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

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The church is most visible when it gathers to celebrate the eucharist on the Lord’s day. This manifestation of the church – the people of God gathered in one time and place – is called the assembly. In this issue we consider the biblical and baptismal foundations of the assembly, its unity and diversity, ways to continue forming the assembly, and liturgical participation – what the assembly does.
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Assembly and Participation

Two key words in the contemporary liturgical renewal are “assembly” and “participation.” In fact, these necessarily go together. When an assembly has been gathered, what it does is participation. When we see liturgical participation, we know that an assembly is present.

Today we speak of “the ministry of the assembly” and often say that “the assembly is the primary celebrant” of the liturgy.

Still new: And yet the term “assembly” still mystifies or is meaningless to some. Others may never have heard it at all. As well, “assembly” is often confused with “congregation.” Some persons are not conscious of belonging to and acting as the assembly in their worship.

We are still learning what assembly means and why we now use this concept so much. We are still “on the way” with respect to forming the assembly and being the assembly.

In this issue of the Bulletin we consider the topic of the assembly: its roots, its identity, its formation, and the participation by which it expresses itself. We also consider the introductory rites of the Sunday eucharist, which are so important in forming the assembly. We also highlight November 9 as a special feast for the assembly.

Selected Reading


Eugene Walsh, Giving Life: The Ministry of the Parish Sunday Assembly (Daytona Beach, FL: Pastoral Arts Associates of North America 1985)

“The Rites of Gathering and Sending Forth,” Liturgy (Washington, DC) vol. 1, no. 4 (1981) 1-95
Biblical and Baptismal Foundations

"Assembly" is profoundly biblical and profoundly baptismal in its meaning and significance. What do scripture, the liturgy of baptism and the Second Vatican Council tell us about who we are as assembly?

Assembly in Scripture

The main biblical roots of our English word assembly are the Hebrew term qahal and the Greek words ekklesia and koinonia.

Qahal

As a verb, qahal means to call together, to assemble, to come together. As a noun it means assembly, congregation, meeting, assemblage of persons.

Passover: It is significant that the first time qahal occurs in the Hebrew scriptures is in Exodus 12: 16, as part of the establishment of the feast of Passover. God says, "On the first day [of the month] you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly." Qahal is also used for the people of Israel in the desert, for example when the people complain to Moses and Aaron: "Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness...?" (Numbers 20: 4).

At Sinai: In Deuteronomy 5: 22 qahal is used in reference to the giving of the Ten Commandments: "These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness."

Promised land: When the people of Israel first entered the promised land, Joshua wrote out a copy of the law and then read it to all the people: "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before the assembly of Israel..." (Joshua 8: 35). Later, "David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly" (1 Chronicles 29:10), and "the king [Solomon] turned and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood" (1 Kings 8: 14).

Exile: After the return from exile, Ezra told the people what to do in order to turn back to their God. "Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, 'It is so; we must do as you have said'" (Ezra 10: 12). "And the assembly said, 'Amen' and praised the Lord" (Nehemiah 5: 13).

The psalmist sang, "Sing to the Lord a new song, God's praise in the assembly of the faithful" (Psalm 149: 1), and the prophet Joel proclaimed, "Blow the
trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people" (Joel 2: 15).

A religious dimension: The gathering together of people of course may be considered from several points of view, among which are those of sociology and politics. Qahal goes beyond these, however, to add a religious level of meaning. The Israelites understood themselves to have been assembled – gathered, called together – by God. As such, they were not simply a people like other peoples. They are the people of God, the chosen people, a people set apart, a holy and priestly people.

Ekklesia

In Greek: When the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (beginning several centuries before Christ), the word ekklesia was most frequently used to render qahal. (Another, closely related Greek word, is synagogue, which also means gathering.)

Called together: Ekklesia is formed from a root meaning "to call," and in classical Greek it referred to the assembly of citizens of the Greek city-states: those who are summoned and called together by the herald in order to conduct the business and worship of the city. (Citizens in this context did not include slaves, children or women.) The translators of the Hebrew scriptures took it over from this secular usage, but in doing so added new levels of meaning. For example, it became inclusive, referring to all Hebrew women, children and men. It was also intended to convey the religious significance that qahal held.

Christian understanding: In writing what we now call the New Testament or Christian scriptures, scribes of the early church took over the use of ekklesia from these Greek versions of the Old Testament. In doing so, of course, they added yet another level of meaning, namely that ekklesia refers to those whom God and Christ call, the community of Christian believers and disciples, the church. In English translations of the New Testament ekklesia is most often translated "church," or occasionally "community;" only rarely is it rendered "assembly."

Rare in the gospels: Ekklesia may be thought of as a predominantly "post-resurrection" word in the Christian scriptures. It is not used at all in the gospels according to Mark, Luke and John, and only twice in Matthew.1

For the early church: In contrast, ekklesia is common in the Acts of the Apostles (23 passages), in the epistles (67 passages), and in the book of Revelation (19 passages).

For example, "All the time Peter was under guard the church prayed to God for him" (Acts 12: 5), and "In the church at Antioch the following were prophets and teachers..." (Acts 13: 1). Paul writes, "I commend to you...Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae" (Romans 16: 1), and "All the churches of Christ send greetings" (Romans 16: 16).

1 The uses of ekklesia in Matthew are quite significant, however. "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church" (16: 18). "If the member [who has sinned] refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (18: 17).
Church and churches: The way it is used to refer both to individual local churches and to the church as a whole is shown well in the following two passages from Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae: “Now the church is his body, he is its head” (1: 18), and “Please give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church which meets in her house” (4: 15).

For Corinth: Interestingly, Paul uses ekklesia most frequently (30 passages) in his two letters to the church at Corinth, a community that had great problems with church unity. “To the church of God that is in Corinth...” (1 Corinthians 1: 2); “For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you...” (1 Corinthians 11: 18); “I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you” (2 Corinthians 11: 8).

Paul uses ekklesia in a variety of ways. He uses it in the singular to refer to Christians gathered in a house, for Christians assembled for worship, or to designate a number of house churches in one city. He also uses the word in the plural to refer to several churches. The idea that the Christian assembly is one which has been gathered by God in and through Christ appears when Paul refers to “congregations of God in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 2: 14) or the “church of Christ” (Galatians 1: 22).

Koinonia: The other important Greek root of our word assembly is the term koinonia. This, however, will be considered later, when we deal in detail with the question of participation and “being” assembly.

Baptism

We enter into the assembly – the ekklesia of Christ, the qahal of God - through baptism. Thus the General Introduction on Christian Initiation says, “Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God’s people,” (n. 2) and “Baptism is the sacrament by which its recipients are incorporated into the Church and are built up together in the Spirit into a house where God lives, into a holy nation and a royal priesthood. Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it.” (n. 4)

Becoming a member: The entire liturgy of Christian initiation nonverbally and verbally tells us that baptism has to do with becoming a member of the church. A few representative texts include the following: “From all who are baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, you have formed one people, united in your Son, Jesus Christ,” and “You have called your children, N. and N., to this cleansing water and new birth, that by sharing the faith of your church they may have eternal life.” (Third Prayer over the Water).

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2 *Christian Initiation: General Introduction*, n. 2. This important but little-known document is printed at the beginning of the Canadian editions of *Rite of Baptism for Children* (1989) and *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1987).

Anointing: The General Introduction on Christian Initiation points as well to the anointing after baptism: "[God] now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain for ever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King."

Confirmation: In the invitation to confirmation in the rite of Christian initiation of adults, the presider says, "My dear newly baptized, born again in Christ by baptism, you have become members of Christ and of his priestly people. The promised strength of the Holy Spirit, which you are to receive...will strengthen you to be active members of the Church and to build up the Body of Christ in faith and love."

Eucharist: Baptism and confirmation find their completion in eucharist. In these sacraments we are initiated into the church, not simply the church of Christ that transcends time and space, but also very concretely into a worshipping community, the assembly that gathers to celebrate the eucharist each Lord's day. It is our enormous privilege to participate in the assembly's worship; it is our blessed responsibility to become part of the assembly each Sunday.

Vatican Council II

The Second Vatican Council frequently emphasizes the importance of baptism and its relationship to the church. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, for example, it says:

Christ instituted this new covenant, that is to say, the new testament, in His blood, by calling together a people made up of Jew and Gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God. For, those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people.' You who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God (n. 9).

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. (n. 10)

Incorporated into the Church through baptism, the faithful are consecrated by the baptismal character to the exercise of [Christian worship] (n. 11).

In its Constitution on the Liturgy the Council taught that "liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the church, which is the 'sacrament of unity,' namely, a holy people united and organized under their bishop" (n. 26). "Every liturgical celebration...is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body the Church" (n. 7).

Participation: The relationship between liturgy, church and baptism are spelled out more concretely in section 14 of the Constitution on the Liturgy:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In
the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.

How We Name Ourselves Today

How do we name ourselves as church today, especially when we refer to ourselves as that manifestation of the church that gathers to celebrate the eucharist on Sunday morning?

Assembly

The term “assembly” in fact was not used in Vatican Council II’s Constitution on the Liturgy. However, it is commonly employed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. It is instructive to see how it is used in this important document, and what other terms are used as synonyms for assembly. The General Instruction says, for example:

- assembly gathered in his name (7)
- the community and unity of the assembly (20)
- the whole assembly (28)
- the assembled community (28)
- all in the assembly (58)
- the assembly (63, 313)
- the gathered assembly (257)

Synonyms and equivalent terms include:

- church (frequently)
- Christ and the people of God (1)
- local gathering together (7)
- the act of a community (14)
- the gathered faithful (15)
- the entire community’s involvement (15)
- take on the form of a community (24)
- an entire people of God (55)
- a holy people, a people God has made his own, a royal priesthood (62)
- the parish community...represents the universal Church gathered at a given time and place (75)
- the entire holy people (257).

People and Faithful

Synonyms for baptism: At the most fundamental theological level, the terms “people” and “faithful” both refer to all the baptized, lay and ordained. It is very important to keep this in mind. For example, the General Introduction on Christian Initiation says, “Baptism is...above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ” (n. 3).
Priest and people: At another level, however, “people” and “faithful” are used in church documents to refer either to all the laity in contrast to the ordained, or to those lay persons who do not have special ministerial roles in the liturgy. This dual usage can cause confusion, and it is not always clear which meaning is intended; however, we just have to live with this dual usage.

What About Congregation?

Possible confusion: The term “congregation” sometimes is used as an equivalent of assembly. This is not a good practice, however. In a liturgical context, congregation means those persons who have no special liturgical ministry - hence those sitting in the pews at a particular time. Thus it is equivalent to “people” and “faithful” when used in a narrow sense, but does not mean the same thing as “assembly.”

Outside of the liturgy, “congregation” is often used as an equivalent of parish or local church community. This is legitimate, though it can cause confusion if the context is unclear or not kept in mind.

Celebrant

Who is celebrant? We sometimes hear phrases such as “Today’s celebrant is Father Smith,” or “Please rise to greet our celebrant.” In these cases, clearly, this term is used to refer to the priest. Some will then say (or think), “But we are all celebrants.” Others, unfortunately, will think, “Well, if he’s the celebrant, we’re not.” To whom does the term “celebrant” properly refer?

Not often used: The General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the rubrics of the Sacramentary (Missal) seldom even use the term “celebrant” except in the context of concelebrated masses. The usual term for the presiding priest is simply “priest.” (The Latin is sacerdos, which includes both presbyters and bishops.)

The principal alternative nomenclature is “priest celebrant,” which is used only seven times in the General Instruction (nn. 42, 47, 78, 248, 252, 271) – outside of the section on concelebrated masses. The term “presbyter” is used in a few places (e.g., 59) when distinctions are made between presbyters and bishops.

In the Sacramentary (except for references to concelebration), the word “priest” (sacerdos) is almost always used. In one rubric of the Latin Missal the term priest celebrant (sacerdotis celebranti) is used, but this does not appear in the English version. In one rubric found in the Canadian edition, the term “celebrant” is used, though this is in neither the Latin or ICEL versions. In addition to priest, “chief celebrant” and “presiding priest” are each used once in the rubrics of the Sacramentary.

Concelebration: Understandably, the term “celebrant” has to be used, in some form or another, when the practice of concelebration is considered. In this context, the terms “concelebrant” and “concelebrants” are used 47 times in the General Instruction, and the term “concelebrating priests” once. “Principal cele-
brant" is used 33 times, and "celebrant" twice. In the Sacramentary the rubrics refer to "concelebrant, "concelebrants," and "principal celeb rant."

**Not just the priest:** The use of the term "celebrant" to refer solely or chiefly to the presiding priest, therefore, receives no support from the General Instruction or the Sacramentary.

