



CENTER FOR LEARNING
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**EVALUATING WORSHIP:
LITURGICAL ASSESSMENT BASICS**

NOVEMBER 16, 2023 AT 10AM PT

FALL SEMESTER
2023



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Documents and guidelines

“Liturgical Actions are not private actions but celebrations of the Church itself; which is the ‘sacrament of unity,’ namely, a holy people assembled and ordered under the bishops; therefore liturgical actions pertain to the whole body of the Church and manifest and affect it, but they affect the individual members of the Church in different ways according to the diversity of orders, functions, and actual participation.” *Code of Canon Law*, 837.1

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s Supper.” *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL)*, 10

“The church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Peter 2:9) is the right and duty by reason of their baptism.” CSL, 14

“The parishes, set up locally under a pastor taking the place of the bishop, are most important: in some manner they represent the visible Church established throughout the world. Therefore, both in attitude and in practice, the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered among the faithful and clergy; efforts must also be made toward a lively sense of community within the parish, above all in the shared celebration of the Sunday Mass.” CSL 42.

“Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it.” *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, 5

“Liturgical participation commits a person to a life of faithful discipleship.” *Built of Living Stones*, 21

The Role of the Parish Worship Commission

Taken from the [Guidelines for Parish Worship Commissions](#) from the Diocese of Lansing.

The Parish Worship Commission's role is advisory. With the bishop and pastor, it:

- assesses the needs of the worship assembly and regularly evaluates practices to see that those needs are being met.
- advises the pastor, pastoral coordinator, or sacramental minister on liturgical matters and the condition of liturgical spaces.
- provides direction for those who prepare liturgies. Then, under its leadership, others implement plans. The commission itself does not concern itself with installing the Advent wreath, purchasing the red geraniums for Pentecost, nor choosing hymns. Subcommittees may be established which utilize others' musical or artistic gifts.
- provides for the liturgical education of all parishioners using various methods including speaker series, school and religious education curriculum, bulletin articles, and liturgical commentary, when appropriate;
- promotes the development of competent liturgical ministers (including those who bring the Eucharist to shut-ins) with regular communication and annual evenings of formation;
- with the pastor, it implements liturgical laws, universal norms and diocesan policies and directives (cf. canon 837.1);
- sets goals for the progress of the liturgical life of the parish;
- and helps the parish see the connection between worship and Christian living.

As an entity of the Parish Pastoral Council, it maintains regular communication with other parish commissions.

Liturgical assessment process

This is a sample process for liturgical assessment in your parish, school, or campus ministry. It is fully customizable to meet the needs and realities of your community. This process was developed by Michael Novak (for more information, see the note below).

FORMATION and ORIENTATION

- ❑ Convene the liturgy committee of the parish or, in the case where there is no committee, a group of invited parishioners to act as an ongoing assessment team. Try to choose a representative cross-section of the parish population.
- ❑ The group will be formed in basic liturgical principles, using the assessment tool as a guide. They will also be familiarized with the assessment tool. This formation may take more than one session.
- ❑ Decide which parish liturgical events will be assessed. These may be limited to Sunday liturgies or they may include other liturgical celebrations (e.g. weddings, children's liturgies, reconciliation services, etc.) over a prescribed period of time.

ASSESSMENT

- ❑ The members of the parish assessment group will attend the appointed liturgical services independently of one another. They will all use the same assessment tool, employing it to help them record their observations. It is recommended to write down the observations immediately after the liturgy, rather than during it.

FOLLOW-UP

- ❑ Convene a follow-up meeting with the pastoral staff and worship committee/parish assessment team (i.e. presiders, musicians, religious educators, school principal, youth minister, pastoral associate, etc.). The assessments will be presented and discussed. The liturgy committee or parish staff can then develop an action plan based on the outcome of the assessments.
- ❑ If the assessments result in numerous suggestions for change or improvement, it might be wise to prioritize the list and agree to tackle only the highest priorities this time around.
- ❑ A future assessment process should be scheduled to gauge progress on the current suggestions and to address any other issues. Making assessment a regular part of the community's life encourages accountability and commitment to excellence.

To listen to a podcast interview with Mike Novak and to download Mike's liturgical assessment tool and a sample assessment report, visit <https://www.ministrymonday.org/episodes/2018/7/28/024-understanding-liturgical-assessment-with-mike-novak>

Liturgical evaluation survey

This tool is intended to be used by liturgical leaders, staff, liturgy committee members, or others to assess the liturgical life of their parish community, prioritize needed improvements, and plan for the future. It may be used in its entirety, or the parish may decide to study one particular aspect of liturgical life at a time.

