



Children's Liturgy of the Word

Guidelines for Children's Liturgy of the Word

Brisbane Catholic Education and The Liturgical Commission (2003)



INTRODUCTION

What 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' means

The term 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' refers to the practice of children leaving the Sunday assembly during the Liturgy of the Word and gathering elsewhere to celebrate a separate Liturgy of the Word that is more appropriate to their level of understanding.

Why it is celebrated

In 1973, the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome issued the document *Directory for Masses with Children*. This document offers principles and guidelines for adapting the liturgy for children to enable them to take a more conscious and active part in liturgical celebrations.

The *Directory* states:

Sometimes..., if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. Then, before the eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word (DMC #17).

This statement is the rationale for many parishes offering Children's Liturgy of the Word as a parish ministry.

The purpose of adapting liturgical celebrations to make them more accessible to children must always be to gradually lead them to full, conscious and active participation in the Sunday liturgical assembly.

How often it is celebrated

Notice the first word of the paragraph quoted at the beginning - '*sometimes*'. When making decisions about how frequently to schedule Children's Liturgy of the Word, two different principles need to be taken into account.

On the one hand, we need to heed the warning given in the *Directory for Masses with Children* that spiritual harm may be done *if over the years children repeatedly experience in the Church things that are scarcely comprehensible to them* (DMC #2).

On the other hand, children do not, and do not need to, understand everything going on around them. In fact they are often fascinated by adult conversation and activity that is beyond their comprehension. Growing-up is a gradual process of growing in understanding of the world around them.

In addition, it is essential to embody the unity of a church which includes children as well as

adults and to lead children to an adult participation in the parish Sunday Mass.

In order to offer children the experience of regularly celebrating all of Mass with the entire community, parishes might consider having a Children's Liturgy of the Word on alternate Sundays or for set (seasonal) periods only.

What is central

Two key principles need always to be kept in mind when preparing and celebrating Children's Liturgy of the Word. Firstly, Children's Liturgy of the Word is **liturgy**, ritual prayer, and not catechesis (religious instruction) or child minding. Its purpose is not to give the children colouring-in-type activities to keep them busy so the adults can listen to the homily in peace! Because it is a liturgical celebration, all the principles of good liturgy (active participation, clear symbols, etc) apply.

Secondly, it is liturgy of the **word**, so it is ritual centred on the proclamation and breaking open of the scriptures. The children do what the rest of the community is doing at this point of the Mass. They listen to the scriptures proclaimed and applied to contemporary life and respond in various ways. It is an experience of prayer, of dialogue with God.

The Scriptures

The approved book of readings for Children's Liturgy of the Word is the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. The LMC adheres as closely as possible to the readings in the Lectionary for Mass, while adapting them to the needs and capabilities of children. It is a simplified version of Scripture, not a collection of paraphrases or Bible stories.

As far as possible the readings follow those in the (adult) Roman *Lectionary for Mass*. Where a reading was considered too difficult for children, it has been simplified or omitted

completely. The responsorial psalms have been adapted to make them easier for the children to sing.

More than only words

A liturgy of the word is never simply a verbal experience. The use of symbols, gesture, movement and singing heightens the children's experience of the transcendent. A beautifully bound book which is handled with respect, a special place for enthroning the word, gathering the children around to hear the scriptures proclaimed well, these all speak to the children of the sacredness of God's word and influence how they accept and live by it.

Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are designed to support sound celebrations of Children's Liturgy of the Word by setting out the relevant principles espoused in the *Directory for Masses with Children* for the assistance of pastors, leaders, parents and all involved in this ministry to children.

PRINCIPLES FOR CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

The following principles are to be taken into account by priests and ministers when celebrating a Liturgy of the Word with children.

1. It must be liturgy. *The Church's liturgy is first and foremost ritual prayer. The liturgy celebrates the word of God in narrative and song and makes it visible in gesture and symbol* (LMC #24). While activity sheets can be useful as take-home material for family follow-up, it is not appropriate that they be used during a liturgical celebration.
2. Gatherings of children in which the primary focus is religious education, sacramental preparation or completing activity sheets should be called 'Sunday School', 'Bible Class' or some other appropriate designation. The

description 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' is reserved for celebrations which parallel the Liturgy of the Word at Mass in content, structure and symbol.

