



Our Lady of Grace Church
223 East Summit, San Antonio TX
Manual for Children's Liturgy

RATIONALE FOR A CHILDREN'S LITURGY

A central tenet of Christian life involves participation of the faithful gathered into a single assembly in liturgical services to celebrate the paschal mystery. Religious initiation of children in Children's Liturgy must be in harmony with this purpose. Once a child is baptized, The Church must be concerned that he or she grows in communion with Christ and each other. The sign and pledge of that Communion is participation at the Eucharistic table, for which children should be guided towards a deeper realization of its meaning.

There are challenges to this process. Children today are faced with the realities and complexities of contemporary life, presenting greater challenges to spiritual progress. Parents may at times have difficulties in fulfilling obligations accepted at the baptism of their children to raise them as Catholic. In the upbringing of children in the Church a further difficulty arises with children's understanding of the liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist. As a result, they likely do not appreciate the spiritual force of the Mass. Although the vernacular is used at Mass, these words and signs have not been sufficiently adapted to the capacity of children. In fact, even in daily life children do not always understand all their experiences with adults, and may find them boring. It cannot be expected that children understand all of adult liturgy.

HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S LITURGY

In creating a Children's Liturgy, the Church takes instruction from Jesus himself, who "put his arms around the little children... . And blessed them" (Mark 10:16). Soon after the Second Vatican Council made sweeping changes to the Constitution of the Liturgy in revision of the Roman Missal in 1969, the Church then focused on how to improve participation by children in the mass. At the time, the leader of the Synod said it would not be a matter of "creating some entirely special rite but rather of shortening, retaining, or omitting some elements or of making a more appropriate selection of texts." This Congregation prepared a special *Directory for Masses with Children*, reserving some adaptations to individual bishops.

The Directory is concerned with children who have not yet entered the period of preadolescence, (baptized children who have not yet received confirmation, and who may have only recently received Holy Communion) so we have included children ages four to ten years for the Our Lady of Grace program. We as parents, clergy, parish community, and ministers to Children's Liturgy work together towards a united objective: provide a focused environment where children may experience the human values of Mass in a Liturgical way that opens them to hear and respond to God's word, appropriate to their age and personal development.

These values include community activity, exchange of greetings, capacity to listen and to seek and grant pardon, expression of gratitude, experience of symbolic actions, silence, a meal of friendship, and festive celebration.



OUR LADY OF GRACE CHILDREN'S LITURGY

In 1999, Monsignor Walsh oversaw the institution of Children's Liturgy at Our Lady of Grace. From its humble beginning with a dedicated group of families, it has become an important part of successful parish outreach to families with young children. Our 'Liturgical celebration' at the Sunday 8:30 Mass serves as an effective liturgical instrument to reach children. The intent of this time of celebration is not to babysit, but to lead children toward the celebration of Mass with adults. Thus, apart from adaptations that are necessary because of the children's age, the result should not be entirely special rites, nor markedly different from the Order of Mass celebrated with parents in the congregation.

