

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PORTLAND
JUNE 2020



Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

RESPONSES TO COMMON QUESTIONS



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For more than two millennia, Catholics have gathered on Sunday to worship God as he calls us to his table to be fed and nourished. There, we meet Jesus in his Word, in the Eucharist, and in one another and the priest. Celebrating the Eucharist is essential to being the body of Christ and the people of God.

However, the reality now before us is such that the celebration of Mass will not always be possible. Yet, it is still critical to our identity as Christians to gather as God's family and grow in closeness and faith. In that spirit, the diocese has prepared materials to assist parishes in planning for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. These liturgies will allow a deacon or layperson to lead us in prayer and fulfill our Sunday obligation to gather as the body of Christ, even when a priest is not available to celebrate Mass.

The Diocese of Portland is contiguous with the entire state of Maine. This raises the question of how we are to maintain the presence of the Church across our vast, primarily rural territory when there are so many small communities and a diminishing number of clergy whose average age continues to increase. Moving forward, parishes must take a fresh look at their structures, staffing, and ministries, including how to integrate Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest into the life of a parish community when necessary to serve the faithful.

The information in this booklet is meant to help you understand the current situation of the Church in Maine and how all of us — laity and ordained — can work together to continue worshiping God as he calls us to his Word and to sharing in Communion, where we are fed and nourished. Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are one pastoral response available to us.

In my 2019 report to Pope Francis, I shared that in my first five years in Maine, I have come to know the strengths and challenges of the diocese. The number of people practicing their faith has declined over the last decades. And yet, those who do practice and maintain the parishes of our diocese, led by their dedicated priests, are a true Christian witness. There is a real commitment to bringing the joy of the Gospel to others in the myriad ways in which the Church does that.

Let us continue to pray that those who may show positive signs of wanting to serve the people of God as priests will listen to the quiet voice within them that calls them to service in the Church.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, J.C.D.
Twelfth Bishop of Portland





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Why do Catholics need to gather at church on Sunday?

On the night before he died, Jesus and his disciples gathered to observe Passover, an important celebration in the Jewish year. It recalls how God saved the Israelites from Egypt and chose them as his own people, making a covenant with them to be their God. Jesus, however, changed the ritual that night. He took bread and said, “This is my Body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” Jesus then took a cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.” From that moment on, the Christian Passover would no longer be only about how God saved his people from slavery in Egypt; it would now be about how God, in Christ, saved his people from sin and death. Thus, at the Last Supper, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass.

But when would this Christian Passover be celebrated? Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week, he met two disciples on the road to Emmaus who recognized him in the breaking of the bread. From that time on, the first day of the week — Sunday — became known as the Lord’s Day, the day on which the Christian community gathered to fulfill Christ’s command and celebrate the Christian Passover. This is what we now call the Mass or the Eucharist. This is the main reason why we gather on Sunday, every Sunday, to celebrate the Eucharist together. Our gathering both signifies and effects our union with one another in Christ.

How so?

By simply gathering for Mass — or for a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (SC or Sunday Celebration) — we remind one another that the Lord’s call is primary in our lives. We walk away from wherever we are and whatever we might be doing, and, like the disciples who left their fishing boats, we leave everything symbolically in order to follow the Lord.

By gathering, we proclaim that we cannot save ourselves. It is the Lord who saves us, through his people, the Church. We cannot heal ourselves. We ask the Lord as a community for mercy, confident in his healing and forgiving love. Moreover, by gathering, we acknowledge that we are members of the body of Christ, the Church. We need one another. As St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, the Lord has given each person gifts for the upbuilding of the whole community. No one person alone has all the gifts necessary for living as fully as God intends.

By gathering, we support one another in faith. People will sometimes ask what they get out of Mass. It would be better to ask what we bring to the Mass that then connects our faith to our daily lives. The presence of the whole community supports the faith of each person gathered. The presence of each person supports the faith of all. Faith recognizes that we never journey alone.

