

GATHERED ON A WEEKDAY WHEN THE EUCHARIST IS NOT CELEBRATED

Some Theological, Liturgical and Pastoral Considerations

STATEMENT OF THE IRISH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE APPROVED AT CONFERENCE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 2015

Foreword

1. The topic of weekday worship has been on the Irish Bishops' Council for Liturgy's agenda for a long time. *Gathered on a Weekday: Some Theological, Liturgical and Pastoral Considerations* is a practical response to the pastoral predicament in which many parishes now find themselves. It simply provides some theological and liturgical markers for those communities who wish to celebrate on weekdays when the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible. The aim is to inform decision-making within the context of the rich Christian tradition at our disposal.

2. It addresses the following in particular:

- The centrality of the Sunday Eucharist as the point of reference for liturgical celebrations on all other days of the week.
- The component parts of the liturgy, along with its long-standing and immediate preparation.
- Options available to Christian communities when they do not have the celebration of the Eucharist.
- The call of bishops, priests and the laity in responding to new pastoral circumstances.

3. Our hope is that this document will prove helpful to those currently trying to discern forms of weekday worship that will nourish and sustain our faith communities in the years ahead. Good theology is one of our safeguards against poor practice, and this document is offered in that spirit. We are also aware that although the challenge of Sunday celebration without the celebration of the Eucharist is not addressed here, it is a matter that will require much consideration and attention.

4. The Council for Liturgy is committed to supporting, in whatever way it can, all those called to guide and lead liturgical formation at the present time.

An Easter People, A Sunday People

5. Christian people are decidedly a Sunday people. Christians gather with brothers and sisters on Sundays in order to keep memorial of Jesus being raised from the dead on a Sunday; the day which the Jewish people named the 'first day of the week':

6. Already by the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation, believers in the Lord were distinguishing themselves as people who came together on Sundays. Being Christian ever since involves the same response – to come together on Sundays and to be immersed in and transformed by the memorial of the Resurrection and of the whole Paschal Mystery.

7. It is at the heart of being the Church to assemble on Sunday and encounter the Lord. The Easter Triduum culminating in Easter Sunday is the annual, great, memorial of the Lord. Thereafter, the Sundays of Easter and every other Sunday are the Church's weekly, no less joyful, Easter celebration.

Sunday Public Worship: Source and Summit of Weekday Worship and Life

8. Christians who are Easter people, Sunday people, may seek to be together for worship on weekdays, too. There is no imperative to do so, save the call for God to sanctify all our days, for all of time.

9. The public worship of the Church on weekdays flows from the vision, experience and empowerment of Sunday's public worship. It serves to enable us, form us and orient us for Sunday worship. It whets the appetite for the fullness of light, joy, festivity and company of the Church reassembled on the following Sunday to offer its constant sacrifice of praise. It, too, manifests all glory to God the Father, in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Component Parts of Public Worship- the Liturgy- Especially on Sunday

10. The Liturgy of the Church consists of the celebration of the Seven Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Marriage, Orders, Anointing of the Sick); the Liturgy of the Hours; the Order of Christian Funerals and the Order of Blessings. The Liturgy of the Church, its sacrifice of praise, surpasses every form of popular, private devotion.

11. The centre and high point of the Liturgy of the Church and of the whole Christian life is the celebration of the Eucharist. Here is thanksgiving at the substantial, uninterrupted presence of the Lord, under the eucharistic species of bread and wine.

12. The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday has particular importance. There is a non-negotiable festal atmosphere. It is the essential forum for the apprenticeship, initiation and sustenance of Christian discipleship. Being Church 'means that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 114).

13. Among the component parts of every celebration of the Eucharist and of all the rites of the Church's liturgy are:

1. A gathering of the community, which works to become one in voice, heart and body through sung, spoken and ritual prayer, and through daily witness.
2. Thanksgiving for the Lord who is present within the persons gathered, through the ministry of the presiding ordained celebrant and in God's Word proclaimed and broken.

Preparing the Celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday

14. The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, as the centre and high point of the whole Church's life, requires that the greatest care be taken in both its long-standing and immediate preparation.

