

# A Basic Liturgy Bookshelf

We hope we've convinced you that every liturgy group needs to spend time improving its level of self-confidence and expertise. With that in mind, we present this brief list of recommended liturgy reading.

The books and magazines below are basics in every sense of the word — they're easy for the average parish group to read, they're mostly well known and widely used, and they'll help provide a firm foundation for your group's discussions. They are also generally easy to find and reasonably priced, and we hope you decide to make at least some of them required reading for your group.

Why "required"? Because having a few books that *everyone* in your group has read will give you some touchstones and authorities to refer to during your deliberations. They will help your committee develop a sense that the world outside your parish not only shares your problems but has sometimes found different solutions. The books here will provide you with a quick course on the rules and regulations, some theological background, and a brief introduction to some of the more interesting and opinionated people writing on liturgy today. (Naturally, we mostly agree with their opinions — that's why these books are on the list.)

This is hardly a complete liturgy library. For one thing, the selection of worship aids (hymnals, missalettes, etc.) is too complex an issue to cover here. In addition, our focus is Sunday Eucharist, and we have not sorted through the avalanche of resources on weddings, liturgies for children, and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Our only advice in these three areas is *beware* — much of what is available is dreck, and a good argument for bringing back the ecclesiastical *nihil obstat*. Before buying, ask advice from your friends at other parishes, or check the periodicals listed below for their reviews and comment.

## 1. *The Lectionary*

*The* basic book for liturgy committees. Every member of your committee needs to be familiar with the lectionary: the rhythm of the gospels and liturgical seasons, how the

book itself is organized, how the Sunday and weekday cycles operate. If you're a committee chairperson, try working up a brief lectionary quiz for your members — you'd be completely justified in asking them to pass it.

The big red parish lectionary shouldn't be locked up in the sacristy: there should be one or more copies available for borrowing and reference by your liturgy committee. For home and planning use, there is a convenient alternative available from Liturgy Training Publications. The *Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers* has all the Sunday readings in the New American Bible translation used in most lectionaries. You also get suggestions for your lectors on pronunciation and preparation (and some forgettable commentaries). It's cheap and issued annually, and all your committee members (and all your lectors) should have a copy.

For a brief historical look at how the lectionary got to be organized the way it is, you might want to look at *The Word in Worship* by William Skudlarek (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), pp. 11-44.

## 2. *The Sacramentary*

This is the other main liturgical volume for your committee's bookshelf, with the presider's prayers and instructions for every Sunday, weekday, and feast. Preparation for any eucharistic liturgy begins not just with a look at the readings, but at what the sacramentary has outlined for the day. One or two members of your committee might well want to master the sacramentary—not just its organization and content, but the areas in which it offers flexibility and options. The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, reprinted in the front of most sacramentaries, is where to start learning.

## 3. *The Liturgy Documents*

The cornerstone of our post-Vatican II theology of worship is what everyone simply refers to as "the documents." First and foremost, that means Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, which everyone on your committee should read, and reread regularly. The other principal Roman documents to be familiar with are the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* and the *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*, which outline all the basic principles and regulations that shape our liturgy. In addition, the American bishops have issued three important documents of their own: *Music in Catholic Worship*, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, and *Liturgical Music Today*.

Luckily all of the above, and others, are collected with useful indexes in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource* from Liturgy Training Publications. This affordable volume should be on everyone's bookshelf.

An even more accessible "official" document for your committee's reading is Cardinal Roger Mahony's 1997 pastoral letter *Gathered Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass*. Written to prepare his Archdiocese of Los Angeles for the year 2000, it's a wonderful introduction to the kind of Sunday celebration our church's tradition calls for. The letter is available from Liturgy Training Publications or, if you have access to the Internet, for free downloading at the archdiocese's Web site (<http://www.la-archdiocese.org>).

#### 4. *How Liturgy Works*

So central are “the documents” to our liturgical life that many committees turn to them as a group’s first reading and self-education project. Warning: You may find that this falls flat. They are primarily *official* documents, strong on theological principle but *not* intended to help people understand what makes for good liturgy, the role of rituals or symbols or tradition, or other basics. Everyone should know and live by the documents, but for a starting point in group education, some of the books listed below may be more effective and enjoyable.

Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer* (Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1988). An excellent overall introduction to how rituals and symbols affect our lives, and how liturgy’s success or failure depends on how well we help these powerful forces operate. Its focus on these basic liturgical issues, rather than on problems specific to Catholics, will reward any committee that wants to understand why a good liturgy “works.”