MINISTERS

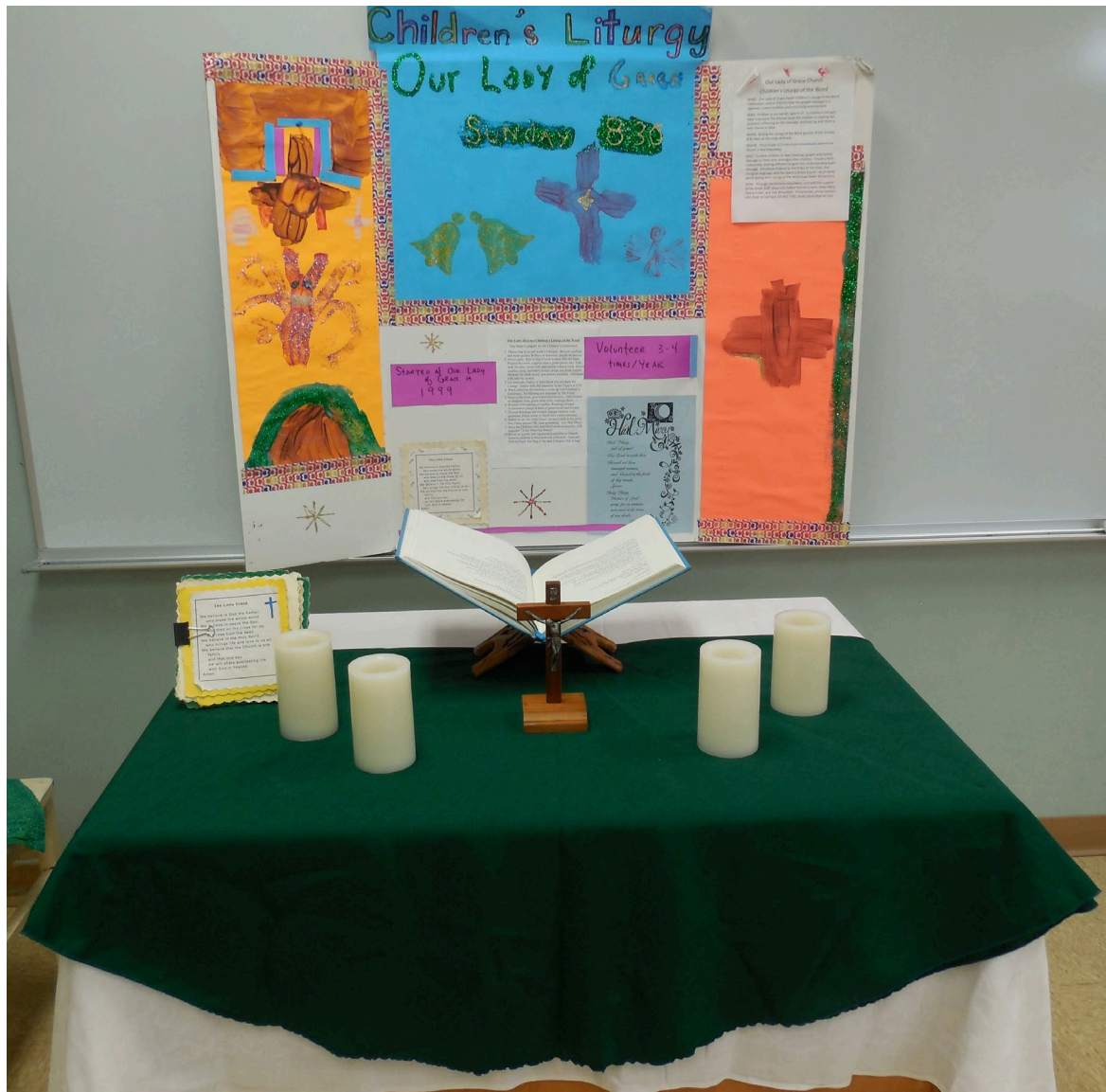
Active and conscious participation by volunteer minister parents of Children's Liturgy are vital to the ongoing success of Children's Liturgy. (With some dedicated families serving in this capacity since its inception) New volunteers are sought annually at the OLG Fall Ministry Fair. Assistants can be family members and teen volunteers from CCD. Interacting with children necessitates Diocesan-mandated training on OVASE child safety, (Office of Victim Assistance and Safe Environment) and this training occurs at OLG. It needs to be renewed every 3 years.

PREPARATION

Each Liturgical celebration with children should be carefully planned and prepared for by the appointed Liturgical Minister, including a review of readings, selection of songs, and intentions of the general intercessions. Following receipt of the Children's Liturgy bag from the prior minister, (Schedule prepared semiannually) this preparation should include reflection on the readings, the gospel, and emphasis points for a focused homily discussion. This process is aided by review of the reference materials in the bag, including the green 'Complete Children's Liturgy Book' and the tan 'Children's Liturgy of the Word'.



Early arrival to the space allows preparation of the room and altar with linens appropriate for the season, placement of candles, lectionary, drawings and artwork appropriate for the week's readings, and arranging of furniture to create an appropriate Liturgical environment. Consider where children may be cantor, lector, responses, and prayers, including the general intercessions. Try to refer to the children by name, and tell them what they may call you. Communicate with confidence and good body language, stand erect and use expansive hand and arm gestures.



PARTS OF THE MASS

The general structure of the Mass is always maintained, beginning with Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding rites. Some rites and texts are not adapted to Children's Liturgy, lest the difference between Masses with children and the Masses with adults become too pronounced. For OLG, Children's Liturgy begins with the procession following the blessing from the celebrant and dismissal, and concludes with return to the Church for Liturgy of the Eucharistic, the Lord's Prayer, Communion, and the Final Blessing concluding the Mass.