15. The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday should manifest a true, substantial gathering of the people. The scheduling of Sunday Eucharist and the number of celebrations in each parish should serve to unite, not scatter, God's people. It is helpful to have neighbouring parishes cooperate on schedules; inward interests and singular convenience are not decisive. It is relevant to ask: how early on Sunday morning is too early to reach the full, conscious, active participation required by the nature of the liturgy? Furthermore, consideration ought to be given to those who work in essential public services and more on Sunday, and how they can be accommodated to celebrate the Eucharist in neighbouring parishes if the schedule in their own parish is not feasible.

16. As the celebration of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Sacrifice of the Cross is carried out by means of symbols and signs perceptible to the senses, great care must be taken with the elements and forms belonging to the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday. Such care would lead us to:

- Bread which looks and tastes like bread, and which is large enough to be seen by and to be broken and shared with the assembly.
- Holy Communion from the chalice for all, so that the faithful who wish to may receive Holy Communion under both kinds, and the faithful who suffer from gluten intolerances may partake in Holy Communion without inconvenience or the public disclosure of their condition.
- The facilitation of the assembly with the words and music of the acclamations, responses and hymns, in order to participate in singing the Eucharist, since liturgical music is integral to both the congregation's part and the presiding ordained priest's part in celebrating the Eucharist.

➤ The assembly being provided with only what it needs to celebrate the Eucharist. Except for persons with hearing impairments, the congregation does not need the texts of the readings from scripture or the full text of the Eucharistic Prayer. Furthermore, it is inappropriate that the choice of Eucharistic Prayer be determined from outside the worshipping community in mass-produced, generic, missalettes.

➤ Capable proclaimers of God's Word and sufficient extraordinary ministers for Holy Communion under both kinds, as well as the enlistment and formation of psalmists, cantors and instrumentalists, assistants at the altar, sacristans, collectors, stewards and ministers of welcome, of decoration and environment. In all, let there be men and women, including children, teenagers and young adults and persons representative of the whole faithful who are each capable of and enabled for the given ministry. For all, let there be informed development in their understanding of the liturgy and safeguarded participation and mutual respect.

17. In the teaching of St John Paul II, *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*, the Sunday Eucharist is set out as the model for all other eucharistic celebrations. On Sunday, the celebration of the Eucharist appears more clearly than on other days as the great thanksgiving. The Eucharist we celebrate on Sunday should be characterised by the joy, festivity, unity and hope of Easter.

The Celebration of the Eucharist in General

18. In the celebration of the liturgy, the same Lord that is *encountered* especially through the eucharistic elements of bread and wine is *heard* in the proclamation of God's Word and is *seen* in the gathering of the faithful, the other members of the household of God and of God's people, as well as in the ministry of the presiding ordained celebrant.

19. The substantial, uninterrupted presence of the Lord in and through the elements of Holy Communion arises at the Lord's command to the Church, by the will of the Father and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here, within the gathered assembly, the ministry of the ordained priest, presiding in the name and person of Christ the head of the Church, is indispensable.

20. This substantial, uninterrupted presence of the Lord within and outlasting the celebration of the Eucharist is played out in the fourfold action of Christ at the Last Supper: he took, blessed, in the three divine-human actions of:

Blessing this bread and wine (praying the Eucharistic Prayer from the Preface dialogue to the broke and gave. We experience these today, firstly,

a. *Taking* bread and wine (the presentation of the Gifts)

b. Great Amen, by which the presiding priest and the whole assembly of the faithful participates in God's consecration of the bread and wine)

c. *Breaking* the eucharistic bread (the Fraction Rite, in which the bread being broken signifies that the faithful are all of the one body and blood of the Lord).

21. The triple action of *taking*, *blessing* and *breaking* leads to and makes possible the fourth action, which is encountering the Lord in the *giving and receiving* by the assembly of the eucharistic bread and wine.

22. The Church is exacting in her teaching that Holy Communion, as the *giving* and *receiving* of the eucharistic elements, is not separated without just cause from the concurrent celebration of the Eucharistic Prayer; the experience, that is, of the *taking*, the *blessing* and the *breaking* in the one and the same celebration.

Holy Communion of the Faithful Who are Sick, Aged, Housebound or Dying Following the Celebration of the Eucharist

23. The Church is mindful to have special care for people, who, because of a debilitating illness, age or condition, are not able to gather at their church on Sunday in order to commemorate the Resurrection of the Lord.

