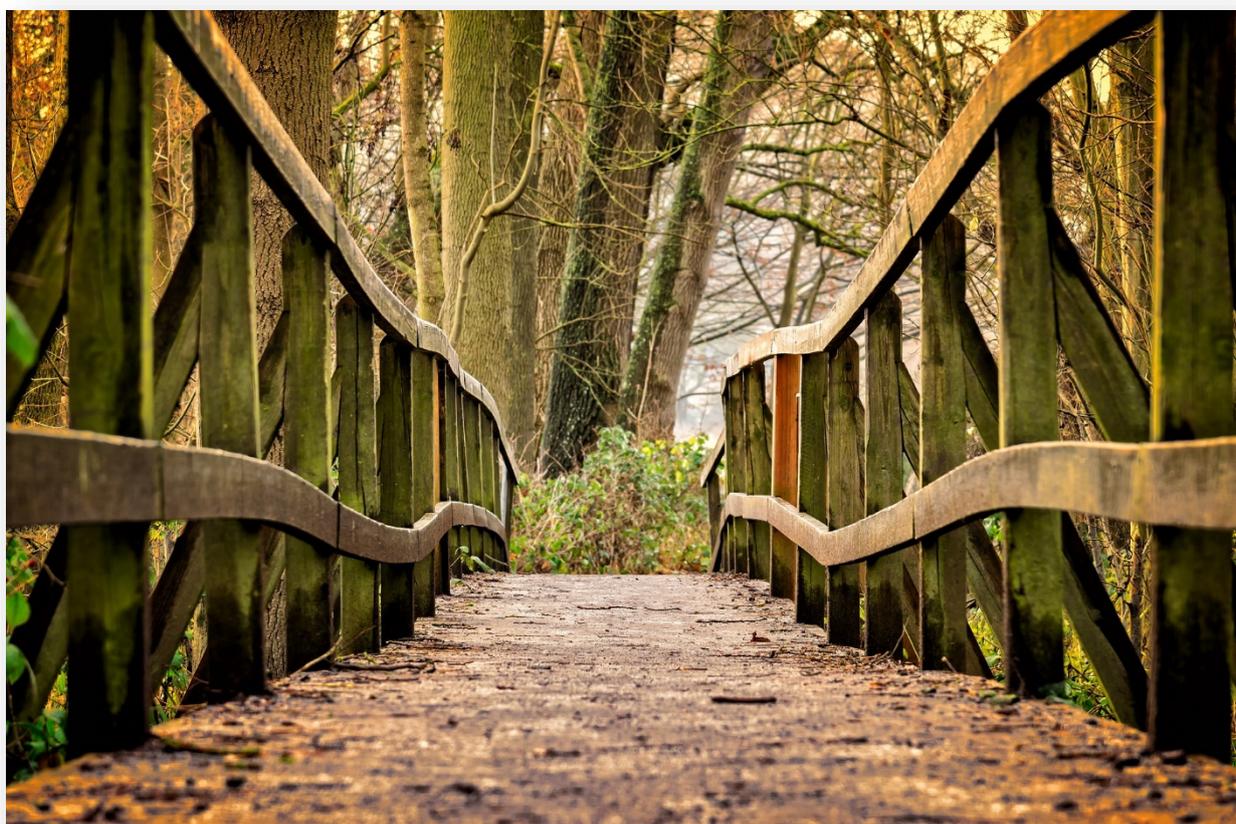


# **Shaping Liturgy 2021**

## **in the Church of Maitland-Newcastle**



***A liturgical bridge from 2020 to 2022***  
***Some pastoral reflections and guidance***

In Advent God shapes us  
*to be alert*

*to revelation hidden from the learned and clever  
and made known by mere children [cf Lk 10:21]*

*to imagine*

a whole new world where

*The wolf lives with the lamb,  
the panther lies down with the kid,  
calf and lion cub feed together  
with a little boy to lead them.  
The cow and the bear make friends,  
their young lie down together.  
The lion eats straw like the ox.  
The infant plays over the cobra's hole;  
into the viper's lair  
the young child puts his hand.  
They do no hurt, no harm,  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the country is filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters swell the sea.*

*That day, the root of Jesse  
shall stand as a signal to the peoples.  
It will be sought out by the nations  
and its home will be glorious. [Is 25:6-10]*

