

Contents

[**Introduction: The Mass** 3](#_Toc166501305)

[**Aim of this Document** 4](#_Toc166501306)

[**The Mass: The Principle of Invitation** 5](#_Toc166501307)

[**The Mass: The Principle of Accompaniment** 6](#_Toc166501308)

[**The Mass: The Principle of Formation** 7](#_Toc166501309)

[**The Mass: The Four Lenses** 9](#_Toc166501310)

[Lens: Season 9](#_Toc166501311)

[Lens: Scripture 11](#_Toc166501312)

[Lens: Senses 13](#_Toc166501313)

[Lens: Structure 16](#_Toc166501314)

[**The Mass: Frequently Asked Questions** 33](#_Toc166501315)

[References 37](#_Toc166501316)

# **Introduction: The Mass**

“At the heart of the life of the Catholic Church has always been the celebration of the Eucharist, or the Mass, as Catholics often call it. Taking part in the Mass is the hallmark of the Catholic, central and crucial to our Catholic identity.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Mass is the central and most important aspect of the Catholic faith, described as the ‘source and summit of the Christian life’[[2]](#footnote-2) which means that it is the foundation from which all other aspects of the faith flow, and the highest point to which the Christian life aspires. The Mass is where the Catholic faithful connect most deeply with Jesus as they encounter his real, living presence through the consecration of bread and wine into his Body and Blood[[3]](#footnote-3). It is through the Eucharist that Catholics feel united with Jesus and his sacrifice and also with each other, as the people of God gathered in worship.

The Mass is rich in meaning and tradition and is central to the Catholic faith. The Eucharist (or Mass) is the sacrament with which Catholics are most familiar. In their experience it is a beautiful and wonderful sacrament, often the centre of their spirituality. The CCC says it is ‘a source of inexhaustible richness’. Sometimes this sacrament can be misunderstood or underappreciated as there is so much to know about it, but this cannot be imparted in one or even many documents. Instead it is something to be lived and experienced.

# **Aim of this Document**

Welcome to this guide aimed at supporting schools planning and preparing for the celebration of Mass. These guidelines are designed to offer practical advice for planning both in-school Masses and those held in local churches. They are not intended to be a comprehensive manual on celebrating the Eucharist, nor do they override any authoritative Church documents or provide the depth of guidance provided in the Prayer and Liturgy Directory (PLD). Instead, they focus on key aspects of Eucharistic celebrations and aim to ensure that those involved are attentive to the teachings and requirements of the Church. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) provides authoritative guidelines and norms for the celebration of the Mass in the Catholic Church and this document merely aims to assist in applying those norms to a school context in a practical way.

These guidelines are applicable to both primary and secondary schools. They draw upon fantastic work by the Diocese of Leeds and the Diocese of Nottingham for which we are incredibly grateful. The purpose of every school Mass is to unite everyone present more closely to Christ, to deepen their love for him and for others. It is hoped these guidelines will help staff and pupils to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Mass, making it even more meaningful for everyone involved in the school community.

A school Mass may be celebrated by a priest, a bishop or the Cardinal. The term ‘celebrant’ has been used throughout this document and refers to whichever member of the clergy is celebrating the Mass. There is guidance in the FAQ section about things to consider when Mass is being celebrated by a Bishop.

# **The Mass: The Principle of Invitation**

Jesus initiated his ministry by extending an invitation to his disciples to follow him. He called them by name and invited them into a deeper relationship with him, offering them the opportunity to be part of his mission. His disciples were from diverse backgrounds and they responded to Jesus in various ways. This diversity is also present in our school communities, highlighting the importance of being invitational and inclusive, whilst respecting the identity and unique dignity of all involved.

When considering our preparation for celebrating Mass, it is important to maintain an inclusive approach, but to also be mindful of the significance of what is taking place for the Catholic faithful. Catholic schools are not parishes, where those choosing to attend are doing so through a conscious decision to engage in prayer and liturgy. In a Catholic school there will often be pupils and staff present who are not baptised and who do not share the fundamental beliefs of the Catholic Church. An invitational approach ensures that Masses are open to all pupils, staff and when appropriate their families, regardless of their faith background. If pupils and staff who are not Catholic accept the invitation to participate in the Mass, discussions should take place beforehand about how they can respectfully enter, be present and participate in a way that does not compromise the integrity of their own beliefs. More about responding to the invitation to participate in the celebration of Mass can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/AssemblyC.pdf).

## Questions to consider:

*Are all Masses by invitation or are there some Masses you expect the vast majority of the school community to attend unless they have formally requested to withdraw?*

*How might you manage a large group of pupils who refuse the invitation to Mass?*

*What are some of the diverse ways in which your school community has responded to the invitation to Mass?*

*How have these responses shaped your future preparations?*

*How does your invitation to Mass convey to the school community that this is the source and summit of the Catholic faith?*

*How do you ensure the integrity of the pupils in your school who are of other religions during the celebration of Mass?*

# **The Mass: The Principle of Accompaniment**

Jesus did not only invite his disciples to follow him; he walked alongside them, accompanying them. He listened to their varied concerns and questions providing answers tailored to their individual needs. He shared in their joys and sorrows, patiently answering their questions and helping them to grow in faith. In Catholic schools we too are provided with a unique opportunity and privilege to walk alongside pupils, to accompany them on their faith journey. We know that just like the disciples, they all have different starting points on the journey and it is important for us to be sensitive to this, particularly in our approach to the Mass.

It is important to respect the integrity of all members of our school communities, which includes understanding that it may not be appropriate for some members to be asked to pray or participate in particular liturgical actions that conflict with their own beliefs. (a fuller discussion relating to ‘participation’ can be found on P11 of the PLD)

While fully appreciating the rationale for members not wanting to actively participate, schools must also use pastoral judgement to ensure that we are also authentically accompanying those who do wish to play an active role in our liturgical celebrations with integrity and sincerity, regardless of their starting point.

Nevertheless, in our dealings with people, we must not lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes. The defence of objective truth is not the only expression of this charity; it also includes kindness, patience, understanding, tenderness, and encouragement. Therefore, we cannot become judges who only deny, reject, and exclude**.[[4]](#footnote-4)**

## Questions to consider:

*How do you consider the differing start points of your school community in relation to the celebration of Mass?*

*What are the ways you accompany your pupils and staff before Mass?*

*What are the ways you accompany your pupils and staff during Mass?*

*What are the ways you accompany your pupils and staff following the celebration of Mass?*

*How do you accompany the families of your pupils in relation to the celebration of Mass, particularly those families who are not of the Catholic faith?*

*How do your sensitively accompany those pupils who are not Catholic but wish to participate in ministries in Mass that are reserved for practising Catholics, such as altar serving?*

# **The Mass: The Principle of Formation**

Jesus called and walked beside his disciples, but it was not a directionless journey. He recognised where they were in their journey and taught them through parables, miracles, and personal interactions. He challenged them to deepen their understanding of God's kingdom and live out their faith in practical ways. Ultimately, he led them towards a destination, salvation. Our Catholic schools also seek to call, accompany and form our pupils so they are ‘directed toward an ideal goal which goes beyond the limitations of anything human’[[5]](#footnote-5).

The Catholic Church emphasises the importance of providing formation about the Mass as it rests at the heart of the Catholic faith. This formation may involve religious education about the main rites and prayers in the Mass, but for those who are Catholic it will also involve catechesis to support pupils preparing to actively, consciously and authentically participate in the Mass.

The Church encourages a way of teaching called mystagogical catechesis, where instead of just learning facts, people *experience* the mysteries of the Mass. The Mass itself teaches us about these mysteries and shows how they connect to our daily lives. This experience becomes transformative, shaping how we think and act as we live out our faith. Formation is helped by being in the context of a supportive faith community and is a life-long process, which is why it is always important as Catholic schools that we are directing people back towards their parish. They will leave our schools but we need to help them to find a spiritual home that will always be there for them.

Those who are involved in liturgical ministries in the Mass, such as servers, lectors (readers), extraordinary ministers of the eucharist, ‘hold a special place in these celebrations’ as they assist the celebrant in the sacred liturgy[[6]](#footnote-6). Formation should help the ministers to understand the deeper meaning and symbolism of the Mass so they understand the spiritual and theological significance of their role. For this reason it is essential that pupils are not asked to ‘help’ at Mass, at the last minute and without any opportunity for formation. Formation necessarily goes beyond the mere mechanics of the roles, although it is important that ministers do know how to carry out their ministries well and with reverence and devotion.

