



## LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN

OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP  
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### GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND CATECHISTS

These guidelines are provided for pastors and catechists to guide the practice of the *Liturgy of the Word with Children* in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

The introduction to the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* offers the important reminder:

Christ's particular care for children teaches us that they are capable of welcoming God's call and responding to it. Children's human and, therefore, religious experience is complete and whole in itself and is not determined simply by their potential for adulthood. The fullest reality of the liturgical assembly is children and adults together—not separate celebrations which run the risk of diminishing the place of children in the liturgical assembly (*Lectionary for Masses with Children*, Introduction, 54).

However, on certain occasions, if the Pastor judges this as opportune and beneficial to the children, a separate *Liturgy of the Word with Children* may take place (*Directory for Masses with Children*, 17))

## IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN

- The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* requires prepared catechists who can also lead liturgical prayer and reflect publicly on the Word of God.
- The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* is intended for baptized children who have not yet received their First Holy Communion.
- The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* includes the various elements of the Liturgy of the Word including: biblical texts, a reflection, the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer, all suitably adapted for the engagement of the children. The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* also includes the various signs associated with the Liturgy of the Word, including incense and candles; as well as the gestures and postures, including processions, sitting and standing, the signing at the Gospel and bowing during the Profession of Faith. Silence and song are also a part of the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*.
- The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* takes place on occasional Sundays, perhaps twice a month, and typically not on Solemnities, like Christmas and Easter.
- The *Liturgy of the Word with Children* takes place in a room separate from the nave and appropriately furnished with a suitable stand for the Lectionary and chairs for all participants.

## OUTLINE FOR THE LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN

### **Dismissal from the Assembly**

Families with children participating in the *Liturgy of the Word with Children* should be encouraged to sit near the front of the assembly. After the Collect of the Mass, the priest celebrant dismisses the catechist and the children for the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*. The dismissal does not include a blessing; rather, the catechist and children come forward for the dismissal with one of the texts given below. The celebrant may hand the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* to the catechist. [This Lectionary is not carried in the entrance procession nor does it return with the children after the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*.] The procession of the catechist and children to the place for the *Liturgy of the Word*

*with Children* may be accompanied by a suitable acclamation or instrumental music.

The priest celebrant says these or similar words:

*Receive this book of readings  
and proclaim God's word faithfully  
to the children entrusted to your care (LMC, 8 A).*

Or,

*My dear children,  
you will now go to hear God's word,  
to praise God in song,  
and to reflect on the wonderful things God has done for us.  
We will await your return  
so that together we may celebrate the Eucharist (LMC, 8 B).*

### **Greeting**

The children should be greeted and welcomed by the catechist for the celebration of the Word of God. Elements of the Introductory Rites should not be repeated. This greeting and welcome may include an invitation to silence, a sung acclamation, and/or an introduction to the readings of the Sunday. The welcome should include the placement of the Lectionary on the stand for the celebration of the Word of God.

### **Reading of the Holy Word of God**

The readings for the Sunday from the Lectionary for Masses with Children are to be used. All of the readings should be proclaimed. However, if necessary, for the sake of comprehension, there may be only two readings. The Gospel, however, is never omitted. The children should stand for the Gospel. If at all possible, the Responsorial Psalm and the Acclamation before the Gospel should be sung.

Those selected to read the biblical texts and lead the singing of the Responsorial Psalm and Acclamation should have competence in this liturgical ministry and in most cases will be other catechists. Children, if adequately prepared, may also read the biblical texts.

## **Reflection**

The catechist then gives a reflection on the Sunday readings. This reflection should draw out the meaning of the Word of God, apply it to the lives of the children and help them to unite themselves to the offering of Jesus in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

## **Creed**

The Profession of Faith, making use of the Apostles' Creed, is fittingly included in the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*. The children stand for the Profession of Faith.

## **Universal Prayer**

The Universal Prayer or the Prayer of the Faithful is to be included in the *Liturgy of the Word with Children* following the pattern given in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. The Universal Prayer, suitably adapted for the children, forms the children to pray as baptized members of the Church for the Church, for the needs of others and for one another. The catechist introduces the Universal Prayer by inviting the children to lift their prayers to God our Father. The sequence of petitions includes the needs of the Church, public officials and the salvation of the world, those oppressed by any need, and for the local community. The catechist concludes with a prayer directed to God the Father asking the intercession of Jesus His Son and our Savior. It is best if the Universal Prayer is prepared in advance. A sung response fosters greater participation.

## **Return to the Assembly**

The Liturgy of the Word at Mass leads us to the offering of Jesus in the Eucharistic Prayer. The catechist, as a conclusion to the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*, instructs the children to bring themselves with what they heard and learned from God's Word and unite themselves to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

The children return to the assembly at the conclusion of the *Liturgy of the Word with Children*. This occurs at the beginning of the Preparation of the Gifts. The children are led into the church by the catechist in an orderly and reverent way to reassume their places with their parents and guardians. Parents and guardians guide their children in their participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites of the Mass.

## **Important Resources**

*Lectionary for Masses with Children* Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York 1993.  
*Directory for Masses with Children* Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship 1973.