and the
world; in the collection we give our material resources – usually, money – to
help meet these needs in concrete ways. We not only talk about these needs;
we immediately act as well – we do something about them.

When collections are smaller than they might be, we might ask these two
questions: Are the general intercessions forceful enough? Does the collection
meet the needs of the community? Does part of the collection indeed go to
meet needs outside the community, and do the people know this?

Eucharistic Prayer

Creation: The general intercessions lead to the eucharistic prayer. Through our
petitions we show that we care for the sky, seas, and earth. In the eucharistic
prayer we thank God for giving us creation, and by doing so remind ourselves
whose marvellous work it is and in what high regard we ought to hold it.

The cry of the oppressed: We have prayed for children, women and men
who experience every kind of need, who suffer all sorts of oppression. In the
eucharistic prayer we give thanks to God for being with our ancestors in the
faith in their needs and oppressions. We recall that the story of the exodus
begins with the cry to God of the enslaved people of Israel in Egypt.
We thank God especially for Jesus Christ, who became human and in his ministry saw and listened to persons in need, cared for them, helped them and ministered to them, spoke on their behalf. In his suffering and death he identified with all who suffer oppression. In him the reign of God, when there will be no more tears, was already present, though yet to come in its fullness.

All this gives us great hope. We know that God has heard the cry of the needy in the past, and we are confident that God will hear our prayers for the oppressed today. In the eucharist we experience the sacrament of Christ's presence with us and with everyone in need, the sacrament of his self-giving for others.

Transformation: In the eucharistic prayer we also invoke the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. We who share in the eucharistic meal ask to be transformed in order to serve others in the name and spirit of Christ and to prepare for his reign.

The reign of God: In the eucharistic prayer (and in the Lord's Prayer that follows) we pray for the coming of God's reign – for the end of pain and tears and the fulfillment of God's dream for humanity and the world. We envision and anticipate an alternative to the present world in which there is too much oppression and need.

Communion Rite

Solidarity and celebration: Communion is both a sign of solidarity with those in need and a celebration of the reign of God. Though a feast of heavenly food, we eat only a morsel of bread, drink only a sip of wine. We stand in solidarity with those who experience physical hunger, and with those whose hungers are for freedom and justice and everything else that constitutes human life with dignity. The sign of peace and the real presence of Christ let us experience a foretaste of God's reign, when all will be fully satisfied.

Sending Forth

Sent to serve: As the conclusion to our Sunday worship, we are sent forth to encounter those in need, to pray for them and try to minister to them. We are sent forth in peace, and with God's blessing. Both point to the future reign or kingdom of God, in which there will be perfect peace and the fullness of blessing.

Integral and vital: The general intercessions thus are neither an intrusion into the rest of the eucharistic liturgy, nor are they an option that can be omitted for a trivial reason. Instead, these prayers are an integral and vital part of our Sunday celebrations.
General Intercessions and Prayer of the Faithful

Two names: The General Instruction of the Roman Missal gives two names for these prayers: general intercessions, and prayer of the faithful. The first describes their content ("general") and genre (intercessions, that is prayers for the needs of others). The English term "general intercessions" renders the Latin *oratio universalis*; this tells us that "general" here does not mean vague or abstract, but rather universal or all-encompassing.

Prayer of the people: The title "prayer of the faithful" names the principal ministers and participants in this prayer, the priestly people of God. Other churches call these prayers the prayer of the people, or prayer of the church, to communicate the same idea.

Structure

The general intercessions have a three-fold structure.

- a brief and simple invitation to prayer
- the intercessions or intentions themselves
- a concluding collect, asking God to receive our prayers.

Ministry

The invitation and concluding prayer are said by the presider. (Of course the people respond Amen at the end of the prayer.)

Leader and people: The intercessions themselves are introduced by a leader, but really are the prayer of the "faithful." Traditionally the leader was the deacon, but today usually will be a lay man or woman. In the ancient church intentions were proposed by the deacon because it was his ministry to know the needs of the local and wider community and to provide leadership in responding to these needs. Today, the equivalent ministry may well be carried out by lay people.

Acclamation or response: Though intentions are proposed or enunciated by a leader, the actual prayer is carried out by the assembly. This is done through the peoples' acclamation or response to the intentions.

Preparation: The intercessions may be composed by the lay or diaconal leader, or by a group of persons charged with this responsibility. Pastoral ministers and persons in social justice ministries should be asked for their contributions. (This is a good way for liturgical and social justice ministers to work together.)
Content

The content of the general intercessions is described in slightly different ways in different places:

- for the Church, for civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all people, and for the salvation of the world.  

- for the needs of the Church, for public authorities and the salvation of the world, for those oppressed by any need, for the local community. In particular celebrations, such as confirmations, marriages, funerals, etc., the series of intercessions may refer more specifically to the occasion.

- for the needs of the universal Church and the local community, for the salvation of the world and those oppressed by any burden, and for special categories of people.

