Reconciliation in Our Broken World
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Reconciliation
in Our
Broken World

Before we can adequately address questions surrounding
the sacrament of penance, we need to consider reconcilia-
tion in a broader perspective, both as a human need and
experience and the many ways it is celebrated liturgically.
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Questions about Sacramental Reconciliation

Few are entirely satisfied with the state of sacramental reconciliation — the rite of penance — in the church today. Some show their dissatisfaction by not celebrating this sacrament as frequently as once was the case; some never frequent the confessional or reconciliation room. Others lament that so few go to confession; lay people are sometimes chastised for not doing so, and presbyters are sometimes accused of being negligent in carrying out this ministry. Some point out liturgical shortcomings in the three forms of the rite of penance, and shortcomings in their celebration. Synods have been held and books have been written on this subject, yet, at least in the short term, little or nothing has changed. In a recent survey, U.S. bishops, presbyters and lay people expressed quite different opinions for the decline in sacramental reconciliation.

A time of transition? One possible interpretation is that it is time for a major change in the way the rite of penance and reconciliation is understood and celebrated. In the long history of the church, drastic shifts in thinking about and celebrating this sacrament have occurred several times. When this happens, people stop celebrating the sacrament, bishops and presbyters lament and cajole, theologians ponder, new practices are experimented with, and eventually — perhaps over one or two centuries — new official theologies and liturgical rites emerge. Are we entering into such a process of radical change now?

Better theological statements? Another interpretation might be that the theological assumptions of the present rite need critical examination and restatement. Some would say that some of the views of sin, of God, of salvation, of the ministry of Jesus Christ, of the church, etc., that are presupposed or expressed in the present rite of penance are in need of updating or revision. Alternatively, it may be that the theology of this rite is basically good, but needs to be expressed in language that better fits the realities and needs of the modern world and contemporary people.

Better understanding and improved rites? Others might say that the new rite of penance has never been given a chance; that it is still being celebrated with pre-Vatican II understandings and attitudes. Alternatively, perhaps the new liturgical rites do not allow people to experience the full potential of this sacrament.

In this issue of the Bulletin, we explore some of the questions and perspectives regarding reconciliation that are being considered by contemporary writers. This will be done by looking at the subject of reconciliation broadly and from a number of perspectives. The emphasis will be on stating the issues that need to be considered and on raising questions that church communities and ministers need to face.
Some Helpful Reading


Richard M. Gula, “A reconciling community. The context for penance” *Church* (Summer 1990) 23-27


Lord our God,
on the first day of creation
you made the light
that scatters all darkness.
Let Christ, the light of lights,
hidden from all eternity,
shine . . . on your people
and free us from the darkness of sin.
Fill our lives with good works
as we go out to meet your Son,
so that we may give him a fitting welcome.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Rite of Penance. Appendix II, n. 24*
The Human Need for Reconciliation

Reconcile: to restore to friendship or harmony.  
*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*

**Good things too:** Before considering the great need for reconciliation in our world today, we should also remember the lives of good people that surround us and the many good things that are happening in our society. We are blessed by the healers, peacemakers, peacekeepers, counsellors and mediators in our world, by those who carry on the work of reconciliation in myriad ways, and by the women, men and children who live lives of reconciliation, friendship and harmony. Too often they are unrecognized and their work is unreported.

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Our Broken World

Wherever we look, we also see situations in which there is a crying need for the restoration of “friendship or harmony.” These needs are both societal and personal.

**Societal Needs**

Today’s news: On the day this is written, the city newspapers print these headlines:
- Women still carry the load. Statistics Canada finds husbands shirking the housework
- Palestinians exchange shots as leaders debate peace move
- Troops got no thanks, just stones and bullets
- Albertans still lost in sexist fog, Tory says
- Angry workers shove tourists, trash government fishery office
- Parents of boy who drowned say son target of kids’ ridicule
- Argentine officials horrified over global child-sex network
- Mostar explodes in mortar, tank fire
- Soldier’s land was stolen . . . by the government he was fighting to preserve
• Horror greets youth proposals. Putting teens in adult correction system condemned
• Egypt charges militants with plotting overthrow
• Catholic trustees unfair to school superintendent
• United Nations: a global failure whose days are numbered
• Local environmentalists join fight to save trees of Clayoquot Sound
• Social, labor groups fight spending cuts
• Tenants flee apartment after arsonist strikes
• Husband admits assaulting teacher
• Women in crime: dangerous offenders?

Church newspapers from the end of summer add their own perspectives:
• Christians should work to eliminate prisons
• Bishop's slaying linked to Salvadoran military
• Basilica bombing linked to Italy's political crisis
• Welfare cuts violate human rights
• When marriage loses its spark
• Ethnic hatred a problem not only in Bosnia
• Tutu calls for confession, forgiveness
• Sudanese allowed to die.

A broken world: Each of us could add other stories that show the reality of our broken world, which seems to be full of violence, oppression, inhumanity, greed, exploitation, discrimination, intolerance, failure to listen or to care or to reach out. How difficult it is – or will be – to restore these situations and persons to friendship and harmony!

Is the rite of reconciliation relevant? Does sacramental reconciliation respond in any significant way to the many grave situations of brokenness and disharmony proclaimed in the headlines of our newspapers? Or is this an unrealistic expectation? Does this sacrament have to do with something else? How, for example, could a sacrament of the Roman Catholic church affect persons, groups and societies that are not members of our church and who will never celebrate this sacrament?

How does the Church respond? It seems possible to affirm that the church as a whole needs to be terribly concerned about societal violence, discord and oppression. Church leaders and each member of the church are called to be prophetic in naming and denouncing lapses from peace and reconciliation. They are also called to be courageous and energetic in helping to work – directly and indirectly, through church structures and in many other ways – for reconciliation and harmony. But this "ministry of justice" or "social justice activism" is a different dimension of the Christian life from sacramental reconciliation. Two articles later in this issue consider ways in which justice ministry is rooted deeply in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.
Violence by Catholics: Sacramental reconciliation, however, is related to societal brokenness in several ways. Individual Catholics and members of nations and cultures traditionally considered to be Catholic, are involved in some of the violence and oppression named in the newspaper headlines quoted above; they are among both the victims and those who do violence. Is it that the church members involved do not celebrate sacramental reconciliation? Or is it that the celebration of this sacrament has not had much effect in their lives? Why there is great violence in some traditionally Catholic societies is a matter for us to ponder.

A model of reconciliation: The celebration of sacramental reconciliation — and other sacraments — ought also to transform the church as a whole so that it can be a credible model of peace and reconciliation. In order to speak out against violence, it needs to practice what it preaches and to live as a community of reconciliation that will be attractive to others and provide an alternative model of human relationships. Does the celebration of sacramental reconciliation have this effect in the church? It is meant to?

The ministry of reconciliation: At the individual level, does the celebration of sacramental reconciliation “connect” at all with the lack of reconciliation in the world around us? Do those who celebrate this sacrament see any relationship between the reconciliation they have experienced and the need for reconciliation in the society around them? Does the celebration of this sacrament challenge them and sensitize them to the need to be ministers of reconciliation in their own lives? Or, is sacramental reconciliation in practice so individualistic and narrowly focused that these wider dimensions are overlooked and neglected?

Social sin: Finally, there is much discussion in the church today about “social sin.” Some deny its existence and put full responsibility for all social discord on the sinfulness of individuals. Others, without neglecting the responsibility of individual persons, also perceive a real or potential “sinfulness” in some structures of society. Only in this way, they believe, can we explain how good people sometimes are caught up in, and become agents of violence, in some complex societal situations.

Does sacramental reconciliation have anything at all to do with social sin? Should it? If it does not, then in what other ways can the church carry out its ministry of reconciliation in the social order?

These are just some of the questions that need to be considered regarding reconciliation in our broken world and the relationship of these needs to sacramental reconciliation.

Personal Needs

What do people feel? Here is how two writers express the personal needs of individuals today:

... the need to come home to one’s true place, to find liberation from fear, boredom and frustration, to find one’s authentic existence behind the many masks of unreality, to find peace from restlessness, anxiety and discontent, to feel a bottomless inner peace with God, with other people and all fellow creatures, with one’s own dependency and limitations and with
the uncertainty of the future and the certainty of death . . . . What is directly accessible to experience is the restlessness, the discontent, the fear and diffuse anxiety, the inability to live in harmony and community with others, the inability to accept our own dependency, poverty and limitations.¹

Limitations, alienation, suffering, pain, death, hurting, aching, disintegration, broken self, burdens, guilt, denial, rejection, indifference, darkness, doubt, being out of touch, grief, violence, inadequacy, lack of peace, failure, neglect, misunderstandings, helplessness, false values, struggles, defeats, anxieties, pretending . . . hate, rejection, indifference, violence, pretending, neglect, alienation, aloneness, being out of touch . . . . Refusal to love, to be present, to encourage, to care, to heal, causes rupture within and without.²

Is the rite effective? The needs of individuals are more clearly within the “competence” of sacramental reconciliation than are society’s needs. How effective is our rite in dealing with the descriptions of individual brokenness just quoted? In fact, one reason why some do not celebrate this sacrament is their feeling – and experience – that the rite is not effective at these deep levels. Our rite is sometimes accused of being entirely too superficial, dealing with specific sins when the problem is with deeper and more fundamental sinfulness.

The expectations of the rite, as expressed in its Introduction, are high:

The follower of Christ who has sinned but who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the sacrament of penance should above all be converted to God with his whole heart. This inner conversion of heart embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life. (n. 6)

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is ‘heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more.’ ‘We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by metanoia. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance’ (see Hebrews 1: 2; Colossians 1: 19 and passim). The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ. (n. 6a)

The sacrament of penance includes the confession of sins, which comes from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins. (n. 6b)

True conversion is completed by acts of penance or satisfaction for the sins committed, by amendment of conduct, and also by the reparation of injury. The kind and extent of the satisfaction should be suited to the personal condition of each penitent so that each one may restore the order

¹ Monika K. Hellwig, Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion. The Sacrament of Penance for Our Times (Wilmington: Michael Glazier 1982) 107-108
which he disturbed and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which he suffered. Therefore, it is necessary that the act of penance really be a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life. Thus the penitent, 'forgetting the things which are behind him' (Philippians 3:13), again becomes part of the mystery of salvation and turns himself toward the future. (n. 6c)

These are noble aspirations, but are they realistic? Can the present rite accomplish these aims, even if celebrated very well?

Conversion: Recent experiences of the human phenomenon of conversion in the context of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has taught us how complex and difficult true and effective conversion can be. The RCIA has taught us that the process of turning to the church and to God takes a certain amount of time, and that trying to hurry this process may not be successful. Furthermore, the RCIA has taught us the importance of community support on an on-going basis. Have we applied these learnings to the celebration of sacramental reconciliation?

Mystagogy: The concept and practice of mystagogy in the RCIA – reflecting on the experience of the liturgies of initiation in order to absorb, deepen and learn to live out their meaning – also has consequences for sacramental reconciliation. It is a common experience that the “satisfaction” or “penance” assigned after the confession is not in fact “suited to the personal condition of each penitent so that each one may restore the order which he disturbed and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which he suffered,” as the Rite of Penance (Introduction, n. 6c) requires. The help needed to live out the experience of reconciliation is not forthcoming, at least for some penitents.

In a context: Part of the problem, according to some, is that the liturgical rite of reconciliation needs to be set in a broader context that includes other experiences – in and out of the church – that also minister to healing and the restoration of harmony. Counselling, therapy, self-help and support groups of all kinds, spiritual direction, good experiences of Christian community and eucharistic liturgy, for example, ought to be valued and explicitly named as being related to sacramental reconciliation.

Relationship to daily life: Others would go further and say that the rite of reconciliation is less effective than desired because it is too divorced from the lives of Christians as a whole; it is too much a separate moment, too isolated from other experiences of reconciliation. Richard M. Gula reminds us:

Liturgy and life are not the same. We should not expect our sacramental celebrations to substitute for genuine human experience, and vice versa. Life is where our experiences happen. Sacramental celebrations are our ways of dealing with human experiences in faith . . . sacraments do not give us something we do not already have. Rather, sacraments are our way of deepening an experience already going on in our lives by lighting up the religious dimensions that are already there. For example, in life we take the risk to trust in the goodness within ourselves and within another who wants to walk together again in pardon and in peace. Our trust is the energy that enables us to say, “I’m sorry for what has broken our relationship.” In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we touch the source of that energy by proclaiming God’s love and acceptance of us.
While we cannot substitute a liturgical experience for a life experience, or collapse one into the other, we should not isolate one from the other. This means that only when reconciliation becomes a reality in our life will the Sacrament of Reconciliation make sense. In fact, without a life of reconciliation, the liturgical celebration of reconciliation is an empty charade. Or at least, it is putting the cart before the horse. For a church like ours that is rich in ritual, we are always in danger of ritualizing without adequate preparation. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) tries to safeguard against the danger with regard to the Sacraments of Initiation. When it comes to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, however, a narrow legalism seems to have turned what ought to be a celebration of forgiveness into a kind of clinical clerical legal pardon.

The decline of participation in this sacrament can be attributed in part to our gradually separating this sacrament from the life of reconciliation that must be lived before as well as after the ritual moment of Reconciliation.

The effective celebration of Reconciliation, then, demands more than knowing the proper ways to celebrate the Rite according to the ritual. Effective celebration of this sacrament also calls for living a life of reconciliation so that we have good life experiences to deepen through the sacramental celebration.  

