

FORMATION MODEL FOR LEARNERS PREPARING TO PRESIDE AT LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

MONSIGNOR MICHAEL BEGOLLY
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The setting for the use of this process is a group of learners who are in the process of preparing to preside at liturgical celebrations. In addition to the group of learners, there is a leader who is experienced in presiding who will serve as both facilitator and resource person for the group.

Step I: Identifying the Assembly as the Context for the Ministry of Presiding

The goal of the first step is to help the learners identify the assembly as a primary liturgical symbol and as the context for shaping the ministry of the presider. In this step, you will help the learners to focus attention on their experience of the liturgy as members of the assembly. In order to facilitate this process, you might provide a model of effective presiding so that the learners would have a common experience of the liturgy on which to base their reflections.

Following the liturgical experience, invite the learners to describe their role as members of the assembly within the liturgy:

- As members of the assembly, what was their role?
- What did they do within the liturgy?
- Were they actively engaged in the liturgy?
- Were they participants or spectators?
- What were the most important parts of the liturgy?
- Who did them?
- What did the assembly do while the other ministers functioned?

After the learners describe their role as members of the assembly, invite them to reflect critically on the meaning of their named experience:

- What was the meaning of the assembly's role in the liturgy? How was this shown?
- Were the members of the assembly drawn into the celebration as active participants? How was this shown?
- What was the relation between the assembly and the other ministers? How was this shown?
- How significant was the role of the assembly within the liturgy?

Step II: Examining the Presider's Role within the Assembly

Step II begins by drawing on the insights that the learners have gained from Step I. After they successfully recognize the assembly as the context for shaping the presider's ministry, invite them to focus on the presider's role within the assembly.

Encourage them to draw on their common experience of the liturgy to name and describe the role of the presider in relation to the assembly:

- What did the presider do?

- How did the presider relate to the assembly?
- How did the presider relate to the other liturgical ministers?
- What did the presider do when other ministers were functioning?

After describing the role of the presider from their perspective as members of the assembly, challenge the learners to reflect critically on their description:

- What impact did the presider have on the worshiping community? How was this shown?
- Did the presider respect the primacy of the assembly? How was this shown?
- Did the presider invite the assembly to full, conscious, and active participation? How was this shown?
- Did the presider respect the ministry of others? How was this shown?

Step III: Identifying the Attitudes and Skills Needed by the Presider

The third step builds on the insights that the learners have gained from the previous two steps concerning the primacy of the assembly and the presider's role in relation to the assembly.

Here, invite the learners to draw on their common experiences of the liturgy (effective and ineffective modeling) to name and describe the attitudes and skills that they see operative within an effective presider:

- What attitudes in the presider reflect the presider's attention to the assembly as a primary symbol within the liturgy?
- What attitudes reflect and foster a sense of care for the assembly and its members?
- What attitudes reflect the presider's ability to work with the other liturgical ministers?
- What attitudes reflect the presider's understanding of this role within the liturgy?
- What skills does the presider manifest in the celebration of the liturgy?
- What skills are operative as the presider leads the assembly in prayer?
- What skills does the presider manifest in relating to the assembly and to the other liturgical ministers?
- What skills does the presider need to develop further?

After the learners describe the attitudes and skills they see operative, invite them to reflect critically on the attitudes and skills they see as important in an effective presider:

- How does a presider manifest these attitudes and skills?
- What happens when these attitudes and skills are not present?
- How does one develop these attitudes and skills?

Step IV: Developing a Presidential Style

Here, you will actively engage the learners in the process of developing their own style of presiding. Having identified a number of key attitudes needed by the presider, the learners now need to make a conscious effort to develop these attitudes as they practice the skills of leading public prayer and working collaboratively with others. While it is possible to practice the skills of leading public prayer and working with others, it is much more difficult to practice attitudes like hospitality, reverence, and authenticity. These attitudes are cultivated by a conscious

reflection on the demands of the attitudes, followed by a conscious decision to incorporate these attitudes while practicing the skills of leading prayer and working with others.

In this step, each learner practices both the techniques of prayer, as well as the actual prayers and actions of the liturgy. The learners work in small groups as they seek to develop the attitudes and skills needed for leading public prayer. Given the significant differences in ritual dynamics and styles between small and large groups, alert the learners to changes that will be required when they move into larger assemblies, especially in the next step. For example, the learners will need to be attentive to the size of the worship space and the location of the assembly within the worship space as they learn to adapt their gestures and voice to fit the space. Provide each learner with several opportunities to lead the group in prayer, first in practicing prayer techniques and later in practicing the liturgical texts of the liturgy.

After each session of leading the group, encourage the learner who presided to reflect on the experience of leading prayer:

- What did the presider do?
- How effectively did the presider lead the community in prayer?
- How did the presider exemplify the attitudes of hospitality, reverence, and authenticity?

Then invite the learner's peers to offer commendations and recommendations with regard to the presider's ministry:

- What attitudes did the presider exemplify?
- What skills has the presider already developed?
- What attitudes and skills need further development?