- for the needs of the Church universal, for national or world affairs, for those beset by poverty or tribulation, for the congregation and members of the local community, and appropriate intentions at such celebrations as weddings or funerals.

These alternative descriptions are substantially the same. These general categories of course have to be made concrete for actual liturgical use.

All four categories: In each celebration one or more than one intention in each major category (universal church, world, oppressed persons, local community) will be included. At special liturgies such as weddings and funerals, other appropriate intentions will be added, but these will not replace the four basic categories.

Composing the Intercessions

The composition of the individual intercessions involves three steps:

- getting ideas: that is, discerning the needs
- writing these out in an appropriate form
- checking for balance
- being ready for last minute changes.

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4 GIRM, n. 45
5 GIRM, n. 46
6 General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, n. 30
7 See footnote 2, nos. 9, 10
Discernment of Needs

The ideas for the concrete needs for which the community will pray may come from a number of sources:

- pastoral ministry in the parish and community
- the scripture readings of the Sunday
- newspapers and news broadcasts
- individual members of the parish
- systematic lists ("calendars of prayer")
- printed intercessions prepared by other persons.

Discerning the needs: Each week those responsible for preparing the general intercessions for the following Sunday have to discern the specific needs that will be presented for the prayer of the priestly people. This has to be done locally; persons from outside the community, no matter how well intentioned or how skillful, cannot relieve each parish of its responsibility for preparing its own intercessions.

Prepared each week: The intentions also have to be prepared during the week immediately preceding the Sunday at which they will be prayed; they have to deal with current needs. Leaders of the intercessions should also be open to the possibility that intentions prepared earlier in the week may have to be updated on Sunday morning in the light of developments in the life of the church and world in the days since their preparation.

Printed resources can provide ideas and suggest good ways of presenting the intentions. Inasmuch as they have been prepared by persons outside the community and composed weeks or months or even years in advance, however, they are not suitable for use simply as printed.

The Universal Church

A broad view of church: The intentions for the church outside our own parish may be based on considerations of geography, ministry, variety of persons in the church, ecumenism, and contemporary needs. The last category has to depend on the current news. The others may also be based on recent activities and developments, but may also be derived, in whole or in part, from a more systematic listing sometimes called a calendar of prayer. This divides possible needs into 52 sections, for the Sundays of the year.

- An aid to drawing up a parish calendar of prayer is the booklet, Preparing for Prayer, which was composed to promote parish prayer during the year prior to the papal visit to Canada. Note, however, that it contains prayers of thanks as well as of petition.

* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1983)
A geographical approach: The needs of the church may be thought of in geographical terms. Naming the church in all the countries of the world, all the dioceses of our own nation, and all the parishes of our diocese (except our own) tells us about the scope of the universal church, helps us stand in solidarity with other Catholic Christians near and far, and helps to give us a global rather than local perspective. It may be assumed that all geographical manifestations of the church have needs, though we may not be aware of their details. For example:

- For the Church in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.
- For the People of God of the dioceses of Montreal and Saint-Jerome.
- For our sisters and brothers of the parishes of Sacred Heart in Edmonton; Holy Cross in Grand Cache, and its missions of Our Lady of the Rockies in Suza Creek, and St Clare in Redwater.

In such a listing, the Eastern Catholic churches should not be forgotten:

- For the People of God of the Maronite eparchy of Canada and the Greek-Melkite and Armenian exarchates.
- For the People of God of the Ukrainian Catholic eparchy of Toronto and for the eparchy for Slovaks of the Byzantine Rite in Canada.

Many ministries: The intentions for the universal church may also be thought of in terms of the many ministries, ordained and lay, that are exercised in the church today. These can be listed and prayed for in a systematic fashion, or as seems appropriate. For example:

- For those who are engaged in ministries of reconciliation between people, both within Canadian society and in the Canadian Church.
- For bishops, priests and deacons in Canada and throughout the world.
- For theologians, and teachers in Catholic schools and catechetical programs.

Members of the church: The various kinds of people who are members of the church may also be prayed for in a somewhat systematic manner. For example:

- For all who prepare for ordained and lay ministries in the Church.
- For all students.
- For all those who see you (God) only dimly and who find it difficult to pray.
- For those members of the church who are faithful in difficult marriages.

Ecumenical: The Church of Jesus Christ is also manifested in the various Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches. They too, including the parish next door, may be mentioned in prayer. For example:

- For the Anglican Communion, especially the Anglican Church of Canada.
- For all the Pentecostal churches in our country and around the world.
**Contemporary needs:** Finally, the daily news presents us with many concrete needs of the church. The following headlines and advertisements from the April 30 issue of the *Western Catholic Reporter* give grounds for prayer:

- Vatican rep signs U.N. convention on children's rights
- Czech president calls pope's visit a miracle
- Responsible roles for Catholic youth urged
- Ex-brother sentenced for molesting boys
- Summer school for liturgical musicians
- Birthright cares for those who are pregnant and distressed
- Pastoral Council adopts mission statement
- Focus on poor, Mexican priests ask pope.