It is important for Catholic schools to provide formation opportunities for members of the Catholic faithful maintaining a distinct Catholic identity and mission[[7]](#footnote-7). Catholic schools are also called, however, to be welcoming to those who do not share the Catholic faith, fully respecting their religious freedom and conscience.[[8]](#footnote-8) This welcome involves respecting diversity and adopting a ‘listening attitude to engage in a constructive dialogue’[[9]](#footnote-9). The Mass remains central to the life of the Catholic school but is open to participation by all members of the school community irrespective of their religious belief, in a spirit of inclusion and mutual enrichment.

## Questions to consider:

*How does your school provide formation for Mass for staff and pupils?*

*How does your school provide formation for Mass for those who will be liturgical ministers?*

*How do pupils and staff develop an understanding of how significant the Mass is for Catholics and what sets this apart from all other prayer celebrations?*

*How are the members of your community who are receiving Holy Communion during Mass, helped to prepare and understand for the significance of what they are undertaking?*

*How are you as a school pointing the members of your community back to their parishes, so they have a sense of belonging to the wider Church?*

*How might you work with your local parish community in the formation of staff and pupils?*

*How are the formation opportunities you provide built upon each year?*

# **The Mass: The Four Lenses**

When planning the celebration of a school Mass, it is useful to consider the four lenses:

-Season

-Scripture

-Senses

-Season

# Lens: Season

Holy Church celebrates the saving work of Christ on prescribed days in the course of the year with sacred remembrance. Each week, on the day called the Lord's Day, she commemorates the Resurrection of the Lord, which she also celebrates once a year in the great Paschal Solemnity, together with his blessed Passion. In fact, throughout the course of the year the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ and observes the birthdays of the Saints[[10]](#footnote-10).

Consideration of the Church's seasons and the liturgical year reveals a vibrant calendar filled with feasts, memorials, and celebrations that unite us to the Universal Church. To navigate this rich tapestry, we rely on the [Diocesan Ordo](https://rcdow.org.uk/att/files/liturgical%20calendar/liturgical%20calendar%202024.pdf), a vital resource outlining our diocesan calendar of celebrations and guide for formal liturgies. Consulting the Ordo before preparing for Mass offers valuable insights into the season, feast day, readings, and any other pertinent details.

Observing the liturgical calendar within the Catholic Church fosters unity by providing a shared rhythm of liturgy worldwide, centred on Christ's life and teachings. Therefore any celebration of Mass within the Catholic school should always be attentive to the liturgical season as this will both enrich the spiritual experience and deepen understanding of the Church's calendar. Readings should ideally be of the day and themes should correspond with liturgical seasons and feasts. For example, a Mass focusing on "light" might be celebrated during Advent, "forgiveness" during Lent, and "joy" during Eastertide. It is important to adhere to the liturgical calendar and to mark the feasts of saints whenever appropriate e.g. the feast of the patron saint.

The liturgical season is reflected in many ways within the celebration of Mass including through the vestments worn by the clergy, the colour of the altar frontal as well as hangings and symbols displayed within the space, such as an Advent wreath. Scripture readings within the Lectionary and the related homily should align with the themes of the liturgical season as should any music or hymns chosen. For example, during Advent, readings anticipate the coming of Christ; during Lent, there is an emphasis on repentance and preparation for Easter; during Ordinary Time various aspects of Jesus' teachings and ministry are explored and this should all try to be reflected in the prayers written and music chosen. The Prayer of the Faithful is also a time to reflect the liturgical season, but also what is happening within the community at this particular time e.g. prayers for those sitting examinations.

Feast days are celebrated with greater solemnity than weekday Masses, and schools may anticipate the celebration of feasts and solemnities that fall on Sundays but it is appreciated that school Masses have to be scheduled based on local circumstances and the availability of clergy. It may not always be feasible therefore to have a celebration of Mass in school on a holy day of obligation but it is recommended an effort is made to celebrate the occasion in some way for example, with a Celebration of the Word. It is important to note that the obligation is for the individual to attend Mass, *not* for schools to provide Mass. Pupils and staff always have the opportunity to attend evening parish Masses if necessary.

In schools where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, regular Masses (twice a month) should be celebrated to highlight the Real Presence. During school holidays, measures should be taken to ensure the respectful treatment of the Blessed Sacrament through either consuming the host or transporting to a local parish tabernacle.

## Questions to consider:

*Other than the obvious colour of vestment and altar cloths, how does your school Mass reflect the liturgical season?*

*The scripture and prayers will reflect the liturgical season if taken from the Lectionary, but do your prayers and accompanying music also reflect the current liturgical season?*

*If you have agreed with the celebrant to not use the readings of the day, how are you ensuring the liturgical seasons is still being reflected in your Mass?*

# Lens: Scripture

The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God’s word and at the table of the eucharist: from the one it grows in wisdom and the other in holiness[[11]](#footnote-11)

Scripture is regarded by Christians as the inspired word of God. Through the pages of scripture, God reveals himself, his will, his promises, and his plan for humanity. The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of scripture forming an integral part of liturgical celebrations and this of course includes the Mass. The structure of the Mass usually includes the proclamation of scripture readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament, and Gospel, followed by reflections and prayers inspired by these readings. The readings during Mass are read from a Lectionary, not a Bible. A Lectionary is composed of the readings and responsorial psalm for each Mass of the year (Sundays, weekdays and special occasions). The readings are divided by the day or the theme (baptism, marriage, vocations, etc.) rather than according to the books of the Bible. Introductions and conclusions have been added to each reading[[12]](#footnote-12). It is recommended that each school purchases a Lectionary for Mass, however this may not always be possible due to financial constraints, so consideration should be given to alternative arrangements and they should be discussed with the celebrant beforehand.

The readings proclaimed during Mass are often the same throughout the Catholic Church which helps foster a sense of unity and communion among Catholics worldwide. This shared encounter with scripture helps to connect Catholics across cultures, languages, and geographical locations, reinforcing their sense of belonging to the universal Church. For this reason it is important for school Masses to follow the cycle of readings in the Lectionary wherever possible. If it is a special celebration, such as a feast day or anniversary, or the start or end of year, suitable readings can be taken from the Lectionary but this should be discussed with the celebrant. When appropriate, children may participate in reading the first or second reading or the psalm. Where it is a longer reading it may be permissible to distribute parts among pupils as long as this does not undermine the dignity of the text. It is *never* acceptable to substitute scripture with any other texts during Mass, whatever their source.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh[[13]](#footnote-13) therefore, encountering scripture is a means of encountering Christ himself. The Gospels, focus on the life of Jesus and are therefore of particular significance. This significance is reflected in the Mass through the gesture of the ‘little cross’ made with the thumb on forehead, lips and heart, through the standing for and singing of the Gospel Acclamation and through the Gospel reading only ever being proclaimed by a deacon, priest or bishop. Through the proclamation of the Gospel during Mass, Christ is present in the word, inviting the faithful to respond to his message and follow him. This is particularly powerful within Holy Mass, as directly following the Liturgy of the Word is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where Christ is believed to be truly present and received in the Eucharist.

The readings are important because Christ is present through the word - they are the word of God. The readings help us to get ready for the presence of God in the Eucharist also[[14]](#footnote-14).

As for the translation of Scriptures, the current Lectionary for all Masses in England and Wales uses the Jerusalem Bible translation and the Grail Psalter, although in Advent 2024 a new Lectionary using the English Standard Version – Catholic Edition and the Abbey Psalms and Canticles will be introduced. More information on approved translations can be found on the Liturgy Office website and it is important to note that there are also approved Lectionaries for Masses with children which use more age-appropriate language for younger pupils. It is important to note that any texts (whether spoken or sung) using the Hebrew Tetragrammaton YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah) are highly offensive to people of the Jewish Faith, therefore this name is not to be read, sung or prayed in the liturgy.