In addition, provide the opportunity for the learners to work with mentors who will guide them in developing their presidential style. From their own experience as presiders, the mentors can both offer encouragement and challenge the learners as they work to cultivate the attitudes and skills needed for presiding.

This step of developing a presidential style could also include each learner making one or two videotapes. Each learner would then review the videotape with you, the mentor, or both. This experience would provide the learner an opportunity to see the presidential style that is taking shape, and to evaluate how well the learner is developing the skills of prayer leadership and incorporating the attitudes of hospitality, reverence, and authenticity as the learner moves through the experience.

It is also important to provide the learners with the opportunity to work with others in the actual planning and celebration of a liturgy for the entire group. This activity will challenge the learners to work collaboratively in the learning process. The mentor might also be able to provide additional opportunities for the learner to work with others in preparing different kinds of liturgical services.

By presiding, by participating as members of the assembly when others preside, and by reflection on their own practice and the practice of their peers, the learners are encouraged to continue to cultivate the attitudes and develop the skills that are needed as the learner prepares to preside

within the liturgical assembly in Step V.

Transition from Step IV to Step V

Because presiding is an art that involves the development of a number of attitudes and skills, it is important that the move from Step IV to Step V follow sufficient amount of time during which the learner works to develop the attitudes and skills that are necessary in this ministry. In addition, it seems that it is necessary to have some kind of evaluation process that would ensure that the learner is adequately prepared to move from practice to the actual experience of presiding. Your evaluation should include input from the learner, mentor, and peers on the basis of the videotape review and the varied experiences of presiding within the learning experience. This evaluation should include an assessment of the presider's ability to lead the community in prayer and to work with others in the planning and celebration of the liturgy. In addition to an evaluation of the technical skills required for effective presiding (e.g., knowledge and understanding of the rite, bodily ease, eye contact, facial expression, volume, pace, tone of voice, use of gesture, etc.), it is important to assess how well the learner has incorporated the attitudes of reverence, hospitality, and authenticity in manifesting an effective presidential style. You would seem to have the ultimate responsibility for commending the learner to the final step or recommending that the learner continue to work in this step to cultivate the attitudes and skills needed to be an effective presider.

Step V: Presiding within the Liturgical Assembly

The final step of this pedagogical method moves the learner beyond the practice of presiding to the actual experience of presiding within the liturgical assembly followed by a process of mystagogical reflection.

- How well did the presider work with others in the planning and celebration of the liturgy?
- How did the presider relate to the other liturgical ministers?
- What was the presider's relation to the assembly?
- How did the presider manifest the attitudes of hospitality, reverence, and authenticity throughout the liturgy?

In addition to the presider's own reflections and those of his or her mentor, encourage the new presider to elicit feedback from members of the assembly who are invited to offer commendations and recommendations on the presider's style:

- How did the presider relate to the assembly?
- How did the presider relate to the other liturgical ministers?
- How effective was the presider in leading the prayer of the community?
- What skills did the presider manifest?
- What skills does the presider need to improve?
- Was the presider hospitable, reverent, and authentic in his or her words and actions?

Mystagogical Reflection

By encouraging the use of mystagogical reflection, you will reinforce the understanding that presiding is an art that needs to be continually developed. One is not born a presider. Rather, one learns to be an effective presider through reflection on experience, study, cultivation of a number of attitudes and skills, and the actual experience of presiding. Inviting members of the assembly

to assist in the process of ongoing reflection is one of the ways that the presider can continue to grow in developing the attitudes and skills needed to preside within the assembly.

Modeling

Modeling is a pedagogical technique that you can use throughout the learning process. By providing a number of models of effective and ineffective presiding, you will help the learners reflect on the impact of the presider on the assembly's experience of worship. Modeling also provides the opportunity for the learners to see in the models the attitudes and skills needed by an effective presider. In addition, the examples of effective presiding will provide the learners with models that the learners can imitate as they begin to develop their own style of presiding. Aidan Kavanagh notes that "mastery of liturgical service, like mastery of language, begins with imitation and continues to imitate long after one is on one's own, for it is nearly impossible to avoid imitating what is admirable"

Mentoring

Mentoring is another tool that can be used throughout the learning experience. The role of the mentor is to assist the learner in the reflection process, especially in Step IV and Step V, when the learner begins to develop a presidential style. In addition, having the wisdom and support of an experienced presider can provide the learner with the encouragement needed to stretch beyond the learner's horizons in trying new styles and techniques in developing an effective presidential style.

Summary

Throughout the five steps of this method, your role is to invite the learners to name and reflect on their experiences, first as members of the assembly, and finally as presiders within the liturgical assembly. This process of naming and reflection, combined with study of the Christian tradition, will help to prepare the learners to make the necessary correlation between their experience and the traditions of the church as they begin to develop a style of presiding that reflects the attitudes and skills needed by one who presides in the midst of the assembly.