By gathering, our actions and words announce the new people of God that the Lord intends us to become. Note that in a Catholic church, the wealthy do not get better seats, nor do the poor have to sit outside or in a loft. Everyone shares the same pews. This very arrangement announces our oneness in Christ. Here, there is no longer rich or poor, male or female, young or old, black, white, or any other race. All are one in Christ.

By gathering, we await the Lord's return in glory. What we see and hear during the liturgy gives us a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. We are given a preview of the peace and the joy that the Lord will give us in their fullness on the day he returns.

By gathering, we practice the kingdom of God, already present though not fully realized on earth.

We cannot fully experience any of this alone. We are relational beings. We need to gather to affirm our identity as Catholic Christians and, even more importantly, to affirm our great need for the grace and the love of the Lord. For all these reasons, and many others, it is vitally necessary for us to gather each Sunday as a community of faith. The Lord has given us this command and this gift. Let us welcome it with faith, hope, and love.

Does going to church on Sunday “count” if we do not receive holy Communion?

The short answer is, “It depends.”

The long answer comes from what we call the precepts of the Church. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2041-2043), the Church's five precepts are “positive laws” of Catholic life that outline the minimum obligations for prayer and moral effort necessary to grow in love of God and neighbor. The first precept sets the obligation for all baptized Catholics to attend Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation and to “rest from servile labor.” The third precept sets the obligation to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least once a year, preferably in the Easter season. Both laws point to the necessity of gathering with the parish for liturgy each week. This is because going to church helps us focus on being united as the body of Christ and on each person having an inherent God-given dignity that does not come from the work we do.

Thus, receiving holy Communion is not the only reason Catholics come together each Sunday. What “counts” as meeting our first obligation is attending Mass or a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, if that is what is available. Coming together, we glorify God on the day of the resurrection of the Lord and avoid those things that would stop us from keeping Sundays holy.



Why are we considering Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest for parishes in Maine?

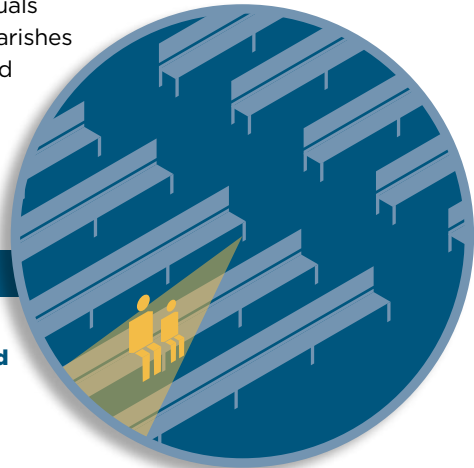
CURRENT SITUATION IN MAINE

There are 279,159 people in Maine who self-identify as Catholic. In 2018, diocesan parishes reported 145,140 individuals registered in a faith community. In October 2019, parishes counted an average of 30,076 people who attended a weekend Mass somewhere in Maine. The number of scheduled Masses each weekend could have accommodated 323,984 people.

MASS ATTENDANCE IN MAINE, OCTOBER 2019

323,984 Number of seats available at scheduled Masses each weekend

Average number of people attending a Mass each weekend **30,076**



As of October 2019, there were 73 active priests in the Diocese of Portland. Twenty-one of these are international priests. In the next three years, as many as 10 priests will reach the standard retirement age of 70. At other times, a priest needs to take a leave from active ministry for illness, a family emergency, or other reasons. This further reduces the number of priests available to serve in parishes.

Priests active in Maine

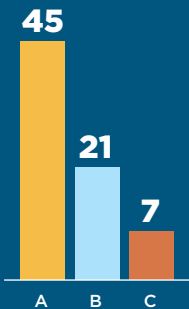
The number of priests available for assignment to active ministry in Maine is one of the factors considered in implementing Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest at this time.