LITURGY OF THE WORD-THE CHILDREN'S LITURGY

The Liturgy of the Word includes the First Reading, the responsorial Psalm, the Second Reading, the Gospel Acclamation, the Gospel, the reflection, the Profession of Faith, and the Prayers of the Faithful. Since readings taken from Sacred Scripture "form the main part of the Liturgy of the Word," Children's Liturgy must include some biblical readings. Of note, all three readings may not be appropriate for this age group, and as such, it is permissible to read two or only one of them. However, the gospel reading must never be omitted. If all the readings assigned to the day seem to be unsuited to the capacity of the children, it is permissible to choose readings or a reading either from the Lectionary for Mass or directly from the Bible, but taking into account the liturgical seasons.

(Following consultation with Fathers Martin or Pat, or Sister Mary Theresa) In the choice of readings the criterion to be followed is the quality rather than the quantity of the texts from Sacred Scripture. A shorter reading is not in itself always more suited to children than a lengthy reading. Regardless, paraphrases of Sacred Scripture must be avoided. Verses of psalms, carefully selected in accord with the understanding of children, or a song in the form of the *Alleluia* with a simple verse can be sung between the readings.

All the elements that will help explain the readings should be given great consideration so that the children may make the biblical readings their own and may come more and more to appreciate better the value of God's word. Among such elements are the introductory comments that may precede the readings and that by explaining the context or by introducing the text itself help the children to listen better and more fruitfully. Depending on the text of the reading, it may be helpful for the children to read it in parts distributed among them, as is provided for the reading of the Lord's passion during Holy Week. The reflection explaining the word of God should be given great prominence in all our

interactions with children. It can easily become a dialogue with the children, allowing them to express what they heard, and best understand and internalize a message or idea. Forming a circle, the Profession of Faith occurs following the discussion, with either the Little Creed or the Apostles' Creed. Finally, Prayers of the Faithful allow sharing in a sense of community. At some point, 4 older children should be selected to bring up the gifts in the Church. Repetition and application of what they have heard is appropriate, and can be done in a very few words.

RETURN TO THE CHURCH FOR LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is of central importance in the Mass. Therefore, return to the Church prior to the beginnings of the Eucharistic Prayer is emphasized. (About 9:00-9:05 am) To aid in this endeavor, an usher will signal to the Children's Liturgy when the homily is concluded. Return to the church should proceed in the next 3-5 minutes, coming in from the south door, and assembling at the back of the Church. At the Presentation of the Gifts, the four selected children will bring up the gifts with the Liturgist, and the other children will proceed to their seats.

SINGING AND MUSIC

Singing has great importance in all celebrations, and it is encouraged in every way with children, in view of their special affinity for music. If possible, acclamations should be sung by the children rather than recited, including melodies from vernacular use, accepted by competent authority, even if these do not correspond exactly to the liturgical texts, found in our Children's Liturgy manuals and other reference material. Supplemental music is also encouraged.

GESTURES

Participation by means of gestures and posture is strongly encouraged. Processions and other activities that involve physical participation deserve special mention. The dismissal and sending forth by Celebrant serves to help them better to experience a sense of the communion that is thus being created, with the Lectionary held high. Children's Liturgy gives time for guidance with other gestures, including the sign of the Cross, as well as the three crosses at the reading of the Gospel. (May the Lord be in my thoughts, and on my lips, and in my heart) Efforts for adherence to periods of standing (for the Gospel), or sitting are encouraged, as is observance of silence.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Children's Liturgy should contain many visual elements and these should be emphasized. This should include accepted visual elements in the course of the mass, as well as through the liturgical year. For example, placement of the Crucifix, candles, and ambo, linens, Passion Sunday with Veneration of the Cross, the renewal white of the Easter candle, the lights on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the Nativity sequence and lighting of the Advent wreath, the red fire of Pentecost, and adherence to the colors of the liturgical calendar. All materials in the classroom may be used, including thematic posters. Children's Liturgy should not appear as something dry or merely intellectual. The use of pictures prepared by the children themselves may be useful, for example, as illustrations of a homily, as visual expressions of the intentions of the general intercessions, or as inspirations to reflection.

