

Lay-Led Liturgy

A Guide to Developing Liturgy in Schools

In devising liturgy¹ for schools, it is important to know and understand the principles which underlie communal worship in the Catholic tradition. These come from the long history of liturgical practice but particularly from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in its constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) and the Church's document on liturgy with children, the *Directory on Masses with Children* (1973). There are also important and useful principles and directions in the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (1971).

Liturgical Principles of the Council

The Second Vatican Council deliberated long and hard over the reform of the liturgy and promulgated some important principles which should inform and govern liturgical celebrations in the contemporary Church. Its Constitution on liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) sets out these principles:

- “full, conscious and active participation” by the laity (n.11, 14) “inwardly and outwardly” (n.19)
- the importance of the liturgical seasons (n.13, 102-111)
- clear expression of texts (n.21)
- importance of scripture in liturgy (n.24, 35, 51)
- variety of roles (n.26-9)
- importance of music and silence (n.30, 112-21)
- the opportunity for catechesis through liturgy (n.33)
- liturgy should be characterised by “rich simplicity” (n.34)
- a place for both Latin and the vernacular language (n.36)
- appropriate local custom and adaptation (n.37-40)
- restoration of the prayer of the faithful [bidding prayers] (n.53)
- importance of sacramental – but with clarity (n.59-62)
- importance of art of “noble beauty” (n.122-29)

The Council spoke about the purpose of liturgical worship as being:

- the making present of Christ in multiple ways (n.7)
- proclamation of the message of salvation (n.9)
- inspiration to go out and love (n.10)

¹ Strictly, the word ‘liturgy’ refers only to the celebration of the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours (the Divine Office of the Breviary). Everything else (eg. Benediction, Holy Hour, Rosary in common, Carol Services, etc.) is technically a ‘paraliturgy’. However, ‘paraliturgy’ is not a pretty word that we would usually wish to use on service sheets and in announcements, etc. In this paper, the word liturgy is used to include what is, strictly, paraliturgy.

In devising and celebrating lay-led liturgy in schools, it is important that these principles are well-understood and are used to shape the liturgy.

Liturgical Principles of the *Directory on Masses with Children*

The *Directory on Masses with Children* (1973) sets out the principles which govern the celebration of the Eucharist with children. The concept of 'children' has, in the UK, been extended to young people. The Directory gives considerable latitude for adaptation of the rites so that the fundamental principle of the Council that participants should be fully, consciously and actively engaged in worship can be realised.

The key principles of the *Directory* are:

- adaptation of the rites to enable full, conscious and active participation
- the linking of key activities of human living with the actions of the liturgy
- the importance and understanding of scripture
- imaginative use of music, movement, silence, texts, images

While the *Directory* applies specifically to the celebration of the Mass, its principles should guide liturgy/paraliturgy with children and young people more widely.

Presiding / Leading

It is important to recognise that in the Catholic tradition, liturgy is led. The Church ordains those it chooses to preside at liturgy (bishops, priests, deacons). Where there is no ordained presider, it is still important that liturgy should be led – it should be clear who is leading. Consideration needs to be given to (a) clothing, (b) seat/position, (c) relationship to others who perform a role.

A lay person leading liturgy should not occupy the position (at chair or altar) or mimic the movement/gestures (eg. procession, arms extended at prayer) of the priest.

In the Catholic tradition, only an ordained presider can speak prayers on behalf of the assembly (congregation). The 'Amen' (meaning "so be it") at the end of a prayer is the assent of the people to the presider's words. Consideration needs to be given to how a lay person prays in lay-led liturgy – it is not appropriate simply to take over the prayers written for the priest. A new 'register' is needed.

Communion outside Mass

There should not be an assumption that if a priest is not available for Mass, a communion service should take place. Even on a Sunday, there is an increasing view that a communion service should not automatically be held.