**For all:** The term "celebration" is used frequently in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal to speak of the eucharistic liturgy as a whole. For example, "The celebration of Mass..." (nn. 1, 2); "the eucharistic celebration" (n. 4); "the celebration of the eucharist" (n. 5). It is also made clear that the entire assembly "celebrates:" "At Mass or the Lord's Supper, the people of God are called together, with a priest presiding and acting in the person of Christ, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord or eucharistic sacrifice" (n. 7). The assembly, then, is the primary celebrant of the eucharist, and all its members may legitimately be called "the celebrants" of the eucharist.

**Presider**

*As an aside*, does the General Instruction support the use of the term "presider" for the priest in the liturgy? Yes. In several passages, the General Instruction uses the term "preside" or its derivatives in describing the ministry of the priest:

- the priest, presiding over the assembly in the person of Christ (10)
- his office of presiding over the assembly (11)
- the priest presiding (11)
- to preside over (59)
- presides over the assembly (60).

**Community**

**Multiple meanings:** We often call ourselves "community," but this term is used and understood in a variety of ways. Do we apply it to the liturgical assembly or to the parish (where these are not the same)? Is there a difference?

**Sometimes community** is used to mean a group of persons who know each other quite well, whose relationships are congenial, and who have common interests. This indeed is one kind of community. Some hold this up as the only desirable type of community, and are disappointed if their church experience does not measure up to this. Though we all value this kind of close community, it is not a realistic – or even desirable – model for the liturgical assembly or for the parish.

**Shared faith:** Community can also be based on the sharing of faith, values, activities and vision instead of close friendship and social interaction. Church communities need to include a variety of persons and a variety of gifts whether or not they are close friends or see eye to eye on everything.

**We cannot afford to exclude** our prophets, our saints and sinners, our wounded ones, persons with disabilities, the economically very poor (or very
rich), those with much or little education – whether or not they “fit in” with the majority of the assembly or parish. Being church requires the inclusion of all the baptized and faithfilled people.

Family

The image of “family” is sometimes used to name local liturgical assemblies, parishes, or both. Of course we need to think of the extended family, not a nuclear family. This is a familiar metaphor and though limited like all such images, it can be helpful.

“Family” is not without its drawbacks in naming the assembly or parish, however. For example, it may be used in ways that exclude (or appear to exclude) single persons and members of single-parent families, and it may not be a helpful image to members of dysfunctional families. In addition, it may imply that “Father” is in charge (and the only real adult member), with everyone else being obedient children. This interpretation is no longer satisfying to many.

When we gather for worship we are assembly; we are the baptized; we are the faithful; we are the people of God; we are the church; we are those called and gathered together by God. Our response is thanksgiving.

Next Year’s Issues

Catholic Book of Worship III: Bulletin 128, Spring. This issue will describe the contents of our new national hymnal and its rationale, and will suggest ways of introducing it to parishes and making best use of the resources it contains.

Sacramental Preparation: Bulletin 129, Summer. How may young people and adults prepare well for the celebration of baptism, confirmation, first eucharist, and marriage? How can the liturgy of these sacraments be an integral part of the preparation experience from the start, rather than something that is planned at the end of the process?

The Three Days of Easter: Bulletin 130, Fall. The Easter Triduum is the centre and high point of the liturgical year. How do Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday form a single, integrated experience? What is the content of each liturgy, and how may they be celebrated well?

The Sunday Lectionary: Bulletin 131, Winter. What is a lectionary, and what purpose is it meant to accomplish? How is the lectionary organized, and on what principles is it based? How does the lectionary itself interpret scripture? How does it communicate the word of God?
Unity and Diversity

Intrinsic to the idea and experience of assembly are a number of tensions; these are best viewed as opportunities and blessings rather than problems and difficulties. Thus the assembly is entire unto itself but is also in communion with other assemblies. Each assembly is unique, yet is in union with the wider church. The assembly is a unity, but also includes diverse gifts and roles. It is one, yet incorporates different persons in different ways and to various degrees.

The Body of Christ

Scripture affirms: Today we are still learning to name, live with, and rejoice over these tensions, opportunities and blessings. Admittedly, some would prefer to dissolve such tensions through simplistic solutions. Scripture itself, however, affirms them as God’s gift to us and guides us in how to live with both unity and diversity. In this regard we can do no better than to quote Paul’s instruction to the church at Corinth:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27)
What are some of the tensions involved in thinking about the liturgical assembly? In considering these, we need to remember that all of the descriptions presented below need to be held together; no one statement is sufficient in itself.

Complete in Itself

The worshiping assembly is a whole – an entity complete in itself. That is, it is not simply or solely a part of some other dimension of church.

It was one of the great accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council to recover this biblical insight:

The Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. For in their own locality these are the new people called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness. In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, 'that by the flesh and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together.' (Lumen Gentium 26)

A local liturgical assembly, then, is not simply some part of the parish, or of the diocese, or of the national church, or of the universal church. It is church in itself. What a great privilege!

In official documents, “local church” in some cases refers to the diocese while in other cases it is the parish. The General Instruction mentions both, giving the diocese at eucharist (not simply the diocese in general) first place:

In the local church, first place should be given, because of its meaning, to the Mass at which the bishop presides surrounded by the college of presbyters and the ministers and in which the people take full and active part. For this Mass is the preeminent expression of the Church. (n. 74)

Great importance should be attached to a Mass celebrated by any community, but especially by the parish community, inasmuch as it represents the universal Church gathered at a given time and place. This is particularly true of the community's celebration of the Lord's Day. (n. 75)

Rare experiences: At the level of experience, the entire diocese rarely gathers for the eucharist. Though this is simply not possible in some places, it would be well to attempt to express and experience the local diocesan church in this way from time to time.

Each Assembly is Unique

Every Sunday the assembly is somewhat different than it was the previous Lord’s Day. Those who are present will vary at least to some degree, ministers may change, liturgical texts and songs will vary. The weekday lives from which
assembly members have come are different than previously, and the world in which they live has changed as well.

Every assembly is also unique vis-a-vis other assemblies. Its membership is different in terms of age distribution, ethnic and educational background and other demographic parameters. Its members are unique as well in terms of their gifts, prayer lives, ministries and spiritual lives generally. The gifts and abilities of the presider, musicians, readers and other ministers will also be unique.

Planning is required: This means that liturgies have to be planned with the individual characteristics of each assembly in mind. That this will be done is assumed – even required – by the General Instruction:

Therefore, it is of the greatest importance that the celebration of the Mass, the Lord’s Supper, be so arranged that the ministers and the faithful who take their own proper part in it may more fully receive its good effects. (n. 2)

The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be heightened if the texts of readings, prayers, and song correspond as closely as possible to the needs, religious dispositions, and aptitude of the participants. This will be achieved by an intelligent use of the broad options described (here)... (n. 313)

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The Assembly is a Unity

Unity within the assembly exists at a number of levels. Thus people have gathered together physically and socially in a single place. They sit together – more or less – and stand, make the sign of the cross and process to and from communion together. All sing together and participate in the liturgical dialogues and prayers together. They listen to the readings and prayers together and pray in silence together.

A common faith: At another level the assembly is united in sharing a common faith in Jesus Christ and in the Trinity. They share the Word of God, baptism, and the church. In matters of ultimate significance they share a common mind and intention. They share a common identity as Christians.

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The Assembly is in Communion with Other Assemblies

No assembly an island: Individual liturgical assemblies do not – indeed cannot – exist except in communion with other local assemblies. By ancient tradition, theological reflection and structures of church organization, the priest-pastor is a bond of unity within the parish and between the parish and diocese. The bishop-pastor constitutes a bond of unity within the diocese and between the local diocese and the church at regional, national and international levels.
Another set of connections is the communion that the local eucharistic assembly has with the families and households from which its members come. If the family is “domestic church,” then this level of communion also needs to be taken seriously. In addition, one may recall the communion that should exist with other baptized Christians who are not Roman Catholics, the communion that should exist with Jews and Moslems, with others who believe in a God, and the communion that we share with all women and men because of our common humanity.

Within the diocese: Consideration might be given to finding ways of strengthening communion between the local assemblies in parishes and the diocesan church. The diocese should not appear to be merely a higher administrative unit of the church, nor the bishop simply a remote administrator who appears for a short while each year or so for confirmation. There are no easy answers here, unfortunately.

In small parishes with a single Sunday liturgy, the parish and the assembly coincide – at least ideally. We always need to remember and reach out to the sick and homebound, those in prison or other institutions, those who are alienated, those who are lax, those who are lapsed.

In larger parishes: Greater challenges exist in larger parishes in which two or more Sunday liturgies are scheduled, and hence in which there are two or more local liturgical assemblies. Here parish and assembly are not identical at all, and this quite common situation raises many questions and challenges. It is not considered at all in official liturgical documents of the church.

In many “multi-assembly parishes” the uniqueness of each individual assembly is not valued and its theological significance is not recognized or honored. It is the parish that counts. Even when the “Saturday night,” the “9:30” and the “11 o’clock” eucharistic celebrations are somewhat distinctive in terms of those who attend regularly, musicians, etc., this may still be viewed primarily as a practical matter rather than from a theological perspective.

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The Assembly is Fragile and Imperfect

No liturgical assembly is perfect, even though it is church. Even though we are conscious of the presence and action of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are also mindful that we are imperfect and often fail to live up to God’s dream for us. We have limited gifts and skills and knowledge. Our weekday lives may be weak in terms of prayer, the reading of scripture, listening to the stories of others, and ministry. We may struggle in our families, social lives and work. We have limited time and energy and financial resources.

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The Assembly Includes Diverse Gifts and Roles

Diverse gifts: One of the basic principles of the contemporary liturgy is that the assembly is composed of persons with diverse gifts, and that within the
assembly different persons have distinct roles. Thus Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy states:

Liturgical services...concern individual members of the Church in different ways, according to the diversity of holy orders, functions and degrees of participation. (n. 26)

In liturgical celebrations, whether as a minister or as one of the faithful, each person should perform his role by doing solely and totally what the nature of things and liturgical norms require of him. (n. 28)

The liturgy makes distinctions between persons according to their liturgical function and sacred orders.... (n. 32)

The full implementation of this principle, however, requires that the gifts of every individual member of the assembly be not only honored, but also discerned, developed and supported.

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The Assembly Includes Different Persons in Different Ways and Various Degrees

Always individuals: Individual members of the liturgical assembly remain individuals who differ one from another. The Constitution on the Liturgy recognizes this (at least to some extent) when it says:

Liturgical services...concern individual members of the Church in different ways, according to...degrees of participation. (n. 26)

But in order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their thoughts match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully. (n. 11)

People vary: It is implicit in the preceding quotation that different members of the assembly almost certainly will vary in their disposition, the degree to which their thoughts match their words, their degree of cooperation with divine grace. They will differ in the extent to which they will take part knowingly and actively. They will differ in the seeds that will be sown in the celebration and in the fruits that will be borne.

Four kinds of members: To simplify, we might think of the assembly as being composed of four kinds of members.

First, there are those who participate as they are called to do: fully, actively, consciously and fruitfully (or at least are well on their way to this goal). The challenge here is to foster greater depth and fruitfulness in their participation.

Second, there are those who (at least outwardly) are passive, reluctant to participate, and who are glad to have the priest and others minister to them and
act on their behalf. They need to be challenged and enabled to see themselves as truly active participants.

Third, there are those who would like to participate fully, but feel that this is not being permitted or encouraged or facilitated. Children, youth, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, middle-aged men, the highly educated or those with little education - all may feel in some circumstances that they are not really included in the assembly; that their full participation is not wanted nor facilitated. At the present time this is a major challenge for local church communities.

Fourth, there are those who would like to participate (and perhaps usually do), but on a particular Sunday or for a longer period of time feel overcome by tragedy or sorrow or other hardship. Hopefully, they will participate in their hearts, if not outwardly, as the Spirit moves. These sisters and brothers will need to be carried gently by the rest of the assembly.

Unity and diversity are not enemies, but companions that walk hand and hand.

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**Through Death to Life**

A National Conference on the R.C. Order of Christian Funerals

May 17-21, 1992

Saint Paul University

223 Main Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K1S 1C4

(613) 236-1393

This conference has a twofold purpose:

- To assist those who are more immediately involved in the pastoral-liturgical care of the dying, the dead and the bereaved, and who, for that purpose, would want to use the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

- To give greater exposure to the R.C. Church’s *Order of Christian Funerals*. This is a significant resource of the Christian community that can help channel and shape the way we deal with the experience of death from a Christian perspective.

