LITURGY COMMITTEES: HOW TO BEGIN AND HOW TO CONTINUE

Dr. Dolly Sokol, Ph.D.
Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM

Questions for Beginning

- When did the idea of liturgy committees begin in the Church?
- When did a liturgy committee begin in your parish?
- Why?
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963)

- “The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that **full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations** called for by the very nature of the liturgy.” (#14)
- “Such participation…is their **right and duty** by reason of their baptism.” (#14)

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

- “It is advisable that [the bishop] set up a liturgical commission to be assisted by experts in liturgical science, music, art and pastoral practice…The Commission is to regulate pastoral-liturgical action throughout the territory…” (#44)
- “For the same reason every diocese is to have a commission on the liturgy…for promoting the liturgical apostolate” (#45)
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

- “Besides the commission on liturgy, every diocese … should have commissions for music and art.” (#46)
- Why? “… so that this pastoral-liturgical action may become even more vigorous in the Church…” (#43)

General Instruction to Roman Missal III

- The importance of “… directions about the preparation of people’s hearts and minds, and of the places, rites, and texts for the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist” (#1)
- “… the entire celebration is planned in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active and full participation of the faithful both in body and mind” (#17)
Redemptionis Sacramentum (2004)

“…it is appropriate that he [the priest] should be assisted in the effective preparation of the liturgical celebrations by various members of Christ’s faithful…” (#32)

Purpose of Liturgical Preparation and Planning

To serve the worshipping assembly so that:

- All may fulfill their role of “full, conscious, and active participation” in the liturgy
- So that all may be transformed into the “Body of Christ” for the world
Worshipping Culture

- **Organizational culture** is patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting transmitted by symbols; basic assumptions about how the world ought to be that a group people share.

- **Meaning** is experienced through patterned actions (rituals) and interactions with artifacts of the culture (symbols and symbolic action).

- The way we do liturgy over time shapes our parish worshipping culture; what we believe about God, the Church, etc.

- Worshipping culture ultimately shapes and strengthens our faith and belief or diminishes and weakens it.

Questions for Reflection

- When strangers/guests come to worship in your parish, what do they say about your parish as a result of participating in the Sunday liturgy?

- Is what they say true of your parish? Do you wish they would say something more? Something different?

- How can your liturgy express more clearly who you are as a Roman Catholic parish in the United States in the Diocese of ___ with your particular community of believers? (hospitality, music, preaching, environment, ritual prayer, outreach ministry, etc.)
What has happened in the past?

- What have liturgy committees been doing in the past 30-40 years?
  - In your parish?
  - In other parishes that you have belonged to or known about?

What have liturgy committees done in the past?

- Created “themes” for Mass
- Wrote commentaries for Mass
- Scheduled liturgical ministers
- Bought flowers to decorate church
- Trained liturgical ministers in logistics
- Bought hosts and wine
What have liturgy committees done in the past? (con’t)

- Decided where to place the manger, Advent wreath, etc.
- Chosen music
- Wrote intercessions
- Given ideas for homily
- Did whatever Father said

What’s the matter with doing some of these things?

- Little knowledge or expertise in ritual, symbol, liturgy, music, art, culture, pastoral practice, etc.
- Often dealing with peripherals rather than substance; signs rather than symbols; procedures rather than rituals; doing rather than experiencing
- Imposed one meaning on the liturgy rather than uncovering multi-valent meanings of liturgy
- Imposed personal taste
- Did the work of other ministers
- Little seasonal coherence achieved
Who should be on a liturgy committee?

- It depends on your tasks.
  - Pastor
  - Liturgist/Liturgy Coordinator
  - Music leader(s)
  - Liturgical Ministry trainers
  - RCIA director
  - Wedding/Funeral/Baptism Coordinators
  - Sacristan
  - Deacon(s)
  - Member(s) of assemblies
- ALL NEED TO BE WILLING TO LEARN!

How do liturgy committees assist in preparing liturgical celebrations today?

1. **Educate** ourselves and others in liturgy and mystagogically reflect on our liturgical prayer experiences
2. **Form and train** dedicated liturgical ministers in ongoing process of reflection and renewal
3. **Collaborate to design** parish liturgical/sacramental **policies**
How do liturgy committees assist in preparing liturgical celebrations today? (con’t)

4. Prepare a **parish vision of liturgy** seasonally, sanctorally and festively
5. **Communicate** the parish vision to those charged with implementation of liturgical environment, music, ministry, etc.
6. **Evaluate** parish liturgical life in above aspects and its impact on how community encounters Christ in liturgy and makes Christ present in the world

---

1. **Educate and reflect on liturgical experiences**

   - Who is **educated**?
     - Ourselves, the liturgy committee
     - Assembly
     - Liturgical Ministers/Clergy
     - Teachers/Catechists
     - Children
Education Strategy for Liturgy Team

- **Study and Discuss**
  - Theology of liturgy/sacraments
  - Ritual and symbol
  - Liturgy Documents
    - *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*
    - Post-conciliar liturgical documents
      - Universal and United States
      - Introductions (praenotanda) and structure of all sacraments and rites

How to study the documents together?