3. The participants are usually children of primary school age. Children younger than this are generally unable to participate consciously and actively in liturgical celebrations. The role of leaders is to facilitate the liturgy and not to take care of young children. If preschool-aged children are included, scripture-based activities will be more appropriate for them. As explained in 2 above, however, this should not be described as a Liturgy of the Word.

4. Children with disability are to be welcomed to participate in Children's Liturgy of the Word. This may require prior contact with the parents to ensure that the child knows that he or she is welcome and to identify any particular support required. As noted in DMC #6, a broader adaptation may sometimes be necessary.

5. During their years of participation in Children's Liturgy of the Word, the children should progressively take on ministerial roles in the celebration. These include proclaiming the readings, playing music, and leading the singing or prayers.

6. The liturgy is celebrated in a space that is separate but not too distant from the church. This place needs to be carefully chosen and well prepared so that the environment is suitable for the worship of God (LMC #49). It should be arranged so that the children can see each other and see and hear the leader.

7. The various liturgical objects used - lectionary, lectern, candle - should provide a focal point for the celebration and be treated with respect and reverence.

8. When Children's Liturgy of the Word is held, the children participate in the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites with the

worshipping assembly. Only the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated separately.

9. *In view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of the psychology of children, participation by means of gestures and posture should be strongly encouraged.* (DMC #33). The use of other ritual elements such as processions, singing, dialogue and silence is integral to children's experience of liturgy.

10. Visual elements used in liturgy such as liturgical colours, light, water, cross, and artwork should be given greater prominence with children (DMC #35, 36).

11. The approved book of readings is the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. Of the readings provided, all three, or two, or even one reading may be used. The Gospel reading should always be included. In choosing the number of readings, leaders need to take into account the level of understanding of the children and the limited time available for the celebration. A simple introduction before the word is proclaimed may help the children to focus on the readings. Occasionally leaders might consider the version of a reading in the adult *Lectionary for Mass* to be more suited to the group.

12. *The liturgical texts should be proclaimed intelligibly and unhurriedly, with the necessary pauses* (DMC #37). While the use of dramatic elements is sometimes appropriate, the impression should not be given that the Liturgy of the Word is a play or historical re-enactment.

13. The shortened responsorial psalm provided in the LMC is sung after the first reading. If possible, the Gospel Acclamation with verse is sung before the Gospel reading.

14. A homily to explain the reading(s), appropriate to the children's level of understanding, should be given by an adult approved by the parish priest (DMC #17, 24). The homily may be instructional or make use of question and answer, discussion, guided

reflection or silent meditation. If the Gospel reading of the day is a difficult one, the leader may choose to concentrate on one of the other readings in the homily.

15. After the homily, a variety of methods such as songs, mime and role-playing can be employed to further break open the scriptures and apply them to the children's lives.

16. Prayers of the Faithful (Intercessions) should always be included in the celebration.

17. If appropriate to the occasion (for example on major feast days), a simple statement of faith may be said. The Apostles' Creed or a question and answer form of the renewal of baptismal promises is recommended.

18. As with any Liturgy of the Word, silence should be observed at appropriate times as part of the celebration. In their own way, children are genuinely capable of reflection. The children will need some guidance in learning how to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or pray to God in their hearts (DMC #37).

STRUCTURE FOR CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

GATHER

- *Gathering together with the whole assembly.* When children are to participate in the liturgy of the word in a space separate from the main assembly, they *first gather with the rest of the assembly to celebrate the introductory rites* (LMC # 8).
- *Processing to the place set aside for the celebration of the word.* *At the conclusion of the opening prayer, but before the first reading is proclaimed, the presiding priest may formally send the children and their ministers to the place where they will celebrate their own liturgy of the word. This may be done by presenting the Lectionary to the one who will preside over the liturgy of the*

word with children and/or by words of dismissal such as:

My dear children, you will go now to hear God's word, to praise God in song and to reflect on the wonderful things God has done for us. We will await your return so that together we may celebrate the Eucharist (LMC #8).

- *Preparing the children to listen.*

Begin the session by welcoming the children and inviting them to share briefly about their week's happenings.