However, the faithful have the right to ask for communion for a good reason, even outside Mass.²

The decision to hold a communion service should be made only if it is impossible to find a priest, or travel to Mass elsewhere, and it would otherwise be necessary to attend Mass (ie. a Sunday or Holyday of Obligation).

² Code of Canon Law n.918

The template for communion outside Mass (other than as viaticum with the sacrament of the sick) is the Good Friday liturgy: a liturgy of the Word, followed by prayers of intercession, followed by the communion rite beginning with the Our Father.

A communion service would therefore look something like this:

- Gathering hymn
- In the name of the Father . . . (but no greeting ‘The Lord be with you’)
- Penitential rite
- Opening prayer
- Readings (usually the readings of the Mass for the day)
- Time of reflection or shared spoken reflections (in place of a homily)
- Prayers of intercession (Bidding Prayers)
- Blessed sacrament is brought from tabernacle to altar (possibly with hymn)
- Communion Rite (from Our Father to giving of communion; but no breaking of bread)
- Closing Prayer
- Blessing

Communion outside Mass should be led by a deacon, commissioned acolyte, or special minister of the eucharist (even if commissioned for one specific occasion).

A Stand-Alone Liturgy of the Word

The template for a stand-alone Liturgy of the Word is the vigil of readings at the Easter Vigil, or the Liturgy of the Word from the Mass.

1	Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gathering movement • gathering song • creating of sacred space • function of the altar • greeting in Xt’s name • welcome and introduction • penitential tropes (especially during Lent) 	<p>There needs to be some simple introductory rite which has the function of gathering the people (hymn, greeting, procession, silence, lighting of candles, placing of the book of the Word, etc.), and calling them into the presence of God (words of invitation, announcing the ‘theme’, silence, hymn). In some liturgies it may be desirable to have a penitential rite.</p> <p>There are many elements which could make up the introductory rite of gathering – but be careful not to use them all. The DMC establishes the principle that there should be few elements.</p>
2	Opening Prayer		<p>The Collect prayer draws the introductory rite to a close by articulating the ‘theology’ of the occasion.</p>
3	Reading(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on the book of sacred scripture • announcing of reading • introduction/context • proclamation of the 	<p>Then come the readings – one, two or more as appropriate.</p> <p>Each reading is announced (“A reading from the book of Genesis”) and it may be useful to add a sentence such as, “in which God creates the heavens and the earth, and our ancestors Adam and Eve on</p>

		<p>word</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The word of the Lord</i> • leaving of the book 	<p>the sixth day, after which he rested and saw that all he had created was good.”</p> <p>The readings should link or relate.</p> <p>One of the readings should always be from the gospels. The gospel reading should be honoured by a change of posture (stand rather than sit) and other gestures (procession, candles, incense, etc.).</p>
4	Response to readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • silence • meditation on an image • a psalm • a song/hymn/music (live or recorded) • a procession / movement • dance • drama • film clip • homily / reflection 	<p>After each reading there should be a reflection or response (a brief spoken reflection, silence, a prayer, a psalm or hymn).</p> <p>There does not need to be a homily – strictly only an ordained person can preach. But there can either be a lay-led reflection or a shorter response as for the first reading.</p>
5	Intercessions		<p>The Liturgy of the Word would usually then include bidding prayers (see below).</p>
6	Closing Prayer		<p>The Liturgy of the Word concludes with a prayer summing up the tenor of the readings and a blessing and sending out (dismissal) to put into action what has been heard in scripture.</p>
7	Blessing		<p>See below</p>
8	Dismissal		<p>A return to daily life / missioning</p>

Carol services and Tenebrae are, in effect, Liturgies of the Word and provide a useful pattern for other Liturgies of the Word.

The readings should be either the readings of the day or chosen for the particular celebration or to reflect the liturgical season. Rather than start from scratch it is always helpful to scan the readings in the lectionary. On choice of readings for liturgy with children see Scripture Readings below.

