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AT A GLANCE

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Preparing for Mass

Overview

Involving youth in preparing Mass has many benefits. Youth who help prepare the Mass learn about and understand liturgy in a deeper and different way. Working side by side with adults to prepare for liturgy, the young people will help guide the preparations so that all members, regardless of age, can participate more fully in liturgy. Youth can be involved in preparing for special liturgies that are provided occasionally for youth. Young people can also be involved in preparing liturgies for the whole community. Ultimately, it would be wonderful for them to participate with adults in preparation for all liturgies in the community.

Principles for Preparing for Mass

Liturgy is the central prayer of our faith and the source and summit of the Church's life (See *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 10). Given the importance of this prayer and the way this prayer celebrates our relationship with our loving God, there are important considerations to keep in mind as we prepare.

Prepare, Do Not Plan

We do not have to plan for liturgies, but we always have to prepare. It may seem like splitting hairs, but the difference is real. Sometimes when liturgy is planned, it changes from its intended purpose, form, and structure. Preparing for liturgy acknowledges that there already is a plan for this, the central prayer of our faith; there is a structure for the prayer, selected readings, assigned space, and designated ministry roles, all of which are essential to full and active participation by the congregation.

Focus Prayer for the Assembly

Every liturgy has the Paschal mystery as its theme: Jesus' death, Resurrection, and promise to come again. Because this theme is at the heart of each liturgy, an additional theme does not need to be chosen. However, it is important to be aware of the needs of the community at the time of the Eucharistic celebration. This relationship is often described as a traditional recipe with fresh ingredients. Liturgy, like a traditional recipe, has been handed down to us and entrusted to us in a way that calls us to be faithful to its form. Our lives today are the fresh ingredients that make this recipe come alive.

One community experienced this relationship when tragedy struck. They had prepared the elements for a Fourth of July liturgy, using the suggested readings. After the preparations, a fire swept through their community, and one-fourth of the parish community had to evacuate their homes. Many people lost their homes or experienced serious damage to their homes. The liturgy preparation team came together to examine the elements for the liturgy and to incorporate the experience of the fire within the prayer intentions and the choices for hymns and prayers. The readings and the occasion for liturgy had not changed, but their lives had. As a result, the community prayed their experience of loss and hope in the prepared liturgy.

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

In liturgy preparation, the main objective is the shared prayer of the community. This means you need to keep the main thing the main thing. If you draw too much attention to some elements, you do so at the expense of the central mysteries of liturgy. Sometimes, in the name of creativity or innovation, elements are added to liturgy to try to make it more fun and exciting, but in the end it is less recognizable as a Mass. When preparing for liturgy, choose and prepare for the elements and prepare the ministers. Keep in mind the elements that are naturally a part of liturgy: silence, songs and hymns, sung prayers, processions, gestures, posture, and responses. To promote fuller participation, the preparations should honor and leave room for these elements to guide the community's prayer.

Form a Preparation Team

The Mass is Christ's work: the members of the Body of Christ join in celebrating the Paschal mystery. Because by its nature the Mass is a communal prayer, involve several persons as you prepare, especially the priest who will preside. A liturgy preparation team that regularly works together is able to learn from its past efforts to help the community pray more fully.

The team leader is responsible for leading the session and keeping everyone on task and involved. When choosing a team leader, look for someone who is skilled in facilitation and can work well with youth and adults. The team leader is also responsible for communicating with the priest if the priest is not present. If the presider will not be part of the preparation team and if the team leader is not experienced and educated in the documents and the process for liturgy, be sure to involve someone from the community who has a liturgical background. Without such expertise key elements can be overlooked or misunderstood. This leader can help the team sort out ideas and suggestions so that together they can discern elements that match with liturgy. Many of the generated ideas might be more appropriate for other forms of communal prayer; these ideas can be saved for times when planning prayer.

Ideally, you will use three other adults, in addition to the team leader, so you have one for each task group: Readings and Prayers, Music and Song, and Ritual and Environment. Recruit a music minister who can work with youth and adults to prepare the music for the liturgy and who can help lead the music in the service. As young people become more experienced in preparing for Mass, involve them in sharing leadership with adults on the team. For instance, one youth could colead with the team leader and assist in the overall planning, and three youth could colead with the leaders of each of the three task groups. In any case, it is important to have more than one adult present.