**What have been your liturgical revelations during 2020?**

**What new liturgical possibilities are you imagining?**

**What liturgical steps in 2021 will help you and your community walk the bridge to realising  
a liturgical life that embodies God's vision for a world made new?**

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## Introduction

As 2020 draws to a close we will all breathe a sigh of relief. It has been an experience like no other: full of challenges and opportunities, insights and reimaginings, constant pivoting and hopes for a return to 'normal'. In many ways it has been a masterclass in mystery and not knowing, of being alert and staying awake for the next change. These realities are at the heart of our celebrations and proclamation, and this year they have been at the heart of our communal experience.

As we come to the end of the year, the Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) and Office, and the Bishop's Office have been fielding numerous questions about the shape of our liturgical life in 2021. Because we will continue to live with the pandemic in 2021 and therefore the immediacy of not knowing and constant change, the DLC imagines our liturgical life in 2021 as a bridge, spanning the distance between 2020 and the hopes and dreams we may have for 2022.

What sort of bridge are you imagining? The image we have used on the cover is a bit rustic. The wood looks like it comes from the surrounding trees. It looks a bit wobbly, as if it may need some patching and maintenance as the weeks and months pass. It is strewn with debris yet it looks inviting. I can imagine myself standing on this side wanting to walk across this bridge, not only to get to the other side, but to experience the journey across the bridge.

In considering 2021 as a bridging time, the DLC offers the following thoughts and guidance to support you and your community, as together we shape the liturgical life of our church through this bridging year.

## Restrictions Continue

### COVID-19 Restrictions

Perhaps the only thing we are sure of as we stand at the foot of the 2021 bridge, is that we will continue to live with COVID-19 until we have a vaccine, and enough people have been inoculated for the community to be safe. We are grateful for the recent easing of restrictions to allow the number of persons in our churches for liturgies to increase to one person per two square metres.

While remaining hopeful that we can continue the public celebration of the liturgy through 2021, we are also aware that COVID-19 outbreaks and hotspots may interrupt our plans.

### Liturgical Restrictions

As we plan for 2021 there will be an ongoing need for our liturgical celebrations to adhere to Public Health Orders. Fr Andrew Doohan, Vicar General, will continue to update the Diocesan [COVID-19 Pandemic Event Advice, Guidance and Instructions to Parishes](#) throughout 2021. This document is our best resource to ensure the COVID safety of the community. The most recent updates have included some relaxation of the COVID safe amendments to the liturgy. We hope parishes have begun to implement these changes.

One of the blessings that has come from the pandemic and the initial move to live-streamed Mass has been the opportunity to reflect deeply on what it means to participate in the celebration of Mass. We have felt and explored the chasm between participating and

watching. For some, to watch Mass has been a rich means of prayer and solace. Watching is, however, far removed from the experience of that which is the source and summit of the Church's life and mission, and the indispensable source of the true Christian Spirit (CSL a. 10 and 14). [Read further on the [meaning of 'participation' in Mass.](#)]

For this reason, live-streamed Masses are not to be proliferated beyond the normal schedule of parish Masses, which includes funerals and weddings. As the numbers allowed in our churches increase, it is hoped those parishes who continue to live-stream Sunday Mass will cease to do so when it is no longer pastorally necessary. At this stage, the need to live-stream weekday Mass has passed. Any parish continuing this practice is encouraged to review it.

Bishop Bill has decided that the 9.30am Sunday Mass at the Cathedral will continue to be live-streamed even beyond COVID-19. This ensures that a locally celebrated Sunday Mass can be watched by those in hospitals and aged care homes, or who are housebound due to age, illness or disability. Fr Andrew is in negotiations with hospitals and aged care homes about providing access to this service. Our ability to do this has been one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic.

The treasury of Catholic liturgy is full of liturgies that are better suited to live streaming through Zoom and the plethora of electronic platforms available to us. The most obvious examples include the 'Prayer of the Church' and 'Liturgies of the Word'. Where there is a pastoral need for streaming, communities are encouraged to consider these options. In 2021, the DLC will be offering some opportunities to support communities who wish to explore these options.

With these ongoing restrictions in the forefront of our minds, let us reflect on the following aspects of our liturgical life through 2021.