LISTEN

Listening to the Word.

The readings follow the same structure and cycle as the readings for Mass. However, for liturgies with children, there is the option of using one, two or three readings. So your choices are:

3 READINGS		2 READINGS		1 READING
1st reading from the Old Testament	<i>or</i>	1st reading	<i>or</i>	Gospel acclamation
Responsorial psalm		Responsorial psalm		Gospel
2nd reading from New Testament		Gospel acclamation		
Gospel acclamation		Gospel		
Gospel				

- *Points to note:*

The readings need to be proclaimed audibly, clearly, reverently, with faith and understanding... by competent readers. It is recommended that, where possible, each reading be proclaimed by a different reader.

In the choice of readings, the criterion to be followed is the quality rather than the quantity of the texts from the scriptures. In itself a shorter reading is not always more suited to children than a lengthy one. (DMC # 44)

The Eucharistic liturgy requires the full use of music which is integral to the whole celebration including the proclamation of the word of God. The responsorial psalm is normally sung by a cantor with the assembly singing the refrain (LMC #51). The gospel acclamation should be sung where possible.

During the Lenten season, the Alleluia is not used. The gospel acclamation usually starts with words like "Glory and praise to your Lord Jesus Christ" or "Praise and honour to you Lord Jesus Christ."

Some readings are appropriate to be read by more than one voice, that is, by dividing the reading into different speaking parts.

Sometimes *silence* is an appropriate response.

DO

- *Breaking open the word*

In the breaking open of the word, an explanation of the readings, appropriate to the children's level of understanding, is provided by an adult approved by the parish priest.

It is important that the adult leaders have some understanding of the readings and can provide children with background information where necessary or appropriate.

In order to engage children's authentic participation, liturgy must respect their need for physical involvement. their internal life is still very much dependent upon what they experience through their senses (LMC #22). Some ways of engaging children's participation which respects their need for physical involvement include: simple role plays, liquid pictures, echo mimes, gospel reflections, frozen tableaux. SEE BELOW for a full explanation and examples of these techniques.

- *Profession of Faith (optional)*

It is best if the profession of faith is simple or even abbreviated, for example, use the Apostles' Creed.

- *Prayers of the Faithful*

These are simple petitions which allow the children to name the needs of the Church, the world, those in need and the local community and bring these to God in prayer. A simple formula is: *We pray for... Lord (or God) hear us* and the response by all children is *Lord (or God) hear our prayer*. SEE BELOW for examples.

GO

Rejoining the community

A simple procession leads the children back to rejoin the community for the Preparation of the Gifts. The presider may choose to say a simple word of welcome to the children at this point. Children rejoin their families.

BIBLE STORY TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN'S LITURGY

CHORUS PLAYS

Chorus plays present Scriptural stories in the form of a play with both individual characters and a chorus. The chorus aspect allows for whole group participation. One of the aims of Chorus plays is to provide not only a presentation of the story but also – and more importantly – an informed interpretation of it. There are many excellent sources of reference available today to assist interpretation, especially Biblical commentaries.

Example

The birth of Jesus is announced Luke 1:26-32

Leader: This story from St Luke's gospel tells us how Jesus got his name.

Reader: One day, the angel Gabriel came to visit a young woman. Her name was Mary. The angel said to her:

Angel: Peace be with you Mary.

Chorus: Peace be with you Mary.

Angel: God is with you and you are greatly blessed.

Chorus: Mary is greatly blessed.

Reader: But Mary did not feel greatly blessed, she felt quite worried.

Mary: What do you want with me? I haven't done anything wrong.

Chorus: Mary hasn't done anything wrong; she is greatly blessed.

Angel: Do not be afraid Mary, God is looking after you. You are to have a son and you will name him Jesus.

Chorus: Mary will have a son, a baby! And his name will be Jesus!

Angel: He will be special, he will be great. He will be God's very own son!

Chorus: Jesus is God's very own son.

*From Sacramental Resource Kit,
Brisbane Catholic Education 2001*

ECHO MIMES

An echo mime is a simple device for assisting (usually younger) people to understand and recall a Scriptural story. The method is quite simple: a passage is chosen and rewritten in short, simple statements. For each statement, an action is devised. The leader (an individual or group) voices the statement and performs the accompanying actions. Both statement and action are repeated or echoed by the rest of the group.

