



Essential Quick Guide for Catechists to – The Liturgy of the Word with Children

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN

The term 'Liturgy of the Word with Children' refers to the practice of children leaving the Sunday assembly during the Liturgy of the Word and gathering with adult leaders elsewhere to celebrate a separate Liturgy of the Word that is more appropriate to their level of understanding.

Two key principles need always to be kept in mind when preparing and celebrating Children's Liturgy of the Word. Firstly, Children's Liturgy of the Word is **liturgy**, ritual prayer, and not catechesis (religious instruction) or child minding. Because it is a liturgical celebration, all the principles of good liturgy (active participation, clear symbols, etc) apply.

Secondly, it is liturgy of the **word**, so it is ritual centred on the proclamation and breaking open of the scriptures. The children do what the rest of the community is doing at this point of the Mass. They listen to the scriptures proclaimed and applied to contemporary life and respond in various ways. It is an experience of prayer, of dialogue with God.

Two documents of the Church specifically consider the celebration of the Eucharist with children; the Directory for Masses with Children, *produced by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1973* and Liturgy of the Word with Children – Guidelines, *produced by the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales in 1996*

SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE CATECHISM

101 In order to reveal himself to men, in the condescension of his goodness God speaks to them in human words: "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men."

102 Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely: "You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time."

103 For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body.

104 In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, "but as what it really is, the word of God". "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them."

131 "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigour, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life." Hence "access to Sacred

Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful."

132 "Therefore, the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too - pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place - is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture."

133 The Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful. . . to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Liturgy of the Word at Mass (on Sundays) contains the following elements:

First Reading - from the Old Testaments (or the Acts of the Apostles in the Easter Season), followed by a **Psalm** — itself part of God's word — forming the assembly's response to the first reading.

Second Reading taken from an apostle, either a letter or from the Book of Revelation. This is followed by

The Gospel, which, because it is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, is greeted in song with an acclamation which often accompanies a procession with the Book of the Gospels.

The proclamation of the Gospel is never omitted.

The homily – 'a living explanation of the word (*which*) increases its impact by assisting the faithful to assimilate it and apply it to their lives.' *Celebrating the Mass 168*

The profession of faith – the Creed

The prayer of the Faithful – known also as the 'bidding prayers'

THE DIRECTORY FOR MASSES WITH CHILDREN

The Church must show special concern for baptised children who have yet to be fully initiated through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist as well as for children who have only recently been admitted to holy communion.

The circumstances of contemporary life in which children grow up are less favourable to their spiritual progress. In addition parents sometimes scarcely fulfil the obligations they accepted at the Baptism of their children to bring them up as Christians.

2 In the upbringing of children in the Church a special difficulty arises from the fact that liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, cannot fully exercise their inherent pedagogical force upon children. Although the vernacular may now be used at Mass, still the words and signs have not been sufficiently adapted to the capacity of children.

In fact, even in daily life children do not always understand all their experiences with adults but rather may find them boring. It cannot therefore be expected of the liturgy that everything must always be intelligible to them. Nonetheless there is a fear of spiritual harm if over the years children repeatedly experience in the Church things that are barely comprehensible; for recent psychological study has established how profoundly children are formed by the religious experience of infancy and early childhood, because of the special religious receptivity proper to those years.

3 The Church follows its Master, who "put his arms around the little children . . . and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). It cannot leave children in the condition described. The Second Vatican Council had already spoken in the Constitution on the Liturgy about the need of liturgical adaptation for various groups. Soon afterward, especially in the first Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1967, the Church began to consider more carefully how participation by children could be facilitated. On the occasion of the Synod, the President of the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy said explicitly that it could not be a matter of "creating some entirely special rite but rather of

retaining, shortening, or omitting some elements or of making a more appropriate selection of texts.”

8...The Church baptises children and therefore, relying on the gifts conferred by this sacrament, it must be concerned that once baptised they grow in communion with Christ and each other. The sign and pledge of that communion is participation in the Eucharistic table, for which children are being prepared or led to a deeper realisation of its meaning. This liturgical and Eucharistic formation may not be separated from their general education, both human and Christian; indeed it would be harmful if their liturgical formation lacked such a foundation.

