

**DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**BASED UPON THE GUIDELINES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**What 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' means**

The term 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' refers to the practice of children leaving the Sunday assembly during the Liturgy of the Word and gathering elsewhere to celebrate a separate Liturgy of the Word that is more appropriate to their level of understanding.

**Why it is celebrated**

In 1973, the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome issued the document *Directory for Masses with Children*. This document offers principles and guidelines for adapting the liturgy for children to enable them to take a more conscious and active part in liturgical celebrations.

The *Directory* states:

*Sometimes..., if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. Then, before the eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word (DMC #17).*

This statement is the rationale for many parishes offering Children's Liturgy of the Word as a parish ministry.

**THE PURPOSE**

The purpose of adapting liturgical celebrations to make them more accessible to children must always be to gradually lead them to full, conscious and active participation in the Sunday liturgical assembly



	<p><b>The Scriptures</b></p> <p>The approved book of readings for Children's Liturgy of the Word is the <i>Lectionary for Masses with Children</i>. The LMC adheres as closely as possible to the readings in the Lectionary for Mass, while adapting them to the needs and capabilities of children. It is a simplified version of Scripture, not a collection of paraphrases or Bible stories. The Contemporary English Version of the Bible is currently used for this purpose.</p> <p>As far as possible the readings follow those in the (adult) Roman <i>Lectionary for Mass</i>. Where a reading was considered too difficult for children, it has been simplified or omitted completely. The responsorial psalms have been adapted to make them easier for the children to sing.</p>
	<p><b>More than only words</b></p> <p>A liturgy of the word is never simply a verbal experience. The use of symbols, gesture, movement and singing heightens the children's experience of the transcendent. A beautifully bound book which is handled with respect, a special place for enthroning the word, gathering the children around to hear the scriptures proclaimed well, these all speak to the children of the sacredness of God's word and influence how they accept and live by it.</p>
	<p><b>Purpose of these guidelines</b></p> <p>These guidelines are designed to support sound celebrations of Children's Liturgy of the Word by setting out the relevant principles espoused in the <i>Directory for Masses with Children</i> for the assistance of pastors, leaders, parents and all involved in this ministry to children.</p>

**PRINCIPLES FOR CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD**

The following principles are to be taken into account by priests and ministers when celebrating a Liturgy of the Word with children.

1. It must be liturgy. *The Church's liturgy is first and foremost ritual prayer. The liturgy celebrates the word of God in narrative and song and makes it visible in gesture and symbol (LMC #24).* While activity sheets can be useful as take-home material for family follow-up, it is not appropriate that they be used during a liturgical celebration.

*It is not about worksheet like Sunday School*

2. Gatherings of children in which the primary focus is religious education, sacramental preparation or completing activity sheets should be called 'Sunday School', 'Bible Class' or some other appropriate designation. The description 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' is reserved for celebrations which parallel the Liturgy of the Word at Mass in content, structure and symbol.

*Not babysitting young children*

3. The participants are usually children of primary school age. Children younger than this are generally unable to participate consciously and actively in liturgical celebrations. The role of leaders is to facilitate the liturgy and not to take care of young children. If preschool-aged children are included, scripture-based activities will be more appropriate for them. As explained in 2 above, however, this should not be described as a Liturgy of the Word.

*Catering for a range of abilities*

4. Children with disability are to be welcomed to participate in Children's Liturgy of the Word. This may require prior contact with the parents to ensure that the child knows that he or she is welcome and to identify any particular support required. As noted in DMC #6, a broader adaptation may sometimes be necessary.

*Training in liturgical ministries*

5. During their years of participation in Children's Liturgy of the Word, the children should progressively take on ministerial roles in the celebration. These include proclaiming the readings, playing music, and leading the singing or prayers.

*The right environment*

6. The liturgy is celebrated in a space that is separate but not too distant from the church. This place needs to be carefully chosen and well prepared so that the environment is suitable for the worship of God (LMC #49). It should be arranged so that the children can see each other and see and hear the leader.