24. We know from the writings of St Justin Martyr, c. 100-165 CE, that it was the practice and desire of the Church to have Holy Communion brought to those who were unavoidably absent from the celebration of the Eucharist. Parishes today need to ensure they have a sufficient number of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion for this same ministry. The sick, aged, housebound or dying person, and the faithful present with them, may receive Holy Communion under both kinds or in the form of bread or wine alone, as is appropriate.

25. In the Communion Rite in the Liturgy of the Easter Triduum on Holy Thursday, that is the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the priest entrusts the Eucharist from the altar to an appropriate minister, so that, afterwards, it is brought to the sick, the aged, the housebound and the dying at home or in hospital or in a care facility, so that they can take part in Holy **Communion**.

26. This same rite is applicable to all celebrations of the Eucharist, and especially those on Sundays, wherein the Eucharist is entrusted from the altar of meal and sacrifice (that is, *not* from the tabernacle) during the Communion Rite and brought to people who are sick, aged, housebound or dying.

27. Here, the *giving* and *receiving* of the eucharistic species in Holy Communion is concurrent with the Eucharistic Prayer which has been prayed in the parish church; it is not separated from the essential preceding actions of the *taking*, *blessing* and *breaking* in the community's place of worship. The Holy Communion of the sick, the aged and the housebound and the viaticum of the dying is, in this instance, part of the same Communion Rite, even though it is occurring outside the place of worship.

28. When a priest, deacon or extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion attends the home of a sick, aged or housebound person, he/she uses the appropriate liturgical rite, namely *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Chapter Three: 'Communion in Ordinary Circumstances':

29. When a deacon or an extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion attends the home of a dying person, he/she uses *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Chapter Five, namely 'Viaticum Outside Mass' [excluding those parts belonging to an ordained priest].

30. When a deacon or an extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion attends a sick, aged or dying person in a hospital or care facility, he/she uses: *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Chapter Three: 'Communion in Ordinary Circumstances', or Chapter Five: 'Viaticum Outside Mass' [excluding those parts belonging to an ordained priest].

31. When a deacon or an extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion attends to several sick, aged or dying persons in a hospital or care facility, he/she uses: *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Chapter Three: 'Communion in a Hospital or Institution'.

Giving and Receiving

Holy Communion of the Faithful who are Sick, Aged, Housebound or Dying at Times Other than during the Celebration of the Eucharist

32. This is the case when Holy Communion in a home, care facility or hospital is not part of the Communion Rite of the celebration of the Eucharist, as described above, but takes place at another time. Since the faithful who are sick, aged, housebound or dying may receive the Eucharist at any hour, the elements of the Eucharist are taken from what is reserved in the tabernacle.

33. This is one instance of two just causes for separating the *giving and receiving* of the eucharistic elements from the concurrent experience of celebrating the full eucharistic rite inclusive of the preceding, essential actions of the *taking*, the *blessing* and the *breaking*.

34. The primary purpose of the tabernacle in a church is to reserve the Eucharist for the Holy Communion of the sick, the aged, the housebound or the dying outside the celebration of the Eucharist. It is not to reserve hosts for their distribution to subsequent congregations during other celebrations of the Eucharist.

35. Indeed, there is no indication in the *Roman Missal* that the *giving and receiving* of the eucharistic species in Holy Communion during the celebration of the Eucharist should normally be with hosts taken from the tabernacle. Rather, the contrary is stated, namely:

It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 85)

Giving and Receiving

Holy Communion of the Faithful Assembled in the Parish Church Without the Celebration of the Eucharist

36. A second just cause for separating the *giving and receiving* of the eucharistic elements from the concurrent experience of praying the Eucharistic Prayer (the *taking*, the *blessing* and the *breaking*), is the unavailability of an ordained priest to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist.

37. The *giving and receiving* of Holy Communion to the faithful assembled in parish churches outside the celebration of the Eucharist requires the adjudication and permission of the diocesan bishop.

38. Notwithstanding the variety of reasons why a priest might not be available for the celebration of the Eucharist on weekdays (sickness, annual holidays, day off, leave of absence, the general shortage of priests), bishops are restricted by Church law in the conditions and circumstances in which they may grant permission for Holy Communion outside the celebration of the Eucharist to the faithful assembled in parish churches. Furthermore, if a bishop does grant permission, it requires his ongoing oversight and regulation.