**Who might attend?**

Parish priests, ordained and non-ordained ministers of pastoral care, funeral directors, pastoral workers, funeral choir members, hospital chaplains, members of other Churches and Christian traditions...

**Resource persons:**

**Richard Rutherford,**

University of Portland, Oregon

Author of *The Death of a Christian: The Order of Christian Funerals*

**Archbishop James Hayes**

Workshop leaders from across Canada.
Participation:
Being Assembly

What the liturgical assembly does is called participation. Alternatively, participation may be considered the way in which the assembly expresses its identity.

According to the much-quoted section 14 of Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.

A number of questions arise from this basic principle. What do we participate in? How do we participate? What does this participation mean or signify? How do we go about participating fully, actively and consciously? What effect does full, active and conscious participation have in our lives?

A dictionary definition of participation is "act or state of participating, or sharing in common, with others." Participate is defined this way: "To have a share in common with others; to partake; share."

At the level of outward human experience, full and active participation means "doing" the liturgy, that is, taking part in the nonverbal, musical and verbal dimensions of the liturgy. Let us consider some of these ways of participating.

Nonverbal Participation

Gathering: We participate in the liturgy by coming together physically. We come from our homes by foot or car or bus, we enter the church building, exchange smiles or handshakes or words with the ministers of hospitality and with other parishioners, walk further and enter the nave of the church, make a sign of reverence, and take our seats. We may kneel for a moment of prayer, then sit.

Caring about others: As we gather, we look around and take note of the other persons who have preceded us to the church and those who come in afterwards. We see which friends, acquaintances and other regular members of the assembly are present, and who is absent. We note persons we do not know; are they guests, visitors, or simply parishioners we have not seen
before? We exchange brief greetings or a smile with those around us. We move inward or make room for people to slide past as others join us in our pew or row of seats.

**Postures:** As the liturgy proceeds, we stand or sit (and perhaps kneel) together with the other members of the assembly. The postures we assume in part are those of ancient tradition, but they should be appropriate for each individual part of the eucharistic liturgy. In addition, as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states so well, “The uniformity in standing, kneeling, or sitting to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the communion and the unity of the assembly; it both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part” (n. 20).

**Processions:** Within the liturgy most of the assembly will again move together in the communion procession. This is not like lining up in a fast food restaurant. The members of the community, in standing and moving together to the table of the Lord for holy communion and returning afterwards to their places, are entering into closer union with each other as well as with Jesus Christ.

**Ministry:** Particular members of the assembly will also move in order to carry out their special ministries within and for the assembly: the readers, acolytes, gift-bearers, ushers, communion ministers and presider.

**Departing:** At the end of the liturgy, we all leave together. We walk out after the dismissal or closing song, we say goodbye or engage in longer conversation, we share coffee, and finally we go back to our homes.

**Gestures:** We participate as well by making certain gestures, and do so in common with the other members of the community. We make the sign of the cross at the beginning of the liturgy and for the blessing at the end, and the triple sign of the cross at the beginning of the gospel. We make some appropriate and customary gesture at the greeting of peace; in Canada this most often is a handshake.

**Touch:** We participate as well through touch: we feel water sprinkled on us during the rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water; we hold the hymnal when needed; we touch one another at the greeting of peace; we may feel the touch of the hand of the minister of communion; we feel the consecrated bread in our hand and hold the holy cup.

**Taste and smell:** We participate as well through taste and smell. We may smell incense, flowers provided for decoration and beauty, and the consecrated wine at communion. We taste the holy bread and wine that we share in holy communion.

**Hearing:** We use our eyes and our ears to participate in the liturgy as well. We hear the presider, the readers, the preacher, the cantor and choir; we hear our neighbors and the assembly as a whole when we sing; we hear the whole community as it prays aloud.

**Vision:** We all see the same things. We see each other – the assembly; preferably we see some other faces, not just backs of heads. We see the focal points of the liturgy: ambo, table, presider’s chair. We see those members of the assembly who have special ministries. We see the sacramental symbols of bread and wine. We see the other modes and signs of Christ’s presence with us as well: the assembly itself, the ordained minister, the lectionary, the cross.
Musical Participation

A musical liturgy: We also participate musically, for the Catholic liturgy is a musical experience. As we gather we may hear an organ or instrumental prelude, and the leader of song may introduce or help us practice some of the music that will be used later in the celebration.

The choir: We may listen to the choir beforehand, at the preparation of the altar and gifts, after communion, and at the very end of the liturgy.

The assembly as a whole has many opportunities to sing; some of these are more important than others. Longer songs include the opening song, the Glory to God, whatever songs might be sung at the preparation of altar and gifts and after communion, the communion song itself, and any closing song if there is one.

Shorter songs include the Lord, have mercy, the gospel acclamation, the preface dialogue, Holy holy, memorial acclamation and great Amen, the Lord’s Prayer and its doxology, and the Lamb of God.

The presider may sing the preface and perhaps other prayers as well.

Verbal Participation

We participate in and through the spoken and silent prayers of the liturgy.

Prayers said aloud and in unison include the I confess of the penitential rite (when it is used), the profession of faith in which we say the Nicene or Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Lord, I am not worthy... before communion.

Dialogues: We participate in a number of short dialogues with the presider or other ministers: the sign of the cross, the biblical greeting, the litany that comprises the third form of the penitential rite, the Lord have mercy when it is used, the Lord be with you.

We dialogue with the readers after the first and second reading, and with the deacon or priest at the beginning and end of the gospel. The general intercessions often take the form of a dialogue, there is the dialogue at the beginning of the preface, at the greeting of peace, when we receive communion, during the concluding blessing and at the dismissal.

Responses: We frequently respond to prayers spoken by the priest; this constitutes a special kind of dialogue. We say Amen or some other response either to complete the prayer, give our assent to what the presider has just said in our name, or respond in some other way.

Listening: We participate by listening to prayers spoken by the presider for all of us: the blessing prayers of the rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water, the absolutions at the end of that rite and of the penitential rite, the opening prayer, prayer over the gifts and prayer after communion, the prayer which introduces the greeting of peace, and especially the eucharistic prayer.
Preaching: We participate through listening to the preaching and responding to it.

Silent reflection: We participate through silent reflection and interior response following the first and second readings and homily.

Silent prayer: We participate through silent prayer which is at the same time both individual and communal. We have opportunities to do this at the beginning of the rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water, at the beginning of the penitential rite, at the beginning of the opening prayer, during the preparation of altar and gifts, during the communion of the ministers, and after communion (or at the beginning of the prayer after communion).

Conscious Participation

Not automatic: The many means of participating in the liturgy just considered of course must never become automatic and must never be entered into as a kind of magic. The Constitution on the Liturgy emphasizes several times that these have a deeper level. For example:

But in order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their thoughts match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors or souls [here read everyone concerned with the liturgy] must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully. (n. 11)

The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. (n. 2)

...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows. (n. 10)

...with zeal and patience, pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally. (n. 19)

In order that the Christian people may more securely derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy... (n. 21)

...both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify. Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community. (n. 21)

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at [the eucharist], should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. (n. 48)
Intellectual Participation

**With understanding:** The Council noted that the faithful are to participate intelligently and with understanding; this was one of the motives for revising the liturgical rites. This led to the call for more and better liturgical study by seminarians, pastors and all the members of the church. This still needs to be carried out.

**Deep experience:** At the same time, liturgy is not a purely intellectual exercise, and years of schooling or academic degrees do not tell us how profoundly one participates in the liturgy. Without negating the need for education leading to better understanding, we may also suggest that "knowing" liturgy needs to be interpreted in a biblical sense. In scripture, knowing means a profound and intimate experience, either of God or of one's spouse in marriage.

Spiritual Participation

**Experience of God:** In the liturgy we express and strengthen our relationship with our God, and in our worship we hope to experience God. We expect no more or no less than the presence of God with us in and as we worship. God has promised this; we believe it.

Transformative Participation

**To bear fruit:** Our worship is meant to bear fruit in our lives; it is meant to change our lives; it needs to make a difference in our lives. We invoke the Holy Spirit upon us to "sanctify us," and that is just another way of saying "transform us."

Participation in the Life of God

**Communion with God:** All this leads us to the most profound mode of participation, namely participation in the very life of the triune God. We often refer to this as "communion," and this leads us to the Greek word *koinonia,* which means both participation and communion; it also means share, partnership, fellowship and (in) common. Let us consider the implications of *koinonia* further.

**In the Acts of the Apostles** the early church is described in terms of *koinonia:*

> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship [*koinonia*], to the breaking of bread and prayers. All who believed were together and had all things in common [*koinonia*]. (Acts 2: 42, 44)

**In Romans** we find another usage: "If any of the saints are in need you must share [*koinonia*] with them" (Romans 12: 13).

*Koinonia* is an especially significant word in Paul's two letters to the church at Corinth. Let us consider these texts in some detail.

**The Christians at Corinth** usually worshipped in the homes of wealthy members; this meant that they were divided into groups that each home could accommodate. They may also have been divided according to neighborhood,
ethnic origin, and perhaps on the basis of who had evangelized and baptized them. However, the Christians were united in their common faith and all probably came together from time to time.

Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth begins by mentioning disturbing reports which he had received regarding schisms or divisions among various groups in the church, concerning incest, and concerning their practice of taking each other to court. Beginning with chapter 7, Paul discusses questions that had been brought up in a message to him from the community itself. These concerned marriage, eating foods offered to idols, spiritual gifts, the resurrection of the body, and the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. As he goes along, Paul brings in other concerns, including advice about disturbances in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

A poor understanding: Some of the things the Corinthian Christians were doing showed that they had failed to understand the practical implications of the gospel message that had been preached to them. In addition, the divisions among them on all sorts of questions indicated that they did not fully understand Paul's teaching regarding the true nature of Christian community—communion or koinonia. It is no wonder, then, that Paul refers to the idea of communion (koinonia) throughout his first and second letters to the Corinthians.

Koinonia with God: Paul begins and ends his correspondence by referring to our communion with God. "God has called you to share in (koinonia) the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" Another translation says, "...God, who has called you to be partners with (koinonia) his Son..." (1 Corinthians 1: 9). Later he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion (fellowship, koinonia) of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). (This is one of the greetings we use in our eucharistic liturgy today.)

Communion: Clearly, this communion—fellowship, sharing in, being partners with—is a way of describing the relationship we are supposed to have with God, in Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. This "vertical" dimension of communion, then, refers to our living the life of the Trinity, to whom we are joined through baptism.

Fellowship: With this perspective clearly in mind, Paul then turns to the "horizontal" dimension of communion, our relationship with other members of the Christian community, the church. Here, at least at one level, koinonia means a "sharing in" or "participation in." It is sometimes translated as "fellowship," meaning participation in the life of the community.

Paul's thinking goes much deeper than this social level, however; for him Christian communion is sharing a common existence—the unity of Christians is like that of a living, human body. "You are the one body of Christ and individual members of it," he says in 1 Corinthians 12: 27.

Body of Christ: This "body"—the community, the church—is that of Christ himself, in that it makes visible and effective in our world today the saving mission of Jesus Christ. It is the means through which the salvation won by Christ can be touched by people today. It prolongs the power of love that was the key of Jesus' mission.

The Christian community lives—and shows to others—an alternative way of living in which humanity is not dominated by self-interest that leads to possessiveness, jealously or fighting. This people possesses "the mind of Christ"
(1 Corinthians 2: 16) and individuals are distinguished only by different Spirit-given gifts of service.

Communion, therefore, is the result of entering into this church and living with others as the body of Christ should live.

Eucharist: Paul's views on communion or koinonia come to a focus when he speaks about the eucharist. In chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians he states, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not communion [koinonia] in the body of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not communion in the body of Christ?" The eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, therefore, constitute a real participation [koinonia] in the body and blood of Christ. And this is possible only if the bread and wine are in fact the body and blood of Christ.

The body comes first: One possible understanding of the relationship between the eucharist and communion is that the eucharist makes the body of Christ: that is, it is in eating of the bread that the body comes into being. For Paul, however, the body of Christ comes first and exists prior to the individual believer and prior to the act of eating and drinking the consecrated bread and wine. In sharing the bread, the believer enters into (or enters more and more fully into) the body.

One loaf: Paul's thinking on this subject starts with the simple fact that one loaf is used in the liturgical celebration. Because it is a single loaf it is a symbol of unity. But because this bread is the body of Christ it is more than a symbol; sharing in it is a real sharing in the body of Christ.

Human involvement: Yet this does not happen automatically, nor is it magic. For the power of Christ to become active, human involvement is necessary. Unity, or more precisely a greater unity, is achieved only when "we all partake." For all to eat a common loaf is already a sharing; because this loaf is Christ-sacramentally - Christ too is directly involved. The participants share with each other but they also "participate" (koinonia) in Christ. In the act of participating they commit themselves in faith and love not only to Christ but also to each other. The already existing unity is deepened, and the body acquires a new and more profound reality.

