



WINTER / JUNE 2026 ♦ VOLUME 56/2

- EDITOR: TRUST AND COLLABORATION ■ KEEPING SUNDAY SACRED
- CELEBRATING THE LITURGY WITH CHILDREN II
- MUSIC: PARTICIPATORY MUSIC ■ AUSTRALIA: PARALLEL PARKES?
- SCHOOLS: THE ART OF LITURGICAL FORMATION
- BOOKS: IN CHRIST NOW MEET BOTH EAST AND WEST
- AND ALL THE LATEST **LITURGY NEWS**

Trust and Collaboration

One of the enduring legacies of Pope Francis is a move towards decentralisation. He set out the parameters of ecclesial renewal in his first year as pope in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). He wrote: *I do not believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralisation'* (EG 16). The document itself illustrates this by regularly quoting local and regional episcopal sources, something which was quite new in papal documents. Vatican Council II had recognised episcopal conferences as an important means of collegial governance. Pope Francis argued that this needed further development (EG 32).

He linked this move to an effective proclamation of the gospel which must take account of local cultures and sensibilities. Unity in the Church does not require uniformity. His ideas moved towards the promotion of 'synodality' which advocates processes of listening to others, discernment of the Spirit, and a new collaboration among all the baptised, whether ordained or not.

This trust of local bishops and collaboration with them extended also to the liturgy. In his 'motu proprio' *Magnum Principium* (2017), Francis modified the Code of Canon Law to clarify the intention of Vatican Council II that it was the bishops' responsibility to translate the liturgical books into the vernacular, to accommodate them to the local culture, and then to prepare and approve liturgical books. The role of the Holy See is 'confirmatio', that is, simply to ratify what the bishops have done. The stronger role of 'recognitio', which requires the Holy

See's judgement on whether the unity of the Roman Rite has been maintained, only concerns adaptations or additions which the bishops may have introduced. Here Rome's particular responsibility centres on safeguarding communion and doctrinal integrity. This rebalancing of pastoral responsibilities in favour of local bishops conferences, he said, makes *absolutely necessary... a vigilant and creative collaboration full of reciprocal trust between the Episcopal Conferences and the Dicastery of the Apostolic See*.

These changes represent a dramatic reversal of the increasingly centralised control of the liturgy over recent decades, a process which gathered momentum especially during the 1990s. Rome took over translation bodies such as ICEL (International Commission on English in the Liturgy) which was originally set up by the English-speaking bishops conferences. The Roman liturgy Congregation now vetted its staff and established the statutes by which it was to work. This was formalised in *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001) which demanded a rigorous literal translation of the Latin with no adaptations or additions, strict Roman oversight of the result, and the Holy See's sole authority in approving (and even preparing) liturgical texts. Despite all these restrictions, *The Roman Missal* (2010) – after its approval by bishops conferences – was released for use with 10,000 changes made unilaterally by Rome. Many have found the Missal linguistically artificial, culturally distant and pastorally disconnected.

Nine years after *Magnum Principium*, we are still coming to terms with the reforms it introduced. ICEL's mandate is to prepare a base translation of the Latin *editio typica*. Inculturation is left to conferences of bishops who are in touch with the local idiom, symbols and pastoral context. They need to adapt the base translation so that people can participate and pray naturally. In Australia, for example, we need to prepare our own edition of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* and the *Order of Christian Funerals*. The current editions of these books were significantly adapted for the English-speaking world by ICEL. Now the new translation they are offering has omitted any of these adaptations or rearrangements. We need to work out what we want to keep. What further adaptations will we need? Are we happy with the new translation and vocabulary? All of this requires a

significant allocation of qualified personnel and financial resources. At this point a task group of volunteers has been meeting by Zoom to address the Christian initiation of adults. But this is not enough.

Pope Francis' liturgical decentralisation has, of course, stirred up some disagreement. Some fear fragmentation and ambiguity. Others have accused Francis of being inconsistent. This latter refers especially to his strict regulation of the Tridentine Latin rite. In *Traditionis Custodes* (2021), he revoked the wide latitude given by Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate the old liturgy as an 'extraordinary form' of the Roman Rite. Both were trying to promote unity in the Church, but Francis believed the old rite was becoming a centre of opposition to Vatican Council II. While he happily decentralised in matters related to inculturation, local language and pastoral adaptation, he adopted more centralist regulations for the traditional Mass because he believed it was becoming a threat to ecclesial communion, the reception of Vatican II and the unity of the Roman Rite. It is notable however that the pastoral implementation of these guidelines was left to local bishops. *Traditionis Custodes* introduces a certain tension with respect to *Magnum Principium*, but it is not a contradiction.

In relation to the traditional Latin Mass, Pope Leo has been very cautious. He always seeks to reconcile and make peace. In this case, he seems to have introduced an inspiring decentralised approach which demonstrates a strong continuity with *Magnum Principium*. It seems that last January at the meeting of cardinals in Rome, Pope Leo talked with Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseilles to see whether the French bishops could reflect on possible pathways to resolve the tensions around the Tridentine liturgy. France is the birthplace and epicentre of these traditionalist communities. If France could discern a way forward, it might help everyone. Rather than enforcing restrictions from the centre, Leo seems to be searching for a way of inviting bishops conferences into a process of pastoral mediation.

Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Parolin followed up with a letter to the bishops of France. He asked them if they could explore *a renewed way of looking at one another, marked by deeper understanding of differing sensibilities so that brothers (sic), enriched by their*

diversity, may welcome one another in charity and in the unity of faith.

He hoped they would find concrete solutions to include everyone generously while respecting the liturgical orientations of Vatican Council II.

Consequently, the French bishops conference spent some time at their March meeting on the theme 'liturgy and tradition'. Perhaps they could determine the doctrinal and ecclesiological questions that lie behind the controversy – how close or distant is God, how does the Church relate to the world, what does freedom of conscience mean, and so forth. What role does political-religious ideology play? Are any adaptations possible, for example, a common Lectionary and liturgical calendar? Would traditionalist communities be interested in celebrating the other sacraments according to the new rite in Latin? One key challenge that has emerged is 'exclusivity', that is, the refusal of some to celebrate any liturgical rites with the rest of the diocese, even the Chrism Mass. It remains to be seen if this initiative bears fruit.

If such a decentralised approach does offer a way forward on the traditional Mass, no doubt it could be applied also to other questions. In Germany, there is tension with Rome over the rites they have developed for blessing couples in irregular marriage situations. Without changing the Church's doctrinal-moral teaching, can this be accepted as a pastoral adaptation suitable for the German context, even though it is totally rejected in Africa? Likewise, solutions developed in Africa for dealing with the liturgical participation of those in polygamous relationships might have no place in other parts of the Church, but could be received as inculturation in Africa. Will the Church be enriched by such diversity? Can these pastoral responses be held together in unity within the communion of the Body of Christ?



by Peter Dillon

IT SOMETIMES SEEMS LIKE A WORLD AWAY when we think that not 50 years ago, nearly every hill in Brisbane had a thriving Catholic parish church ministered to by often two or more priests celebrating Masses in schools, nursing homes, convents and households, catering for a vast range of expectations and spiritualities. They were the days of plenty when terms like 'sustainability' and 'pastoral planning' were not needed. Our Church was growing in so many ways and there was no reason to think that anything would change.

However, while we were busily carrying on the vital works of the Church as we thought necessary, the environment was changing. We either didn't notice or didn't know what to do about it, but vocations to the priesthood were steadily declining, congregation numbers were inconsistent, parishioners were clearly aging along with their pastors, and the cultural mix of both clergy and parishioners was becoming more diverse. While all this was happening, the number of Masses and churches stayed the same. The numbers of volunteers in parish ministries started to become unreliable as social and family commitments increased. While it would be difficult to assign a specific cause to these changes, culturally our world was evolving, making it difficult for the Church to know which way to adapt to all that was happening.

Especially over the past ten years across Australia, Catholic parish communities are encountering a situation that has become increasingly familiar: Sundays when no priest is available to celebrate Mass. For many communities, especially in rural, regional and remote areas, this is no longer an occasional interruption but part of an emerging pastoral pattern. One priest may now have responsibility for several parishes spread across large distances or be required to prioritise sacramental ministry in one location at the expense of another. With no obvious way to increase the number of clergy, the only pastoral plan seemed to be to link or amalgamate parishes, which has been demanding for priests and parishioners alike. In this scenario parishes are not dissolved so much as absorbed into neighbouring parishes. To soften the blow of this

absorption, many priests tried to keep the same number of Masses and locations going, a solution that cannot be sustained long term.