The stories, teachings, and wisdom contained in scripture are a source of inspiration and guidance for Catholics. They provide essential instruction and guidance for living a Christian life. By hearing and reflecting on scripture passages during Mass, the congregation may be nurtured in their faith, strengthened in their resolve to follow Christ, and equipped with the wisdom needed to navigate the challenges of life.

## Questions to consider:

*How do you convey how precious the Word of God is during your preparation for and during the celebration of Mass?*

*Do your Celebrations of the Word help pupils to understand the place of scripture in the Mass?*

*What formation does your school provide for those who will be lectors (readers)?*

# Lens: Senses

Existential engagement happens — in continuity with and consistent with the method of Incarnation — in a sacramental way. The Liturgy is done with things that are the exact opposite of spiritual abstractions: bread, wine, oil, water, fragrances, fire, ashes, rock, fabrics, colours, body, words, sounds, silences, gestures, space, movement, action, order, time, light. The whole of creation is a manifestation of the love of God, and from when that same love was manifested in its fullness in the cross of Jesus, all of creation was drawn toward it[[15]](#footnote-15).

In the Catholic school the aim for each celebration of Mass is the full, active, and conscious participation of everyone present. The celebration needs to be as accessible and inclusive to as many people as possible according to their age and capacity. This may include incorporating introductions explaining the theme, using the Lectionary for Masses with Children, providing resources to aid responses and through homilies that seek to enlighten and inspire. The structured format of the Mass incorporates various rituals, gestures, and symbols that deepen its spiritual significance and facilitate worship. From the Sign of the Cross at the beginning to the final blessing and dismissal, each element of the Mass is imbued with meaning and serves to draw participants into closer communion with God.

Younger pupils may engage more with the sensory aspects of the Mass, such as vibrant colours, music and the physical gestures such as genuflecting, kneeling, standing and making the Sign of the Cross. These sensory experiences can help them feel connected to the Mass and understand its importance in a tangible way. Older pupils may appreciate the sensory elements on a deeper level, recognising their symbolic significance and how they contribute to the overall worship experience. They may also be more attuned to the emotional and spiritual impact of sensory stimuli, such as the beauty of sacred art or the solemnity of incense. The Mass speaks to everyone using the language of the senses, offering a rich variety of gestures, prayers, songs, and movements to engage all who are present.

See:

Visual elements such as sacred art, icons, statues, stained glass windows and liturgical decorations create a reverent atmosphere and provide focal points for prayer and reflection. These items may be readily available in a church, but not always in a school. Consideration may need to be given to how the school environment can be enhanced, if Mass in church is not an option. Any suitable space in the school can be used if a church or chapel is not available, but there should be a recognisable altar/table, lectern (or ambo) and if possible a presidential chair (a chair for the celebrant). Ideally these items should only be used for the celebration of Mass. PowerPoint displays can be useful when assisting the congregation in making liturgical responses and singing but they should not overshadow the liturgy and always be used respectfully and with discretion.

The movements and gestures of the liturgical ministers, including bishops, priests, deacons, altar servers, and readers, convey the sacredness and solemnity of the Mass. Postures during school Masses include standing, sitting, kneeling, and bowing, reflecting the significance of what is taking place in the Mass at the time. It is recommended that school Masses follow the pattern of posture used in parish churches, with adaptations as necessary, based on the circumstances of the celebration and the school environment.

The use of liturgical colours, vestments, and altar frontals reflect the liturgical season and add richness to the visual experience of the Mass. The choice of colours for vestments, altar frontals, and lectern covers in school Masses follows the liturgical calendar:

* White is used during Easter and Christmas seasons, celebrations of the Lord (except His Passion), feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Holy Angels, Saints (except Martyrs), solemnities of Trinity Sunday, All Saints, Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, feasts of Saint John the Evangelist, Chair of Saint Peter, and Conversion of Saint Paul.
* Red is used on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost Sunday, celebrations of the Lord's Passion, feasts of Apostles, Evangelists, and martyred Saints.
* Green is used in Ordinary Time.
* Purple is used during Advent, Lent, and for Reconciliation. It may also be worn for Funerals.

Hear:

Listening to scripture readings, prayers, hymns, chants, and the homily helps members of the congregation to receive God's word, respond in faith and enter into the mystery of Christ’s presence.

Music, including hymns and chants, enhance the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the Mass, lifting hearts and minds to God. Singing holds significant importance in school Masses, particularly when celebrated with children. Choirs can support the congregation in singing, but they should not replace it. The music chosen should be in harmony with the liturgy, so it would not be appropriate to sing, for example, hymns about receiving Holy Communion during the Entrance Procession. Care should always be taken that the words sung are faithful to Catholic teaching and it should not be assumed that just because a song is Christian that this will necessarily be the case. Further guidance to assist with choosing music for Mass can be found on P38 of the PLD.

It is especially fitting for the acclamations of the Mass, particularly those within the Eucharistic Prayer, to be sung. The Music Committee of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales provides guidance on which parts of the Mass should be sung according to the nature of the celebration and can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Music/Singing.pdf). Musical settings commonly used in parishes across the Diocese should also be learned and sung in school Masses. More information about the Ministry of Music can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/MusicianC.pdf).

Drama, dance, and presentations do not have an automatic place within the celebration of the Eucharist. A dramatic presentation of a scripture reading, a thanksgiving dance or a powerpoint presentation about school events may take place before the Mass begins or after the Mass has concluded but is not appropriate during Mass.

Bells are rung during consecration to create a joyful noise to the Lord. This draws our attention to the miracle taking place on the altar.

Think:

During the Mass, those present are called to participate but this does not just mean through words and gestures, but also refers to the interior and how they engage internally with what is happening during the Mass. We are called to think about the words in the prayers that are being said, to prepare our hearts and say sorry for where we have fallen short during the Penitential Rite. We are called to listen attentively to the readings from scripture, allowing the Word of God to speak to our lives and inspire a commitment to faith. We are invited to make our own personal prayers and intentions and to pray for the needs of others and to thank God for the blessings in our lives.

With hearts prepared to receive the Eucharist, we have the opportunity to approach the sacrament with reverence and humility ready to receive spiritual nourishment and transformation. The grace received through the Eucharist should help to empower us to live out our vocation to witness to Christ’s love in the world.

If people are called to participate fully in the liturgy then it important that they can comprehend and appreciate the meaning of what is happening and therefore it is important that effort is made to ensure the liturgy is appropriate to the age and development of those in attendance.

Do:

Touch: The physical act of making the Sign of the Cross, genuflecting, kneeling, and standing at various points in the Mass helps to engages the whole body in worship and draws attention to the significance of key moments within the liturgy. Exchanging the Sign of Peace fosters a sense of unity and fellowship amongst the congregation.

Taste: Receiving the consecrated host and the Precious Blood during Holy Communion connects us in a tangible way with Christ and also spiritually nourishes those who receive.

Smell: The use of incense during Mass symbolises prayers rising to God and adds a fragrant element to the liturgical environment, enhancing the sense of sacredness.

Questions to consider:

*How does your school consider the senses when planning a Mass?*

*How is it made obvious to the members of the school community that the celebration of Mass is significantly different from anything else that takes place in school?*

*Can you discuss with your celebrant how you can be creative in emphasising the distinctness of Mass in the life of the school in an appropriate way?*

*If Mass is being celebrated in your assembly hall or in a classroom what can you do to make it feel distinctly different from any other occasion?*

# Lens: Structure

The liturgical books, such as the Roman Missal and the Lectionary, set out the structure to be followed, the words to be spoken, the gestures to be performed, and the symbols to be used when celebrating a liturgy. The possibility for some creativity and adaptation remains but they have to be exercised within the parameters authorised by the liturgical books[[16]](#footnote-16).

School Masses should closely mirror the structure and content of Masses celebrated with adult congregations. The structure of the Mass has been carefully developed over centuries of Catholic tradition, guided by the teachings of the Church and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This structured format ensures continuity and consistency in worship practices across Catholic communities worldwide. The structured format of the Mass creates a sense of continuity and familiarity that is comforting and reassuring for the Catholic faithful, especially within the context of a school community. Regardless of individual differences or personal circumstances, everyone can find solace and strength in the structured rhythms of the Mass.