Failure to share: In chapter 11 Paul speaks about the eucharist at greater length. The Corinthians show their lack of full understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper. The communal meal they share prior to the liturgical celebration demonstrates their divisions: the well-to-do versus the poor; one social class against another. The wealthy bring lots of food, but do not share any of it with the poor, who have only a little. The rich have as little as possible to do with the lower classes.

An inconsistency: The lack of sharing and communion at this point in their weekly gathering is inconsistent with the sharing and communion that comes in eating and drinking the eucharistic bread and wine. Indeed, it contradicts the values that are expressed in the eucharist.

Guilty: Paul's thinking becomes clearer when he goes on to say, "It follows that anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of offending against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). Furthermore, "he/she who eats and drinks [unworthily] eats and drinks judgement on himself/herself if he/she does not discern the body" (v 29). At one level the
“body and blood” and “body” here are the eucharistic body and blood of Christ. In this context, however, Paul is more likely referring especially to the church.

**Unify, not divide:** If one eats and drinks in ways that divide instead of unify the members of the church with each other and with Christ, then one “will be guilty of offending against the body and blood of the Lord.” If one does not recognize that other members of the community are part of the ecclesial body of Christ – and behave accordingly – then one shows that he/she does not recognize the full significance and implications of eating and drinking the eucharistic body and blood of Christ. If they do not show “the mind of Christ” and do not behave like him in recognizing that the church is Christ, then “it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat,” a very harsh condemnation indeed.

**Poor understanding:** The Corinthians had agreed intellectually to the concept of the community as the body of Christ, but the way they behaved showed all too clearly that they did not really grasp the implications of the gospel. They accepted jealousy and strife as part of the normal pattern of existence even for those in Christ.

**Paul, however,** insists on the communal dimension of the eucharist. Only the profound conviction that all believers share the common life of the body can restrain and eventually destroy the divisive tendencies that are the residue of their previous self-centered mode of existence. It is on this point that Christians must examine themselves before they participate in the eucharist. The authentic community is Christ, and both everyday life and liturgical life must show this.

**The collection:** Paul now very surprisingly applies the idea of communion (*koinonia*) to a much more down to earth matter: taking up a collection for the church of Jerusalem, which was very poor. In chapters 8 and 9 of his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of this collection in a profoundly theological manner. It is no mere financial transaction and far from just a practical matter. He uses terms like grace, service or ministry, liturgy or worship, blessing or thanksgiving – and communion (*koinonia*). He speaks of sharing in (*koinonia*) this generous service to their fellow Christians (2 Corinthians 8: 4), the poor believers in Jerusalem.

**Sharing one’s material resources** – money, clothes, food – with fellow Christians outside of one’s immediate church community is a natural consequence, for Paul, of sharing the life of the body of Christ in one’s own local church. Since one shares the spiritual bonds of life in God: Father, Christ and Spirit, and shares the common eucharistic body and blood of Christ, it is only natural to share one’s other resources and gifts as well.

**Communion** – *koinonia* – is central to Paul’s thought about our relationship to God, about the church, about the eucharist, and about caring for the wider church throughout the world. And it is as important for us today as it was for him almost two thousand years ago.

**Participation and communion** are two sides of the same coin, two facets of a jewel, two perspectives on the same reality. Our outward participation in the liturgy should mirror our inner communion with God and our practical sharing with one another. Our interior communion with God needs to be expressed in the external movement, song and words of liturgical celebration as well as in the ways we serve our sisters and brothers.
The church today has a great vision of the liturgical assembly - the local church gathered in this time and place for worship. The church today also has great expectations of the assembly: full, active, conscious and fruitful participation in the liturgy; full active, conscious and fruitful sharing with our sisters and brothers; full, active, conscious and fruitful communion with God.

But not all assemblies live out this vision fully; not all live up to these expectations. (Indeed, they never will do so perfectly.) Within the bounds of possibility, though, how can we help our assemblies grow toward this vision and these expectations? How can we help them travel along the way toward these goals?

The needs of individual assemblies will differ, of course. But they probably also have much in common. Here we suggest some questions that pastors, pastoral ministers and liturgy committees and commissions might use as a basis for formulating a pastoral plan that is appropriate for their own situation. It is hoped as well that these questions will spark others.

Three things are certain:

• Forming an assembly will take time and will require some effort.

• Forming a liturgical assembly is essential for the life of the local church community.

• Forming an assembly is very rewarding.

Pastoral Planning

• Is forming the assembly a conscious goal of the priest, other pastoral ministers, parish council and parish liturgy committee?

• Is forming the assembly given a high priority in the life of the parish community?

• Do parish ministers see their role (at least in part) as making the local church what it is supposed to be: the liturgical assembly and a larger community of liturgical assemblies?

• Do parish ministers regard the Sunday liturgy as a primary and privileged opportunity to build church?

The Priest

• Does the priest understand the role and importance of the liturgical assembly?

• Does he really value the assembly and its participation?
• Where there is more than one priest in a parish, do they attempt to minimize differences that might inhibit full participation by all?

• Is their conscious intention to “say mass” or lead the assembly in celebrating the eucharist?

• To facilitate the full participation of the entire assembly?

• Do they actively and obviously encourage participation?

• Have they stopped or reduced the use of “celebrant” to refer only to themselves?

• Have they asked music leaders not to say things like “Let us rise and greet our celebrant?”

• Do they consciously avoid hurrying through the liturgy?

• Is it obvious that they care deeply about the liturgy and about the people?

Promoting Experiences of Community

• Is the building up of the community in general fostered by pastoral visiting of members of the assembly?

• Is special attention given to hospitality at weddings and funerals?

• Are efforts made to foster full participation in weekday liturgies?

• Is family life being supported as a primary experience of community?

• Are opportunities provided for single members of the community to gather?

• Are efforts made to have occasional social events for the entire parish community?

Other Experiences of Church

• Are members of the assembly actively invited and encouraged to participate in liturgical and other ministries?

• Do the bulletin and the announcements show that the weekday life of the parish is healthy and worthwhile?

• Are new people invited to participate in the various activities and events of the parish community?

Weekday Religious Life

• Are members of the assembly encouraged and helped to say grace at meals during the week (at least occasionally)?

• Read scripture?

• Pray by themselves and/or with others?

• Participate in the liturgy of the hours, either in church or in someone’s home in their neighborhood?
Teaching and Improving Self-Image as Church

• Are opportunities found to teach the assembly about itself and about the liturgy?
• Is the assembly being taught the skills it needs to participate well?
• Are they being taught that they are church?
• That their participation is needed and expected?
• That the church is the people, not the building?
• Is the assembly being taught that sacraments are actions and not things?
• That the entire assembly celebrates the sacraments?
• That the priest does not “do” the sacraments all by himself?
• Are individuals and groups regularly told how valued they are by God, and what great dignity they have through baptism?
• Are people regularly told that the liturgy is their action, not simply the priest’s?

Honoring Uniqueness and Giftedness

• Is liturgy planning taken seriously?
• Is the liturgy planned for each assembly individually?
• Are lay people involved in liturgy planning?
• Is liturgy planning seen as an opportunity to provide education about the liturgy?
• Are people regularly told that each has a gift of the Spirit for the service of all?

Dealing with Individualism

• Is the great contemporary problem of excessive individualism, which makes communal worship difficult, ever named and discussed?
• Is the problem of consumerism (sitting back and letting someone else do it all) ever named and discussed?
• Is it ever pointed out how church life in general and the liturgy in particular, embody different values; that they value and expect communal action and full participation?

Understanding Ministry

• Are efforts being made to teach about - and model - modern concepts of ministry?
• Are lay ministries outside the liturgy valued in the parish? Outside the parish?
• Are people outward-oriented, or oriented toward themselves or only their own parish?

Language
• Is it ever pointed out that when the liturgy says “you,” it is referring not simply to individuals by themselves, but to the entire community as a community?
• Is it ever pointed out that the public prayers of the priest always say “we” and “us,” not “I.” (And that this really does include everyone; it is not an editorial or “royal” we.)
• Are the words “assembly” and “community” regularly used in speaking to and about those gathered for worship?

Architecture
• Is there easy access to the church for persons who are in wheelchairs or have difficulty in climbing stairs?
• Is any help provided for persons with impaired hearing, either earphones or interpreters?
• Can people hear the presider, readers, musicians?
• Can they see the ambo and reader, the chair and presider, when sitting?
• Can they see the presider at the chair when all are standing?
• Can they see the bread and cup on the altar when all are standing?
• Is congregational seating arranged in such a way as to gather people into community?
• Can people see the faces of some other members of the assembly?
• Are the ambo, chair and altar placed so that they are clearly within the assembly, and not separated from it?

Inclusivity
• Is inclusive language used as much as possible?
• Are efforts made to include women as liturgical ministers?
• Does preaching touch on the concerns of women?
• Are efforts being made to facilitate the participation of children in the Sunday eucharist?

Lay Ministries
• Are people encouraged to participate in the liturgical ministries?
• Are they given appropriate training, support, and evaluation?
Music
• Do the music leaders have good skills in leading community song, in teaching new music, and in encouraging everyone to participate in the musical dimensions of the liturgy?
• Do the music ministers receive appropriate education about the liturgy and the principles of liturgical music?
• Do they have a budget for music and other materials?
• Is their ministry publicly recognized and are they thanked?

Hospitality
• Are there ministers of hospitality before – and after – the Sunday liturgy?
• Do they receive training, encouragement and support?
• Do they carry out this ministry in such a way that they encourage everyone to be hospitable?

Silence
• Are significant periods of time provided when this is indicated in the liturgy?
• Are people taught how to use periods of silence for personal reflection and personal prayer (depending on the context)?
• Is silence valued by liturgical leaders?
• Are people told how important silence is in the liturgy?

Dialogues
• During the liturgical dialogues, does the presider look at the people?
• Are they said in a manner that invites a meaningful response?
• Are they real experiences of mutuality?

Penitential Rite
• Is the assembly taught that this is not a substitute for the sacrament of reconciliation?
• Are people taught that this rite has a communal as well as an individual dimension?
• Are litanies (the third form) composed in the parish?

The Word
• Is it clear that the word of God is being addressed not simply to individuals, but also to the assembly as a whole?
• Are people really given an opportunity for meaningful response to the scripture readings, through silence, the psalm, etc.?
• Are the readings proclaimed well?

Preaching
• Is the homily life-giving, encouraging, and empowering?
• Is it addressed to the community as a whole as well as to individuals?
• Do lay members of the assembly have some opportunity for input into the preparation process, and some opportunity to discuss it afterward?
• Is the language used in preaching inclusive?
• Are women and children kept in mind in preparing the homily?

General Intercessions
• Are the intentions offered by lay people, rather than by the priest?
• Are they compelling and moving?

The Gifts
• Is the bread baked by members of the assembly?
• Is the procession of gifts carried out so that it is clear that the gifts really do come from the body of the assembly?
• Are they “handed over” to the presider at the altar rather than at the entrance to the sanctuary?

The Collection
• Do people know how the money collected will be spent?
• Do they know that some will go to the poor, both locally and elsewhere? (Is this true?)
• Do they have any say in what proportion is spent to help others, and how this amount is spent?

Eucharistic Prayer
• Are efforts being made to increase the full participation of the entire assembly in the eucharistic prayer?
• Are people taught the meaning of this prayer and that it is the prayer of all?
• Are people taught about the meaning of the epiclesis?
· Are the acclamations sung?

· Is the posture assumed by the laity during the eucharistic prayer really appropriate?

Doing Eucharist

· Are efforts being made to teach the assembly that the eucharist is not a thing, but an action?

· That eucharist is not simply the consecrated bread and wine shared in holy communion, but also their participation in the great prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification – the eucharistic prayer – and in the entire liturgy?

Communion Rite

· Are efforts being made to ensure that the communion is understood and experienced as a communal action, not in an individualistic manner?

· Does the communion song facilitate union among communicants, and not isolate them from one another?

· Is everyone offered the cup?

· Do the communion ministers look at the people as they come forward?

· Do they speak their acclamation, “The Body/Blood of Christ,” in a significant and caring way?

· Are efforts made to avoid rushing through communion?

Sign of Peace

· Is the sign of peace exchanged?

· Are people taught the meaning and significance of this action?

· Is it being carried out in a meaningful way?

The Dismissal

· Are efforts made to make the dismissal a real commissioning, and not a way of saying “goodbye?”

