

CHAPTER 10

SECTION 4

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUNDAY

After thorough research and visits to parishes around the U.S. and Canada, we found that parishes that have Liturgies that are effectively engaging and re-engaging parishioners on Sunday, take an initial focus on improving a few key areas. These best practices are as follows:

Hospitality

Hospitality is meant to be more than a “warm welcome” by a few greeters who walk into the church on Sunday. Parishes that are flourishing have spent time cultivating a ‘culture of hospitality’ within those who attend Mass regularly. This allows the community to become a powerful channel of God’s love to all those who come to Mass on Sunday. This is what allows people to feel ‘at home’. And, feeling ‘at home’ can dispose a person to an openness to God, and an openness to what they are about to encounter in the Mass.

As we begin to assess how our parishes are doing with hospitality, it is important that we are always considering ‘what might be the experience of a person who has never been here?’ or even, ‘what might be the experience of someone that has never been to a Catholic Mass?’. The hope is that those in hospitality ministry and a large number of parishioners in the pew, have a loving openness to everyone coming to Mass on Sunday and encounter each person with joy and with a hope that the person they meet will be open to a life changing encounter with God, *this Sunday*.

Imagine if those in hospitality ministry and a large number of people in the pew, really did *see* with reverence those around them at Mass and imagine if these same people had the desire to make everyone in the church feel ‘at home’. To cultivate this culture of hospitality will take intentionality and effort. It will take formation and ongoing assessment. It will take invitation from the pastor and us all helping on another move from a ‘habit of faith’ to an enlivened faith that responds to the reality of us being one family of God. It will take intentional recruitment of parishioners who have a gift of hospitality, who naturally exude joy and welcome. It will take ensuring that you are really taking into account and have a feel for *who* is coming to each Mass. If for example you have a 9:00 Mass that is primarily consisting of families with young children, you would hope to have people on hospitality ministry who naturally relate to families and are able to anticipate the needs of both parents, children and the family unit as a whole.

It is important to consider that hospitality begins from the time anyone drives or walks onto the campus of the parish. We can ask ourselves, ‘is it easy to find where to enter the church?’ , ‘are the grounds and walk from the parking lot to the church, inviting and beautiful?’ , ‘ if I’m not Catholic, is it easy for me follow along and know what is happening?’. In summary, we should always be considering what the experience of others might be, so that we might anticipate their needs and what would make them feel most at home.

Knowing how to find what we need, is an important aspect of hospitality. It is important to consider if things like the restroom or cry room are easily identified and easy to find. It is important to consider what information parishioners might be wanting to find on Sunday. Are there people available to help them find the answers they are looking for, or the forms they are looking for? If for example, an announcement is made at Mass that retreat registration has begun, is there an easy way people can register after Mass that day?

Additionally, hospitality can become a means for CONNECT, the first step in Formation Life Cycle. Therefore, when we consider the CONNECT element of hospitality, we should consider ‘what do we want to direct them to next?’. In this way, we are intentional and open to helping people perhaps take important next steps in the their journey of faith. All those who minister in hospitality should know the formation life cycle and be mindful of how their ministry fits in with the overarching purpose of the parish, to make disciples

Hymns (Liturgical Music)

Music is a powerful gift indeed. Music has the ability to speak the language of love, to touch the human heart and move us in a particular direction. *Song* has the ability to help us express and communicate something deep within us, in a way that mere spoken word may be insufficient. As we have probably heard the quote from St. Augustine, “he who sings, prays twice”.

And we see that music in the liturgy can be a great gift, it is meant to help us enter into a dialogue with God. It is meant to help us offer a hymn of praise to God! When done well and beautifully, music has the ability to open and move our hearts to enter into that dialogue and to recognize the beauty within the mystery and reality of what and WHO we are encountering at every Mass.

As we researched *what* impacts people’s experience of Mass, **music** is always at the top of that which is most influential. And, why it is so important that we devote attention and care to our music ministries in order to ensure the quality of our music at Mass.

As *positively* impactful as beautiful liturgical music can be in helping a congregation enter more deeply into dialogue with God, unfortunately, we know also that music done poorly or with poor quality, can have as much of a distracting and negative impact on people’s experience of Mass.

This is why St. John Paul II reminds us, “**it is important to devote attention to the songs used by the assembly**, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. **Care must be taken to ensure the quality**, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church’s tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.” *Die Dominis*, Pope St. John Paul II (50)

A first step towards improving music, would be to assess current music ministry groups and take steps in moving towards a standard of excellence. Skilled musicians tend to attract skilled musicians, and often in our parishes we perhaps haven’t allowed for the opportunity for good musicians to step into those roles, often because they simply can’t relate or see themselves contributing in the way music is being offered at present. Also, often we haven’t provided adequate opportunities to form young people or adults in a way that allows them to use their gifts of music to serve the liturgy.

A well formed music ministry should include the following:

1. Skilled musicians
2. Prayer and discernment as primary part of how the music ministry plans, prepares and ministers
3. An understanding of the liturgy and the role of sacred music in the liturgy
4. An understanding of how to apply the three judgments that are to be made in preparing liturgical music for the Sunday celebration:
 - a. The Liturgical Judgment: how the music accords with the liturgical season and this particular liturgy (with special attention given to the Scripture readings).
 - b. The Musical Judgment: is the music of good quality? Musical form and quality are not to be confused. The Church recognizes and accepts many different forms of music.
 - c. The Pastoral Judgment: will the music selected enable this particular congregation to give expression to its faith and foster a union of hearts and minds? Does the music selected recognize the abilities and diversity of the congregation?
5. Adequate time for preparation and rehearsal.