This experience is not unique to Australia, but it has particular resonance here, as we come to the realisation that we cannot continue to expect that priests from other countries will always be available. Many of these countries are themselves starting to experience the downturn in vocations that we are now living with. As a result, many parishioners understandably ask:

How do we remain faithful to the Lord's Day when the Eucharist cannot be celebrated?

What does the Church ask of us when Mass is simply not possible?

The Church's response is clear, careful and pastorally grounded. While the Sunday Eucharist remains the normative and preferred celebration of the Lord's Day, the Church explicitly provides for lay-led liturgical celebrations in the absence of a priest, so that communities are not deprived of communal prayer, the proclamation of Scripture or their ecclesial identity. In the Australian context, these celebrations are not a second-best option, but an important expression of pastoral realism and ecclesial responsibility.

Sunday at the Heart of Catholic Life

Australian Catholics share with the universal Church a deep conviction that Sunday is not merely a day off, but *the Lord's Day*. Sadly, for many people Sunday Mass now has to compete with a range of social and commercial attractions, whether sport or shopping. The Vatican Council II reaffirmed that Sunday stands at the centre of Christian life as the weekly celebration of the Resurrection (SC 106). From the earliest days of the Church, Christians gathered on Sunday to listen to the word of God, pray and break the bread (Acts 2:42).

The Eucharist remains the fullest expression of this Sunday gathering. The Church does not dilute this claim. However, the Council also recovered a broader theology of Christ's presence: Christ is present in the proclaimed word and in the praying assembly (SC 7). This wider understanding is essential when Australian parish communities are unable, through no fault of their own, to celebrate Mass.

The alternative to a Sunday without a priest is not simply 'nothing', nor is it an individualised spirituality disconnected from communal parish life. The Church consistently encourages the faithful to gather intentionally on Sunday, even when Mass cannot be celebrated, so that the rhythm of ecclesial life is not broken.

In response to pastoral realities very similar to those now faced in Australia, in 1988 the Holy See issued the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. This document remains the key reference point for diocesan policies and parish practice.

The Directory makes three points that are particularly important for Australian dioceses:

- ♦ The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday remains the ideal and should always be fostered wherever possible.
- ♦ Sunday celebrations without a priest are permitted when Mass is genuinely unavailable and not simply inconvenient.
- ♦ Lay leadership of such celebrations is proper and legitimate, when authorised by the bishop and supported by appropriate formation.

The Directory acknowledges bluntly that pastoral neglect of Sunday worship can weaken parish life far more than a well-prepared Liturgy of the Word led by trained lay leaders. It is careful to insist that these celebrations must never be confused with the Mass. Sometimes, a Liturgy of the Word may include communion from the tabernacle, but this does not make it equivalent to the sacrifice of the Mass.

Canon Law and Episcopal Responsibility

The Code of Canon Law provides a clear juridical foundation for lay-led Sunday celebrations. It explicitly states that when participation in the Eucharist is impossible because no sacred minister is available, the faithful are strongly encouraged to participate in a Liturgy of the Word celebrated in accordance with diocesan norms (CCL 1248.2).

This canon is especially relevant in Australia where the bishop's role in coordinating parish life across large geographic areas is critical. The canon assumes diocesan leadership and not ad hoc improvisation. Lay-led Sunday celebrations are therefore not merely local solutions. They are ecclesial actions exercised under episcopal authority.

At the same time, the Code affirms the dignity and co-responsibility of the baptised. All the faithful share in the building up of the Church according to their own vocation (CCL 208). Lay leadership in Sunday prayer flows directly from this baptismal foundation, not just from a 'shortage mentality' or by clerical delegation alone.

The Australian Context

In many dioceses, particularly those that cover a large area with a mixture of rural and urban parishes, it is not uncommon for one priest to serve multiple parishes separated by long drives. Weather, illness, unexpected funerals, annual leave or diocesan commitments can easily disrupt Sunday Mass schedules. In recent years many parishes have found it difficult to find a priest who can provide Sunday supply. In such circumstances, communities can feel abandoned if no alternative form of communal worship is provided.

Lay-led Sunday celebrations respond directly to this situation. They ensure that:

- ♦ parishioners continue to gather as the local Church;
- ♦ the Word of God is proclaimed and reflected upon;
- ♦ the Lord's Day remains visibly honoured.

Without this provision, parishes risk a gradual erosion of communal faith practice that is hard to restore.

Australian dioceses that make use of lay-led liturgies consistently emphasise the importance of careful selection, proper training and ongoing formation of lay leaders. This is not merely a practical concern but a theological one. The way a celebration is led shapes how the community understands itself as the Church.

Lay leaders are not substitutes for priests. They do not preside in the same manner. Their role is to serve the prayer of the assembly and to proclaim Scripture faithfully. As the 1988 Directory indicated, it is important to maintain a clear distinction between a Liturgy of the Word and the Mass, particularly when holy communion is offered to the people. Diocesan guidelines typically stress that vesting, gestures, language and ritual structure must avoid any confusion about the nature of the celebration.

Equally important is catechesis of the broader community. When parishioners understand *why* a lay-led celebration is taking place, and *what it is and is not*, these liturgies are often received with gratitude rather than reluctance. In many cases, communities develop a deeper appreciation for both the Word of God and the unique sacramental role of the priest.

Pastoral Fruits in Parish Life

Experience within Australia and elsewhere suggests that well-prepared lay-led Sunday celebrations can bear unexpected pastoral fruit. Parish communities often report:

- ♦ a renewed attention to the Scriptures and the Sunday readings,
- ♦ a greater confidence among lay ministers,
- ♦ a stronger sense of shared responsibility for parish worship,
- ♦ and an increased prayerfulness rather than passive attendance.

Importantly, these celebrations can strengthen the desire for the Eucharist rather than diminish it. Eucharist is not just about receiving holy communion. It is a participation in the saving mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. To make this clear, we must stop giving people communion from the tabernacle during Mass. Communion at Mass is a participation in the offering of Christ made at the altar. Communion during lay-led Sunday worship is a remembrance of the Eucharist celebrated last week and an anticipation of the Eucharist which might be celebrated next week.

When Mass cannot be celebrated, its absence is felt. This is an absence which is held prayerfully within the Church and is not resolved by pretending the Eucharist is dispensable.

Conclusion: A Faithful and Necessary Practice

Pope Francis urged us to be attentive to the signs of the times. Lay-led liturgical celebrations on Sunday are not a sign that parish life in Australia is failing. They are a sign that the Church is responding faithfully to real pastoral circumstances while remaining anchored in its liturgical tradition.

The challenge for Australian dioceses is not whether such celebrations should exist. The Church has already answered that question. Rather we need to make sure that they are well-prepared, taught and integrated into parish life. When exercised with clarity, reverence and episcopal oversight, these celebrations help ensure that no community is left spiritually isolated simply because a priest cannot be present.

In a Church shaped by vast distances, changing demographics and fewer ordained ministers, lay-led Sunday celebrations are not merely an emergency measure. They are a pastoral expression of communion, ensuring that the People of God continue to gather around the Word, to pray as the Church and to live Sunday as the heart of Christian life. We remain oriented toward the Eucharist, God's greatest gift to the Church.

■ Very Rev Peter Dillon is Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

CELEBRATING THE LITURGY WITH CHILDREN

A Vision for Engagement

by Clare Schwantes and Michael Mangan



Building on the theological foundations outlined in the previous issue, this article turns to the practicalities—offering tangible adaptations, ministerial roles and pastoral strategies that enable children to participate fully, consciously and joyfully in the Church's liturgical life.

Singing and Music

In promoting full, conscious and active liturgical participation, Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Liturgy suggests a number of ways for members of the assembly to do so; half of the listed ways are musical (SC 30). While singing is vital in all liturgies, it has a particular priority in Masses celebrated with children *in view of their special affinity for music* (*Directory for Masses with Children*, DMC 30).

The capability of the children must be taken into account so that they can easily participate in the singing. However, the repertoire must still serve the needs of the liturgy and be selected according to the priorities for liturgical music and according to criteria for liturgical suitability.

As in all Masses, the Gospel acclamation and the acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer should always be sung, as should the Responsorial Psalm (at least the people's response), the Gathering Song and the Communion song. Ideally the *Gloria* (if it is included), the *Lamb of God* and the *Lord Have Mercy* would also be sung. Other music may be included, for example at the preparation of the offerings, after communion and as a recessional; however, these have less liturgical importance.