This list, of course, is just a start. Whatever the needs of an individual assembly, it is important to make a plan to help in its further formation and to persist in this important process.
Ministries in the Assembly

The development of lay liturgical ministries has been an important part of the contemporary liturgical renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council. Readers, musicians, ushers, communion ministers, "greeters," acolytes or altar servers, planners, artists and others carry out their ministries in our liturgical celebrations on a regular basis. In some places deacons also exercise their ministry in the liturgy. There is also a renewed understanding of the role of the priest in the liturgy: that of presider rather than sacrificer.

Concerns: Although these developments are widely welcomed, concerns have also been expressed. For example, some have felt that too much attention has been paid to lay liturgical ministers and not enough given to the ministries of lay persons outside of the liturgy, both within the church community and in society. Certainly an appropriate balance needs to be maintained in this regard.

What about the assembly? In addition, sometimes so much energy and resources have gone into recruiting, training and supporting the lay liturgical ministers that less attention has been paid to the assembly as a whole and to the fostering of its ministerial skills and spirituality. It has sometimes appeared that promoting lay liturgical ministries has been considered the major answer to the question of the ministry of the assembly as a whole.

Individual ministries and the assembly: Here we consider one further aspect of the contemporary renewal in liturgical ministry, both lay and ordained: the relationship between individual ministries and the assembly as a whole and its ministry.

Before Vatican II the liturgical ministries (largely those of priest, acolyte-server and musician) to a large extent substituted for or replaced the ministry of the assembly. The priest offered the sacrifice on behalf of the people; he said the mass while they attended. In addition, the priest read all the scripture readings and he alone served communion. The server said the responses in place of the congregation. Often too, the musician sang or played the liturgical music in place of the assembly. (The hymns that the people might have sung were extras, not really part of the liturgy itself.)

Today, the idea of trying to replace or substitute for the assembly as a whole or of doing things in the people's place has been discarded.

What relationship? But what has taken its place? How do the liturgical ministries of individuals or small groups relate to the liturgical ministry of the assembly as a whole?

One common view of ministry in general is that the minister is to do good things for and to others: to heal, counsel, encourage, absolve, challenge; to serve the sick and those in need; to work to transform society, etc. This approach has its good side, obviously.
Passivity: But if carried too far, this approach can lead to passivity on the part of those ministered to. They become recipients, not participants. They become objects of ministry, not active subjects.

If carried too far, doing things for others in the context of liturgical celebrations could inhibit the ministry of the assembly, not foster it.

To facilitate and enable: What if we were to take the view that a major purpose of all individual liturgical ministries was to facilitate, enable and foster the ministry of the assembly as a whole? Not to replace or do good things for and to the assembly, but to help the assembly become the minister it is called to be.

Readers, for example, might see themselves not only as proclaiming God's word to the people, but also — even foremost — as enabling the people to hear and respond to God's Word — Jesus Christ present among us.

Cantors would not simply lead the people in song, but facilitate the closer union of members of the assembly through their singing together. They would enable the assembly to respond to the biblical word and liturgical prayer through the psalm and the acclamations.

Communion ministers would not simply "distribute" the consecrated bread and cup, but help the assembly respond to God's call to union and transformation.

Ministers of hospitality would not simply smile, say good morning and introduce guests and visitors, but foster the hospitality of all.

Ushers would not only take up the collection but, as a response to the word of God just proclaimed, foster the sharing of material resources with all those in need.

Gift bearers would not only bring up the bread and wine for the eucharistic meal and offering, but enable all to minister to others by sharing food with the hungry.

The priest would not only preside, offer invitations, lead prayer, say the presidential prayers, but lead the entire assembly into prayer and foster a rich prayer life among the members of the community.

The individual liturgical ministers are therefore called to think of the assembly and its ministry first. Their role is in part to encourage, facilitate, foster and enable the assembly as a whole and each of its individual members to the full, active, conscious and fruitful participation to which they have a right and responsibility because of their baptism. This is a great challenge and a great privilege.
The Introductory Rites of the Sunday Eucharist

The introductory rites of the eucharistic liturgy play an important role in forming and naming the assembly.

Gathering in Community

Gathering together with other men and women, girls and boys, is a natural thing for people to do. Few of us live all by ourselves, without any contact with others.

We form communities of many different kinds and degrees of closeness: friends, families and households, school, work and play, neighborhoods, towns and cities and nations, the international community.

We gather together physically with other people. We speak with each other, we laugh and cry together. We gather for the support and stimulation that comes from contact with other persons. We gather to collaborate and work together with others. To various degrees we become dependent on one another, we care for one another, we assume certain responsibilities for each other.

Unity and diversity. When people gather they express the unity of humankind. They also express the rich diversity that characterizes humanity.

God called the people of Israel to be a chosen nation. We Christians have been called by Jesus Christ to come together in the church, and each Sunday we are called to gather together and celebrate the eucharist.

Scripture tells us that community is God's dream for humankind. For example the psalmist sings: "How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity" (133:1).

Body of Christ: Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13).

The Book of Revelation presents this vision of eternity: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb." (7:9)
The Introductory Rites

The gathering action of our Sunday liturgy is officially called the introductory rites. In fact it is hard to say exactly when the gathering of the Sunday assembly begins.

Gathering of the People

Last Sunday: We could say that it began at the end of last Sunday’s liturgy or as Christians lived the eucharist through the week. Or we might say that it begins on Sunday morning when people leave their homes and make their way to the church. It would also be correct to say that it begins when people arrive at the church, are greeted by the ministers of hospitality, say “good morning” and smile to others, and take their seats. These real but informal beginnings may also include music by organ or choir, and the teaching or rehearsal of music by the leader of song.

Informal gathering is important: The official liturgical books of the church take all this for granted; they assume that the people have gathered in the church. In pastoral practice, however, the informal gathering of the people is of great significance and deserves careful attention.

Opening Song

Sing a new song: The first thing the Sacramentary speaks of is the opening song. Those who are able to do so stand for the opening song, for standing is a posture of active participation and joyous singing.

Procession: During the opening song the priest presider and other ministers enter in procession and take their places. It is clear from the General Instruction (n. 25) that the song is primary, not the procession. The procession takes place during the song; the song is not primarily to accompany the procession.

Dialogues and Greetings

Following the opening song we participate in several dialogues and short prayers, including the sign of the cross, apostolic or other biblical greeting, the presider’s personal greeting, penitential rite or blessing and sprinkling water, the Glory to God, and finally the opening prayer.

We begin with the sign of the cross, a greeting used by the Apostle Paul (or another biblical greeting), and the presider’s personal greeting.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Three alternative biblical greetings are offered:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.
The grace and peace of God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.
(or Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.)
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

An informal greeting by the priest may follow.

Reminder of Baptism

Two choices: After this, we may choose to continue with the penitential rite or with the rite of blessing and sprinkling water.

The rite of blessing and sprinkling water, which is a reminder of our baptism, begins with an invitation to pray and a moment of silent prayer by all. This rite is especially appropriate during the Easter season; it may be used at other times as well. It is an important opportunity to remind the people of God of their baptism, and to link baptism with the eucharist.

Dear friends,
this water will be used
to remind us of our baptism.
Ask God to bless it,
and to keep us faithful
to the Spirit he has given us.

Silent prayer: This invitation needs to be offered in a meaningful way, people need to be taught and urged to pray all together in silence, and a significant period of silence should be given for this prayer.

The priest continues with one of several prayers in which we ask God to bless the water, which reminds us of our baptism. The following prayer is used at Easter time:

Lord God almighty,
hear the prayers of your people:
we celebrate our creation and redemption.
Hear our prayers and bless this water
which gives fruitfulness to the fields,
and refreshment and cleansing to humankind.
You chose water to show your goodness
when you led your people to freedom through the Red Sea
and satisfied their thirst in the desert
with water from the rock.

Water was the symbol used by the prophets
to foretell your new covenant with humanity.
You made the water of baptism holy
by Christ's baptism in the Jordan:
by it you give us a new birth
and renew us in holiness.
May this water remind us of our baptism,
and let us share the joy
of all who have been baptized at Easter.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Water is sprinkled: After this prayer the presider sprinkles the ministers and
the people; this needs to be done thoroughly and with care. An antiphon or
short song may be sung while this is being done, though singing should not
continue after the sprinkling has been completed.

The sprinkling rite concludes with a brief prayer.

May almighty God cleanse us of our sins
and through the eucharist we celebrate
make us worthy to sit at God’s table
in the heavenly kingdom. Amen.

Penitential Rite

A second option is the penitential rite. This rite sometimes is misunderstood,
and the title does not accurately describe its contents. The penitential rite at the
beginning of the eucharistic liturgy is not the equivalent of, or a substitute for,
the sacrament of reconciliation or penance. It has to do as much or more with
our sinfulness, not with particular sins. As a corporate action and prayer, it has
as much to do with the failures and weaknesses of the assembly and local
parish as with those of individuals. Finally, in part it is a celebration of the mercy
of God, who has redeemed us and is always ready to forgive the penitent.

Silent prayer: Again there is an invitation to prayer and a pause for silent
prayer by all. Three model invocations are given; the presider or liturgy planning
group may compose alternative texts.

As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ’s love, let us acknowledge our failures and ask the Lord for pardon and strength.

Coming together as God’s family,
with confidence let us ask the Father’s forgiveness,
for he is full of mercy and compassion.

My brothers and sisters,
to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries,
let us call to mind our sins.

All pray silently for a moment. Again, there needs to be a significant period of silence, and people need to be taught and encouraged to use it well.

Three alternatives follow, though the second is not much used.

The first is the prayer, “I confess” followed by the “Lord, have mercy.” Though
this seems highly individualistic – “I” is used five times – it is also truly communal in nature. We confess to one another as well as to God. We never ask God for forgiveness, but only ask one another, as well as the heavenly church, to do so on our behalf.

I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault,
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, 
all the angels and saints,  
and you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord our God.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  

The third option is a brief litany which includes the Lord, have mercy. For example:  

Lord Jesus, you raise us to new life:  
Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  

Lord Jesus, you forgive us our sins:  
Christ, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  

Lord Jesus, you feed us with your body and blood:  
Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  

Finally, there is a concluding prayer. Though this is called an “absolution,” it is quite different from the absolution of the rite of penance. The latter includes phrases such as “may God give you pardon and peace” and “I absolve you from your sins.” It is also different from the absolution at this point in the pre-Vatican II eucharistic liturgy, which said, “May almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to life everlasting.” The present prayer is, deliberately, much weaker and more communal. 

May almighty God have mercy on us,  
forgive us our sins,  
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.  

Glory to God  

Should be sung: The introductory rites conclude with the Glory to God and the opening prayer. By nature the Glory to God is a song, though in practice it sometimes is merely recited. The General Instruction (n. 31) calls it “an ancient hymn in which the Church, assembled in the Holy Spirit, praises and entreats the Father and the Lamb.”  

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly king, 
amighty God and Father, 
we worship you, we give you thanks 
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, 
Lord God, Lamb of God, 
you take away the sin of the world; 
have mercy on us; 
you are seated at the right hand of the Father; 
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, 
you alone are the Lord, 
you alone are the Most High, 
Jesus Christ, 
with the Holy Spirit, 
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Opening Prayer

The last element of the introductory rites is the opening prayer. This takes the form of a dialogue between presider and people.

The presider begins by inviting everyone to pray, and there is a period of silence in which we all do pray. The General Instruction (n. 32) tells us, “Next the priest invites the people to pray and together with him they observe a brief silence so that they may realize they are in God’s presence and may call their petitions to mind.”

Let us pray.

All pray silently for a moment. Liturgical tradition tells us that this silent prayer of the assembly is the most important part of the opening prayer. The spoken prayer of the presider is a conclusion or completion to the unspoken prayer that has preceded it.

The collect: The presider then says the spoken part of the opening prayer; this is appointed for the day in the Sacramentary. For example, here is the prayer for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

All-powerful and ever-living God, 
direct your love that is within us, 
that our efforts in the name of your Son 
may bring humanity to unity and peace. 
We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 
your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, 
for ever and ever. 
Amen.

The people’s “Amen” is the conclusion of the opening prayer, and the last part of the dialogue.
To Promote Unity and Community

**Why do we do these things** when we gather for worship? What do they mean – or at least what are they supposed to mean?

**Purpose:** The introductory rites have two purposes. The first is to promote unity and community among those who have come to worship. The second purpose is to prepare the gathering to listen and respond to God’s word fruitfully and to celebrate the eucharist well.

**Complex:** The introductory rites contain quite a number of separate elements, and seem quite complex. What do all these prayers, songs and actions mean to us? There are several ways to approach this question.