The Altar

The Altar is the central focus of all worship in the Catholic tradition. It represent Christ and is the place where the sacrifice of the Eucharist is celebrated. In devising lay-led liturgies, consideration needs to be given to the role of the altar.

Traditionally, the number of candles placed on (or beside) the altar indicates the importance of the feast or celebration (two, four, or six, or seven if the diocesan bishop is presiding).

Nothing should be placed on the altar other than the Blessed Sacrament (at Exposition/Benediction), the sacred vessels (at Mass), candles, cross, and incense. Other things should be place before or near the altar.

If your lay-led liturgy takes place in a place where there is no altar, you should not create or import one specially.

Scripture Readings

Approved translations for use in liturgy are the Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) [RSV(CE)], the Jerusalem Bible [JB]³, and the Good News Bible⁴ [GNB] (for children’s liturgy; In general, the RSV is better for the NT and the JB for the OT. Psalms are from the Grail Translation.

In liturgy with children, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that the scripture used is intelligible and speaks to its listeners:

- Have fewer rather than more readings (in many school liturgies, especially in primary schools, one will be enough)
- Shorten readings that are too long
- If readings are truly inaccessible or inappropriate for children (relevant to age and maturity) choose other readings
- Bring readings to life by using different voices, or by dramatizing them
- Use images to illustrate readings
- Use the symbol of the book (the book itself, candles, lectern/ambo, procession, reverence, posture, music, gospel-signing of head, lips and heart, showing of the text, etc.)
- Use spoken introductions (but only if necessary to explain the context of the reading or flag-up what to look for)
- Involve the children in responding to the scripture (dialogue, Q&A)
- Don’t forget silence (Let us think about this story . . . what this reading has said to us . . .)

Bidding Prayers

The models for bidding prayers are the Solemn Intercessions of Good Friday. These are the “Rolls-Royce” version of a bidding prayer and consist of:

1. The **announcing of an intention** by someone other than the presider.
2. A **silent pause** in which the people make their own prayer for the announced intention.⁵

³ But note this does not include the New Jerusalem Bible [NJB]

⁴ The *Good News Bible* is also known as *Today’s English Version* [TEV].

3. The **prayer** addressed to God, on behalf of the assembly, by the presider.
4. The '**Amen**' by which the people assent to the prayer made on their behalf.

While these prayers are probably more than is usually needed in liturgy, they do provide the template for writing bidding prayers.

This template is employed for the useful exemplars of 'ordinary' bidding prayers given in the Roman Missal (p.1514). These are well worth looking at. They make clear that the normal number of bidding prayers should be no more than four. They also set out a general pattern for the four prayers:

1. For the needs of the universal Church
2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world
3. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty (poverty, war, bereavement, sickness, etc.)
4. For the local community (especially those assembled here)

On particular occasions it is desirable to make the intentions reflect the occasion and its implications.

The leader introduces the prayers (not with a prayer but with an invitation to pray, or a reason for making intercessions) and concludes them (with a prayer asking God to listen to our petitions).

Each bidding prayer should begin with an intention. This is not in itself a prayer but the announcement of what we are praying for in the silence and prayer that follows.

Then follows a brief moment of silence (and stillness) when people can respond to the intention with their own prayer.

Then be concluded with a prayer to which the people respond. This may be a prayer or the simple response: Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

In England and Wales, it is customary to include the Hail Mary.⁶ The Hail Mary should come as the last of the intercessions and before the presider's concluding prayer. Any invitation to a slightly longer moment of silence to 'pray for our own intentions' should come before the Hail Mary, not after it.

The bidding prayers are concluded with a short pray that gathers up the intention and asks God to respond. For example:

Father,
in your mercy,
hear the prayers we make in faith.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A few other considerations:

- There should usually be four bidding prayers.

⁵ In the Good Friday liturgy there is the practice of kneeling for this silent prayer, making it still more obvious that this is not just a pause between words but a real moment for personal prayer in common, before standing for the public prayer said or sung by the presider.

