

**Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest
General Guidelines and Norms for the Rite
Diocese of Boise**

General Considerations:

- There should be no confusion among the faithful between this celebration and a Eucharistic celebration (Mass). To that end, nothing that is proper to the Mass, particularly the presentation of the gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer, should be inserted into this celebration. Further, lay leaders are to omit the words, gestures, vestures, rites, etc., which are proper to an ordained minister.
- The texts of the readings for each Sunday, solemnity, or feast are to be taken from the Lectionary, in order that the faithful follow the cycle of the liturgical year and listen to the Word of God in union with the universal Church. On Sundays and solemnities, three readings are used, as at Mass. Whenever possible, a sung responsorial psalm should follow the first reading
- The only approved forms for Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest in the Diocese of Boise are those outlined in the ritual book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC; June 2007). When leading official prayer, use the official books. The official book for the readings is the *Lectionary* or the *Book of the Gospels*. The official book for Morning or Evening Prayer during a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest, and Liturgy of the Word with or without Holy Communion on a Sunday when a priest is absent, is *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.
- The leader of this celebration should be assisted by other ministers who will proclaim Scripture, assist with the distribution of Holy Communion, sing the psalms and other songs, provide music, and prepare the place for the celebration.
- It is appropriate to keep many of the parish norms for celebrating the Mass in place. For example, music is encouraged.
- Treatment of vessels, altar linens, sacred books, and the consecrated host should follow the guidelines of the *General Instructions for the Roman Missal* (GIRM).

- The chair used by a presiding layperson or a presiding deacon must be different from the presidential chair used by a priest or the chair normally used by a deacon, and normally it should be placed outside the presbyterium (sanctuary) in close proximity to the assembly. The ambo is reserved for the Liturgy of the Word. The altar, as the table of sacrifice and of the paschal banquet, is only to be used during the Communion rite. No books should be placed on the altar, as this will help clarify that the sacrifice of the Mass is *not* taking place.
- All leaders of Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest must be trained and installed. Deacons, by means of their training and ordination, may preside at a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest.

Specific Considerations:

- **Vesting:** A deacon leader should vest as he would normally for Mass. A lay leader should vest in whatever is appropriate to each parish for lay ministers.
- **Altar servers or another minister:** May be used to hold the book for the leader of prayer.
- **Liturgical Seasons:** Follow the customs of the liturgical seasons with regard to prayer forms, music, environment, etc.
- **Preaching:** Lay leaders must be trained prior to being allowed to preach at a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest. They must also be appointed by the Bishop. Deacons may preach provided they have been given faculties to do so. The pastor or pastoral administrator may provide a text for the leader to read, or if the bishop has authorized the leader to preach, the minister preaches in his or her own words.
- **Dignity/Respect:** The action taking place at a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest deserves the greatest attention to detail, respect and dignity normally reserved for Mass.
- **Greeting & welcome:** The leader provides a brief introduction to the people using the formula in the ritual book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.
- **Opening prayer:** The Opening Prayer is taken from one of the three options in the ritual book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. (Do not use prayers from the *Sacramentary*, as these prayers may make reference to the sacrifice; this language is appropriate only for the celebration of the Eucharist, not for a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest, where no sacrifice takes place.)

- **Readings:** The readings are those for the proper of the season according to the Lectionary cycle (it is crucial for the community to progress with the universal Church through the liturgical year by use of the proper readings). It is most appropriate that the community continue to provide lectors as if for Mass, as this is a proper role for the lay members of the parish.
- **Homily/Reflection:** Deacons are allowed to preach a homily provided they have been granted faculties to do so. Lay leaders may preach, provided they have been trained and have been delegated to preach by the Bishop. Presumably, all designated lay leaders of Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest will have the appropriate delegation to perform all the functions of this position, including preaching.
- **Time of Silent Reflection:** Sacred silence is especially meaningful at all appropriate places in the service.
- **General Intercessions:** Opened and closed by the leader. These are normally led by another minister. These should be provided per the norms of the parish. It is suggested that they be composed prior to the service so that spontaneous intercessions are not encouraged
- **Offertory:** The collection should be taken up at the end of the service. Provide music as normal.
- **Communion:** Distribution should be per normal custom. If the parish normally uses extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, they should continue to do so.

In churches without the reserved Eucharist:

Before the Liturgy of the Word begins, set the consecrated bread on the credence table and place a lighted candle next to it. When it is time for communion, a minister of communion is to bring the consecrated bread to the altar. A candle is placed on or near the altar.

In churches with the reserved Eucharist: When it is time for the distribution of Holy Communion, candles are lighted at the altar before the sacrament is brought to it from the place of reservation. A minister of communion will bring the consecrated bread and place it on the altar.

- **Dismissal:** Deacons may do the full blessing as part of the dismissal, while lay leaders cannot. See *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, pp. 145.

