Implementing the Constitution on Liturgy from Vatican II

It's possible that no aspect of the work of Vatican II had a greater immediate impact on the people of the Church than the reforms made in the Liturgy. This is true because liturgy is where most Catholics have their most intimate contact with the Church community. Before the Council itself was ended, liturgical reforms began to be implemented around the world. They were indeed felt by everyone! And today, some may believe that the work of reforming the liturgy is completed.

But in fact, this work continues. We are constantly seeking ways for pastors and pastoral leaders to assist the people of the Church to take a more active part in the celebrations of the sacraments. In this worksheet, we share practices we have found effective in parishes of all sizes and shapes.

“The liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time” (#21).

So let us all share the fervent hope of the bishops and popes of Vatican II and dedicate ourselves to the task of creating liturgies full of life and vigor! Let us welcome warmly the people who come to pray with us, offering them appropriate roles and opportunities to let their hearts be engaged in liturgical prayer. Let the Church say Amen!

From the Constitution

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed. It is also the source from which all its power flows” (#10).

“It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (#14).

“Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that when the liturgy is celebrated, their obligation goes further than simply ensuring that the laws governing valid and lawful celebration are observed. They must also ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it” (#11).
## Principles

What Principles does Vatican II’s Constitution give us to follow?

1. **Scripture**
   “Sacred Scripture is of greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy.” (#24)

2. **Communal in nature**
   “Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the church.” (26)

3. **Many roles**
   “Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical ministry.” (#29)

4. **Active participation**
   “To develop active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns...actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. “ (#30)

5. **God is speaking**
   “In the liturgy, God speaks to his people, Christ is still proclaiming his gospel, and the people respond to God both in song and in prayer.” (#33)

6. **Noble simplicity**
   “The rites should radiate a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear and free from useless repetition.” (#34)

7. **Liturgy of the Word**
   There is to be more reading from Scripture, with the sermon drawn from that source. (#35)

8. **Latin**
   The use of Latin is to be preserved... but wider use may be made of the local language especially for readings and other elements. (#36)

9. **No rigid uniformity**
   “Even in the liturgy, the church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity...rather does it foster the qualities of many cultures.” (#37)

## How Is Christ Present at Mass?

Christ is present most of all in the Eucharistic elements (bread and wine).

He is present in the person of his minister, the presider.

He is likewise present in the Word, broken open and shared.

He is present in the community, gathered as church. (#7)

## Article 64 of the Constitution on the Liturgy restored the RCIA after being absent from church life for more than 1600 years!

The restoration of the Catechumenate
The catechumenate or RCIA is an ancient process of the church, lost to history in the 3rd Century. It was restored at Vatican II and named by subsequent papal documents as the model for all faith formation.
Excellent Ideas for Implementing Liturgy

At the door
Remember that many people do not come to Mass every week. While we certainly don’t condone this, we also want to be careful to warmly welcome everyone when they do come. Many people also come to Mass with family members who are not Catholic. Again, a warm welcome is important.

And there is a large group of people who may not feel very welcome at Mass on any day: because of a marriage irregularity, or because of a sense of shame they may carry, or because they have made life choices that do not reflect Catholic teaching perfectly.

How can we welcome all in Christ’s name?

Gestures
Build in gestures during the liturgy which help people to feel as though this is their liturgy, too. Such gestures should be carefully designed so they are not embarrassing for people to do. They can be kept simple but still carry a profound message.

In response...
For example, whenever the priest addresses the people, he gestures by opening his arms. Teach your people to make a similar gesture toward him in return. As people gesture toward the presider, their own spoken response is more genuine and less “muttered.” The gesture itself teaches everyone that we are “in dialogue” with the presider at this point.

Prayers of the Faithful
In one parish, the people of the community were invited to request prayers as they entered the church. Was someone in their family ill? Traveling? In any kind of special need? An editor was parked near the church entrance who took all these notes and prepared the prayers which would then be read aloud just moments later during Mass. Very powerful.

The Offertory
How we pray shapes what we believe and how we behave. Allow everyone in the church who has a gift to bring it forward from their pew in a messy “procession of gifts.” This simple gesture allows people to “own” the gift they bring forward.

A personal offering, shared
In some parishes, just as he is ready to pray the Offertory prayers, the presider invites everyone to symbolically place on the altar with him any special intention they may have in their hearts that day. Then he invites them to pray with him in both thanksgiving and need.

Plain English
In some parishes, the priests make it a point not to use words that are not in the everyday lingo of the people. Hence, they no longer use terms like “evangelization” or “mystagogia.”

In the Rite of Baptism, for example, the priests speak directly to the parents, in everyday language, rather than in the jargon of the Missal.

Gracious hosts
In some parishes, the presiders and communion ministers receive only after they have served everyone else. In this way, they demonstrate good hospitality and help everyone see that they are servants of all. The response of the people to this is overwhelming. As they see their ministers acting as servants, they are catechized each Sunday.
What else was reformed by the Council?

The rites for Baptism of infants & adults are to be revised. (#66-67)

A new rite for those already baptized is to be devised, celebrating their entry into full communion. (#69)

Confirmation rites are to be revised with an emphasis on the connection to baptism. (#71)

The rite of Penance is to be revised to focus more on the mercy of God. (#72)

Extreme unction (as it was called then) will be called anointing of the sick. (#73-75)

The rite for ordination of priests is to be revised. (#76)

The rite of marriage is to be revised and may include suitable local customs. (#77-78)

Sacramentals are to undergo a revision. (#79)

The prayers of the Divine Office (now known as the Liturgy of the Hours) are to be revised to better match the hours of the day. (#88)

The calendar of the liturgical year is to be revised in such a way that the feasts of the Lord take precedence over all others. (#107-108)

All the faithful should sing as part of the active participation we have called for. (#113-114)

In selecting and retaining art or sacred vessels and vestments, pastors should strive after noble beauty rather than sumptuous display. (#124)

Telling the Parish Story as Part of Liturgy

Gertrude

In one parish, one member of the pastoral care team reports each week after Communion (during the announcement time) on the work they do throughout the week. Recently, one communion minister told the story of Gertrude.

She was an older member of the parish who could no longer come to Mass during the winter months. This minister had taken communion to her home, spent some time with her, and invited her to send a greeting back to the community. Gertrude asked her to thank everyone on her behalf, and to tell them how important these weekly visits were to her. Then in the midst of that, she began to cry. The minister inquired and Gertrude told her that in the past month, two friends of hers had died, one of whom she talked with daily on the phone. Gertrude told the minister how knowing that the community cared enough to remember her each week gave her a great sense of connection. “Thank you for being here,” Gertrude said. “It makes me feel that I still belong.”

By telling stories like this one, all present at Sunday Mass become part of the ministry. People understand better the needs of the parish. More people step forward to become part of the work. And the community is enriched by having Gertrude present in this greeting.

This is the “heart connection” that is sometimes lacking on Sunday at Mass. It connects the story of Jesus with this real parish community. It helps everyone grow in faith and a sense of belonging.