

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of
BALLARAT



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

GUIDELINES FOR SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST

CRITERIA FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN THE DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

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FOREWORD

My dear people,

For some years now, a number of the Catholic communities in the diocese have been celebrating Lay Led Assemblies on some Sundays, when there has been no priest available to preside at a Sunday Eucharist. This situation is not unique to the Ballarat diocese. Similar arrangements exist in other dioceses in Australia and in other countries.

In 1988, the Congregation for Divine Worship published a *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. This directory recognised the need for pastoral arrangements to be made in order to sustain the community that assembles on Sunday. In the absence of a priest, lay men and women are called to lead the Sunday prayer of the community.

Our Catholic tradition recognises that the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is at the centre of the Church's life. However, we also recognise the value of a Sunday assembly for sustaining the life of the local Catholic community, even when it is not possible to celebrate the Eucharist every week.

The Roman document provides guidelines for such Sunday Assemblies, while leaving more detailed provisions to be made by the bishop of each diocese. In our diocese, we have been assisted by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission which has helped to formulate criteria for judging when Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are appropriate. The Commission has also provided a *Manual for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies*, formation for those communities that need to have Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, and ongoing assistance to those preparing the Sunday celebrations.

I encourage all those involved in our Sunday Assemblies to draw on the resources provided by the Liturgical Commission to guide and enrich the Sunday gatherings.

I ask your prayers that God will provide us with the priests we need to celebrate the Eucharist, the source and summit of our whole Christian life. I also ask your prayers for God's blessing on those Catholic communities that gather on some Sundays for Lay Led Assemblies. May we all be nourished as we keep Sunday as the Lord's Day, rejoicing in the presence of the Risen Christ.

God bless you all.

+ Paul Bird CSsR
Bishop of Ballarat
2024

CRITERIA FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST IN THE DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

Too much importance can never be attached to the Sunday assembly, whether as the source of the Christian life of the individual and of the community, or as a sign of God's intent to gather the whole human race together in Christ.

All Christians must share the conviction that they cannot live their faith or participate - in the manner proper to them - in the universal mission of the Church unless they are nourished by the eucharistic bread. They should be equally convinced that the Sunday assembly is a sign to the world of the mystery of communion, which is the Eucharist.

#50 Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

The individual bishop himself, may, in view of the conditions of the place and the people involved, determine more precisely the details of the celebration, using resources prepared by the national or diocesan liturgical committee.

#41 Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

INTRODUCTION

While the Eucharist is and will always be the proper manner of celebrating Sunday for the Catholic Community, present circumstances force us to acknowledge that there are some occasions in this diocese when there can not be a priest available for the weekly celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, both in emergency and on-going situations.

In such situations, the option of a **Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest**, as presented by the Congregation for Divine Worship in the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* [June 2, 1988 - Vatican City] may be adopted, in accord with the conditions stated in that Directory and according to the diocesan details called for by the Directory [#41], and stated in this document as Principles and Criteria for the Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.

Such a celebration in the Diocese of Ballarat is known as a **Sunday Assembly of Word and Communion**.

PRINCIPLES RE SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION

1. The norm and the ideal for the gathering of the local community on a Sunday is the celebration of the Eucharist.
2. The centrality of the Eucharist for the Catholic community requires that in the event of a priest being unavailable for the celebration of the Sunday Mass, a reasonable attempt is made to obtain the services of a supply priest.
3. While Sunday Mass is of paramount importance, the law of the Church stipulates that no priest is to celebrate more than three Masses on a Sunday (which includes a Saturday Vigil Mass).

cf. §905
4. The continuance of the local community, both liturgically and pastorally, should be the aim of any change in liturgical and pastoral situations.
5. The principle of shared leadership underpins leadership of such celebrations. This is in the spirit of the Directory which states that, “a lay person who leads the assembly acts as one among equals...” #39.
6. Whilst observing the directives of the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, every effort must be made to distinguish such celebrations from the celebration of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Hours and Liturgy of the Word Services provide appropriate alternatives to the Liturgy of Word and Communion.
7. Such celebrations must always take place in expectation of the return of weekly Sunday Eucharist and must be linked to Eucharistic celebrations of the wider Church.
8. Leadership of the Sunday Celebration may also lead to leadership in other liturgical situations, particularly Vigils, Funerals and Burials and celebrations of the liturgical year other than Sundays.