There are a number of criteria or judgements which guide the choice of music which is appropriate for use in liturgy. Clearly, chosen repertoire must be pastorally appropriate for children; they must be able to sing it and be drawn in to sing it. That is not to say that all songs should be children's songs. Indeed, it is important that the children also come to know and love some of the standard parish repertoire.

Liturgical songs must be technically well constructed, have some artistic musical value and make 'musical sense'. They must be in a range which is able to be sung easily by the children and not rendered too

difficult by awkward melodic leaps or overly intricate rhythms. It is worth noting that the Church does not exclude any genre of music from liturgy as long as it is in keeping with the spirit of the liturgical action (SC 116, MS 9). Simple, well-crafted songs composed for children can have artistic merit and still support their active liturgical participation.

Music must serve the liturgical needs of the season, the Mass and the particular part of the Mass in which it is to be used. For example, Gathering and Communion songs must foster a sense of unity in the assembly which means that everyone must be able to sing them easily (GIRM 47, 86). Similarly, a Gathering song would not sing of being 'sent out' and a Communion song would sing of receiving and becoming the Body of Christ rather than of bringing bread and wine to the altar.

Finally, the lyrics of liturgical songs must always remain true to Catholic doctrine and be drawn mainly from scripture and liturgical sources (SC 121).

The DMC encourages involving children in music ministry leadership wherever possible by singing in the choir or acting as cantor (DMC 22). Having children play musical instruments, even simple percussion when appropriate, can *express festive joy and the praise of God* (DMC 32). While live music is always preferable, if necessary, recorded music may be used to sustain and support the children's singing in liturgy.

Children in Liturgical Ministry

DMC is unequivocal: *The principles of active and conscious participation are in a sense even more significant for Masses celebrated with children. Every effort should therefore be made to increase this participation and to make it more intense* (DMC 22).

It is important to be clear: the presence of non-Catholic children is not a reason to avoid celebrating Mass. Quite the opposite. The Mass, when celebrated with welcome, openness and inclusion, is one of the most powerful ways of facilitating a child's encounter with Christ.



LITURGICAL MINISTRIES RESERVED FOR BAPTISED STUDENTS

- Proclaimers of Scripture (Readers)
- Readers for the Prayer of the Faithful (*these represent the 'faithful', the baptised.*)
- Altar Servers (*usually expected to have received First Communion.*)
- Lay Ministers of Communion (*usually a trained adult Catholic.*)
- Presentation of the Offerings

LITURGICAL MINISTRIES FOR ALL STUDENTS

- *Preparation Team*: Students should be included in a liturgy preparation team.
- *Art & Environment*: Children help prepare & decorate the worship space.
- *Screens & Projection*: Older students could operate the computer for the screens.
- *Welcome*: Welcoming children and adults as they arrive for the celebration.
- *Processions*: Children in the entrance procession
- *Drama*: Some elements of drama might enhance the Liturgy of the Word.
- *Music Ministry*: Skilled students as cantors, choristers or instrumentalists.
- *Dance & Movement*: Students might lead actions or movement in some songs.

Participation in these ministries can open a door, sometimes imperceptibly, into a desire for deeper belonging. It shows them and their families that they already have a place here.

Rehearsal

Another practical and pastoral encouragement from the *Directory* is the value of rehearsal. Not simply to practise songs or readings, but to prepare children spiritually to enter into the mystery.

Ideally, the priest can be present at this rehearsal. Even a short visit to the class before the Mass can be a powerful moment to welcome the children personally, to tell them, 'I'm so glad you'll be there', and to affirm that they belong.

The Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, *Desiderio*

Desideravi, notes that the liturgy is not something we

master before we enter; it is something that forms us as we participate. Francis writes, *Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the liturgy* (DD 65).

From Blessing to Belonging

It is one of the quietest gestures in the liturgy, and yet one of the most profound: a young person, not yet receiving communion, comes forward during the Communion Rite with their arms crossed over their chest. They receive a blessing. And they return to their seat. But in that moment something sacred is unfolding.

When a young person presents themselves for a blessing during Communion, they are already participating in the liturgy in a deeply personal way. They are not spectators. They are seeking. It is up to both parish and school to notice. We trust that the Spirit is already working and that our role is to invite and to accompany.

The Power of Invitation

These children may not be ready for baptism, but they may be ready to talk, to ask questions, perhaps even join an RCIA group, or simply to sit in the pew again the next week.

The Church must show special concern for the faithful who are not fully initiated (DMC 3). That concern can take the form of a teacher gently asking, *Have you ever thought about becoming Catholic?* or a priest saying, *You're always welcome here, and if you ever want to know more, I'd be glad to talk.* Often, the young person has never been asked. Often, they think they've missed their chance. And often, when that simple invitation is made, they say yes.

A Warm Welcome

First impressions matter. Especially for families who may only occasionally attend Mass, the welcome they receive in the first moments of their arrival can determine how they experience the whole celebration.

This welcome is not only a greeting at the door, though that is a good place to start. It is also the tone of the opening words and the inclusion of children and parents in the introduction to the liturgy; these can create a ripple of recognition, easing nerves and softening hearts. Never underestimate the power of welcome because, in the end, it is Christ who welcomes people through us.

The DMC and Parish Liturgy

Many clergy, parish liturgy teams and even school leaders are not familiar with the DMC, and many of those who are incorrectly assume that it only applies to Masses in schools. While much of the document addresses ‘Masses With Children in Which Only a Few Adults Participate’ – effectively school Masses – DMC 16-19 specifically focus on ‘Masses With Adults in Which Children Also Participate’, that is, general parish eucharistic liturgy. Further, DMC encourages parishes to employ some of the adaptations in the document *wherever the bishop permits* (DMC 19).

In parish Masses, *it is necessary to take great care that the children present do not feel neglected* because they are too young to understand what is being ritualised, prayed and proclaimed (DMC 17). The *Directory* counsels that children should be acknowledged and spoken to directly by the presider in the introductory comments and *at some point in the homily* (DMC 17). While the needs of the children may be partly met if they are withdrawn for a separate Liturgy of the Word with Children, it is still important that they are not otherwise ignored when they are present in the assembly.

Indeed, the *Directory* suggests that *if the number of children is large, it may at times be suitable to plan the Mass so that it corresponds more closely to the needs of the children* (DMC 19). In this instance it is recommended that the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* is used together with one of the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. The homily would be directed to the children *but in such a way that the adults may also benefit from it* (DMC 19). Some ministries at these Masses might be assigned to children, for example, the procession of gifts or involvement in music ministry (DMC 18).

The Children's Lectionary

Many parishes have scheduled ‘Family Masses’ throughout the year. These can be a vital point of contact with families and children from the school or sacramental program. While the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* is primarily envisioned for

non-Sunday settings, the *Directory* also allows for its use in Sunday Masses *when the Mass is celebrated with a large number of children* (DMC 42).

The Children's Lectionary translation is also highly appropriate for parents who may not be familiar with the scriptures. Even parishioners who attend Mass every Sunday report hearing the Lectionary texts in a new way and perceiving new insights when hearing the children's translation.

During times of sacramental preparation, the parish liturgy becomes a crucial formation space. It is here that children and their families see the sacraments not as isolated events, but as part of the ongoing life of the Church. These moments call for us to put extra energy into the liturgy, to speak directly to the children's sense of wonder.

Gestures in the Liturgy

The DMC is unequivocal in stating that *the purpose of the Directory is to help children readily and joyfully encounter Christ together in the eucharistic celebration and to stand with him in the presence of the Father* (DMC 55). One optional but meaningful gesture some parishes adopt is inviting children to gather near the altar prior to the Lord's Prayer. The children might be welcomed to come and stand together in front of the family table.

If the children's liturgy of the word has taken place, they might be engaged in a brief dialogue about what they heard in the word of God and what they reflected upon at children's liturgy. Then the Our Father can be introduced as prayer we pray together to the God who gathers us as one family. There is an opportunity for the celebrant to share a sign of peace with each child before they return to their seats.

In every generation, the Church is called to draw young people into the mystery of faith, not as observers but as full participants. When the liturgy is adapted with care, creativity and fidelity to the Church's vision, children come to know that they belong to the community, to the story of salvation, and to Christ himself. This is the heart of our ministry: to form communities where children and their families are welcomed, engaged and drawn ever more deeply into the mystery of divine love.

