



A  
Planning  
Guide

for celebrating major events  
in Catholic Schools



Brisbane CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Archdiocese  
of  
Brisbane



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As Catholics we effectively meet God in Liturgy, especially the Eucharist. It is there also that we most keenly experience the effects of the Second Vatican Council with its message and structures.

Because it is so important Liturgy should be both proper and life-giving. Unfortunately at times it is neither, either because of a lack of understanding, poor planning, or for some other reason. Instead of uplifting us such Liturgy tends to leave us feeling depressed and sometimes angry.

Young people participate in Liturgy both at Parish and School level. Sometimes the latter is the only real experience of Liturgy they are ever likely to have. For that reason therefore it is important that such Liturgy should be both life-giving and meaningful.

These guidelines are an attempt to assist planners in that task. I welcome them and commend them to you. I have no doubt that the suggestions made will do much to assist overall planning in the Archdiocese, as well as to improve the quality of the celebration that takes place.

*+ J. A. Bathurst*

**ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE**

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## INTRODUCTION

There are many occasions which call for celebration. And many kinds of ritual events which will be suitable for those occasions.

In a school context, celebrations are frequent within the classroom, within the staff and within the whole school body. These events are often marked at school assembly or at times of special activity outside the classroom. Through planning these occasions, teachers and pupils develop a certain facility with articulating and celebrating special events.

This planning guide is intended to build on that experience to assist Catholic schools with some of the larger, more public celebrations which are part of the school year. These might be occasions when Church or civic leaders are present, when a large part or even the whole school is present with members of their family and their friends. Asking the right questions in the planning stages can help shape a suitable way of celebrating which is appropriate for the group and the occasion and which is within the Catholic and academic traditions of the school.

It is hoped that the guide will serve as a checklist of points to consider for those who have had some experience in planning these major school events, and that it will provide some direction for those who are new in the game. By using this planning process, and keeping a record of how the questions have been resolved each year, a school will be able to review its decision making and will be more easily able to pass on its wisdom to succeeding generations of principals, APRE's, teachers and pastors.

The guide is divided into five sections.

- **1. Getting the Basics**

This section will help you to decide some of the basics: what, where, when, how and with whom you will be celebrating.

- **2. If Eucharist is Included**

The second section raises a number of points to consider if the event will include the celebration of eucharist.

- **3. If Other Ritual is Included**

The third part will help you to plan the event without eucharist if this is deemed to be more appropriate.

- **4. Organising the Structure**

The fourth section offers some models by way of example to help with structuring a major school event.

- **5. Planning the Details**

The fifth section introduces some of the areas of more detailed planning.

The sections need not be taken in this order. A planning team may wish to think about some of the issues raised by a eucharistic celebration, for example, before they begin to decide on the basics. Examining the models in section four may be unnecessary in a school which has already established a good pattern of celebration, and so on.

# 1. GETTING THE BASICS

*These questions can be taken in any order. But note that when one element has been decided it will have implications for the other questions, and the choices later will be more limited. Start with the questions that are already decided or on which there is most agreement. Under each question, you may think of other possibilities to consider.*

- When is the celebration?
  - start of year
  - end of year
  - feast day
  - other
  - daytime
  - evening
  - weekend
  
- What will happen?
  - presentation of awards
  - graduation
  - investiture of school leaders
  - farewell
  - presentation of annual report/goals
  - recognising a success
  - opening/blessing a building
  - inaugurating something
  - display or performance
  - other
  
- Who will be there?
  - students (all, some)
  - staff
  - parents
  - family & friends
  - guests
  
- So what kind of gathering will it be?
  - how big?
  - how Catholic?
  - how committed?
  - how formal/casual?
  - how local?
  - how young?
  
- Where will it take place?
  - school
  - church
  - parish hall
  - gymnasium
  - open air
  - hired hall, theatre, stadium
  
- What form will it take?
  - speeches, presentations etc.
  - musical, theatrical performance
  - prayer, ritual
  - eucharist

- celebration of word
  - blessing, dedication
  - commitment rite
  - other
- Who will prepare it?
- principal
  - APRE
  - other staff
  - students (which ones?)
  - parents
  - professional consultants

**REMARKS**

Getting the basics in order is a most important task. There is no one order in which to take these questions. In fact, the process will often be circular with the discussion returning to earlier questions when other matters are being discussed.