Commentary Resources

- ◆ For a commentary book, consider *Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year series* (Collegville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993). Liturgists and homilists often use this series.
- ◆ A simpler resource is *Living Liturgy—Sundays and Solemnities, Year A, B or C*, published annually by The Liturgical Press.
- ◆ The Center for Liturgy at Saint Louis University has a free online resource at liturgy.slu.edu that includes commentary, spirituality articles, and prayers.

Prepare Yourself as Team Leader

Liturgical preparation has three steps. The first task is to prepare by reviewing and renewing your own understanding of liturgy. As team leader, you will find it valuable to familiarize yourself with the principles of liturgy that are found in the Church's foundational documents and commentaries. You may not be able to read every document or article, but try to set aside reflective time to read about liturgy each time you are involved in preparation. See the suggested articles and resources on page 37 of chapter 2, "Youth and Liturgy: Promoting Full Participation," for suggested readings.

Second, you will want to prayerfully read the Scriptures of the day and reflect on the liturgy you are preparing. If it is a Sunday liturgy, consult a commentary about the liturgy as part of your preparation.

Third, prepare practically for this liturgy by meeting with the presider and other key leaders involved in the liturgy, such as the music director or liturgist. When you meet, provide an overview of your plans for liturgy preparation. Discuss the liturgy and any factors that would affect your preparations.

Determine the Givens for Liturgy

With any liturgy preparation, some elements will be open to adaptation, and some things cannot be changed. Some of these limitations are due to the nature of liturgy itself, and some are determined in advance by the community and its leaders. Limitations might include the time of the liturgy, events that occur before or after the liturgy, the place for worship, and guidelines outlining who is able or unable to participate in certain roles within the liturgy. You can find out the givens in your situation by talking to the presider and other leaders in your community. If you learn what these factors are in advance of your meeting with the preparation team, you can focus the energies of the team on the possibilities and elements that they can be involved in preparing.

Gather Preparation Resources

You will want to gather and have the following items available for the meeting with the preparation team:

- Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States*, second typical edition (the book of readings), or copies of the readings for team members
- The *Roman Missal* (book of prayers and rituals)
- hymnals you will use for the liturgy, other music resources, and equipment such as microphones, music stands, and so forth
- copies of handout 19, “Mass Preparation Form,” one for each team member
- copies of handout 20, “Preparing the Elements of Mass,” one for each team member
- pens or pencils, one for each team member
- periodicals and books that assist in understanding readings of the day (see Commentary Resources)
- books or periodicals that assist in selecting music, such as:
 - *Music & the Mass—A Practical Guide for Ministers of Music*, by David Haas and Victoria M. Tufano (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1998).
 - For a periodical that includes music suggestions, see *Today’s Liturgy*, a magazine published quarterly by Oregon Catholic Press. OCP also has a subscription-based Web site resource at www.liturgy.com.

The Preparation Process

During the preparation process, take time to prepare for the people who will assemble for liturgy and the Scriptures you will hear in the liturgy, the ritual actions of the community, the songs, and the prayers. As team leader, choose

Overview of Process

- ◆ Welcome and Prayer
- ◆ Discuss the People and Setting for This Mass
- ◆ Who, What, Where, and When
- ◆ Reflect on the Scriptures
- ◆ Identify a Focus for Preparation
- ◆ Prepare the Elements of the Mass
- ◆ Review the Overall Plan
- ◆ Evaluate the Mass and the Preparation

which elements, based on the experience level of your team, you will concentrate on during preparations. For example, you do not have to involve team members in reviewing the prayers from *The Roman Missal*. Ask the presider to make these choices.

Choose the Mass setting and the setting for the psalm response in advance so you can focus the team's time on rehearsal and selection of hymns. As the team becomes more experienced, add additional tasks in each area.

