



# Liturgy of the Word with Children at Sunday Mass

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## Introduction

This document is intended to encourage all who are involved in a Liturgy of the Word with Children at Sunday Mass using the principles espoused in the Directory for Masses with Children (1973), a special supplement to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. This directory is, in its own words (DMC #3), one means by which 'the Church follows its Master, who put his arms around the children...and blessed them. (Mk. 10:16)'

It may be helpful for priests and people to reflect on it together, sharing their experiences, insights, and difficulties.

A growing feature of the Sunday Eucharist is the withdrawal of children to celebrate their own liturgy of the Word. The usual Sunday process of three readings, interspersed with psalm, silence, and acclamation, and enlivened by homily and prayer of the Faithful, requires a level of concentration of which most children are not capable. Simplifying this part of the celebration, while maintaining its *liturgical* character, satisfies the needs of the young so that they, too, can celebrate the Eucharist with 'full, conscious and active participation' which is 'their right and duty by virtue of their baptism'. (CSL #14)

In 1973, the Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated a pivotal document, the *Directory for Masses with Children*. This document offers principles and guidelines for adapting the liturgy for children so that they may gradually take a more active and conscious part in the full Eucharistic assembly. The Directory attempts to respect the nature of childhood and the age and abilities of the young. Its introduction speaks of a fear of 'spiritual harm, if over the years children repeatedly experience in the Church things that are barely comprehensible' (#2) and declares that children cannot be left in this situation (#3).

One of the principles espoused by the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* is that of adapting the liturgy for various groups. The *Directory for Masses with Children* declares that 'adaptions are necessary so that children can experience, according to the psychological patterns of childhood, the mystery of faith...by means of rites and prayers'.

(DMC #38) Chapter 11 of the Directory, *Masses with Adults in which Children also Participate*, states that 'if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. (#17)

The *Directory for Masses with Children*, while primarily concerned with Eucharistic celebrations, offers guiding principles around which such a Liturgy of the Word with Children should be celebrated, if the psychological patterns of childhood are to be respected. It is the intention of this document to formalise these principles.

## Principles for celebrating Liturgy of the Word with Children at Sunday Mass

The following principles ought to be taken into account by priests and ministers when celebrating a liturgy of the Word with children. The following principles are normative for the Archdiocese of Adelaide:

- It must be *liturgy*, that is, ritual prayer. It may not be only a catechist class or simply an activity session (e.g: cut and paste)
- The participants would best be children of school age.
- This Liturgy of the Word is appropriately celebrated in a room separate, but not too distant from the church.
- The children rejoin the adults in the church before the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins.
- Since liturgy is ‘an activity of the entire person, participation by means of gestures and postures should be strongly encouraged’ (DMC #33)
- The use of visual elements is to be incorporated (DMC #35). These may include a Lectionary or Bible, candle, liturgical colours, symbols specific to the reading
- If three or even two of the readings can only be understood with difficulty, two or even one reading is permissible, as long as the Gospel is always proclaimed. (DMC #42)
- If all the readings for a particular Sunday are unsuitable, other reading (s) from the Lectionary or directly from the Bible may be used as long as they are appropriate to the Liturgical season (DMC #43)
- The use of a Lectionary appropriate to children is strongly recommended. (DMC #43, 44, 45)
- Verses of psalms appropriate to the children’s understanding sung in the form of psalmody or the Alleluia with simple verse should be sung between the readings, or the Alleluia before the Gospel. (DMC #46)
- Introductory elements to help the children listen to the reading (s) fruitfully, as well as having the reading read in parts are appropriate.
- A homily to explain the readings, and appropriate to the children’s level of understanding, should be given by an adult approved by the parish priest. (DMC #17, 24)
- Prayer of the Faithful should be included. If appropriate to the occasion, a simple Profession of Faith may be said.
- As with adult Liturgy of the Word, ‘silence should be observed as the designated times as part of the celebration....since children are genuinely capable of reflection.’ (DMC # 37) This means after each non-Gospel reading, and after the Homily.

## Ministries

Ministers should be chosen for their ability, competence and example, since children learn through imitation. How ministers act will both enhance the celebration and show the Christian ideal of service. All involved in ministry will need to meet regularly to prepare and evaluate the liturgy and their own ministry.

## LEADER

The leader's ministry is to open the hearts of the children to the Word of God and allow them to respond to God's word in prayer and life.

The leader:

- Focuses the celebration
- Welcomes the children
- Proclaims the Gospel
- Leads the reflection on the Scriptures
- Leads the Profession of Faith
- Introduces and concludes the Prayer of the Faithful
- Facilitates the smooth running of the liturgy

## READER

- Proclaims the Scriptures
- Understands what she/ he is reading
- Communicates well
- Is aware that God's people are spoken to in this proclamation

## MUSICIAN

- Leads the children in song
- Enables them to pray through song
- Encourages able musicians among the children to share this ministry

It is not always easy to find someone to lead the music. If none of the adults have the confidence to begin a song or acclamation, the children themselves may be capable of starting. As a final option, the use of recorded music is possible. It is easier to include music if some of the items are used regularly and so become well-known to the children.