**Part of a process:** The idea that sacraments are moments in the life process, and that they should celebrate what is happening in our lives, is widely accepted in modern sacramental theology. The rite itself does not say very much in this regard (though it does not contradict it), and the structure of the rite does not take this into account. Does the rite need to be improved from this point of view? What role does pastoral ministry between celebrations of reconciliation have to play? What education of pastoral ministers and lay people is needed in this regard?

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**Sinned Against**

**Victims of sinful behavior:** People who find themselves in need of reconciliation at the human level sometimes find that this is not so much because they themselves have acted in ways that have broken relationships, but because others have sinned against them; they feel more sinned against than sinners. Sacramental reconciliation, however, deals with the individual’s responsibility for brokenness— with the forgiveness of sin.

**How does the church respond?** Should sacramental reconciliation be expected to deal with the experience of being sinned against, or is this not within its terms of reference? In the latter case, in what ways does or should the church minister to this serious human need?

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Reconciliation and Justice

**Continuation of violence:** Victims of destructive behavior by others have additional concerns about sacramental reconciliation. If and when they celebrate this sacrament, they forgive those who have sinned against them. This is what Jesus Christ desires, and what his disciples desire as well. But those who are forgiven – the perpetrators of violence – may continue to batter their wives, abuse their children, or continue whatever other kind of sinful behavior they engage in.

**Where and when** does the need for justice come into consideration? The sad experiences of some persons have led them to think that sacramental reconciliation in practice can perpetuate situations of violence and appear to condone destructive behavior against those who desire reconciliation and who offer forgiveness to those who sin against them. Does our practice of sacramental reconciliation – or the pastoral ministry that ought to accompany it – protect victims of violence and help them in situations of vulnerability?

**Reparation of injury:** Sacramental reconciliation may also be celebrated by persons who have done violence to spouses, children and other persons, and who sincerely repent and seek God’s forgiveness. The Introduction to the Rite of Penance clearly states that “true conversion is completed by acts of penance or satisfaction for the sins committed, by amendment of conduct, and also by the reparation of injury” (n. 6c, emphasis added). To what extent is “the reparation of injury” taken seriously in the celebration of reconciliation today? To what extent does this “reparation” actually make up for the violence done or help the victim?

**In their human weakness,** persons who have engaged in violent behavior against others and who have celebrated sacramental reconciliation, may revert to their previous habits. Such persons may feel that the rite of reconciliation has been of too little help to them. The victims of their destructive behavior also may feel negatively toward the sacrament and the church. They may feel that the sacrament is being used to condone violence against them. What is, or might be, done in such situations?

* * *

Lord our God,
you call us out of darkness into light,
out of self-deception into truth,
out of death into life.
Send us your Holy Spirit
to open our ears to your call.
Fill our hearts with courage
to be true followers of your Son.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

*Rite of Penance. Appendix II, n. 56*
Reconciliation and the Life of the Church

The Introduction to the Rite of Penance speaks of the church in this way:

Christ ‘loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy’ (Ephesians 5: 25-26), and he united the Church to himself as his bride. He filled her with his divine gifts, because she is his body and fullness, and through her he spreads truth and grace to all.

The members of the Church, however, are exposed to temptation and unfortunately often fall into sin. As a result, ‘while Christ, holy, innocent, and unstained (Hebrews 7: 26), did not know sin (2 Corinthians 5: 21) but came only to atone for the sins of the people (see Hebrews 2: 17), the Church, which includes within itself sinners and is at the same time holy and always in need of purification, constantly pursues repentance and renewal.’ (n. 3)

The church is called to be sacrament of reconciliation, to live out reconciliation, to model harmony and mutual love, to give an example of good relationships. The liturgy of sacramental reconciliation and the life of the church as a whole, need to be consistent one with the other. But is this the case?

Alienation in the church: Today we are conscious that some people – perhaps many – do not experience the church as a community of reconciliation. In practice, they find that one or another dimension of church life and ministry is alienating. Such persons are not likely to find sacramental reconciliation inviting.

Frailty of the church: Who might not experience our parishes and diocesan churches as sacraments of reconciliation? The following headlines from recent church newspapers will begin to tell the story.

- Bishop regrets male paradigm
- New agreement compensates abuse victims
- Bishops recommend new pro-life strategy
- Catechism praised, criticized
- Lutherans seek intercommunion
- Bishops unhappy with report on violence
- Marian devotions linked to feminism
- Jesus didn’t invite women to Last Supper
- Finding middle ground on Humanae Vitae
- Youth seek a place in their parishes
• Religious orders seek new life in the face of impending death
• Pope says capitalism is no panacea for society’s woes
• Africans blast ‘contraceptive colonialism’
• Lefebvre followers remain aloof to Vatican efforts
• Vatican affirms Danylak’s authority in Toronto eparchy
• World Council is off track – Orthodox bishops
• Time for action re: enculturation of the faith
• Lessons of the Holocaust often seem overlooked
• Collegiality means being open to others
• Unity a priority for new Anglican bishop
• Youth take issue with church teaching
• Bishop: I am an alcoholic
• The teaching church cannot ignore the voice of the people
• Church leaders apologize to aboriginal peoples
• Law firm to sue churches for abuses
• Bishops struggle over social justice statements
• Diocese has sex abuse policy in place
• Laity should be consulted
• Pope invites chief Israeli rabbi to Rome
• Gay youth lament Vatican antipathy in face of suicides
• Women-Church: A way to stay while patriarchy walks away

In parishes and dioceses: Who might not experience our parishes and diocesan churches as sacraments of reconciliation? Perhaps the separated, divorced and remarried; sometimes single persons and single parents; those in irregular marriage situations; perhaps those who practice birth control or who have had an abortion; homosexual members of the church; at times, members of other churches, members of other faiths, and guests. Women may feel excluded or inferior in some parish and diocesan churches, children in others, and elsewhere elderly persons or persons with disabilities.

Aboriginal peoples and church employees: We are well aware that women and men who were abused sexually or physically or culturally by priests or religious or in church institutions, may well feel alienated from the church. Aboriginal peoples who feel that the church and its missionaries assaulted their traditional cultures may not experience the church as sacrament of reconciliation. Persons who have been paid unjustly low wages by the church, or who have worked for the church for years without health or retirement benefits, or who have been fired from church jobs in ways that were abusive, may also fail to think of the church in terms of reconciliation.
Mutual excommunication? Our church has many laws, rules, norms and points of view that are, in themselves quite logical and clearly justified. The end result, however, is that some baptized sisters and brothers are in practice, "shunned" or "excommunicated" or feel unwelcome or inferior. As well, it sometimes is the case that those in different theological camps intentionally or unintentionally "excommunicate" each other. In addition, some traditions or practices may not be consistent with the gospel.

From a different perspective, Kathleen Hughes tells us that:

In his intervention at the 1983 Synod on reconciliation Archbishop John Roach discussed the chronic rejection and alienation felt by some people in our community which they might easily ascribe to the Church or even to God, namely those who are minorities because of race, low income, psychological and physiological problems, minimal social skills, disordered family environments, and other factors which separate them from society's mainstream. He says:

Such people sometimes carry a diffused sense of guilt, stemming not from personal sin but from judgments rendered by the majority culture. Some cultures, for example, subtly regard personal prosperity and social success as signs of God's favor. The absence of such achievements can impose unrealistic burdens of guilt and a sense of divine rejection on numbers of people. Pastors must attempt to dispel such guilt and self-depreciation, for it is unrelated to personal sin. The pastor's acceptance of all penitents as sinners like himself is essential in reconciling the socially alienated Catholic.¹

Hughes continues:

Is it possible that the Church communicates, in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes not so subtle, that we are a community of the saved and that broken people have no home with us?

It may be that "shunning" has been going on in our preoccupation with number and species, and with the sixth and the ninth commandments. It may be that we communicate that the community embraces only certain of its members, members who have the good fortune to remain in stable marriages, members who abide by Western cultural values, members who are codifiable in canon law, members whose religious constitutions are approved.

In whatever measure we communicate to one another that there is a hierarchy among us because of vocation, sex, values, lifestyle, we suggest that the shadow of public canonical penance remains, although it is off the books. In whatever measure there is a lack of equality in the community, and a less than enthusiastic welcome at the eucharistic table, we participate in the ritual of shunning.²

² Hughes, 118-119
Father John Catoir, the current director of The Christophers, asserts:

I have come to believe that vast numbers of Catholics have distanced themselves from the church for a shocking reason: they perceive the church to be unforgiving. It is the image they have received and apparently the one we unconsciously keep sending: ‘Shape up or ship out.’

These “dark sides” of the church in its daily life constitute serious challenges. Some failures to live as sacrament of reconciliation can be remedied at the parish level, others by dioceses or the national church, and still others are matters that need to be dealt with by the universal church.

Continued reform of the church: We need to name and recognize the defects in church life, to say that we are sorry, to act to correct the problems, and to seek out and be reconciled — in justice and love — with those who have left because of our failure to live as we should.

Sacramental reconciliation is weakened and made both less inviting and less effective when the church as a whole does not live its daily life as sacrament of reconciliation. Are we ready to face and deal with this matter?

Reconciliation and Community

Richard Gula reminds us that:

God comes to us through us. This basic sacramental principle directs us to look to the community itself as the mediator of divine love to individuals and the world. The ritual sacraments are expressions of the whole community and its life. For this reason, the reality and vitality of the sacraments are proportional to the reality and vitality of the community.

The community, which the sacraments presume (and to some extent shape), is not just a collection of individuals assembled for a short time, nor is it just a physical unity. Rather, it is a unity of ideals and values, a common pattern of feelings about all sorts of things, a sense of belonging, caring, and being cared for. Lack of a vital sense and experience of community may be the greatest obstacle to the church’s sacramental challenge to the future of the reconciling community. Today community itself is countercultural.

Weak community life: Gula discusses a number of factors that conflict with Christian community or make it difficult to experience. His United States perspective is unfortunately all too applicable to Canada as well.

Individualism in America is the most pressing cultural force with which the church must contend if it is to speak of and experience community as foundational to liturgy, sacraments, and social justice. . . .

3 John Catoir, “Is the Church Unforgiving?” America (January 19, 1985) 47
4 Richard M. Gula, "A Reconciling Community. The Context for Penance" Church (Summer 1990) 23
Self-reliance, independence, and rugged individualism have been so much a part of our cultural heritage that we are nearly blind to the role the community plays in our becoming fully human persons, living fully human lives... the Christian sacraments require a community wherein all give and all receive.

The relationship of reconciliation to living in community is difficult to show when persons are surrounded by the collapse of social structures that naturally generate community, such as the family and the neighbourhood.

Reconciliation is not the normal way Americans think about resolving conflict. Litigation is. We seem content to say that we are at peace if we have not violated another's rights. Asserting rights assumes that individual claims have primary value. Reconciliation is diminished when life together is ruled more by preserving individual rights to serve one's own ends than by learning to negotiate and to live cooperatively and interdependently.

Again, sacramental reconciliation is weakened by the weaknesses in our community life as church. Are we prepared to face this challenge?

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A Reconciling Community

**Challenges:** Doris Donnelly has posed a number of challenges to parish and diocesan church communities with respect to reconciliation.

- **Is the church a forgiving community?**
  
  She asks, Is your parish? Is my family? Our challenge is to undo the harm that has been done by one of us to others of us by apologizing, by asking forgiveness of those who have been dismembered, marginalized, rebuffed, condemned.

- **Is the Church a courageous community?**
  
  She asks, Do we speak out against the sins that really matter: discrimination, violence, violation of human rights, sexism, racism – even when the cause is unpopular and our own self interest is at stake?

- **Are we sensitive and attentive to signs and symbols that divide?**
  
  She asks, Are we attentive to language at liturgical celebrations when it virtually excludes half the human race? More subtly, do we notice lip service paid to 'adult faith development' while treating those same adults as children...? The Gospel says we need to leave our gifts at the altar while we straighten out our commitments as a repentant, forgiving, and reconciling people in the pews.

- **Does the Church seek the initiative at being peacemaker?**
  
  She asks, The bishops of the Philippines have told us that peace was not one choice among many, but the only choice. And the unexpected leadership of a
Catholic laywoman, the President of the Philippines, reinforces and continues to reinforce some basic truths about forgiveness: that it is compatible with confrontation; that it is linked with justice; that its goal is the conversion of the offender and not his or her humiliation; and that it is a strength (not a weakness) capable of transforming people, certainly, but even nations.

- Is the Church an encouraging community, supportive of people who forgive, or do we regard the forgiving and reconciling approach to conflict and hostility as a weakness?

She asks, We need to support each other when someone says, “I forgave my father for the way he abused me as a child?” “I’m tired of holding a grudge against my sister-in-law.” “I want to forgive my wife for her unfaithfulness.” “I need to forgive my son for his ingratitude.” We need to buy these people a beer. We need to celebrate their steps in the reconciliation process that begins with human hurt, moves through forgiveness where the pain is relieved, until, eventually, a reconciliation occurs.

- Are we a community that listens and responds to the human story?

She asks, I think we do a good deal of our sacramental theology from the wrong starting point. We tell God’s story; sometimes we tell only God’s story, and we fail to link it with the human story. Not only do we need to tell the human story; we need to hear the human story first — a story of loneliness, rejection, betrayal, alienation, brokenness, guilt, remorse, tragedy, pain, and an overwhelming desire to start all over again, then wipe the slate clean, to eradicate mistakes, to be new.
The Gospel of Reconciliation

Too narrow? Because we often use the term "reconciliation" in relation to penance and confession, we need to be aware of the possibility that our view of this reality is too narrow. The Christian Scriptures, however, use it in a broad way; it is almost a synonym for salvation. On this point the Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission on Salvation and the Church is helpful. "In order to describe salvation in all its fullness, the new Testament employs a wide variety of language. Some terms are of more fundamental importance than others: but there is no controlling term or concept; they complement one another."

