



The Liturgical ‘Master of the House’ and *his* Assistants!

The public celebration of the liturgy of the Church is a primary means by which the community of faith publicly worships God in response to the Paschal Mystery. This is especially true when the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, the ‘summit and source’ of the Christian life (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10), the celebration of which should be marked by a noble simplicity.

This desire for noble simplicity is particularly significant when the Bishop presides over liturgical celebrations, especially in the cathedral. These liturgies should serve as models and examples to parishes and diocesan instrumentalities and to the community. Thus these liturgical celebrations should be prepared and celebrated with great care and due regard for the liturgical tradition of the Church.

Enter the Master of Ceremonies!

At the heart of the role of the Master of Ceremonies (MC) is an intimate knowledge of the liturgical tradition of the Church, particularly its finer and sometimes more obscure parts. But the MC is not the liturgical policeman, though some people might perceive him as such. He is about fostering and enabling the noble celebration of that which marks the Church as the Church.

The role of the Master of Ceremonies is mentioned in the liturgical books of the Roman Rite as follows:

For a liturgical celebration, especially a celebration presided over by the bishop, to be distinguished by grace, simplicity, and order, a master of ceremonies is needed to prepare and direct the celebration in close cooperation with the bishop and others responsible for planning its several parts, and especially from a pastoral standpoint.

The master of ceremonies should be well-versed in the history and nature of the liturgy and in its laws and precepts. But equally he should be well-versed in pastoral science, so that he knows how to plan liturgical celebrations in a way that encourages fruitful participation by the people and enhances the beauty of the rites.

He should seek to ensure an observance of liturgical laws that is in accord with the true spirit of such laws and with those legitimate traditions of the particular Church that have pastoral value.

(CEREMONIAL OF BISHOPS, 34)

It is desirable, at least in cathedrals and in larger churches, to have some competent minister or master of ceremonies, to see to the appropriate arrangement of sacred actions and to their being carried out by the sacred ministers and lay faithful with decorum, order and devotion.

(GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL, 106)



The focus of the ministry of the MC is, therefore, the service of the worship of the People of God, particularly when the ‘whole Church’ is gathered, ie the People of God with their Bishop surrounded by his Priests and Deacons. Attention to detail, and what some might consider arcane knowledge of obscure parts of the ritual books, are very much at the heart of the life of those who are appointed to such a role.

The MC’s role of service is rooted fundamentally in prayer. Since liturgy is an activity of prayer undertaken corporately by the People of God, so too is the preparation and the coordination of the celebration of that liturgy. As the MC attempts to give voice and structure to the pastoral needs of the People of God who will gather to celebrate a particular liturgy, they themselves will be delving into the very mystery that will be celebrated in a particular place at a particular time.



The component parts of the liturgy – words, actions, symbols, etc – have meaning and significance that need to be carefully orchestrated so that they constantly proclaim the truth of the Church’s faith.

It is always easy to recognise when something doesn’t quite fit the expected nature of a liturgy. I suspect we’ve all had that feeling during a liturgy that something wasn’t quite right, even if we can’t always put our finger on the specifics. This is where the MC can help by ensuring that a liturgy fulfills its purpose by paying attention to the language of the liturgy, the use of symbols and actions and the way in which all of these are brought together in a coherent whole.

At its very heart, the role of the MC is never about saying ‘no’ for the sake of saying ‘no’. It is about saying, ‘I see what you want to convey, here’s how we might best do that.’ It is about bringing all his skills, experience and knowledge to bear on the liturgical celebrations of the People of God, for the sake of the

People of God as they gather to worship the God who has claimed them all.

When a priest fills the role of MC, it is impossible for him to con-celebrate major liturgies. This is particularly an issue in our current circumstance where Fr Andrew Doohan, the current MC, is also the Rector of the Cathedral. Bishop Bill therefore requested that consideration be given to how this situation might be resolved.

Fr. Andrew and Sr. Louise Gannon, the diocesan Co-ordinator of Liturgy, in consultation with the Diocesan Liturgy Council, developed a discernment and formation process for a group of Assistant Masters of Ceremonies (AMCs).

In 2016, expressions of interest were sought from the community and a group of six began a journey with Andrew and Louise. All have significant experience in liturgical ministry, mostly as adult servers, and this experience has been brought to bear in their new role as AMCs.

The process of formation and discernment has included the

opportunity to gain practical experience in this role and to reflect on their experience at the formation gatherings. Time and exposure to the ministry of the AMCs will assist in the community's developing understanding of this ministry.

Those who discern a call to this ministry will be commissioned by Bishop Bill during 2020.

The role of the AMC is predominantly the same as that of the MC. In directing liturgical celebrations on behalf of the Bishop, the AMCs exercise the same authority as the Master of Ceremonies. Like him, they ensure the appropriate and dignified celebration of the liturgy of the Church. The service of the liturgy, and therefore of the Church, is at the heart of the ministry of the AMCs.

Together they form a College of AMCs, which will serve the liturgical life of the Church of Maitland-Newcastle by sharing the ministry of the MC. Having this College available has meant more events can now have the support of the MC or one of the AMCs.

Already the community is feeling the benefit of the ministry of the AMCs: those preparing liturgies at which Bishop Bill or his delegate presides; clergy who now don't have to worry about whether everything is in

place; the worshipping community, and last but not least, Bishop Bill.