Example

Jesus is tempted Mark 1:12-15

Jesus went into the desert.
Walk on the spot, right hand over eyes looking in all directions.

He was hot.
Wipe hand over forehead and make a blowing sound.

He was thirsty.
Make a cup with hand and put to mouth.

He was tempted by the Evil One.
Cross hands in front of face.

There were wild animals.
Make 'wild animal' actions and noise.

God's angels took care of him.
Hold both arms out as if to embrace.

Good News! Good News!
*Raise left hand and make flashing motion.
Do the same with the right hand.*

Trust in God.
Circular motions with arms out in front.

Believe in God.
Hands in prayer position.

*From Attending to the Sacred: Resources for
Children aged 4-8 years, Brisbane Catholic
Education 2003*

FROZEN TABLEAUX

Visual stimulus assists the children to embrace the story. Some ideas for this are included throughout the gospel reflection. The 'actions' are actually frozen positions which the various characters display at different times throughout the reading. It is suggested that one group of children do the actions involving Mary, Martha and Jesus and a different group read their parts.

Example

Lazarus John 11:3-7, 17-27, 33-45

Reader: One day, Mary and her sister Martha sent a message to Jesus.

Action: *Mary and Martha sitting together. Martha has one hand outstretched. Lazarus is standing to one side.*

Sisters: Jesus, your good friend Lazarus is very sick.

Action: *Jesus stands some distance from the sisters. He extends a hand towards them.*

Jesus: Don't worry Martha. Mary, it'll be okay. Lazarus will not die.

Reader: At this time Jesus was staying in a place some distance from where Mary and Martha lived. After a couple of days he returned to Bethany to see Lazarus.

Action: *Another child enters and gently wraps a large bandage around Lazarus, then leaves.*

Reader: When Jesus finally arrived at the home of Mary and Martha, he discovered that Lazarus was already dead.

Martha: Jesus is here at last and I'm going out to welcome him.

Action: *Martha moves to stand near and look at Jesus.*

Martha: Jesus, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But you can still save him because God will do anything for you.

Jesus: Martha, Martha, fear not. Lazarus will live again. He will rise to new life.

Martha: I know that he is living with God and that if we believe in God we will have eternal life. And I know that you are God's Son, the one we've been waiting for.

Jesus: You are right Martha. I am the resurrection and the life. Now let's go and find your sister Mary.

Action: *Martha and Jesus move to stand near Mary. Mary crouches at the feet of Jesus, head bowed, deep in sorrow.*

Mary: Jesus, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Reader: Jesus was deeply moved by the sorrow of Mary and Martha and he too began to weep.

Action: *Martha and Jesus bow heads in deep sorrow.*

Reader: Mary led Martha and Jesus to the tomb where Lazarus was buried.

Action: *All turn towards Lazarus.*

Reader: When they arrived at the tomb, Jesus gave an order:

Jesus: Take the stone away from the tomb. Lazarus, come out!

Action: *Lazarus turns to face Jesus.*

Jesus: Untie him and let him go free!

Action: *Two children remove the bandage from Lazarus, who stands with arms elevated in praise of God.*

Leader: Many people saw what happened that day and believed in Jesus. This is the Good News of Jesus.

From Children's Activities for the Lenten Program, Year A, Brisbane Catholic Education 2002.

LIQUID PICTURES

Liquid pictures is a form of drama which allows a story to be presented in a flowing or liquid manner. The process follows this pattern:

- *Choose a familiar Scriptural story and divide it into five or six main sections.*
- *For each section choose one or two short phrases.*
- *Choose a simple action for each section.*
- *Choose one person for each section. These five or six people stand with their backs to the rest of the group.*

- A teacher or leader introduces the story with a simple statement.
- The first student, turns to face the group, repeats a phrase two or three times (once is not enough for children to remember!) then freezes. Process continues until the last student finishes.
- The teacher or leader concludes with a simple statement.