**Criticism:** First, the present introductory rites have been criticized for being untraditional, complex, not completely coherent, difficult to carry out, and not capable of doing what they are supposed to do: unify the gathered assembly. These criticisms have been made by thoughtful and knowledgeable people, who provide cogent argumentation.

**Several approaches:** Be that as it may, these are the rites we have at the present time, and it is important as well to see their good points. Here we will approach them from four perspectives: as doorways of the assembly; as ways of naming the assembly as church; as actions that call for a high degree of active participation; and in their relationship to daily life.

**Doorways of the Assembly**

**One way to think about** the various elements of the introductory rites is to view them as the front door (or better, a series of doorways) through which the faithfilled people come in order to form the liturgical assembly.

**When we enter our own homes** or apartments, we may come through a gateway, proceed along the front walk, go up the steps, open the screen door and then the main front door, perhaps come into an entrance hall where we take off coats and boots, and only then enter the front room.

**In an apartment building** there is the outside door, a foyer, stairs or elevator, another hall, and finally the door to the apartment.

**These many doorways** or entranceways are of diverse shapes, sizes, colors and designs. Through these doorways we enter our own home or apartment, and know that we are “at home.” Or we enter into someone else’s home and are received with warm hospitality.

**At the Sunday eucharist,** through the diverse doorways of the introductory rites, we enter into our own home, the church. The church is not the building but rather the living, breathing liturgical assembly, the people of God gathered here and now, ready to exercise their baptismal right and responsibility to celebrate the Sunday eucharist.

**Naming the Church**

**Another way** of viewing the introductory rites is to think of each separate element as a way of naming the assembly, that is, of naming ourselves as church. Explicitly or implicitly, we also name the God who calls us together.
In the opening song we name ourselves as people of praise, joy and song. We collaborate with each other in acts of praise that are joyful and beautiful. Our God is described in various ways in individual songs, but implicitly is a God who has created us and created song and beauty.

In the sign of the cross and the apostolic greeting we name ourselves as sisters and brothers of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, and as friends and adopted children of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By naming our God here and elsewhere, we also implicitly denounce all that is not of God; we denounce all idols and thereby proclaim our allegiance to the one true God.

In the rite of blessing and sprinkling water we remind ourselves that we are part of God's creation, along with every other man and woman, girl and boy around the world. We also name ourselves as those baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the penitential rite we remind ourselves that we sometimes fall short of God's dream for us, both individually and as church community. We also proclaim that our God is a God who loves us and who is always ready to forgive us.

In the Glory to God we name ourselves as people of praise, worship and thanksgiving. The words of this song proclaim a God who is creator and redeemer.

In the opening prayer we name ourselves as people who pray, both individually and collectively, both silently and aloud.

Taking Part Together

Active participation: The prayers of the introductory rites call for our active participation, as does the entire Sunday eucharist. In fact, this part of the eucharistic liturgy is noteworthy for its high degree of verbal participation. In addition, the posture of standing denotes activity and participation.

In unison: In part the introductory rites consist of prayers said or sung in unison. These include the opening song, the action of making the sign of the cross, and the silent praying at the beginning of the blessing and sprinkling rite, at the beginning of the penitential rite and at the beginning of the opening prayer. In addition, we say the I confess and sing the Glory to God in unison.

The importance of song, such as the opening song, the Glory to God, and perhaps the Lord, have mercy and other parts, cannot be reiterated too often. Music in Catholic Worship tells us:

Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. ... Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith. It should heighten the texts so that they speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music adds to community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration. (n. 23)

In addition to expressing texts, music can also unveil a dimension of meaning and feeling, a communication of ideas and intuitions which
words alone cannot yield. This dimension is integral to the human personality and to growth in faith. It cannot be ignored if the signs of worship are to speak to the whole person. (n. 24)

Dialogues: The prayers of the introductory rites also include dialogues between presider and people. These include the words of the sign of the cross, the apostolic greeting, the Lord have mercy, and the opening prayer. The invitation to prayer followed by silent prayer is also a kind of dialogue.

Mutuality: Dialogues are not only involving and participatory, they demonstrate and express a spirit of mutuality between presider and people. They imply that the liturgy is the work of everyone, that each has his or her role, that at least part of the ministry of the priest is to invite and respect the participation of the other members of the assembly.

All are called to participate. The very form of our prayers shows us that everyone is involved, everyone is called to participate fully, actively and consciously.

Related to Weekday Life

At the beginning of the Sunday eucharist, all the members of the assembly have just come from their weekday lives. They carry these lives into their celebration, and afterwards carry the eucharist to their lives next week. In part, the introductory rites make connections between our daily lives and the eucharist. The periods of silent prayer at the beginning of the rite of blessing and sprinkling water, the penitential rite and the opening prayer, for example, give members of the assembly opportunities to bring something of their daily lives to the Sunday assembly.

Visible community: In the introductory rites of the Sunday eucharist we gather in response to God’s call. We become the visible community of the church, expressing both unity and diversity. We experience something of what it means for human beings to come together in the way God intends and which we will experience fully in God’s kingdom. We name and practice being the kind of community that will characterize the reign of God.

Human community everywhere: Our experience of community in the Sunday eucharist reminds us, challenges us, and encourages us to work to promote the unity of humankind and the formation of human community everywhere: within families, neighborhoods, cities, towns and nations; at work, in school, in our recreation.

God’s kingdom: Our liturgical experience of community leads us to transform our weekday communities so that they too will express the values of God’s kingdom. We confront idols and work for liberation, justice and true unity among peoples; we value the weak and neglected persons of our world and facilitate the full participation of all in our communities; we proclaim the radical equality of all and allow everyone to share their distinctive gifts.
November 9:
A Feast For The Assembly

The liturgical assembly celebrates its identity — its calling and mission — every Easter and every Sunday. These are primary feast days of the church. Pentecost, All Saints, and the feast day of the patron saint of the parish also are special days for the assembly.

November 9: There is one other special feast day for the assembly in the liturgical calendar, though it is not well known, and though its name tends to hide its significance in this regard. This is November 9, the feast of the dedication of the church of St John Lateran. Its texts are the same as those used for the dedication of churches.

Cathedral of Rome: The church or basilica¹ of St John Lateran is the cathedral of the city and diocese of Rome, and hence the pope’s church in a special way. Theologically, as the cathedral of Rome it is of greater significance than St Peter’s, though it is much less in the public eye. Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died, is the symbolic center of the church of the west. Its cathedral is the symbolic parent of all other western churches, including our own diocesan cathedral and parish churches.

Basilica of Jesus Christ: The designation “Lateran” comes from the name of a Roman family. Their city mansion eventually became the property of the emperor Constantine, and he gave it to the bishop of Rome. It came to be called “St John” because it was once served by monks from the nearby monasteries of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist; its own baptismistry was also dedicated to St John the Baptist. This church was originally dedicated as the basilica of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, however, and this its most significant designation.

Not about buildings: Contrary to what one might at first think, the liturgical texts for the dedication of churches in general and for the dedication of St John Lateran in particular, have little to do with church buildings. Instead, they are all about the church as people — baptized people, the Body of Christ. They are all about the assembly as the people chosen, called and gathered together for worship by God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is always present with his friends, disciples, sisters and brothers — his Body the Church — as they worship; theologically, he can be said to be the principal worshiper.

Houses for the church: Church buildings serve, at a practical level, to house the church and to provide an appropriate — even splendid — setting for the

¹ The term “basilica” originally referred to a certain type of Roman building. This type of building was used for secular purposes in ancient Rome, but was suited for church use as well. After the conversion of Constantine he gave a number of these buildings to the church, and this style of architecture was then copied when the church began to build its own buildings. In Romania the word biserică (= basilica) is still the ordinary name for churches today. The term basilica is now also a designation given to honor certain churches for one reason or another.
church's worship. In the early centuries of the Christian people the church building was not called "the church" but rather, "the house of the church;" this is more precise.

At another level, however, church buildings are symbols or icons of the real church; they point to, announce, and proclaim the presence and ministry of the real church which is God's faithfilled people.

Ourselves as church: Thus when we celebrate the dedication of a church building we are celebrating ourselves as church. When we celebrate the dedication of St John Lateran we also celebrate the communion of our individual assemblies with all other liturgical assemblies.

The biblical images that are central in the liturgical texts for November 9 are those of the Temple of Jerusalem and of the city of Jerusalem – both the historical city of the Hebrew scriptures and the gospels and the eschatological Jerusalem of the book of Revelation. In the context of this feast, however, these images become metaphors for us as church, for us as liturgical assembly. The symbolism employed in this feast's texts is highly imaginative and creative, as well as profound and moving.

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**Eucharist**

There is a single reading from the Old Testament, but we may choose between two readings from the epistles of Paul and four gospel lessons.

First Reading

We begin by proclaiming the story of Jacob's ladder, from Genesis 28. Jacob fell asleep, and in his dream a ladder or stairway reached from earth to heaven. God stands beside him and promises that "in you and your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing. Know that I am with you...." When Jacob awoke he exclaimed, "Truly, the Lord is in this spot, although I did not know it." He took the stone which had been his pillow, "set it up as a memorial stone, and poured oil on top of it."

Jacob's memorial stone reminds us of foundation stones, of capstones, and of the building stones of which the temple - and churches - are built. But we see that the stones that are really important are people. This image is developed creatively in the first letter of Peter:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2: 4-5)

As we shall see, the two readings from Paul contain similar images.
Psalm

Two psalm refrains are given: "How lovely is your dwelling-place, Lord, mighty God!" and "Here God lives among his people." Both apply in the first place to us as assembly, and only secondarily to the building that is the assembly's house.

Psalm verses sing, "My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord; Happy are they who dwell in your house; I had rather one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere." Do we feel this way about our Sunday assembly?

Second Reading

We may proclaim either 1 Corinthians 3: 9-13, 16-17 ("You are the temple of God") or Ephesians 2: 19-22 ("Through the Lord, the whole building is bound together as one holy temple"). Both use the image of a building to speak about the church. In the first passage Paul says directly, "You are God's building." Paul laid the foundation, but this foundation really is Jesus Christ himself. He moves on to affirm, "you are the temple of God, and ...the Spirit of God dwells in you."

The passage from Ephesians turns the image around a little. Now the foundation is the apostles and prophets, "with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone." "In him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit."

Gospel

The four gospel readings are most profound. The first is Matthew 5: 23-24, "Go and make peace with your brother first, and come and offer your gift." Though it refers to "the altar," it has no other reference to buildings. It is basically about the kind of relationships that members of the assembly should enjoy: mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

The second gospel reading is from Luke 19: 1-10, the story of Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to this house." Jesus chooses to associate with sinners – like us; he calls Zacchaeus – and us. "I mean to stay at your house today." Zacchaeus also proclaims justice: "I give half my belongings, Lord, to the poor. If I have defrauded anyone in the least, I pay him back fourfold."

The third gospel passage is John 2: 13-22: "He spoke about the temple of his own body." Actually, there are two references to temples. The first part of the reading is the story of Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the temple. Contrary to popular opinion, these and the other merchants named in the story were not bringing secular business into the temple. Rather, they were piously trying to facilitate the worship of those who had come from afar to the temple. They were not unlike those who sponsor church bingo games or bakesales, or those who sell candles, holy pictures or religious publications at the back of our churches. In all cases, the question is, are our priorities straight?

The second part of this reading applies the image of temple to Jesus' own body. "Destroy this temple...and in three days I will raise it up." The church is the Body of Christ in the Holy Spirit.
The fourth gospel reading is John 4: 19-24, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." In speaking with the Samaritan woman Jesus tells her that it is not so important in what geographical place we worship, but in what interior spiritual space we worship: "authentic worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Indeed it is just such worshipers the Father seeks."

Prayers

The first opening prayer uses the following images as virtual synonyms: living stones, chosen people, eternal temple, your church, faithful people, new and eternal Jerusalem. How rich!

God our Father,
from living stones, your chosen people,
you built an eternal temple to your glory.
Increase the spiritual gifts you have given to your Church,
so that your faithful people may continue to grow
into the new and eternal Jerusalem.

The second opening prayer speaks of God's people gathering together – that is, assembling – in God's name to love, honor and follow God to the eternal kingdom.

Father,
you called your people to be your Church.
As we gather together in your name,
may we love, honor, and follow you
to eternal life in the kingdom you promise.

The prayer after communion calls us God's church on earth, a sign of the new and eternal Jerusalem, the temple of God's presence, and the home of God's glory.

Father,
you make your Church on earth
a sign of the new and eternal Jerusalem.
By sharing in this sacrament
may we become the temple of your presence
and the home of your glory.