■ Dr Clare Schwantes is Director of Liturgy Brisbane and chairs the National Liturgical Council; she is a former teacher.

■ Michael Mangan is a liturgist and composer of liturgical music for children; he is Director of Litmus Productions.



Returning Participatory Music to Liturgy

by Geoffrey Madden

Our Roman Catholic liturgy is musical. Music is not an add-on to liturgy, it is baked into the liturgy. Our liturgy is also participatory, so that anything that impedes active participation, such as using recordings of hymns, needs to be addressed. Having music to support the assembly's role will need to take into consideration the declining availability of musicians. Rather than listening to a recording of someone else singing a song, we need to explore the use of simple instruments and technology that could allow our congregations to find their voice.

To be honest, music in parish liturgy in Australia is patchy. It is poorly funded and hence relies on volunteers. Many of our organists are aging and dying and, for that matter, guitarists like me are struggling with our arthritic hands. I read a post on a Catholic web page describing the situation in Western Australia, *Church music is all but dead outside the capital cities and not present in all parishes there*. When trained, enthusiastic musicians who are not suffering from burn-out are available, all is well, but that is becoming less common. Many parishes will struggle to have music for their liturgies and will need to examine their options.

More 'quiet' Masses are an option, just less than ideal. Modern people need all the help they can to see the numinous. The fear of Romano Guardini in 1964 that modern minds had become incapable of the liturgical act is even more pressing today than it was in the 1960s. T S Eliot diagnosed the post enlightenment person as having a 'dissociation of sensibility', that is, our rational thought is divorced from our feelings in a way that was not true for the premodern mind. Music is one of the few activities in which we can recover the nonrational (not irrational) act of feeling and thinking simultaneously. It enables us

to be more able to participate in the work of liturgy. If liturgy be the engine, then music is the fuel.

Many church documents tell us about the importance of music in liturgy. A good summary is provided by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (2007).

Singing is one of the primary ways that the assembly of the faithful participates in the liturgy. The musical formation of the assembly must be a continuing concern in order to foster full, conscious and active participation (STTL 26).

What do we need to do?

Stepping away from laudable aspirations, let us look at what is required to have music in a liturgy. From a purely practical point of view, there are three basic functions required; beginning musicians probably cannot do them all themselves.

Firstly, you need to know how Mass is celebrated in that particular assembly. All parishes have subtle differences, whether it is due to local custom or priestly preference. Not adjusting for these can interfere with the liturgical flow. Just remembering cues for each piece of music is a feat that even long-time Catholics find difficult. Musicians will also likely be advancing slides on the overheads or doing other tasks they lack enough hands to achieve. It won't happen smoothly without a local expert standing next to the new volunteer to tap them on the shoulder.

Secondly, you need a method to get the singing started and an indication of the melody, especially for new songs. That could be a singer to lead or a melody instrument. An indication of tempo and key and a clear introduction would be mandatory. My guitar is not sufficient because it only plays chords; I need a singer. Unaccompanied singing is possible for well-known songs but still someone must get it started.

There is also the question of supporting the people's singing. If a parish knows the song well, the leader can help them start and then sing quietly away from a microphone. But if the song is new or the congregation is uncertain, it will need stronger support. There is a magic volume at which the assembly doesn't stop singing because it is all happening without them but still have enough reassurance to make the effort to sing.

Thirdly, you need something with which to make music. You could use very simple



instrumentation and voice. We must remember no-one is giving a performance in church, nor is perfection expected. If we are struggling to find musicians, one solution is to find instruments that are easy to play. Some instruments are by their nature simpler to play. Autoharps (*above top*) are not a common instrument, but they allow chords at the press of a button and can be strummed with minimal training. Ukuleles are enjoying a major resurgence and while the ordinary Uke is an unlikely liturgical instrument, the Baritone Ukulele (*above*) is essentially a four stringed travel guitar. There are ukulele clubs all over the country including many retirement villages, so it is worth investigating. Moving to guitar, many very beginner guitarists can play 6 chords in the key of G (G, C, Am, Em, D and Bm) and an extraordinary number of songs can be played with these chords and a capo.

All music can be beautiful and sacred if it comes from the heart of your assembly. Inculturation applies everywhere. Whether it is Latin texts and chant, or traditional hymns and a pipe organ, or the idiom of folk or country music, what is meaningful should be used. Simple instruments coming from within a community will be more helpful than excellent musicianship that is foreign to a community. If you have no musicians at all, your options narrow, unless you are born to a *capella* music like some of our Islander communities.

New possibilities

Some parishes use a recording of a performance of the song. This is not ideal because it is a *performance* and so not necessarily something that people can sing along with. The key is frequently too high and tempo is obviously fixed and so cannot be adapted to the needs of the assembly. It also tends to encourage a culture of listening which is antithetical to participation.

Another option is using backing tracks in liturgy. I would like to make it clear that live music is and should be the norm. The best use of backing tracks is for learning new pieces, so they can be played as the songwriter intended. Beyond that, for use at Mass, the technology has reached the point where, as an alternative to no music at all, they will have to be considered for use in our liturgies.

When I started playing guitar in church, I resorted to a bit of support from the primitive backings of the 1990s. Having used self-made backings, I am well aware of their drawbacks. A competent live musician will act dynamically with the assembly and can react to unexpected occurrences. A backing cannot do that and they are harder to sing with than a live musician for that reason – the backing always wins.

I have been told, point blank, that recorded backings are forbidden in the Mass, but there have been a lot of prohibitions over the centuries relating to musical instruments in the liturgy. The esteemed pipe organ, for example, was not accepted until the twelfth century because it was associated with secular entertainments and the proper music of the Church was only vocal. Since Vatican Council II, the possibilities have been broadened, provided they facilitate music that is suitable for sacred use and encourages people's participation.

Non-live music should not replace musicians nor discourage participation. Of course, if there are no musicians it isn't replacing anyone. The liturgical documents will no doubt continue to catch up with actual practice in order to cater for new pastoral needs. What the writers of the documents could not foresee were the advances in computing that now make it possible for a community to make their own backings, specific to their situation, that encourage participation until enough real musicians are available.

There are also some pre-recorded options – commercially available backings designed for congregational use – the best being the piano backings from Willow for much of their repertoire in singable keys. Some songwriters include backing tracks in their packages, especially for schools. However, I fear that relying on commercially available pre-recorded backings will be impossible across the whole repertoire of a parish, which suggests a place for computerised backings.

Many keyboards allow a musician to record MIDI files, which then can be used while they are away, again with the benefit of editing being available. I make MIDI files using a program called Band in a Box, available from PG Music in Canada. It can do many amazing things, but for our purposes the key function is that someone who is not at all musical can, with a little work, make a competent backing for their parish needs. In its basic form it is much less daunting than most computer music programs.

The documents of the Catholic Church that refer to music have changed in their acceptance of diverse instrumentation. They are clear that singing remains the major way that the assembly participates in liturgy and that music should come from within the local parish. With musicians in short supply, lateral thinking is needed in funding music training, encouraging and assisting less skilled players of easier instruments to be involved. But in the face of necessity, it is also worthwhile for a parish to explore ways of taking advantage of technology so that they can make their own backing tracks to support participatory music in the liturgy.

■ Dr Geoffrey Madden is a GP, formerly of Brisbane and currently in Tasmania. An active liturgical music minister, he has a background in literature, religion and liturgy.



PARALLEL PARKES?

by Gerard Hore

On a hot afternoon in February 2026 in western New South Wales, my wife Geraldine and I visited Murriyang ('Skyworld' in Wiradjuri language). We knew the iconic piece of Australian technology found there as the Parkes Radio Telescope or just 'The Dish'. We were very impressed with what we saw and we learned a lot.

Afterwards, as we drove the 20km into Parkes for a cold drink, I realised that in 1961 when the telescope was opened, I was in Grade 1. Then I remembered this was the year before the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Later I wondered if the story of the telescope might provide a parallel to the life of the Catholic Church over those same 65 years.

Outsiders glancing at both Murriyang and the Church might think neither had changed much between 1961 and 2026. The telescope, with its 64-metre diameter dish atop a three-storey support structure, looks the same today as in its Opening Day photographs. Likewise, many of the church buildings where the Catholics go to Mass may look externally as they did in 1961. Further, public portrayals of the Church often use tired clichés and stereotypes which suggest not much has changed: it is said to be an environment of staid conservatism and an authoritarian hierarchy, subscribing to outdated rules regarding behaviour and moral questions.