From all of these – and other – possible needs of the universal church, a few will be chosen for next Sunday's general intercessions.

**National and World Affairs**

**Social, political, economic and environmental needs** and concerns may be presented in the intentions. For example: good weather, good fishing and safety from storms, fertile soil and plentiful harvests; elections, leaders of government, pending legislation, public policies, the system of taxation; just wages, the just settlement of labor-management disputes, better economic relations between rich and poor nations; freedom for those oppressed, a humane justice and prison system, liberation of hostages, etc. Both national and international concerns ought to be named.

The following stories from the May 10 issue of the *Edmonton Journal* give ideas for intercessions:

- Plastics pile up as recycling venture bogs down
- Jail guards walk out today
- East German unemployment nearly doubles
- Growing South Korean strife
- Parole board chief calls for open hearings
- Prime Minister seeks advice on Meech.

**Oppressed Persons**

**Poverty and tribulation:** Intercessions are also lifted up for those beset by poverty or tribulation. This category of intentions might include the sick, infirm and dying, prisoners, exiles, orphans, widows, the unemployed, single parents, abused children and women, those enslaved by unjust political or eco-
onomic systems, the unborn, etc. The following stories from the May 10 Edmonton Journal suggest needs for the general intercessions:

- Doctors race to save baby turned down for heart surgery
- Disability costs manager his job
- Research helps epileptics control convulsions
- More than 500 gather to mourn death of children
- More Native Mounties needed
- Board approves material on child abuse.

The Local Community

This category has to do with the local church community (parish). The sick and bereaved members of the parish should be mentioned, as might parish ministers (lay as well as ordained), those preparing for or celebrating special sacraments, others with special needs, the needs of the community as a whole.

The General Intercessions as a Litany

The general intercessions most commonly take the form of a litany. Each intention usually concludes with a "cue" that leads to the congregation's prayerful response.

Intentions

The intentions usually take one of three closely related forms:

- For..., that....

For all pregnant women, that they and their children may receive support, love and welcome in their families and society.

For men and women in positions of political leadership, or who aspire to such positions: leaders of nations, provinces, cities, political parties, unions, neighborhood groups – that they may truly have the interests of people in mind, and understanding and tolerance for their opponents.

For the people of God in Quebec City, Montreal, and Toronto, that their new archbishops will facilitate growth, openness, and the implementation of the best insights of Vatican II.

For all who have to make difficult decisions: political leaders, civil servants, voters, parents, young people, school boards, negotiators in labor disputes, and others – that God will grant them both wisdom and common sense.
• For....

For children caught up in war, poverty, discrimination, famine and disease, in El Salvador, Lebanon, Kampuchea, Ethiopia, South Africa, and elsewhere.

For women who have just been diagnosed with breast cancer, those receiving treatment, those who are dying or have died from this disease; for spouses, children and friends; and for the nurses, physicians and other health care workers who care for them.

For all women and men who cannot find work or whose gifts, training or education are ignored by society or church.

For all who suffer from natural disasters, terrorism, warfare, societal divisions, or family conflict.

For those who grow the bread we eat, as they face poor weather for harvest, problems in storing and transporting their grain, and poor prices; and for those who have lost or will soon lose their farms.

• That....

That progress toward free societies in Eastern Europe will be rapid, peaceful, and just.

That all who lack adequate food or shelter this winter will receive proper care.

That we and all persons will open our hearts to others and not close them in intolerance, racism, anti-semitism and other forms of hatred and bigotry.

That the release of Nelson Mandela from prison will lead to peace with justice in South Africa.

Because there has already been an invitation to prayer, and because either the cue or response, or both, often contain the words “pray” or “prayer”, it is not necessary to begin each intention with “Let us pray . . .”. For emphasis, if desired, this might be said at the beginning of the first intention only, or not at all.

The Cue

A common cue used to conclude the intention and invite the response of the congregation, is “We pray to the Lord.” However, it may be simply “We pray.” Alternatively, such phrases as “We pray to our God,” “We trust in you, O God,” “Our hope is in you,” or “We have faith in you, Lord,” may be used.

A standard cue and response that go together is “Lord, in your mercy . . . hear our prayer.”

The same cue need not be used every Sunday, but whatever is said must be clear to the congregation.
The Congregational Response

A common congregational response is “Lord, hear our prayer.” Others that might be used include: “Lord, have mercy;” “Help us to be like Christ;” “Open our eyes to your deeds;” “God is kind and merciful;” “for you have done great things for us;” etc.

Language

**Forceful:** The intercessions should be written in language that shows that we have seen the need and care deeply about it, and in language that moves us to respond to the need in prayer and in action.

**Concrete:** The language of the intercessions should be concrete rather than vague, forceful rather than weak, and caring rather than neutral. It will be inclusive with respect to children, women and men.