In the first preface for the dedication of a church we speak of this house of prayer, God's temple of living stones, the church, the body of Christ, and the heavenly city of Jerusalem which is the vision of God's peace.

We thank you now for this house of prayer
in which you bless your family
as we come to you on pilgrimage.
Here you reveal your presence
by sacramental signs,
and make us one with you
through the unseen bond of grace.

Here you build your temple of living stones,
and bring the Church to its full stature
as the body of Christ throughout the world, to reach its perfection at last in the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which is the vision of your peace.

The second preface speaks of the presence of God which makes us a house of prayer and place of blessing; we build up the temple of God's Spirit, creating its beauty from the holiness of our own lives.

Your house is a house of prayer, and your presence makes it a place of blessing. You give us grace upon grace to build the temple of your Spirit, creating its beauty from the holiness of our lives. Your house of prayer is also the promise of the Church in heaven. Here your love is always at work, preparing the Church on earth for its heavenly glory as the sinless bride of Christ, the joyful mother of a great company of saints.

In the antiphons and acclamations of the eucharist we sing:

I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, like a bride adorned in readiness for her husband.

Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool, says the Lord; what is the house that you would build for me?

My dwelling-place shall be with them, says the Lord, and I will be their God and they will be my people.

In my house, says the Lord, everyone who asks will receive; whoever seeks shall find; and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

Like living stones let yourselves be built on Christ as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood.

Liturgy of the Hours

Scripture readings: At evening prayer 1 we use a portion of the passage from Ephesians that is also proclaimed at mass: "you too, in Christ Jesus, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit." At morning prayer we turn to Isaiah: "I will make them joyful in my house of prayer; my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." At evening prayer 2 part of the wonderful chapter 21 of the book of Revelation is read: "I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.... Here God lives among humankind. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple."

The antiphons use many different images of temple, Jerusalem, house and people to speak of us as church:
The streets of Jerusalem will ring with rejoicing; they will resound with the song of praise: Alleluia

How safe a dwelling the Lord has made you; how blessed the children within your walls.

In the holy city, throngs of saints make jubilee; angels pour out their songs of praise before the throne of God, alleluia.

All you who love Jerusalem, rejoice with her for ever, alleluia.

My house will be called a house of prayer.

Blessed are you, O Lord, in your holy temple.

Praise the Lord in the assembly of his holy people.

Zacchaeus, hurry down, I mean to stay with you today. He hurried down and welcomed Christ with joy, for this day, salvation had come to his house.

This is God's dwelling place and he has made it holy; it will stand for ever firm.

Let us go up with rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

All you his saints, sing out the praise of our God.

This is God's dwelling place and he has made it holy; here we call on his name, for Scripture says: There you will find me.

In the responsories we sing:

Your house, O Lord, must always be a holy place.

For ever and ever.

The Lord is great beyond all telling, he exceeds all praise.

In the city of our God and on his holy mountain.

Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.

They will praise you for ever.

The intercessions begin:

Our Savior laid down his life so that all God's scattered children might be gathered together. In our need let us cry out: Remember your Church, Lord.

We are the living stones, laid upon the cornerstone that is Christ. Let us pray to our all-powerful Father for his Son's beloved Church, professing our faith in her as we say: This is the house of God and the gate of heaven.

The intercessions themselves first use images of Jesus Christ as founder and gatherer of his church. Then come images of God the Father as farmer, shepherd, sower and builder.

Lord Jesus, you built your house upon a rock

Lord Jesus, blood and water flowed from your side

Lord Jesus, you are in the midst of those who gather in your name

Lord Jesus, you prepare a dwelling place in your Father's house for all who love you
Lord Jesus, you never cast out anyone who comes to you
Father, like the farmer, prune your vineyard, protect it and increase its yield
Eternal shepherd, protect and increase your flock
All-powerful sower, plant the word in your field
Wise builder, sanctify your home and your family.

Office of Readings

In the antiphons of the office of readings we sing:
Open wide the doors and gates. Lift high the ancient portals.
How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of power and might.
Glorious things are said of you, O City of God.

Six different responsories are offered, to go with this number of readings. They provide a wide range of images of the assembly:
I saw water flowing eastward from beneath the threshold of the temple, alleluia.
Wherever the river flowed everything became alive; those who were saved by it cried out: Alleluia, alleluia.
When the temple was dedicated, the people sang songs of praise and beautiful hymns.
Your streets of gold, Jerusalem, will ring with happy song, throughout your length and breadth one great cry from the lips of all: Alleluia.
You will shine in splendor like the sun; all people on earth will pay you homage.
If two of you agree on earth to ask for anything whatever, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
Now my eyes will be open and my ears will be attentive to the prayer that is prayed in this place.
The walls of Jerusalem will be precious stones.
The towers of Jerusalem will be built with jewels.
The gates of Jerusalem will be built of sapphire and emerald,
and the wall around the city will be made of precious stones.
The Lord's house is built on the mountain summit; it is high above the hills.
From the ends of the earth people come running to it, crying out: Glory to you, Lord.
They come, see, they come, laughing for joy, laden with sheaves.
How I long, O mighty Lord, for the holy temple where you dwell.
My soul yearns for the courts of the Lord.
those who live in your house, O Lord, will praise you endlessly.
Liturgical Greetings

At or near the beginning of most contemporary liturgical rites there is a "greeting." Most often the greeting concludes with "be with you all" and it evokes the response, "And also with you."

Such greetings are dialogues between presider and the rest of the assembly. Presider and people speak with each other, pray for each other, show care and regard for one another. The greeting is an act of mutuality and active participation.

The Sacramentary provides three greetings for use at the eucharistic liturgy:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The Lord be with you.

The bishop's characteristic greeting is:

Peace be with you.

The same greetings have been used in most of the other new rites. However, a few new greetings were added as well, especially in the Rite of Penance (Appendix) and Order of Christian Funerals.

The Roman Book of Blessings,¹ however, includes a great variety of new and different greetings. They are of several styles and expand the content of the "regular" greetings in new and creative ways. Here we present all the greetings that follow the style, "be with you all/And also with you." Other types will be considered in a future issue of the Bulletin.²

Studying and meditating on the variety of greetings in our liturgical books may have several purposes:

• They may be the subject of meditation and prayer.

• They may be memorized and, with modification, be used as short prayers throughout the day. For example, a commonly used text may be changed to "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us" or "...is with us."

• Study may help us appreciate more the nature of a liturgical greeting.

¹ Book of Blessings, prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1989)

² The greetings of the liturgy have most recently been studied by Thomas A. Krosnicki, "Grace and peace: greeting the assembly," in Shaping English Liturgy, ed. P.C. Finn and J. M. Schellman (Washington: Pastoral Press 1990)
• This collection provides a treasury from which new greetings may be chosen, when this is permitted and when it is appropriate.

• These greetings may show us how to compose new greetings ourselves, for use when this is permitted and appropriate.

For convenience, this collection of greetings has been divided into a number of subtypes. In the liturgical books and even the Book of Blessings, some greetings are used more than once.

Type A

The Lord be with you.

May the Lord, whose praises are sung by the saints, be with you all.

May the Lord, who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous sight, be with you all.

May the Lord, who fills you with his bounty, be with you always.

May the Lord, who nourishes us with the bread of life, be with you.

May the Lord, who confirms us in holiness, be with you.

May the Lord, who went about doing good, be with you.

May the Lord, the dawn from on high who breaks upon us to guide our feet into the way of peace, be with you all.

May the Lord, whose word dwells in your hearts, be with you.

May the Lord Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, be with you all.

May the Lord Jesus, who commanded his disciples to heal the sick and bring them relief, be with you all.

Type B

Peace be with you.

Peace be with you (this house) and with all who live here.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Type C

May God, the source and origin of all, from whom every good thing comes to us, be with you all.

May God, the source of all holiness, who never ceases to call us to follow Christ, be with you all.

May God, our strength and salvation, be with you all.
Type D

May the love of God be with you always.
May the God of love and peace be with you all.
May the God of wisdom, knowledge, and grace be with you always.
May the God of hope give you the fullness of peace, and may the Lord of life be always with you.

Type E

May God, who has set us over the works of his hands, be with you all.
May God who loves you and fills your life with joy, be with you always.
May God, who through water and the Holy Spirit has given us a new birth in Christ, be with you all.
May God, who enlightens every heart, be with you.
May God, who sent us his Son as the herald of salvation and who continually pours the Holy Spirit of truth into our hearts, be with you all.
May God, who has given us power over the works of his hands, be with you all.
May God, who is wonderful in all his works, be with you all.
May God, who has called (chosen) us to be saints, be with you all.
May God, who is rich in mercy and who has favored us in wonderful ways, be with you all.
May God, the Most High, who created heaven and earth, be with you all.
May God, who is the fountain of all goodness, be with you all.

Type F

May the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation, be with you.
May the Father of mercies, who wills that all be saved, be with you.

Type G

May Christ, who became one of us in the womb of the Virgin Mary, be with you all.
May Christ, the Son of God, who was pleased to be known as the carpenter’s son, be with you all.
May the light of Christ, who is our peace and salvation, be always with you.
Type H

The grace and peace of God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior be with us for ever.

The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The grace and peace of God our Father, who raised Jesus from the dead, be always with you.

The grace and peace of God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ, who showed his love for children, be with you all.

The grace and peace of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, the image of the unseen God, be with you all.

The grace and peace of God our Father, who exalted the marriage bond and made it the sign of Christ and his church, be with you all.

The grace of God our Father, who has made us his children by adoption, be with you all.

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, be with you all.

Type I

Grace and peace be with you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ who loved us and washed away our sins.

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus who laid down his life for you.

Grace and peace in God's holy Church be with you all.

Type J

May the grace and peace of Christ be with you.

May the grace and peace of God our Father, the source of all blessings, be with you all.

Type K

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is eternal Wisdom and our only Teacher, be with you all.

The grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, who for our sake hung on the cross, be with you all.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, giver of life and conqueror of death, be with you all.
Type L

The grace and favor of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always.

Type M

Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son be with you in truth and love.

The grace, the mercy, and the peace of God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior be with you.

May grace, peace, and mercy from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, from whom we have the remission of all our sins, be with you all.

Type N

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered for us his body and blood, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mother, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the crowning glory of all the saints, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, who makes us one Church, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Others

May God, the source of all wisdom, Christ the Lord, his Word incarnate, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, be with you all.

The grace, the love, and the mercy of God be with you all.

The love of God our Father, the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Godparenting:  
A Life-Long Ministry

The ministry of godparenting is exercised during the liturgy of baptism for children in a variety of ways: accompanying the parents and child to the church and home afterwards, pledging to help the parents, signing the child’s forehead with the cross, joining the parents in the renunciation of sin and profession of faith, perhaps helping with the white garment and the lighting of the candle. We are well aware of these aspects of the godparents’ ministry.

In addition, the godparents have a continuing ministry that lasts at least until the child has reached adulthood. We sometimes forget or neglect this aspect of their ministry, however.

Toward the beginning of the liturgy of baptism for children the presider speaks to the parents in these or similar words:

You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

The parents reply, “We do.”

The godparents are then asked, “Are you ready to help these parents in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers?” The godparents respond, “We are.”

In the context, this “help” clearly goes beyond the liturgy of baptism. It includes the whole enterprise of raising a Christian child. What might this mean in practice? It is not the intention of the church that godparents necessarily assume responsibility for raising or supporting the child in case of the early death of its parents. Nor is it intended that they interfere or get too closely involved in the life of the family.

How godparents might actually help and support the parents in their responsibility needs further consideration by the church community. Here we present only one, very simple suggestion, namely to support and encourage the child by writing a letter (a letter, not just a signed card) to him or her once a year, on or around the date of the baptism. (It would be best if this letter were not confused with Christmas or birthday cards, which might also be sent on a regular basis.)

Children, and even teenagers, seldom receive letters addressed to them and for them personally. Such a letter would show in a concrete way the care and concern that the godparents still have for him or her, even many years after the baptism.

What should the letter say? As one of the characteristics of modern young people today is low self-esteem, the letter might tell the child how much the godparent cares about him or her, how valued he or she is, how much God loves him or her, etc. If the godparents really know the child, they might speak positively of his or her gifts or accomplishments. They might speak of the dignity conferred by baptism. The intent of the letter is primarily to support and encourage the child, not to prod, correct, or present expectations; parents, teachers and others do this all the time.

What other practices are occurring in parishes? What other suggestions do readers have along these lines?