There are however specific considerations for Masses involving school children. Each Mass should be meticulously prepared in advance, including prayers, songs, readings, and intentions for intercessions. Ideally, pupils should be involved in this preparation process[[17]](#footnote-17). While adaptations may be necessary due to the age of the children as outlined in the Lectionary for Masses with Children, the overall format should not deviate significantly from the Order of Mass for adults[[18]](#footnote-18).

The celebrant is responsible for celebrating Mass in accordance with the norms of the Church and it is essential to prepare the Mass to facilitate this under his guidance. The successful celebration of school Masses hinges on a strong working relationship between clergy and school staff and collaborating with the celebrant in advance ensures there are no misunderstandings. While the General Instruction on the Roman Missal assumes that choices are made by the celebrant, it also emphasises sensitivity to the congregation's circumstances and collaborative decision-making with other ministers. During the Mass, the celebrant should prioritise the dignity, clarity, and simplicity of his actions and gestures to ensure he is easily understood[[19]](#footnote-19).

## Questions to consider:

*How does your school involve pupils with the planning of Mass?*

*How does your school liaise with the celebrant?*

*Have you discussed with the celebrant in advance of the Mass the context of your school i.e. do they know that may pupils and staff members may come forward for a blessing?*

*Have you sent your Order of Service to the celebrant in advance to ensure expectations are aligned?*

*If there are certain items required for Mass that the school does not have e.g. sacred vessels, have you informed the celebrant so he can either bring with, or you can borrow from a local church?*

*If the celebrant is new to the school, how will you ensure that your expectations are aligned?*

## **In Preparation - Before Mass**

Environment

The church is the main setting for children's eucharistic celebrations, but sometimes logistical constraints make this impractical. In such cases, it is important to create a suitable worship space elsewhere. An assembly hall or classroom can be transformed into a sacred space and be made to feel very different, with careful attention to style, colours, artwork, and lighting, all of which contribute to setting the right tone and distinguishing this time as special. The key is to always align with the liturgical season, scripture, and any liturgical feasts being observed – consult the Ordo for guidance. More information about preparing the liturgical environment for Mass can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Environment.pdf).

(If Mass is being celebrated at school, please ensure there is a space for the celebrant to put on their vestments. This may need to be a considerable space depending on how many clergy are in attendance.)

Atmosphere

Before Mass begins, it is important to ensure that the space is prepared, with candles lit and everything in order. This sets the scene for the solemnity of the occasion. To maintain a reverent atmosphere, consider playing gentle music as the congregation enter, helping them transition into the mood for the Mass and reinforcing that this area is now a holy and sacred space. It is also beneficial to help pupils understand the proper way to enter the Mass space with reverence. By entering in silence and, if practical, reverently genuflecting or bowing, people can better appreciate the sacredness of the Mass they are about to participate in. If there is no tabernacle present, pupils should be reminded that when approaching or passing the altar, they should bow. As part of the formation for ministers especially those who serve as altar servers, lectors, or gift-bearers, they should be reminded of the significance of bowing before the altar during Mass.

Introduction

Prior to the start of Mass, an introduction may be led by young people or a member of the staff. This serves to welcome those gathered and establish the overarching tone and theme of the Mass. The aim of this introduction is *‘that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily’[[20]](#footnote-20).* During the introduction, a warm welcome should be extended to the congregation and any special guests. The theme of the Mass should be introduced, whether it pertains to the liturgical season, a specific saint's feast day, or the intentions of the Mass. This sets the stage for active participation by preparing the congregation to engage as a community. Furthermore, the introduction may include commentary to explain the significance of selected readings and how they relate to the theme of the Mass. It is also an opportunity to encourage reflection on a particular intention throughout the Mass.

Additionally, the introduction provides an opportunity to incorporate objects or symbols that enhance reflection on the Mass theme or season. These could include artwork by young people, symbols representing the theme, or religious icons. Care should be taken to integrate these elements thoughtfully, either by creating a designated prayer area or explaining existing symbols before Mass begins. These additions should not overshadow the significance of the altar or detract from its central role in the celebration. Ideally, these supplementary elements should be presented at a separate site to maintain the focus on the altar. For example: ‘We place a sleeping bag to remind us that Saint Vincent de Paul cared for those who were homeless and in need, and that we should follow his example’. It is important to ensure these objects are brought up prior to the beginning of Mass or during the Entrance Procession but *not* during the Offertory procession, which should be reserved only for the bread and wine.

## Questions to consider:

*If the school is celebrating Mass in a church are staff familiar with the building, where pupils sit, where they should sit, where members of the public may be sitting?*

*If Mass is being celebrated in school what is happening in the space immediately beforehand?*

*How do you consider practical features of the room such as space and temperature to ensure comfort and avoid unrest?*

*How much time do you have to set up, does this include a walkthrough in the space for those involved in ministries?*

*What conversations have taken place with pupils and staff before entering the space where Mass is to be celebrated to ensure everyone is clear about expectations?*

*How do you provide an authentic welcome to everyone present that acknowledges their starting points and helps to ensure Mass is meaningful for them?*

*Have appropriate staff been prepared in advance for how to model gestures and responses in the Mass?*

## **In Preparation - During Mass**

The Mass is a cohesive celebration comprising four integral parts: a beginning (Introductory Rite) and an end (Concluding Rite), along with two central pillars—the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Together, these components constitute a single act of worship, and it is essential that the structure of the Mass is always maintained.

Each part of the Mass will now be explored, with an explanation of the significance of what is happening and what should be considered when planning. More detailed planning sheets are hyperlinked at the relevant points.

[I INTRODUCTORY RITES](#_Entrance_Procession)

[II LITURGY OF THE WORD](#LOW)

[III LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST](#LOE)

[IV CONCLUDING RITES](#Concluding)

**The Introductory Rites**

Ordinarily the congregation stands from the beginning of the Mass until after the Collect (Opening Prayer) and everything that takes place within this time forms part of the Introductory Rites.

## Entrance Procession

As the Mass commences, the Entrance Procession is accompanied by a hymn, marking the beginning of the celebration. Led by the bishop/priest and ministers, including altar servers carrying the cross and candles, this procession serves as a symbolic gathering of the entire community. If it has not already taken place before Mass (discuss the most appropriate time with your celebrant in advance), it is an apt moment to introduce objects or symbols representing the occasion, placing them near the altar (their significance should have been explained beforehand in the Introduction). Incense, where appropriate, may also be part of this procession, adding to the solemnity of the occasion.

The standing of the congregation and the procession signifies the unity of the congregation as they prepare to meet Christ through the Word of God and Holy Communion. Throughout this process, music accompanies the entrance of the bishop/priest, deacons, altar servers, and ministers. The participation in the entrance hymn is a symbol of the congregation being united, coming to Mass from different places, cultures, ages but singing together with one voice, as the Body of Christ.

##

## Sign of the Cross and Greeting

The Mass begins with the Sign of the Cross and concludes with it too, during the final blessing. By invoking the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are acknowledging God's presence in the Holy Trinity and invite his grace to be with us throughout the celebration of Mass.

The celebrant greets the congregation with words from Sacred Scripture, “The Lord be with you” and we respond with a profound theological statement “and with your spirit”. When we respond in this way, we are not simply wishing the celebrant well but acknowledging his priestly soul and the fact that he is acting in the Person of Christ.

## Penitential Act

The Penitential Act helps us to self-reflect, humbly acknowledge our failings and seek God’s mercy and forgiveness. It is a time for us to prepare our hearts and minds for what we are about to participate in and receive. This forms a key part of all school Masses except when, on Ash Wednesday and the Presentation of the Lord, it is replaced with an alternative rite. The Penitential Act should follow one of the forms set out in the Roman Missal:

1. The Confiteor, or ‘I confess to Almighty God…’ prayer

2. A prayer led by the celebrant (C) with response (R) from the congregation:

C: Have mercy on us, O Lord

R: For we have sinned against you

C: Show us, O Lord, your mercy and love

R: And grant us your salvation

3. Three statements about Jesus’ love and mercy followed by the responses: ‘Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy’ (also referred to as Kyrie Eleison). To ask for God’s forgiveness, we use the words of the blind man who heard that Jesus passed by and knew he could not be cured himself, but needed the help of God as he began to shout in the middle of the crowd: “Lord, have mercy on me.”

