

Guidelines for a Multilingual Celebration of Mass

In 1987, the Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) collaborated to produce guidelines for multilingual Masses. The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship's Subcommittee on Divine Worship in Spanish revised them in January 2013. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist parishes and other communities faced with multicultural and multilingual celebrations of the Eucharist. These guidelines arise out of the experience of many parish liturgists, priests, and diocesan worship offices in their planning and celebration of such liturgies, and from a respect for the liturgical principles which comprise the rites of the Roman Missal. With the permission of the FDLC, these guidelines are revised and reprinted as a resource of the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship.

Introduction

The United States of America is composed of multicultural and multilingual groups. This multiplicity is reflected in the Roman Catholic community, especially when diverse groups assemble on significant occasions for liturgical celebration. Such assemblies may provide opportunity to employ the rich diversity of cultural and linguistic expressions into one common act of worship.

The following guidelines for liturgical celebrations of multicultural and multilingual assemblies are offered to assist in the preparation and celebration of these special occasions. Such serious concern for the diversity of culture and language should express the unity which flows from liturgical celebration.

It is presumed that liturgical planners understand that the goal of Masses which blend multiple languages and other cultural expressions is to unite people of shared faith in common prayer around the word and the Eucharistic table, and that the extraordinary feature of such celebrations is that only some, not all, of the elements of the celebration of the Mass will be understood by those assembled.

An explanation or understanding of these special features will be occasion for those assembled for common worship to enter more freely and deeply into the meaning and structure of the rites of the Mass, respecting the order of worship with which they are already acquainted, and respecting the linguistic or cultural expression of these rites even when they may not be their own.

It is also presumed that, on ordinary Sundays, multilingual parishes provide Eucharistic celebrations to meet the linguistic needs of their people. Therefore, multilingual liturgies have particular value in the celebration of major feasts, weddings, funerals, and other important parish and diocesan events.

A. General Norms

1. The cultural and ethnic diversity of those assembled for Eucharistic celebrations should be reflected throughout the celebration in the choice of gestures, postures, vesture and environmental design, as well as in the choice of musical texts and styles and in the determination of languages which will be used to proclaim the scripture readings and prayers of the Mass.
2. Multilingual celebrations may require the moderate use of a commentator at appropriate points which do not impede the natural rhythm of the structure of the Mass:
 - a. before the celebration, for instruction concerning the celebration;
 - b. before the Liturgy of the Word (cf. GIRM, no. 31 and no. 105b);
 - c. following the Prayer after Communion, for announcements.

B. Norms for Specific Rites during Mass

1. *The Introductory Rites* – The introductory rites of Mass have as their purpose “to ensure that the faithful, who come together as one, establish communion and dispose themselves properly to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily” (GIRM, no. 46). Therefore, every effort should be made to create this disposition in those assembled.

- a. The choice of processional music, introductory greetings and of music for the penitential intercessions and the *Gloria* can elicit an awareness of the cultural and linguistic diversity of those gathered for the liturgy.
- b. The invitation to pray before the Collect can be given in the diverse languages spoken by those assembled. The Collect itself should be prayed in one language to preserve its integrity.

2. *The Liturgy of the Word* – “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel.

“Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are an element of the greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture the Word of God is addressed to all people of whatever era and is understandable to them, a fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness of the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, by the Homily, as part of the liturgical action” (GIRM, no. 29).

In order that the Sacred Scriptures can be heard with reverence and understood by all, attention should be given to the language(s) in which they are proclaimed and commented upon in the homily.