⁶ Indult of Pope Paul VI in the 1970s but falling out of favour with some bishops. The Hail Mary is not used in the bidding prayers in Scotland. Another Marian prayer may not replace the Hail Mary.

- Bidding prayers should not be a news bulletin.
- They do not need to change constantly.
- They should relate to the experience of the children.
- They be concise and clear and easy to read (avoid long complex sentences).

The Art of Writing a Prayer

Prayers for public use have a particular structure:

Collect of Wednesday of Third Week of Lent

1	Grant, we pray, O Lord, that,	<i>The address to God (Which person? Here it is God the Father)</i>
2	schooled through Lenten observance and nourished by your word,	<i>Reminder of feast, mystery, season, 'theme'</i>
3	through holy restraint, we may be devoted to you with all our heart and be united in prayer.	<i>The intercession (or praise, or thanksgiving, etc.)</i>
4	Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.	<i>The Trinitarian ending (sets out how the prayer 'works') – this is the ending for prayers addressed to God the Father</i>
5	Amen.	<i>The people's assent</i>

The alternative ending for prayers addressed to God the Son: "who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever."

A Prayer during Examinations

1	Lord,	<i>The address to God (Which person? Here it is God the Father)</i>
2	as I prepare for this examination, let your strength and your wisdom be present to me.	<i>Reminder of 'theme' – examinations – and reference to attributes of God which are especially relevant here</i>
3	May I revise my work thoroughly. May I understand what it is I have to know. May my memory be reliable and orderly. May I be calm and focused on the task ahead. May I know and feel the love and support of my family and friends.	<i>The intercessions</i>
4	And may you, the author and creator of all things, enlighten me. Through Christ our Lord.	<i>The prayer refers back to the attributes of God; and is addressed to the Father through the intercessor, Jesus Christ</i>

5	Amen.	<i>The people's assent</i>
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In writing about the particular attributes or activities of God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, it is good to use scriptural or traditional words, phrases and language. This helps connect the new prayer to the Christian tradition of prayer and builds up a vocabulary and 'prayerful cadences' which become familiar to people in worship.

There are prayers on the Jesuit Institute website which have been found to work well with children and young people: jesuitinstitute.org > *resources for schools* > *prayers*

Blessings

Strictly, only an ordained person can give a blessing. However, there is a long tradition of anyone being able to say prayers of blessing.

In adapting a prayer of blessing to be lay-led, the language is of "we" and "us" rather than the "you" of the priest's blessing. An example is given for the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Hours:

Priest's Blessing	Lay-led Blessing
The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. May almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.	The Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

The missal gives models of prayers of blessing (p.709 and included in the particular pages for major feasts and Sunday of Lent, etc.). These can be adapted for lay-leadership by changing the language from "you" to "we" and "us". Cf. this example from the blessing for ordinary time No.2:

Priest's Blessing	Lay-led Blessing
May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.	May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

An example of a well-written prayer of blessing:

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself.
May the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service.
May the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls.
May the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be amongst us and remain with us always. Amen.

(William Temple 1881-1944)

Other Symbols

The Church has traditionally deployed a rich treasury of symbols, images and objects to foster devotion, prayer and reflection. These concrete objects can be especially effective in liturgies with children and young people but thought needs to be given as to what you are trying to communicate and what response you are looking for from the assembly.

Cross

Think about whether you want to use a cross (without the corpus) or a crucifix. Is the cross the visual focus?

Paschal Candle

The Paschal Candle should be present and lit during any liturgy in the Easter season but not outside the Easter season (ie. after Pentecost Sunday) unless there is a particular reason for doing so. There is good catechesis which can be worked up into liturgy in the markings and incense grains made on the candle at the Easter Vigil.