The priests who serve the Catholic parishes and ministries in Maine fall into one of five categories:

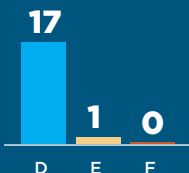
- Diocesan priests are men ordained to serve in this particular diocese and take a promise of obedience to the bishop of the Diocese of Portland.
- International priests are men ordained to serve a diocese or religious order based outside of the United States, though they serve in Maine for a period of time.
- Religious priests are ordained men who take vows to serve the Church through a particular religious order like the Jesuits or Franciscans, often assisting in dioceses as part of an order's mission.
- Extern priests are men ordained to serve in another diocese though they serve in Maine for a period of time.
- Priests retired from active ministry are priests living in Maine who are no longer assigned to a particular ministry due to age (70 or older) or other reasons. Some are still able and willing to assist parishes on a limited basis.

OCTOBER 2019

73
PRIESTS ASSIGNED TO
PARISHES AND HOSPITALS
(FULL OR PART-TIME)



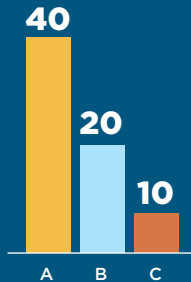
A DIOCESAN PRIESTS
B INTERNATIONAL PRIESTS
C RELIGIOUS OR EXTERN PRIESTS



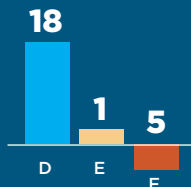
D PRIESTS RETIRED FROM ACTIVE
MINISTRY, THOUGH ABLE TO ASSIST
E ORDINATIONS
F RETIREMENTS

OCTOBER 2020

70
PRIESTS ASSIGNED TO
PARISHES AND HOSPITALS
(FULL OR PART-TIME)



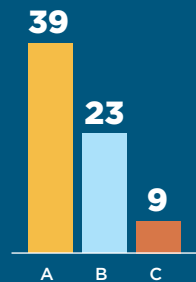
A DIOCESAN PRIESTS
B INTERNATIONAL PRIESTS
C RELIGIOUS OR EXTERN PRIESTS



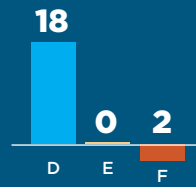
D PRIESTS RETIRED FROM ACTIVE
MINISTRY, THOUGH ABLE TO ASSIST
E ORDINATIONS
F ANTICIPATED RETIREMENTS

OCTOBER 2021

71
PRIESTS ASSIGNED TO
PARISHES AND HOSPITALS
(FULL OR PART-TIME)



A DIOCESAN PRIESTS
B INTERNATIONAL PRIESTS
C RELIGIOUS OR EXTERN PRIESTS



D PRIESTS RETIRED FROM ACTIVE
MINISTRY, THOUGH ABLE TO ASSIST
E ORDINATIONS
F ANTICIPATED RETIREMENTS

HOW THE CHURCH HAS DEALT WITH SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES

Our present reality is not the first time in the history of the Church or in the history of this country that there have been concerns about having enough priests to meet the needs of the Catholic population. Our present reality is not the only time when Catholics have gathered for liturgy on Sunday without a priest or without sharing in holy Communion.

From the 4th century on, there have been many communities throughout the world where Catholic Christians have had to gather on Sunday for liturgical services without a priest. Even today, there are well-established parishes that cannot be assured of having a priest available on a regular basis to lead Sunday Eucharist.

In 1898, Sunday services without priests were first seen on a regular basis in the African country of Burundi. These services were presided over by a layperson. By 1943, places that did not see missionaries often were obligated to adopt Sunday services led by a layperson. This practice quickly spread across the continent. Churches in Latin America and Asia have had Sunday services led by a layperson for many years, and churches in Canada and Europe have also adopted the practice.

In the United States in 1780, a report was sent to Rome that showed 16,000 Catholics in Maryland and only 19 priests. There were no priests to minister to the 1,500 Catholics who were in New York City at the time. The priests who were available for parochial ministry were not permanent to one parish. The bishop often sent them as itinerant priests who went from one community to another baptizing, confirming, witnessing marriages, and celebrating Masses. This meant that many Catholics in Maine at that time gathered on Sundays for prayer and fellowship without a priest being present, and they rejoiced on the occasions when the priest could visit and celebrate the sacraments. In a letter dated August 4, 1797, Father John Cheverus, who later became bishop of the region, gave detailed instructions for Sunday and holy day devotions that lay Catholics followed to preserve and practice their faith during periods when he or another priest was unable to be with them.