The reality is different. What might the scientists at the Dish say when comparing the activities of 1961 with those of 2026? What about Australian Catholics, how would they answer the same kind of question?

Of course there is continuity. I think it would not take much discussion to reach a point where both sets of people would say that, at the deepest level, their core business in 2026 is the same as it was in 1961. For 65 years, the people of the Parkes Dish have been adding to humanity's knowledge of the universe. The former



sheep paddock Murriyang has ceaselessly (literally 'ceaselessly' we discovered) been receiving signals from the sky across unimaginable distances and incomprehensible eons of time. Likewise, the Church, led by Jesus Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, continues to give glory to the Father in its liturgy and has continued to spread God's kingdom of peace and justice.

However, within the unchanging dedication to the same task, it is obvious that the activities in both Murriyang and the Church are very different from those of 65 years ago. We were surprised to learn that Murriyang is now 10,000 times more powerful than it was in 1961. Much of its work today deals with aspects of the universe barely imaginable when the instrument was commissioned. In 2026 the space objects it studies, the theories it tests and the methods it uses to obtain and process data would have been beyond the dreams of the scientists at the Parkes Radio Telescope in 1961. No professional working with the telescope today would want to go back to 1961 understandings, attitudes or ways of doing things.

The Church too has seen vast change. Since Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church is humbler; we acknowledge that we do not have a monopoly on truth but that we can learn from other Christian faith communities and grow in co-operation and unity with them. Ecclesial leadership is understood as service rather than as feudal-style lordship. The Church is described as the 'Body of Christ' and all the baptised are seen as having the central role and responsibility in the Church's mission.

In the liturgy, there are some obvious changes. Latin has given way to the vernacular and sanctuaries have been reordered. But what is more significant are the new ways of understanding what we are doing.

The Eucharist is no longer thought to be a ritual celebrated by the priest with the people just 'attending' or 'hearing' Mass. Christ celebrates the liturgy (*Catechism* 1136), that is, the whole body of those baptised into Christ. The Vatican Council's *full, conscious, active participation* – the aim to be pursued above all else (SC 14) – means that everyone is the celebrant of the liturgy. In this way, we are able to participate in the ever-ancient, ever-new paschal work of Christ. We recognise that Christ is present and saving us not just in the actions of the priest and in the blessed sacrament he has consecrated, but also in the gathered Church and the proclamation of the word. There is new emphasis on the two-part structure of Mass in the Liturgy of Word and Eucharist. We have opened up the lavish treasures of the Scriptures by proclaiming a much broader range of texts in a language people can understand. The sermon is replaced by the homily which leads people to encounter Christ in the word. We have realised that the Scriptures are an essential part of God's loving revelation to us. The Liturgy of the Word in its present form and richness would undoubtedly be a surprise to pre-Vatican II Catholics.

The liturgical reform, marked by 'noble simplicity' (SC 34), has introduced us to a new understanding of sacramentality. Whether it be water or oil, bread or wine, hands or the voice, a sacrament leads us into an encounter with Christ in mystery. That is why the Church has put new emphasis on making the sacramental sign strongly. The Church proposes immersion for baptism, encourages us to receive communion in the form of bread broken as well as the common cup. Communion is to be received not from the tabernacle but from the altar. The people's postures, actions, speech, singing, listening, processing, taking, eating, drinking and

being silent, all express a reverent commonality with one another and with Christ.

In order to support these new forms and understandings of the liturgy, hardly any Catholic church looks the same internally as they did in 1961. As far as pre-existing physical structures and budgets have allowed, the design of the liturgical space now displays the sense of a community of people gathering round a sanctuary which contains a presidential chair and an ambo as well as a free-standing altar. Placing the tabernacle in its own space away from the focal point of the celebration is desirable because the primary meaning of Eucharist lies in the celebration, the action (God's action) in the liturgy. That action includes receiving communion from what is consecrated in that actual celebration.

Catholics of 2026, like the radio-astronomers now using Murriyang, look back with gratitude to the pioneering people of 1961. At the same time, we can, again like today's scientists at Parkes, be delighted and thankful with the developments over recent decades. While we expect rapid change and better ways of engaging in areas of science and technology, it gives us joy to recognise also the new theological insights which have greatly enriched our celebration of the Church's liturgy.

■ Gerard Hore worked in Catholic schools as teacher, APRE, principal and then in system leadership roles for 46 years. He and Geraldine are members of St Theresa's Parish, Toowoomba.

OUR COVER

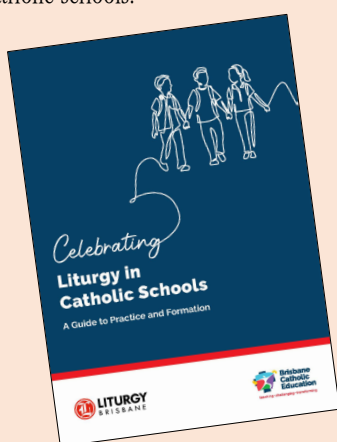
Parables of the Kingdom

The second of Matthew's parables of the Kingdom of Heaven which we have chosen occurs in the liturgy on the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (26 July). It is the parable of the dragnet (Mt 13:47-48). Cast into the sea, the net brings up all kinds of fish. The good ones are put into baskets; the bad ones are thrown away. So it will be, says Jesus, at the end of time when the wicked are separated from the good.

The kingdom is a mixed body of saints and sinners. The final sorting is left to God when the good will be welcomed with joy into the company of the risen Christ. In the meantime, we live our lives in hope, treating others with tolerance and patience. For ourselves, we seek to be numbered among the saints invited to be part of the Lord's glorious kingdom

LITURGY IN SCHOOLS

The launch of *Celebrating Liturgy in Catholic Schools* marked an important milestone in the ongoing collaboration between Liturgy Brisbane and Brisbane Catholic Education. Developed through extensive consultation with educators, liturgists and pastoral leaders, the document offers practical and theological guidance for the celebration of liturgy in Catholic schools.



The 68-page resource seeks to bridge the worlds of parish and school by supporting teachers who are planning liturgy in educational settings, while also assisting clergy and parish leaders to better understand the distinctive context of Catholic schools. It provides clear guidance around the celebration of Masses with children, non-eucharistic liturgies, the proclamation of Scripture, music, ritual symbols, seasonal celebrations and the participation of children in liturgical ministries.

The document was warmly endorsed by Archbishop Shane Mackinlay and launched at a gathering of Brisbane Catholic Education leaders in June. The launch reflected a shared commitment to fostering liturgical formation that is both pastorally sensitive and deeply grounded in the liturgical life of the Church.

Celebrating Liturgy in Catholic Schools is now available for free download through the Resources section of the [Liturgy Brisbane website](#).

MARRIED PRIESTS

Belgian bishop, Johan Bonny of Antwerp, has written a pastoral letter about implementing matters arising out of the Synod on Synodality. He made proposals about women pastors and rethinking the nature of the parish, about welcoming new Catholics and reflecting on how to present the Church's message. But what caught universal attention were his words about ordaining married men as priests.

He acknowledged with gratitude the ministry of priests from abroad but said 'they come to help us, not replace us'. He argued that in fact we already have married priests who are well accepted – priests both from Eastern rite Catholic communities and also from among pastors of other Christian Churches who are received into full communion. Though married, they can be ordained as Catholic priests. Why then can we not ordain suitable married Catholic men from the local diocese? It is no longer a question of *whether* it can happen, but of *who* will do it and *when*.

He indicated that in conscience this was a move he needed to make. We discern, support and bring together all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Bonny sees the ordination of married men as a necessary pastoral development tied to credibility, local responsibility and the future of Church life. The Synod must end where it began: in every diocese and local Church. Bonny noted that in Antwerp, there were whole zones without a single Belgian priest under retirement age and hardly any seminarians.

He said he would approach suitable candidates personally, ensure that they have the necessary theological training and pastoral experience, and then move forward transparently but discretely. Over the next two years he would try to reach agreement with the Belgian bishops conference and the Vatican.

Meanwhile, statistics have been published from the United Kingdom. Between 1992 and 2024, there have been 522 Anglican priests ordained in the Catholic Church, representing 35% of ordinations in England and Wales. The diocese of Birmingham, for example, has 33 Catholic priests who are married in a presbyterium of about 150 active priests.