When you gather with the preparation team, expect the liturgy preparation process that follows (steps 1 to 5) to take 90 minutes to 2 hours. Follow up with an additional meeting, closer to the date of the liturgy, for reviewing the overall plan, preparing ministers, and making final preparations (step 6). Music rehearsal and ministers' preparation might take additional time, depending on the experience level of those participating. If this is the first time this team is preparing liturgy, consider including an additional meeting to provide catechesis about the pattern and nature of liturgy.

Welcome and Prayer

1. Welcome the preparation team, and provide an overview of the preparation process. Facilitate introductions (if needed), and lead the team in prayer. For prayer, consider a moment of silence, followed by the opening prayer for the liturgy you are preparing. The opening prayer is found in *The Roman Missal*, listed according to the season and day or feast.

Discuss the People and the Setting for This Mass

2. The people who will be present, the time, the place, and the surrounding events make every Mass unique. It is important for the team to discuss the *context* of each liturgy so you can prepare the Word, the music, and the rituals for full participation. Share with the team the givens or factors for this liturgy that are already decided. Here are several simple questions to think about and discuss (it may be helpful to record this discussion by posting the responses on newsprint):

- **Who** is likely to be present for this Mass? What is the mix of age and culture among those who will be attending this Mass? How well do the participants know each other? Are there any other special circumstances that will affect their attention and participation? (Examples: a retreat group, certain visitors.)
- **What** local, national, world, or church events will influence or shape the prayer and participation of those gathered for this Mass? Are there any particular needs for prayer? (Examples: a local tragedy, an anniversary, a feast or special occasion.)

- **Where** will the Mass take place? Are there particular advantages or limitations to keep in mind? (Examples: a large church for a small group, no official chapel at the retreat site.)
- **When** will the Mass take place? What time of day? Is this a regularly scheduled liturgy or a special occasion? What is the liturgical season? Is this a special season or a calendar holiday? (Examples: World Youth Day, Fourth of July, local graduations, during a conference, late evening versus an early morning Mass.)

Reflect on the Scriptures

3. Read and reflect on the Scriptures assigned for the day, keeping in mind some of the elements you have just identified. Read the Gospel first. It will set the stage for hearing the first and second readings and the psalm response. As necessary, review other sources for additional background information on the scriptural passages. Discuss how these readings apply to the assembly that will gather for this Mass. Record this discussion by posting the responses on newsprint.

Special Note: Always use the assigned readings of the day. If you need to choose other readings because of the nature of the group or event, first check the votive and ritual Masses in the back of the *Lectionary* for suggestions rather than select passages directly from the Scriptures.

Identify a Focus for Preparation

4. Several key ideas will begin to emerge as the team discusses the Scriptures in light of the context of this Mass. Summarize (through discussion and note taking) those ideas into several words or a short phrase that can be used to focus the rest of the preparation. Remember, every Mass has the same *theme*—the Paschal mystery that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. *Focus* the preparation to help the assembly pray and participate more fully in the Paschal mystery.

Prepare the Elements of Mass

5. Provide each team member with copies of handout 19 and handout 20, and a pen or pencil. Three sets of tasks must be accomplished. You may choose to have the group as a whole work together or in smaller teams. Whichever approach you choose, be sure all the questions and the tasks are discussed and determined. Note: Provide handout 21, “Preparing the Prayer of the Faithful,” and handout 22, “The Prayer of the Faithful Worksheet,” to the leaders who are preparing the petitions.

Review the Overall Plan

6. The Mass is the responsibility of *everyone gathered*. Make sure the preparations allow for the assembly to *pray together*. Some final tasks to keep in mind:

- Review the work of each task group.
- Meet with the priest presider and review the order of worship.
- Rehearse readings, music cues, processions, and so forth.
- Identify what will happen first.
- Pray as a team.

Evaluate the Celebration and the Preparation

7. Evaluation is the last step in Mass preparation. Take time at the beginning of the next team meeting to ask the question, “Did our preparations help the assembly to pray?” Evaluation is not for listing the ways things went wrong but for reviewing whether the preparations were successful in helping the assembly pray more fully. After evaluating the Celebration, take time to evaluate the preparation process. Preparation for liturgy should be prayerful and efficient—celebrate the successes and learn from the mistakes.