**For clarity and force** each intention usually should be brief and straightforward; any possible confusion or uncertainty should be avoided. Intentions should not “preach,” but state needs clearly and invite the prayer of all the people.

**No bias:** Especially when the “For . . . that . . .” or “That . . .” form is used, it is important to avoid showing bias or offering simplistic solutions. For example, if there is a strike, pray for persons on both sides, not just one. Pray simply for peace with justice, rather than offering political or economic solutions to very complex problems, especially when members of the congregation, in all good faith, hold differing positions.

Balance

**Evaluate the intentions:** One often thinks of far more needs than will be appropriate for the general intercessions on a given Sunday. As another step in the advance preparation of written intercessions, therefore, it is necessary to look over and evaluate the list of intentions.

- Are all four traditional categories (universal church, world, oppressed people, local community) represented?

- Within the proposed intentions, is there a reasonable balance among the four traditional categories? There need not be an equal number of intentions in each category, but there probably should not be too much of an imbalance unless there is a very good reason.

- Is there a reasonable variety and balance of intentions over the course of time? To pray for the same need every Sunday may indeed be appropriate if this represents the state of the church or world. Alternatively, such repetition may simply mean that those preparing the general intercessions are falling into a rut, or that they have only a narrow view of needs, or that they are imposing their own concerns on the congregation. Be careful!

Even when it is appropriate to pray repeatedly, for example, for justice and peace in the Middle East (or Northern Ireland, or South Africa), the ways such
intentions are phrased may be varied each Sunday, in order to touch upon various concrete expressions of the needs of these regions. One might, for example, speak on different Sundays about the children, the women, the police and military personnel, the social and economic consequences, refugees and exiles, those seeking peace and liberation, etc.

Adding Intentions

An opportunity might be provided for members of the congregation at large to indicate needs that they would like to be included in the general intercessions. They might be invited to telephone someone, for example.

Last minute additions: Often, however, they will bring these needs to church with them on Sunday morning. Some churches have a book in the narthex in which people can write, for example, the names of sick persons for whom they seek the community’s prayers. Alternatively, index cards might be available. Or the person leading the intentions might be available in the narthex before the liturgy begins.

The leader’s response: Sometimes, as with the names of the sick, these new concerns can be added to the intention for the sick that has already been prepared. In other cases, if there is great urgency, a new intention should be composed. In some cases the need can wait to be expressed until the following Sunday. Finally, there might be a general intention, such as "For other needs that are known to us privately."

Spontaneous Intercessions

Unknown needs: In some communities it is the custom for the leader to invite spontaneous intercessions from the community, after she or he has completed the intentions that have been prepared ahead of time. This shows that the general intercessions are indeed the prayer of the priestly people and permits the mentioning of needs of which the leader (and others responsible for preparing the intentions) were simply not aware.

Audibility is important: Members of the congregation need to learn the importance of the general intercessions, need to be sensitive to needs around them, and need to be taught how to present them to the congregation. In addition, these intentions need to be heard by the rest of the congregation. Thus people need to speak loudly, or use a microphone, or relay their intentions to the leader, who can repeat them. Sometimes, therefore, the use of spontaneous intentions is effective only when there is a small congregation.

In inviting spontaneous intentions, the leader should never say, “You are invited to add your own intentions.” This implies that all the other intentions are not “your own” intentions, which is not true (or should not be true). It is better to say something like, “You are now invited to add (Please add) other intentions.”

An alternative to spontaneous intentions, especially when these cannot be heard throughout the assembly, is to conclude the prepared intentions by saying something like, “For other needs carried in our hearts.” After a moment of silence, the leader says the customary cue, leading to the community’s response.
Theological Reflections on the General Intercessions

The general intercessions are prayers in which we bring before God many concrete needs of the church, the world, oppressed persons, and our local community. Sometimes, however, vague and abstract intentions are preferred while concrete and forceful ones are considered inappropriate. Why might this be?

Resistance to Strong Intercessions

Published intercessions: One possible reason for resistance to forceful intercessions is the influence of the published prayers that are so prevalent and so often used. These are necessarily rather abstract in nature. If really concrete intentions were composed, they would be dated when published some time later, and publishers therefore do not wish to use these. The publication of intercessions, especially when they accompany other mass texts, gives them a semiofficial status and suggests that they are meant for use. People are not aware that they are only models, and publishers may not be entirely clear about this either. In addition, they are easy to use and require no real effort on the part of priests and lay persons. Priests and laity may not be aware of other ways of composing the intentions. If publishers really wanted to print texts that are models, they would be intentions that could not actually be used, but which would stimulate parishes to compose their own.

Threaten and disturb: A second possible reason is that forceful intentions may threaten or disturb the tranquil life of the parish community and its individual members. Parishes and individuals that are closed in upon themselves, not aware – at least as Christians – of the world around them and its needs, may not want their general intercessions to be too concrete. Parishes and individuals that are not conscious of their call to ministry in the church and world may not want their intentions to be too concrete – that might be threatening. Such communities of course need to be disturbed and threatened.