## **The Liturgical Year**

We all hope that the normal rhythm of feasts and seasons will be celebrated publicly in our Churches throughout 2021.

## **The Diocesan Liturgical Calendar**

The diocesan liturgical calendar includes a variety of major liturgies, some of which are part of the liturgical year, and some are unique to our local Church. Examples of such events are the 'Chrism Mass' which is part of the liturgical year and the Catholic Schools Office 'Called to Serve Mass' which is unique to our local Church.

At this stage, the Bishop's Office is tentatively booking these liturgies into the Bishop's calendar. It is our hope that all such celebrations will take place, albeit differently. The difference will be determined by the nature of the event, the celebrating community and the COVID-19 restrictions at the time.

Let us consider two examples:

1. The Chrism Mass, of its nature, must be Mass and so will be celebrated in the Cathedral as usual on Tuesday 30 March 2021. The two main differences foreseen

at this stage are a restriction on numbers and the COVID-19 adaptations to the liturgy required at the time.

2. The Catholic Schools Office 'Called to Serve Mass' is the annual diocesan celebration of the ministry of Catholic School Education. It includes a Presentation of Awards prior to Mass and the commissioning of school staff during Mass.

While traditionally this celebration is a Mass, of its nature it does not need to be Mass. The CSO Religious Education and Spirituality Team are currently planning several options for this event scheduled for 11 February 2021.

In making a final decision about the form the liturgy will take, they will weigh the competing goods. For example: to have Mass in the Cathedral means a restriction on numbers; to have another liturgy that can be streamed opens the opportunity to celebrate this event with a much larger community, including students, parents and more staff than usually attend.

Ultimately, given the nature of the event, the COVID-19 restrictions at the time, and the new opportunities imagined, the community will decide the most pastorally appropriate way to celebrate the 'call to serve' at the heart of Catholic School Education.

As 2021 unfolds, each community will seize the opportunity to look with fresh eyes at their annual liturgical events and discern how best to mark them. The Caritas Project Compassion Launch Team are currently engaging in such a process of discernment.

In making such decisions, it is important for communities to know that Bishop Bill has always been happy to preside at a range of liturgies. Many wrongly presume that if Bishop Bill or his delegate is the presider, you must have Mass. There has always been more freedom than people imagine.

Given that we will continue to pivot and change throughout the year, communities are encouraged to begin preparing their events earlier than usual so there is plenty of time to consider their options. Support is always available from the [Liturgy Office](#) and/or the CSO Religious Education and Spirituality Team.

## **Sacraments of Initiation: the bridge beyond our Fallow Year**

Prior to the pandemic no one imagined Sacramental Teams would have a 'year off' to pray, reflect, review, and reimagine; another unexpected COVID-19 blessing.

That said, like all analogies, the image of a 2020 'fallow year' limps. The land of preparing and celebrating Confirmation and First Communion has indeed been fallow, and we have forgone its produce. However, even without the usual busyness involved in this preparation celebration, for most of us 2020 has been anything but a time to rest with God. We have been busy pivoting and sanitising! [I hope you have heard the news reports of [Santa's exemption to enter Australia](#) without having to isolate for 14 days, given his commitment to having sufficient hand and hoof sanitiser!]

On March 19 Bishop Bill asked us to spend 2020 reflecting on our current Sacraments of Initiation practices in preparation for 2021. In response, the DLC prepared the [Sacraments of Initiation Fallow Year Reflection Resource](#) to support communities in seizing the opportunity Bishop Bill invited us to take.

Towards the end of the Introduction to the 'Fallow Year Resource' we said,

*Even as we begin this fallow time reflection, we can be sure of one thing:  
there will be no going back to doing things the way we did them in 2019.  
We have been changed by the experience of pandemic and the new  
experience of social isolation and suspension of public worship.*

So, as we approach the end of our fallow year, and the beginning of the journey across the liturgical bridge of 2021 ...

*What insights have you gained from your reflection on your Sacraments of Initiation practices?*

*What questions have you been pondering?*

*What challenges have you identified?*

*What changes are you making to the Sacraments of Initiation journey in your parish in 2021?*

*How will the Initiation 2021 be different, feel different, look different?*

We are pondering a difference that is deeper than that required by COVID-19 restrictions; a difference in numbers and spacing and scheduling and how anointing oil is applied, or Communion given. We are pondering a significant difference that emerges from, and embodies, the fruit of our fallow year reflection: a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the journey of initiation as unique to each individual and family, and as the responsibility of the whole parish who is on its own journey of becoming an initiating community.