9 For this reason all who have a part in the formation of children should work together and consult toward one objective: that, even if children already have some feeling for God and the things of God, they may also experience in proportion to their age and personal development the human values that are present in the Eucharistic celebration. These values include the community activity, exchange of greetings, capacity to listen and to seek and grant pardon, expression of gratitude, experience of symbolic actions, a meal of friendship, and festive celebration. Eucharistic catechesis, dealt with in no. 12, should develop such human values. Then, depending on their age and their psychological and social situation, children will gradually open their minds to the perception of Christian values and the celebration of the mystery of Christ.

17[In Masses with adults] it is necessary to take great care that the children present do not feel neglected because of their inability to participate or to understand what happens and what is proclaimed in the celebration. Some account should be taken of their presence: for example, by speaking to them directly in the introductory comments (as in the beginning and the end of Mass) and at some point in the homily.

Sometimes, moreover, 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. Then, before the Eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word.

LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN - GUIDELINES:

The guidelines suggest that in preparation and planning for the Liturgy of the Word with children it is important that catechists and leaders have an understanding of the general principles of liturgy.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF LITURGY

- Liturgy is the praise and worship of God.
- Liturgy is the source and summit of the Church's life and our lives.
- It is the right and duty of all the baptised, both children and adults.
- The function of liturgy is to build up the members of Christ's body, to strengthen us in preaching Christ.
- Liturgy is action and symbol; it speaks to the whole person, it involves all the senses: sight, touch, sound, taste and smell.
- Participating in liturgy forms our habits because we are ritual people and learn through repetition and copying.
- In liturgy we discover the riches of prayer, through word and gesture, silence and stillness.
- The purpose of adapting liturgy for children is to lead them into full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy of the parish.

- Liturgy with children, as with adults, demands dignity, clarity, and simplicity.

The *Guidelines* offer a model for celebrating liturgies of the word with children:

1. Children gather with their families in church for the introductory rites of the Mass. After the opening song and the greeting, the children, together with their leaders, are called forward.
2. A book of the scriptures is presented to a child or leader. All process to a nearby place. (In some places this happens after the opening prayer.)
4. When the children have gathered, the leader introduces the scripture of the day.
5. Before the gospel is proclaimed an acclamation is sung.
6. The scriptures are explored through reflection, discussion and other appropriate activity.
7. There is a time of intercession for the Church, the world, those in need and the local community.
8. All return to the main body of the church for the liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Guidelines suggest that the following outline:

Proclaiming the word

- Books containing the word of God proclaimed in the liturgy remind hearers of the presence of God speaking to his people. They are signs and symbols of the sacred so care must be taken to ensure that they are worthy and beautiful. (*The Lectionary for Masses with Children is the most appropriate book from which to proclaim the Gospel*)
- 3 passages from scripture are given in the lectionary for Mass. If they are not suitable to the understanding of children two may be omitted, but the Gospel is always proclaimed.
- Brief introductory comments may precede a reading in order to help the children appreciate its biblical context, to listen attentively and make the scripture their own.
- The way we pass on biblical stories to children will influence the way in which they will hear the message of the scriptures proclaimed in the liturgy.
- Other forms of proclamation can be used to enhance the reception of the scriptures e.g. mime, drama, song or choral recitation

Responding to the word

- Leaders will need to prepare carefully what they will say. In time they will become confident in their own reflections and in the response of the children.
- The introductory comments to the scriptures and the reflection that follows the proclamation are the most important and maybe the most daunting of the leader's ministry.
- In a liturgy of the word with children the reflection serves the same function as does the homily at Mass. In the context of the feast or season the concerns of the gospel writer can be unfolded and the point of a particular passage related to the children's lives. The scriptures are not just stories of the past but are signs of what God is doing now in this assembly
- The reflection will probably be a dialogue between the leader and the children, and can incorporate other forms of communication such as song, story and image.
- Bear in mind too that, in the Mass, the liturgy of the word is not an end in itself but leads into the liturgy of the Eucharist. The reflection is a pivotal point in the movement of the Mass.

- Be wary of replacing the reflection with activity alone, lest others perceive this gathering as a containment exercise or Sunday school rather than an act of worship.

Intercession

- Liturgy is the prayerful action of the whole assembly. Children share the prayer at their own level, absorbing the pattern and movement of the action.
- As we pray with children they learn; they adopt pattern and structure naturally. The sign of the cross, intentions for prayer, and, most of all, silence are absorbed into the manner of praying.
Parents, leaders and helpers, will have their own prayer-life. This will communicate their regard for prayer to the children: their silence, joy and sadness, their respect for person and place, will nurture the children's prayer and allow them to express their natural sense of awe and wonder.