ACBC LITURGY

Reports of the liturgy celebrated at the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference meeting in May were encouraging. Eastern Rite liturgy is now a regular part of their liturgy cycle. This year Mass was celebrated in the Melkite tradition by Bishop Robert Rabbat with the other bishops concelebrating. Prayers were proclaimed in English and Arabic. Bishop Rabbat reflected that, over sixty years, Eastern Catholic Churches have moved from 'being listed as migrant chaplaincies to being accepted as 'integral Churches within the *Cattolica*'. He spoke of *the unity of the Church which is made manifest in the diverse ways in which faith is held and proclaimed, and in which the Household of the faith lives the life in Christ*. He suggested that one key way of journeying towards unity with Orthodox Churches was to work together on a common date for Easter.



An ecumenical service was also celebrated with representatives of more than a dozen Christian denominations. The liturgy was led by Bishop Michael Kennedy who chairs the Commission for Christian Unity and Interreligious Dialogue. In the homily, Bishop Greg Homeming urged participants to look to Christ the light, to walk with him and stand with him, in the midst of the darkness of the world and the madness of war.



MEETING OF CARDINALS

The college of cardinals from all parts of the world met in Rome on 26-27 June 2026. They focussed their discussion on 'our view of the world, peace, the common good and synodality'. Part of their work was to share ideas on the recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitatis* dealing with Artificial Intelligence and to reflect on 'the culture of power and the civilisation of love'.

Pope Leo spoke of synodality as ecclesial discernment and collaboration. It occurs when *we learn to listen to one another, to share responsibilities, and to recognise the action of the Spirit in various churches*. Pope Leo demonstrated this approach dramatically in his opening words to the cardinals.

Pope Leo said: *I wish to ask for your help. The ministry which the Lord has entrusted to me cannot be carried out alone. It requires your experience, your pastoral wisdom, your knowledge of the churches and peoples entrusted to you. I am counting on you to help me discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church today. I need your support: strong, explicit and public... Help me to listen to what is emerging in the churches, to recognise the signs of hope that often grow in silence, but also not to ignore the struggles, misunderstandings and resistance that can slow our journey. I need your freedom, frankness and your loyalty. Sincere advice is always an act of communion.*

Can we imagine surprising words like this being spoken by a parish priest in a parish community, perhaps to the parish pastoral council or finance council?

LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

In his Wednesday catechesis on 20 May 2026, Pope Leo began a series of talks on the liturgy document of Vatican Council II. He urged his listeners to allow themselves *to be shaped inwardly by the rites, the symbols, the gestures and above all by the living presence of Christ in the liturgy*. He indicated that liturgical participation is both 'interior' and 'exterior'. What we celebrate in the liturgy needs to unfold concretely through our daily life, in an ethical and spiritual dynamic, so that the liturgy translates into life and leads to a faithful way of life.

This can take place, he said, because *in the liturgy, the work of our redemption is*



carried out (SC 2) which makes us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (see 1 Pet 2:9).

As demonstrated by the threefold renewal – biblical, patristic and liturgical – that swept through the Church during the 20th century, the mystery [of Christ in the liturgy] does not refer to some obscure reality, but to God's salvific plan, hidden from eternity and revealed in Christ... This, then, is the Christian Mystery: the Paschal event, that is, the passion, death, resurrection and glorification of Christ, which is made sacramentally present to us precisely in the liturgy, so that every time we participate in the assembly gathered 'in his name', we are immersed in this mystery.

Christ himself is the inner principle of the mystery of the Church, the holy people of God, born from his pierced side on the cross. In the sacred liturgy, by the power of his Spirit, he continues to act. He sanctifies and unites the Church, his bride, to his offering to the Father. He exercises his absolutely unique priesthood, he who is present in the proclaimed word, in the sacraments, in the ministers who celebrate, in the assembled community and, in the highest degree, in the Eucharist (see SC 7). Thus, according to Saint Augustine, in celebrating the Eucharist, the Church 'receives the Body of the Lord and becomes what she receives': she becomes the Body of Christ, 'the dwelling place of God in the Spirit'.

This series of weekly catecheses would be an excellent source for material to be included in parish newsletters. They can be found at:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/audiences/2026.index.html>

ACCESSIBLE MASS

The historic Holy Cross Church at South Kincumber in the Diocese of Broken Bay is one of the oldest buildings in Australia (1843). It has introduced an 'Accessible Mass' on the second Sunday of each month. It welcomes diversity and gives special attention to individuals and families living with disability, neurodiversity or additional needs. The Mass is celebrated in a supportive and flexible environment where everyone is welcome to participate in ways that feel comfortable for them.

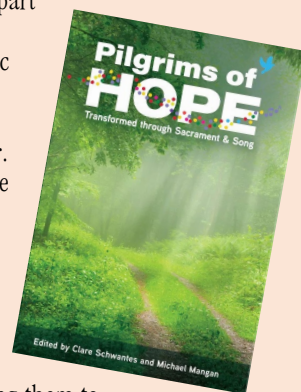
For some people, the liturgy can be overwhelming, stressful or confusing because of all the activity, sounds, smells and rules. The accessible celebration takes place in a quieter place with more space and modified lighting and sound levels. In this calmer environment, people are free: they may move around or even in some cases make noise. Someone might want to move away from other people or go to a darker space. People might want to wear sunglasses or headphones, for example, or bring fidget tools or other items.

A detailed description is given on the Broken Bay diocesan website under the title *Accessible Mass Visual Story*. It sets out procedures for moments such as the Sign of Peace or receiving holy communion.

<https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/mission/accessible-mass-visual-story>

NEW RESOURCE

Pilgrims of Hope: Transformed through Sacrament and Song is a title familiar to those who took part in the national liturgy and music conference in Adelaide in October last year. Here many of the presentations are edited and published. It is an excellent reference for those who attended, enabling them to review what they heard and catch up on what they wished they had (one cannot attend all the papers). For those who were unable to attend and take part in this wonderful event, here is the opportunity to catch a glimpse of what went on. The 430-page book is available from [Liturgy Brisbane shop](#) at \$39.95.

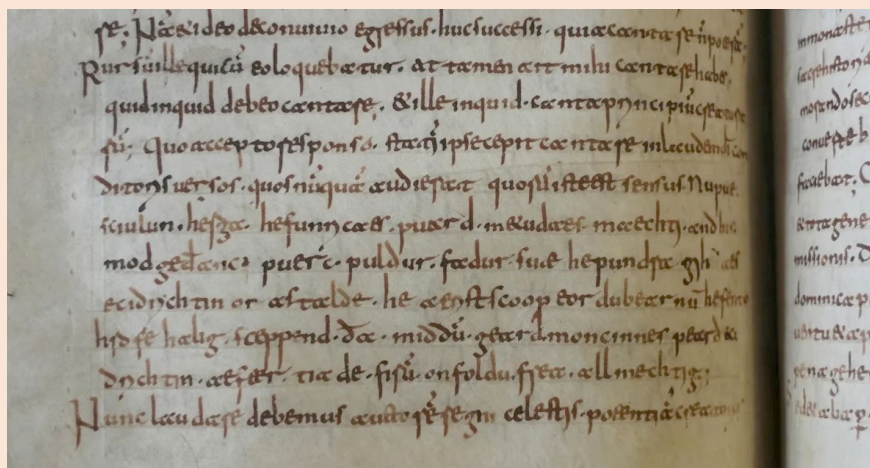


CAEDMON'S HYMN

A copy of the oldest surviving poem in Old English has been discovered written into an early 9th-century Latin version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. The manuscript is held in Rome's National Library.

Bede tells the story of Caedmon's Hymn, saying that it was composed to be sung in Old English by a Northumbrian agricultural worker at Whitby Abbey in the 7th century. It is a prayer-poem on creation. It was usually translated into Latin, sometimes with the Old English written afterwards into the margins of the Latin text.

Unusually, in this case, it is incorporated into the text itself, indicating that it was considered valuable to preserve a vernacular text. English becomes literature! The Latin switches to Old English on the last word of the seventh line from the bottom and runs over the next five lines before switching back to Latin.



The text of the poem in Old English

Nupue.
sciulun. herga. hefunricaes. puard. metudaes. maechti. and his.
mod geðanc. puerc. puldur. fadur. suæhepundragiaes
ecidrichtin or astalde. he aeristscoop eor dubearnū hefento
hrofe halig. sceppend. ða. middū. gear. moncinnes peard eci
drichtin. aefter. tia de. firu. on foldu. frea. allmechtig.