One thing we do know is that pre-COVID-19 most parish Sacramental Teams were not satisfied with how the Sacraments of Initiation for children were going. We may well have initiated children but most would agree that we were not achieving the intent of Christian Initiation which is to make 'lifelong disciples'. In this regard we are talking about the children's families more than the children themselves.

By and large, to date, the process of Christian Initiation has not captured the imagination, hearts and minds of parents. Therefore, why would we not change our practices to embody our richest understanding of Christian Initiation and nurture God's vision of a world made new?

If

- We capture the imagination of the parish community and lead it to become an initiating community ...
- Sacraments of Initiation for children are for those of a 'pre-catechetical age'...
- We focus more on parents/carers and families, and endeavour to capture their imagination rather than complete a program ...
- Preparation is about
  - growing in love with Jesus
  - getting to know the Catholic community – its way of life and prayer
  - becoming a lifelong disciple who tries to live as Jesusrather than learning stuff ...
- The life and mission of the parish community and the liturgical year are the 'program'

- We appreciate that children of families who are active in the parish community are already on the path to lifelong discipleship and ought to be initiated without further ado when the parents and the parish priest/leader or her/his delegate discerns they are ready – whatever the age ...
- We appreciate that 'knowing' follows 'loving' and that both are a lifetime journey ...
- As an initiating community the parish prioritises staying in touch with families, whose children are initiated, for the twelve months following the completion of initiation ...

What could the Sacraments of Initiation journey for children in your parish be like as we cross the liturgical bridge of 2021?

*What might preparation look like?*

*What would the schedule for celebrating the sacraments look like?*

*How could the parish community take up and live its responsibility for initiation?*

*What small steps might you take pursuant of your larger vision?*

Might the continuing COVID-19 restrictions provide opportunities you could seize to begin to do some things differently?

If you were totally honest: What would you want to start up again? What would you want to let go of and never do again? What possibilities entice you? How might we make room for the Holy Spirit to blow where she wills?

## **Regarding Baptism**

The celebration of baptisms resumed some time ago, mindful of the [advice and directives](#) that are regularly updated by Fr Andrew.

The Sacrament of Baptism begins the journey of Christian Initiation. We know baptism is a life changing event for the child and her/his family, and for the parish community. If individual families are not aware of the magnitude and implications of baptism for life, how might the parish community show this to families in very human ways? What might this look like for baptisms outside Mass? What would need to happen for the worshipping community to become more welcoming of families at baptisms during Sunday Mass?

How can we reimagine what baptism could look like as we walk across the liturgical bridge of 2021?

## **Regarding Confirmation**

As Bishop Bill has already indicated, the celebration of Confirmation will resume in 2021 and the Bishop's Office is making dates with parishes.

Changes to the celebration required by COVID-19 restrictions are outlined in the [Pandemic Event Advice document](#). What opportunities do these restrictions provide us as we reimagine Confirmation for children of a pre-catechetical age?

Confirmation is complex. One of the key considerations in discerning how we celebrate it in 2021 is the involvement of Bishop Bill or his delegate. Bishop Bill is considering how to

manage this, including the possibility of expanding the pool of delegates to include Deans and some senior clergy. Such arrangements will be clarified as we move through 2021 and the number of additional ceremonies needed to accommodate numbers in a socially distant environment becomes clearer.

Some of the challenges and opportunities for Confirmation 2021 include:

- The need to schedule Confirmation because there is a special presider and the fact that scheduling reinforces the notion of a cohort, rather than personal and family readiness.
- The move of almost all parishes to celebrating Confirmation outside Mass has highlighted the absence of the parish community from these celebrations.

How are communities to balance the different values and principles that guide their discernment about how they will celebrate Confirmation in 2021? Perhaps a good place to start is to remember that any difference – even a COVID-19 difference – is an opportunity for further change.

At the very least, the number of celebrations will need to be multiplied. Is there an opportunity here to increase the involvement of the parish community? Could families who feel their child is ready for this next step in the journey of Christian Initiation, and who are not regular members of the parish community, be sponsored by a family who is part of the life and worship of the community? Could this take the form of some sort of 'family accompaniment' focused not on learning things but on introducing the family presenting their child, to the life and worship of the parish? This would be the preparation.