When the dioceses in the United States were surveyed in the late 1980's, some had already written, or were in the process of writing, guidelines for Sunday worship without a priest. Such services were referred to as "Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest" or a "Liturgy of the Word with Communion" when the service took place on a weekday. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops developed a universal directory and national guidelines for Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. The official ritual text *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of Priest* (SCs or Sunday Celebrations) was issued in 1994.

After the 1994 SCs ritual had been in use for a while, the U.S. bishops worked to resolve issues with forms that were too long or complex, unfamiliar to people, or caused confusion with the Mass. The Vatican approved an amended ritual in 2007. A subsequent revision made in 2012 ensured that the ritual texts reflected the changes in the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*. This rite now assists parishes in celebrating a Sunday liturgy when no priest is available.

CARING FOR THE DIOCESE OF PORTLAND NOW

The Catholic Church in Maine is once again mission territory. We are blessed with thousands of committed people hungry to share in the body of Christ. We are also challenged with too few priests to serve all the faith communities as they once had. Parishes address these challenges through practical solutions like adjusting Mass schedules or having pastors and laypeople collaborate to sustain vital ministries. Even with these efforts, more is needed to care for both the people and the priests of the diocese.

In June 2018, on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Bishop Robert Deeley issued “Norms for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest in the Diocese of Portland, Maine” as a pastoral solution to sustaining local church communities. The norms specify the conditions when the bishop will grant permission for a SC that incorporates the Liturgy of the Word with the distribution of holy Communion because a priest is unavailable to offer the Mass on a weekend. The norms also make clear that SCs are not equal to the fullness of the sacrifice of the Mass. While not the ideal, SCs provide communities a way for the faithful to fulfill their obligation to gather on the Lord’s Day and to be nourished through Christ who is present in the Word, in the people assembled for liturgy, and in holy Communion when the availability of consecrated hosts allows.

Like those who received the instructions Bishop Cheverus provided in the late 18th century, Catholics in Maine in the early 21st century now have guidance for sustaining one another and the Church by continuing to gather on Sundays and holy days. Through participating in a Sunday liturgy — whether Mass or an approved Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest — we fulfill our obligation to God and one another, keeping us from becoming isolated in a territory that can all too easily alienate us from the source and summit of all love and life.



SCs provide communities a way for the faithful to fulfill their obligation to gather on the Lord’s Day and to be nourished through Christ who is present in the Word, in the people assembled for liturgy, and in holy Communion when the availability of consecrated hosts allows.



A Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood

*Loving Father, you sent your Son
so that all might come to know the truth and be saved.
With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit,
you continue his work through the Church.
Your Son reminded his disciples that the harvest
was indeed plentiful but the laborers few.
Following his instructions, we beg you
to call many to ordained priesthood.
Grant them the grace to hear you
and to respond wholeheartedly.
May Mary Immaculate, the mother of your Son
and the patroness of our diocese, intercede for us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Adapted from a prayer composed by
Most Rev. Joseph John Gerry, O.S.B., 10th Bishop of Portland



What can I expect at a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest?

The previous chapter touched upon why we as Catholics gather on Sunday. It emphasized the fact that in gathering we remember “that the Lord’s call is primary in our lives.” This is one reason the first precept, or duty, of the Catholic Church is “You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.”

So, what is one to do if there is no local Mass available on a Sunday or holy day of obligation?

Since our gathering for Sunday liturgy both signifies and realizes our union with one another in Christ, the Church provides options for when no priest is available to celebrate the fullness of the Eucharist in the celebration of Mass. In Maine, a pastor can ask the bishop to permit a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (SC or Sunday Celebration) in his assigned parish. The request to celebrate a SC must be for a specific church on a particular Sunday (or Saturday evening) when circumstances do not allow a priest to celebrate Mass at that location. If the bishop agrees with the pastor that the situation warrants its use, the bishop will grant the pastor/parish

permission to schedule a SC. This Sunday Celebration will usually be a Liturgy of the Word with distribution of holy Communion led by a deacon or appointed lay leaders of prayer. In this way, members of the faith community can still gather as part of fulfilling their obligation as practicing Catholics. However, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest will be used sparingly; that is, they are to be used when every other option has been exhausted.

