

# Diocese of Portsmouth

## Guidelines for Worshipping Community and Pastoral Area Liturgy Groups

### *Liturgy Groups*

- 1 As parishes reconfigure to become part of new Pastoral Areas, it is hoped that any existing individual liturgy groups in enlarged pastoral areas will begin to work together, in the same way that one would expect in other areas of parish life.  
In recognition of the fact that our present parishes will be working in partnership with others from 2006 onwards, and that the word "parish" may be less frequently used than in the past, the following guidelines generally use the words "*worshipping community*" for a particular Mass, which might in some situations be the same as an individual parish, "*community*" for a more loosely-defined body which could be either part or all of an existing parish, or a new pastoral area, and "*pastoral area*" where a new pastoral area is the only intended meaning.
- 2 Some communities call their group a "liturgy committee". This word can put some people off, since it might imply talk without action. "*Group*" may be a better word than "committee".
- 3 Any community or pastoral area that does not already have a liturgy group is strongly encouraged to form one, with a designated co-ordinator, by Easter 2007 (see ***Go out and bear fruit***, page 14).

### *What is liturgy?*

- 4 "Liturgy" comes from two Greek words meaning "the work of the people", or "something that people do". It means the worship of God in the broadest sense, not just Mass. Boiled down to its essentials, all liturgy is a two-way action in which God speaks to his people, and we respond in prayer and worship.
- 5 Liturgy is not words in a book. In somewhat the same way that a piece of music is not the score and does not exist until someone performs it, so liturgy does not exist until the words on the printed page are given flesh in speech and singing, gestures and actions. The liturgist Aidan Kavanagh once famously said: "Liturgy ain't liturgy unless it's **done**."

### *What is a liturgy group?*

- 6 A liturgy group is a **policy-making body**. Its principal role is to monitor **globally** the liturgical life of the community and work to move the community forward and help it grow in its prayer-life.
- 7 The liturgy group's task is **not** to prepare particular liturgies or select hymns: that is the job of a subgroup, or a working group with a particular task (e.g. planning Holy Week or the parish jubilee), or a particular individual (e.g. the community's music director). These subgroups/individuals should be left alone to get on with their work, but they should report to the main group at regular intervals.

- 8 While the main group may be concerned with particular details, the group will not necessarily be the ones responsible for implementing those details – see previous paragraph. In other words, while the group may discuss things in some detail, they themselves will not be responsible for making those things happen. Particular individuals (who may be members of the group) will have that responsibility; or a subgroup or a special working group.

**Two examples:**

**(a)** Your community may not yet have Communion under both kinds at every Mass, Sunday as well as weekday. The liturgy group's role will be to discuss and decide whether or not it would be a good thing for it to happen, and, if it is a good thing, when it should start.

Making it happen will be the responsibility of others, probably including one or more members of the group but not limited to them. Those involved might include all the clergy, lay ministers of communion, sacristan, MC and servers, a secretary . . . not all of whom will be on the liturgy group!

**(b)** The group may discuss in depth how the Word of God is proclaimed and received in the community. They might decide that at the end of every reading, whether from Old Testament or New Testament, whether a Gospel or not, there will be a substantial pause before the reader says "This is the word/Gospel of the Lord".

Making that happen will involve all clergy and all readers. It might also involve the person who types the newsletter, and a member of diocesan personnel leading a readers' formation or refresher course. But probably the only people on the group involved will be the clergy representative(s) and the person co-ordinating the readers or (if there isn't one) the person charged with handling communications (see below, paragraph 14).

*Who should be on the liturgy group?*

- 9 The liturgy group needs to be representative of the community or area as a whole, so, in addition to the **clergy**, membership might include someone representing the **readers**, someone else representing **ministers of communion**, another person representing **musicians**, yet another representing **servers**, someone involved in **RCIA, Liturgy of the Word with Children, environment**, and so on. If local **schools** have liturgy groups, they should also be represented on the community group (and, importantly, *vice versa*), so that there is a commonality of practice and understanding between the community and school. It may also be a good idea to include one interested "ordinary pew person" from each of the weekend Masses celebrated in the church or area.
- 10 Members of the group need to be prepared to **evaluate** the liturgical life of the community – see paragraph 12 below.
- 11 They should also be prepared to receive as much liturgical **formation** as they need – see paragraph 16 below.