If this happened, not only would the child's extended family be present at the celebration of Confirmation, but also her/his 'companion family'. This change in the makeup of the liturgical assembly would make a big difference to the experience of the liturgy. Responses would be heard. Hymns might be sung if/when singing is allowed. Such a change in the experience of the liturgy has the potential to positively impact the families of those being initiated.

Perhaps more significantly, if 'companion families' understood their 'companioning ministry' to include the year beyond completion of initiation, families of the newly initiated may be more likely to stay in touch with the wider parish community. Surely that would be worth a try.

Once the parish has discerned 'how' it wishes to reimagine the celebration of Confirmation in 2021, then it will be in a position to advise the Bishop's Office about the number of celebrations required.

### **Regarding First Communion**

The celebration of First Communion will also be impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Some issues are different to Confirmation, most significantly because First Communion does not usually involve Bishop Bill or his delegate, and it takes place at Sunday Mass.

Given that numbers in our churches will be a significant issue, you might consider seizing this as an opportunity to not schedule a First Communion Mass or series of First Communion

Masses. Rather, allow First Communion to become something that may happen at any Sunday Mass, whenever candidates and their families discern their readiness.

If parishes chose to try a 'family accompaniment' process, this would continue through to First Communion. When a family feels their child is ready for First Communion, they could approach a designated member of the community – perhaps a member of the Sacramental Team or the Parish Leader – to finalise this discernment. Ideally, this process would include their accompanying family. Numbers of First Communicants at any Mass would need to be limited according to the size of the Church and in consideration of the size of the regular Sunday Assembly.

Making First Communion [the completion of the process of Christian Initiation] a regular feature of Sunday Mass would assist the parish to become an initiating community. Imagine where that might lead!

## **Sacrament of Penance**

It is now possible for parishes to consider reintroducing the communal celebration of Penance in keeping with [COVID-19 safety directives](#).

Most parishes celebrate the Second Rite of Reconciliation, at least during Lent and Advent. As we reimagine these liturgies, communities might take the opportunity to consider celebrating not only the Second Rite, but also the wonderful and underused Penitential Services that are found in the appendix of the Rite of Penance. Both these communal forms of Penance provide an opportunity to focus on social sin/brokenness, forgiveness and healing.

The DLC is currently developing a process of community engagement and reflection on the Sacrament of Penance as a means of reimagining the gift of this Sacrament in our life and mission. Stay alert for further updates on this.

### **First Reconciliation**

As we all know, First Reconciliation is not a Sacrament of Initiation. It sits on the side of this journey and is, of necessity, enmeshed in the process.

In reimagining preparation for First Reconciliation parishes might consider celebrating Penitential Services. Families and children could then be engaged in a process of reflecting on the experience of the liturgy and what light it shines on discipleship.

As parishes set their liturgical calendar for 2021, it is good to remember the opinion Fr Matthew Muller, Diocesan Chancellor, provided to parishes in 2017 regarding First Reconciliation. The most significant points from that included:

- Children and their families are to be provided with the regular parish schedule for the Sacrament of Penance which would include both First and Second Rite opportunities. They are invited to participate in one of the rites when the child and family are ready. There is to be no follow-up regarding whether or not they did.
- It is not appropriate to schedule a Second Rite of Reconciliation specifically for those celebrating their First Reconciliation. This is contrary to the confidentiality issues surrounding the Sacrament of Penance.

- Certificates are not to be given.

## Conclusion

We celebrate Advent at a set time of the year, so we integrate the characteristics and qualities of Advent into our lives as disciples of Jesus.

As we continue to be alert to pondering all that God is revealing to us in this pandemic event ...

And as we are filled with hope at the vision of God's promise for a world where there is no hurt or harm because the land is filled with the knowledge of the Lord ...

As we move towards the liturgical bridge of 2021, a bridge that continues to be shaped by COVID-19 restrictions, let us discern the best steps to take to nurture our liturgical life for flourishing in 2022 and beyond.

*What is energising and exciting you?*

*What is the liturgical change you want to see?*

*How would you rewrite Isaiah's image of a whole new liturgical world beyond 2021?*



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