Each decision in establishing the norms for SCs aims at increasing the desire to be present at and participate in celebrating the Eucharist whenever possible. While SCs do not offer the fullness of the Eucharist celebrated at Mass, the structure achieves the purpose of gathering as a community of faith and fulfills one's Sunday obligation. SCs share many of the elements of the Mass, though sometimes occurring in a different order.



Both celebrations take place in the regular worship space of the Church; many of the words and symbolic gestures are similar. For example, the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated in its entirety in both Mass and SCs. Other elements are absent in SCs; for instance, the Penitential Rite and Eucharistic Prayer are omitted because the Church reserves those actions to an ordained priest in Mass. Distribution of holy Communion looks similar; however, the hosts offered in SCs were consecrated at a prior Mass.

There are also slight differences in how a deacon or a layperson leads the community in prayer when using the SCs ritual. You will notice that in SCs led by laity, some gestures or texts are intentionally omitted because their use could give the impression that a layperson is functioning as an ordained cleric. For instance, a deacon will vest in alb and stole and sit in his usual chair in the sanctuary, from which he will lead a Sunday Celebration. A layperson, however, will not vest and will sit in a pew, coming forward from the assembly to lead the celebration.

Both the Mass and SCs are guided by official ritual texts with prayers and readings that follow the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. Both are organized so the people of God are strengthened by listening to and reflecting on God's Word, by being nourished through sharing in the body of Christ, and by giving thanks to God through full, conscious, and active participation in the prayer and the sharing of our gifts of time, talent, and treasure. The differences between the Mass and SCs make clear the unique role of the priest in providing the Eucharist for the faith community, as well as each person's essential contribution to the body of Christ joined as one in the divine liturgy.

Similarities and differences in the liturgical elements of Mass and Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

These charts describe what happens throughout a Sunday liturgy and why we participate in the ritual as part of fulfilling our Sunday obligation. They also show how we celebrate the various elements in Mass and in SCs. Note the similarities and differences depending on who is leading the particular liturgy.

What Happens in the Liturgy Why we participate in this ritual	How We Do This in Mass as prescribed in Roman Missal, 2010	How We Do This in SCs as prescribed in Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, 2012
Gather as Body of Christ	Introductory Rites	
Entrance Chant/Song along with Entrance Procession	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sign of the Cross & Greeting Begin the prayer dialogue between God and the faithful	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Penitential Act	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gloria	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opening Prayer Gather prayers of all assembled into one and encourage all to hear the Word of God in the context of the celebration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as prescribed by the Roman Missal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as prescribed by the ritual, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest
Nourish at the table of God's Word	Liturgy of the Word	
First Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Responsorial Psalm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Second Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gospel Acclamation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gospel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Homily	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deacon gives homily; Layperson reads prepared reflection
Period of Silence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Dismissal of Catechumens (optional)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Profession of Faith State our shared faith	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) Intercede with our faithful and loving God on behalf of the Church, the world, and ourselves	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

What Happens in the Liturgy Why we participate in this ritual	How We Do This in Mass as prescribed in Roman Missal, 2010	How We Do This in SCs as prescribed in Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, 2012
Offer the Eucharistic sacrifice	Liturgy of the Eucharist	<i>no consecration without a priest</i>
Preparation of the Gifts/Collection	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eucharistic Prayer with sung acclamations (Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation; Great Amen)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communion Rite Share in holy Communion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> when possible
The Lord's Prayer Pray together in words Jesus taught us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sign of Peace	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fraction Rite/Lamb of God	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invitation to Communion/ "Lord, I am not worthy..." Acknowledge unworthiness to receive the great gift of Christ's real presence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Communion Receive holy Communion as a sign of unity in the body of Christ	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in both forms	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> only distribute blessed hosts reserved in the tabernacle
Prayer after Communion Ask that the benefits of the Eucharist will remain active in our daily lives	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Act of Thanksgiving Praise the Lord for who he is and his wonderous deeds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCs ritual
Draw liturgy to a close	Concluding Rites	
Brief Announcements & Collection Share information for the good of the faith community and gather monetary gifts for support of the Church and care of the poor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Invitation to Pray for Vocations to the Priesthood Pray together for an increase in priestly vocations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Blessing Call upon the Triune God to bless us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> form differs depending on if leader is a deacon or a layperson
Dismissal Send forth to bring the fruits of the Eucharist to the world	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recessional Procession	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sign of Peace Share a sign of hope as we go forth to live as members of the body of Christ in the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



Who does what during a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest?