HOSPITALITY	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
1. Are there greeters outside the church, at the doors, and inside welcoming people as they arrive?				
2. Would a visitor or newcomer feel welcomed? Are they invited to return by at least one person?				
3. Are the locations of restrooms clearly marked so that visitors know where to find them?				
4. Are the parking lot, gathering areas, and church space clean and inviting?				
5. Do those with mobility concerns have easy access to all areas of the church grounds?				
6. Are worship aids or projected materials printed clearly in type that is easily read?				
7. Do all who use the microphones use them effectively so that all can hear well?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>	Opportunities for growth			

PROCESSION	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
8. Did the gathering procession look like a procession?				
9. Did the ministers walk with dignity? Too slowly or hurriedly? Did they move gracefully?				
10. Were the cross, Book of the Gospels, and other items carried and placed with dignity?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>		Opportunities for growth		
LITURGICAL MUSIC	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
11. Are there enough hymnals or missals for the assembly? Can visitors find them easily?				
12. Did the opening hymn accomplish the task of gathering the assembly? Were all verses sung?				
13. Did the assembly know and sing the Kyrie? the Gloria?				
14. Did the accompaniment support and enable the full participation of the assembly in sung prayer?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>		Opportunities for growth		

LITURGY OF THE WORD	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
15. Was there ample silence between readings? After the homily?				
16. Were the readings proclaimed clearly and confidently? Projected well so all could hear?				
17. Did the lector convey the emotion and meaning of the reading, use appropriate pace?				
18. Was the lector's posture appropriate? Were they free of distracting behaviors?				
19. Did the assembly sing the Responsorial Psalm well?				
20. Did the cantor lead the Psalm from the ambo?				
21. Did the assembly sing the Gospel Acclamation well? Was the appropriate verse sung or spoken?				
22. Did the Profession of Faith feel like a "profession" by the whole assembly?				
23. Were the General Intercessions announced by the reader prayerfully and clearly?				
24. Did the assembly participate fully, consciously, and actively through the whole Liturgy of the Word?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>	Opportunities for growth			

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
25. Were the gifts of bread and wine brought to the altar from the midst of the assembly?				
26. Were the vessels used of genuine, beautiful, and dignified quality?				
27. Was enough bread and wine for the whole assembly brought to the altar?				
28. Did the procession of gifts look like a procession? Were the gifts processed with care and dignity?				
29. Was money collected in a graceful, unhurried, but efficient manner?				
30. Did the assembly sing the Eucharistic acclamations confidently?				
31. Did the acclamations match the feel of the liturgical season?				
32. Did the people share the Sign of Peace genuinely? Did the gesture feel like a ritual sign?				
33. Did the Fraction Rite take an appropriate amount of time? Was it calm and organized?				
34. Were both species available for the whole assembly?				
35. Were there enough Communion ministers for the whole assembly?				
36. Did Communion ministers speak clearly and confidently, using good eye contact?				

37. Did the assembly feel united as one body during the entire Communion procession?				
38. Was the whole assembly able to sing the Communion song confidently?				
39. Was there a good amount of silence after Communion?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>	Opportunities for growth			
CONCLUDING RITE	Y	N	n/a	Note(s)
40. If there were announcements, were they brief and necessary?				
41. Was the recessional hymn or song sung by the entire assembly?				
42. Did the assembly remain until the recessional hymn was concluded?				
43. Was the assembly dismissed with a sense of mission?				
44. Was there a place and period of time following the liturgy for people to meet and visit together?				
<i>Other comments and observations</i>	Opportunities for growth			

Based upon the evaluation above, what opportunities should be prioritized?

Who will be responsible for addressing these priorities?

What resources (if any) will be needed, and will the parish commit to obtaining them?

What is the timeline for addressing the priorities?

When will the liturgical evaluation be conducted again to assess growth?

What liturgical formation and catechesis can be provided for liturgical leaders, lay ministers, and the congregation as a whole? Make sure to address each group.

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LITURGICAL EVALUATION TOOL

Advent/Christmas

ADVENT

“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.” (GNLY, #39)

Was this twofold character sufficiently expressed in the liturgy, or was one aspect too dominant? Consider specific examples.

Did the liturgies of Advent help bring this twofold character into focus relative to other seasons of the year? Was Advent clearly a distinct season from others (e.g Christmas, Lent, or even Ordinary Time?) How so or how not? Consider art & environment, preaching, music, devotional symbols and exercises, intercessions, variations in ritual.

Did Advent liturgical “variations” and liturgical choices (again: environment, music, preaching, other texts, devotional exercises/symbols, etc.) *reinforce* or *obscure* the reality that in each Eucharist, “the victory and triumph of [Christ’s] death are again made present?” In other words: did the Mass retain its fundamentally paschal character? Did Advent feel connected enough to the Easter Triduum?

CHRISTMAS

“Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery [Lent-Triduum-Easter cycle], the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ’s birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.” (GNLY, #32)

Did the Christmas season adequately celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation and Christ’s manifestation to the world? While it should be the focal point of the season, was the celebration of the Nativity (Christmas Eve/Day) too dominant? How so or how not?

Did the liturgies of Christmas make clear the inseparable connection between the Incarnation and the Resurrection? Is Christmas clearly connected to, leading to, Easter? Or did the liturgy establish Christmas more as a “standalone” idea? Consider art & environment, preaching, music, devotional symbols or exercises, intercessions, variations in ritual, etc.

