

Memo: From Pandemic to Endemic

Reimagining the liturgy in all its fullness and beauty

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi

We owe to the Council — and to the liturgical movement that preceded it — the rediscovery of a theological understanding of the Liturgy and of its importance in the life of the Church. As the general principles spelled out in Sacrosanctum Concilium have been fundamental for the reform of the liturgy, they continue to be fundamental for the promotion of that full, conscious, active, and fruitful celebration (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium, nn. 11; 14), in the liturgy “the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n.14). With this letter I simply want to invite the whole Church to rediscover, to safeguard, and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration. I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue. The priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper that all may be one (John 17:21) judges every one of our divisions around the Bread broken, around the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, the bond of charity.

Desiderio Desideravi (a 16)

Introduction

Mandatory self-isolation for those who test positive for COVID-19 ceased on 14 October 2022. The government has indicated that it is time to move beyond restrictions imposed on the whole community to empower and respect the choice of the individual.

It is time therefore to remove the current COVID liturgical and pastoral advice and guidelines for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle – [Continuing Life during COVID-19 the New Normal Edition published 25 February 2022](#) – effective from 14 October 2022.

This memo extends an invitation to seize this moment as an opportunity to reflect on what we have learnt about liturgy – sometimes from its absence – during COVID, and to reimagine how the liturgy is celebrated by the local community. What are we learning about:

- the significance of symbols and rituals;
- liturgical ministry including the ministry of the Assembly;
- the Church environment?

This is a moment of great grace, highlighted by Pope Francis' recent Apostolic Letter [Desiderio Desideravi](#) on the Liturgical Formation of the People of God. Here the Pope offers 'prompts and cure' inviting us into a deeper and richer appreciation of the liturgy and formation 'for and by' the liturgy. It is a moment to consider not just what we do but why and how we do it. What is the deeper meaning the liturgy reveals? Is it indeed shaping us for discipleship, ecclesial life and mission?

The Diocesan Liturgy Council encourages parishes, schools, and other communities to engage in the deep reflection Pope Francis invites us into, and to move forward, rather than go to back to the way we celebrated the liturgy pre-COVID. It is an invitation to proceed gradually, deliberately, and in conversation with the whole community as we continue to exercise great care for and by everyone.

By way of example, the Diocesan Liturgy Council offers the following observations and suggestions which highlight those aspects of the liturgy that until now have remained under restriction. Like the government's advice to society, it is time to let go of external restrictions imposed on all and empower and respect the choices of the individual.

Use of Face Masks and Hand Sanitiser

While no longer mandated, NSW Health continues to recommend the use of face masks and hand sanitiser. The choice to wear a face mask is left to the individual. The continued availability of hand sanitiser in church buildings is recommended.

Greeters and Hospitality Ministers

COVID has helped us appreciate the essence of this ministry.

While COVID has shown that parishioners can pick up a bulletin and hymn sheet without someone handing it to them, what has been missing is the friendly, engaging, smiling faces of those who:

welcome everyone;

talk with strangers;

show people what they need and help them find a place to sit if needed;

introduce new people to someone they can sit with;

put new parishioners in touch with the priest or appropriate parish leader.

It is hoped Greeters and Hospitality Ministers will return to our doors with a re-founded appreciation of what this ministry is really about.

Holy Water Stoops

Stoops may once again be filled with Holy Water for members of the Assembly to bless themselves as they enter the church. It is recommended that the Holy Water be changed regularly.

Presentation of the Gifts

Communities were encouraged to reinstate the Presentation of the Gifts more than eighteen months ago. In the various editions of the guidance documents, the practice of having those bringing forward the gifts of bread and wine right to the altar and handing them to the presiding priest was recommended. This is more in keeping with the intent of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* that the gifts are not placed on the altar prior to the prayers being prayed over them (GIRM a.140-141).

For ease of reference, the practice as outlined in previous documents is summarised below:

- Those processing the gifts move into the sanctuary and stand to each side of the altar.
- The Presider first takes the bread, prays, and then places it on the altar.
- The Presider then takes the wine, pours it into the chalice, adds water, prays, and then places it on the altar.
- Those who presented the gifts can then return to their seats.

To date, where this revised practice has been implemented, the people love it and immediately appreciate the fuller meaning of it.

You can see how this is done via the [Cathedral live stream](#).

Sign of Peace

This is one of the liturgical signs that suffers from a poverty of understanding. Our current circumstances provide a unique opportunity through preaching, to invite people into a deeper appreciation of the fullest meaning of this sign. It is recommended that you refer to the diocesan [Pastoral Guidance for the Celebration of the Communion Rite at Mass](#) which is available online.

Use of Large Host by the Presider

During the heights of COVID, some priests returned to using a small presider's host which they consumed entirely.

The *General Instruction* presumes that at least some of the liturgical assembly will receive Communion from the same host that the presider uses. The smaller presider's host not only makes this virtually impossible but almost eliminates the integrity of the sign of the 'one bread broken to feed the many'.

The symbolic value of the larger presider's host being broken and shared for Communion is an important consideration when determining how eucharist is celebrated in a local community (GIRM a. 321).

For the integrity of the liturgical sign, communities are encouraged to consider using the larger hosts that break into twenty-four pieces.

Communion from the Chalice

The integrity of the celebration of the Eucharist rests on the central symbols of one bread broken and one cup poured out for all. Receiving Communion under both kinds is a much richer symbol of the action that the entire liturgical assembly celebrates at Mass.

It has been a long time since the Assembly has been able to receive Communion under both kinds. The principle of moving from imposed restrictions to individual choice suggests that it is time to offer Communion from the chalice to those who are longing to receive. The take-up will no doubt be slow. That we offer it is important.

Communion on the Tongue

Restriction on the reception of Communion on the tongue has already been lifted. Great care should continue around this practice. Those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue should be gently encouraged to move to the end of the Communion Procession as a means of mitigating any risk to the broader liturgical assembly.

Sacramental Anointings and other forms of touch

Communities were encouraged to reinstate physical anointings and other forms of touch in the liturgy some time ago, always determined by the comfort of the recipient. For example, most would have noticed that the anointing in the Sacrament of Confirmation has been celebrated in the traditional way all year. It has been the same for baptisms.

Anointing Masses continue to present a challenge because we are anointing the sick, possibly one after the other. In the parish, great pastoral sensitivity should be exercised in these circumstances with individual requests being accommodated as much as possible.

In hospitals and aged care facilities, the guidelines applicable to individual facilities are to be followed.

Baptismal Water

Previous editions of the guidance documents recommended that where multiple baptisms take place during the same liturgy, care be taken to prevent the use of the same water for each person being baptised. While the need for this is now reduced, it is recommended that the water used for baptism be changed after each ceremony.

Where requested, the use of separate containers for each person being baptised should continue.

Conclusion

The Diocesan Liturgy Council urges parish communities to see this opportunity for what it could be: an opportunity to re-examine and reimagine what we need to do, how we might be able to do it, and most importantly, why we are doing it.

Together let us seize this moment and set out to shape our liturgical celebrations to be all that they can be in our local settings.

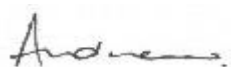
The Diocesan Liturgy Council is ready to assist and accompany parish, school and other communities through the provision of specific advice or formation for your local community. If you have any questions or specific needs, please do not hesitate to reach out via the Office of Worship and Prayer, contact details are below.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. This is our moment to live faithfully for the sake of our brothers and sisters now and into the future.

Wishing you every blessing and with thanks,



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