

EMERGING ISSUES IN THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

October 2009

PREAMBLE

1. The May 2008 Plenary of the ACBC meeting passed the following motion:

SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST

In order to understand the issues relating to these celebrations it has been proposed that there be a review of the practice. It is proposed that there be a wide consultation. This will be implemented by the Permanent Committee.

MOTION

That the Conference facilitate the establishment of a working party to engage with issues that are emerging from the practice of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, and that such membership be drawn from the Bishops Commissions for Liturgy, Pastoral Life, Church Ministry and Doctrine and Morals. **CARRIED**

2. The Working Party comprised: Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Bishop Brian Heenan, Bishop Peter Elliott, Mrs. Cathy Murrowood, Sister Anne McMillan, Ms. Kimberley Davis with the ACBC General Secretariat providing administrative support.
3. The Working Party met by teleconference.
4. The Working Party considers that it is opportune to offer some general principles and guidelines and highlight some emerging issues to assist bishops, dioceses and parishes where there is a need for Sunday Celebrations in the absence of a priest (herein referred to as Sunday Celebrations). Such principles and guidelines follow on from the Directives for the Dioceses of Australia (ACBC 2004) and other relevant documentation.

PRINCIPLES

5. The liturgical and canonical principles are set out in the documents:

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 1963. Para. 35, No. 4.

The Code of Canon Law - Canons 1248 §2, 230 §3, 231 §1, 910, 911

Directory for a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (Vatican City 1988)
Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest: Directives for the Dioceses of Australia. (ACBC, 2004)
Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (1973)
Redemptionis Sacramentum (2004)
Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy. (Pope John Paul II, 1998)
Dies Ecclesiae. The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday. 53.
Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest. Vatican City 1997.
 Article 7, Nos 1, 2
Pastoral Handbook for the Diocese of Australia (National Liturgical Commission 2004)

6. The Diocesan Bishop is competent to issue instructions as to the proper implementation within the diocese of the principles set out in these documents.
7. To the extent to which local circumstances can be accommodated it is preferable that there be a uniform approach by dioceses to the way in which Sunday Celebrations are regulated.

EMERGING ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED FOR DIOCESES AND PARISHES

8. **The Directives for the Dioceses of Australia** (ACBC, 2004) in some cases has not been acknowledged and implemented. This document provides valuable information for the practice of Sunday Celebrations.
9. The **Internet** needs to be explored and utilised to provide relevant documents, guidelines, resources and formation for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.
10. The **regular Sunday celebration of the Mass** within each identifiable parish community is the ideal to which each community will aspire. This requires coordination between liturgical and pastoral planning.
11. **Pastoral planning initiatives**, diocesan or parish, should have strategies in place to assess the liturgical, communal and pastoral viability of on-going Sunday Celebrations.

12. Where it is **not possible for the community to gather** for Sunday Mass, it should gather each Sunday for a form of worship that follows the norms set out in the *Directory for a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* (1988).
13. **Sunday Celebrations will not be** held wherever there is a celebration of the Mass that day at that location or in close proximity thereto. In determining what is a reasonable expectation for travel to nearby places for the celebration of the Mass, the circumstances of the local community, its cohesive identity, spiritual need, degree of isolation and patterns of travel for secular purposes should be taken into account. The judgement on this issue is for the local bishop given the differences in rural and city circumstances.
14. As **changes** occur in parish life, clarification will be needed regarding celebrations for specific liturgical occasions:
 - Triduum / Ash Wednesday
 - Celebration of Sacraments of Initiation
15. Each community should identify a number of people to coordinate the Sunday Celebrations and **share the leadership and ministries**. There should be regular preparation, proper training, adequate resources and on-going support.
16. More attention must be given to the **provision of resources and formation** and the sharing of resources and insights across the Dioceses of Australia. On-going catechesis of the Eucharist and its relationship to Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest is needed.
17. Dioceses should **provide resources and facilitate sharing** among their various communities and initiate regular formation opportunities for leaders of Sunday Celebrations. Formation in sharing the Word of God is essential for those who lead the Sunday Celebrations. There should also be regular reviews of the celebrations to ensure that the worship is of a fitting liturgical quality.
18. The bishop should provide some **formal accreditation** or mandate to those designated to lead Sunday Celebrations.
19. When a community has regular Sunday Celebrations there is a need to distinguish these from **weekday liturgies**. Other forms of worship should be explored for weekdays.
20. The National Liturgical Council could produce a **modified form of the Liturgy of the Hours** that may be more suitable for use by parish communities on weekdays when the Mass is not celebrated.

21. **Formation** regarding the practice of Sunday Celebrations and the use of similar weekday celebrations must be given to Catholic school staffs and communities. This also applies to other Church agencies, organisations and religious communities.

In issuing this document, the Australian Bishops are aware of the loss that many communities experience in not being able to celebrate the Eucharist as often as they wish.

These guidelines are provided to assist those who are called to lead their communities in Sunday Liturgy of the Word and Communion.

The Bishops would like to acknowledge the important role of those who gather the communities to nourish and celebrate their faith through leading Sunday Liturgy of the Word and Communion, when their priest cannot be with them.