A sign of contrition (saying sorry) such as the striking of the breast is a physical way of showing remorse and the need for God’s mercy. It was reemphasised in the revised translation of the Roman Missal and takes place at the point in the Confiteor when we say ‘through my fault, through my fault, through my own grievous fault’ emphasising the individual responsibility we each have for our sins. Pope Benedict described how seriously the gesture should be taken:

We point not at someone else but at ourselves as the guilty party, remains a meaningful gesture of prayer. … When we say mea culpa (through my fault), we turn, so to speak, to ourselves, to our own front door, and thus we are able rightly to ask forgiveness of God, the saints, and the people gathered around us, whom we have wronged[[21]](#footnote-21).

After the Penitential Act, the celebrant offers a prayer of absolution (forgiveness).

##

## Gloria

The Gloria is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. It reminds us of the angels' song on Christmas night and therefore the preference is that it should be sung by the entire congregation rather than merely spoken. The Gloria is a moment for us to stand together in unity to express gratitude for God's greatness and mercy. The Gloria is not included in ordinary weekday Masses but only on feast days, solemnities, Holy Days of Obligations, and Sundays (except during Lent) and so will not always be a feature of school Masses. See the Ordo for times when the Gloria is required.

##

## Collect

The opening prayer marks the moment when the celebrant invites us pray. The prayer connects us with the universal Church reminding us that wherever Mass is celebrated around the world, fellow believers are engaging in the same act of worship. Beginning with the words "Let us pray," the celebrant extends his hands as a sign of invitation. This is a moment of silence where we join together, asking the Lord for his help. At the end of the prayer, we respond "Amen." This prayer is called the ‘collect’ as the celebrant collects all the prayers we have prayed quietly in our hearts and sums them up in the Church's prayer to God our Father.

It is also permissible for the priest to adapt the presidential prayers to the needs of children, but this must preserve the purpose and substance of the prayers and avoid language foreign to the genre of presidential prayers, moral exhortation, or a childish manner of speech[[22]](#footnote-22).

## Questions to consider:

*How does your school ensure the pupils and staff know when to stand, sit or kneel, is this included within your Order of Service?*

*Will pupils be seated on chairs or on the floor and will this change your expectations of whether they should stand or kneel during the Mass?*

*How does your school ensure that pupils and staff know and can participate in the Mass responses?*

*Have you checked which Penitential Rite your celebrant intends to use, so that your Order of Service reflects this and confusion is avoided?*

**The Liturgy of the Word**

Expectant Listening

A profoundly special part of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Word. Here, we encounter God speaking directly to us and so ‘expectant listening’ is encouraged i.e. ‘*What message does God have for me through these readings?*’. Through listening carefully to the readings there is a hope that God will nourish our faith and help prepare us for the Eucharistic celebration to follow. Sometimes providing the readings in advance allows us to engage more meaningfully with the scripture. Providing a brief time of silence after each reading, can also enable reflection on God’s message for people individually and as a community.

## Readings

When preparing for the celebration of Mass, the diocesan Ordo should always be consulted to ensure the readings of the day are used.

The readings in the Mass take the following form:

The **first reading** is present for all celebrations of Mass. It usually comes from one of the books of the Old Testament. These texts remain important to Christians because they prepare us for Jesus' teachings and his coming. The first reading always connects directly to the Gospel reading that follows, showing how God's plan unfolds through history. This helps us to understand and appreciate the message of Jesus better. Sometimes the First reading is taken from one of the Letters in the New Testament and in the Easter Season it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles.

Following the first reading, there is always a **psalm**, usually from the Book of Psalms but sometimes a canticle from elsewhere in the Bible. Throughout the history of the Church, the psalms have always held great significance. They are considered to be the words of God, the words he gave his people to help them know how to communicate with him. Through the psalms, the congregation learn the language of prayer and deepen their connection with God. The psalm is sung or read by the psalmist, and is a response to the scripture that has just been read. The response is spoken or sung by the congregation. Psalms originated as songs sung by God's chosen people long before they were written down. Therefore, during Mass, it is preferred that the psalm be sung, even if with a simple melody. This can be done responsorially or sung collectively. Alternatively, if singing is not feasible, perhaps instrumental music could accompany the recitation of the verses, which can help those present to reflect on the words.

The **second reading** is taken from the New Testament, typically including the letters of Saint Paul, the Catholic Epistles, the book of Hebrews, or the Apocalypse. These writings come from the Apostles who were directly instructed by Jesus to guide and teach people after his departure. Fuelled by the Holy Spirit, they evangelised, spreading the good news far and wide. Their writings offer profound insights and wisdom and enrich our understanding of the Christian faith. This reading is usually only heard on Sundays and solemnities so may often not be a feature of school Masses.

Gospel Acclamation

During the Gospel Acclamation, we stand and sing to welcome the Good News of the Gospel. This moment is often accompanied by a procession of the Book of Gospels with candles and sometimes with incense. The person who read the scripture reading may stay at the lectern or ambo to lead the acclamation before the Gospel is proclaimed. It is important for the reader to step aside however before the celebrant and any altar servers arrive. The Gospel Acclamation is the way we greet the Good News through song or spoken words. In each of the liturgical seasons except for Lent, the Gospel acclamation is "Alleluia", which is a Hebrew word that means to "Praise God". So in this acclamation the we praise God and prepare our hearts to receive his word in the Gospel.

The Reading of the Holy Gospel

In the first reading, God communicates through his prophets; in the second, through His Apostles. Now, in the Gospel, he speaks directly through his Son, Jesus Christ. The reading of the Gospel is naturally the high point in the Liturgy of the Word as it is here that we encounter Jesus' own words, teachings, and healing actions. The term "gospel" signifies "good news," representing not merely a message but the person of Jesus Himself—the most extraordinary news imaginable!

Typically, we are seated during the Scripture reading or readings, but rise for the Gospel Acclamation and the Gospel reading, which is always read by a bishop, priest or deacon who announces, "A reading from the Holy Gospel according to (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)". We respond, "Glory to you, O Lord," while marking a cross with our thumb on our forehead, lips and chest. This gesture is a form of prayer, for the presence of the Word of God in the minds (forehead), words (lips), and hearts (chest) of those present.

The Gospel concludes with the declaration, "The Gospel of the Lord," to which the response from the congregations is "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." The Gospel acclamation may be sung again, particularly when there is a procession of candles and incense.

Adjustments for Young Children

The intention for Mass is ‘active and conscious participation’, so it is important that the scripture is appropriate for the age and capacity of those present. There may be slight adaptations to the readings required for Masses involving young children to help with their understanding, however, such modifications must be carefully considered. It is important to ensure that the essence and integrity of the passages always remain intact, preserving the intended message of divine revelation.

“If all the readings assigned to the day seem to be unsuited to the capacity of the children, it is permissible to choose readings or a reading either from the Lectionary for Mass or directly from the Bible, but taking into account the liturgical seasons… If, because of the limited capacity of the children, it seems necessary to omit one or other verse of a biblical reading, this should be done cautiously and in such a way ‘that the meaning of the text or the intent and, as it were, style of the Scriptures are not distorted’”[[23]](#footnote-23)

The readings taken from the Scriptures "form the main part of the liturgy of the word," so even in Masses celebrated with children, it is never permissible for the readings to be omitted[[24]](#footnote-24). If any adjustments to the readings are being considered, this should be discussed with the celebrant in good time beforehand.

To ensure clarity and ease of understanding, scripture should be proclaimed by a single voice. If the scripture given for the first or second reading is of a longer length, and has a number of voices or characters in, then this can be an opportunity to involve several young people in its reading, each taking a different character or voice or reading the part of narrator.

As part of formation, teachers may wish to share the scripture and ‘teach’ it before Mass so children can engage more deeply during Mass. This echoes the process of how adults might prepare for Mass by reading scripture ahead of time.

Reading the Word of God

In a church, the readings will be read from an Ambo or Lectern, directly from the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. In a school it is just as important the readings are treated in a way that demonstrates their sacredness and is appropriate to the reverence of the occasion. If reading from a Lectionary is not possible, individual pieces of paper should be avoided. Instead, consideration should be given to how readings can be read in a way that reflects the importance of these words for the worshipping community i.e. a beautifully adorned folder that is already on the lectern.

