

Parish Liturgy



people • process • procedure

by

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INTRODUCTION

P*arish Liturgy* is hard to describe in terms of exactly the kind of publication it is. On the one hand, it is a practical manual that parish liturgy committees can use in a variety of ways. It is also a workbook. In another sense it is a collection of handouts with little explanatory text, thus allowing the materials to be used in many different kinds of situations, sometimes even for very different purposes. Let's agree to call this publication a "folio," the purpose of which is to gather together under one title these and other possible uses.

Naming is important because it often defines a task. This folio is intended to facilitate in a practical and, hopefully, fruitful manner the work of the many people involved in planning, preparing, and carrying out parish liturgy. It differs from other helpful materials which have already been published in that it encourages each parish to use these materials, not as an end in itself, but to use them to compile its own parish liturgical portfolio with their own particular materials. Thus, the ring binder format encourages other materials to be added to what is already included here. Wide margins encourage making notes and promote as down-to-earth a use as possible.

Parish Liturgy is, in other words, an "unfinished product." The finished volume is written by each parish as they, year by year, consider and reconsider the people, process, and procedures which make or break good parish liturgy.

The purchaser may peruse the Contents page and wonder why there is no section on a theology of liturgy. This, for two reasons. First, because that would be a book in itself and many have already been published (including by myself). The list of books given for a parish liturgy library (see pages 77-88) supplies many suggestions for further reading and study in this area. Second, this folio is intended to be a *practical* guide, helping liturgy personnel with some of the details and breadth of implementing a good liturgy program in a parish or other liturgical community. Not addressing a theology of liturgy (except tangentially), of course, does not imply that a theology of liturgy is not important; indeed, this is the foundation for everything (as is intimated throughout this folio).

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“Down to earth” is the order of the day for this folio. Although no theological education content is included as such, a consistent theology of liturgy as making present the paschal mystery underlies every single page (modeling what must underly every single liturgy and decision about liturgy in a parish). This folio has a limited, specific purpose: to provide guide materials for the everyday nuts and bolts of making liturgy happen well in a parish.

If there were a procedure to guarantee fruitful parish liturgy, no doubt someone would have published it long ago (and probably made a mint and retired early). A suspicion is that good parish liturgy—when it happens—is the result of an ongoing cooperative effort requiring searching and sharing on the part of many. Further, that effort is broader than preparing a specific liturgy.

Fruitful liturgy is the result of prayer, faith commitment, education about liturgy and liturgical renewal, communication, cooperation, involvement, careful preparation, artistic implementation—to name but a few constituents. Rather than discouraged, we are challenged to strive for the probable and dream the possible.

FORMULA FOR FRUITFULNESS

In the course of years of facilitating workshops, both in religious education and liturgy, it has become apparent to me that no matter what I said or how well, two features always seem to be part of the most fruitful endeavors.

One feature guaranteeing real fruitfulness is to make sure that the facilitator believes what is being said. Many of us probably take this for granted, but it is a point well worth considering. Especially when we do many workshops and frequently repeat the same ones, there is always the temptation to just “get through the material.” Somehow, familiarity tempts us to lose that sense of passion and vibrancy whereby we “ring true” with our hearers. In other words, we need a stake in what we are doing. The best lessons are taught—and response is elicited—when the heart and head work together. This principle is not only true for liturgical formation; it is also true for celebration. If the liturgical ministers are not truly praying, completely attentive, and obviously participating, then all the planning and preparation in the world will not help make good liturgy.

A second guarantee of real fruitfulness in improving parish liturgy is the use of handouts—practical, proven aids that liturgical personnel and others can actually use to the benefit of all in the parish. The idea here isn't necessarily just to make someone's job easier (by providing some "ready-made" materials), but to share creative approaches which have positively helped others reach a goal of continually implementing better liturgy. This folio is filled with many examples of practical handouts which might be used. Notice in the copyright information on page 2 that permission is granted the purchaser of this folio to use any of these handouts in his or her own liturgical community with no further permission needed. Please, of course, always carry the proper identification and copyright line at the bottom of each sheet.

Lists, charts, fill-in-the-blanks, guided reflections, and other such succinct materials are clearly perceived, easily recognized, and quickly understood by those who prepare them and those who participate in their use. Handouts facilitate dealing with rather large amounts of data. They promote expeditiously distinguishing essentials. They often make our work much easier by guiding us to the heart of a matter.

These two features of fruitfulness—believing in what we are doing and practical aids to achieve something—are the guiding force behind this folio.

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USING THIS FOLIO

P*arish Liturgy* consists of brief explanatory text and numerous handouts (reflection/preparation guides and worksheets) which have been compiled from different workshops I have given over the past three decades in various contexts and to various audiences. Here I bring them all together into this one folio. These materials have been distributed over the years in bits and pieces and in diverse forms and have proven helpful for many parishes and other liturgical communities. This third edition of *Parish Liturgy* incorporates many new materials developed over the last decade and a half since the first edition appeared.

It is my prayer and hope that this folio will assist parish liturgy personnel in their all-important task of helping liturgy come alive by celebrating well what liturgy is really all about: making present the paschal mystery. *Parish Liturgy* is a simple guide intended to enable parish liturgical personnel to discover the depth of liturgical riches and interact with each other with

respect to the meaning and value of Christian liturgy for them. Remarks are kept to a minimum and serve primarily as introductory notes for using the handouts.

Wide outside margins are an important format of the folio. Users are encouraged to make their own notes and jot down their own contextualized schema of implementation. Since no two parishes or liturgical communities are quite alike, a program as detailed as this one cannot be used simply “as is.” Adaptation is the order of the day.

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Adaptation of these materials is no small task but this is precisely the way that the materials become one’s own. The more the handouts are adapted to particular parish use, the more helpful they will be with respect to the desired goal. There is no program which in and of itself can guarantee fruitfulness. There is no program which will single-handedly and in a single application wipe out liturgical boredom and get everyone “involved.” Yet aids such as these contained in this folio can help ensure that we are at least covering all the bases.

We are, basically, addressing the serious question of liturgical renewal. For good or ill, most of the adaptations recommended by Vatican II and the revised rites are in place. To the surprise of many, the desired renewal hasn’t seemed to happen. Rather than discourage, this phasing from adaptation to renewal might serve as an impetus to appropriate to a more significant degree the personal and communal transformation into being ever more transparent images of our identity as body of Christ which is really what liturgy is all about.

Being transformed—this is what we are about in liturgy. Our truest worship of God arises from hearts filled with praise and thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ. As we conform ourselves more and more to the divine Son and live the gospel he preached (that is, the paschal mystery dying and rising), we give God praise and thanks everywhere and in all things by our very selves, who we are: the body of Christ. Our truest worship is the self-surrendering that liturgy demands: giving ourselves over to being transformed, to becoming ever more perfect members of the body of Christ. Our self-surrender is our sacrifice of praise whereby, united with Christ, we offer ourselves as a perfect and holy sacrifice.