

INTRODUCTION

Liturgy committees may never have been “cool,” but here in the late 1990s when we first talked about producing a new edition of this book, we wondered if maybe their heyday hadn’t passed.

There are fashions and trends in parish life, just as there are in other parts of our experience, and as the two of us reached middle age it sometimes seemed as though the American church’s enthusiasm for liturgy committees had been one of those passing fads. In one of the dioceses near us, the director of the liturgy office says that no more than a quarter of the parishes even have liturgy committees, and that he doubts that very few of them do anything like what liturgy committees have the potential to accomplish.

Why? Perhaps people have moved on to other worthwhile enthusiasms, such as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; or, perhaps the energy and enthusiasm of the post-Vatican II liturgical changes just reached the end of their natural course. Or maybe, just maybe, there were just too many liturgy committees who weren’t sure why they existed in the first place.

If such is the case, that’s too bad, because it’s more important than ever for a parish to take care of its liturgy committee. In the years ahead those parishes without liturgy committees will be missing an enormous source of future strength.

While liturgy committees may have started because of the need to understand and implement all those vast liturgical changes of the 1960s and 1970s, right now the need is different: our church needs a new generation with a sense of adult responsibility for every aspect of the church’s work. In the past, a liturgy committee might have been seen as a helpful but optional adjunct to the clergy or parish staff; now, however, it is a necessary source of future leaders and ministers. Without a strong base of lay leaders in place who understand liturgy and are comfortable with leading, planning, and evaluating it, our parishes will become sadder places, as the number of priests continues to fall and new forms of leadership fail to take their place. The future is very much in the hands of laypeople who believe that their work will help keep our liturgical traditions alive and powerful. Liturgy

committees are one place where people like that can get their training, their experience, and their support. And of course, strong liturgy committees also have benefits in the here and now: they help each parish find its unique way of making the prayer of the church its own.

Who's this book for? We hope it's for parish committees at every point in their life span, whether it's a new committee just trying to get off the ground or an existing group that wants to see if it can't work on more difficult, and therefore more interesting, challenges. Most of all, we're hoping to reach any committee that's looking for a renewed sense of enthusiasm for its work and a new vision of what it can accomplish.

So, when we talk about "you" in this book, we're addressing both chairpeople and committee members at large, in the hope that they will benefit from working through the book as a group. However, we also hope that it will be of use to pastors and other priests who work with liturgy committees, or perhaps are thinking about starting one. Now and then we take a few shots at priests in the book, but please forgive us in advance. If you keep careful count, you'll find lay constituencies receive their fair share of sarcasm.

But we're really not mean people. In fact, we'd like to acknowledge a lot of friends in this introduction, namely all the wonderful liturgists, liturgical artists, and liturgical musicians we've worked with over the years who continue to inspire us with their work, their sense of fun, and their love of liturgy. We thank especially Ernie Andreoli, Andrew Ciferni, O. Praem., Larry Madden, S.J., Nancy Paolini, Elaine Rendler, Bruce Salmestrelli, Father Sam Sirianni, Peter Smith, Carol Sullivan, and Ed Walker. Long ago, Father Charles B. Weiser first invited us to work on a liturgy committee together when he was director of the Aquinas Institute at Princeton University, and we're still grateful for his leadership. We'd also like to thank Dan Connors, our editor at Twenty-Third Publications, who helped shape the first version of our book 13 years ago and whose friendship has been just as supportive, and his insights just as valuable, this second time around. Most of all, we thank our spouses, Sue McSorley and Mimi Mahon, who provided perhaps less goading than the first time we published this book, but certainly more child care, as well as sound and valued advice whether or not we knew we needed it. We're infinitely grateful for it all and offer them our love, and we dedicate this book to them.

Tom Baker and Frank Ferrone