It is clearly indicated in the lectionary that when introducing the reading, the book of the Bible where the text is from is mentioned at the beginning. For example: A reading from the Book of Exodus. At the end of the Reading there is a pause and then the lector says, ‘The Word of the Lord’ to which the congregation enthusiastically responds: ‘Thanks be to God’. (Please note the lector does **not** say ‘*This is* the Word of the Lord’.

It is important that the scriptures are read clearly, by a confident reader. Young people will appreciate the opportunity to practice their readings. Providing them with an explanation of the meaning and context of what they are reading will help them to feel more comfortable and grow in confidence. If a microphone is needed then care should be taken to ensure it is well placed and easily adjustable by the reader, so that it does not become a distraction. More information about the Ministry of Reading can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/ReaderC.pdf).

Bible Translations

The Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has approved specific translations of the Bible for use during the Mass to ensure consistency and fidelity to the original text.

* English Standard Version – (the translation used in the Lectionary for Mass from Advent 2024)
* Jerusalem Bible (the translation that is currently used in Mass until Advent 2024)
* Revised Standard Version
* New Jerusalem Bible
* New Revised Standard Version
* Good News Bible

## The Homily

The term "homily" originates from a Greek word meaning "dialogue" or "conversation," and it is an important time in the Mass where the celebrant has the opportunity to break open the Word and help reveal the true meaning to those present. The Word of God is dynamic and alive and hopefully, through the homily, we can be guided as to how we can apply it to our own lives. During school Masses it is hoped that the homily will be suitable to the age and capacity of the pupils. The homily is only ever entrusted to ordained ministers, including deacons, priests and bishops.

Following the Homily, a brief moment of silence is encouraged so that there can be prayerful reflection on the message heard.

## The Profession of Faith

The Profession of Faith, known as the Creed, is a concise summary of Christian beliefs. There are two creeds within the Roman Missal and therefore part of the Mass i.e. the longer Nicene Creed and the shorter Apostles' Creed. The Directory of Masses for Children recommends the shorter Apostles Creed for use with children.

The Creed is usually recited by the whole congregation on Sundays but not in ordinary weekday Masses. The only time the Creed will be a feature of school Masses therefore is likely to be on Holy Days of Obligation and solemnities. As a congregation we stand to profess our faith together, at which time we should be reflecting on our own individual faith and relationship with God.

## The Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful, sometimes known as the Bidding Prayers, Intercessions or the Universal Prayer, is the time in Mass when we stand and turn to God and ask for his help with the lessons that learnt from the scripture we have listened to.

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the celebrant and then the intercessions are led by a member of the congregation. The entire congregation is invited to make a response at the end of each intercession.

There are four intentions included in the Roman Missal as general guidance for the Prayer of the Faithful:

1. For the needs of the Church;

2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;

3. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty;

4. For the local community.

When writing the intercessions, it is helpful to consider the scripture heard during the Mass, the liturgical season and the theme of the Mass.

To be clear, the intercessions are not prayers directed to God, but instead they are directed to the congregation, who are then given a period of silence to pray to God for that intention. The time of silence following each intercession, then is really important as this is the time for the actual prayer. This needs to be explained to the reader and to the congregation. At the end of the period of silence there is a plea to God to hear the prayers through words such as ‘Lord Hear Us’, followed by the congregation emphasising the plea by saying ‘Lord Graciously hear Us’.

At the end of the intentions, it is customary in England and Wales to pray for the personal intentions of the congregation and to ask for the intercession of Mary through the ‘Hail Mary’. The celebrant concludes the Prayer of the Faithful with a simple prayer and only once this has happened should the reader of the intercessions return to their seat.

More information about the preparing the Prayer of the Faithful can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Intercessions.pdf).

## Questions to consider:

*Do you help prepare pupils for the gestures in Mass by including them in other times of prayer, such as Celebrations of the Word, e.g. greeting the Gospel and the ‘little cross’ on head, lips and heart?*

*What preparation / unpacking of the scripture to be read at Mass can take place in advance to help prepare pupils and staff and ensure pupils are expectantly listening?*

*How as a school do you refer back to the message of the Gospel / homily to reinforce its meaning following the Mass?*

*If the Creed is being professed at this Mass, have you included the words within your Order of Service for those who may require help remembering the words?*

*How do you ensure the pupils reading The Prayer of the Faithful understand what they are reading and understand why it is important to allow time for the congregation to pray?*

*How do you ensure those who are reading scripture and the Prayer of the Faithful understand the significance of the silence during those times?*

**The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is a central part of the Mass, as it involves the preparation, consecration, and reception of the Eucharistic elements. “The liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist together form ‘one single act of worship’”[[25]](#footnote-25). In this part of the Mass we begin to prepare for the meal, just as Jesus asked his disciples to get ready for their Last Supper which he was going to eat with them before he was to die on the cross. What is done here is “in memory” of what Jesus did and we believe we are truly present there with him as he gave his life in sacrifice for us.

##

## Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts

During the preparation of the gifts, we are seated as everything needed for the Eucharistic offering is arranged. Altar servers often assist the celebrant in bringing items such as the Roman Missal and sacred vessels to the altar. Before Mass, sufficient altar breads and wine are prepared and placed on a table for procession. Members of the congregation then bring forward the gifts of bread and wine as an offering to God and a symbol of all the things we wish to offer to God through this Mass. Just as the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus, we pray that our lives may be transformed through participating in the Mass, to be more like him. In this way, we are active participants in the Mass, not just mere observers. We offer ourselves to God, our frailties, our sufferings, our joys, our whole self.

*Please note: The water is not brought forward in procession as it not made of human hands and cannot therefore be offered as a sacrifice. Instead the water should already be on the credence table.*

During the procession there may be singing of an appropriate hymn, instrumental music or it can simply be a time for silence. The celebrant receives the gifts, offers them to God the Father, and places them on the altar, preparing them for consecration.

 Besides money, gifts in kind and other real gifts for the poor are appropriate, but not token items that will be retrieved and returned to ordinary use after the celebration. If it is intended to make use of things that symbolise the particular work or identity of the assembly or occasion for celebration, these are best brought to the sanctuary as part of the Entrance Procession and displayed near the altar or other suitable place. They should not be brought in the Procession with the gifts of bread and wine*[[26]](#footnote-26)*.

## Prayer Over the Offerings

Following the presentation of the gifts, the celebrant bows toward the altar and silently offers a prayer, one of several moments during Mass where he communicates with God inaudibly. During this particular time, he prays, "*With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God*." This is an important time in the Mass as it shows that when the celebrant celebrates Mass, he is actually engaging in prayer. He is talking to God and not just performing empty rituals.

After receiving the gifts of bread and wine, the celebrant mixes water with the wine, which symbolises how God shares in the life of those present and how they share in his. The gifts are presented to God, and the celebrant invites us to join him in praying that God the Father will accept the gift offered.

## Eucharistic Prayer

At the Last Supper, Christ instituted the Sacrifice and Paschal meal that make the Sacrifice of the cross present in the Church. From the days of the Apostles the Church has celebrated that Sacrifice by carrying out what the Lord did and handed over to his disciples to do in his memory. Like him, the Church has taken bread and wine, given thanks to God over them, broken the bread, and shared the bread and cup of blessing as the Body and Blood of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:16). The Church’s Eucharist, in all its rich variety of forms and traditions, has always retained this basic shape: the taking of the elements of bread and wine in the preparation of the gifts, the act of thanksgiving in the Eucharistic Prayer, the Breaking of the Bread, the giving and sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion[[27]](#footnote-27).

The Eucharistic Prayer is a central prayer of the Mass, during which the celebrant consecrates the bread and wine, transforming them into the Body and Blood of Christ. There are several different Eucharistic Prayers each with their own themes and focus, encouraging us to think about the words as they are being prayed.

“The three prayers use different levels of language. Prayer I may be more suitable for those only recently introduced to the Eucharist. Prayers II and III may be more appropriate as children grow in sacramental awareness and in familiarity with the Eucharistic liturgy”[[28]](#footnote-28)

In Primary Schools, with younger children, it may be appropriate to use a Eucharistic Prayer specifically for children but this should be discussed with the celebrant in advance.