Silence

- Silence or stillness is another integral element of liturgy.
- The whole way in which liturgy is celebrated should foster reflectiveness.
- Children are capable of reflection. They will need some guidance so that they learn how to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or praise and pray to God in their hearts.

The Liturgical Year

It is important that leaders of the Liturgy of the Word with Children are familiar with the cycle of the Church's year and use the liturgical colours in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

The Diocesan Year Book, published each year during November, gives the full calendar for the year.

The Liturgical Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and runs through to Solemnity of Christ the King.

Advent

From evening prayer 1 of the Sunday falling on or closest to the 30 November (The First Sunday of Advent) and ends before evening prayer 1 of Christmas, on 24 December, There are 4 Sundays of 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.

Christmas

From evening prayer 1 of Christmas, (celebrated on the evening of 24 December, the beginning of the liturgical day of 25 December - Birth of the Lord) to Baptism of the Lord (Sunday after the Solemnity of the Epiphany).

Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.

Ordinary Time I

From the Monday following the Baptism of the Lord to the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. The Sundays in Ordinary Time are numbered consecutively from the Baptism of the Lord.

The Sundays of this season do not celebrate a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Instead they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects. Ordinary Time continues after the season of Easter.

Lent

From Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday. There are 6 Sundays of Lent.

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of

Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices.

Holy Week, which begins on the 6th Sunday of Lent, Passion [Palm] Sunday, has as its purpose the remembrance of Christ's passion, beginning with his Messianic entrance into Jerusalem.

Easter Triduum

Begins with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil and concludes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday.

Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year. The solemnity of Easter has the kind of pre-eminence in the year that Sunday has in the week.

Easter Season

Begins with celebration of the Easter Vigil on Easter Sunday and concludes 50 days later with Pentecost Sunday.

The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one 'great Sunday' These are above all others the days for the singing of the Alleluia.

Ordinary Time

From the Monday following Pentecost Sunday until the Saturday before the 1st Sunday of Advent. The last Sunday is the Solemnity of Christ the King which is Sunday 34 in Ordinary Time. The preceding Sundays are calculated to end with Sunday 34.

The Sundays of this season do not celebrate a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Instead they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects.

Liturgical Colours

There are 4 principal liturgical colours:

White

is used in the the seasons of Easter and of Christmas; also on celebrations of the Lord (other than of his Passion), of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of the Holy Angels, and of Saints who were not Martyrs;

on the solemnities of Trinity Sunday, All Saints (1 November) and of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist (24 June); and on the feasts of Saint John the Evangelist (27 December), of the Chair of Saint Peter (22 February), and of the Conversion of Saint Paul (25 January). It may in England & Wales be used for Funerals.

Red

is used on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and Good Friday, on Pentecost Sunday, on celebrations of the Lord's Passion, on "birthday" feasts of the Apostles and Evangelists, and on celebrations of martyred Saints.

Green

is used in Ordinary Time.

Violet

is used in the seasons of Advent and of Lent. It may also be worn for Funerals.

Rose may be used, where it is the practice, on Gaudete Sunday (Third Sunday of Advent) and on Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent).

(source:- Liturgy Office, Bishops' Conference of England & Wales)

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

P reparation is essential to good liturgy. Individual liturgies should grow from reflection on the scripture of the day, how it relates to the faith experience of the people involved, and how best the gospel can be shared with the children.

The seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter have their own rhythm. Each Sunday should be planned as part of the whole season. The scripture readings of the Sundays of Ordinary Time also have a pattern which, with forward planning, helps the preparation of individual liturgies.

Forward planning over a season also means that those Sundays and festivals can be identified when it may be more appropriate for the whole assembly to celebrate the liturgy of the word together. The great feasts of the Church's year, Christmas, Easter etc. are times for adults and children to stay together. It is a challenge to prepare liturgies that involve all the baptised. A planning group for liturgies of the word with children involves all who have a ministry.

Together,

- they will be able to reflect on and evaluate liturgies already celebrated,
- to prepare through prayer and discussion future liturgies and co-ordinate the various tasks.

A good planning group will:

- help with the ongoing formation of its members,
- provide the opportunity to encourage potential leaders,
- and nurture the faith development of all.