• The concept of salvation has the all-embracing meaning of the deliverance of human beings from evil and their establishment in that fullness of life which is God's will for them (e.g., Luke 1: 77; John 3: 16-17; cf., John 10: 10).

• The idea of reconciliation and forgiveness stresses the restoration of broken relationships (e.g., 2 Cor. 5: 18ff; Eph. 2: 13-18).

• The language of expiation or propitiation (hilasterion etc.), drawn from the context of sacrifice, denotes the putting away of sin and the re-establishment of right relationship with God (e.g., Rom 3: 25; Heb. 2: 17; 1 John 2: 2, 4: 10).

• To speak of redemption or liberation is to talk of rescue from bondage so as to become God's own possession, and of freedom bought for a price (e.g., Mark 10: 45; Eph. 1: 7; 1 Pet 1: 18ff).

• The notion of adoption refers to our new identity as children of God (e.g., Rom. 8: 15-17, 23; Gal. 4: 4ff).

• Terms like regeneration, rebirth and new creation speak of God's work of re-creation and the beginning of new life (e.g., John 3: 3; 2 Cor. 5: 17; 1 Pet. 1: 23).

• The theme of sanctification underlines the fact that God has made us his own and calls us to holiness of life (e.g., John 17: 15ff; Eph. 4: 25ff; 1 Pet 1: 15ff).

• The concept of justification relates to the removal of condemnation and to a new standing in the eyes of God (e.g., Rom 3: 22ff, 4: 5, 5: 1ff; Acts 13: 39).

"Salvation in all these aspects comes to each believer as he or she is incorporated into the believing community" (n. 13).

For Paul: The following quotations demonstrate the centrality of reconciliation in the thinking of St. Paul.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of
reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5: 17-21).

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5: 8-11)

Remember that at [one] time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2: 12-19)

The breadth of vision encompassed by “reconciliation” in scripture is also demonstrated by the number of scripture readings that are recommended in Chapter 4 of the Rite of Penance. They include 47 passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, 15 of which are from the psalms. Twenty-eight readings from the New Testament epistles are suggested, and 26 passages from the gospels. Other scripture readings are included in Appendix II: Sample Penitential Services of the Rite of Penance. All of these are appropriate passages for our own meditation and prayer, as well as for preaching and liturgical use. Other readings will occur to us as well.

Are we too narrow? Does this breadth of vision inspire and direct our understanding and practice of sacramental reconciliation? Does this larger perspective suggest any improvements in the rite or its use, or in the way we think and speak about the rite? Is this in fact the context in which sacramental reconciliation is celebrated, or is our view more narrow?

Theological Complexity

Within the full range of meaning conveyed by the biblical term reconciliation, what is the focus of the rite of penance or reconciliation; what reality is being celebrated?

Many words: There is an immediate challenge of words; we have an embarrassment of riches in this regard: teshuvah, epistrephein, metanoein, paenitentia,
conversion, repentance, contrition, conversion, satisfaction, reconciliation, and still others. Here we will use "conversion-and-reconciliation" as a single term; it refers to fundamental aspects of the reality that is being celebrated, it is positive in tone, and it is not unduly limited by prior close association with pre-Vatican II sacramental practice or theology. Furthermore, "conversion" and "reconciliation" are not used as two words that describe different realities, but rather, both refer to the same concept, but from different points of view.

**Conversion-and-reconciliation** is a complex movement, having the following aspects or features:

- It is first of all the action of God, Father, Christ and Spirit.
- It also requires the effort of individual sinners.
- Furthermore it depends on the efforts of the entire Christian community on behalf of its sinful members.
- It is a turning away from evil.
- It is a turning back to God.
- It is based on acknowledgement of God's justice, holiness, infinite love, mercy, and desire to forgive sinners, as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- It is also based on both private and public acknowledgement of one's own sinfulness and sorrow for sin.
- The entire process is an act of faith in the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ, and an act of praise and thanksgiving to God.
- The process of turning away from sin and back to God involves the restoration of broken relationships with God, with others, and with creation.
- Conversion-and-reconciliation is expressed both in daily life and in many liturgical rites.
- It involves the assurance of God's forgiveness on the part of the church.
- It involves the acceptance of pardon on the part of the sinner.
- It involves a recommitment to the true Christian life; real amendment of life.
- Conversion-and-reconciliation is received as a freely given gift from a merciful God.
- It is an occasion for praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Balance and breadth is needed**: Even this brief summary shows the complexity of the reality called conversion-and-reconciliation. Problems may arise, therefore, when the subject is not viewed in its entirety, and when its true complexity is not respected. Any lack of balance or lack of a total view, may lead to distortions both in theological analysis and in liturgical practice.

**What improvements?** Does our understanding and practice of sacramental reconciliation respect and take into account the full complexity – and hence richness – of this or equivalent views of conversion-and-reconciliation? Are the different dimensions of this reality held in creative tension and balance in our liturgical practice? What improvements might need to be made in the rite or in its use to better convey its full range of meaning?
Other Considerations

Clearly, this is just the beginning of a critical, renewed consideration of sacramental reconciliation in the life and liturgy of the church. Other topics that also need to be considered are our understanding of sin and forgiveness, of sacramental action, and of humankind and of God. In addition, the varied ways in which reconciliation is celebrated liturgically need to be reviewed. Finally, the liturgical rite of reconciliation needs to be critically examined. These topics exceed the space available here.

It is hoped that the several topics that have been dealt with – and these only briefly – have suggested the broad scope of the problem of sacramental reconciliation today, and our need to approach the practice of this sacrament in an inclusive way.

* * *

Lord Jesus,
you opened the eyes of the blind,
healed the sick,
forgave the sinful woman,
and after Peter’s denial confirmed him in your love.
Listen to my prayer:
for give all my sins,
renew your love in my heart,
help me to live in perfect unity with my fellow Christians
that I may proclaim your saving power to all the world.

Rite of Penance, n. 45f
Justice, Injustice and Sunday Worship

J. Frank Henderson and Kathleen Quinn

This and the following article are slightly edited versions of keynote addresses given collaboratively by the two authors to the joint conference of the Canadian Liturgical Society and The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada; this meeting was held July 4-8, 1993, in Toronto.

Kathleen Quinn was formerly the regional animator of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace for Alberta and the Northwest Territories. For several years the two authors have prepared the annual Lenten Solidarity Day Liturgical Celebrations published by Development and Peace. With Steven Larson, they co-authored Liturgy, Justice and the Reign of God: Vision and Practice (Paulist Press 1989).

The “we” and “I” of the original presentation have been retained.

Last night we sang “Our cities cry to you, O God,” and I think it is fitting that we are meeting in a large urban centre to reflect on justice in worship, word and song. Throughout North, Central and South America, God’s people are on the move, and the magnet is the city.

We have gathered in downtown Toronto, near centres of power – financial, consumer, governmental and ecclesial. We are meeting in a city where many are homeless, jobless, and feeling powerless, where racism has many faces, and where air quality is a concern.

It is also a city where flowers abound in the summer – in tiny gardens, on apartment balconies, and in hanging baskets – where people of all races and many ethnic groups contribute to the life of this city, enriching it through the marketplaces, shops and restaurants, and challenging it to include them.

In my home city, Edmonton, Alberta, there is a Native healing centre called the Necchi Centre and Poundmaker Lodge. I participated in a day of dialogue there recently. The architecture of the building expresses different Native spiritualities and ways of organizing space.

At one point, we gathered for a sweetgrass ceremony in the centre of the building. This gathering place was like a teepee, only made of stone and more open at the top. We could see the roof of the overall building and we could hear the sounds of other people in the building. Our worship leader explained that this was intentional. While some of us gathered inside the ceremonial space for more reflective prayer, we were still connected to those who were engaged in the prayer of work.

As we sit in this church building [Metropolitan United Church], let us be mindful of the street people who gather at the picnic tables outside and find respite.
from the heat under the beautiful trees. As we move from building to building for our sessions [at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute], let us be mindful of our world, with all of its pain and all of its promise, all of its cruelty and all of its beauty. Let us be aware of the connections between liturgy and life.

What do we mean by “Liturgy and Justice,” and why is it so important? Grammatically, this phrase could be understood as linking two entirely different topics, perhaps like apples and oranges, or better, even like apples and airplanes. If we took this point of view, we might be speaking about one or two liturgies a year where we especially focus on the theme of justice, or perhaps the liturgies that are celebrated when social activists have their workshops.

That is not our approach here. Instead, we view justice as one dimension of all liturgical celebrations, whether we are conscious of it or not. A parallel would be the expression, “Liturgy and Music,” for music, as a rule, is acknowledged to be intrinsic to liturgical celebration. So too is justice intrinsic to liturgy; it is not an extra, not an option. When we speak about liturgy and justice, therefore, we are referring to every liturgy.

One challenge in dealing with liturgy and justice is that the word “justice” is hard to pin down – it appears to be rather abstract, somewhat nebulous. Do we mean economic justice, social justice, legal justice, “an eye-for-an-eye” justice? Does the definition of justice depend on where you are located, or how much you have, or do not have?

It is probably easier to start with “injustice;” we can all think of examples of injustice, and we probably have experienced injustice personally. Well, justice is just the opposite of all these examples of injustice.

To be a little more concrete, however, we offer this constellation of words to give some degree of specificity to the idea of justice in liturgy:

- include and unite
- empower and give life
- dream and vision.

Liturgy that is just includes and unites:
- persons in the local community
- persons all around the world
- ourselves and all of creation.

Liturgy that is just empowers and gives life. It empowers people to be who God calls them to be. We think of the old saying, “The glory of God is the human person fully alive.”

Liturgy that is just has to do with dream and vision:
- God’s dream for humanity and all of creation; the words kingdom or reign of God are often used here
- a vision of God that is as big as possible
- new ways of seeing and dreaming for us; we see the world in terms of God’s dream, which in turn inspires our lives.

We will be expanding on these key words, and adding others, as we go along.

This presentation will have to do with the liturgical experience itself. The second will be concerned with the relationship of liturgy to daily life. In fact these are like two sides of a single coin, rather than two entirely separate topics.
It is vitally important that our liturgies be just, that they be experiences of justice. They need to immerse us in justice so that we can imbibe, absorb, and practice attitudes and visions and relationships that include, unite, empower, give life, and give expression to God’s dream and our vision. Then, we need to live this way the rest of the week.

We will attempt to show you what we mean by considering a number of elements or “ingredients” of most Sunday liturgies. These are space, hospitality, leadership, shared ministry, participation, embodiment, inculturation, symbols, music, scripture, preaching, prayers, and time.

But first, please use your own memory to identify one or two aspects of your own Sunday liturgy that you find are good experiences of justice. What are you doing at home that you want to affirm? Would you please jot these down.

Now, use your imagination and name one or two aspects of your own Sunday liturgy that might be improved with respect to justice. Please jot these down as well.

[Readers are invited to do this as well.]

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**Space**

The space in which we worship – the building and its furnishings and decoration – expresses justice when it includes and unites: when it welcomes and reaches out to the community around it, when it honors nature through the authenticity of the materials from which it is constructed, when it is beautiful but not too expensive.

Our space expresses justice when it unites those who worship in community, when it is more like a circle than a long, thin box, when it brings people together, allows them to see the faces of at least some of their fellow worshippers, when it allows them room to move, when it is adequately lighted and allows everyone to hear; when the minister or priest, and the furnishings that are at the front are part of the community too, and not in some separate world, when it facilitates and encourages the full participation of all.

When examining our worship space, we can ask: does it show a God who is aloof from the world, or who is unwelcoming, or who keeps people apart from another, or who is somewhere else? Does it show a God who dwells with us, be it in a tent or a temple? And what we say about God in our worship space, applies also to the church, the people of God.

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**Hospitality**

Hospitality, entering into gracious relationship with others, is also a dimension of just worship. Our architecture needs to be hospitable: is it easy or difficult for people to get inside, especially small children and their parents, older folks, women and men in wheelchairs, or those who find it difficult to climb a hundred steps?

The people – all of them – also need to be hospitable. Do people smile and say hello both to old friends and persons they don’t know; to persons who differ from themselves in dress, skin color, education and income, theology?
Are there particular women and men who, on behalf of all, greet and welcome guests and visitors, help them feel at home, and invite them to participate as fully as they are able or wish to?

Are hymnals, bulletins, announcements, and so on arranged just for the "regulars," or do they assume that there will be visitors each Sunday? Are they helps or obstacles to the participation of those who are not "regulars?"

The hospitality that we express needs to show a God who embraces and welcomes all, who reaches out and draws people in, who smiles a lot at people not seen here before and at those who come only occasionally.

We would not want our hospitality to reveal a view of God who is unfriendly, who does not care about people, who does not really care if the kids and the old folks and the strangers worship or not. And what we say about God, applies also to the church.

Leadership, Shared Ministry and Participation

The next three items are closely related, and they go by different names in different traditions. This is what we mean by these terms.

By leadership we wish to speak about the one or a few ministers or priests who provide leadership throughout the liturgy.

By shared ministry – or the sharing of ministry – we mean to speak about the roles of individuals or groups within the entire group who have particular ministries at times during the liturgy: those who read scripture, who take up the offering or collection, who sing and play instruments and lead the whole group in singing, those who may help with communion.

By participation we wish to speak about the roles of all the rest of the folks, the people in the pews. The way these groups and individuals interact in worship on Sunday generally reflects the way they interact during the week as well.

