



## Diocesan Norms for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

February 2, 2012, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

“By an apostolic tradition which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of ‘the Lord’s Day’ or ‘the Day of the Lord.’ For on this day, Christ’s faithful should come together into one place so that, by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, may thank God, who ‘has begotten us again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope’ (1 Peter 1:3).”<sup>1</sup> The Sunday Mass, therefore, is the principal and preeminent way the Church celebrates its faith. Such celebrations, however, are not always possible, because of a lack of a priest or some other serious reason which prevents the Mass from being celebrated. These Diocesan Norms seek to specify for the Diocese of Cheyenne the norms and instructions given in the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship,<sup>2</sup> and the liturgical book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*,<sup>3</sup>

Norm 1. When a priest is not available to celebrate Sunday Mass, which includes the Saturday evening anticipatory Mass for Sunday, the celebration of a Mass on another day of the week when the community can be present is encouraged, even though this weekday celebration of the Mass does not take the place of Sunday Mass or fulfill the Sunday obligation.<sup>4</sup> (Those who are unable to attend Sunday Mass because it is not available to them are morally excused from the observance of this obligation, but are encouraged to gather for prayer as a community, as groups, as families or as individuals.<sup>5</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963 n. 106: *AAS* 56 (1964) 126; translation from *The Documents of Vatican II*, gen. ed. Walter M. Abbott, SJ (New York, NY: Guild Press, 1966) 169.

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in Absence of A Priest [Directory]*, June 2, 1988: *Notitiae* 24 (1988) 366-376 ; translation in “Appendix IV,” *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007) 369-401.

<sup>3</sup> *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest [SCAP]* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 12; *Directory*, n. 27; *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus [CIC]* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989) c. 1247.

<sup>5</sup> See *CIC*, c. 1248 §2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 2000) nn. 2181; 2183.

- Norm 2. Before Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are celebrated, the faithful are to be suitably instructed, and ministers suitably prepared.<sup>6</sup>
- Norm 3. Since the celebration of the Mass is the normal means to celebrate the Lord's Day, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are not to be celebrated in a church where a Sunday Mass will have already been celebrated or will be celebrated.<sup>7</sup> A Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, therefore, is only to be celebrated when no Sunday Masses are celebrated in a specific church, including the Saturday evening anticipatory Mass for Sunday.
- Norm 4. Again, since the celebration of the Mass is the normal means to celebrate the Lord's Day, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are not to be planned to be celebrated in a specific church in a community when there are other churches in the same community celebrating Sunday Mass or when there is a church in another community less than thirty (30) miles away where Sunday Mass is being celebrated.<sup>8</sup>
- Norm 5. In the event, however, that a priest is suddenly unable to celebrate Mass, such as illness, accident, or weather, another priest is not available to celebrate Mass even if it exceeds the number of Masses he is to celebrate on a given day, and there is not another Mass available that day in the same community or another within less than thirty (30) miles away, then Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest may be celebrated even if Sunday Mass has already been celebrated earlier in that church.<sup>9</sup>
- Norm 6. After consultation between the Diocesan Bishop and the Pastor, the Diocesan Bishop may grant permission to schedule Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest at one or more of the churches the Pastor has within his parish or parishes when there are not sufficient priests in the parish or area to cover all the Masses.<sup>10</sup> This permission would be granted when a priest would have to regularly offer more than two (2) Masses on a Saturday including the anticipatory Mass or Masses for Sunday on Saturday evening and three (3) Masses on a Sunday, or when churches are such distances from each other, that a priest cannot reasonably travel to all of them between Saturday evening and Sunday evening on the same weekend in order to celebrate Mass at each of the churches. Ordinarily in these situations, Mass and Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest shall be rotated, so that Mass is celebrated in each church at least twice a month.<sup>11</sup>
- Norm 7. In the extreme case where a Pastor has diligently tried on his own and then with the assistance of the Chancellor to find a priest to cover Masses during his

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<sup>6</sup> See SCAP, nn. 15; 38; *Directory*, n. 30.

<sup>7</sup> See SCAP, n. 15; *Directory*, nn. 18; 21.

<sup>8</sup> See *Directory*, n. 18.

<sup>9</sup> See SCAP, n. 15; *Directory*, nn. 18; 21; 25.

<sup>10</sup> See SCAP, nn. 18; 21; *Directory*, nn. 24; 29; *CIC*, c. 905; translation in *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition, New English Translation* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> See SCAP, n. 22; *Directory*, n. 28; *CIC*, c. 934 §2.

vacation and cannot find a priest, the Diocesan Bishop can give the Pastor permission to schedule on two (2) consecutive weekends Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest so that the priest may have close to three (3) weeks of vacation.<sup>12</sup>