Statement on the Sunday Assembly When the Priest is Absent

1. Where there is a Catholic community it is of the utmost importance to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist. Jesus “is always present in a body of the faithful gathered in his name. He is present, too, in his Word, for it is he who speaks when the scriptures are read in the Church.” And “in the sacrifice of the Eucharist he is present both in the person of the minister...and above all in the species of the Eucharist.” (*Vat. II, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Ch. I, No. 9*)
2. It is clear then that the Church teaches that Jesus is present in the Assembly whether the Eucharist is celebrated or when there is a Service of the Word or a Service of the Word and Communion. In the light of this, each Catholic community is urged to consider the paramount importance of coming together in prayer each Sunday even when the Eucharist is not celebrated. “The Lord’s Day is the first holy day of all.” (*Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, #13*)
3. Each parish is directed to “cultivate liturgical knowledge and art.” (*Vat. II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, #5*). In the present circumstances, when there is such a shortage of priests, and particularly in regions where supply priests are more difficult to secure, it is imperative that parishes and missions observe the diocesan directives on the organization of viable liturgical commissions. Such a commission should be a part of every parish. There should be no parish without trained readers, ministers of the Communion, and ministers of music and hospitality. In each place where Mass is celebrated, there should be a core group which will be able to plan and carry out a Service of the Word or Service of the Word and Communion, as outlined in the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, when a priest cannot be present, just as when Mass is celebrated.
4. At times, priests need to be away from their parishes. They are entitled to time off each week, ample vacation time, and adequate time for continuing education. They are expected to travel monthly to participate in support groups, are expected to attend bi-annual Presbyterate meetings and are to make an annual retreat. Many priests serve on diocesan committees and must travel to meetings. At times, sickness or pressing family concerns will cause them to be away from the parish. In any of these circumstances, it may happen that celebration of the Eucharist in a parish may not be possible for a period of time or on a given weekend.
5. At the present time, a substitute priest is often not available. While our retired priests are generous in offering help whenever they can, they are

retired and cannot be expected to fill every need. Priests who work in special ministries work full time at their assigned duties and should not have to carry the additional burden of supply work except when they are free to do so. In the list of these prevailing circumstances, a pastor or pastoral administrator may prudently determine that an appropriate service may be held instead of the Eucharist when the priest is away from the parish.

6. If a substitute priest is available, the pastor is to arrange for a priest to celebrate the Eucharist.
7. When the Eucharist is celebrated “in a place nearby,” parishioners may be asked to go there for Sunday Mass (*Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, #18). However, if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop, it is not practical or possible for the community to participate in the celebration of Mass in a church nearby, the community should assemble for Sunday worship in their own community, under the leadership of the person the bishop and pastor or parish life director have designated to lead them in prayer. In such a case, the celebration takes one of the forms found in the ritual *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. It is the role of the pastor or parish life director to determine what form of celebration is appropriate for the community when the priest is absent. For example, parishes that do not reserve large amounts of the consecrated Eucharist will be unable to distribute Communion in the event of an unplanned absence of a priest.
8. There should normally be only one assembly of this kind in each place on any given Sunday. A parish or mission which celebrates Mass on a given Sunday may not normally also hold a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest on that same day. However, this may not be possible given the size of our parishes and the size of our churches. When a community wishes to deviate from this directive, they can apply to the Diocesan Office of Worship, through their pastor or parish life director, for permission to hold more than one Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest per weekend, or a celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) and a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest on the same weekend. Further, given an emergency where it would not be possible to communicate to the faithful that the regular scheduled weekend Masses were cancelled, it would be allowable for each Mass, *for that weekend only*, to be replaced by a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest.
9. It is the duty of the parish priest or parish life director to inform the bishop about the appropriateness of such celebrations in his/her territory and to prepare the faithful for them. It is the duty of the priest to celebrate the sacraments for their community when possible, particularly the sacrament of penance. The parish priest or pastoral life director is to see to the

suitable and continuous instruction of appointed lay leaders of prayer in their parishes.

10. The priests of the diocese are asked to study and follow the ritual book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2007), and to direct those whom they designate in their parishes or missions to lead Sunday celebrations in their absence to follow this ritual book when they plan such services.
11. The parish is considered the model for the above guidelines. Missions, stations, and chapels should also adhere to these guidelines as they apply to the normal situation of such communities.

Diocese of Boise Policies and Procedures For Lay Leaders of Prayer

1. A lay leader must be officially designated by the pastor/pastoral life director or pastoral administrator and appointed by the bishop of the diocese. The appointment is for a three-year period, renewable for another three years.
2. The lay leader must have participated in a training program. Continuing formation through retreats, workshops, and private study will be provided by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission.
3. The lay leader will be officially commissioned in the presence of the community at a Ceremony of Installation during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist (Mass).
4. The lay leader of prayer in the Diocese of Boise may be vested in whatever garb is appropriate in their parish for lay ministers at liturgies.
5. "The person who leads the community at a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest, whether a deacon or a layperson, is called the leader." (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, Bishop's committee on the Liturgy, USCC 1991, "Specific Norms," #55 A)
6. "A layperson, delegated by the bishop, may impart any of the blessings given in the Book of Blessings that are not reserved to a bishop, a priest, or a deacon." (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, #55 H)