Leadership

Can you imagine a worship leader – the priest or minister – who is not a good model of justice? Please think for a moment. Such a person would probably never smile, would not particularly enjoy being with people, would try to ignore all the folks out there in the pews, would mumble, would have a narrow view of the world, would speak only in monologues, would always be in a hurry, would never have heard of silence, would be gruff and grumpy.

Now imagine a worship leader that does personify justice. She, or he, is empowering and tries to share life. She, or he, sincerely desires that everyone participate fully – and not just externally but also deep down inside. She, or he, engages in dialogue and in relationships of mutuality. What else can we imagine; probably, being friendly, prayerful, aware of the world around us,
prophetic, committed to justice, skilled. She, or he, calls people to life – full life, and enables people to walk in community and with their God, to become who they are called to be.

The women and men who lead us in worship need to show a God who, as at the Exodus, goes before and goes behind and is present in the midst of the community as well; who animates – gives soul to the liturgy; who enables and dialogues and sings with us.

Worship leaders hopefully will not portray a God who sits in one place and practices navel-gazing, who is not caring, who does not believe people should grow. And what is said about God, applies also to the church.

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Shared Ministry

The question here is simply this: is leadership in worship carried out not only by the minister or priest, but also by deacons and lay people who read scripture, lead music, show hospitality, help to share communion? And this list is not exhaustive, of course.

We believe that a just liturgy shows many gifts, many talents, many faces and voices and hands and smiles. The minister or priest does not try to do all of these ministries alone, even if he or she does them very well.

Does our liturgy speak of a God who gives many gifts, who images the church as the body with many parts, who believes in the people who are God’s friends?

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Participation

Please remember how your own congregation participates in its Sunday liturgy. Do most of the people participate relatively fully? Is participation lukewarm? Is it poor? If people do not chose to participate in their Sunday liturgy, it then may say something about their self-understanding as baptized persons and as church. If people do not participate because they are not allowed to or encouraged to, then it may say something about the minister’s understanding, or the architect’s, or the music leader’s.

We hope that the way we participate, and the extent of our participation, shows a God who is alive, engaged, experiencing Godself, experiencing community, dreaming great dreams. The alternative is uninspiring and disheartening.

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Embodiment

Just worship, we believe, is the worship of whole persons. Whole persons have bodies as well as heads, but all the bodies and all the heads are different, and so are able to participate differently or to different extents. This diversity does not diminish the personhood of anyone.
Worship by whole persons includes using our heads, of course - the intellectual or cognitive dimension. But it also means using our affective side - emotions and feelings. And a range of senses, too: sight, smell, taste, touch, posture, gesture, movement.

Worship that limits the participation of our entire person is not just; perhaps we could even say that it is not fully human.

Worship that limits the participation of our entire person is also not very biblical. Are we not called to love God with our whole mind, whole heart, and whole strength? In some liturgies, it seems that the ministers use their bodies rather fully, but the folks in the pews are not allowed to or not encouraged to. We challenge this sort of discrimination.

Our ancestors in the faith once imaged the trinitarian God as three persons dancing in a circle. Should we do any less?

God, who is disembodied, made us with bodies. Jesus had a body and used it fully in worship. He stood and sat, bowed and walked, used hands and feet and voice. Should we do any less?

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**Inculturation**

A particular aspect of embodiment has to do with the cultures of which we are part. Today there is more appreciation of the diversity of cultures in the world, in our countries, in our local communities. We are beginning to acknowledge that our cultures need to be expressed in worship, indeed by means in which we worship, and we are trying to find out how to do this.

One particular example has to do with worship by members of the many Aboriginal cultures of Canada and the United States. No longer do we assume that these cultures are bad, and that Aboriginal persons have to adopt European cultures or modes of worship that originated in Europe. This also applies to persons who have come to North America from Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

How we do justice with respect to culture, especially when local church communities contain a large number of different cultural groups, is a challenge that we are just beginning to learn about.

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**Symbols**

Central symbols of liturgy include the people of the worshipping assembly, the word, the font, and the table. For the moment, we will focus on font and table.

Just liturgy calls for the font, the water, the bathing, and the prayer that accompanies these to be authentic, full, and life-giving.

Just liturgy calls for the bread and fruit of the vine, and the sharing of these holy foods, and the prayer that accompanies these to be authentic, full and life-giving.

Some of us may possibly have had experiences of such symbols that are not authentic, full and life-giving. One example is wafers used in place of real bread. Can you think of other poor examples?
It's so sad, isn't it? Because it really isn't difficult to experience these central symbols well.

In baptism and eucharist, and in our worship space, we encounter the material world of God's creation especially closely. Do we recognize and acknowledge and rejoice in the fact that water and bread and wine are elements of God's creation, that the created world is part of our worship - needs to be part of our worship, for its own sake and for ours?

Today we are more aware than we used to be that our relationship with the rest of creation needs to be repaired. We need to honor and respect and care for the rest of creation, and appreciate as well our own createdness. Creation is a canvas on which God's face is portrayed.

Does our worship show us a God who created and is creating, who invites us to share God's creativity, who bathes, washes feet and irrigates, who bakes bread, makes wine, and waits table for us? It should.

Music

Don't we feel better for singing? Isn't it wonderful to give God glory through song? The joy that music can bring, the beauty that it can express, the opportunity it provides for participation,

The affirmation it can afford, the challenge it can bring, all are but a few reasons why music is, as a rule, intrinsic to liturgical celebration.

God sings, Jesus sang, the Spirit moves us and all creation to sing. God enjoys our singing.

Scripture, Preaching and Prayers

Together with the words we sing, we come now to the more verbal elements of worship: scripture, preaching, and prayers.

Justice here means that our language will be inclusive of persons, and will show a vision of God that is as big as possible. It will, in short, be life-giving.

Liturgical speech is not simply words said or sung as fast as they can, with no pauses. Instead, speech is musical, with rhythm, and tempo. It includes silence, when we listen, reflect, recharge our batteries, go deeper within ourselves. Silence in liturgy is a justice issue for us. To deprive worshippers of appropriate opportunities for silence is a form of injustice.

Scripture

Scripture is important in the liturgies of all the churches, though we may differ in how we use it and how we understand it, depending on our individual denominational traditions.
We believe that the just use of scripture in Sunday worship requires that the choice of readings – because we always choose a few small selections from a much larger body of writings – needs to be life-giving; this will be interpreted differently from place to place and time to time. Today we recognize that choices formerly made were not always life-giving to women, and hence to the entire church. This needs to be changed, as the Revised Common Lectionary has attempted to do.

The language of the translation we use – because we choose one translation over another – needs also to be life-giving in that it should be inclusive, and for most folks, modern.

We believe that there should be several readers of the scripture passages, to embody the message in different voices. And if appropriate, it should be translated into sign language for our deaf sisters and brothers. Also, assistance needs to be provided to others who have difficulty hearing. And the readers should have the skill to communicate the life-giving message.

The proclamation of scripture always has and always will invite our response: interior and individual responses, communal and ritual responses. The reading of scripture should also be seen as dialogue, not monologue. In content, our responses might include affirmation and argument, praise and confession.

Structurally, liturgies of different churches and congregations may be divided into two types:

- those that are more like monologues
- those that are more like dialogues.

Monologue: Some liturgies traditionally have put two or three scripture readings, a psalm (which in practice becomes an additional reading), and the sermon, all together before the people get a chance to respond in a communal, liturgical manner. We are not very happy with this practice.

Dialogue: Instead, we believe that congregational responses should immediately follow at least most of the readings, as well as the sermon. In addition, the responses should, at least in part, be musical. Finally, they need to be meaningful responses to the scriptures that have been proclaimed.

Our liturgies need to speak to a God who wants to communicate with us, who wants to dialogue, who wants to listen to us as well. They need to speak to a God who wants to give life through the word God speaks and the response of our hearts.

What is the alternative? A God who shouts, harangues, puts us down? who monopolizes the conversation, giving us no chance to speak? who mumbles and looses the place? who has nothing much to say to our world today? And so too the church.

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**Preaching**

Preaching will be more just if it expresses our key words: inclusive, uniting, empowering, life-giving, showing forth God's dream and our vision.

The preaching needs to engage the world, and not pretend it doesn’t exist; to confront injustice in the world — and in the church — and move us to compassion and action.
Preaching, like the proclamation of scripture and indeed the entire liturgy, needs to be more like a dialogue than a monologue. Are the folks in the pews partners, or targets; are they given opportunities to respond — whether verbally or silently? They need to be participants, not simply objects of the preacher’s attention; they need to be respected.

Justice issues seem to be controversial by nature, arousing strong emotions and opinions. Some people may feel threatened, while others would prefer not to think about these issues in a liturgical setting. When preaching, it can be helpful to raise questions or offer a biblical framework in which to situate the current issues. Other forums for discussion can also be provided outside the liturgy. Those of us who dare to stand in front of people and preach or speak need to remember our own blind spots and failings and strive to live and celebrate the word we preach.

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**Prayers**

The prayers of the liturgy need to be inclusive, beautiful, moving, poetic, and of a narrative character. They need to express God’s dream for us and our vision of God and of ourselves.

What do we mean by being inclusive? To begin with, inclusivity is more than a gender issue, although gender is an important aspect of inclusivity. My 9-year-old son just asked the question: “Why does ‘men’ sometimes mean only boys, and sometimes means boys and girls?” My 10-year-old son is engrossed with Star Trek and quickly observed that one word was different in the mission of the old Star Trek and in that of The Next Generation. “To boldly go where no man has gone before” now is “to boldly go where no one has gone before.” In addition, he noticed that there are more women in leadership positions in the later series.

We can only emphasize that our language of prayer should name and include children, youth, women and men.

Another aspect of inclusivity in prayer is to avoid making objects of groups of people; to avoid setting up an “us and them” relationship. Imagine that it is Sunday and you are in a worship service at the time of intercessory prayer. The prayer leader says “Let us pray for the unemployed, the hungry, and the poor in our city.” And you make the appropriate response. On Monday your job is abolished. You are now one of the unemployed. What are your feelings: Shock? Anger? Fear? A sense of failure? The next Sunday, you return to worship. Could your pain be eased if your community prayed with words such as these: “Let us pray for those among us who are unemployed and searching for jobs?”

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**Time**

Liturgy that are just are careful about how they express time.

It is not empowering or life-giving to spend our time in the past. However, it is good to bring the empowering and life-giving stories of the past into the present. Do we go from the present into the past — and stay there — or do we invite the past to enter our world today?
And what about the future? For a long time we either did not pay much attention to the future, or we considered the only future to be "heaven"—the after-life. Today we realize that just liturgies need to name and honor the future in this life as well—tomorrow and the next day and the next decade.

To put the future off until we are dead disempowers us; it means that there is no chance for change in this life; that God’s dream is never to be realized while people are alive. To see the future as including tomorrow and the next day means that we have an opportunity and a responsibility to work for God’s dream for us now. There is a big difference.

Is God with us as we live, or does God only wait for us at the end of our lives?

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**An Action List to Take Home**

At the beginning of our time together, we asked you to name one or two aspects of your Sunday liturgy that you wanted to affirm; things that you think are indeed good experiences of justice.

In the light of this presentation, do you have other things to affirm? Are there other aspects that you think need improvement?

**Changing Places**

To take this self-evaluation one step further, we now ask you to see how other members of your congregation feel about your Sunday liturgy. In your imagination, put yourself in the shoes of someone else. For example, if you are a man, you might view the liturgy through the eyes of a woman. We are all adults here; how might teenagers or children experience your liturgy? If you are healthy, put yourself in the shoes of a person experiencing illness or disability; if you are well-known, put yourself in the shoes of someone who experiences isolation.

From this new perspective, what aspects of your own Sunday liturgy do you want to affirm, and what aspects need to be improved?

We hope that you will take these lists home with you and work with other members of your community to make your liturgies more just. [And readers are invited to do the same.]

But perfection is not possible; neither is it our goal. We are all on a journey in which we want to do the best we can, but we know that what we think is our best now is still open to reflection and change next week or next year.
Liturgies, Justice and Daily Life

Kathleen Quinn and J. Frank Henderson

[In the two days between the first and second presentations, participants in the Canadian Liturgical Society - Hymn Society meeting responded to the first talk, shared personal experiences, and made additional suggestions. One of these additions is given in the first part of the second presentation.]

To our list of 13 aspects of liturgy, one person suggested we add planning beforehand and reflection after liturgies. Justice questions that arise are: Who is involved in planning liturgies? How can the voices and experiences of people in the pew be more fully considered in the planning process? Who gets a chance to say what worked well and what could be changed?

These questions remind us that the liturgy is part of church life as a whole – a life that includes committees, deadlines, policies, personalities, budgets, etc., etc., etc. These are areas where nitty-gritty justice issues arise, along with conflicts over priorities and the use of power.

Every community has its warts and struggles, its times of pulling together and pulling apart. In the Sunday liturgy, the local church reveals itself to the world.

On Sunday, I attended a Baptist liturgy with a friend in Toronto. This community revealed itself to me, a visitor, and this is what I saw: a community concerned about local and global justice. I was invited to sign an Amnesty International postcard, and in the bulletin was a special plea for donations to the food bank. This food bank is a joint effort between a coffee shop and the church. There was a gentle reminder that the cost of a cup of gourmet coffee equals the cost of a can of food.

I saw a community that wants anyone to feel free to drop in from the busy street, and so casual dress is welcomed. Two adults who were recent immigrants to Canada were baptized during the service. They shared their stories and I was moved to tears by the ways in which this community celebrated their commitment.

As we have observed, there is no such thing as a perfect liturgy and this worship community, like all of ours, has elements to reflect upon and work on. In this case, there seemed to be little awareness of inclusive language.