Sacrilege: A third possible reason is that concrete intercessions may, at some deep level, be perceived to be a kind of sacrilege. It may be considered inappropriate to bring the concrete and often unpleasant needs of daily life into what is thought of as the sacred realm of the Sunday liturgy. This of course represents a dualistic division of sacred and secular, holy and profane, liturgy and life that has roots in tradition, but is no longer seen to be valid or healthy. Because feelings of sacrilege operate at relatively deep levels of our consciousness, and because they also affect other areas of liturgy (for example, arrangement of seating, music, decoration, lay ministries, perception of the priest’s role, lay participation in general), this needs to be named and discussed explicitly. Feelings of sacrilege may also inhibit mention of certain needs of the church, for example, sexual abuse by clergy and religious.
Prayers of Intercession

What are we doing: It is well also to reflect on the meaning of the general intercessions at a deeper level. What are we really doing? What do we imply about God, the church, and the world?

A simplistic view of prayers of intercession might be something like this. "OK, God, here is a problem. Please fix it." But rarely is the problem "fixed" in the way that we might imagine or as quickly as we would like.

We believe that God already knows all the needs that we lift up in the general intercessions – and many more besides. We believe that God does not intend that the world be a place of calamity, oppression, sickness and sin. We believe that God respects human freedom, and we know that only rarely does God intervene in nature to perform "miracles". We cannot seriously believe that our prayers change God, jog God's memory, or cause God to be better or more kind.

And yet we continue to pray in intercession for others, and scripture tells us to do so without ceasing. What a great mystery! In these prayers we express our belief that God is present and active as the ground and origin of the continuing reality of everything in the world. We manifest our faith and trust in God, and our desire to deepen our relationship with God. We symbolize our solidarity before God; what is given to each of us is to be shared by us all as far as possible. Our intercessions are our response to the action of God's grace acting in us, and lead to God's further response to our prayer.9

Prayers For Our Own Conversion

In part, the general intercessions are directed to ourselves. They call us to change, they remind us of needs, they ask us to be better and more kind – and they ask God to give us grace to undergo these kinds of conversion. In this regard the general intercessions are doing a number of things simultaneously.

• We name needs and the many causes of pain and oppression. In doing so we are honest about our church, our society, and our world. We describe needs as they are; we do not pretend that things are better (or worse) than they actually are. Only by naming – uncovering, disclosing – needs can we begin to deal with them.

• We call forth an alternative vision of church, society and world. This is not done directly, but indirectly. Each time we name a need, we surely have in mind its opposite. If we name sickness, we envision health; enslavement, freedom; poverty, life with dignity; ignorance, education. We believe that it is this alternative vision that God intends, that this dream for humanity and the world is what will be experienced in God's reign or kingdom. This gives us hope.

• At times, naming the needs of the church and world may in part be our confession that we are part of the problem; that we have contributed to the prob-

9 For a more extensive discussion of this subject, see for example, John H. Wright, A Theology of Christian Prayer (New York: Pueblo Press 1979) chapter 5
lem either actively or by not acting. The general intercessions may be a way of making reparation and asking forgiveness.

° We increase our awareness of needs close to home and around the world. Our minds become better educated, our hearts become more sensitive, our perspective becomes more global.

° We pray not only as individuals but as a community. We build our parish up as a Christian community that is dedicated to help others outside the parish. Some of the needs prayed for should find their way on the agenda of the parish council and into the parish budget.

° We commit ourselves, individually and as a community, to do what we can to alleviate the sufferings of others. It would take a cold heart indeed to ignore the pains and wrongs and problems that we name in the general intercessions — if they are well done. The authentic and generous Christian response is always: how can we help?

When there is something concrete to do locally to respond to a need, then we are called to do it. This may be taking food to a bereaved family next door, but it might also be calling city hall or Catholic social services, or a volunteer agency.

The needs we name in far away places may remind us of similar needs in our own community (inadequate food, shelter, clothing, health care, for example), and lead us to action at the local level. They may also lead us to greater support of Development and Peace and other agencies that support international development and aid. As well, they may make us more concerned about the international policies and activities of our own governments, about global political and economic matters, and about the United Nations.

° We stand in solidarity with persons in need. We know that they exist, that those who suffer are our brothers and sisters in God's creation, and sometimes sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ as well. We are united with them. If they suffer, so do we.

° We are the voice, in this time and place, of those who suffer; we speak for them, we speak on their behalf. And so we speak boldly and forcefully about the ills of the world and the church. And this may lead us to be the voice of oppressed persons in our society as well.

° We lament with persons in need. The prayers of lament in the psalms are increasingly being seen as an important pattern for contemporary prayer as well.10 Prayers of sadness and desolation are important too.

**God's Response to Our Prayers**

We ask God the many specific things expressed in the intercessions. In a more general way, we especially ask God to change hearts.

° To change our own hearts, individually and as a parish and universal church. To call us to conversion, give us new vision, and give us wisdom to discern how we are to respond to the needs we have named.