##

## Preface

This term, "preface," originates from the Latin words "pre" and "factum," meaning "before the act." It is an appropriate name for this part of the Mass as it is the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer and precedes the most fundamental moment of the Mass: the consecration. During the Preface, all stand and a dialogue takes place between the celebrant and the congregation: "*Lift up your hearts*" "*We lift them up to the Lord*". The Preface should genuinely lift our hearts and help prepare them for the profound moment when Christ actually becomes present in the Eucharist.

## Sanctus

The words of this hymn are drawn entirely from Sacred Scriptures. The first part mirrors the song sung by the choir of angels witnessed by the prophet Isaiah in the presence of God's throne. The repetition of "Holy" three times symbolizes the Holy Trinity's three divine persons. The second part echoes the jubilant acclamation of the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, exclaiming, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." Just as the crowd joyfully welcomed Jesus as their long-awaited king, in the Mass the we too also greet Christ, who is about to be present among us. Thus, the Sanctus serves as a hymn of praise sung by human beings and angels, uniting us in glorifying God.

## Epiclesis

Where possible, we are encouraged to kneel following the Sanctus and throughout the remainder of the Eucharistic Prayer, until the Great Amen. If kneeling isn't practical, standing is preferable. Being seated during this part of the Eucharistic Prayer should only really be considered if kneeling or standing would be very impractical or disruptive.

A consecration is a solemn act of making something sacred or holy. During Mass the bread and wine are ‘consecrated’ and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This begins at the Epiclesis (the calling of the Holy Spirit) when the celebrant extends his hands over the bread and wine. This act reminds us of many significant events in the Bible, such as God creating the world, Mary being asked to be the Mother of God, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Sacraments where hands are laid upon believers, Jesus laying hands on the sick and forgiving sinners, and the disciples being prayed over before their missions. In the Mass, the celebrant calls upon the Holy Spirit to descend over the gifts of bread and wine to make Christ truly present.

## The Institution Narrative and Consecration

Following the command Jesus gave to his apostles: “Do this in memory of me;” the celebrant, acting in the person of Christ, says the words of the institution of the Eucharist, the same which Jesus spoke the day of the Last Supper. These words have the power to transform reality. Just as God's word spoke the earth into existence and Jesus' words healed the sick and raised the dead, so too do the words of God, spoken through the celebrant during Mass, hold the power to change reality. As the celebrant proclaims, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body..." and "...drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood..." the offerings of bread and wine undergo a profound transformation. In this moment, they cease to be mere elements and are truly transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, containing his full essence—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. If, out of necessity, the congregation is standing during the Eucharistic Prayer, it is good practice to teach them beforehand, why this is an appropriate time to bow respectfully as the celebrant genuflects after the two elevations of the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Following the words of Institution and the subsequent elevation of the Body and Blood, the congregation participates in the Memorial Acclamation. These acclamations proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ, emphasising the Paschal Mystery as the central focus of the prayer. The text for the Memorial Acclamation is selected from the three options provided in the Roman Missal. It is always preferable to sing the Memorial Acclamation.

When the Doxology, ‘Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, for ever and ever’, is sung by the celebrant then the Amen should be sung by the congregation. This Great Amen is the final Acclamation by which we make the prayer our own and to say ‘yes’ to everything we have heard.

## The Communion Rite

The Communion Rite follows the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer and includes the Lord's Prayer, the breaking of bread, and the invitation to receive Holy Communion.

##

## Lord’s Prayer - the Our Father

When we pray this special prayer, we are not merely using our own words but instead the words that Jesus himself used. “*What prayer would the Father hear more gladly than that in which he hears the voice of his only Son, Jesus Christ?”[[29]](#footnote-29).*  The prayer begins with "Our Father," uniting us as children of God. “*This is a prayer which cannot be recited with enemies in one’s heart, with hatred for another*”[[30]](#footnote-30). It is important this prayer belongs to the whole congregation and so everyone should be able to join in. Consideration therefore needs to be given if the prayer is to be sung, that the setting should enable everyone present to participate and should also include the acclamation “for the kingdom, the power…”.

##

## Sign of Peace

During the Rite of Peace, we exchange the peace of Christ with those nearby, typically through a handshake. It is important to ensure that this exchange remains reverent and does not disrupt the flow of the Mass.

##

## The Fraction

The Fraction, also known as the Breaking of the Bread, occurs during the Communion Rite. It involves breaking the consecrated Host while the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) is sung or recited. The Agnus Dei is deeply rooted in Scripture. In the Old Testament (Exodus 12) the lamb of God is the sacrifice by which the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament, John the Baptist applied this image to Jesus saying ‘Behold the Lamb of God…’ It is through Jesus, who is led like a lamb to the slaughter, that the congregation are freed from their sins so they can find peace with God. The Fraction itself reflects Christ's sacrifice and prepares the consecrated bread for distribution to those who are ready to receive.

##

## Communion

Christ becomes food for us because he wants to nourish us so we might have life and have it to the full. Communion is the time in the Mass when the celebrant shares the Eucharistic food. It is appropriate that it is called Communion because upon receiving the Body of Christ, we enter into an intimate and profound communion with him. When we receive the Body of Christ, not only does the Eucharist become part of us, but we become what we eat, we become Christ-like.

Both the Sacred Host and the Precious Blood are considered to contain the full presence of Christ, so receiving Holy Communion in one form (either the Host alone or both the Host and the Precious Blood) is sufficient for a complete reception of Christ. The decision to administer Holy Communion under both kinds at school Masses should be made in consultation with the celebrant, considering factors such as the number of attendees and appropriate catechesis.

Individuals may choose to receive the Sacred Host (Body of Christ) on the tongue or in the hand, a decision that is usually made during their preparation for First Holy Communion. Before receiving Holy Communion, a bow of the head or another act of reverence is appropriate. Those receiving the Sacred Host should consume it immediately, responding with "Amen" before receiving. Proper preparation and catechesis are needed so that children and young people receive Holy Communion respectfully and know that they should consume it *before* they begin to move away from the minister.

As Holy Communion is to be distributed, it is important to approach the issue of who may receive Communion with great care. An invitation should be extended to all present to participate, whether in receiving Holy Communion or coming forward for a blessing, respecting each individual's beliefs and preferences. This sacred moment should be approached with sensitivity, allowing everyone to participate authentically according to their faith. Those who do wish to receive a blessing should join the procession and indicate their wish by placing their hands across their chest. In a primary school, where whole classes of children have not yet made their First Holy Communion, this should be discussed with the celebrant beforehand.

In a school Mass where many may not be familiar with Mass or the way the room has been arranged for this special occasion, providing clear guidance on how and when to move, as well as proper conduct during Communion, is important. Additionally, having designated stewards, such as young people or staff, can assist in ensuring a dignified and calm atmosphere as the congregation approaches the celebrant. If possible, any instructions should be given before Mass begins to preserve the sacredness of the moment.

Trained and commissioned extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist with distribution when there are not enough clergy present. However, they should not give blessings using the formula of the Trinity or by holding up the host and tracing a blessing. Instead, they should extend a hand towards the person with appropriate words such as "May the Lord Jesus bless you". Sensitivity and understanding should be shown towards children of other religions who may come forward for a blessing.

During the distribution of Holy Communion, any music should always reflect the significance of the mystery being celebrated, aligning with the theme of the Mass or the liturgical season. Emphasising the sacredness of this time, there should be time for a deliberate silence, allowing for prayer and reflection, echoing the silence observed at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. These moments of quiet invite God to speak to our hearts and deepen our connection with him.

Following Communion, the sacred vessels are purified by the celebrant, and any unconsumed Hosts are consumed or respectfully returned to the tabernacle.

## Prayer after Communion

The celebrant brings the Communion Rite to a close with the Prayer after Communion.

