



DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

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MOST REVEREND W. FRANCIS MALOOLY, DD
BISHOP OF WILMINGTON

August 26, 2019

Dear Brothers,

I am writing to promulgate the newly minted *Norms for Communion Services in the Diocese of Wilmington*. In order that you will have ample time to both inform and prepare your parishioners, I am mandating that these norms be observed in all parishes and parish missions in the Diocese of Wilmington, effective on Sunday, November 24, 2019, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the *Norms for Communion Services in the Diocese of Wilmington*, as well a bulletin announcement. Please make certain that this announcement is placed in your parish bulletin so that your people will be well aware of these new regulations.

Since the use of the ritual text *Sunday Celebrations on the Absence of a Priest* requires the permission of the Local Bishop, by this letter, I am granting the necessary permission for it's use on **Sunday** but only in **emergency** circumstances. Make note of the directive on page 2, article 4 of the Norms which states: *Since the permission of the Diocesan Bishop is required in order to utilize this ritual, the priest's absence for a Sunday Mass along with the pertinent circumstances must be reported to the Bishop's Office or the Director of Worship immediately.*

I am grateful for your cooperation in this matter and I am grateful also for your service and commitment to the Priesthood and to your people. Continue to pray for our seminarians who are in formation and for an increase in Priestly Vocations.

God bless you for all that you do,

Sincerely in Our Lord,

Most Reverend W. Francis Malooly
Bishop of Wilmington

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Catholic Diocese of Wilmington Norms Regarding Communion Services when Daily Mass cannot be Celebrated

For priests, it is a great privilege to celebrate Mass for the faithful. Legitimate occasions do arise when a priest cannot be available for daily Mass. These occasions include times for priests to be away from the parish, such as retreats, workshops, vacations, pressing pastoral needs, and the weekly day off. (The absence of a priest for a Sunday Mass is addressed succinctly in #4 below.)

In recent years, it has become somewhat common practice for parishes to schedule Communion Services on those days when daily Mass is cancelled or not scheduled. The Church views Communion Services during the week as an extraordinary exception rather than the norm. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* states that:

[165] It is necessary to avoid any sort of confusion between this type of gathering (Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest) and the celebration of the Eucharist. The diocesan Bishops, therefore, should prudently discern whether Holy Communion ought to be distributed in these gatherings. It will be preferable, moreover, when both a Priest and a Deacon are absent, that the various parts be distributed among several faithful rather than having a single lay member of the faithful direct the whole celebration alone. Nor is it ever appropriate to refer to any member of the lay faithful as “presiding” over the celebration.

[166.] Likewise, especially if Holy Communion is distributed during such celebrations, the diocesan Bishop, to whose exclusive competence this matter pertains, must not easily grant permission for such celebrations to be held on weekdays, especially in places where it was possible or would be possible to have the celebration of Mass on the preceding or the following Sunday.”

Even on Sundays, the *Code of Canon Law* recommends a simple Liturgy of the Word rather than a Communion service. *Canon 1248 §2* states that:

“If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families.”

Although the Church does, in limited instances, foresee a Liturgy of the Word with Communion (i.e., a Communion Service) typically on a Sunday, the Church asks that such liturgies be rarely permitted on weekdays and then only by extraordinary exception. The theological and liturgical primacy of the reception of Holy Communion during Mass is rightly safeguarded when a Communion Service occurs only in special circumstances and then only with the express permission of the Diocesan Bishop.

The following guidelines are effective immediately in all parishes and parish mission churches in the Diocese of Wilmington.

1. Communion Services may not be substituted for Daily Mass, except in the unexpected circumstance that, at the last minute, the scheduled priest fails to show up or if he has a sudden illness or personal emergency.
2. When a daily Mass is cancelled, and published as such in advance, the faithful must be notified of the availability of other daily Masses at nearby parishes so that the faithful may attend Mass, if they so desire.
3. In lieu of daily Mass, the Pastor may schedule another type of service: Liturgy of the Hours, a Liturgy of the Word, Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, or the communal recitation of the Rosary.
4. In the extremely unlikely event that a priest becomes indisposed from being able to be present for Sunday Mass, then the ritual that the Church has provided must be utilized, that is *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. If a priest finds himself unable to be present for a Sunday Mass this must be for a very serious reason and every effort should be made by him to find a priest replacement. *(Since the permission of the Diocesan Bishop is **required** in order to utilize this ritual, the priest's absence for a Sunday Mass along with the pertinent circumstances must be reported to the Bishop's Office or the Office of Worship immediately. The Bishop should not learn of this through the "grapevine".)*
5. The Leader of prayer on those occasions when there is no priest shall be a Deacon if there is one available. Subsequently, prayer may be led by a Seminarian who has been assigned to the parish, a Religious, or a Lay minister designated by the pastor. In addition to the leader, it is a laudable practice that several others share in the parts of the service. There may be music but there is to be no procession. The presider chair may not be used to lead these prayer services nor (as stated above) may the Lay leader of prayer ever be referred to as the "presider."

Hopefully, these newly promulgated guidelines will eliminate confusion and render us all united in what we celebrate and when and by whom.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. Thank you also for your ministry and generous service to the People of God in the Diocese of Wilmington.

If you have need for clarification or with any questions, please contact the Director of Worship, Fr. James Kirk at frjtkirk@aol.com or 302.584-6486.



Most Rev. W. Francis Malooly, D.D.
Bishop of Wilmington

The Bishop Promulgates Norms for Communion Services in the Diocese of Wilmington

Bishop Malooly recently issued norms regarding the celebration of Communion Services in the Diocese of Wilmington. The Bishop has directed that the following be placed in all parish bulletins:

In recent years, it has become somewhat common practice for parishes to schedule Communion Services on those days when daily Mass is cancelled or not scheduled. The Church views Communion Services during the week as an extraordinary exception rather than the norm. (Sunday Mass where no priest is available is addressed below.)

Although the Church does, in limited instances, foresee a Liturgy of the Word with Communion (i.e., a Communion Service) typically on a Sunday, the Church asks that such liturgies be rarely permitted on weekdays and then only by extraordinary exception.

The following guidelines are effective immediately in all parishes and parish mission churches in the Diocese of Wilmington:

1. Communion Services may not be substituted for Daily Mass, except in unexpected circumstances. For instance, the scheduled priest fails to show up or has a sudden illness or personal emergency.
2. When a daily Mass is cancelled, and published as such in advance, the faithful must be notified of the availability of other daily Masses in surrounding churches.
3. In lieu of daily Mass, the Pastor may schedule another type of service: Liturgy of the Hours, a Liturgy of the Word, Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, or the communal recitation of the Rosary.
4. In the extremely unlikely event that a priest is indisposed from being able to be present for a Sunday Mass, then the ritual that the Church has provided must be utilized, that is *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. A priest's absence from Sunday Mass must be for a very serious reason and every effort must be made by him to find a priest replacement.
5. The Leader of prayer on those occasions when there is no priest shall be a Deacon, or a Seminarian who has been assigned to the parish, or a Religious, or a Lay minister designated by the pastor. It is a laudable practice that other members of the Lay Faithful share parts of the service.

Hopefully, these new guidelines will eliminate confusion surrounding the question of Communion Services and render us all united in what we celebrate and when and by whom.