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• To give strength, comfort, peace, and courage to persons in need; to move their hearts to hope and even joy in spite of oppression; to heal spirits even when bodies sicken.

• To change the hearts of those who cause or contribute (intentionally or unintentionally) to the sufferings of others; to call them to conversion and give them new vision and wisdom.

• To give wisdom and compassion to those with authority and power in the church, society and the world, so that they will do everything they can to alleviate and prevent suffering.

Implications and Assumptions

The general intercessions say much about our understanding of God, the church, and the world. What are some of their implications?

• Our God cares about every person who suffers, about suffering in institutions, societies and the church, and as well, about wounds suffered by our earth. God is not indifferent or so distant that these needs are not seen. The trinity is a model of the mutual love, respect and care that humans should show to each other.

• Jesus Christ is present in all who are in need, and as well in those who care for others (Matthew 25). As Paul VI put it:

   He is present in his Church as it performs works of mercy, not only because we do to Christ whatever good we do to one of the least of his brothers and sisters, but also because it is Christ, performing these works through the Church, who continually assists by his divine charity."  

In the general intercessions Christ is present as servant who goes around helping persons in need, as priest who prays to God on behalf of the oppressed, as prophet who names and denounces the causes of suffering, as crucified who identifies totally with those who suffer, as risen to lead us to the alternative vision of his dominion.

• Though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly, it is only in the Spirit that we can pray as we ought.

• The Church is very much in the world; it — we — knows that there is oppression, cares about those who suffer, and acts to alleviate needs. In Christ, the church too is servant, priest, prophet, crucified, and points to God's future reign. The church admits that it too has needs, and that it is an imperfect pilgrim people, a flawed community. It confesses, but also moves forward in joy and hope.

• The general intercessions tell us that this life — human life in the present world — is important. We not only look forward to a future life in God's presence, where there will be no more tears, but also to a better life in this world. We are not resigned to suffering and oppression, though we know that the world will never be perfect this side of God's reign.

11 Mysterium Fidei, n. 35. Documents on the Liturgy, 176:1179
• Human persons are viewed holistically; their whole persons are important socially and religiously, not just their souls.

The general intercessions, if well done, teach us much about fundamental theology and about the Christian life. Let us have ears to hear.

Daily Prayers of Intercession

Not just on Sunday: Prayer for the needs of the universal church, the world, oppressed persons, and the local community need not be confined to the Sunday eucharist. Prayer for those in need should be part of the everyday prayer of every Christian.

The daily news: Just as the newspapers and news broadcasts on radio and television are an important source of ideas for the Sunday general intercessions, the daily news may also be a source of inspiration for our daily prayers. There would seem to be no news story or editorial – or even advertisement – that does not speak of someone's need, either explicitly or implicitly.

Reading the newspaper, or listening/watching the news on radio or television, then, can become a theological exercise, an important part of our daily prayer life. It can be an extension of last Sunday’s eucharistic liturgy into our daily lives, and a preparation for next Sunday’s eucharist as well. If members of a family, or of a religious community, or several friends watch the news together, or are reading the paper at the same time, news-inspired prayers can become shared or communal prayer.
Other Notes

Obituary: David R. Newman

The Reverend David R. Newman, minister of the United Church of Canada and professor of Public Worship and Preaching at Emmanuel College, Toronto, died January 24, 1990. He was a leader in liturgy education and liturgical renewal in the United Church, and was active in ecumenical-liturgical activities in Canada and North America. He was married and had two children.

David Newman was educated at the University of Toronto, Emmanuel College, the University of Tubingen, and received a doctorate in systematic theology from St Michael's College, Toronto. He was active in the North American Academy of Liturgy and was on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Liturgical Society.

Within the United Church of Canada he served on many committees dealing with worship and liturgical renewal, and contributed to the recently published service books for Sunday worship (word and eucharist), baptism, marriage and funerals. He also had a great interest in liturgical space and environment. Among his publications are "Worship in the United Church of Canada," (Worship, 1979); As Often As You Do this: Toward More Frequent Celebration of the Lord's Supper in the United Church (United Church 1981); A Guide to Sunday Worship, with A. Barthel and P. Wilson (United Church 1988); and Worship as Praise and Empowerment (Pilgrim Press 1988).

May he enjoy the heavenly liturgies.

Bibliographical Aids

Two helpful bibliographies in the area of liturgy have appeared recently.


Entries are restricted to books and articles published in the English language since 1979.

Publisher's address: The Revd T. R. Barker, Alcuin Club Treasurer, All Saints Vicarage, Highlands Road, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 4PS, England.


This very extensive listing covers the liturgical literature in all languages through 1982.

