



word on worship

The Creative; The Usual?

Imagine yourself in the following situation. Your friends Mary Ann and Jerry have invited you to spend the Christmas holiday with them and their two children, Corynn, age 8, and John, age 12. They're now living in the Pocono region of Pennsylvania. You haven't seen them since they moved from New York City two years ago. You've missed them so you eagerly accept the invitation.

Mary Ann and Jerry ask you to arrive on December 23 so that you can join them in making preparations for Christmas Day. Nothing will be done until you arrive.

On December 23 you pack your car with your luggage and the gifts you've bought for your hosts. The trip down Route 80 seems endless, the traffic is horrendous, the weather is damp and cold, but the thought of being part of a traditional family Christmas keeps your spirits high. You even start singing along to the Christmas carols playing on the car radio.

You arrive about 3 PM. True to their word, Mary Ann and Jerry have no signs of Christmas around the house. Everything's been put on hold until your arrival. You walk through the door. Greet everyone with a hug and make the usual remarks about how much the children have grown. Mary Ann then shows you to the kitchen table where a plate of fresh vegetables, cheese and fruit has been prepared, along with a cup of herbal tea.

"Hurry," the kids say, "we've been waiting for you so that we can start decorating the house." You rush through some cheese along with a couple of handfuls of vegetables, and splash it down with the tea, which is just a bit too hot. There's Christmas work to be done. You're as anxious to start as Corynn and John.

Outside the house, which sits on a full acre of land, Jerry explains the plan to outline the whole house in lights. Your job is to make sure each string of lights is working before Jerry and his son put them up. You plug in the first set to be tested and you're astonished. The lights are purple and yellow. "Purple and yellow?!" the words spring out of your mouth. "I picked the yellow," says Corynn, "John picked the purple." "We let the

kids decide about Christmas. It's for them, isn't it?" says Mary Ann. With this explanation, you begin checking the other strings of lights. Three hours later, the house is outlined in glaring purple and yellow. Just then Domino's Pizza arrives with supper.

The next day begins with a quick breakfast, then it's time to put up the Christmas tree. You notice a sand-filled pottery vase, about eighteen inches wide and two feet high, has been placed in the family room. "It's for the tree," says Jerry.

Everyone now goes outside to find a branch. You're told to look for a branch about three or four feet long and to bring it back. It will be your contribution for the tree. Wandering through the wooded area behind the house you notice an evergreen tree. You break off a limb and return. Mary Ann takes your branch, pushes it into the vase and does the same with her branch and those collected by Jerry and the kids. Your evergreen branch is surrounded with dried out branches that look as if they should be broken into kindling. This is the Christmas tree. It's then decorated with strips of paper on which each person has written a wish. "Love for the earth." "No more homelessness." "I hope I get a computer." "Hugs not drugs." And your "Peace on earth, good will to all."

The afternoon passes listening to John's selection of hip-hop "Christmas music" and making the kind of Christmas cookies that John and Corynn have decided on - marshmallow crisps and double fudge brownies decorated with figures of Barney and the Ninja Turtles.

As evening approaches you're told to get ready for Christmas Eve dinner. Since Mary Ann is of Polish background, you know this will be a special meal. You join the family at 7 PM. "Get your coat, we're going out." You join the family in the car. Jerry explains that each year one member of the family decides on Christmas Eve dinner. It's Corynn's turn.

"Chinese, Chinese," Corynn announces. With the taste of expected mushroom soup, pierogi and other Polish delicacies

evaporating from your memory, the family heads to "The Mandarin First Wok" for dinner.

"This will turn out great." says Jerry. "On the way home we can stop by St. Leo's and catch the 10:00 PM Mass in the school gym." "It'll be awesome," adds John. "Some teenagers are doing a Christmas play they made up, instead of that Gospel that everybody's heard. It takes place in Los Angeles during those riots."

If you had been in the situation just described would you have considered it a creative Christmas? Or would it simply have been different, or maybe odd, or perhaps even jarring?