For example, if it is decided to celebrate eucharist on a particular occasion, then a suitable venue must be chosen - one which allows full participation by all and which does not reduce those present to mere spectators, one which allows freedom of movement for people to come forward for communion, and so on. On the other hand, if a certain venue has already been chosen (e.g. a theatre) to accommodate a large number of people, then it may be an inappropriate setting for eucharist and another form of celebration (e.g. a religious pageant or play) would be chosen.

There is thus a constant interaction between the occasion, the purpose, the participants, the place and the form of the celebration. Ask:

- What elements are given, determined?
- What demands do they make on what is not given, determined?

## 2. IF EUCHARIST IS INCLUDED

*If the celebration of eucharist is proposed as part of a large school event, there are a number of important issues which need to be dealt with.*

### 1. *SIZE OF GROUP/VENUE*

Everyone must not only be able to see and hear, but be able to participate actively. The key symbolism of the eucharistic meal is to share in the one bread and cup. Normally in any celebration of eucharist, whether in parish or school, the cup should be offered, the bread should be broken up and shared, people should be able easily to come forward to the Lord's table, etc. When the group is so large or the venue is such that the eucharist cannot be celebrated adequately, then the eucharist may not be most appropriate form of celebration. However often careful thought can overcome these problems of logistics.

### 2. *COMPOSITION OF GROUP*

Sharing the eucharistic bread and cup is an expression of our unity in Christ, in the Catholic tradition, of unity already established; we do not use holy communion as a means of achieving or fostering unity where it does not exist. The celebration of the eucharist might for this reason be inappropriate for some groups. For example, where a significant number of people feel alienated, are disaffiliated, or not in full communion with the Church, they would be unable to share in the eucharist and it may then appear as a sign of division rather than unity. What will be the case in the large school group for which you are planning? Quite apart from whether people are or are not receiving holy communion, it is important to respect people's freedom and level of faith commitment. If, for example, graduation takes place at Mass, those who graduate do not have much choice about participation in celebration of the eucharist. Is that appropriate?

### 3. *A SUITABLE DAY*

Sundays in particular should be avoided for any special eucharistic celebrations in schools because it is the day when the local Church assembles in parishes. Nothing should be done to take away from the life and unity of the parish community. On solemnities, feasts and Sundays, the Mass of the day and the readings of the day are always used and exceptions to this rule require serious need and permission of the bishop. This will make them unsuitable for many occasions when a school might wish to celebrate eucharist with a large group. The best days for large school eucharist are usually ordinary weekdays.

### 4. *PREPARING RITES*

When you come to plan a celebration of eucharist, you do not need to start from scratch. The Church has provided structures, rites and texts for the liturgy in the Missal. This is a powerful sign that the liturgy belongs to the whole Church - our celebration is in communion with those of Christian communities around the world. So this is where to start. How can the riches of these texts be unlocked? How can the key symbols and gestures be opened up to reveal the mystery they contain? Anything else - dance, mime, poetry, song, banners, presentations, processions - is used to let the liturgy speak not just to "dress up" the liturgy, still less to disguise it. The question which must always be asked is, "What is the purpose of the rite or gesture?" This will help to keep a balance and a sense of proportion, and will prevent a secondary or background element from dominating the celebration. Flexibility and creativity are needed to use the Missal well.

### 3. IF OTHER RITUAL IS INCLUDED

*Because of the nature of the occasion, the venue, the composition of the group, it may be decided that the eucharist is not the best way for a school to celebrate a major event. Yet a Catholic school will often want to include some prayer ritual as part of a celebration. How should this be approached?*

#### 1. RITUAL AND SYMBOL

What is being celebrated? Returning to this basic question will begin to reveal possible structures and symbols for a ritual. Thus, for example, a graduation rite might involve some gesture of separation from the school community and a ritual of sending forth or a ritual of induction or welcome to a new situation. An investiture or presentation may focus on the badge or award as a symbol. How will the participants be arranged? Where will they move? Good use of space can make the ritual and symbols eloquent in articulating the celebration.