39. The bishop's permission is restrictive because the celebration of the Eucharist is at the very nature and heart of the community. When the *giving and receiving* in Holy Communion is decoupled from the *taking*, the *blessing* and the *breaking*, the integrity of the eucharistic rite, in faithfulness to the Lord's fourfold command, is compromised. The Church cannot envisage, as normal, the Holy Communion of the faithful gathered in assembly taking place apart from their concurrent celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

40. In the event that on select occasions and circumstances, after prudent discernment with the Priests' Council, the Diocesan Pastoral Council or equivalent bodies, the diocesan bishop gives permission for this to happen, he is to lay down general and particular norms and ensure clear understanding of the primacy and essential difference of the celebration of the Eucharist

How do Parishes Pray When They do Not Have the Celebration of the Eucharist?

41. The pattern of a daily gathering for public worship is long established in the Church in Ireland. Here, faithfulness to the Gospel is interwoven with social, cultural and interpersonal motives. Indeed, Easter people, Sunday people seek to be together for worship on weekdays.

42. The daily prayer of the Church consists in the celebration of the Eucharist with its cycle of readings and prayers *and* the Liturgy of the Hours (especially Morning, Evening and Night Prayer). Just as there is a given cycle of texts for the celebration of the Eucharist for each day so, too, there are given 'hours'; a given cycle of hymns, psalms, readings and prayers to be prayed at different times of the day.

43. It is increasingly common that the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible every weekday in all parishes. This is because an ordained priest is unavailable to preside over the celebration in the name and person of the Lord. When the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible, a congregation can still share fully in the proper given liturgy of the day, in praying one of the 'hours' of that day.

44. The Lord is present when people pray the Liturgy of the Church other than the Eucharist, for he said: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Mt 18:20). Similarly, he is present when the scriptures are read, for when the scriptures are read in sacred assembly, God speaks to God's people and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel (cf. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 27, 29).

45. When the Church gathers to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours (especially Morning, Evening or Night Prayer) or the Liturgy of the Word, which has been assigned to a particular day, the Lord truly is with his people. He is teaching them. He is nourishing them. He is sustaining them. He is increasing their appetite for their communion with him in the *taking*, the *blessing*, the *breaking*, the *giving* and *receiving* at the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Mass, especially on Sundays.

46. When a parish does not have the celebration of the Eucharist on weekdays, people who wish should continue to gather and encounter the Lord in his Word and in the assembly, prayer and witness of God's people. With such gathering, they will help sustain the faith life of their community and support one another.

47. They ought to celebrate God's Word in all its richness, in good proclamation and liturgical song, and so help to build up and enhance the greater celebration and breaking open and witness to God's Word, which is Sunday's Eucharist.

48. It is good practice to have lay faithful in each parish to serve and assist those who wish to gather and pray on weekdays when the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible. It will be essential to form these as leaders of public prayer, particularly of celebrations of God's Word and of Morning, Evening and Night Prayer. Permanent deacons, where available, have a part to play as leaders of public prayer, when the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible

49. It will also be useful and important to provide resources and assistance for weekday assemblies to sing the Word of God, namely, psalms, canticles, hymns and acclamations in praise of the Lord.

50. In addition to praying one of the 'hours' of the day, or the given Liturgy of the Word from the celebration of the Eucharist of the day, it is desirable to have occasional celebrations of the Word of special intercession and community focus that are rooted in the patterns of liturgical worship and the Sunday commemoration of the Lord and his resurrection. These celebrations ought to be attuned to the liturgical season and day. They can be seen as opportunities to identify new gifts in and for the community. We can see them also as the invitation and means to a renewed participation in Sunday's celebration of the Eucharist.

51. When people gather to pray on weekdays on which they cannot have the celebration of the Eucharist, let them thank God for all who serve the life of faith in the Church in Ireland and beyond: parents, parishioners, parish teams and pastoral workers, catechists and those who provide spiritual accompaniment, diocesan councils and faith development services, teachers of theology, shepherds and pastors of souls. Let us pray earnestly that there are new and eager labourers for God's harvest always, especially ordained priests, to serve the celebration of the Eucharist in the name and person of Jesus, the Lord. The task of making and sustaining Christians through the power of the Holy Spirit belongs to the whole Church. The call of Christ to serve him and his Church as ordained priests, equally belongs to the whole Church.