Suppose the situation with Jerry and Mary Ann and their children had turned out this way. When you arrived the family greeted you, then invited you to share some turkey sandwiches and hot chocolate. The decorations that you put on the house were little white lights, interspersed with large red velvet bows made by Mary Ann and her daughter. The evening ended with you and the family taking a walk through the neighborhood to admire the lights on the other homes and to see what your handiwork looked like from a distance.

The next morning, you and the family drove off to a Christmas tree farm. You spent an hour walking together through the forest of evergreens trying to discover the perfect tree. You and John were given the honor of cutting it down. As the two of you carried it back to the car, Jerry, Mary Ann and Corynn scooped up a large bag of pine cones.

When you returned home at 11 AM, the tree was placed in the family room and the decorating began. The tree was strung with tiny colored lights. Then you and Jerry highlighted the collected pine cones with a little gold paint and inserted hooks to attach them to the tree. Mary Ann and her son John made and threaded popcorn to form a garland for the tree. Corynn tied small red velvet bows which she carefully attached to the branches. When the tree was completed, the family gathered to bless it, using *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*. You and the family then sang a slightly off key, but

spirited version, of "O Christmas Tree."

After a quick snack, it was time to bake Christmas cookies. Sugar cookies, chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin in the shapes of stars and trees and angels were produced by the dozens as favorite holiday carols danced from the boom box that John had brought into the kitchen.

In the evening you and family drove to the home of Mary Ann's parents for a traditional Polish Christmas Eve dinner. During the meal Mary Ann's father explained the Polish traditions of Christmas. You were given the honor of being the first to break the traditional Christmas wafer and to wish the joy and peace of Christmas to those around the table. The meal ended with stories about past family Christmas celebrations and then carols and plates of the Christmas cookies you had helped to bake that afternoon.

During the drive back home Mary Ann told you to be up early to open gifts. "Real, real early!" shouted Corynn. Mary Ann then invited you to join the family for Christmas Mass. "We're going to the 10:30 in the morning. The choir is singing." "After that," said Jerry, "we want to stop at my mother's church to see their decorations. They always do a great job. Then we're going over her house for dinner."

If you had been in this second situation would you have considered it creative? Or would you have thought it boring, simply the same old thing? How we view the two situations just described reveals our understanding of creativity. It also reveals how we handle liturgy when we set out to make it "creative."

If we think of creativity as doing something different, as being inventive, as not doing the same old thing, then our liturgies may have much in common with the first Christmas situation. Such creative liturgies will include the unexpected and the unusual.

The wedding, where the bride and groom stand next to the priest during the eucharistic prayer, since they are viewed as the hosts of the celebration.

The funeral, where a piper plays

"Danny Boy" after the distribution of communion, since it was the deceased's favorite song.

The school Mass, where each class brings up its art work to place on the altar during the presentation of the gifts.

The baptism, celebrated at the house of the parents rather than in the church building, since each family is a "little church" and the home is where it assembles.

The Mass on Scout Sunday, that begins with a parade of uniformed scouts carrying in flags and troop banners and ends with the distribution of merit badges and awards.

The Christmas Eve liturgy, where Santa Claus presents a cake with candles for Jesus's birthday, or where children perform a Christmas pageant complete with a live infant appearing from behind the altar at the appropriate moment.

But true creativity in liturgy does not mean doing the unusual, the unexpected, the different, or the cute. Rather it means doing the usual, unusually well. That, after all, is what happened in the second Christmas situation. The usual traditions of Christmas were not discarded as unimportant or reshaped, but instead they were carried out with care and love, they were done unusually well.

We do not have to re-invent liturgy or do something new, each time we gather to celebrate. Like Christmas, the liturgy of the Church has its own form and structure. It has its own words and actions. It has its own seasons and traditions. Those things need to be treated with respect and care. Doing so is what makes our liturgy creative. Creativity in liturgy means doing the usual, unusually well.

This means that those preparing liturgy must first know the usual, they must know the liturgy. This is so basic that it is often overlooked. How many persons, priests included, have never read the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the *Directory for Masses with Children*,

Music in Catholic Worship, Liturgical Music Today, Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals* or to the *Rite of Baptism for Children*? How many people dealing with liturgy do not know their way through the Sacramentary or Lectionary? How many know little or nothing of the history and development of the liturgy? How many have never attended a workshop or continuing education sessions dealing with liturgy? We cannot expect people who have little appreciation or understanding of liturgy to prepare it or celebrate it unusually well, anymore than people who do not understand the meaning of Christmas can make its celebration special.