Eugene A. Walsh, *Giving Life: Ministry of the Parish Sunday Assembly* (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1993); *Celebration: Theology, Ministry and Practice* (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1994). Walsh’s critique of the deadness of most liturgies, and his advocacy of “celebration” as the best term to describe the liturgy Vatican II calls us to have, remain unsurpassed. Both books are filled with practical suggestions and guidelines for everyone who works on liturgy.

Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1982). In some ways a necessary and valuable complement to Walsh’s enthusiasm and emotion, Kavanagh reminds us that liturgy is also dependent on our sense of simplicity, style, “tradition and a certain good order.” His gracefully written book is modeled after Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*, and is filled with perceptive and opinionated rules, principles, suggestions, and even a list of common mistakes. You also get an excellent bibliography.

Elaine Rendler, *This is the Day* (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1995); *In the Midst of the Assembly* (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1994). Two books that suffer somewhat from having their origin as a series of weekly columns, but which are nevertheless filled with useful observations on music, liturgy, and parish life in general.

#### 5. *Planning Aids*

Certainly there is no shortage of resources on the marketplace that purport to give you week-by-week ideas on how to celebrate better liturgy. The danger of all such planning aids is that your group will cling to their recommendations in the same way that an earlier generation slavishly followed their version of “the rules.” And alas, such a pattern of

### A Note for Internet Users

Lists of resources like this tend to go out of date, and that’s one reason we’ve set up a little Web site at <http://liturgycommittee.com>. At the very least we’ll make sure you always have access to an up-to-date version of this Appendix, and we also invite you to check out the site from time to time and drop us an e-mail with comments and stories on how your committee is doing. If enough people write, we’ll post some of the more interesting things we get.

behavior will be self-defeating, since no book can do your work for you, despite the impression such resources often give. Take our word for it: Not all of these resources' apparently authoritative "tips" are (a) good ideas; (b) good ideas for your parish; or even (c) solidly grounded in current liturgical thinking and official guidelines. And of course, they also have the tendency to focus your group on week-to-week changes rather than the basic issues of good liturgy we've pointed to again and again earlier in the book.

There! We've gotten that out of our system, and if you keep all this in mind, we *do* recommend Liturgy Training Publications' annual *Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons*. This handsome annual workbook provides useful background reading on every liturgical season and feast, and is a valuable (but not infallible) reference even for those not engaged in week-to-week planning. Certainly any committee chair should have a copy, and make his or her own judgment about providing copies to everyone in the group.

The *Sourcebook* generally avoids music suggestions, but the ones from Elaine Rendler and others in the magazine *Today's Liturgy* (from Oregon Catholic Press) and from Fred Moleck and others in the *GIA Quarterly* are always excellent. See the addresses below.

### 6. Periodicals

Strangely, there aren't many good magazines or periodicals on liturgy being published as we write this. The two most useful for the average parish committee are probably *Today's Liturgy*, from Oregon Catholic Press, and the *GIA Quarterly*, from GIA Publications. Since they're from our country's two leading publishers of liturgical music, they both focus closely on music as opposed to other liturgical issues, but are nevertheless practical and handsome, and will keep you up to date with the latest people working in the field of pastoral music and worship. You may also want to explore *Liturgical Ministry*, published quarterly by The Liturgical Press.

There are also good articles on liturgy in two more general periodicals on parish life, *Today's Parish* (from Twenty-Third Publications, publisher of this book) and *Church* (from the National Pastoral Life Center). Your parish will want subscriptions to both.

Finally, you should also be aware of *Worship*, a handsome scholarly journal that has been of enormous importance in this country's liturgical renewal. While some of *Worship's* articles may be too academic for you, its views of current trends in liturgy and liturgical practice are always worth reading. It's from The Liturgical Press.

### Important Addresses

GIA Publications  
7404 South Mason Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60638

Oregon Catholic Press  
5536 N.E. Hassalo  
Portland, Oregon 97213

The Liturgical Press  
St. John's Abbey  
Collegeville, Minnesota 56321

Twenty-Third Publications (*Today's Parish*)  
P. O. Box 180  
Mystic, CT 06355

Liturgy Training Publications  
1800 North Hermitage Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60622

National Pastoral Life Center (*Church*)  
18 Bleecker Street  
New York, NY 10012