#### 2. WORDS AND MUSIC

Christian ritual generally includes the proclamation of scripture. It can be done creatively but always needs a solemnity as befits the Word of God. There are many other kinds of text which need careful preparation: introduction and welcome should be concise and sufficiently poetic to set the mood; there may be a place for inspiration and exhortation, for heartfelt intercession, for praise and thanks to God, for blessing. Music plays a special part in drawing people together and expressing the character of the celebration. It can help to structure a rite. Hymns and songs should be suitable for the corporate action which ritual is.

#### 3. PARTICIPATION

The planning team will need to be aware that ritual is not like a concert or theatrical performance. There are no spectators in liturgy, only performers. Everyone participates. A musical or theatrical performance might play a role in ritual but is not the same thing. Participation by all the assembled people in the movement, gesture, prayer, acclamation and song is essential. What needs to be done to achieve this?

#### 4. AN EXAMPLE

How would you plan a school rite to farewell one principal and welcome a new one? One school adopted a very simple but effective structure:

##### *PART ONE: Thanksgiving and Praise*

The outgoing principal sat in a position of honour. In song and text, God was offered thanks and praise for recent developments in the school. There were a few words from the principal and the school captain.

##### *Transition*

As the people sang, the outgoing principal was led to the front row of the assembly and the new principal was led to the empty seat.

##### *PART TWO: Blessing and Intercession*

Now the mood changed. God's blessing was invoked upon the school, prayers of intercession were offered, and the new principal spoke offering a vision for the future.

The whole rite took less than half an hour.

## 4. ORGANISING THE STRUCTURE

*Having settled some of the basics and reflected on the suitability of the eucharist for a particular large school celebration, it is now time to organise the structure. Structuring the event is important if the celebration is to "make sense" to participants. What is going on? How can we help people to understand what is happening, where the rite is moving? Without a well defined structure, the celebration becomes a pointless and interminable sequence of events. Individual elements should not be over-emphasized or over-extended to the point of interfering with the flow of the celebration. Rather a sense of proportion and balance needs to be maintained. Pace and climax are also important. The celebration builds to something. How all this is done will vary widely according to the occasion, but some examples or models might assist.*

### EXAMPLE 1:

#### *BLESSING A NEW BUILDING*

The Archbishop will be present for a short rite of blessing (including song, scripture, intercessions, prayer of blessing and sprinkling with water). The premier will be present to unveil a plaque and make a speech. How are these events best structured?

This is probably a case where the religious and civic aspects of the event need to be kept apart. Civic dignitaries and other guests will feel uncomfortable on a stage or dais during worship and the religious ritual will be compromised if it is included in a civic (political) context. One school did it like this.

The premier and other guests were seated in the front row. The event began with the liturgical rite (hymn, prayers, readings, homily, blessing). When the archbishop left for the sprinkling he was accompanied by a procession with candles. The people sang a hymn. The rite concluded with a final blessing and dismissal. Then, while the school band played, the official guests were escorted to the podium, the archbishop removed his vestments and joined the other guests. The speeches and unveiling were concluded with a rousing rendition of the school song, and all adjourned for afternoon tea.

This structure may be found most suitable for investing prefects, presenting prizes, and a host of similar events which do not sit easily within the rhythm of the liturgy. Thus, for example, a graduation might begin with a concert item or two, involve one or more speeches, and the presentation of certificates. Then the evening could conclude with a worship service of blessing the graduates as they go forth from the school.

### EXAMPLE 2:

#### *END OF SCHOOL YEAR*

The school wanted to include eucharist because it is the Church's great act of praise and thanksgiving. But they wanted to respect the freedom and the varying levels of commitment of their school community. So they integrated the celebration of the eucharist into their end-of-school year event but made it optional. It happened like this.