A translation in modern English

Now let us praise Heaven-Kingdom's guardian, the Maker's might and his mind's thoughts, the work of the glory-father—of every wonder, eternal Lord. He established a beginning. He first shaped for men's sons heaven as a roof, the holy Creator; then middle-earth mankind's guardian, eternal Lord, afterwards prepared the earth for men, the Lord almighty.

LITURGICAL NAMES

For centuries, English Christians have called Pentecost Sunday 'Whitsunday'. On 3 June 1770 which was Pentecost day, James Cook's ship *Endeavour* was sailing among a group of islands off the east coast of what is now Airlie Beach, Queensland, the home of the Ngaro people. Cook called the largest of them Whitsunday Island, a name which is applied now to the whole group of islands and the passage through them. He also gave the name Pentecost to another (small) island in the group.

The next Sunday 10 June was Trinity Sunday. By now, Cook was 600 km further north and he named the area Trinity Bay, which today is Trinity Beach near Cairns.

Easter does not figure in any Cook-named places in Australia. His first sighting of eastern Australia (in south-east Victoria) was on Friday 20 April 1770. The previous Sunday had been Easter. It is interesting to see how the liturgical feasts were fixed in the minds of people in the 18th century in a way that would no longer be true today.

UNAUTHORISED ORDINATIONS

The traditionalist Society of St Pius X, established by Archbishop Lefebvre in reaction to Vatican Council II and its liturgical reform, went ahead to ordain four bishops without a papal mandate. This has been judged to be a schismatic act which puts the society outside communion with the Catholic Church. It is an injury to the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Vatican has declared that not only the bishops who took part in the ordination but their priests as well as any lay person who 'adheres' to the SSPX are in schism and are automatically excommunicated. When the priests celebrate penance or marriage, these sacraments are invalid. The ordained however do have valid orders; therefore, the Masses they celebrate are valid but illicit. There are some 1500 formal members of SSPX with perhaps 600,000 people who attend their liturgy world-wide.

The SSPX is maintaining that they are the only ones upholding the true Catholic faith; their statement indicated that they could not accept 'errors' which gravely harm the salvation of souls. Examples of such errors were ecumenism which recognised the work of the Holy Spirit in other Churches or, by extension, the idea that non-Christian religions (including Judaism) might contain some good and provide a path to salvation. The SSPX rejected ideas of religious freedom and the new developments of synodality which they maintained would make the Church a consultative, parliamentary democracy.

Over the last fifty years, the Vatican has tried every conceivable strategy to reconcile the SSPX – making allowance for the Tridentine Mass, lifting earlier decrees of excommunication, establishing a special agency *Ecclesia Dei* to dialogue with the group – all to no avail. Sadly, the SSPX has not moved an inch from their fixed ideas. It has become increasingly clear that it is not just a matter of celebrating the traditional Latin liturgy but of accepting the fundamental teaching of Vatican Council II. For the Catholic Church, this is not negotiable. That is why Pope Leo noted before the ordinations took place: *Certainly, division among Christians is always a painful point. But they [the SSPX] refuse to accept certain fundamental elements of the Church, starting with several points from the Second Vatican Council. If they make*

that choice, I am sorry, but we must move forward.

The rhetoric of the SSPX maintains that they are the real Catholic Church. Now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome has made it perfectly clear that they are not; they are outside the Catholic Church. In addition, the Dicastery has outlined a five-step procedure for the reinstatement of any cleric who wishes to affirm their unity with the Catholic Church. The Vatican remains open to dialogue.

LAY PREACHING

At a time when national and local synods in Australia are calling to expand the possibilities for lay preaching, the German bishops have received a negative reply on lay people giving the Sunday homily. In order to address the shortage of priests, the German bishops conference had requested an indult to allow lay people to give the homily after the gospel at the Sunday Eucharist. The problem seems to be the terms 'homily' and 'Eucharist' because the Holy See itself in its reply pointed to the Code of Canon Law which makes provision for lay people to preach in church *if this is necessary under certain circumstances or recommended as useful in individual cases* (can. 766). The following canon says that the homily is the most important form of preaching and, as such, is reserved to the priest/deacon.

The Holy See saw the homily as a sacramental act linked to the proclamation of the gospel and as an integral part of the broader liturgical act which immerses participants in the mystery of salvation. These responsibilities belong to the sacrament of orders, it says. Specific pastoral situations do not justify changing the norm. Underlying this question is the broader task of articulating the priesthood of all the baptised with the ministerial priesthood given in the sacrament of Orders and identifying how the mission to teach (*munus docendi*) fits into the schema.

Lay preaching remains possible at Mass (as well as other liturgical and prayer events). Since 1988, it has been allowed in Germany for lay people to preach on the readings at the beginning of Mass, although this is awkward since the people have not yet heard the biblical texts. Lay 'reflections' after the gospel are approved in Switzerland and are widespread in other parts of Europe.



The APRE and the Art of Liturgical Formation

by John Downie

It's Friday morning, and a Year 6 class is preparing for prayer assembly. Two students quietly practise proclaiming the scripture, checking pronunciation and pacing. Nearby, a small group chooses images that reflect the theme of justice they've explored in class. At the back of the room, their teacher gently asks: *'How will we help people really pray today?'*

Later, as the community gathers, there are moments of uncertainty, slight pauses and hesitant voices, but something deeper is happening. Students listen attentively. Silence settles after the scripture. A simple gesture invites reflection. This is more than a well-run assembly; it is a community learning how to pray.

Behind this moment is the often unseen work of the Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE) - not simply organising the event but shaping the formation that made it possible.



In Catholic schools, liturgy is not simply something we *do*; it forms who we are. It is where the community gathers to encounter Christ, listen to the word, and participate in the prayer of the Church. For this reason, the role of the APRE is significant and deeply formative.

The APRE stands at the intersection of leadership, pedagogy and spirituality. Their work is not only to organise liturgical celebrations but to cultivate a Catholic culture where liturgy shapes the identity and mission of the school. This calls for formation that is intentional, integrated and grounded in the lived experience of students and staff.

Liturgy as formation, not just celebration

One enduring insight of contemporary liturgical renewal is that liturgy forms us over time. It is not an isolated event but part of an ongoing process through which individuals and communities come to know and live the mystery of Christ more deeply.

In schools, this invites a shift from seeing liturgies as occasional 'special events' to recognising them as part of a broader rhythm of formation. The APRE fosters this shift by supporting a coherent approach in which:

- classroom learning prepares students for liturgy,
- liturgy gives expression to what is learned,
- reflection on what is learned deepens understanding and personal meaning.

This integration ensures that liturgy is not experienced as something external but as the natural expression of a community that is learning to pray, to listen and to respond.

Participation: more than involvement

Central to liturgical life is the call to full, conscious and active participation. In schools, this is not simply about assigning roles or ensuring student involvement. It is about creating opportunities for genuine encounter where students, staff and community engage with the symbols, words and actions of the liturgy in meaningful and transformative ways.

The APRE's leadership is critical in shaping this kind of participation. This involves:

- forming students in the meaning of liturgical symbols, gestures and responses,
- designing experiences that are appropriate to age and context,
- inviting student voice and co-design in prayer and liturgy,
- creating space for silence, reflection and response.

When participation is understood in this way, students move beyond 'doing things' in liturgy to experiencing it as prayer, encountering God through word, sacrament and community.

The classroom as a privileged place of ongoing formation

If liturgy is to be formative, it must connect with the everyday life of the classroom. It is here that students learn to pray, listen and recognise God's presence in their lives.

Teachers play a vital role. Through regular, intentional prayer practices – morning prayer, scripture reflection, rituals of gathering and sending – they establish a rhythm that prepares students for deeper engagement in communal liturgy.

The APRE supports teachers to see themselves as ministers of this formation. This includes:

- providing practical resources that connect scripture, prayer and student experience,
- modelling simple, authentic prayer practices,
- leading professional learning that builds theological understanding and confidence,
- encouraging consistency across the school.

When classroom practice and liturgical celebration are aligned, students begin to experience faith not as a subject but as a way of living.

Integrating liturgy into the life of the school

A key responsibility of the APRE is ensuring that liturgy is woven into the rhythm of the school. This is more than planning major celebrations; it is shaping a culture in which prayer and ritual are part of daily experience.