Example

Jesus is tempted Mark 1:12-15

Leader: God's Spirit made Jesus go into the desert

- Into the desert, into the desert, into the desert!
- For a long time, a long time, for a very long time!
- There were wild animals, wild beasts, wild animals everywhere.
- But Jesus was safe, safe and sound, safe in the desert.
- The time has come, the Kingdom is here, here right now, this is it!

Leader: Turn back to God and believe, believe, believe the Good News!

From Attending to the Sacred: Resources for Children aged 9-14 years, Brisbane Catholic Education 2003

ECHO REFLECTION

Example

Promise to Noah Genesis 9:8-15

Leader: God told Noah and his family, "I am going to make a promise.

All: A promise.

Leader: A promise to all people and all creation.

All: All people and all creation.

Leader: This is an important promise.

All: A really important promise.

Leader: A very serious and important promise.

All: A serious and important promise.

Leader: And this is it.

All: Here it comes...

Leader: I promise to look after the earth and all the creatures on it.

All: Everybody in fact!

Leader: The earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood.

All: Never again will a flood destroy the earth.

Leader: There will be a special sign in a sky.

All: A rainbow!

Leader: To tell you that I will keep my promise.

All: A rainbow in the sky.

From Attending to the Sacred: Resources for Children aged 9-14 years, Brisbane Catholic Education 2003

RAP

Example

Zacchaeus Rap

Jesus went to Jericho one fine day
The crowd gathered round him along the way.
A little man, Zacchaeus, climbed a big huge tree
He waited, excited, for Jesus to see.

Zacchaeus climbed a big, huge tree
Jesus, Jesus, he wanted to see.

When Jesus saw him, he said "Come on down.
Invite me to your place. I like this town."
Zacchaeus got down in a great big hurry
He welcomed Jesus with an enormous flurry.

Zacchaeus climbed down the tree
Jesus, Jesus, he wanted to see.

The crowd turned around and began to mumble
'He's a sinner, he's no good' each one grumbled.
Zacchaeus just stood there and said "I'm sorry.
I don't want to cause any more worry."

Zacchaeus said "Lord, I am sorry."

Jesus said, "Zac, don't you worry!"

"I'll change my ways and give to the poor.

I don't want to hurt anyone any more."

Jesus said, "Zac, I'm glad you're back.

Let's go now and have this snack."

Zacchaeus said, "Lord, I am sorry."

Jesus said, "Zac, let's not worry."

From Sacramental Resource Kit, Brisbane Catholic Education 2001

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Some Examples

(For the needs of the Church)

Reader: We pray that the leaders of our Church will work together for peace in the world.

Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(For the needs of the world)

Reader: We pray for countries where there is war. Lord, hear us,

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(For those in need)

Reader: We pray for people who are sick. Lord, hear us,

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(For the needs of the local community)

Reader: We pray that God will send the rain we need. Lord, hear us,

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Now write your own intercessions

For the needs of the Church

Reader: We pray that / for

Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the needs of the world

Reader: We pray that / for

Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For those in need

Reader: We pray that / for

Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the needs of the local community

Reader: We pray that / for

Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

CHILDREN'S LITURGY RESOURCES

Lectionary for Masses with Children (Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York 1993)

Directory for Masses with Children (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship 1973)

LabOra Worship electronic library (Liturgy Brisbane)

Break Open the Word (Liturgy Brisbane, annual)

The Summit (Quarterly Journal, Melbourne)

Celebrating the Gospels: Activities and Prayers for Sunday Cycles A, B and C (Liguori, 2003) This resource does not follow the format suggested in these Guidelines, but is a good reference for suggestions for breaking open the word with children.

Join the Circle – Children's Liturgy of the Word Lectionary Cycles A, B and C. (Media Com, Adelaide).

Resources by Rina Wintour published by Mountjoy Enterprises:

Sacred Celebrations for Advent and Christmas: Year A, B, C

Sacred Celebrations – Liturgies for Children Just Imagine: Creative ways of presenting Scripture

Just Imagine 2: More Creative ways of presenting Scripture

Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word, Christopher Walker (CD and music book for each year of the liturgical cycle with responsorial psalms and gospel acclamations)

Children at Heart, Paul Inwood.

Children, Liturgy and the Word (Video, Liturgy Training Publications, 1997)