All students and parents were invited to take part in a large well-planned eucharist held at midday in the church nearby. A family picnic was then held in the park at 1.00pm. Next parents were invited to visit classrooms to look at displays of the year's work. In the evening, a concert was held in the school gymnasium during which the principal spoke and prizes were given. Another year, the eucharist was held at 6.00pm, followed



by a shared supper and then the concert began at 8.00pm. Many families participated in eucharist, others joined in at the picnic or supper, still others came for the concert.

### EXAMPLE 3:

#### *PATRON SAINT'S DAY*

This school staff felt that eucharist was better celebrated in class grades. There, it could be planned by the children more fully, adapted more easily to their level and needs, and provided with a smaller more familial environment in which to hear the Word together and share the consecrated bread and cup. Parents were invited to participate. So that there were not multiple Masses in the parish during these weeks, the regular parish Mass was cancelled on the days when a grade was celebrating and parishioners were invited to join the parents and children. Each grade made and used a long banner carried on a pole.

When the patron saint's day came, a kind of pageant was held, incorporating the banners each grade had made and using some of the hymns they had learned, linked together by narration and mime. The grade celebrations of eucharist were gathered together in the non-eucharistic whole-school celebration

## 5. PLANNING THE DETAILS

*Preparing the space and its decoration, the ritual movements and their choreography, the texts and their proclamation - these activities come at the end of the planning process. It is the enjoyable time when very wide and creative cooperation is possible.*

### 1. ART and ENVIRONMENT

Who for example, are the artists who can prepare the space for worship? This will be more difficult in a gymnasium than a church because some sense of the sacred is required. Remember a celebration is not a political rally (we don't want to reduce everything to a slogan or one-line theme). Nor is it a class where the participants are to be taught (many activities are suitable in a class room but are inappropriate for ritual). Nor is ritual like a concert (since *all* are participants we decorate the *whole* worship space with flowers, colours, not just the "front"; we set out the chairs so that people are grouped not as spectators but as active participants).

### 2. MUSIC

Who are the best people to prepare the music for the celebration? What singers and instrumentalists are available? How can their talents be harnessed in a large school celebration? Music can help to define the difference between concert and ritual. Not that solo or choral performance has no place in liturgy: it can assist at times of transition or quiet reflection. But fundamentally liturgical music draws people into participation. Decisions need to be made about *where* music is to play a part and *what* music is most appropriate. For example, a triumphalistic school song would be quite out of place in worship, even as an entrance or recessional song, but it might be perfect after a stirring speech by the school principal.

### 3. TEXTS

Sometimes this will involve choosing texts from the options provided in the liturgical books. Who has the background and understanding of the liturgy to do this appropriately? Sometimes new texts will need to be written (introductions, intercessions, invitations). Who will help determine their content and who have the gifts to write poetic texts? Particular attention needs to be paid to inclusivity: not only including both sexes and various cultural or ethnic groups in the planning and celebration of the rite, but also using inclusive language in the texts chosen or composed. Who can assist in determining the content of these texts? Who will proclaim them during the celebration itself?

### REMARK

The danger here is that the tail wags the dog. Planning the details means marshalling all your talents and efforts to serve the structure and purpose of the celebration.

Good luck! Happy celebrations!

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## RESOURCES

The introduction to the Roman Missal and to the Lectionary will provide many essential principles, especially for the celebration of eucharist.

The Directory for Masses with Children will be a fundamental reference, giving authority to balanced adaptation of the liturgical rites for children. It is published in the front of the *Sacramentary*, published by Catholic Book Publishing Co. and it is included in *The Liturgy Documents: a parish resource* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991) 3rd ed.

Many people do not know of the official liturgical book which contains blessings for people in various situations, their buildings and their activities, their needs and special occasions: *The Book of Blessings* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989).

A number of translations of Scripture are approved for liturgical use. They include: the New Jerusalem Bible, The New Revised Standard Version, The New American Bible (with revised New Testament), The Revised English Bible, The Good News Bible. These translations will provide readings which are more inclusive in their language.

For further background reading, try:

Chris Harris, *Creating Relevant Rituals: celebrations for religious education* (Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1992)

Gabe Huck, *Liturgy with Style and Grace* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1984)

Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* (New York: Pueblo, 1982)

*Liturgy News*, quarterly journal published by The Liturgical Commission, Brisbane.