In addition to knowing the liturgy, those involved in preparing it must be familiar with the liturgical calendar. They must know the meaning and the rhythm of the different liturgical seasons. They must understand how, for example, the purple of Advent is different from the purple of Lent, why the Easter Triduum is the center of the liturgical year.

Those who prepare liturgy must also realize that liturgy speaks to people not just in words, but it speaks even more clearly in sign and symbol, in gesture and movement, in environment and art. People preparing liturgy must appreciate the non-verbal aspects of communication.

Only such people who understand and appreciate the usual of liturgy will be able to make it truly creative. Only they will be able to prepare and celebrate it unusually well.

I began by giving examples of Christmas, I would like to end by giving an example of what I mean by a creative liturgy. Imagine it is the Second Sunday of Advent in a local parish.

As people arrive they are greeted by the ministers of hospitality and by the other ministers of the Mass. Walking up the center aisle, the people pass under a large Advent wreath which is suspended from the ceiling. Two large wax sarum blue candles are burning. A few minutes before the start of Mass the music of the gathering song begins to be played softly. Just before the procession is readied the

ministers gather for a short prayer.

The leader of song signals the people to stand, the music of the gathering song increases in intensity and the singing begins. The procession makes its way to the front. The Gospel Book is brought forward in procession. All the ministers are holding hymnals and joining in song. The presider and deacon wear vestments that match the sarum blue of the altar cloth. Realizing that music is sung prayer, the gathering song continues until all its verses have been sung/prayed.

The presider makes the sign of the cross. He does not just say the words, he prays the words of the liturgy. The deacon assists with the penitential rite.

There is a separate reader for each of the scripture readings. The assembly's worship aid does not contain the readings. There is a psalmist for the responsorial psalm, who sings the psalm from the pulpit/ambo.

The deacon chants the proclamation of the gospel. The homilist understands his responsibility to break open the word and distribute it to the people. He builds on what was said the previous week. There is a time of silence after the homily as there was after each reading.

Following the creed, the petitions of the general intercessions are chanted. The people respond in song. There is a common set of petitions for the Advent season.

The gifts are brought forward by people who were invited the week before to represent the community. They bring forward the collection in a handsome wicker basket, a large crystal decanter filled with red wine, and a plate with sufficient breads for all the congregation.

The presider sings the introductory dialogue and the preface. The people sing the eucharistic acclamations that have been chosen for the season. As they say the Our Father the people raise their hands in prayer. They sing the acclamation which ends the Lord's Prayer. During the singing of the Lamb of God the deacon and assisting ministers prepare the chalices and the plates for

communion. Hosts are not brought from the tabernacle. The people remain standing.

Communion is offered under both forms. There are two ministers of the cup for each minister of the bread. The ordained also minister the cup. During communion the people sing a Taize chant. After they have received, the people continue standing and joining in song.

When all have received, the altar is cleared and all sit for a time of silent prayer. They stand as the presider rises for the prayer after communion. When this prayer is finished those bringing communion to the sick leave the assembly. After the dismissal, the congregation joins the ministers in recessing from the church. On this Sunday the procession goes to the parish hall for coffee and donuts.

Nothing in the liturgy I just described is unusual or new. But if done well, such a liturgy will be a life-giving experience for those present. They will be touched by the presence of God in word and sacrament and in one another. Such a liturgy will be creative, just as the second Christmas situation was creative. For creativity in liturgy does not involve doing the new, the different or the odd, but doing the usual unusually well.✠

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The Spirit of the Lectionary for Masses with Children