- a. One or both of the readings preceding the Gospel should be proclaimed in the language understood by the majority of those assembled. If two readings are to be proclaimed, one may be proclaimed in another language appropriate to those assembled. As a suggestion, since the first reading and the Gospel normally have similar themes, these could be proclaimed in different languages so that each group can hear at least some of the primary themes from the Sacred Scriptures of the day.
- b. Printed booklets which provide translations of the Sacred Scripture readings have proved helpful and should be continued. Including a brief commentary in these booklets, however, tends to be disruptive of the liturgy.
- c. In multilingual Masses the Responsorial Psalm should not be divided into different languages but sung or read in one language in its entirety including the response in order to maintain the unity and integrity of the text. The language used would preferably (though not necessarily) be the same language as the first reading, since the Psalm in some way responds to it, and this would show the relationship more clearly. The refrain used with the Psalm should be the same language as the Psalm or bilingual.
- d. The Gospel, which Christ himself proclaims, may be read in more than one language in its entirety. There is long and varied precedent for this, from the Papal liturgies chanting in both Latin and Greek because of the ancient bilingual character of the city, to various Eastern Churches (some of which proclaim the Gospel in two or more languages), to the Extraordinary Form in which the Gospel is chanted in both Latin and the vernacular. If this is done, then the procession, introduction and incensation should only be done once. At the conclusion of the proclamation in the first language, a minister should immediately proceed to the proclamation of the text in the next language. The conclusion is said only once and in the last language used. The *Alleluia* verse should be in the same language as the first proclamation of the Gospel. It is not recommended that the Gospel be broken into different sections for different languages.
- e. The homily, ordinarily, should be preached in the language understood by the majority. A short summary may be given in other languages. The homilist may reflect the same theme in his summary while incorporating a different development or cultural illustration.
- f. Several options for the Universal Prayer are available:
 - i. The invitation to each of the petitions could be given in the various languages understood by those assembled (e.g., “Let us pray for the Church” and “Let us pray for the sick,” etc.). Following each invitation, a silent pause will allow for the assembly to unite in prayer for particular concerns. The conclusion to each intercession could then be spoken or sung in the same language throughout to allow for the consistent, flowing pattern of the response among the assembled.
 - ii. Or, each petition could be said or sung in a different language, each with a common response, e.g., *Kyrie eleison* or *Te rogamus audi nos* or *Domine, exaudi nos*, etc. This would eliminate the repetitiousness of the invitation in several languages for each petition.
 - iii. Or, the first part of the petition could be given in one language and the second part (the assembly's response) be given in another.

3. *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*

- a. *Preparation of the Gifts.* "At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts which will become Christ's Body and Blood are brought to the altar" (GIRM, no. 73). These gifts of bread and wine, as well as gifts for the Church or the poor brought by the faithful or collected at Mass, are appropriate.
 - b. *Eucharistic Prayer.* To preserve the integrity of the Eucharistic Prayer, the whole of the Priest's parts of the Prayer (from Preface through Doxology) should be in the same language. The acclamations proclaimed by the assembly could be either bilingual or in the language of the Eucharistic Prayer.
 - c. *Communion Rite.* Because the Lord's Prayer is common to all Christians, members of the assembly may be invited to recite the prayer in his or her own language simultaneously with others. Otherwise, to preserve the integrity of the Communion Rite, it should be conducted in one language (different from that of the Eucharistic Prayer). The *Agnus Dei* acclamation should be either bilingual or in the language of the rest of the Communion Rite.
4. *The Concluding Rites* – When the more solemn forms of blessing are chosen, each of the blessing prayers may be given in alternating languages appropriate to those assembled.

C. Norms for Music

1. Members of multilingual assemblies can join in the singing of short texts even if the language is foreign to them (e.g., "Lord, have mercy," "Hosanna in the highest," psalm antiphons, etc.). Repetitious "ostinato" styles of music, like Taizé, provide a style of music which allows for the texts to become familiar and easy to sing; such a form of music can also foster a sense of unity among those assembled.
 When Latin chants or antiphons are known, understood, and can be sung well, these can be an effective means of bringing about musical unity.
 "Since the faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is desirable that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Profession of Faith and the Lord's Prayer, according to the simpler settings" (GIRM no. 41).
2. The languages of those assembled should be expressed in song. Music proper to each culture, however, should be preferred to the practice of translating texts to accompany melodies which express a different culture. An integrity of musical styles, however, should be respected throughout the liturgy.
 An effort should be made to promote the expertise of poets and musicians of each cultural group toward the development of original music which can be incorporated into these celebrations.
3. Some familiar hymns are known in several languages. Alternating verses in each of the languages represented by those in the assembly can be effective. Care should be taken to balance instrumental accompaniment with the language of the culture, as well.
4. Antiphonal selections of hymns can be used effectively when the verses are sung by cantor or choir in several languages, while the antiphon is sung by all present in a common language.
5. Eucharistic acclamations should reflect an integral musical style and may include a blend of the diverse languages of those assembled. Composers must give special attention to the blending of multiple languages in such musical settings.
6. Choirs assembled for special occasions must work together in the development of a common repertoire and in the development of a unified choir for the exercise of music ministry.