

GUIDELINES FOR  
SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST



DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

Office of Divine Worship  
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## OCCASIONS FOR USE OF DEACONS OR LAY LEADERS

- I. For Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation a Word and Communion Service led by a deacon or lay leaders may be scheduled after consulting with the Bishop or Vicar General when the assigned priest is prevented from presiding at Mass and no substitute priest is available due to the following:
  - A. Attendance at a continuing education workshop or retreat.
  - B. Conducting a workshop, retreat, or mission.
  - C. Celebrating a baptism, wedding, or funeral away from his assigned parish/mission.
  - D. Vacation or extended leave.
  - E. Hospital stay or recuperation time away from the parish/mission.
  - F. Other circumstances, if no substitute priest can be found after a reasonable effort.
  
2. For Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation a Word and Communion Service led by a deacon or lay leaders may be scheduled even when it is impossible to contact the Bishop or Vicar General when the assigned priest is prevented from presiding at Mass due to the following (This, again, presumes that no other priest is available):
  - A. Sudden illness of the priest.
  - B. Emergency in priest's family.
  - C. Weather conditions make travel inadvisable.

In the above circumstances, whenever possible, the assigned priest will make the decision to hold a Word and Communion Service in lieu of a Mass; however, in the absence of the priest, the parish council or other individual(s) pre-selected by the priest may make the decision.
  
3. Parishes served by a deacon may also have and use lay leaders -especially if the number or frequency of Word and Communion Services warrants it.
  
4. If an emergency has not occurred and the parish has time to actually schedule the Word and Communion in advance, there should normally be ONE Word and Communion on any given Sunday. Other prayer opportunities may be offered at other usual Mass times. In parishes where Mass is offered in more than one language, one Sunday Word and Communion Service can be

offered in each language instead of a single bilingual service if warranted for pastoral reasons.

5. A Word and Communion should not be scheduled on a Sunday or Holy Day when a Mass is available in the same church or readily available in a neighboring church.
6. Word and Communion services as a substitute for mass should not be seen as an alternative for more than two consecutive Sundays.
7. Weekday Word and Communion services in the place of Mass are not permitted within the diocese without the explicit permission of the Bishop or Vicar General. When a priest is not available to celebrate a normally scheduled weekday Mass, a communal celebration of Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, led by a deacon or lay leader would be appropriate.

## RITUAL

8. For a Word and Communion Service on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation, the appropriate ritual options to be used in the diocese are found in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. The appropriate rituals found there are:
  - A. Morning Prayer with Holy Communion
  - B. Evening Prayer with Holy Communion
  - C. Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion
9. Noting paragraph 7 above, if a Weekday Word and Communion Service is deemed appropriate by the Bishop, the ritual to be used in the diocese is the Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass with the Celebration of the Word, in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, found in its own volume or in *The Rites, Volume One*.
10. For any Word and Communion Service, in the absence of even a deacon, it is appropriate that the various parts of the ritual be divided among two or more lay leaders, in order to avoid the appearance of the lay faithful “presiding” over the celebration.
11. Ordinarily, lay leaders are selected by the pastor in consultation with the parish pastoral council and the liturgy committee.
12. Candidates may be men or women and they should be at least eighteen (18) years of age and have received the Sacrament of Confirmation.
13. Qualities to look for in potential candidates include:

- Catholic in good standing.
- Apparent strong faith.
- Good public presence.
- Sensitive to the local community .
- Committed to the time required for training.
- Good working relationship with the pastor.
- Ability to offer a shared reflection on the Scriptures.

#### LAY LEADER TRAINING

14. The Office of Divine Worship is responsible for providing materials and assistance to the parishes for training deacons and lay leaders.
15. Lay leaders must commit themselves to continuing education after the initial training and certification. The Office of Divine Worship is responsible for providing this continuing education.

#### LAY LEADER CERTIFICATION

16. Following satisfactory completion of the required training, the Office of Divine Worship will issue a certificate to the lay leader indicating that he/she may conduct Word and Communion Services within his/her assigned parish.
17. This certificate of training will be issued for one ( 1) year and may be renewed each year for three (3) years provided the lay leader has completed the required continuing education. After the third one year, a certificate valid for three (3) years may be issued.
18. Prior to certification renewal, each lay leader must be evaluated by the pastor or someone recognized by the Office of Divine Worship. Completion of continuing education offerings will be considered in the evaluation.
19. Deacons are not required to receive certificates.

#### LAY LEADER COMMISSIONING

20. There is to be proper catechesis of the parish before the commissioning can take place. This will consist of at least a Homily given before the commissioning.
21. The pastor or a delegate approved by the bishop should commission the lay leaders and present the certificates during the celebration of a Sunday Mass using the "Rite of Commissioning Lay Leaders" available from the Office of Divine Worship.