## PRIEST CELEBRANT

The priest celebrant presides over the entire liturgy of the Mass. He is a sign of the union of all the baptised in the one Body of Christ. So that the separate Liturgy of the Word with Children is seen as part of the *one* celebration, it is important for the priest celebrant to

- Recognise the children as members of the assembly in the introduction
- Send the children and leaders with dignity to their Liturgy of the Word

Recognise the children's return to the main assembly after their Liturgy of the Word.

The support and encouragement of the priest to the children and to the whole assembly can foster a sense of ministry among the leaders.

## Celebrating Liturgies of the Word with Children

Since the children, with their families, constitute the 'one assembly' gathered to worship, it is appropriate that the children are seated with their families as the celebration of Mass begins. Their celebration of the Word then follows.

### THE PROCESS

- After the Opening Prayer the children and their leaders are called forward by the presider or commentator.
- A book of Scriptures is presented to, or collected by the leader.
- A candle is presented to a child.
- The children and leaders process out to the place set aside for the celebration of the Word.
- The leader begins the celebration by preparing the children to listen.
- Welcoming the Word - in song (especially the Gospel with the Alleluia or acclamation)
- Proclamation - may be simply proclaimed, or it may be enhanced by posture, action, the use of more than one voice etc.
- Response - either in song or by silence
- Homily - may be instructional, question and answer, reflection or meditation
- Profession of Faith (optional) - it is best if this is simple or abbreviated - e.g. Apostles Creed, Easter Vigil profession of Faith ("Do you believe in...")
- Prayer of the Faithful - simple petitions allow the children to name the needs of the Church, the world, those in need, and the local community. (e.g. "For...., Lord hear us.")
- Rejoining the Community - may be led by candle, lectionary etc. This candle could be placed on the altar and the lectionary placed on the lectern to link the children's Liturgy of the Word with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

*Note: Some system is necessary to inform the group when to return to the church. An indication that the priest's homily is finished should give enough time for the leaders to draw the children's Liturgy of the Word to an appropriate conclusion.*

### INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHILDREN

Children can be involved through singing, posture, presenting the reading(s) in parts where appropriate, during the homily, Prayer of the Faithful, silence, Procession of Gifts, and commitment to some action during the week.

### REJOINING THE CENTRAL CELEBRATION

Procession led by candle and lectionary (see above)

- Acknowledgement of the children's return by the presider/ assembly
- Children rejoin their families or join the priest around the altar

## VENUE

There should be a primary visual focus- eg. Lectern draped with coloured cloth appropriate to the liturgical season/ celebration.

There may be other symbols appropriate to the reading(s).

## Suggested Resources

LECTIONARY for MASSES with CHILDREN 1993 Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, USA

DIRECTORY for MASSES with CHILDREN Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 1973

JOIN THE CIRCLE: CHILDREN'S LITURGY of the WORD MediaCom P.O Box 610 Unley, SA 5061

WELCOME the WORD Joan Brown SND. 1989, Geoffrey Chapman, London

TO LISTEN AND TELL: Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children -Kate Dooley.  
1993, The Pastoral Press, Washington

JUST IMAGINE: Creative Ways of Presenting Scripture for people of all ages -Rina Wintour.  
2000, Mountjoy Enterprises, Brisbane

*Note: Rina has written over 15 books to enhance Liturgy of the Word with Children.*

*To view these please visit the following website: [www.liturgycreations.com/publications.html](http://www.liturgycreations.com/publications.html)*

*These are also available at The Catholic Resource and Information Centre 83016869: or visit the website: <https://adelaide.catholic.org.au/our-faith/catholic-resource-and-information-service>*

GUIDED MEDITATION FOR CHILDREN - Sydney Ann Merritt.  
1995, Resource Publications Inc., San Jose, California

GUIDED MEDITATIONS FOR CHILDREN- Jane Reehorst, BVM.  
1986, Brown Publishing- ROA Media, Dubuque, Iowa (there are two volumes available)

CALLING THE CHILDREN - Christopher Walker  
1992. OCP Publications, Portland, Oregon.

LITURGY HELP is a subscription website that gives you access to the official Lectionary and Missal which are fully integrated with national Liturgical Calendars and a wealth of other liturgical resources. They provide easy online access for parishes, schools and other Catholic communities to the wealth of the Church's liturgical texts; making it faster and easier to prepare materials for liturgy and prayer.

[www.liturgyhelp.com](http://www.liturgyhelp.com)

## Conclusion

The Directory for Masses with Children speaks of aims and benefits of liturgy with children:

- Various kinds of celebration may also play a major role in the liturgical formation of children and in their preparation for the Church's liturgical life. By the very fact of such celebrations, children easily come to appreciate some liturgical elements, for example; greetings, silence and common praise (especially when it is sung). But care must be taken that the instructive element does not become dominant in these celebrations.
- Depending on the capacity of the children, the word of God should have a greater and greater place in these celebrations. In fact, as the children's spiritual capacity develops, celebrations of the word of God in the strict sense should be held rather frequently, especially during Advent and Lent. These celebrations are able to encourage in the children an appreciation of the Word of God.
- While all that has been said remains true, the final purpose of all liturgical and Eucharistic formation must always be a greater and greater conformity to the Gospel in the daily life of the children.

[\(DMC #13-15\)](#)