It is important to recognize that members of our church communities can be very hurt by some of the policies, practices and attitudes of their churches. Their capacity to experience liturgy as a foretaste of the reign of God may be partly or completely blocked. If there is too much pain, or if that pain is not acknowledged and addressed, they may see no other option than to stay away from Sunday worship for awhile, or to leave the church completely.

We also recognize that many may come to Sunday worship wearied by the daily stresses and struggles of life. There are so many issues of justice and so
many human needs crying out for attention and action that individuals and church communities can easily feel overwhelmed.

No individual or community can actively respond to all of the cries for justice and mercy that come to them. However, each person and each community can cultivate a listening heart and a stance of solidarity, a stance of communion. While not all are called to action through explicit justice ministries, all of us are called to pray, to contribute financially, and to affirm the explicit justice work of individuals and our church agencies.

Justice ministry is hard work that calls for hope and perseverance. It is often lonely and costly because it means embracing the pain of injustice and marginalization. Those of us involved in these ministries can sometimes be thorny. We may come to Sunday worship bruised, angry or downcast. We need the balm of the healing touch and of music which restores our strength. We need to hear our concerns lifted up in prayer by the whole community.

And we are not alone in our hungers. Many people come to Sunday worship hungering for many different things. The question is – how can we feed each other?

The things we do in church on Sunday are very similar, in their basic dynamics, to what we do during the week. Let’s look at our liturgy more carefully from this perspective.

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**Gathering**

The first part of our Sunday liturgy, the part we call gathering, is actually done in many different ways in our different church settings. Basic to all, however, is the fact that people come together and form or re-form a community. In addition, they say who they are and affirm that they are good – though not perfect. They also name their God and thereby implicitly renounce idols – all that is not of God.

We suggest that daily life is full of times when we do the same sorts of things. There are many occasions on which we come together with others to form some kind of human community, whether in our households, at work, at play, in our neighbourhoods, towns and cities, states or provinces, at the national and international level. Forming and re-forming bonds with other persons, showing our unity as groups of various kinds and sizes, building communities of all types, is part of daily living as well as part of most liturgical celebrations.

For example, in addition to my church community, I am part of the community where we live – our immediate neighborhood; to several communities of teachers and students at several colleges and universities; to communities of scholars in science and liturgy that extend around the world, and to various civic communities. I value all of these.

At church on Sunday we try to include and welcome everyone; we try to see that no one is left out. In our city and nation, however, as well as globally, we know that many are not included and welcomed as they should be. Our liturgical experience heightens our sensitivity and moves us to action on a wide range of issues.
For example:

- Several Youth Emergency Shelters have been built in our city, but they are full and additional shelters are needed.
- Homes for battered women are full, and counselling services for women have three to six months waiting lists.
- Many Aboriginal people still live in great poverty; there is high unemployment and much alcoholism.
- Day care facilities are in short supply.

We recently visited a church congregation of people who originally came from the south of India. They were extremely gracious and warmly hospitable. We wondered, however, if because of the color of their skin, they would be greeted as warmly at other churches in the city.

The following is taken from a news story that shows division in what would have been expected to be a united community. The headline reads, “Students organize Blacks only prom.”

Students at two Toronto area schools, one public, one Catholic, organized proms apart from the ones their grad committees organized. They said that the tone and theme of traditional proms do not appeal to many young black people, citing different tastes in music and food. One organizer also wanted to celebrate the fact that so many black students are graduating, because this community experiences a high number of drop-outs.

What was the problem here: racism? poor communication? failure to include black students on the planning committee? or just a desire to express one’s differentness?

Consciousness that we worship in a church building can also make us aware of situations like these:

- The Catholic school system in one of our suburbs recently fired 30 janitors and caretakers, in order to replace them with lower paid contract workers.
- There have been recent cutbacks in funding for new public housing and cooperative housing projects.
- The building of a women’s cottage-style prison on the edge of our city is receiving heavy opposition from surrounding neighbourhoods. It is a minimum security prison intended to facilitate visits from the women’s children and to help them prepare for re-integration.

You undoubtedly know stories like these from your own experience and region – stories that contradict the values of inclusion and hospitality that we act out in our liturgy.

Word

After we gather, we read scripture, respond to it, interpret and apply it to our own situation, and respond some more. In terms of basic dynamics, this part of our Sunday liturgy consists of storytelling, listening to stories, responding to stories, interpreting and applying old stories to our own needs, and listening and responding some more.
Surely we do the same in daily living. We share stories with other persons in our households, at work and at play, in society. Storytelling, communicating, dialogue, is part of human life, part of a just way of living. We give and we receive, we trust and we challenge, we listen and are listened to, we affirm and are affirmed, we respect and are respected. We certainly value good conversations with our spouses, with each other, with other friends, with colleagues in many areas.

I value my liturgical experiences of dialogue as well, and when occasionally I preach, I make sure that everyone has a chance to speak as well.

But the way that we communicate in the liturgy also makes us conscious that many have no voice in our society; that there are many stories we never get to hear. For example:

• There are an increasing number of new Canadians who speak languages other than French and English, and an increasing number who speak non-European languages. Yet funding for English as a Second Language programs have been cut back.

• In our part of Canada, translators for deaf persons are paid by the provincial government; in some other parts of the country they have to be paid by the deaf persons themselves.

• In our province the cabinet minister responsible recently said that she would prefer that immigrants who did not already speak English went to some other province.

Segments of our society that are relatively or completely voiceless include: advocates for women’s health issues; single parents; persons on welfare; prostitutes; teenagers; and Aboriginal peoples.

Certainly there is some good news in this area as well.

• The federal government funds TV and radio in the Canadian north, and there is a good deal of broadcasting in several Aboriginal languages.

• There are an increasing number of Aboriginal journalists, and a few newspapers in these communities.

• In Vancouver, there is a new newspaper, called *Spare Change*. It is written and produced by street people, and sold by street people for “spare change.” It provides a voice for persons who ordinarily would not have a vehicle to speak out. Whether street people are actually heard by those in political and economic power is of course another question.

How does the church use its voice to bring to the forefront the needs of those who are marginalized?

• A recent story in our Edmonton newspaper, headlined “Garden a Peaceful Place in Gritty Inner City” describes how a church agency advocated on behalf of apartment dwellers for land for gardens. A garbage-strewn empty lot has now become a fertile garden, shared among people who are refugees, immigrants, and economically poor.

This story illustrates the choices church groups have — to use their voices and powers and acts with marginalized peoples, or to silence their voices and abandon their advocacy.
Who is voiceless in your town or city? How does your church give voice to their needs? Or how do you think it might do this?

In the middle of our Sunday liturgies come what we variously call the prayers of the people or of the church or the general intercessions; these often are followed by what some call the offering and others call the collection. Both are, or should be, exercises in justice; in both we practice justice skills that we then live out during the week.

In the prayers we remember before God the needs of church, society, our local community, and of individuals. These can be terribly pious, they can be boring, they can be trivial. But they can also be passionate and powerful; they can bring us into solidarity with sisters and brothers around the world; they can name deep ills in our society; they can move us to action. What is our own experience? Do the prayers we participate in on Sunday make us more conscious of the needs of persons and of society during the week? If they do not, they need to be improved.

Here are two more news headlines:
- Lives smashed by new turf wars in South Africa.
- Number on welfare rises again.

If you were writing the prayers of the people for next Sunday, what would you say about these issues; how would you include them in these prayers? We invite you to spend a moment or two composing such prayers. [And readers might do this as well.]

What about the offering or collection? Does part of the money given at each Sunday liturgy go for justice ministries? Does it go to meet needs of persons inside and outside your church community? Does everyone in your congregation know this?

How much of your parish budget goes for justice concerns? Do you know? Who made these decisions, and to whom did they listen?

Now let us consider the announcements, though they often come toward the end of the liturgy. At best, they are theological in nature, in that they tell us about the life of the church from one Sunday to the next; hence they are expressions of the self understanding of each community as church.

What kinds of announcements proclaim that the church is a community that cares about justice? What kinds would tell us that a community is not much concerned about justice? Can you think of some examples of each type? What is an announcement that you would be proud of?

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**Baptism**

We now invite you to consider this scenario. A group in the parish has asked you to talk to them about baptism and justice. This might be the Sunday school, or teens, or expectant parents, or seniors, or the choir, or some other group.

They ask you to speak especially about the justice-significance of the water, the laying on of hands, and the prayer of blessing said over the water. Decide
Baptism invites you. Jot down ideas of what you might say about baptism and justice. [Readers are invited to do this also.]

When we think of baptism we immediately think of the water in which we immerse people or pour over them. This in turn, can lead us to think of water in daily living. We are surrounded by lakes and rivers and oceans, and today we are more aware than in the past that these need our care; too many human activities are polluting them.

We can think of those for whom water is an instrument of devastation and death. We think of floods and tidal waves, and the need to help persons whose homes, fields and jobs are lost.

We can think of those who do not have enough water – or enough water that is usable – and who may need our help in digging wells, in piping clean water to places where it is needed, in preventing the spread of disease by means of water supplies.

A vivid image comes to mind when I think of water, and that is a highly polluted stream winding its way through fields of broccoli in Mexico.

The Canadian government has approved the North American Free Trade Agreement. Recently in the United States, a judge ruled that a full environmental impact study was needed; however, the government’s response was to say, “We’re going ahead anyway,” and that decision will be appealed. This is not the time or place to debate the pros and cons of the Free Trade Agreement. However, I draw attention to this issue because it has implications for all of us, for our two countries, and for Mexico and her people. Church people and other groups from three countries have been working together to advocate keeping the justice and environmental issues before the public and the legislators. They worked very hard and they must feel disheartened. I know I do and I feel powerless.

So I ask, How could we “average folks” respond to news such as this? I think that lamentation is an appropriate response right now. Lamentation for the rivers and the earth being polluted along the U.S. – Mexico border; lamentation for the Mexican people who must work and live in obscene conditions; and lamentation for the rest of us as consumers who unconsciously participate daily in the injustice of our food production, preparation and distribution systems.

From lamentation, we can move to symbolic action and symbolic choices. After watching a video called “Dirty Business,” I can never knowingly purchase broccoli or green peppers grown in Mexico – though I am sure I will end up eating them in a restaurant sometime. Symbolic actions and choices for me are an act of faith. We can take these steps individually and collectively in our church communities, and name these issues in our Sunday worship.

Baptism is also about entering into new forms of solidarity with Jesus Christ and all his sisters and brothers. The communities into which persons are baptized ideally are communities of radical equality: no longer slave nor free, no longer male and female, Jew or Greek.

We are all too aware that our society does not yet fully embrace these values: discrimination of all kinds still abounds, abuse of women and children is still all too common, women and men of color are still put down in various ways.
When we celebrate baptism, are we conscious of these connections? Are we called to denounce and correct these deficiencies in our society and world? When you preached or chose music last week, did you relate this summer's human rights conference in Vienna to baptism?

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**Eucharist**

What pictures or images come into your mind when you think about eucharist and justice? Reflect quietly for a moment. If you wish, please quickly sketch out some of these images. [Readers might do this also.]

When we think of eucharist we immediately think of bread and the fruit of the vine. Do we naturally think as well of those who grow wheat and grapes, who harvest them, process them, bake the bread and make the juice or the wine, and make them available to us in stores?

Do we think of these questions as well:

- What is being done to ensure that farmers and others who produce our food receive just incomes?
- What is being done to prevent contamination of foodstuffs by chemicals, or to prevent spoilage of food by moisture and rats?

The bread and wine or grape juice of our eucharistic liturgies are but one form of the nourishment which humans need and of which they are signs. There are many kinds of foods, and many kinds of nourishment for the soul and spirit that are not foods at all. Care and love and affirmation are some of these.

Eucharist is also an experience of sharing and of solidarity. We all receive about the same amount of bread and wine. Does this give us a vision of a society in which all receive about the same amount of food? Does it remind us of the reality that in our world today some have much and many have too little?

Does the fact that we receive only a little bread and a sip of drink make us conscious of our solidarity with all those around the world who have only a little to eat each day?

Here is another newspaper story that is relevant; the headline is "Cheers Finale Aids Food Bank." The finale to the TV series, Cheers, was highly promoted throughout North America. People gathered in bars and lounges throughout our two countries to watch this finale. In Toronto, people went one step further. They went to Skydome, the stadium here, where the program was projected on huge screens. There was no admission fee; however, everyone was asked to bring a donation to the food bank. Well over 30,000 people came and each brought some food. Did anything like this happen in your town?

Eucharist is also all about living thankfully. Eucharist, like life, is gift: gift to be lived to the fullest; gift to be shared.

A Toronto writer, Mary Jo Leddy, observed:

> There are those who do good more out of a sense of guilt than out of gratitude. Guilt may galvanize us into action for a while. But not for long,
not for a lifetime. Guilt may stop us from doing wrong but it does not sustain us in doing good.

For those who are grateful, the bottom line of life is a blessing rather than a burden. Gratitude for what has been given is really the starting point for a life which is given over to others. Gratitude enables us to recognize what is promising in life. It is the ground from which we grow in a desire to make a promise of our own lives – to others and to the world. (Memories of War, Promises of Peace, 1989)

Many of our liturgies include what is variously called the peace, or sign of peace, or greeting of peace. Sometimes it comes just before the liturgy of the eucharist, and sometimes just before communion. It usually involves both words of peace spoken to others, and, in our countries, touching others in some ways: shaking hands, sometimes hugs and kisses.