Lights / Candles

Candles/lights have a variety of functions in worship:

- they denote sacred space and sacred action (eg. candles on altar, candles accompany the book of the gospels/scripture)
- 'candle-prayers' are made by lighting a candle
- to create an atmosphere or effect (eg. Taizé-style liturgies where many small lights are used to create a sacred space)
- lighting candles one by one to increase the light (as with the Advent Wreath) or extinguishing lights one by one into darkness (as at the Tenebrae service of Passiontide before Easter).

Water

Water signifies baptism, ritual cleansing, preparation for worship, and is life-giving. Using water in liturgy (visually, by dipping, by sprinkling) can be very effective with children.

Oil

The three holy oils of the Church's sacramental life (Oil of Catechumens, Oil of the Sick, and Chrism) hold a very special and sacred place among the symbols and objects used in worship. There are strict rules around how these oils are blessed, stored, used and disposed of. In general, it is better not to use any other oil in worship lest it leads to confusion with the three sacred oils.

Incense

The rising of incense can be a powerful image of prayer. It also addresses the sense of smell just as other senses are engaged by sound and image. Incense still has a strong and recognizable connection with the sacred. But beware that in a confined space it can cause difficulties and some children may not like the experience!

Incense is traditionally burned on or before the altar. You can buy different kinds of incense with different aromas and density of smoke produced.

Crib

An obvious focus for liturgy at Christmas time. It is sometimes effective to have just one or two key figures rather than the whole crib ensemble.

Icon

Be aware that, in the Eastern tradition (both Catholic and Orthodox), icons are treated with very considerable respect (they are 'chrismated' with holy oil just like a person at baptism/confirmation) and you need to take care in the way you display or use icons.

Statue

Statues tend to become part of the forgotten furniture of schools. Judicious use of a statue as a focal point for a liturgy can work well. Care must be taken that the impression we are worshipping the statue is not given – this can easily be misinterpreted by children and non-Catholics.

Tableau

It is sometimes powerful to create a tableau of objects which reflect the scripture/gospel reading. For example bags of coins for the parable of the talents, stone jars of water for the wedding feast at Cana, loaves and fish (plastic stage props) for the feeding of the five thousand.

Relic

A relic of a saint can provide a good and unusual focus. Relics need to be treated with respect and are placed on the altar accompanied by lights.

Ashes

Ashes can be used during Lent as well as on Ash Wednesday.

Banners / Liturgical Colours

Having banners hanging in the assembly hall, or near the chaplaincy, or in other strategic locations around the school can reinforce a sense of the liturgical seasons and major feast days.

Green – during Ordinary Time (the colour of hope and growth)

Purple – for Advent and Lent (the colour of penance and preparation)

White – for the seasons of Christmastide and Eastertide and major feast days

Red – for Pentecost, the Holy Spirit (eg. at the beginning of the new school year) and the feast of martyrs (the colour of fire and blood)

Blue may also be used (though not in Mass vestments) for the seasons (October and May) and feasts of Our Lady.

Offerings

Objects that are brought up and in some way represent the individual and his/her prayers/intentions can be a powerful element of liturgy with children and young people. Offerings might be something made, collected, or worked-on during a retreat day or RE lesson and now offered at a liturgy.

Procession

The DCM suggests physical movement from one place to another as a possible element of liturgy. You can create an effect by having different parts of the liturgy in different locations (this was widely practiced in the Marian/May and Corpus Christi processions of the past).

Using PowerPoint Presentation

PowerPoint slides with the words of hymns, responses, etc. can be very practical. But it can also be very distracting and the focus away from whatever you intended to be the focus for the assembly.

A few things to think about if you are using PowerPoint slides:

- use images sparingly (one or two images repeated or seen in close-up detail, rather than a new image for every slide)
- if you are creating something visual as a focus for worship, then use images of that, including close-up detail, rather than other, additional, images
- think about colour ('key colour' concept)
- think about not being overly prescriptive – more abstract images get children to think/pray
- do not over use animation effects – these can be distracting



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