In such a culture:

- liturgical seasons are lived, not simply marked,
- key school moments are framed by prayer and ritual,
- assemblies and gatherings reflect the language and symbols of faith,
- connections are made between liturgy, justice and mission.

This integration helps students understand that liturgy is not separate from life. Rather, it forms and sends them into the world as participants in God's mission.

Formation of staff: essential and ongoing

For liturgy to be celebrated well, those who lead it must themselves be formed. The APRE supports staff not only in the practical aspects of planning but in deepening their understanding of liturgy as the prayer of the Church.

This formation is relational and ongoing. It might include:

- opportunities for shared prayer and reflection among staff,
- unpacking the theology and structure of liturgical celebrations,
- modelling good practice in preparation and leadership,
- creating a culture of confidence and shared responsibility.

When staff are formed, their leadership of liturgy becomes more authentic and engaging. This enhances the experience for students and the wider community.

A ministry of encounter

Ultimately, the APRE's work in liturgical formation is a ministry of encounter. It creates the conditions in which students and staff can meet Christ through word, symbol, silence and community.

This work requires vision and attentiveness: vision to see what is possible, and attentiveness to the needs and experiences of the school community. It is not about perfection but authenticity in prayer.

When liturgy is thoughtfully prepared, meaningfully participated in, and deeply integrated, it becomes a powerful source of formation. It shapes not only what students know, but who they are becoming. In supporting this work, *Liturgy in Catholic Schools: A Guide to Practice and Formation* (2026), developed collaboratively by Liturgy Brisbane and Brisbane Catholic Education, offers APREs and school communities a valuable resource for leading with clarity, confidence and shared purpose.

The APRE is both leader and companion: guiding the community in prayer, supporting the work of teachers and inviting all into the richness of the Church's liturgical life.

■ John Downie is Manager of Formation and Engagement in Leadership with Brisbane Catholic Education.

Thomas O'Loughlin, *In Christ Now Meet Both East and West: On Catholic Eucharistic Action* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2023) 112 pp

by James Cronin

Many people simply ignore our theology of the incarnation and deny that the reforms begun in Vatican II were and are desperately needed. They employ a series of false memories, combined with nostalgia and aestheticism, ignore the reality of what was done, along with the reasons, both theological and pastoral, for the reforms and the fact that such needed reforms could not be accomplished in a moment or even in a decade, but are still in process (pp. 93-4).

Luckily, we have fine scholars like Tom O'Loughlin who continue to promote Vatican II's *ressourcement*! The key concerns dealt with in this very cogent little book are: the assembly as celebrant; the understanding of memorial and blessing; sharing the one bread and one cup; sharing with the poor; and anticipating the heavenly banquet.

The first of these concerns is realised in the posture assumed for the liturgy: *when we exhibit our neediness we do not grovel, nor kneel, but stand*. Standing for prayer denotes that *all the baptised are the priests of the new covenant* (p. 77). It has long annoyed me that the current translations of Eucharistic Prayers I and II avoid the reference to the people who 'stand' around the altar. Eucharistic Prayer I translates *omnium circumstantium* (literally 'all those standing round') as 'all gathered here'; Eucharistic Prayer II translates *astare coram te* (literally 'to stand before you') as 'to be in your presence'. Now we, the baptised, are the *circumstantes* at the Eucharist, those who stand at the altar to make the offering; it is our place. Would it be difficult to have the congregation join the priest around the altar from the offertory onwards? Sometimes yes. Because we put our altars onto high platforms for the sake of visibility, we lose the sense that we are all participants in the eucharistic action.

O'Loughlin goes on to make a fine case for having a single loaf at each Eucharist: *It is*

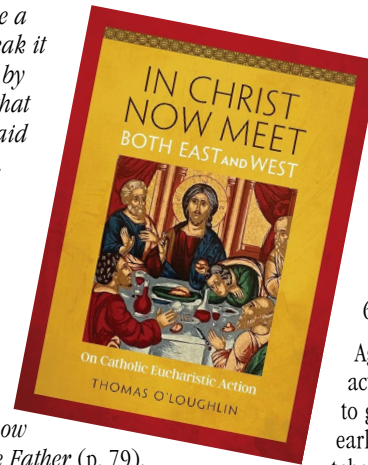
only when we actually have a loaf of real bread, then break it so that a piece can be held by everyone in the assembly, that we can reflect on what is said about this in the Scriptures.

We are the body of the Christ, we are the beneficiaries of his sacrifice, we are one with him, we are the scattered children of God that have been regathered like the grains of wheat and transformed by him and now stand in the presence of the Father (p. 79).

The import given to the shared cup is even more challenging. Whether we go for coffee or share a bottle of wine with friends, *we drink liquids from our individual cups...[but] Jesus' distinctive action was that at his table companions shared not a liquid but a cup* (p. 80). Jesus says, 'Take this cup and drink...' This shocking innovation begun by Jesus was *an act that shattered other boundaries such as those of race, social status, and factions within the churches, and implied a willingness for a new constructed community and a new intimacy in Jesus. Sharing a cup, they had become blood brothers and sisters* (p. 87). St Paul's challenge to the Corinthians always applies: *Examine yourself, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. If you eat and drink without recognising the body [sacramental and ecclesial], you eat and drink judgement to yourself* (1 Cor 11: 28-29).

Some priests insist on their own exclusive chalice alongside the cup that others will share; other clergy allow 'both kinds' for everyone only on Holy Thursday or Corpus Christi. We hypochondriac Westerners simply don't or can't accept the fact that one is more likely to pick up a disease from the air rather than from the communion cup. Priests and ministers have consumed the leftovers for fifty years and suffered no ill effects.

O'Loughlin offers insight on the church building. *The community is the primary sacrament: we are the body of Christ... the building is just a wraparound... if a building interests us more than what the community is doing, then that building has failed as a place for our celebrating* (p. 66). The focus of the community action is the table for our banquet. The Passover celebration of the Last Supper was a domestic feast: *Jesus located his action of a loving sacrifice of praise not in a numinous special 'other' location, but in the heart of human community: in the household around the table. The household table –*



already a holy place within Judaism for the weekly Shabbat meal... – would be the place of memory, petition and praise. His disciples would be characterised by that loving intimacy that goes with a common table (p. 69).

Again, in mentality and action we have a long way to go. Some Catholics arrive early for private prayer at the tabernacle before Mass begins.

They may be annoyed by the musicians' warm-up and people exchanging greetings. But the church building is not first and foremost 'a throne room for the blessed sacrament'.

All of this extraordinary richness is found in just one chapter of this amazing little book. The next chapter rounds off the book with the eucharistic explorations of the 2nd century author, Justin the martyr. He opens up for us the idea of outreach to the poor for the sake of justice. The way we conduct ourselves at Mass is not just a prelude to acting charitably outside but is already putting that love into practice. St Justin described what happens after the prayer and thanksgiving over the loaf and cup: *Then there is a distribution and each shares in these things over which there was the thanksgiving, and they are taken by the deacons to those who are absent. Then those who are wealthy and willing give whatever each thinks fit, and what is collected is left to the presider who uses it to help widows and orphans and anyone else who is in need* (pp. 98-9). There is an important lesson here. What our world spends on weapons is many times over what is needed to quell poverty – arms trump alms every time!

In all these ways, our celebration of the Eucharist looks forward to the heavenly banquet. Our union with one another and with Christ is a sign of the kingdom of heaven. Tradition is not taking refuge in antiquated ritual forms. *Tradition is a great river and we are always moving forward upon it. And 'river' in this image is a metaphor for the living power of the Spirit among us* (p. 51). The antiphon of Thomas Aquinas acclaims this *holy banquet in which we receive the Christ, when we renew the memory of his passion and our minds are filled with grace, and a taste of future glory is given us* (see p. 51).

To see the Eucharist as an action not an object is a challenging and much needed reminder from a fine theologian.



Volume 56 Number 2
WINTER ♦ June 2026

© Liturgy Brisbane.
All rights reserved
ISSN 2653-0090 (Online)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rev Dr Tom Elich (*editor*)

Sr Maree Byron OSU

Mr Gerry Crooks

Rev John Fitz-Herbert

Mrs Elizabeth Harrington

Sr Ursula O'Rourke SGS

Dr Clare Schwantes

Articles for publication are welcome.
We reserve the right to edit material
in consultation with the author.

CONTACT



GPO Box 282, Brisbane Australia 4001
orders@liturgybrisbane.net.au
www.liturgybrisbane.net.au