Does this part of our liturgy challenge us on issues of peace and war? Does it make us weep because of what we know is happening in Bosnia and elsewhere? Does it make us conscious of the need to stop abuse of spouses and children in the home? Do the words we say and the gestures we make really effectively teach us about the ways we should relate to others during the week? Do the grace and gentleness with which we speak to and touch others in church on Sunday teach us how to do the same in our daily lives?

In General

There are some things we want to say about the liturgy as a whole.

Vision

A United States psychotherapist, Michael Lerner, says:

Too often people find that if they want to be successful, they have to act in ways that violate their own highest principles. The people who do best in the economy are often people who do best at manipulating others. This focus on money and power may do wonders in the marketplace, but it creates a tremendous crisis in society. People who have spent all day learning how to sell themselves and to manipulate others may well find it difficult to form lasting friendships or intimate relationships.

And families or religious institutions which try to teach values to the young are up against an insuperable barrier, because young people know that the moral teachings they are hearing have nothing to do with how the real world is run.

And yet, he says, many are hungering for a different kind of society – one based on the principles of caring, ethical and spiritual sensitivity, and communal solidarity.

Do our liturgies hold up a vision of a different kind of society – the reign of God? Do our liturgies enable people to practice justice, compassion and communal solidarity? Do our liturgies motivate us to work for a more just society?
Hope

The Toronto writer, Mary Jo Leddy, recently said:

Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we become bearers of hope for one another. As the economic recession deepens, the politics of despair freely trades on a new mythology of (so-called) "reality." We are now told – and so we can choose to believe – that the new information-based global economy will raise up a whole new and very small class of "winners." Most others will be losers, classified as . . . cheaters of the system, as outsiders who really have no right to be here; as young people who, though they may be more than qualified, have less than a right to a job. In this new myth, most people are treated as problems rather than as promises of hope. In debates about the deficit, too many human beings are treated as liabilities rather than assets.

What we need and want is a politics of hope, which begins when we begin to turn to one another and ask for a reason to hope. It begins when you believe that you are meant to give hope. It begins when you trust that there are those, perhaps unknown to you now, who will give you reason to hope. (Catholic New Times, June 27, p. 5)

Is this not a liturgical issue as well? Do our liturgies give hope, do they value people and refuse to distinguish winners and losers?

Conclusion

In his letters to the young churches, St. Paul used liturgical language to refer to daily life – he wasn't describing church services. We invite you to look at all 168 hours of your week as liturgy, the work of the people, the Incarnation of Christ in our world.

May God bless us all
with wisdom to care for our earth,
with strength to do justice,
and with compassion for sisters and brothers
all around the world.
Amen.
In its publication, *Praying Together*, the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) has provided helpful notes on the texts of many commonly used liturgical prayers. Here we print their notes on the text of the Glory to God; ELLC uses the title, Gloria in Excelsis.

**Glory to God in Excelsis**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God’s people on earth.  

Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty 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.

The author and source of this Greek “Christian psalm” are unknown. Since the fourth century it has been associated in the East with morning prayers. In Rome it found its way into the eucharistic liturgy only gradually, at first on special occasions such as Easter and Christmas (to which it is particularly appropriate). By the twelfth century a custom had grown of adding it on other Sundays as well, but not in Advent and Lent. Its purpose was to introduce the Liturgy of the Word. In 1552, for Anglican worship, Archbishop Cranmer transferred it, as an act of thanksgiving for holy communion, to just before the final blessing of the congregation. In recent years it has been generally restored to its earlier place.

It consists of a series of acclamations, a doxological and hymnodic form characteristic of the ancient Greek liturgies. Since it is not a dogmatic text like the
creeds, a modern version may adapt its pattern to hymn structures that are more readily understood in English, without any basic modification of its substance and spirit. An analysis of the structure of the hymn shows that it consists of an opening antiphon based on Luke 2: 14, followed by three stanzas of acclamation: the first addressed to God the Father, the second and third to God the Son. The above translation of the text, identical, except for one word in line 2, to that proposed by ICET, preserves this structure, but transposes certain lines and phrases and omits others to avoid unnecessary repetition. It has proved widely acceptable in use.

Lines 1-2. The traditional English version "goodwill towards men" derives from a defective text of Luke 2: 14 (eudokia instead of the better attested eudokias, "of good will," which is followed by the Latin bonae voluntatis). The Eastern tradition, which refers the "favor" or "goodwill" to God, that is, God's peace and favor to human beings, is almost certainly faithful to the original meaning. There is also a question whether "people" refers to the human race generally, or to the chosen people of God who are the recipients of God's special favor. The proposed translation agrees with the consensus of New Testament scholars (evident in the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible, and the New American Bible) that "favor" refers to God's favor; but it leaves open, in the phrase "to God's people," whether "people" means all people or those who are specifically God's people of faith and hope.

The "his" of the ICET text, which has no counterpart in the Greek or Latin texts, has been replaced by "God's" to make the meaning clear and to avoid an unnecessary masculine expression. Other versions were considered but the one proposed was accepted as preserving the rhythm of the ICET text so that existing musical settings would not be disturbed.

The translation of in excelsis is difficult. According to biblical imagery, it would mean "in the highest heaven." Today we do not have a cosmological theology of a series of heavens, whether three or seven. It would be a simple solution to translate the phrase by "in heaven," but this lacks the exultant feeling of the acclamation. The phrase "in the highest" has therefore been used. This phrase agrees with familiar English liturgical and hymnodic usage.

Lines 3-6. This stanza is addressed to God the Father. The order of lines 3-4 and 5-6 in the original has been reversed to make it clear at once to whom the acclamations refer. The sense of the Greek phrases traditionally rendered "we bless you" and "we glorify you" is included in the words "worship," "thanks," and "praise." The stanza now consists of two pairs of parallel lines, coming to a climax in the word "glory."

Lines 7-12. This stanza is addressed to God the Son. The transposition of "only Son of the Father" and "Lamb of God" in lines 7-8 gives to each of these lines an acclamation that praises Christ in both his divine and human natures, and it also places "Lamb of God" in immediate juxtaposition with what follows in lines 9-10. The common Greek version introduces "and the Holy Spirit" after line 7, but this is possibly a later displacement from line 17 which is taken from the Latin. The double reference to Christ as "Son" in lines 7-8, which occurs in the Greek original, has been removed as redundant.

2 ICET stands for International Consultation on English Texts, the organization that preceded the English Language Liturgical Consultation. It published earlier ecumenically agreed on versions of the Glory to God and similar liturgical texts.
Line 9. The declarative form ("you take") has been preferred to the relative form in lines 9 and 11, as more suitable to acclamation. The three acclamations of lines 9-12 in the Greek text have been reduced to two so that "have mercy on us" goes with line 9, and "receive our prayer" is related to Christ's sitting at God's right hand in line 11.

Some requests were received that "sin (or sins) of the world" here and in the Agnus Dei be harmonized with each other. Those who prefer the singular refer to John 1: 29. The Consultation agreed, but it also thought that the concepts of cosmic sin and individual sins should both be expressed in the liturgy. There is no effect on the musical settings whichever is chosen.

Lines 13-18. The third stanza continues the acclamations to Christ. In order to express the link, the conjunction "for" is used. The repetition of "alone" is emphatic, to show that the titles here given to Christ are those which also belong to the Father: "Holy One," "Lord," and "Most High." Lines 16-18 are a joyous doxology ascribing glory to the Holy Trinity.
Between Christmastime and Lent

The season of Christmas (also called Christmastime or Christmastide) comes to an end on the Sunday that is the feast of the Baptism of our Lord; this falls between January 9 and January 13. Because of variation in the date of Easter, Lent begins between February 4 and March 10.

In 1994, the Baptism of the Lord falls on January 9, and Ash Wednesday will come on February 16.

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord is also the first Sunday of Ordinary Time, and the four to eight or nine weeks between the end of Christmastime and the beginning of Lent constitute for Roman Catholics the first part of the long season of Ordinary Time; other churches continue to use the designation, Time after Epiphany.

In 1994 there will be six Sundays of Ordinary Time before Lent begins.

A quiet time: This month or two in the liturgical calendar is a quiet time; we relax and catch our breath after the excitement and activity of the Christmas season. We are also waiting quietly for the intensity of the lenten season that is about to begin.

Brief and awkward: This first part of the season of Ordinary Time is awkward because of its brevity; it is over before we have had time to get used to it. It is too short for much planning or programming; it gets “lost in the shuffle.” It is difficult to think about it ahead of time because of the needs of Advent, Christmas Day, and the Christmas season. It is hard to start planning in mid-January; there doesn’t seem to be enough energy.

Variable: This period is also somewhat discomfiting because it is so variable in length: between one month and two months. And its length seems to jump in length so irregularly from one year to the next.

Important readings: Despite these difficulties, the Sunday liturgies of the first part of the season of Ordinary Time contains some important scripture readings – the first parts of the gospels, for one thing – and its weekdays include some significant and noteworthy feasts. The content of this season will be reviewed briefly here.

Missed readings: A difficulty that preachers especially need to take note of is that important scripture readings, especially from the gospels, are missed when there are only five or six or seven Sundays of Ordinary Time instead of the full number of eight (rarely, nine).
The Sundays

The following table gives the scripture readings for the second through eighth Sundays of Ordinary Time, the usual maximum length of the season between Christmastime and Lent. It is taken from Adrien Nocent's *The Liturgical Year. Volume One. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany.*¹ The "themes" are Nocent's interpretations; the versification has been checked with the new Canadian edition of the Sunday lectionary.²

Cycle A

**Sunday 2** God’s choice
- John 1: 29-34. The Son of God is here
- Isaiah 49: 3, 5-8. Choice of the servant
- 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3. The apostles are called; so are we

**Sunday 3** The Good News: A great light has shone
- Matthew 4: 12-23. Galilee of the Gentiles
- Isaiah 9: 1-4. A great light has shone
- 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17-18. No divisions among us

**Sunday 4** God chooses the poor
- Matthew 5: 1-12a. Blessed are the poor in spirit
- Zephaniah 2: 3; 3: 12-13. A people humble and lowly
- 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31. God has chosen the weak

**Sunday 5** Salt of the earth and light of the world
- Matthew 5: 13-16. Light of the world
- Isaiah 58: 6-10. Your light shall rise in the darkness
- 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5. Proclaim a crucified Messiah

**Sunday 6** A new law in continuity with the old
- Matthew 5: 17-37. You have heard . . . but I say
- Sirach 15: 15-20. Condemned to freedom
- 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10. Wisdom is revealed to us for our glorification

**Sunday 7** The love of others
- Matthew 5: 38-48. Love your enemies
- 1 Corinthians 3: 16-23. You belong to Christ

**Sunday 8** Seek first the kingdom
- Matthew 6: 24-34. The duty of improvidence
- Isaiah 49: 13-15. God does not forget us
- 1 Corinthians 4: 1-5. God will disclose the purposes of the heart

¹ (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1977) pages 334-338
² *Lectionary for Sundays and Solemnities* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1992)
Omitted readings: Important parts of the Sermon on the Mount are omitted when the season between Christmastime and Lent is short, as are important parts of the first letter to the Corinthians. This ought to be brought to the people's attention. The passages to be missed in a particular year might be printed in the bulletin, with a suggestion that they be read at home.

Cycle B

Sunday 2 The call of God
John 1: 35-42. Come and see
1 Samuel 3: 3b-10, 19. Hear the call and obey
1 Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20. Our bodies are the members

Sunday 3 Be converted and believe
Mark 1: 14-20. Repent and believe in the gospel
Jonah 3: 1-5, 10. Turn from your evil ways
1 Corinthians 7: 29-31. Live in freedom

Sunday 4 The teaching of God
Mark 1: 21-28. Teach in the name of the eternal God
Deuteronomy 18: 15-20. I will put my words in his mouth
1 Corinthians 7: 17, 32-35. The unmarried woman and the concerns of the Lord

Sunday 5 Overcoming the forces of evil
Mark 1: 29-39. He healed the sick
Job 7: 1-4, 6-7. Suffering fills all my days
1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23. The duty of proclaiming the gospel

Sunday 6 We are lepers
Mark 1: 40-45. If you will, you can make me clean
Leviticus 13: 1-2, 45-46. The unclean must dwell alone
1 Corinthians 10: 23 – 11: 1. Christ our model

Sunday 7 The forgiveness of sins
Mark 2: 1-12. The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins
2 Corinthians 1: 18-22. Our "yes," to the glory of God

Sunday 8 The marriage of God to his people
Mark 2: 18-22. The bridegroom is with us
Hosea 2: 14, 15, 19-20. I will speak tenderly to my spouse
2 Corinthians 3: 1-6. Ministers of a new covenant

Omitted readings: The beginning of the gospel according to Mark is of great importance, and parishioners might be urged to read the passages that are omitted. The wonderful marriage readings of the eighth Sunday are only seldom heard; what a shame!