CRITERIA FOR EMERGENCY SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION

SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION MAY BE CELEBRATED IN ALL PARISHES WHEN:

1. The absence of the priest does not allow enough time to notify the Mass community of a change of arrangements.
2. There is, in the Church Community, a designated person or persons authorised to prepare for and to lead such celebrations in the absence of a priest.
(See Manual for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies - Lay Leaders of Prayer)
3. A suitable supply priest is not immediately available.
4. The Church Community has received prior information/education in the status and procedure of such celebrations.

(See Appendix 1)

CRITERIA FOR ONGOING SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION

SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST MAY BE CELEBRATED REGULARLY BY A LOCAL CHURCH COMMUNITY WHEN:

1. Sunday Mass will not be available in the local Church community weekly, but will be available at least once a month.
2. There is no Sunday Mass available at that Church Community.

3. It is not possible to reschedule Mass times in the Ministry District to provide Sunday Mass for all Church communities.
4. Members of the local community will be seriously disadvantaged by the absence of a Sunday celebration. Such disadvantages could be in regard to the elderly, sick and housebound, those to be initiated and the Catholic presence and identity within the wider community.
5. The local Church community has sufficient resources for the necessary liturgical ministries and ongoing support for such celebrations.
6. An appropriate programme of formation, education and consultation of the local Church community has taken place prior to their implementation.

(See Appendix 1)

7. There is a designated group within the local Church community who bear the responsibility for the preparation and leadership of such celebrations.

(See Manual for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies - Lay Leaders of Prayer)

- 7.1 This group must have undertaken a programme of initial formation and have been officially commissioned for such leadership by the Parish Priest/Administrator.

(See Appendices 1 & 2)

- 7.2 On-going formation in Scripture and liturgical principles is to be provided as a necessary part of leadership for Sunday Assemblies of Word and Communion.

- 7.3 Each Liturgical Assembly is to be preceded by a time of preparation for leaders and ministers.

(See Appendix 3)

APPENDICES

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2. Order of Commissioning of
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FORMATION FOR LEADERS OF SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION

A. INITIAL FORMATION

The Diocesan Liturgical Commission offers initial formation for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies. Such formation is for those who have been selected to lead the Assemblies (*see Manual for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies - Lay Leaders of Prayer*).

This consists of two sessions:

1. Background for such celebrations and introduction to the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (Congregation for Divine Worship, Rome, 1988) and *Sunday Celebrations of Word and Communion: Criteria for Implementation in the Diocese of Ballarat*.
2. Introduction to the *Manual for Lay Leaders of Sunday Assemblies of Word & Communion (Diocese of Ballarat)* and to procedures and a ritual for a Sunday Assembly of Word and Communion.

B. PARISH FORMATION

The Liturgical Commission provides information and/or formation for a parish or Church community in regard to the celebration of Sunday Assemblies of Word and Communion in order to assist a community with the implementation of such celebrations.

Resource information for times of the Church year is emailed to parish contacts or is available from the diocesan website

www.ballarat.catholic.org.au.

Contact:

Diocesan Liturgical Commission
5 Lyons Street South (PO Box 576)
BALLARAT VIC 3353
Ph. 03 5337 7159
Email: liturgy@ballarat.catholic.org.au

ORDER OF COMMISSIONING OF LAY LEADERS OF SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES OF WORD AND COMMUNION

After the gospel reading, the celebrant in the homily, based on the sacred text and pertinent to the particular place and people involved, explains the meaning of the celebration.

PRESENTATION OF THE LEADERS

The celebrant presents to the people those chosen to serve as Leaders of Prayer, using these or similar words:

Celebrant: Dear friends in Christ, our brothers and sisters, (names are given), are to be entrusted with the role of leadership of the Sunday Assembly in the absence of an ordained minister.

