

DATA PROJECTION IN CHURCHES

A response from the National Liturgical Architecture and Art Board

The National Liturgical Architecture and Art Board has received a number of requests for advice regarding the use of visual display technologies, and in particular data projection, in churches. While the competence of the Board essentially concerns the architectural and aesthetic aspects of including data projection in plans for new churches or introducing such technology into existing churches, the Board is also very aware of liturgical considerations arising from use of these technologies. Accordingly, in responding to requests for advice the Board has consulted liturgists and liturgical musicians, has surveyed guidelines and directives already issued by diocesan liturgical commissions and offices, and has referenced national guidelines in *'And when churches are to be Built ...': Preparation, planning and construction of places of worship*, which states:

- §696 Where a church is designed to include data projection, its presence should be unobtrusive. Where data projection is added to an existing church, care should be taken that it harmonises with the design of the interior.
- §697 Data projection equipment must never overwhelm or detract from the liturgical setting, the symbolism and function of the sacred furnishings, or the celebration of the liturgy. Its purpose is to serve the liturgy as an aid to participation, never to entertain. It is best employed to display the text and music line of sung parts of the liturgy. It should not be used to display the entire Order of Mass and the readings.
- §698 Data projection technology develops quickly. New technologies should be investigated in the process of designing data projection for a church.

To these normative guidelines the Board adds some further observations:

- The Church has a long custom of providing published text for use by the assembly, primarily in missals (Mass books) and hymnals (hymn books). The use of data projection in churches was a 'natural' development from overhead projectors, the use of which in turn evolved from hymnals. Overhead projectors were used almost exclusively for projecting hymn texts to aid assembly singing. In contrast, newer technologies and software have enabled much broader use of data projection, including text, musical notation, and graphic images, the latter often a digital form of banners.
- The use of data projection in churches is largely an antipodean phenomenon, found mainly in Catholic churches in Australia and New Zealand. Most other countries, with strong local traditions of using hymnals, have not incorporated visual display technology in churches. Where such technology has been installed in churches, it tends to be used sparingly, to project the words of a hymn that is not found in the hymnal that serves parish liturgy, or to project images and/or text in support of a particular initiative, campaign or fundraising program.

- As well as enabling the projection of both hymn texts and music lines to aid assembly singing, data projection has also provided for projection of parts of the Order of Mass such as the Glory to God and the Profession of Faith. Since the introduction in 2011 of the current translation of the Roman Missal, data projection has assisted the active participation of the assembly in the liturgy as people have become familiar with new forms of traditional texts. In similar vein, data projection of select texts from the Order of Mass has assisted Catholics whose first language is other than English to become conversant with the complex vocabulary and grammatical structure of the current translation.
- The use of data projection technology in churches has also led to some unforeseen outcomes. Excessive use of data projection has meant that some Catholics no longer learn by heart liturgical prayers and acclamations they once knew. The use of data projection during the homily has in some instances reduced the homily from being an act of preaching to a didactic exercise. Overuse of data projection during funerals has recast these rites from acts of liturgical prayer for the deceased and the mourners to celebrations of the life of the deceased.
- The use of visual display technologies in the liturgy, and especially of data projection, has had a considerably greater impact on liturgical celebration and assembly participation than many might have anticipated. The extent to which data projection and other visual display technologies – media generally associated with entertainment, education and business – have begun to change the way Catholics understand the liturgy and the modes of their participation in it, has sometimes been detrimental to authentic liturgical celebration. For example, in the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, excessive use of data projection to personalise the liturgy for each participating child can result in the sacramental action being diminished or even supplanted by photographic images.

To assist Catholic parishes, schools and other worshipping communities to make well-informed choices regarding data projection, the Board commends the accompanying 'Guidelines for the use of Visual Display Systems in Liturgical Celebrations' of the Diocese of Parramatta, at the same time thanking the Diocese for making these guidelines more widely available.