- Norm 8. Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are to be Celebrations of the Word, utilizing the readings from the Sunday Lectionary, and Distribution of Holy Communion, unless there are insufficient consecrated hosts for Holy Communion, in which case, there will only be Celebrations of the Word.<sup>13</sup>
- Norm 9. When Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are scheduled, the Pastor is to make sure an adequate number of hosts are consecrated, are reserved in the tabernacles of the churches where these celebrations are scheduled, and are renewed often.<sup>14</sup>
- Norm 10. The deacon is the preferred minister to preside at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest;<sup>15</sup> but when one is unavailable, a suitably trained layperson is to lead the service.<sup>16</sup>
- Norm 11. Pastors are to make sure the deacon and layperson are suitably prepared and trained utilizing the diocesan approved program, and that they have received a background check and participated in the safe environment program.<sup>17</sup>
- Norm 12. In order for a layperson to preside at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, they must be nominated by the Pastor and confirmed by the Diocesan Bishop.<sup>18</sup> Laypersons are to be chosen for their skills to lead a community in prayer, their consistency in living their lives according to the Gospel, and their acceptability to the local community.<sup>19</sup> This appointment is to be for the time determined in the confirmation letter of the Diocesan Bishop, and their appointment is to be made known to the local community in a liturgical celebration.<sup>20</sup> The “Order for Blessing Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service,” in the *Book of Blessings* is to be used.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See SCAP, nn. 18; 21; *Directory*, nn. 24; 29; *CIC*, c. 905.

<sup>13</sup> See SCAP, nn. 39-41; 47-117; *Directory*, nn. 19-20; 28; 32; 36; 38-49.

<sup>14</sup> See SCAP, n. 22; *Directory*, n. 28; *CIC*, c. 939.

<sup>15</sup> See SCAP, n. 23; *Directory*, n. 29.

<sup>16</sup> See SCAP, n. 26-27; *Directory*, n. 30.

<sup>17</sup> See SCAP, n. 29; *Directory*, n. 30.

<sup>18</sup> See SCAP, n. 26.

<sup>19</sup> See SCAP, n. 27; *Directory*, n. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> See SCAP, n. 27; *Book of Blessings*, “Part VI: Blessings for Various Needs and Occasions,” “Order for Blessing Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service,” nn. 1808-1826.

- Norm 13. Other ministers and ministries are to be utilized at these celebrations, such as ushers, musicians, lectors, and when needed, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.<sup>22</sup>
- Norm 14. The deacon wears an alb, deacon stole and a dalmatic,<sup>23</sup> and the layperson may either wear an alb or Sunday dress clothes.<sup>24</sup>
- Norm 15. The deacon is to avoid all things proper to a priest, and the layperson is to avoid all things proper to a priest or deacon.<sup>25</sup> They are to familiarize themselves with this Rite and all its rubrics.
- Norm 16. The chair used by the deacon or layperson is not to be the presidential chair used by the priest, which is to remain empty.<sup>26</sup> When possible, the chair used by layperson should be placed outside of the sanctuary in close proximity to the assembly.
- Norm 17. The leading minister at a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest is to ensure that there is no confusion between this celebration and the celebration of the Mass, and should some confusion begin to arise, it is to be addressed immediately.<sup>27</sup> The faithful need to be catechized that the Eucharistic Sacrifice cannot take place without a priest, and even though reception of Holy Communion at a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest is closely connected with the Mass, such a celebration is inferior to the Mass.<sup>28</sup>
- Norm 18. If a deacon is leading a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, the deacon may preach a homily.<sup>29</sup> If a layperson is to be leading a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, the Pastor is encouraged to prepare a homily to be read by the layperson.<sup>30</sup> If there is no prepared homily, the leading minister is to allow for silent reflection upon the Scripture readings.<sup>31</sup> Only with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop, may a specific, qualified layperson be allowed to preach.<sup>32</sup>
- Norm 19. There will always be petitions in the Prayers of the Faithful for vocations to the priesthood, for the pastor and for the diocesan bishop.<sup>33</sup>
- Norm 20. Before the final dismissal, a prayer for vocations is to be recited by all present.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See *SCAP*, nn. 25; 28; 37; *Directory*, nn. 15; 40.

<sup>23</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 24; *Directory*, n. 38.

<sup>24</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 36; *Directory*, n. 40.

<sup>25</sup> See *SCAP*, nn. 26; 30; 35; *Directory*, n. 31.

<sup>26</sup> See *SCAP*, nn. 24; 36.

<sup>27</sup> See *SCAP*, nn. 16; 17; 48; 59; 60; *Directory*, nn. 13-14; 21- 23; 35; 40; 46.

<sup>28</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 17; *Directory*, nn. 12-14; 21; 23.

<sup>29</sup> See *SCAP*, nn. 23; 31; *Directory*, nn. 29; 38.

<sup>30</sup> See *Directory*, n. 43.

<sup>31</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 56; *Directory*, n. 43.

<sup>32</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 32; *Directory*, n. 43; *CIC*, c. 766.

<sup>33</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 57; *Directory*, n. 44.

<sup>34</sup> See *SCAP*, n. 65.

These norms become effective on February 2, 2012, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.  
They are to be published in the monthly mailing.

Given in Cheyenne, this February 2, 2012.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD STL  
Bishop of Cheyenne

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol DeLois". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Carol DeLois  
Chancellor