Those chosen move to the Sanctuary area. The celebrant then addresses them:

As you carry out this service for the good of the faith community, you must strive to grow in holiness through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is this Sacrament which is at the heart of our lives as the People of God.

As Leaders of the prayer of the Assembly be, therefore, especially observant of the Lord's command to love your neighbour and honour the presence of Christ in the midst of the Assembly who gather on a Sunday.

Therefore I ask you:

Are you resolved to undertake this service of leading the community in honouring Sunday, the Day of the Lord, reflecting on the Word and offering praise to God, and so serve to build up the Church?

Leaders: I am.

Celebrant: Are you resolved to lead the community in prayer with the utmost care, reverence and dedication?

Leaders: I am.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Celebrant: Dear friends in Christ, let us pray with confidence to God, the creator of all things, that blessings be bestowed on these men and women, chosen to serve as Leaders of Prayer.

Pause for silent prayer.

Merciful God, creator and guide of your family, bless ✠ our brothers and sisters here before you. May they faithfully lead your people in hearing and responding to your Word and offering to you praise and thanksgiving. Strengthen them to witness to you in spirit and in truth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Celebrant: Go now, to continue your commitment to serve God and the People of God.

The Leaders of Prayer return to their places.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

The Mass now continues with the Prayers of the Faithful. These should be in the usual form for the Sunday Mass, with the inclusion of the following:

Reader: For the Church and for this parish of, that all may continue to gather and worship the Lord in Word and Sacrament. Lord, hear us.

For the Leaders of Prayer of this parish. May they witness to the leadership of Christ in our community, and continually seek to deepen their commitment to serve God and their neighbour. Lord, hear us.

The Prayers of the Faithful conclude and the Mass continues in the usual way.

APPENDIX 3

PREPARATION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF A SUNDAY ASSEMBLY OF WORD AND COMMUNION

Each Sunday Assembly of Word and Communion requires a time of preparation prior to the celebration.

WHO GATHERS?

The time of preparation should involve all who have any ministry in the Sunday celebration - Leaders, Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Musicians and the Parish Priest/Administrator.

PREPARATION MEETING:

Suggested procedure:

1. Opening Prayer

Spirit of God, open our hearts that Christ may make us like himself as once he taught those first disciples, who have handed on the Scriptures to us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. The Gospel Text

- The Gospel passage is read aloud.
- A time of silence follows.
- Consider the following questions in relation to the Gospel passage:
WHERE? WHEN? WHO? WHAT? HOW? WHY?
This may require consideration of the wider context of the Gospel passage and the use of Scripture commentaries / background material.
- A deeper look at the text:
 - What feelings are at work in the passage?
 - What are the central values or attitudes at work in the passage?
- Making connections with the Gospel and life - do the experiences and attitudes at work in the passage bring to mind:

- an aspect of your own life and relationships (*this may be shared or private reflection*);
- any local or world-wide events or issues?
- an aspect of your church community life?
- some part of Catholic tradition and teaching?

3. **The First Reading**

- The First Reading is read aloud.
- Discussion
 - How does this reading throw light on the Gospel passage?
 - What are the links with our lives?

4. **The Second Reading**

- The Second Reading is read
- Discussion
 - Does this reading throw any further light on the content of the Gospel and First Reading?

5. **Reflection**

Time is now taken to write a short reflection on what has emerged from considering and discussing the texts. *These could provide a basis for the Shared Reflection at the Sunday Assembly.*

6. **Intercession**

Do the readings bring to mind things for which your church community needs to pray? *These could form the basis of the Prayers of the Faithful for the Sunday Assembly.*

7. **Practicalities**

- Selection of music - this should reflect the themes of the readings and the season of the Church Year.
- Choice of Opening Prayer, Praise Prayer and Prayer after Communion.
- Awareness on the part of all ministers of their particular role in the Assembly.
- Attention to the environment for the Sunday Assembly.
- Requirements of the congregation, eg. pamphlets to participate fully.
- Any matters requiring prior communication to the community.

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