Publisher's address: The Scarecrow Press, 52 Liberty Street, PO Box 656, Metuchen, New Jersey 08840, U. S. A.
Recent Ecumenical-Liturgical Publications


As a further step forward in ecumenical convergence regarding baptism, the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) presents its work on a common baptismal liturgy. As an agreed liturgy prepared by an ecumenical-liturgical body whose members come from seventeen churches in Canada and the United States, it stands as a concrete expression and sign of the churches’ belief in “one baptism,” and as well is an expression of the liturgical and theological convergence and consensus regarding baptism. This liturgy is proposed as a symbol of baptismal unity, for study by all churches, and for liturgical use, where this is authorized by individual churches.


Several common liturgical texts are used in translations that have been agreed upon by the major Christian churches throughout the English-speaking world. These texts include the Gloria, the creeds, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, Magnificat and seven others. Originally published between 1970 and 1975, the churches have recently proposed revisions and improvements in the English translations. These have been considered by the international, ecumenical organization, the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), on which the Roman Catholic Church in Canada is represented. Its recommendations are published in this booklet. Some texts remain unchanged, while revisions are proposed in others. Valuable notes on the Greek and/or Latin originals and on the English translations are included. At present the ELLC texts remain proposals; individual churches have yet to adopt them officially.


This is a wonderful resource for increasing consciousness of the global nature of the Christian church, and for enriching the general intercessions of the Sunday eucharist. In volume 1 the countries of the world are divided into 52 groups. For each group helpful information is provided regarding the countries being considered, and about the Christian churches there. This is followed by a fine and varied collection of intercessions and prayers both from each group of countries and having to do with their life and needs.

Volume 2 provides thirteen complete noneucharistic services, for Advent, Pentecost, Justice and Peace and other occasions and themes. These include prayers and music from different churches and countries around the world.

If not available locally, this set may be ordered from the Anglican Book Centre, 600 Jarvis Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2J6, the Canadian agent for World Council of Churches publications.

This book brings together what many have too often experienced as separate realms — liturgy and social justice. The authors (who are from Edmonton, Alberta) are not the first ones to explore this area; after all, we have just finished celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the American Benedictine, Virgil Michel. Writers have been addressing this topic in different parts of the world. The authors of this book draw on their own broad experience and knowledge together with that of many others, and gather a wealth of information into an easily accessible format for clergy and laity, including those without formal studies in liturgy or social justice.

The cover description says that is a "brief, practical book." That is exactly what it is. However, it is really three books in one.

First, it is a book about the justice dimensions of the liturgy. The text starts with the basic issue of liturgy and social justice, and then has chapters based on the major elements of Sunday worship — Gathering, the Word, Baptism, Eucharist, and Sending Forth.

Second, it is a wide ranging anthology of quotations from authors ranging from Justin Martyr to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, together with descriptions of the experiences of individuals and communities all over the world related to liturgy and justice. Also included are specific recommendations for further study, as well as an extensive bibliography.

Finally, it is a workbook, leading the reader to do what the subtitle suggests, "integrating vision and practice." On almost every page of the book, readers are asked to evaluate specific elements of their Sunday worship experience, to name what in the experience needs to be affirmed and supported, and what needs to be improved or changed. At each point, both verbal and nonverbal dimensions are explored. Also included are very concrete suggestions under the title, "If you have energy for just one area, start here." Another feature of the book is a series of reflection questions, which start with symbols and experiences in the liturgy and connect these with life outside the liturgy.

All three "books" are integrated together, so each page addresses a specific topic, lists the relevant quotes and resources, and leads back to the lived experience of worship and day to day life outside of the liturgy.

The method of the book is to start with the traditional liturgy as it has emerged in the "mainline" denominations. Reference is made frequently to Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and United Church liturgical books, as well as the Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry document of the World Council of Churches. This ecumenical dimension will be both invigorating and challenging to many Roman Catholic readers. Too often Roman Catholics see their eucharistic liturgy as existing apart from the liturgy of other denominations. We seldom experience the liturgies of other denominations, and even less take time to study them. Reading various churches' liturgical texts and experiences helps us realize the rich Christian liturgical tradition that we all have drawn from. As more Christian congregations are working from a relatively common lectionary, this ecumenical awareness becomes even more important.

The authors do not try to bring social justice concerns into the liturgy from the outside. Rather, their approach is that the justice dimension is already at the very center of the liturgy, although this may not always be realized or celebrated. For example, from the days of
the early church baptism has been seen as a celebration involving a radical justice commitment. The authors are cautious about "using" the liturgy to advance specific concerns or issues.

This book does have limited goals. Liturgists seeking an in-depth exposition of the various liturgical points will not find it here. Many social activists have come to see regular Sunday worship as inflexible and not relevant to the living out of a social justice commitment in today's world. There is a major trend among activists to gather in free flowing non-eucharistic worship experiences, often ecumenical, which strive to be more connected to modern day working for justice. This book does not seek to address this issue in an explicit manner. The main thrust of the book is to encourage everyone, including social activists, to look again with new eyes at traditional Christian worship. Readers may be surprised to see how widely the justice dimension of the liturgy extends. The obvious points of homilies and prayers of intercession are included, but attention is directed also to greeting at the door, seating arrangements, the language used, the role of children, the water used in baptism and many other points.