When the Church considers the pastoral care of children, the direction usually seems to take the shape of an adaptation of an adult enterprise. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* allowed for the adaptation of the liturgical rites of the Church with the understanding that the spirit and principles of the Roman Rite would be maintained in the adaptation. The *Directory for Masses with Children* (1973) is a direct result of the Church's realization of the need for the adaptation of the liturgy for children. This *Directory*, however, has not proven to be the Church's *once and for all* statement on the pastoral formation of children but a catalyst for the ongoing pastoral care of children and a charter for all adaptations with children. While preserving the "true and authentic spirit" (see *CSL* #37) of the liturgy it continues to remind and challenge the Church of the obligation to continue to direct efforts in making adaptations for children. One such challenge presented by the *Directory for Masses with Children* (*DMC*) was to urge "the individual conferences of bishops to prepare lectionaries for Masses with children" (*DMC* #43). This task was begun in the US in 1983 with the formation of a task force consisting of representatives from the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and experts in catechetics for young children. In 1991 the US bishops approved the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* (*LMC*) and as of September 1, 1993 the *LMC* was published for use in the liturgy. The First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 1993 was established as the effective date for use of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. No other English lectionary for Masses with children may now be used.

The *LMC* is an adaptation of the format in the *Lectionary for Mass* and basically follows its cursus of readings. It is not an adaptation or paraphrasing of the readings from the *Lectionary for Mass*.

What distinguishes the *LMC* prepared for use in the United States from other lectionaries prepared for use with children is that it is an official translation of scripture for early youth prepared by the American Bible Society and approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for liturgical use. This official translation, called the *Contemporary English Version*, is a translation intended for use with children of elementary grades (pre-adolescents)

Like all the liturgical books of the Church, the *LMC* contains an introduction. It consists of 54 numbered statements which is the primary resource for developing the catechesis concerning this liturgical book. The *Introduction to the LMC* is a conversation between the *DMC* and the introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* and can only be understood in this context. The introduction to the *LMC* acknowledges the power of the proclaimed Word of God. Through Christ himself "present... when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church" (*CSL* #7), our identity as a people of faith, ritualized in the gathering on the first day of the week, is being formed. At the same time, the *LMC* flows from the *DMC* and, therefore, its governing principles of adaptation for Masses with children remain operative: integral ritual elements must be preserved; Masses with children are not about creating something new but retaining, shortening and/or omitting; the full Sunday assembly remains the goal toward which children are led; biblical readings are never omitted; basic shapes of the rituals — symbols, gestures, language — used in celebrations with children must be similar. The introduction to the *LMC* is divided into four parts:

- 1) The Liturgical Celebration of God's Word
- 2) The Celebration of the Word of God with Children
- 3) The Lectionary for Masses with Children
- 4) Particular Issues

The Liturgical Celebration of God's Word

Part one of the introduction gives the theological basis for the liturgical celebration of the Word of God. "God speaks to us in the Word... and in the liturgy we are called together in the Spirit that we may listen to and respond to the word of God in Christ" (*Intro. LMC* #1). The proclamation of the word "must be prepared for and experienced as the specific kind of event it is, namely a ritual celebration" (*LMC* #2) where "Christian communities discover, express and deepen their identity" (*LMC* #3). This proclamation if it is to be understood must be understood in its most complete sense as proclaimed in the Sunday assembly. The Sunday gathering proclaims who we are and propels us deeper into the reality of God. We are a people who gather to form community, a people who are fed at the table of word and eucharist, a people who are blessed and sent forth for mission. "In the liturgy of the Word, we proclaim the message in ways that no theology class or inquiry class can match: in scripture (proclaimed not read); in prayer and song; with vesture and gesture; in sight, sound and silence; in story, image and symbol; within a community of believers" (*Echoing God's Word*, James Dunning published by The North American Forum on the Catechumenate p. 104).

The Celebration of the Word of God with Children

In 1973 the *DMC* presented Sunday celebrations of the Word of God for children in a separate place as an alternative pastoral practice in the liturgical formation of children. At that time the only directive given concerning this pastoral practice was that children could be separated from the main assembly for their own liturgy of the word but "before the eucharistic liturgy begins the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile been

celebrating their own liturgy of the word" (DMC #17). Implementation over the years has taken many shapes. Part two of the introduction of the *LMC* addresses the shape of celebrations of the word with children. Children gather with the assembly for the introductory rites. At the conclusion of the opening prayer, but before the first reading is proclaimed the children are formally sent to a place where they celebrate their own liturgy of the word containing all integral elements pertaining to the liturgy of the word. "The liturgy of the word is neither a catechetical session nor an introduction to biblical history" (LMC #24). Liturgy of the word with children "is first and foremost ritual prayer" (LMC #24).