*What will the liturgy group do?*

- 12 The group will take a good look at how the community does things, and how it might do them. This means that they will be asked to offer reactions and constructive criticism to what they experience at liturgies. This in turn means that they will need

to keep their ears and eyes open and have a care for the prayer experience of the whole community. Anyone for whom liturgy is solely an occasion for private prayer and devotion will probably not be suitable as a member of the group.

- 13 Groups often focus on a particular season, such as Advent or Lent, and discuss what “flavour” the community’s celebrations might have during this time.

One important area at this time in the life of our diocese is how “accessible” or “inclusive” the community’s liturgies are in general. This does not relate to physical access for disabled people (though this is very important) but to how “user-friendly” and attractive celebrations are. For example, are people from different backgrounds, of different ages, from different cultures, of different educational levels, etc, all welcomed and included in what the community does when it comes together to celebrate?

- 14 The group will pray, reflect and take advice and input from parishioners and take decisions accordingly. The group will also have a system for disseminating information as widely as possible in the community so that people understand what lies behind changes when these take place. (Some groups include a person responsible for **communications** to and from the group.)

- 15 The group will need to monitor its subgroups and other personnel.

- 16 The group will also want to have periodic times of **ongoing formation** during which the whole group is given input and a chance to grow. It is strongly suggested that this formation be given by a person or persons outside the group. It could usefully be preceded by a community liturgical audit (for details of different types of liturgy audits, see the **Liturgy** section of the diocesan website: <http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk>).

Everyone, from the most experienced and knowledgeable to the beginner, will benefit from formation received together as a group. Those who know less acquire knowledge and skills, while the more experienced take the opportunity to update themselves.

See also *Basic Principles* no. 5, below.

- 17 The group will need to meet at least once a month initially, less frequently once things are well underway. It is suggested that, in the early stages, formation of the group should take place several times a year. Another way is for some formation to be a standard part of the agenda of every meeting, or every other meeting.

- 18 The group’s mode of working will need to be **collaborative**. It may take time for members to be able to leave aside the “vested interests” of their own group in order to promote the greater good of the whole community.

Some people are better at expressing ideas than others. It is important that everyone has a chance to contribute, and that all contributions are equally valued. If a stated opinion comes from a lack of knowledge, remedying this will be a useful growth point for the whole group.

- 19 The group will need good **leadership**. The chair can either be a lay person or a member of the clergy.

- 20 The group will need to be closely connected to the parish pastoral council or worshipping community pastoral group. When new pastoral areas have formed, the

group will need to be connected to the pastoral council of the new area and its pastoral leadership team.

## Appendices

### SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF LITURGY GROUPS

**1. (The Golden Rule)**

Worship is first and foremost a celebration – that implies active listening and active participation on the part of everyone, both liturgical assembly and liturgy group.

Problems often arise because people do not understand these and other basic principles – for example, paragraphs 4 and 5 above (*What is liturgy?*).

2. Planning for a liturgy should be done only by people who are members of the community that celebrates that liturgy. The task of evaluating that liturgy is also, first and foremost, theirs. Sometimes criticism can come from those who do not wish to celebrate in a participatory way at liturgy but merely to attend. Or, ideas can be pushed through by people who don't normally come to that particular liturgy and so don't know the context.

3. The parish group's task is not to plan liturgies as such, but to set goals, direction and standards for the overall liturgical life and activities of the parish. One of these goals could be creating and encouraging regular subgroups responsible for each regular liturgy – e.g. the 10 o'clock Mass subgroup and the 12 noon Mass subgroup. If so, the main group should work with these subgroups but leave them alone except for periodic evaluation.

