

Preparing Youth for Liturgy

"But in order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with the proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with divine grace, lest they receive it in vain."

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #11, Vatican Council II)

How can we help young people develop proper dispositions — that is, to be ready, willing, and able to enter into the celebration? A person who is properly disposed:

- has a living relationship with God, in Christ, and calls upon God in prayer.

- follows Jesus in daily life as a disciple;
- is an active, engaged member of the faith community;
- understands ritual action and language;
- comes to the liturgy ready to celebrate fully, consciously and actively;
- recognizes the essential pattern of his or her life in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup.

What happens at Mass for young people depends on what happens with them outside of Mass: to become properly disposed, young people need first and foremost to be evangelized. They need to be welcomed and valued in their faith communities. They need to hear the Good News and accept the

transforming love of Christ. And they need parents and families of faith — as well as vibrant, joyful faith communities — supporting them in their relationship to Christ as young believers. Young people also need to be catechized, not only broadly in the faith, but specifically in the ways of our worship, through liturgical catechesis.



Liturgical Catechesis: Connecting Liturgy with Life

Liturgical catechesis explores the mystery of the Eucharist by reflection and study that take place before, during, or after the liturgy. It seeks to increase our appreciation and understanding of the many different elements that make up our liturgical celebration.

Through liturgical catechesis, young people learn:

- to connect liturgy and life through varied experiences of

- symbols such as cross, water, bread, wine, and fire;
- to pray individually and communally;
- to uncover the deeper meanings of the liturgy;
- to explore the nature of ritual and ritual elements such as sign, symbol, gesture, vesture, word and song;
- to engage in the movements of the liturgy and the

liturgical year;

- to live the Eucharist during the week so as to celebrate Eucharist with integrity on Sunday.

Liturgical catechesis can happen during retreats, in mini-courses, in small faith communities; through homilies that help deepen the experience of the liturgy; and most importantly, through liturgy that is prepared and celebrated well.

Renewing the Vision: The U.S. Bishops' Blueprint for Comprehensive Youth Ministry

Excerpts from "Renewing the Vision — A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry," NCCB, 1997:

"Parishes should be a place where young people are welcomed, grow in Jesus Christ, and minister side by side with the adults of the community."

"Parishes should have programs for young people that recognize their special talents and role in the life of the Church. They bring to the parish

community youthfulness, energy, vitality, hopefulness and vision."



become "youth friendly" communities in which youth have a conspicuous presence in parish life.

"If parishes are to be worthy of the loyalty and active participation of youth, they will need to

These are parish communities that value young people — welcoming them into their midst; listening to them; responding to their needs; supporting them with prayer, time, facilities, and money. These are parish communities that see young people as resources — recognizing and empowering their gifts and talents, giving them meaningful roles in leadership and ministry, and encouraging their contributions."

Preparing the Liturgy Well

"Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism."

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14)

The liturgy is something that we do. It requires that all who are present actively participate in mind, body and spirit, through singing,

listening, responding, reflecting, and going out to serve the needs of the world. Therefore, anything that places the assembly in the role of the spectator must be avoided.

How can we prepare and celebrate vibrant liturgy with the full, conscious and active participation of all in mind? Such a liturgy includes:

- hospitality that is inviting and welcoming;
- an understanding of Christ present in word, eucharist, assembly, and presider;
- liturgical ministers who represent the many faces of the worshiping assembly, and who possess the gifts proper to their role: lectors who have the gift

of proclamation; cantors and music ministers who engage the assembly; presiders who are imbued with the spirit of the liturgy;

- music that is selected and executed with care and with the entire faith community in mind;
- homilies that are thoughtfully prepared, well-presented, and inclusive of all;
- an environment that supports the ritual action as well as lifts our hearts and minds to God; and
- an assembly, alive in faith, that understands itself as the Body of Christ.

The Two Most Frequently Asked Questions

Wouldn't it be better to have a regular Sunday "youth Mass?"

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is an act of Christ and his Body, the Church. Anything that would divide the Body of Christ is contradictory to the Eucharist. A separate Sunday youth Mass deprives the parish community of the gifts of young people and deprives young people of inclusion in the broader, intergenerational, community of faith. It, de facto, creates an artificial, one-dimensional community bereft of the diversity of the Church. We must avoid separating anyone from the rest of the community at the very celebration that should unite us in purpose and send us forth ready to proclaim the Good News. Occasional special liturgies for youth are fine, but not regular Sunday celebrations. We simply don't provide special Masses on Sunday for any particular age or interest group, because this would run counter to what we believe about the Eucharist.

So if not a Sunday "youth Mass," what about a "youth-friendly" Sunday celebration?

All of our liturgies should be friendly to young people, in fact, to all people. If "youth-friendly" means invigorating the music, making the homily more relevant and

understandable to all ages, and including young people in liturgical ministries, then all will benefit. However, if "youth-friendly" is taken to mean liturgies where the liturgical ministries, music and homily are principally, or even exclusively, directed toward youth, the inclusive nature of the liturgy is lost.

Two very influential elements of the liturgy for youth are preaching and music. These two elements are in need of particular attention if we hope to provide an experience of worship that is meaningful for youth.



Resources for Study and Discussion:

Renewing the Vision — A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, NCCB, 1997.

The Liturgical Documents, Liturgical Training Publications, 1991.

From Age to Age: The Challenge of Worship with Adolescents, NFCYM, St. Mary's Press, 1997.

Fulfilled in Your Hearing, USCC, 1982.

The ministry of prayer and worship celebrates and deepens young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it awakens their awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it incorporates young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially eucharist; it nurtures the personal prayer life of young people; and it fosters family rituals and prayers.

(Renewing the Vision, p. 44)