## Questions to consider:

*Do you have sufficient sacred vessels for the size of your community if you require many extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion?*

*How do you anticipate and prepare, through formation, for the times of Mass where the reverence is sometimes interrupted e.g. sign of peace, distribution of communion?*

*How do you prepare logistically so the distribution of Holy communion is efficient and respectful?*

*How can staff or older pupils discretely ensure Holy Communion is consumed by all who receive?*

*How do you ensure that the music ministry helps the congregation to engage fully in the Mass and does not become a performance by the choir?*

*Is a ciborium, with consecrated host, to be collected form the tabernacle before distribution?*

*If unconsumed Holy Communion is to be returned to the Tabernacle is this organised in advance of Mass?*

**The Concluding Rites**

The final part of the Mass includes the Blessing and Dismissal.

##

## Blessing

The blessing is prescribed by the Roman Missal to ensure that there is uniformity and reverence.

## Dismissal

The Mass is mission-focused by its very nature. The emphasis is on sending forth, highlighting the call to live out and share the Good News that we have encountered. There are different options for words at the end of Mass but they all link to Jesus sending out his disciples (known as the Great Commissioning) and the Christian belief that God is with us:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.[[31]](#footnote-31).

We respond to the celebrant’s words of dismissal by saying ‘*Thanks be to God’*. As we leave the sacred space, we are reminded to live in peace and love as one of Jesus' disciples, reflecting Jesus through our words and actions.

The invitation that precedes the final blessing is important in Masses with children. Before they are dismissed, they need some repetition and application of what they have heard, but this should be done in a very few words. In particular, this is the appropriate time to express the connection between the liturgy and life[[32]](#footnote-32).

Following the blessing and dismissal, the celebrant and any accompanying servers exit the sanctuary or altar in procession. This moment may be accompanied by a concluding hymn. If a final hymn is included, it should be fairly short, uplifting, and purposeful, igniting a spirit of mission within the congregation.

## Questions to consider:

*How do you send forth the pupils, so their mission is their lasting impression of Mass, rather than a series of notices or chair stacking…?*

*How do you ensure relevant people are thanked and appreciated in an appropriate way at the end of the Mass?*

# **The Mass: Frequently Asked Questions**

If your question is not asked or answered then please discuss with your parish priest or diocesan advisor.

## **What is required for the celebration of Mass in school?**

For a school Mass, various practical items are needed and these include:

Fittings

• Altar

• Ambo (or lectern)

• Processional cross and/or altar cross

• Credence (small side) table

• Presidential Chair (chair for the priest)

Books

• Roman Missal

• All volumes of the Lectionary

Perishables

• Altar breads

• Wine

• Water

• Wax Candles

• Matches

Vessels

• Paten: a shallow dish for holding the host(s) for the Eucharist

• Ciborium: a covered dish for storing consecrated hosts (plural ciboria)

• Chalice: a large cup for the wine for the Eucharist

• Cruets: small containers for the water and wine used in the preparation of gifts

Linen

• Altar cloths

• Corporal: a square cloth placed on the altar underneath the chalice and paten so that no fragments are discarded

• Purificator: cloth used to wipe the chalice after Communion

• Lavabo cloth: cloth used to dry the priest’s hands at the preparation of gifts

At the beginning of Mass, there should be a white altar cloth, candles, and a crucifix on the altar. It is important that the vessels, cloths, vestments, liturgical books, and other items used in the Mass are clean and of good quality. Glass or earthenware vessels should not be used for the Sacrament itself. If the school does not possess the items listed above then hopefully arrangements can be made with a local parish to borrow them when needed. If the school does have it’s own items then consideration should be given to where they can be stored respectfully when not in use.

## **What differences are there when it is a Bishop celebrating the Mass instead of a priest?**

The text of the Mass is as normal apart from the Bishop’s greeting at the beginning of Mass, after the Sign of the Cross, is ‘Peace be with you – and with your spirit.’

The main other differences will relate to the roles of the altar servers and they do need to be prepared in advance. The Bishop will usually bring his mitre and crozier and it is helpful to have two additional servers to assist with these. These servers walk behind the Bishop in the procession and may wear vimpae, special scarfs which the Bishop will bring with him. As the Bishop arrives at the altar he will pass the crozier and mitre to these servers who can take them to the side. The Bishop will usually wear his mitre for the first reading and psalm (and if there is one, the second reading). This can be brought to him by the server. During the Gospel Acclamation, the Bishop may bless the deacon or priest who is to read the Gospel. Then he will remove his mitre – which the server can take away – and receive the crozier which the other server will bring. After the Gospel the server will need to take the crozier to the side. The Bishop may preach the homily using the mitre and the crozier and this can be clarified before Mass. The Bishop may wear the mitre to receive the gifts during the offertory procession. The Bishop needs the mitre and crozier for the final blessing.

## **What age do pupils need to be to attend a school Mass?**

There is no minimum age but it is a matter of judgment and will often depend on context. This applies particularly to early years children.

## **In what sense do pupils participate in school Masses?**

The principles of active and conscious participation in the liturgy are important for Masses celebrated with pupils. Everyone is invited to participate spiritually and prayerfully. Pupils should also take up different specific roles, as appropriate, during the celebration – for example, serving, singing and music, reading, praying, and bringing up the gifts of bread and wine. Silence also has an important place and a value in enabling participation

## **Should all pupils, even those who are not Catholic, be expected to bow or genuflect to altar/tabernacle?**

A dialogue should take place with those pupils who are not Catholic, or their parents, prior to the celebration of Mass to discuss what is deemed an appropriate mark of respect that does not compromise the integrity of their beliefs. Some pupils may feel comfortable bowing, others may not and this should be respected.

## **How can those members of the community who are not Catholic be involved in Mass?**

In preparation for Mass, those members of the school community who are not Catholic can help with the preparation of the liturgical space and they may choose to be part of a group considering Mass intention/themes for Prayer of the Faithful. During Mass they can learn to listen to and engage with the prayers and the Scriptures, reflecting on what the experience means to their own lives. They can assist with music and song. They can come forward for a blessing during the Communion Rite. They can respond to what they have seen and heard by taking it forward into their own life.

## **Can those members of the community who are not Catholic be altar servers?**

It is common practice to only invite people to prepare to be altar servers after they have made their first Holy Communion. More information about the Ministry of Altar Serving can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/ServerC.pdf).

## **What can be done if the priest will not allow female altar servers?**

No one has a right to serve – male or female. However, there is no liturgical reason for excluding girls from the ministry in school Masses.

## **Why don’t we sing the Alleluia and the Gloria during Lent?**

In a similar way to fasting from certain foods, we fast from the Alleluia and Gloria so that they are more joyful when they return at Easter.

## **Could another text be used instead of a scripture reading in Mass?**

No.

## **Who can read the Gospel and preach the homily at Mass?**

The priest proclaims the Gospels unless a deacon is present. Only clergy can preach the homily, unless they delegate this to another as specified in the Directory for Masses with Children.

## **Can those members of the community who are not Catholic read at Mass?**

In school Masses in this diocese Ministers of the Word are expected to be of the Christian faith.

## **At Mass, can scripture readings be adapted for younger children?**

Yes, the Directory for Masses with Children makes this provision, but always discuss with the celebrant beforehand.

## **Is there guidance on writing the Prayer of the Faithful (bidding prayers)?**

Yes, see <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Documents/Intercessions.shtm>

## **What should be brought forward in a procession with gifts (offertory procession)?**

Principally the bread and wine. This gives an indication that anything brought forward is something which will not just be returned but will in some way be transformed. Artefacts and displays are better incorporated in the Introductory Rites.

## **Who is allowed to distribute Communion?**

Where there are insufficient clergy present, a commissioned extraordinary minister of Holy Communion can assist. More information about this ministry can be found on the Liturgy Office website [here](https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Communion).

## **What age do pupils have to be to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion?**

This will depend on the circumstances in consultation with local clergy. Any Extraordinary Minster should have celebrated Confirmation and Eucharist and received the appropriate training and commissioning.

## **Do all pupils have to come forward for a blessing at Communion?**

No. The encouragement is for the ‘blessing’ to be more a simple prayer for the person concerned rather than a blessing. Good practice is to ensure all ministers including clergy observe the same form. It may be that for practical reasons, all pupils are required to walk towards the front, although there will be no expectation for them to receive a blessing or Holy Communion. This should be discussed with the celebrant in advance.

## **Is applause appropriate during Mass?**

It is helpful for pupils to understand that liturgical celebrations are not performances. However, it can be appropriate to thank all those who have ministered at the end.

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