(*Liturgy of the Word with Children - Guidelines*)

MINISTRIES

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: presides over the celebration, welcomes the children, may proclaim the Gospel, leads the reflection on the scriptures, introduces and concludes the intercessions, facilitates the smooth running of the liturgy.

Reader

The word of God must be proclaimed audibly, clearly, reverently, with faith and understanding. The lectionary for Mass recommends that each reading be proclaimed by a different reader.

A reader: proclaims the scriptures, understands what he/she is reading, communicates well, is aware that God speaks to his people in this proclamation.

Musician

The musician: leads the children in song, enables them to pray through song, encourages able musicians among the children to share in 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.

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. (*Liturgy of the Word with Children - Guidelines*)

Resources for Liturgy of the Word with Children:

For the liturgy

Children's Lectionary – Book of Readings for Sundays, Feast Days & Solemnities, Years A, B and C, publ. Treehaus Publications – available through <http://www.viewpoint24.co.uk>

Sunday Weekly Leader Guide for Sundays, Feast Days & Solemnities, Years A, B and C, publ. Treehaus Publications, revised 2002 – available through <http://www.viewpoint24.co.uk>

Music Accompaniment Book – Years A, B and C – Treehaus Publications – available through <http://www.viewpoint24.co.uk>

The Liturgy of the Word with Children, Katie Thompson, publ. Kevin Mayhew

Complete Children's Liturgy Book, Katie Thompson, publ. Kevin Mayhew 1995

Living Water – a creative resource for the Liturgy, Years A, B and C, Susan Sayers, publ. Kevin Mayhew 1998

Welcome the Word: Volume 1, Advent To Trinity Sunday, Joan Brown, publ. Geoffrey Chapman, 1997

Welcome the Word: Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children, Volume 2 Sundays of Ordinary Time and the Solemnity of Christ the King, Joan Brown, publ. Geoffrey Chapman, 1997

WELCOME! Celebrations with young children for the Church's year, Jenny Pate, publ. McCrimmons 2003

Weekly Web Resource for Children's Liturgy – Diocese of Westminster, <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/catechesis>

Further reading and Resources:

The Lord Be with You, Jenny Pate, publ. McCrimmons 1997 A book to help bring children to a deeper understanding of the Mass.

Praying with Children – some ways and means, Jenny Pate, publ. McCrimmons 2001

A Handbook for Children's Liturgy, Barbara Hopper, Canterbury Press 2003

A Child Shall Lead Them, Gerard A. Pottebaum, Sister Paule Freeburg, D.C, Joyce M. Kelleher, publ. Treehaus Publications 1992 – available through Viewpoint (<http://www.viewpoint24.co.uk>)

To Walk With A Child, Gerard A. Pottebaum, publ. Treehaus Publications – available through Viewpoint (<http://www.viewpoint24.co.uk>)

Enjoying Mass, Joan Brown, publ. Kevin Mayhew 2002

Lectionary Based Catechesis for Children - A Catechist's Guide, Sylvia de Villers, publ. Paulist Press, 1994.

God's Story 1, 2 and 3, publ. Matthew James 2002

God's Story CD Rom, publ. Matthew James 2002

Liturgy of the Word with Children – Guidelines, Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 1996, downloadable from <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/LOWC>

Directory for Masses with Children, Congregation for Divine Worship 1973, downloadable from

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/LOWC>

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Geoffrey Chapman, London, revised 1999

Celebrating the Mass – A Pastoral Introduction publ. Catholic Truth Society 2005

Web Resources:

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/worship/children-liturgy>

<http://litcom.net.au/documents/childrensliturgy/techniques.php>

<http://www.sadliereligion.com/webelieve/weeksliturgy.cfm?>

<http://www.loyolapress.com/sunday-connection.htm>

Useful websites for purchase of resources:

Pauline Books & Media- www.pauline-uk.org

St Pauls – www.stpauls.org.uk

McCrimmons – www.mccrimmons.com

Kevin Mayhew – www.kevinmayhew.com

Amazon Books – www.amazon.co.uk

Training for the Preparation Team:

- Training and formation will be initially offered by the parish priest who will be able to guide catechists in an understanding of the Liturgy of the Word for Children and will have resources available in the parish such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church and existing resources for Liturgy of the Word with children
- Contact your diocesan Catechetical Adviser or check the diocesan website: www.rcdow.org.uk/catechesis, to ask what supplementary training opportunities there are in the diocese.
- Check the diocesan website for information and resources.