It is indeed good to have a 'Master of the House'! The following stories might help us 'step into the shoes' of a 'Master' and 'Assistant Master' of the house.





Appendix 1

Fr Andrew reflects on what attracted him to the ministry of Master of Ceremonies.

It was 1992.

That was the year my journey into the study of liturgy, in all its glory, began.

In my first year of seminary formation and education one of the required courses was “Introduction to Liturgy”. The lecturer’s knowledge of and passion for his subject matter was palpable – and contagious!

During the course, I discovered an entirely new language – the language of ritual – with a unique vocabulary, a unique ‘alphabet’ and a unique way of being enacted. I was hooked, and from that moment my passion for understanding this language has not diminished and my knowledge has, I hope, increased.

Most of the knowledge I have gained is

useful almost daily. Other knowledge is admittedly arcane and obscure; the kind of stuff that could be very helpful if the right kind of question is asked during a trivia contest. All of it, however, has contributed to my current role as MC.

The *Ceremonial of Bishops*, referred to earlier, is one of those obscure and potentially arcane liturgical books with which liturgists and those who find themselves in the role of MC become intimately familiar. I’ve had my own copy for many years and it is well used.

In exercising the role of MC, I assist not only the Bishop but also the wider Church of Maitland-Newcastle in the planning for and celebration of its liturgical life. It’s not just about consulting the ritual book and then doing what is decreed. The liturgy of the Church is not found in those books, despite their significance.

The liturgy only truly exists when it is enacted on a particular occasion in a particular place and I truly enjoy contributing to the liturgical life of the Church of Maitland-Newcastle.

With whom and for whom do I work as Master of Ceremonies?

Most people will be aware of the presence of an MC on those more significant occasions when the Bishop is celebrating liturgies with the People of God such as the annual Chrism Mass, the Ordination of a Deacon or a Priest or the Dedication of a Church. The role of MC is intimately linked to the liturgical

role of the Bishop in enacting these rarer liturgical celebrations. Having an MC guiding such events means the liturgy can be celebrated by the assembled People of God with the grace and beauty such celebrations demand.

The MC works with other ministers – musicians, proclaimers, sacristans, etc – in planning and enactment because liturgy is a ‘team effort’ that requires coordination, cooperation and charity. It is never about individuals and always about the worship of God by God’s People.

It’s not only the Bishop that an MC assists. An MC can contribute by being a point of reference, a resource person whom parishes, agencies and individuals can contact for assistance in planning particularly unusual liturgies, for help in developing an understanding of the liturgy and liturgical principles and for guidance in liturgical practices.



Appendix 2

Louise Outram shares her experience of becoming an Assistant Master of Ceremonies.

I am a recently retired Catholic primary school Principal. I have always been actively involved in my faith and over the years I have worshipped at different churches, with my longest associations being St Kevin’s at Cardiff and the Sacred Heart Cathedral at Hamilton.

Before I began as server at the Cathedral in 2015, I had been Minister of the Word and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. In 2018 I was invited to participate in the Assistant Master of Ceremonies discernment and formation process. This seemed a natural progression from serving at the Cathedral, as it is the gathering point of many diocesan celebrations.

The AMCs meet formally every two months under the guidance of Fr

Andrew and Sr Louise. These gatherings have a practical purpose, looking at how and why things are done a certain way, planning for major celebrations and allocating an AMC to individual liturgies. Our gatherings also provide an opportunity for spiritual formation as we spend time reflecting on and sharing God's word.

The ministry of Assistant Master of Ceremonies supports the liturgical life of the diocese by serving the presider. A significant part of the role is familiarising ourselves with the liturgy that has been prepared so that it flows as intended. Local communities, with the support of Sr Louise, do the 'hard yards' of physically preparing the master copy and we work from the finished product. It is vitally important that the AMC knows what is happening so that s/he can oversee the practical tasks and free the presider to enable those participating in the celebration to be truly present.

The more liturgies in which I am involved, the more confident I am becoming in the ministry, and the growing confidence allows me better to serve both the presider and the worshipping community.

As one of the Diocesan AMCs I have the privilege of travelling to other parishes. Primarily I am there to assist the presider, but I am also there to serve the parish community by providing ministry support on important occasions.

I love this opportunity to visit churches I have not seen and meet wonderful people committed to their faith and parish, even occasionally catching

up with old friends. When you see parishioners being involved in a celebration with which they have no familial connection, you see ordinary people giving witness. In every parish you visit similar groups of people are working to support their parishes, this diocese and God's work.

These hardworking people belong to Sacramental Teams and Liturgy groups, they form choirs, they serve, they cantor...

I am always greeted with such graciousness by the various parish communities I visit that it makes my task a joy. Lately most of my AMC ministry has been for confirmations. Another great joy is witnessing the look of wonder on the faces of those being confirmed. I have a front row seat for the actual confirmation and it is a delight to watch the faces of the young people as they are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

"Those who have been baptised continue on the path of Christian initiation through the sacrament of Confirmation. In this way, they receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love." (Rite of Confirmation)

I am privileged to travel the diocese in my ministry as AMC. Encountering Christ in so many varied communities renews my hope in the future of our Church.



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