Cycle C

Sunday 2 Marriage
John 2: 1-12. The marriage at Cana
Isaiah 62: 1-5. The marriage of Jerusalem
1 Corinthians 12: 4-11. The same Spirit distributes all gifts
Sunday 3 The word of God proclaimed to all people
Luke 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21. He has anointed me
Nehemiah 8: 1-4a, 5-6, 8-10. Listening to the word
1 Corinthians 12: 12-30. The body and the members

Sunday 4 A prophet speaks to the world
Jeremiah 1: 4-5, 17-19. A prophet to the nations
1 Corinthians 12: 31 - 13: 13. Charity the greatest of the three

Sunday 5 Messengers of God
Isaiah 6: 1-2a, 3-8. Here am I! Send me
1 Corinthians 15: 1-11. The message of faith

Sunday 6 Blessings and curses
Luke 6: 17, 20-26. Blessed are you poor. Woe to you that are rich
Jeremiah 17: 5-8. Authentic riches and security
1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20. If there is no resurrection, our faith is vain

Sunday 7 Be merciful
Luke 6: 27-38. Be merciful as God is to us
1 Samuel 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-25. Spare your enemy
1 Corinthians 15: 45-50. We shall bear the image of the heavenly one

Sunday 8 The word and the heart
Sirach 27: 4-7. The word and the heart
1 Corinthians 15: 54-58. God gives us the victory through Christ

Saints and Other Feasts

Many important saints are commemorated and celebrated in the period between Christmas and Lent, as well as one feast of our Lord, and one of Mary. Three groups of saints are brought to attention here: women saints, apostles and theologians, and saints that represent the spread of the faith around the world. Several Canadian and U.S. saints or blessed are included in this number. For the sake of inclusiveness, and because they tend to be neglected, all the saints of January are considered here; the cut-off date is March 7.

Opening prayers for a few of these feasts are included for our meditation.

Feasts of Our Lord

Presentation of the Lord, February 2. We commemorate the presentation of Jesus in the temple forty days after his birth, in conformity with the law of Moses. For many centuries this was considered a feast of Mary.

All-powerful Father,
Christ your Son became [human] for us
and was presented in the temple.
May he free our hearts from sin
and bring us into your presence.
We ask this . . .

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Feasts of Mary

Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11. On this day in 1858 Our Lady first appeared to the 14 year old girl, Bernadette Soubirous.

Father of mercy,
we celebrate the feast of Mary,
the sinless mother of God.
May her prayers help us
to rise above our human weakness.
We ask this.

Women Saints

Elizabeth Seton, January 4. From the United States, she founded the Sisters of Charity.

Lord God,
you blessed Elizabeth Seton with gifts of grace
as wife and mother, educator and foundress,
so that she might spend her life in service to your people.
Through her example and prayers
may we learn to express our love for you
in love for our fellow men and women.
We ask this.

Marguerite Bourgeoys, January 12. A Canadian woman, model for us all.

God our Father,
you called St. Marguerite
to seek your kingdom in this world
by striving to live in perfect charity.
With her prayers to give us courage,
help us to move forward with joyful hearts in the way of love.
We ask this.

Agnes, January 21. She died at the beginning of the fourth century, in the persecution of Diocletian, at the age of thirteen.

Angela Merici, January 27. Died in 1540; called to educate the poor, she founded the first teaching order of women, known as the Ursulines.

Bridget of Kildare, February 1. Though not in the universal calendar, she is an important saint for many. She died about 525; a great holy Irish woman, her convent became famous for its hospitality and almsgiving. She is the second patron of Ireland, with Patrick.

Agatha, February 5. Martyred in Sicily, probably during the persecution of the emperor Decius.

Scholastica, February 10. Born in Italy about 480, the sister of Benedict, the great monastic founder. By tradition she established and directed a community of nuns near Monte Cassino. She died ca. 547.

Perpetua and Felicity, March 7. Perpetua was a young married woman; Felicity, her companion, was a slave-girl. Martyred at Carthage in 203.
Apostles and Theologians

**Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen**, January 2. Natives of Cappadocia (now central Turkey); bishops and theologians.


> All-powerful God,
> as St. Hilary defended the divinity of Christ your Son,
> give us a deeper understanding of this mystery
> and help us to profess it in all truth.
> Grant this . . .

**Francis de Sales**, January 24. Died 1622; great preacher; bishop of Geneva; wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

**Conversion of Paul**, January 25. His conversion was sudden and dramatic: from being a persecutor of the church he is transformed into an apostle of Christ; a turning point in the life of the primitive Christian community.

> God our Father,
> you taught the gospel to all the world
> through the preaching of Paul your apostle.
> May we who celebrate his conversion to the faith
> follow him in bearing witness to your truth.
> We ask this . . .

**Timothy and Titus**, January 26. Timothy was from Lystra (now central Turkey); converted by Paul; two of the New Testament epistles were addressed to him; by tradition, first bishop of Ephesus. Titus organized the church on Crete; by tradition, first bishop of the Cretan city of Gortyna. One of the New Testament epistles was addressed to him.

**Thomas Aquinas**, January 28. Died 1274; member of the Dominican Order; one of the greatest doctors of the church.

> God our Father,
> you made Thomas Aquinas known
> for his holiness and learning.
> Help us to grow in wisdom by his teaching,
> and in holiness by imitating his faith.
> Grant this . . .

**Peter Damian**, February 21. Died in 1072; Benedictine hermit-monk; cardinal-bishop of Ostia; worked strenuously through his writing and preaching to reform abuses in the church.

**Chair of St Peter**, February 22. This feast celebrates the episcopal dignity and universal primacy of St. Peter, Prince of Apostles.

**Polycarp of Smyrna**, February 23. Martyred about 155; one of the great martyr-heroes of the early church; possibly a disciple of the Apostle John; bishop of Smyrna (in western Turkey).

> God of all creation,
> you gave your bishop Polycarp
> the privilege of being counted among the saints
> who gave their lives in faithful witness to the gospel.
> May his prayers give us the courage
> to share with him the cup of Christ's suffering
> and to rise to eternal glory.
> We ask this . . .
Throughout the World

**André Besette**, January 6. From Montreal, a Brother who served at the Shrine of St. Joseph.

Lord our God, friend of the humble,
you have given your servant Brother André
a great devotion to St. Joseph
and special commitment to the poor and needy.
Through his intercession
help us to follow his example of prayer and love,
and so come with him into your glory.
We ask this . . .

**Raymond of Penyafort**, January 7. A priest from Catalonia (in modern Spain); patron of confessors.


Father,
you called St. Anthony
to renounce the world
and serve you in the solitude of the desert.
By his prayers and example,
may we learn to deny ourselves
and to love you above all things.
We ask this . . .

**Vincent**, January 22. From Spain; a deacon; died 304.

**John Bosco**, January 31. From Italy; died in 1888; founded a congregation to minister with boys.

Lord,
you called John Bosco
to be a teacher and father to the young.
Fill us with love like his:
may we give ourselves completely to your service
and to the salvation of mankind.
We ask this . . .

**Blaise**, February 3. From ancient Armenia; bishop of Sebastea; died ca. 316. According to legend he saved the life of a boy who got a fish-bone stuck in his throat.

**Ansgar**, February 3. Died in 865; A French monk and later Archbishop of Hamburg, he preached the Gospel in Denmark and northern Germany.

Father,
you sent St. Ansgar
to bring the light of Christ to many nations.
May his prayers help us
to walk in the light of your truth.
We ask this . . .

**Paul Miki and Companions**, February 6. Born in Japan, Paul Miki entered the Jesuit order and preached the Gospel in his country. In 1597 he and his companions – the martyrs of Nagasaki – were put to death for the faith by a form of crucifixion.
God our Father,
source of strength for all your saints,
you led Paul Miki and his companions
through the suffering of the cross
to the joy of eternal life.
May their prayers give us the courage
to be loyal until death in professing our faith.
We ask this . . .

Cyril and Methodius, February 14. These were two brothers, natives of Thessalonika in present-day Greece, who about the year 863 were sent to Moravia, and were the apostles to the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe.

Father,
you brought the light of the gospel to the Slavic nations
through St. Cyril and his brother St. Methodius.
Open our hearts to understand your teaching
and help us to become one in faith and praise.
Grant this . . .

David of Wales, March 1. Died about 588; founded several monasteries; bishop of Menevia.

Casimir of Poland, March 4. Died 1484; son of the King of Poland; patron saint of Poland and Lithuania; “a father, son and brother” to widows, orphans and the oppressed.

Church Unity Octave
January also contains the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a significant period of ecumenical awareness and prayer together.

St. Agatha and Breast Cancer

St. Agatha is the patron saint of women with breast cancer, and her feast day, February 5, is a special day on which Christians should especially remember those who have, or have had, cancer of the breast.

Tortured: St. Agatha lived in Sicily in the third century. The local Roman governor repeatedly attempted to seduce her, and because she resolutely spurned his attentions, she was arrested and tortured. As part of her torture, her breasts were cut off, but it is said that on the same night, God sent St. Peter to restore and heal them. Further torture led to her death on February 5.

In art, St. Agatha traditionally is shown carrying her cut-off breasts on a plate. (However, these sometimes have been misunderstood to be loaves of bread, and in some places the custom arose of blessing bread on St. Agatha’s Day.)

Patron: Because of her own personal experience, St. Agatha became patron of those with breast diseases, and in particular of women with cancer of the breast. This is a point of considerable relevance in contemporary North America, where breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in women, and
where about one out of every 10-12 women will develop breast cancer some-
time during her lifetime.

**Breast cancer:** When detected early, breast cancer can be successfully treat-
ed in a large number of cases. However, when the disease has spread, treat-
ment is much more difficult and less often successful. In every case, however,
the diagnosis of breast cancer – or even the possibility of having it – is a cause
of anxiety and fear, and treatment necessarily involves trauma and cosmetical-
ly undesirable changes.

**Consequences:** Because of the nature of the disease, it is five to 10 years
before one is confident of successful removal of all of the tumor. In cases in
which complete removal of the tumor cannot be accomplished, women will suf-
fer from their disease for varying periods of time. In addition, women who die
from breast cancer may leave bereaved parents, sisters and brothers, friends,
and sometimes husbands and children.

**Concern for breast cancer victims:** The Christian community always has
had a special concern for its sick members – and for the sick in general – and
it seems highly appropriate for Christians to take special note of this all-too-
common form of cancer in women.

**Ministry of prayer:** There is a need to pray in thanksgiving for those who
have been successfully treated, to pray in support for those who do not yet
know the outcome of their treatment, to pray in consolation for those who are
dying, to pray in remembrance for those who now rest in God's peace, to pray
in sympathy for families and friends left behind, and to pray in gratitude for
those who care for women with breast cancer.

**Acts of charity:** Naturally, these prayers should be accompanied, whenever
possible, with concrete acts of concern.

**The feast of St. Agatha** seems an appropriate time for Christians to focus
their concerns and prayers for breast cancer patients. In 1994, February 5
occurs on Saturday, and a special effort might be made to invite all those con-
cerned with breast cancer to a special liturgy on that day. In addition to or
instead of the eucharist, this might be the occasion for private or communal
celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, for other special prayers and bless-
ings, for visiting the sick at home and in hospital, and for showing concern for
families and communities who have lost wives, mothers, sisters, daughters
and friends.3

Ash Wednesday: The Catholic Liturgy

The blessing and giving of ashes— which come from the branches blessed the preceding year for Passion Sunday— is usually set in the context of the eucharist. The Liturgical Calendar reminds us that there is no penitential rite this day.

The readings, which are particularly rich, set the scene:

• Joel 2: 12-18. Rend your hearts and not your clothing.
• 2 Corinthians 5: 20 – 6: 2. Be reconciled to God, for now is the acceptable time.
• Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18. Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

The blessing of the ashes follows the homily. First there is an invitation followed by silent prayer, and then the prayer of blessing. As always, the period of silent prayer is of the greatest importance.

Dear friends in Christ, let us ask our Father to bless these ashes which we will use as the mark of our repentance.

Pause for silent prayer.

Lord, bless the sinner who asks for your forgiveness.

or

Lord, bless these ashes by which we show that we are dust.

Pardon our sins and keep us faithful to the discipline of Lent for you do not want sinners to die but to live with the risen Christ, who reigns with you for ever and ever.

The ashes are then sprinkled with holy water in silence.

The priest then places ashes on those who come forward, saying to each:

Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.

or

Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return.
Outside of Mass

When ashes are blessed outside Mass, it is fitting to do this in a brief scripture service, using parts of today's liturgy. The Liturgical Calendar recommends the following order of service:

- Opening hymn
- Sign of cross, greeting
- Collect
- Readings and Psalm
- Homily
- Blessing of ashes
- Distribution of ashes
- General Intercessions
- Lord's prayer
- Closing hymn.

When There Is No Priest

In some communities it is no longer possible to have the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday because no priest is available; some priests simply have too many parishes to serve. Still, it is highly desirable that the beginning of Lent be marked liturgically, and if possible, with ashes. One parish's answer to this need is the following; other parishes may find other responses to this need.

At the end of the eucharist on the Sunday that precedes Ash Wednesday, the priest blesses the ashes. Suitable amounts of ashes are placed in capped vials, and they are given to each household that wishes, to take home. On Ash Wednesday people are encouraged to celebrate a liturgy in their home, preferably with other households.

It is suggested that all gather in a living or family room, or around a table. A lighted candle and a cross or crucifix may be placed where they can be seen. It is suggested as well that one or several children administer the ashes. Three sets of words for this are given as alternatives; if possible, they should be memorized ahead of time. All those present may take turns in leading the prayers. The celebration may begin with a suitable song. The citations for the usual Ash Wednesday scripture readings are provided.

The following additional resources are also provided; it is assumed that they will be adapted as desired. In particular, if small children are present, the liturgy most likely will be considerably shortened.

**Leader 1:** Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of God's favor.

**Leader 2:** We hear God's word according to the prophet Isaiah: This is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.
Leader 3: O God, we have not loved you with all our heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

There may be a pause for reflection, shared or in silence.

Leader 4: As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from the love of God and neighbor.

Leader 5: Repentance, fasting, prayer, study, and works of love help us return to God.

Leader 6: We read from the gospel according to Matthew: When you fast, you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do. They change the appearance of their faces so that others may see they are fasting. I assure you, they are already repaid. When you fast, see to it that you groom your hair and wash your face. In that way no one can see you are fasting except your God who is hidden; and God who sees what is hidden will repay you.