ART & ENVIRONMENT

“During the liturgical year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth through his passion, death, and resurrection to his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his coming in glory. In its celebration of these mysteries, the Church makes these sacred events present to the people of every age. The tradition of decorating or not decorating the church for liturgical seasons and feasts heightens the awareness of the festive, solemn, or penitential nature of these seasons. ..Plans for seasonal decorations should include other areas besides the sanctuary. Decorations are intended to draw people to the true nature of the mystery being celebrated, rather than being ends in themselves.” (BLS, #122-124)

Did Advent and Christmas accomplish this in terms of art & environment? Consider specifics.

Did the altar, ambo, and cross retain their preeminence in the liturgical environment or did secondary and devotional items (cloths, wreaths, crèche scenes, etc.) dominate?

PREACHING

“By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year.” (*CSL*, #52)

“The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part. It flows from the Scriptures which are read at that liturgical celebration, or, more broadly, from the Scriptures which undergird its prayers and actions, and enables the congregation to participate in the celebration with faith.” (*FYH*, #42)

“The preacher then has a formidable task: to speak from the Scriptures (those inspired documents of our tradition that hand down to us the way the first believers interpreted the world) to a gathered congregation in such a way that those assembled will be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord.” (*FYH*, #49)

Did this happen? Consider specific themes, words, phrases, concepts, approaches, or styles.

MUSIC

“The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord’s coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (cf. Col 3:16) Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass...” (*GIRM*, #39-40)

“Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. As sacred song united to words it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. Yet the function of music is ministerial: it must serve and never dominate. Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith. It should heighten the texts so that they speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music adds to community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration.” (*MCW*, #23)

Did music “do its job” in the liturgies of Advent and Christmas? Consider assembly singing, responsorial psalmody, choral/ensemble singing, presidential and diaconal singing/chanting.

Did the liturgical music of Advent clearly establish it as a distinct season from others in the year? Christmas?

Was the liturgical music truly ministerial? Did it help the assembly express and share their faith? Did it heighten the texts?

Resources and reading list

Essential documents

Lysick, David, ed. *The Liturgy Documents, Volume One* (5th edition). Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012.

This volume contains the following essential documents:

- *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (1963)
- *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy* (1998)
- *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002)
- *Lectionary for Mass; Introduction* (1981, 1998)
- *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*
- *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and General Roman Calendar* (1969)
- *Ecclesia de Eucharistia: On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church*
- *Redemptionis sacramentum: On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*
- *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*
- *Book of the Gospels: Introduction*
- *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*
- *Built of Living Stones; Art, Architecture and Worship*
- *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*
- *Gathered in Steadfast Faith: Statement of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy on Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest*

Formation resources

Baker, Thomas and Frank Ferrone. *The Liturgy Committee Handbook*. New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007. **Access the entire book for free at www.liturgycommittee.com**

Belford, Msgr. William. *Parish Liturgy Basics*. Portland: Pastoral Press, 1992.

Fleming, Austin. *Preparing for Liturgy: A Theology and Spirituality* (revised). Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

Foley, Edward. *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2009.

Hibbard, Angela. *Worship Committees that Work*. Franklin Park: World Library Publications, 2004.

Hoffman, Lawrence. *The Art of Public Prayer*. Portland: The Pastoral Press, 1988.

Huck, Gabe. *Sunday Mass Five Years from Now*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2001.

Huck, Gabe and Gerald T. Chinchar. *Liturgy with Style and Grace*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

Johnson, Lawrence. *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of Mass*. Washington: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2004.

Kavanagh, Aidan. *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982.

Kwatera, Fr. Michael. *Come to the Feast Liturgical Theology of, by, and for Everybody*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006.

Laughlin, Corinna, Michael R. Prendergast, Joanne Sanders, and Paul Turner. *Guide for Liturgy Committees, 2nd Edition*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2021.

Mahony, Cardinal Roger. *Gathered Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

Mick, Lawrence. *Forming the Assembly to Celebrate the Mass*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2002.

Rendler, Elaine. *In the Midst of the Assembly*. Portland; Oregon Catholic Press, 1994.

———. *This is the Day*. Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1995.

Thiron, Rita. *Preparing Parish Liturgies: A Guide to Resources*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004.

Walsh, Eugene A. *Giving Life: Ministry of the Parish Sunday Assembly*. Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1993.

———. *Celebration: Theology, Ministry, and Practice*. Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1994.

Worship Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. *We Gather in Christ: Our Identity As Assembly*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996.

Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. *The Ministry of the Assembly*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.

Paprocki, Joe and D. Todd Williamson. *Great is the Mystery: Encountering the Formational Power of Liturgy*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2013.

Seasonal and annual resources

Archdiocese of Cincinnati liturgical assessment pages. **Access and download these pages at <https://resources.catholicaoc.org/offices/divine-worship-and-sacraments/worship-resources#evaluation>**

Liturgical Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America, Secretariat of Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. **Access and download these calendars at www.usccb.org.**

Seasonal Preparation Aids, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. **Access and download these free seasonal guides at www.fdlc.org.**

Living Liturgy: Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays. Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications.

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