“The body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts” (1 Corinthians 12:14).

Whenever the Church gathers for liturgy on Sunday, she is a visible expression of the invisible bonds that unite the many parts of the body of Christ as one. Each role is essential to the strengthening of the Catholic community and to the building up of the kingdom of God.

As many parts of the body of Christ, each person has a unique role in the gathering for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCs or Sunday Celebrations). It is important to recognize that all ministers carry out their responsibilities by virtue of their baptism and the delegation of the diocesan bishop.

PEOPLE IN THE PRAYING ASSEMBLY

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (no. 1141). Each person in the faith community is called to participate in a SC as actively and reverently as he or she would a Sunday Mass. All those assembled make the invisible presence of God visible when they:

- praise God through voicing the prayers, singing, and sharing common gestures;
- both listen to the Word of God and hear it, letting it seep into their lives;
- receive the body of Christ in remembrance of him and, in turn, go out into the world to nourish and strengthen others in the faith; and,
- contribute to meeting the responsibilities of the parish and to caring for those in need.

Parishioners also have a role to play and may have to exercise flexibility during this time of transition when there are so few priests and even fewer vocations to the priesthood. This may mean traveling to another parish, going to Mass at a different time, or participating in a SC. The whole community is expected to pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood, both in the universal Church and especially in this diocese.

LEADER OF PRAYER

In the absence of a priest, either one deacon or two appointed laypersons take on the responsibility of leading the community in a Sunday Celebration. By virtue of his ordination, a deacon is the ordinary leader of SCs. A deacon will lead the community in prayer, read the Gospel, and help the congregation understand what they have heard by giving a homily. However, humbly recognizing his role in the diaconate rather than the priesthood, the deacon will leave the presider's chair empty "as a symbol that the community awaits the presence of a priest" (SCs no. 24). If the Sunday Celebration relies on the ministry of laypersons, the first person acts as the leader of prayer, while the second proclaims the Gospel and reads a homily or reflection prepared by the pastor ahead of time. A lay leader of prayer sits with the assembly rather than in the sanctuary near the altar.

Whether a deacon or a layperson, the leader of prayer follows the official ritual approved for use in the Diocese of Portland, inviting those assembled to full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgical prayer of the Church. Before the service begins, the leader of prayer also ensures that the sanctuary is prepared for the Sunday Celebration and checks to see if there are enough consecrated hosts reserved for the assembly to receive Communion.

Why are two laypeople but only one deacon needed to lead SCs?

How we pray reflects what we believe as Catholics. Deacons are ordained by the Church with the "faculties" or authority to proclaim the Gospel, preach, and assist in the distribution of holy Communion during liturgy. Bishops can delegate these faculties to laypeople, though rarely does he allow one person to exercise them all in one-and-the-same liturgy. One deacon can serve all the leadership roles in SCs by virtue of his ordination. Two laypeople are needed to lead a Sunday Celebration, both as a visible expression of the uniqueness of ordination as well as a visible sign of how we cooperate with one another in gathering for prayer, proclaiming the Gospel, and being the body of Christ for one another.

READER

The reader's role is to proclaim the Word of God found in the Old and New Testaments as organized for liturgical prayer in the Lectionary. Through clarity, inflection, pitch, and tone, the reader disposes the assembly to receive the living presence of God, who speaks through sacred Scripture. A reader also offers the prayers of the faithful. In this, he or she lifts the intercessory prayers of the congregation up to God who hears our prayers. Lastly, the reader will read the announcements, if any, during the collection.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Extraordinary ministers of holy Communion help distribute the Blessed Sacrament to the parishioners as they normally would. If the Blessed Sacrament is reserved outside the worship space, these ministers will have the privilege of retrieving the reserved hosts and bringing them to the altar for the Communion Rite. The minister may also assist the leader of prayer in preparing the vessels for Communion if needed.