Leader 7: O God, we have been deaf to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Again, there may be a pause for reflection, shared or in silence.

Leader 8: We are all invited, therefore, to commit ourselves to love God and neighbor by confessing our sin and by asking God for strength to persevere in our Lenten practices.

In the following, all may take turns as leader.

We confess to you, O God: all our past unfaithfulness; all the pride and impatience in our lives.
   We confess to you, O God.

Our selfish desires and ways and our exploitation of other people.
   We confess to you, O God.

Our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves.
   We confess to you, O God.

Our excessive love of worldly goods and comforts and our dishonesty in our daily life and work.
   We confess to you, O God.

Our laziness in prayer and worship and our failure to witness to the faith that is in us.
   We confess to you, O God.

Accept our repentance, O God, for the wrongs we have done. For our neglect of human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty.
   Accept our sorrow, O God.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt towards those who differ from us.
   Accept our sorrow, O God.
For our waste and pollution of your creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us.
Accept our sorrow, O God.

Restore us, O God; help us turn back to you.
Accept our sorrow, O God.

Ashes may be placed on the foreheads of participants, in the form of a cross, saying:

Remember that you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.

or

Turn away from your sins
and believe the good news.

or

Repent.

Leader 9: Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory.

Leader 10: O God, may everything we do begin with your inspiration, continue with your help, and reach perfection under your guidance. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

A sign of peace may be exchanged.
Ash Wednesday: Anglican and Protestant Liturgies

The Lutheran and Anglican churches have always marked Ash Wednesday through a special collect (opening prayer) and proper readings, but until recently they did not use ashes. Other Protestant churches generally did not mark this day in any special way. Since 1978, however, this picture has changed. Now Anglicans, Lutherans and some other Protestant churches have a richer liturgy for Ash Wednesday than formerly was the case, and, at least as an option, ashes are prayed over and distributed. Some of these liturgical developments are reported here.

The impetus came from the U.S. Episcopal (Anglican) Church, in the process of preparing its 1979 Book of Common Prayer.¹ Their materials, which were publicly available in draft form, were borrowed (with small adaptations) for the Lutheran Book of Worship, published in 1978.² The Episcopal materials, plus some Lutheran adaptations, were then borrowed – and slightly rearranged – for use in the 1985 Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada.³ It is this Canadian liturgy that is reported here.

Anglican Church of Canada

The service begins with a liturgical greeting and the collect of the day, itself adapted from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

Almighty and everlasting God, you despise nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,

¹ The Book of Common Prayer ... According to the use of The Episcopal Church (New York: Church Hymnal Corp. 1979)
³ The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1985)
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

The readings follow; they are virtually the same as those used in the Catholic liturgy. Psalm 103 replaces psalm 51, however, as the latter is used elsewhere in the Anglican liturgy. A sermon may be preached, and after the sermon the penitential service that may include ashes begins. First there is an address by the priest, concluding in an invitation to observe a holy Lent.

Dear friends in Christ,
every year at the time of the Christian Passover
we celebrate our redemption
through the death and resurrection
of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration
and to renew our life in the paschal mystery.
We begin this holy season
by remembering our need for repentance,
and for the mercy and forgiveness
proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If ashes are used, the following may be said.

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes,
an ancient sign,
speaking of the frailty and uncertainty of human life,
and marking the penitence of the community as a whole.

The celebrant continues:
I invite you therefore, in the name of the Lord,
to observe a holy Lent
by self-examination, penitence, prayer,
fasting, and almsgiving,
and by reading and meditating on the word of God.
Let us kneel before our Creator and Redeemer.

Silence is then kept for reflection.

Psalm 51: 1-18 is sung or said.

Refrain: Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Litany of Penitence

Most holy and merciful Father,
we confess to you, to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints
in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault
in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives.

We confess to you, Lord.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,

We confess to you, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

We confess to you, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

We confess to you, Lord.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

We confess to you, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,

Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;

Hear us, Lord, for your mercy is great.

*If ashes are to be imposed, the celebrant may say the following prayer:*

Almighty God,
from the dust of the earth you have created us.
May these ashes be for us a sign
of our mortality and penitence,
and a reminder that only by your gracious gift
are we given eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Those who desire to receive ashes come forward, and the ashes are applied to the forehead of each person with the following words:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.
After all who desire ashes have received them, the celebrant leads the con­gregation in the conclusion of the confession, all kneeling.

Celebrant: Accomplish in us, O God, 
the work of your salvation.

People: That we may show forth your glory 
in the world.

Celebrant: By the cross and passion of your Son, our Lord,

People: Bring us with all your saints 
to the joy of his resurrection.

The bishop, if present, or the priest stands and, facing the people, says,

Almighty God have mercy on you, 
forgive you all your sins 
through our Lord Jesus Christ, 
strengthen you in all goodness, 
and by the power of the Holy Spirit 
keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The sign of peace is exchanged and the eucharist may follow.

Other Churches

The 1986 Book of Worship of the [U.S.] United Church of Christ¹ includes, as an option, an Ash Wednesday liturgy that is a slightly shortened version of the Episcopal/Anglican and Lutheran liturgy. This may stand on its own, being concluded with a hymn, or may be followed by a Service of the Word and Sacrament [that is, eucharist] or by a Service of the Word.

The 1993 Book of Common Worship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)² includes essentially all of the Episcopal/Anglican and Lutheran liturgy for Ash Wednesday. This is followed immediately by a preface and great thanksgiving [eucharistic prayer] especially for Ash Wednesday. This is the preface:

It is truly right and our greatest joy 
to give you thanks and praise, 
eternal God, creator and ruler of the universe. 
You are our God, 
and we are the creatures of your hand. 
You made us from the dust of the earth, 
breathed into us the breath of life, 
and set us in your world to love and serve you. 
When we rejected your love and ignored your wisdom, 
you did not reject us.

¹ Book of Worship. United Church of Christ (New York: Office of Church Life and Leadership 1986)
You loved us still
and called us to turn again to you
in obedience and in love.
Therefore we praise you,
joining our voices with the heavenly choirs
and with all the faithful of every time and place,
who forever sing to the glory of your name:

[Holy holy]

The beginning and end of the great thanksgiving are as follows:

You are holy, O God of majesty,
and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Out of your great love for the world,
you sent Jesus among us
to set us free from the tyranny of evil.
He lived as one of us,
sharing our joys and sorrows.
By his dying and rising,
he releases us from bondage to sin
and frees us from the dominion of death.

[institution narrative and other texts]

[at the end:]
Lead us, O God, by the power of your Spirit
to live as the Lord requires:
to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with you, our God.
Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ
until this mortal life is ended,
and all that is earthly returns to dust.
Give us strength to serve you faithfully
until the promised day of resurrection,
when, with the redeemed of all the ages,
we will feast with you at your table in glory.

[doxology]

The 1992 United Methodist Book of Worship includes a full liturgy for Ash Wednesday. After the scripture readings and sermon there is an Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline, borrowed from the Episcopal/Anglican and Lutheran service. As an option, this is followed by a Thanksgiving over the Ashes, and then the Imposition of Ashes. Psalm 51: 1-17 is then prayed with a short concluding prayer, and the sign of peace. The service may continue with the Offering, a Prayer of Thanksgiving (not a eucharistic prayer), the Lord's Prayer, a Hymn, and a Dismissal with Blessing. Hymn suggestions are provided from the United Methodist Hymnal.

The United Church of Canada has no official liturgical materials for Ash Wednesday, but special liturgies, including the distribution of ashes, are celebrated in some congregations.

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Ministry to the Sick and Dying: The Need for Education

In a recent conversation, a Protestant minister who is the chief chaplain at a large urban hospital mentioned that he had spent a lot of time that day finding a Catholic priest to come and give "the last rites" to a dying Catholic patient; local priests had been busy with other pastoral responsibilities. On further questioning, he said that Catholic patients and their families almost always used the term "last rites," and by that they meant the liturgy of anointing. He added that the priests he worked with also used this terminology. He was quite unaware that anointing was not the Catholic church's sacrament for the dying, or that viaticum could be given by lay persons.

Hopefully, this is an isolated incident. However, it raises a number of questions regarding the continuing need to educate both Catholics and others about the Catholic church's ministry to its sick and dying members.

The term "the last rites" is pre-Vatican II language; nowhere is it used in the official liturgical book, Pastoral Care of the Sick. Rites of Anointing and Viaticum (1982). Today the church speaks of the "anointing of the sick" or the "sacrament of anointing," or, where the context is absolutely clear, simply "anointing." Likewise, the church says "viaticum" or "viaticum for the dying."

Extreme Unction: Before Vatican II, "last rites" referred to extreme unction, the sacrament of last anointing; this is no longer the sacrament primarily for the dying, but for persons who are seriously ill but not on their death beds. The use of the phrase "last rites" today very likely refers to the wrong liturgy. It is unlikely that anyone who says "last rites" really means viaticum, the church's present day sacrament for the dying.

Popular views: Unfortunately, the pre-Vatican II language of "last rites" is perpetuated by movies and television, which sometimes show priests anointing dying people. Even worse, they occasionally show priests anointing persons who are already dead; the church does not do this.

Delaying anointing: In addition, one hears stories of lay persons who are afraid to celebrate the sacrament of anointing because they think it means that they are close to death. Some, therefore, in effect make the anointing of the sick into a sacrament for the dying by delaying it until they are dying. This is unfortunate, and entirely contrary to the intentions of the church.

Continued education about the sacrament of anointing and about viaticum and about their individual roles in the pastoral-liturgical care of sick and dying persons is needed; a clear understanding of these rites unfortunately cannot be taken for granted. Neither priests nor lay persons should use the term "last
rites" any more; it is misleading in several ways. Lay people deserve to be taught the proper language now used by the church. This is not a matter of "liturgical correctness;" it affects the ministry they receive and celebrate and how they understand this ministry. Of course, in emergencies anointing and viaticum can be celebrated together.

Many liturgies: Lay people also deserve to be informed and educated about the full range of liturgical ministry afforded sick and dying persons by the church. As found in the liturgical book, *Pastoral Care of the Sick. Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, this includes visits with prayer, visits with holy communion, individual and communal anointing of the sick, viaticum, commendation of the dying, and prayers for the dead; the sacrament of penance, of course, needs to be added to this list. Pastors and chaplains need to provide these liturgies, or see that they are offered to sick persons.

Hospital personnel: Catholic priests, liturgists and diocesan authorities also need to educate hospital personnel – nurses, doctors, administrators – about the forms of ministry to the sick and dying that are celebrated by the Catholic church. It is also important that other chaplains, especially those with some supervisory responsibility in the institution, have an accurate knowledge of Catholic liturgical practices. These hospital personnel and non-Catholic chaplains want to do things right; they want to respect Catholic practices and the needs of their Catholic patients; they want to use the proper language; they need appropriate education.

Who ministers? Catholic lay people, hospital personnel and other chaplains also deserve to know who can minister the various forms of Catholic liturgies for the sick and dying. Anointing and penance require the ministry of presbyters, but in their absence lay persons can preside for visits to the sick, the bringing of holy communion to the sick, viaticum for the dying, commendation of the dying, and prayers for the dead. Naturally, presbyters should participate in the latter as well.

Lay ministers: When a Catholic minister is needed to bring viaticum to a person who is dying, therefore, a priest is not required, though this may be desired by the patient; this desire, of course, will be respected. In addition, the patient may desire to celebrate the rite of penance. A lay person may administer viaticum and lead the commendation of the dying. Hospital personnel and non-Catholic chaplains should know how to summon lay parish ministers in cases of need.

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New Forms on Ministry and Celebration

The scarcity of priests and the increase of lay Catholics in pastoral ministry and hospital chaplaincy raise additional issues that are still in the stage of development. Lay people may be called on to minister to sick and dying persons in ways that in some ways resemble what only priests are authorized to do. Thus patients may well feel called to "confess" to them, and the lay persons may well feel called to assure the patients of God's love for them. This is perfectly legitimate in itself, but no one should think that it is the sacrament of penance or a substitute for penance.
Prayer and touch: Similarly, lay ministers may be called to pray with patients and to touch them caringly, especially when the sacrament of anointing is not available because of scarcity of presbyters. But this should not be called anointing of the sick, as this title is used for the church's sacrament.

Local developments: The liturgies for the sick and the dying that are being created by lay pastoral ministers and chaplains are undoubtedly grace-filled, though no one really knows what is happening in this regard across our country or around the world. We need to be careful, however, that these be clearly distinguished from the rites in the official liturgical books, and especially from those which require the ministry of presbyters.

In conclusion: parishes and diocesan liturgical offices might wish to draw up a plan for the continuing education of Catholics and others regarding the many liturgies of the Catholic church for persons who are sick or dying.

Next Year's Issues

Liturgy and Creation: Bulletin 136, Spring. We worship in the created world, as part of creation, and using created signs and symbols. We thank God for the goodness of creation, and commit ourselves to wise and loving use of all of creation.

Music, Language, Silence: Bulletin 137, Summer. We worship using music, sung and spoken language, and silence, in changing but familiar rhythms that move our whole beings and that mediate our encounter with God.

Trinitarian Dimensions of Liturgy: Bulletin 138, Fall. The God whom we worship and whom we name, address and invoke in our worship, is a Trinity. This issue will consider the trinitarian dimensions of our liturgical rites and texts, and the consequences of trinitarian worship for ministry, church architecture, and daily Christian living.

Sunday Celebrations of the Word: Bulletin 139, Winter. This issue will describe a new national resource for this type of liturgy, offered to deacons, lay people and parish communities when it is not possible to celebrate the Sunday eucharist because no presbyter is available.