The vast majority of people who read this book will read it individually. However, those who take the reflection and action questions seriously are apt to become frustrated pretty quickly. Liturgical experiences are community experiences, and liturgical changes are not easily made by individuals, even by those in authority in hierarchical settings. To take full advantage of this book, some ongoing group reflection/action process within a worshipping community would be needed. A fascinating experiment would be to have such a group include liturgical as well as social service and action ministers in a worshipping community. This book would facilitate and focus the conversation.

People exercising specific ministries (e.g., hospitality, leading prayer of intercession, baptism preparation, lectors, acolytes) will find specific material helpful to their ministries.

There is much about justice and worship that this book does not and probably cannot address. If a congregation is experiencing serious injustice in the midst of its community life, this will show up in its liturgical life. For Roman Catholics, for example, until the unresolved and painful issues concerning the role of women in the life of the church are resolved, the justice dimensions of Sunday worship can only partially be realized.

For some, the basic message will be self-evident, and the book itself appear redundant. The movie "Romero" has recently been released. There is a scene when the Archbishop of San Salvador, a man exercising a prophetic justice ministry, is gunned down as he completes the prayer over the wine within the eucharistic prayer. The movie scene captures the historical event which occurred ten years ago. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. The film is worth seeing. However, it is important also to read and reflect on the thousand (plus) words. This book makes a major contribution to this reflection.

Reviewed by Bob McKeon. For many years he was coordinator of the social justice commission of the archdiocese of Edmonton, and has taught social justice and liberation theology at Newman Theological College, St Stephen's College, and St Joseph's College, Edmonton. At present he is on leave, doing doctoral studies in Toronto.
ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council called for a revision of the funeral rites so that they more clearly express the mystery of Christian death and correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions of various regions (see Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 81). The Ordo Exsequiarum was issued in 1969. The English text was prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and was issued the same year. In 1973 an adapted text was prepared for use in Canada.

Following a broad consultation, the bishops' conferences around the English-speaking world asked ICEL to provide an updated and expanded edition of the funeral rites. The Order of Christian Funerals was approved by the Canadian bishops in 1986 and the text was subsequently confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship.

The new Canadian edition includes extensive pastoral notes, complete rites for adults and for children, and a great number of texts to be used in special circumstances (e.g., tragic death, suicide, cremation). New rites for the first pastoral visit following death, rites for gathering in the presence of the body and for the transfer of the body to the church are included. The Canadian edition also includes nine models for the liturgy of the word and two models for evening prayer to be used during the vigil for the deceased.

Pastors, liturgy committees, musicians, ministers who lead or take part in the vigils for the deceased and funeral liturgies, funeral directors, and those who work with bereaved individuals and families will find this edition a carefully arranged pastoral resource for the celebration of Christian death.

XVI + 436 pages, 19 x 27 cm, two colours, quality paper, strongly bound, 3 ribbons: $24.95

Available now from Publications Service (CCCB), 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1.
Upcoming Conferences

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE
ON CULTURAL AWARENESS IN LITURGY

A conference designed to explore the serious issue of inculturation in the liturgy is scheduled for November 13-20, 1990 in Rome.

Conference organizers hope to discuss ways in which people of various colors and cultural backgrounds might best be able to remain authentically Catholic while still bringing to the liturgy those special gifts which God has bestowed on each race of people. The conference is also designed to give all those interested in liturgy a deeper understanding of the cultural backgrounds which help form the religious traditions of the universal family of God.

Speakers include His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze of the Holy See, Bishop Wilton Gregory of the Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy (USCC), Fathers Ronald F. Krisman, Murray J. Kroetsch, Tran Van Kha, and Cuthbert Johnson OSB, Sister Francesca Thompson, OSF, Mary Frances Reza, and conference organizer, Father Grayson Brown.

The conference organizers note that the cost of the conference per person, which includes round-trip air transportation, hotel accommodations, ground transportation, meals, and conference fees, is as follows: $1,589.00 US from New York, $1,689.00 US from Chicago, $1,789 US from Los Angeles.

For further information contact: Rev. Louis Vallone, St. Benedict the Moor Church, 91 Crawford Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Telephone: (412) 281-3141.

FORM/REFORM

A Conference on Environment and Art for Catholic Worship will be held October 28-31, 1990 in Albuquerque, NM, with the theme, "A House for the Church in the Global Village." Sponsored by the Form/Reform National Committee (USA) in collaboration with the Georgetown Center for Liturgy, Spirituality and the Arts, the conference is designed for those involved in church building or renovation projects, diocesan building and liturgical commissions, liturgical and technical consultation, as well as architects, artists, craftspeople, people who seek further knowledge and enrichment in the forum of environment and art.

For further information contact: Conference Services by Loretta Reif, P.O. Box 5084, Rockford, IL 61125. Telephone: (815) 399-2150.