4. Liturgical planning (the actual selection of music, feeding into the homily, the writing of invocations in the third form of the penitential rite and intentions in the intercessions, and the orchestration of all the other variables that make up a liturgy) should be left to the people you choose to do these things, preferably as small and as talented a group as possible. Leave them to get on with their tasks, but once again ensure that they have periodic evaluation and, importantly, make sure that they do understand the underlying liturgical principles before they begin.

Work should be done by the smallest group competent to do it.  
(cf. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931, paras 79-80)

5. No liturgical planning process - for a particular weekly liturgy, a special occasion, or the community's liturgical life as a whole - is complete without a genuine evaluation. In fact one of the major roles of the liturgy group will be a continuous ongoing assessment of the parish's liturgical life. In this area it will be important to have support and input from diocesan liturgy personnel on a regular basis.

## **SOME FURTHER BASICS**

1. The tension between diversity and universality is healthy. We are united in what we believe, but not necessarily in the way in which we express those beliefs.  
Different worshipping communities will celebrate in different ways while following the same underlying principles. Variety can be a good antidote to monotony, and unity does not necessarily mean uniformity. Use uniformity sparingly, and only when necessary for the good of the whole community.
2. Always ask: could/should someone else be deciding this?
3. The group exists to help liturgies, not be in charge of them. Leave room for the action of the Holy Spirit!
4. The aim of all liturgy is the prayer of the people, so don't attempt to use liturgy as a catechetical tool.  
We come together to celebrate what we already have in us, not to take on board new information.  
Liturgy does form us through our experiencing of it, but it is useful to remember that liturgy is about celebrating rather than teaching.
5. When conflict arises, prayer in common can often help resolve differences of opinion. Deep-seated conflicts need to be dealt with outside the meeting.
6. Accurate reporting is essential. Some groups have a secretary who sets everyone else free to take a full part in discussions.
7. The group may need a budget for its work and the work of its subgroups.

## **LITURGICAL BUILDING BLOCKS – SOME AREAS FOR CREATIVITY**

1. Space and layout (includes sound systems and lighting)
2. What things look like, and where things take place (a liturgical audit can be very helpful here)
3. Visual impact (liturgical symbols)
4. Those who preside at or lead services
5. Different ministries and how they inter-relate
6. Music – styles and combinations of styles, different forms of accompaniment
7. A sense of occasion (including welcome)
8. Pacing and shape (how memorable are liturgies, do all understand their structure?)
9. Timings of different elements within rites (these will need to be recorded with a stopwatch or on video to aid proper discussion)

## SOME AREAS OF TENSION – NOT IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER

1. Musical style v. quality in whatever style is used
2. Posture – uniformity? Pastoral decisions? Questions of “reverence”?
3. Children – their presence accepted or rejected, ways of involving them, behaviour issues (inc. parents)
4. Bells – a hangover from another era? How to integrate them into the “sound” of the celebration?
5. Altar rails – what were they for? Questions of posture and liturgical environment
6. Using “themes” for Mass – the Lectionary should always be our starting point
7. Genuflecting / bowing / location of tabernacle – what the Church’s documents actually say
8. People who read or speak too fast, ministers who don’t wipe the rim properly or turn the chalice for each communicant, or who are infectiously ill – training for ministry a requirement?
9. Times of services – not just at times like Holy Week but the whole year round
10. Buildings and their amenities – provision for disabled access, lavatories, listed building consents, chairs v. pews, sound and lighting, seasonal décor, where to place the Advent Wreath, crib, altar of repose, baptismal pool . . .

## RESOURCES

Some diocesan guidelines and resources are available on the Liturgy section of the diocesan website (<http://www.portsmouth-dio.org/liturgy/index.html>), together with references to other useful material.

The Diocesan Director of Liturgy, supported by the Diocesan Liturgy Committee, is available for anyone to contact. He is particularly happy to help individual liturgy groups, whether through general advice, assisting with formation, or parish liturgy audits. He also organises and undertakes training for different liturgical ministries.

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