<p><i>Liturgical symbols and colours but not a separate mass for kids</i></p> <p><i>Participation is the key to good liturgy</i></p> <p><i>Age appropriate readings CEV Bible for different age groups</i></p> <p><i>Breaking open the Word</i></p>	<p>7. The various liturgical objects used - lectionary, lectern, candle - should provide a focal point for the celebration and be treated with respect and reverence.</p> <p>8. When Children's Liturgy of the Word is held, the children participate in the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites with the worshipping assembly. Only the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated separately.</p> <p>9. <i>In view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of the psychology of children, participation by means of gestures and posture should be strongly encouraged.</i> (DMC #33). The use of other ritual elements such as processions, singing, dialogue and silence is integral to children's experience of liturgy.</p> <p>10. Visual elements used in liturgy such as liturgical colours, light, water, cross, and artwork should be given greater prominence with children (DMC #35, 36).</p> <p>11. The approved book of readings is the <i>Lectionary for Masses with Children</i>. Of the readings provided, all three, or two, or even one reading may be used. The Gospel reading should always be included. In choosing the number of readings, leaders need to take into account the level of understanding of the children and the limited time available for the celebration. A simple introduction before the word is proclaimed may help the children to focus on the readings. Occasionally leaders might consider the version of a reading in the adult <i>Lectionary for Mass</i> to be more suited to the group.</p> <p>12. <i>The liturgical texts should be proclaimed intelligibly and unhurriedly, with the necessary pauses</i> (DMC #37). While the use of dramatic elements is sometimes appropriate, the impression should not be given that the Liturgy of the Word is a play or historical re-enactment.</p> <p>13. The shortened responsorial psalm provided in the LMC is sung after the first reading. If possible, the Gospel Acclamation with verse is sung before the Gospel reading.</p> <p>14. A homily to explain the reading(s), appropriate to the children's level of understanding, should be given by an adult approved by the parish priest (DMC #17, 24). The homily may be instructional or make use of question and answer, discussion, guided reflection or silent meditation. If the Gospel reading of the day is a difficult one, the leader may choose to concentrate on one of the other readings in the homily.</p>
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<i>Reinforce/ Review</i>	15. After the homily, a variety of methods such as songs, mime and role-playing can be employed to further break open the scriptures and apply them to the children's lives.
<i>Prayers</i>	16. Prayers of the Faithful (Intercessions) should <b>always</b> be included in the celebration.
<i>Creeds</i>	17. If appropriate to the occasion (for example on major feast days), a simple statement of faith may be said. The Apostles' Creed or a question and answer form of the renewal of baptismal promises is recommended.
<i>Silence is golden</i>	18. As with any Liturgy of the Word, silence should be observed at appropriate times as part of the celebration. In their own way, children are genuinely capable of reflection. The children will need some guidance in learning how to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or pray to God in their hearts (DMC #37).

<i>Child Protection Issues</i>	<p>Arena of Safety</p> <p>Contemporary Australian society has high expectations about the proper treatment of children in every setting esp within the church. <b>All facilitators</b> of Children's Liturgy of the Word are to be trained in Child Protection and are to operate within an approved set of guidelines and code of behaviour. Practices such as never being alone with a child are highly recommended.</p>
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## STRUCTURE FOR CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

### GATHER

- **Gathering together with the whole assembly.**  
When children are to participate in the liturgy of the word in a space separate from the main assembly, they *first gather with the rest of the assembly to celebrate the introductory rites* (LMC # 8).
- **Processing to the place set aside for the celebration of the word.**  
*At the conclusion of the opening prayer, but before the first reading is proclaimed, the presiding priest may formally send the children and their ministers to the place where they will celebrate their own liturgy of the word. This may be done by presenting the Lectionary to the one who will preside over the liturgy of the word with children and/or by words of dismissal such as: My dear children, you will go now to hear God's word, to praise God in song and to reflect on the wonderful things God has done for us. We will await your return so that together we may celebrate the Eucharist* (LMC #8).
- **Preparing the children to listen.**  
Begin the session by welcoming the children and inviting them to share briefly about their week's happenings.

### LISTEN

- **Listening to the Word.**  
The readings follow the same structure and cycle as the readings for Mass. However, for liturgies with children, there is the option of using one, two or three readings. So your choices are:

3 Readings		2 Readings		1 Reading
1st reading from the Old Testament		1st reading		Gospel acclamation  Gospel
Responsorial psalm		Responsorial psalm		
2nd reading from New Testament	<i>or</i>	Gospel acclamation	<i>or</i>	
Gospel acclamation		Gospel		
Gospel				

**ENGAGE**

**Points to note:**

The readings need to be proclaimed audibly, clearly, reverently, with faith and understanding... by competent readers. It is recommended that, where possible, each reading be proclaimed by a different reader.

*In the choice of readings, the criterion to be followed is the quality rather than the quantity of the texts from the scriptures. In itself a shorter reading is not always more suited to children than a lengthy one. (DMC # 44)*

*The Eucharistic liturgy requires the full use of music which is integral to the whole celebration including the proclamation of the word of God. The responsorial psalm is normally sung by a cantor with the assembly singing the refrain (LMC #51). The gospel acclamation should be sung where possible.*

During the Lenten season, the Alleluia is not used. The gospel acclamation usually starts with words like "Glory and praise to your Lord Jesus Christ" or "Praise and honour to you Lord Jesus Christ."