- **Pre-work**
  - Assign each member a document/rite or a section of a document/rite to teach to the other members at next meeting
  - Teaching involves overview of content, clarification questions, and discussion of “how does this apply to our parish?”
    - Use visuals, handouts, flipcharts, etc.
Education Strategy for Liturgy Team

 Reflect (do mystagogy)
  • On experience of parish Sunday liturgy at each Mass
  • On experience of parish sacramental celebrations
  • On liturgical experiences outside parish
  • Refrain from sharing just likes and dislikes; go deeper into the why did something help you to pray communally or not; how were you transformed?

Process of Sacramental Mystagogy and Theological Reflection

 Observation – what is happening to you? What did you notice about your prayer/our prayer together?
 Interaction – how does this connect with your story, our story, the story of God Creator, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit?
 Response – What will I/we do (differently) as a result?
How to pray together?

- Use liturgical prayer models
  - Liturgy of the Hours (AM/PM prayer)
  - Liturgy of the Word with Theological Reflection on liturgical texts from scripture, teachings/homilies of early Church Fathers, early Church documents, etc.
  - Symbolic Action Prayer

2. Form and Train dedicated liturgical ministers in ongoing process of reflection and renewal

- Liturgical ministers
  - Liturgy Committee(s) members
  - Pastoral Musicians
  - Lectors
  - Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
  - Ushers/Greeters
  - Servers and Sacristans
  - Environment and Art ministers
  - Children’s Liturgy of the Word ministers
  - Writers of Prayers of the Faithful
Formation and Training Strategy

 Dedicated liturgical ministers
  • Ministry description including gifts
  • Discernment of gifts
  • Volunteers vs Committed Ministers
  • Ask for and expect commitment

 Initial training and formation
  • Spirituality of liturgy and ministry
  • Gifts and skills of ministry
  • Practice/Feedback and procedures
  • Assess competence to minister

Formation and Training Strategy (con’t)

 Ongoing training and formation
  • Evaluation and feedback
  • Skills updating and competency
  • Spiritual renewal
  • Offer sabbaticals
3. Collaborate to Design Parish Liturgical/Sacramental Policies

- Collaborate
  - Universal church
  - Diocese
  - Pastoral staff
  - Parish community
- Sacramental policies
  - Regarding liturgical celebrations of sacraments
- Liturgical Ministerial training policies
  - Ministry descriptions and qualifications
- Financial policy
  - Budget allocations for liturgy/sacraments

Liturgical/Sacramental Policy Strategy

- Gather existing parish liturgical/sacramental policies
- Research and gather policies from other parishes
- Gather diocesan policies
Liturgical/Sacramental Policy Strategy
(con’t)

- Do same with liturgical minister job descriptions/qualifications
- Compare similarities/ differences, omissions, etc.
- Name particular aspects of your parish to be taken into consideration when developing policy
- Design or re-design your policies for today’s liturgical parish life
- Find past liturgy budgets or actual expenditures; how do they support policy implementation?

4. Prepare Parish Vision of Liturgy Seasonally, Sanctorally and Festively

- Seasonal planning
  - Triduum, Lent/Eastertime/Pentecost, Advent/Christmastime/Epiphany, Ordinary Time - Fall/Winter/Summer
- Planning of special liturgies of saints
  - (patronal, cultural, etc.)
- Planning of feasts of ideas
  - Corpus Christi
  - Immaculate Conception
  - Assumption
Parish Vision of Liturgy: Strategy

- Establish **Seasonal Planning Teams**
  - Review evaluations of season in past year(s)
  - Study and reflect on liturgical sources for season
    - Church history of season
    - Prayer texts
    - Scripture
    - Seasonal rites
  - Provide vision and overview for seasonal celebration
- Repeat pattern for sanctoral and festival liturgies

5. Communicate Parish Vision and Seasonal Plans with those charged with implementation

- Clergy/Preachers (permanent and visiting)
- Music director(s)
- Environment and Art ministers/Sacristan
- Coordinators of Liturgical Ministers
- Assembly
- Let all do their job
Communication Strategy

- Have a member of each group join liturgy committee and be responsible for communicating with rest of ministry
- Set regular meetings with rep of liturgy committee and ministry group
- Share minutes of liturgy committee meetings with ministry group
- Create liturgy preparation summary sheet to be shared with ministry groups
- Invite ministry reps for joint evaluation of season

6. Evaluate how community encounters Christ at liturgy

- The way we celebrate (ritual)
  - Sunday Mass
  - The Seasons of the Liturgical Year
  - The Sacraments
  - The saints
  - The feasts
  - Other Forms of Communal Prayer
Mystagogical Evaluation

- What was my experience of prayer at this liturgy/season?
- What enhanced my/our ability/openness to pray fully, consciously and actively?
- What kept me/us from full, conscious, active prayer?
- What can we do to build on the positive experiences and change the inhibiting experiences?

Evaluate how community makes Christ present in world

- What signs are there in the life of the parish that the experience of celebrating the Paschal Mystery at Mass/sacraments is having an effect on the way the community is becoming the Body of Christ in the world?
- How has that grown or changed over the past year(s)?
- How can we make stronger connections between liturgy and life?
Resources for Liturgy Committees

- Liturgical Publishers websites
- Explore good liturgy websites
  - www.cal-liturgy.org/documents
  - www.fdlc.org
  - http://liturgy.slu.edu
  - http://dsjliturgy.blogspot.com
  - www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/