

Youth and Sunday Mass: Preparing Youth for Liturgy and Preparing the Liturgy Well

Parents and parish leaders struggle to find ways to encourage youth to actively participate in the Mass. They share a heartfelt desire for the youth of our Church to be involved in the celebration of the Eucharist each Sunday and in the life of the parish community. Accomplishing this is no easy task.



To assist parishes in meeting this challenge, the Archdiocesan Offices of Worship and Youth Ministry offer here:

- foundational principles for understanding the liturgy,
- practical strategies to include youth in the life and worship of the parish,
- ways to prepare the hearts of young people for worship through liturgical catechesis, and
- answers to frequently asked questions about youth and the liturgy.

It is our hope that young people will find a place in worship that is rightfully theirs by virtue of their baptism.

We invite pastors, youth ministers, DREs, liturgy coordinators and worship commissions to read, reflect upon, and discuss how best to implement the principles and practical strategies that follow.

Understanding Ritual: Is the Mass Really Boring?

Youth often complain that the Mass is boring because it is a ritual: we do the same things over and over. Ironically, the lives of young people are filled with rituals, not only religious ones.

Take for example all of the ritual elements in a football game: ritual clothing (uniforms), ritual enactors (players, cheerleaders, spectators, band, referee), ritual music (Star Spangled Banner, Alma Mater), ritual gestures (the wave, signals for scoring and penalties), ritual language (touchdown, field goal, quarterback, holding). What if the way we played football changed on a weekly basis, including rules, language, music and uniforms? The spectators and players would find themselves confused and disoriented without the ritual aspects of the game.

Stability, consistency, and repetition are crucial to the positive experience of ritual. Moreover, participants need to understand and appreciate basic ritual elements, both on the football field and in worship. Ritual itself is not the problem: rituals of all sorts enrich the lives of young people.

Our liturgies are ritual — they are essentially the same week in and week out. The pattern and repetitive nature of the liturgy enable the worshiping assembly to enter fully into prayer, provided the assembly is properly prepared, and the liturgy is well-celebrated.

Ritual prayer can lead us to a profound sense of the awe and mystery of God. Our Eucharistic gatherings on Sunday are meant to be an experience of the

heavenly kingdom that is to come, an experience of Christ present among us.

We must prepare the hearts and minds of our young people so that they may be engaged in this most profound experience.

Equally important, our liturgical celebrations must be prepared and executed well to nourish and foster the faith of young and old.

It is imperative that we prepare youth for liturgy and prepare the liturgy well.

Contents

Preparing Youth	2
Preparing Liturgy	3
Strategies	4

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 worshipping 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)

Suggestions, Strategies and Recommendations

FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH YOUTH

Be well formed in the liturgy and integrate its richness into your ministry.

Attend workshops, study the liturgy, and deepen both your understanding and appreciation of it. Regularly include in your ministry prayer experiences and activities that help young people to connect to the symbols, actions, and signs of the liturgy.

Lead young people in preparation for and reflection upon the liturgy, or find someone who can do this well.

During youth meetings, or in intergenerational groups, lead young people in discussion and reflection that will help them to actively participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and connect the liturgy with their lives.

Connect liturgy with life through comprehensive youth ministry.

Integrate youth into the life and ministries of the faith community. Provide opportunities for adults and youth to share faith in the context of retreats, prayer services, faith formation, service activities, and social gatherings. Such experiences connect youth to the life of the community, and so enrich what it means to gather, to hear God's Word, to share the Eucharist, and to be sent forth.

Help young people know how to pray.

Prayer is both a gift and a skill. From the rosary to guided meditation, from spontaneous shared prayer to ritual prayer, youth can and do pray. They need capable adults to guide them as they grow into praying people.

FOR THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THE LITURGY

Prepare!

Prepare every celebration with the full assembly in mind, children, young people, and adults. Active participation of the entire assembly is a primary goal. Regularly evaluate the preparation of the worship environment, proclamation of the Word, selection and execution of music, and content of the homily for their impact on all who are present, and include young people in this evaluation.

Include youth in homily and liturgical preparation teams.

Inclusion of youth provides preachers and liturgy planners with valuable input from a variety of perspectives, which provides a richness to the Sunday celebration. Such preparation can be a wonderfully formative experience for all who participate.

Include youth in liturgical ministries whenever possible and appropriate.

Many ask if there is an age requirement for liturgical ministry in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Pastors and worship commissions determine the age considered appropriate for their communities, remembering that the individual comes to liturgical ministry by virtue of his/her baptism, reception of the Eucharist, and discerned skills for ministry. The sacrament of Confirmation is not a requirement for participation in liturgical ministries.

Ensure that liturgical ministers are well-formed and take seriously their responsibility to prepare adequately.

Those who serve as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, music ministers, altar servers, and ministers of

hospitality must continue on-going formation in the liturgy and continued development of their skills.

FOR ALL IN PARISH LEADERSHIP

Make worship a priority in parish planning, budgeting, and hiring.

Remember that the celebration of the Eucharist is central to the life of the community of faith. Adequate resources must be made available to ensure that worship is well prepared and celebrated.

Regularly invite and encourage youth to take an active role in all of parish life.

Include youth in the parish advisory structure, such as worship commissions, liturgy preparation committees, parish council, and youth ministry core teams. By giving young people an active role in the advisory process, youth are encouraged to participate fully in parish life, and the community grows in awareness of the needs and gifts of youth.

Listen to youth.

Encourage youth to speak honestly. Listen carefully and help youth to articulate their concerns. Make certain that youth are heard, understood, and respected.

Provide trained youth ministry leaders who have the vision and skills to incorporate young people into all aspects of our life of faith.

Youth groups are not enough – in fact, they can be a big part of the problem if they separate youth from rest of the faith community. Trained adult youth ministry leaders strive not to build youth groups, but to build comprehensive youth ministry, leading to broad-based participation of youth in the faith community – including our Sunday worship.

Questions for Discussion

Pastors, youth ministers, musicians, liturgy coordinators, worship commissions, and DREs should gather to discuss:

- How can we further involve youth in the life of our parish, including the liturgy?
- How can we enhance our homilies and liturgical music?
- How can we better provide opportunities for young people to deepen their understanding and appreciation for the liturgy?
- How can our liturgies become more inclusive?
- How do we regularly evaluate our liturgical practices and implement changes where needed?
- How will we implement the principles and practical strategies presented here?