SACRISTAN

The sacristan works with the leader of prayer to prepare the materials for the celebration and coordinates other liturgical ministers as she or he would typically do for other parish liturgies.

USHERS

The role of ushers is very similar to that exercised during Mass. They typically assist with distributing the special worship aid for SCs, seating people, collecting the monetary offerings during the announcements (after the distribution of holy Communion), and securing the collected funds in the prescribed manner.

MUSICIANS

Much like as in Mass, the music minister's role is to encourage the full, conscious, and active participation of the assembly in the liturgy through its sung elements as prescribed for SCs. Instrumental music at designated times helps create an atmosphere of worship and reverence.

THE BISHOP AND PASTOR

The bishop and pastor work together to provide the means for Catholics in Maine to fulfill the Sunday

How are lay leaders of prayer chosen and appointed?

Each pastor identifies local laypersons as potential lay leaders for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest through a discernment process with the Pastoral Council. Only men and women who are fully initiated, faithful, practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church may be considered. Desired qualities in a lay leader of prayer include being prayerful and reverent in her/his presence with others, comfortable being in front of a group in a public setting, supportive of the ordained ministers in the Church, and well-known and respected by the people of the local faith community. With agreement among the pastor, council chair, and individual, a request for appointment is sent to the bishop. If accepted, the individual is appointed to a three-year term of service, which requires initial and ongoing training for the role.

What factors help determine when a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest should be scheduled?

How many priests are in the parish?

Can the current Mass schedule be adapted to better meet the needs of parishioners?

- Are all the scheduled Masses at least 60% filled?
- Are there enough liturgical ministers in addition to the priest available to provide for the solemn and vibrant celebration of each Mass?
- Are the priests saying the maximum number of Masses permitted in a weekend (four per priest)?

Are there other churches to which parishioners could reasonably travel for Mass?

In what ways do members of the local community support the vitality of the parish through giving of their time, talent, and treasure?

obligation to gather. The bishop sets out the norms for when and how Sunday Celebrations may be utilized in the parishes of the diocese. A pastor weighs these considerations and explores other avenues for offering Sunday Mass before deciding to petition the bishop for permission to use SCs. Only the bishop can authorize a Sunday Celebration for a specific weekend at a specific church.

Pastors consult with parish councils to identify persons who might serve as leaders of prayer for SCs. The bishop considers parishes' requests to appoint leaders of prayer, then provides for training and support to those designated to fulfill that role in Sunday Celebrations. A pastor also prepares a homily or provides a written reflection for lay leaders of prayer to read at a SC.

Keep in mind that SCs are neither meant to replace the celebration of Sunday Mass, nor to be viewed as its equal substitute. Sunday Celebrations are considered temporary pastoral solutions that give faith communities the opportunity to gather to worship God as the body of Christ on those occasions when a priest is not available to celebrate Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation.

As in all Catholic liturgy, every member of the body of Christ is significant for giving visible expression to the invisible bonds that unite us in faith. Different liturgies require different roles; for example, when a priest celebrates Mass, altar servers are needed to assist him throughout the liturgy. Since there is no priest and Eucharist is not celebrated during a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, there is no role for altar servers in this liturgy. Nonetheless, whatever liturgy we celebrate, God is at work among us.



Why is it important to make Sunday different from other days of the week?

In previous chapters, we said a great deal about the Sunday liturgy itself. Keeping the Lord's Day begins with making connections between the Sunday liturgy and the rest of the day. The belief is that if Sunday is permeated with the spirit of the Eucharist, that spirit will spill over and be with us every other day of the week. By keeping the Sabbath, we honor both our inherent human dignity and our need for healthy relationships with God, neighbor, and ourselves.