The *DMC* clearly sets out the desire that children no less than other members of the community be formed by the same word of God (LMC #6). Full Sunday assembly remains the goal toward which children are led. "The fullest reality of the liturgical assembly is children and adults together" (LMC #54). Children can be dismissed from the assembly for a separate liturgy of the word in another place "if the circumstances of the community permits" (DMC #17). This community is an assembled people that "await the return" (LMC #8) of the children, not having sent them to a baby-sitting service. Crucial to implementation of the *DMC* is the understanding that this document is not about separating children but incorporating them into a deeper participation as part of the assembly. Liturgy of the word with children is not a pastoral replacement for our cry rooms.

The Lectionary for Masses with Children

Part three provides the directives for understanding the *LMC* with the underlying primary intent to lead children to deeper participation in the liturgy rather than to establish a different rite for children. The directions for use provided in this section make it clear that it was never intended that the *LMC* replace the *Lectionary for Mass*. This is not the lectionary for Sunday Mass even though a large number of children might be present. The intended uses for the *LMC*

The way in which the word of God is proclaimed and celebrated in the lives of children today will shape the future life of the Church.
(LMC #54)

can be founded in the three models of celebrating Masses with children as presented in the *DMC*. The first model, which is presented in chapter 2 of the *Directory*, introduces the possibility of a liturgy of the word for children in a separate place. The *LMC* would be used for children's liturgy of the word. Chapter three of the *DMC* gives the guidelines for adapting the entire liturgy for "Masses with children in which only some adults take part" which "are recommended during the week" (DMC #20). The *LMC* would be used for such Masses. A third model concerns Sunday Masses in which a large number of children are present along with adults. The *LMC* can be used in this circumstance but with "proper balance and consideration for the entire assembly" (LMC #13). The *LMC* is not to be used exclusively or even preferentially at Sunday Mass; "nevertheless, there will be occasions when a particular assembly is constituted almost entirely of children and other occasions when their number is so significant that the adaptations made by the *DMC* should be applied for good pastoral sense" (LMC #53). There are certain days, Christmas Day, Epiphany, the Sundays of Lent, Easter Sunday, Ascension and Pentecost which the *LMC* cannot be used except at a separate liturgy of the word for children (see LMC #13).

Part three of the introduction also reiterates the principles that govern adaptation from chapter three of the *DMC* (#41 ff.). These principles are provided under the topics of age level, number of readings, omission of readings, length of readings, replacement of readings and responsorial psalm. Part three also provides an extensive section

on the relationship of the lectionary to the liturgical year and gives suitable explanation of the significant role that the liturgical year has in Christian formation. This section on the liturgical year can be a resource for catechist and liturgist alike.

Particular Issues

Part four addresses particular issues regarding the celebration of the word with children. This section emphasizes the importance of proper celebration and provides pastoral reminders for good liturgy. "The place where liturgy of the word is celebrated may influence how the children receive God's word... Care must be taken that ... (the environment) is suitable for worship" (LMC #49). Objects used in worship specifically in regard to the proclamation of scripture "should be eloquent witness to the Church's reverence for scriptures" (LMC #50). "Care should be taken not to give the impression that the liturgy of the word is a play" (LMC #52). All our preparations for the celebrations of liturgies "begin and flow from the desire to assist them (children) to participate in the worship of the entire community" (LMC #53).

Conclusion

The *DMC* remains the challenging voice in the pastoral care of children, nevertheless; the *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children* joins in the song. The implications of this document for the pastoral care of children are yet to be discovered, expressed and practiced. In the pastoral practice we await the implications of forming children in the living word of God. We await the influence of the *LMC* for the adaptation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* for children. We await the fruits of the *LMC* as our children are formed by the liturgical year as they assume their rightful place in the assembly of the faithful. ✚

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Newsletter

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