Some readings are appropriate to be read by more than one voice, that is, by dividing the reading into different speaking parts.

Sometimes SILENCE is an appropriate response.

- **Breaking open the word**

In the breaking open of the word, an explanation of the readings, appropriate to the children's level of understanding, is provided by an adult approved by the parish priest.

It is important that the adult leaders have some understanding of the readings and can provide children with background information where necessary or appropriate.

*In order to engage children's authentic participation, liturgy must respect their need for physical involvement, their internal life is still very much dependent upon what they experience through their senses (LMC #22). Some ways of engaging children's participation which respects their need for physical involvement include: simple role plays, liquid pictures, echo mimes, gospel reflections, frozen tableaux.*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Profession of Faith (optional)</b> It is best if the profession of faith is simple or even abbreviated, for example, use the Apostles' Creed or a simple version such as the</li> <li>• <b>Prayers of the Faithful</b> These are simple petitions which allow the children to name the needs of the Church, the world, those in need and the local community and bring these to God in prayer. A simple formula is: <i>We pray for... Lord (or God) hear us</i> and the response by all children is <i>Lord (or God) hear our prayer</i> .</li> </ul>
<b>GO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rejoining the community</b></li> </ul> <p>A simple procession leads the children back to rejoin the community for the Preparation of the Gifts. The presider may choose to say a simple word of welcome to the children at this point. Children rejoin their families.</p>
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## SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

*Lectionary for Masses with Children* Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York 1993.

*Directory for Masses with Children* Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship 1973.

*Break Open the Word* edited by Barry Copley and published by The Liturgical Commission, Brisbane. Copies can be ordered from The Liturgical Commission, GPO Box 282, Brisbane 4001 Phone (07) 3336 9444 / Fax (07) 3221 1705 / email [orders@litcom.net.au](mailto:orders@litcom.net.au)

*The Summit* Journal of the Liturgical Commission, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. (Annual subscription \$44) Phone (03) 9926 5764 email [worship@melbourne.catholic.org.au](mailto:worship@melbourne.catholic.org.au)

*Celebrating the Gospels : Activities and Prayers for Sunday Cycles A, B and Gaynell Cronin Liguori, Missouri* reprinted 2003 (This resource does not follow the format suggested in these Guidelines, but is a good reference for suggestions for breaking open the word with children.)

Faith and Life produces Lenten and Easter prayer resources for children and young adults. These resources contain background information for adults for each week of the Lent and Easter seasons. Contact Rob Cosgrove at Faith and Life, GPO Box 282, Brisbane 4001 Phone (07) 3336 9163 email [cosgrover@bne.catholic.net.au](mailto:cosgrover@bne.catholic.net.au)

*Join the Circle - Children's Liturgy of the Word.* Lectionary Cycles A, B and C. Margie Abbott rsm Published by Media Com South Australia. Phone 08 8371 1399

*Sacred Celebrations for Advent and Christmas: Year A*  
*Sacred Celebrations for Advent and Christmas: Year B*  
*Sacred Celebrations for Advent and Christmas: Year C*  
*Sacred Celebrations- Liturgies for Children*  
*Just Imagine: Creative ways of presenting Scripture*

*Just Imagine 2: More Creative ways of presenting Scripture*

All by Rina Wintour published by Mountjoy Enterprises. Phone (07) 3348 6038 or email [rwintour@ozemail.com.au](mailto:rwintour@ozemail.com.au)

*Children, Celebrate!* Carmel-Anne Ellen RSM. This resource provides commentary on the readings for the leader, a guide for preparing the

celebration, suggestions for the homily, music, etc, and a take-home sheet.

*Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word* Christopher Walker. The resource consists of a set of tapes, a CD, and a music book for each year of the liturgical cycle. It gives a responsorial psalms and gospel acclamations for every week of the year. These can be borrowed from the Multimedia Centre at Brisbane Catholic Education (07) 3033 7000

*Children at Heart* Paul Inwood. CD produced by OPC Publications, Portland, Oregon

*Children, Liturgy and the Word* VIDEO produced by Liturgy Training Publications, 1997. It is available for loan from Multimedia Centre, Brisbane Catholic Education (07) 3840 0481

[www.liturgyhelp.com](http://www.liturgyhelp.com) is a subscription website produced by Creative Ministry Resources. It offers all the official liturgical texts and other liturgical resources such as music suggestions and homily notes.

LabOra Worship dvd

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