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1 This article was inspired by a conversation with Dr. Elaine Ramshaw.
Eulogies, Funeral Homilies, and Words of Remembrance

A certain amount of confusion and ambiguity surrounds the use of the term "eulogy" in the context of the Order of Christian Funerals. This word seems to be used in four significantly different ways. In addition, it is applied to several different parts of the funeral liturgy. Finally, though it is widely known that eulogies are prohibited in the Roman Catholic funeral liturgy, persons who participate in such liturgies often say afterwards that they heard a eulogy. Here an attempt will be made to clarify this issue.

Four Meanings of Eulogy

Dictionaries give us two meanings of the word "eulogy," and another two seem to be in popular use in the context of the funeral liturgy.

- Eulogy is a certain kind of rhetoric or public speaking, focused on the deceased person, with the intention of praising him or her.
- Eulogy is simply any "high praise," particularly with reference to a dead person. There may be an implication that the praise is exaggerated or even untrue.
- Eulogy is sometimes used to refer to any preaching at a funeral, regardless of form or content.
- Eulogy may also be used to refer to any kind of personal reference to the deceased, whether with high praise or not. (Of course, at a funeral most references to the deceased will be positive, even if not truly laudatory.)

The Prohibition of Eulogies

How is "eulogy" used in the Catholic funeral liturgy, and which of these meanings of "eulogy" is prohibited by the church?

Not used: Except in the context of prohibition, the Order of Christian Funerals never uses the term eulogy. It would be best if priests and other pastoral ministers would also avoid this term and discourage its use in parishes. It is in such wide circulation, however, that its use and misuse cannot be influenced too much.

The prohibition of eulogies is found in the general introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals (n. 27 in the Canadian edition) and in the introduction to "the funeral liturgy," that is, the funeral mass or funeral liturgy out-
side mass (n. 308). The general introduction says, “A brief homily on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service, but there is never to be a eulogy.”

Though “eulogy” is not further defined, this brief statement provides quite a bit of information. Thus the eulogy is a kind of preaching; it is preaching by the presiding minister; it is a different kind of preaching than a homily; and, if given, it replaces the homily.

A kind of rhetoric: It seems clear, then, that it is the first definition of eulogy given above that is prohibited: a particular form of rhetoric or public speaking whose primary focus is to heap praises upon the deceased; it has little or nothing to do with the scripture readings or with the paschal mystery; indeed it may have no theological perspective at all. This is the kind of eulogy that is prohibited, and with very good reason. It is simply not Christian preaching.

Homily as Eulogy

In place of homily: Eulogy is being used in an entirely different way when it is meant to describe any preaching at funerals. It is thus used to describe a true homily at the vigil or funeral mass. This use is not prohibited by the church, but it is a very poor use of the term. This usage is not helpful and is to be discouraged. Certainly, preachers themselves should never make this mistake. A homily is a homily, and we need to say so.

Personal References to the Deceased

Some presiders and preachers seem to think that the prohibition against eulogies means that they cannot or should not say anything personal about the deceased in the homily – or at other appropriate occasions in the funeral liturgy. This view is quite mistaken; personal references are not prohibited at all. Indeed, a failure to make some personal reference to the deceased goes against the intent of the funeral homily.

The introduction to “the funeral liturgy” tells us that:

The homilist should dwell on God’s compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord proclaimed in the Scripture readings. Through the homily, the community should receive the consolation and strength to face the death of one of its members with a hope that has been nourished by the proclamation of the saving word of God (n. 308).

The general introduction has the same description, but adds:

The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well (n. 27).
Presiders cannot possibly attain these goals without including some personal references to the deceased.¹ In his recent commentary on the funeral liturgy, Richard Rutherford says:

The homily is not a eulogy to honor the deceased. We gather to remember one whose achievements have touched us ‘for the good.’ We gather because we believe he or she is alive and with God. We are not merely looking to the past and honoring our dead; we are hearing words that speak of life – life changed and not ended. The homily is addressed to us, the living, to keep alive our faith.

The homily at the funeral liturgy is counseled by the Ordo to...take into account the authenticity of faith that marked the life and death of the deceased. Relating the death of a given deceased person to the saving death and resurrection of Jesus will certainly take his or her life into account.

All concede the need to duly recognize the Christian whose funeral Mass is being celebrated.²

In another commentary, William Cieslak goes further:

For the bereaved, the narration of the deceased’s ‘story’ is a recollection in the face of loss by which they create a memory. In speaking about the deceased in the past tense, thereby distinguishing memory from reality, they take a significant step in their own grieving process.

Perhaps part of the larger story of the deceased is the story of the faithful deceased: those aspects or elements, those scenes or events, that remember the deceased as a faithful Christian, as one who tried to live life inspired by the Gospels and the example of Christ. Struggle, difficulty, temptation are all part of this story as are grace, goodness, and freedom. Such memories manifest salvation history as lived out in the life of the deceased. These ‘stories’ witness to the living presence of Christ in the deceased and in the world, and become the points of intersection with the Church’s ‘story’ about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. At these points the two sets of stories become one: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the life and death of the faithful Christian. It is this faith dimension of the deceased’s story that is quite fittingly told in the vigil service and as part of the funeral liturgy.

The cry in liturgical circles today is for a homily, not a eulogy, to be given as part of the liturgy of the word. Some homilists totally disregard this rubric. Others err in the opposite direction, preparing a ‘generic homily’ and delivering it over and over again. Often they give a homily that is a teaching or discourse on death rather than words capable of moving the hearts of the hearers, strengthening their faith, and offering nourishment.

...the homilist, it would seem, has to incorporate something about the deceased in the homily.³

¹ It is accepted that in some cases nothing personal is known about the deceased, and so the funeral has to be more impersonal. However, that is not the typical parish situation.


Words of Remembrance

In everyday usage, the term “eulogy” is sometimes also applied to another element of the funeral liturgy, namely, the brief words of remembrance of the deceased given by a member of the family or friend of the deceased.

This is described in the Order of Christian Funeral’s introduction to vigils for the deceased (n. 90):

After this prayer [the prayer of intercession] and before the blessing or at some other suitable time during the vigil, a member of the family or a friend of the deceased may speak in remembrance of the deceased.

A rubric toward the end of each vigil liturgy states, “A member of the family or a friend of the deceased may speak in remembrance of the deceased.”

Not a eulogy: Though these words of remembrance obviously will speak of the deceased, they will undoubtedly do so in a positive way, and may perhaps be laudatory, they are not the eulogy that is prohibited at Catholic funerals. Again, we should avoid using the term “eulogy” for this part of the vigil service and instead use a more precise and descriptive term such as “remembrance” or “words of remembrance.”

The words of remembrance are an optional part of the funeral liturgy, and in Canada they are included in the vigil but not in the funeral mass.¹

The content and style of the words of remembrance are not described in the introductions or pastoral notes of the Order of Christian Funerals. We may deduce, however, that they are not to be lengthy. The rubrics indicate that they are to be given by a single person. Even if this is not adhered to literally, it suggests that they are not to go on and on. As with every individual element of a liturgical celebration, the words of remembrance need to be in balance with the other elements.

Not praise: In addition, they are to be words of remembrance, not exaggerated praise. William Cieslak says:

Brief words, spoken by various people, can provide the deeply personal and human touch often absent from funeral liturgies. Much like speeches at the conclusion of a banquet, these words bring recognition of the one honored into focus.²

Finally, though guidelines may and indeed should be given to the persons carrying out this ministry, it will not be possible for planners or presiders to completely control this part of the vigil liturgy.

¹ In the United States they are also permitted, as an option, at the end of the funeral mass, just before the final commendation. This difference in practice between the two countries should be kept in mind in reading educational materials regarding the funeral rite that come from the U.S.
² Cieslak, Console One Another, p. 138.
Invitations to Prayer

Another use: Some apply the term eulogy to the “invitations to prayer” at or near the beginning of the vigil liturgy, the rite of final commendation, and the rite of committal. Here “eulogy” seems to mean the inclusion of any personal references to the deceased.

Model texts: Though texts are printed for all three invitations, these are only models, and the presiding minister may instead use “similar words” (n. 340) or “a similar invitation” (n. 390).

May be composed: It is entirely in order for presiders to compose alternative invitations that are more appropriate than those printed, for example, in light of the circumstances of the death or the needs of the family and community. However, they should never become speeches, occasions to make casual remarks, or opportunities to praise the deceased person. They always need to invite the community to prayer. These invitations should never be called eulogies, and indeed their content and style should not tempt those present to do so.

Richard Rutherford describes the invitation to prayer at the beginning of the final commendation as follows:

The invitation to prayer alerts all present to the uniqueness of the moment, and the silence that follows allows them to enter personally into this final commendation and expression of last farewell. Here is an interplay of active participation and silence. This invitation to prayer is to ensure that what follows is truly an opportunity for faith-filled prayer, commending the deceased to God while at the same time proclaiming paschal faith and consoling hope. The presiding minister’s words are important, the invitation having been prepared as thoughtfully as the funeral homily. They are to include both an introduction and brief explanation.6

In view of the number of different ways in which eulogy is used, it would seem best for liturgists, teachers, priests and other pastoral ministers to avoid this term as much as possible. More precise language is available — homily, words of remembrance, invitations to prayer, personal references to the deceased, etc. — and is preferable.


This book is quick and easy to read and provides good liturgical principles and primary resources for liturgy planning teams. The first section deals with the basics for planning eucharistic liturgies and includes reference to readings, music, processions, and the environment. The author proceeds to expand on these basics in a limited way.

There are some good practical suggestions for liturgy coordinators such as rehearsing ministers for their ministries (a must for school liturgies!), the timing of movement, and being intentional in our liturgical celebrations. A check list is provided to assist planners in the celebration of the eucharist and the hours.

The book falls short of recognizing the sub-culture of youth and providing some practical approaches in adapting liturgy to children and adolescents. It also limits liturgical celebrations to eucharist and hours, thereby ignoring penitential liturgies and various kinds of celebrations that can play a major role in the liturgical formation of youth.

This is a worthwhile resource for teachers wishing to develop sound liturgical principles.

Reviewed by Mr. Paul Tratnyek who is a high school chaplain in the diocese of Hamilton and chairperson of the National Council for Liturgy.

Psalm Prayers for Morning and Evening arranged for the daily office edited by Brian Magee, CM. Veritas Publications, 7-8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1. ISBN 1-85390-121-0, 64pp, appendices, indices, 3.50 Irish pounds.


These two books, received from Ireland, are collections of psalm prayers for communities or groups which celebrate daily prayer in common. Psalm prayers provide a brief pause after each psalm for personal prayer. These useful collections will offer inspiration for those looking for prayerful reflections on the psalms and canticles.


The investigation of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen by the Vatican is the backdrop for this examination of episcopal authority and primacy in the Roman Catholic Church. The articles of this volume originate from the
series of symposia held at Seattle University between 1987 and 1989. Among the contributors are David Tracy, Richard McBrien, Anne Patrick, Peter Chirico, Karen Barta, Michael Raschko and Mary Ellen Sheehan.


A collection of traditional prayers, including psalms, novenas and litanies for various occasions.

**Choosing Joy for Lent** by Marilyn Norquist Gustin. 1990 Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057-9999. ISBN 0-89243-331-0 79pp, $3.95 US.

Too often Lent is greeted with sorrow rather than joy. This small book contains many suggested themes and practices to recover the joyful transformation of this season. Each chapter (for example: "Attachment Hinders Joy") offers a reflection, practices and scripture readings.


Susan Muto’s clear writing style combined with one of the great spiritual writers makes this an excellent book and reading guide for the spiritual life. As more people experience some religious awakening in their lives, this book on St. John of the Cross offers sound guidance.

Those who are seeking the balance between the excesses of “selfisms” and religious rigidity will experience the enlightenment of this Spanish mystic.


Contains the calendars and propers for both the Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Alternate Services along with the Anglican Cycle of Prayer.


A good, short summary of the principal events of church history. The text also contains useful tables and charts for easy reference and a summary of the documents of Vatican II.


A good morale boaster for preachers who underestimate the power of the word. The author examines the various roles of the preacher under the headings: What? Why? How? When? or, the preacher as reconciler, gift-giver, witness and nurturer.

**Ecumenical Marriage & Remarriage** by Michael Lawler. 1990 Twenty-Third Publications, 185 Willow Street, PO Box 180, Mystic, CT 06355. ISBN 0-89622-441-4, 101pp, notes, $8.95 US.

Although the title refers to ecumenical marriages, the author’s exposition on marriage is applicable to all Christians who wish to understand and live their commitment to God and spouse. The author provides inspiration to couples and those who assist in the preparation of marriage.
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Vigils and Related Rites from the Order of Christian Funerals. A participation booklet for vigil services, funeral liturgies outside of Mass and office of the dead. Contains 25 hymns with musical notation. 109pp, $3.95 plus GST.

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