What follows are suggestions for how we can honor Sunday as the Lord's Day. They are not meant to be strict requirements or additional burdens. They are given in the hope that they will inspire you to find ways to better honor the Lord's Day in your own life. Not every suggestion will work for everyone. Still, there should be something here that can work for anyone. The hope is that you will find ways to live Sunday so that it is different from every other day of the week.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND THE CHURCH

PREPARE

If possible, do not go to the liturgy “cold.” Read the Sunday readings in advance to help you to be more receptive to the Word of God proclaimed during Mass or a Sunday Celebration, and more ready to take in the homily. This may be a challenge if you are scrambling to get a family ready to get to church on

time; therefore, take a few moments the night before or earlier in the week to read at least the Gospel for Sunday and to note what is going on in the liturgical year.

Which resources can help me prepare for Sunday liturgy?

- Missalette or hymnal used at the parish
- Scripture listed in parish bulletin or on website
- USCCB.org/readings
- PortlandDiocese.org/prayer-and-faith-resources



GATHER

Participate in parish celebrations, especially Sunday liturgy. Stop for donuts and coffee after Mass, and then, introduce yourself to those you recognize from the parish but do not yet know. Attend special events aimed at building a sense of belonging both to the parish and the wider community.

DISCUSS

As soon as you return home, or at some other time on Sunday, take time to process what you heard. Did something from the readings, homily, or prayers strike you? Talk about that with your spouse and/or family. If you live alone, meet up with a fellow parishioner and discuss that day's liturgy together. What was the Lord saying to you? How might you act differently in your life because of it? Why do you need to follow through on this message in your life?

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

LISTEN

Sunday is an excellent day for pausing and listening to one another. Does a family member need your support or understanding in some way? Has anyone been overlooked lately? Have you told the people in your life how much you love them and how grateful you are for them? Sunday is as good a day as any, perhaps better, to do this.

VISIT

Sunday is a good day to enjoy the company of other people and to practice hospitality. It may be one of the few days when the whole family can be together for a meal without other distractions. Reach out to someone who lives alone and spend time with that person. You will not only receive a taste of the Lord's rest, but you will be giving it to someone else.

SHOW MERCY

Honor Sunday and the Lord by giving special care to those in need.



What are corporal works of mercy?

Acts of kindness to help our neighbors meet their physical or material needs:

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Shelter the homeless
- Clothe the naked
- Visit the sick
- Visit prisoners
- Bury the dead
- Give alms to the poor

What are spiritual works of mercy?

Acts of compassion to help our neighbors meet their emotional and spiritual needs:

- Counsel the doubtful
- Instruct the ignorant
- Admonish the sinner
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Forgive injuries
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Pray for the living and the dead

RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF

REST

As the Christian Sabbath, Sunday is a day of solemn rest. Do your best to honor this by giving yourself and others time to rest and be refreshed in mind and body. What renews your spirit? It could be a walk in the woods, a book, a crossword puzzle, or some craft you find relaxing. If you have been feeling stressed, even a few games of Solitaire might help. The beauty of music or art often feeds our spirits. Watching a sporting event may help — if it does not get you too worked up! Maybe you just need a good nap, or take part in a special retreat sponsored by your parish. Be compassionate to yourself, and you will find it easier to be compassionate to others.



ABSTAIN FROM UNNECESSARY SECULAR ACTIVITIES LIKE SHOPPING

If possible, plan your week so that you do not need to shop on Sunday. Shopping is not bad in and of itself, but not doing this on Sunday will give you time and space for some of the other ideas mentioned. Sunday is also a good day to pray about what gift to give someone else or to determine what donation to make to a charity or other good cause.

RECONCILE

Are there any unresolved tensions or differences in your life or in the life of anyone in your family? Sunday is a good time to stop, speak to them, and work toward understanding and reconciliation. Do you need to ask for anyone's forgiveness? Do you need to forgive anyone who has asked it of you?

Keeping Sunday as Sabbath “brings everyday work to a halt and provides respite. It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2172). Whatever you do to honor Sunday as the Lord's Day, may it help you to be more receptive to the abundant love of the Lord!



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