

Children's Liturgy ('Children's Liturgy of the Word') will restart in St Paul's Parish on Sunday 25 July at our 9.30am Mass.

The terms 'Children's Liturgy' or is also more correctly called 'Children's Liturgy of the Word' refers to the practice of children leaving the Sunday assembly during the Liturgy of the Word and gathering elsewhere to celebrate a separate Liturgy of the Word that is more appropriate to their level of understanding.

Why it is celebrated

In 1973, the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome issued the document *Directory for Masses with Children*. This document offers principles and guidelines for adapting the Mass for children to enable them to take a more conscious and active part in these celebrations.

The *Directory* states:

... if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. Then, before the Eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word (DMC #17).

This statement is the rationale for our parish offering 'Children's Liturgy' (Children's Liturgy of the Word) as a parish ministry.

The purpose of adapting the celebration of the Mass is to make it more accessible to children and to gradually lead them to full, conscious and active participation in the Sunday liturgical assembly.

How often it is celebrated

From Sunday 25 July, 'Children's Liturgy' will be celebrated during every 9.30am Sunday Mass (except during school holidays, or on important feast days when all parishioners, of all ages, need to be together for the liturgy of the word (the readings)).

What is central

Two key principles need always to be kept in mind when celebrating Children's Liturgy (Children's Liturgy of the Word) Firstly, Children's Liturgy of the Word is **liturgy**, ritual prayer, and not catechesis (religious instruction), child minding or a Catholic version of 'Sunday School'. Nor is the primary focus of Children's Liturgy religious education, sacramental preparation or completing activity sheets. Its purpose is not to give the children colouring-in-type activities to keep them busy so the adults can listen to the homily in peace! Because it is a liturgical celebration, all the principles of good liturgy (active participation, clear symbols, etc) apply.

Secondly, it is liturgy of the **word**, so it is ritual centred on the proclamation and breaking open of the scriptures. The children do what the rest of the community is doing at this point of the Mass. They listen to the scriptures proclaimed and applied to contemporary life and respond in various ways. It is an experience of prayer, of dialogue with God.

The Scriptures

The approved book of readings for Children's Liturgy of the Word is the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. As far as possible the readings in this lectionary (book) follow those in the (adult) Roman *Lectionary for Mass*. It is a simplified version of Scripture, not a collection of paraphrases or Bible stories.

More than only words

A liturgy of the word is never simply a verbal experience. The use of symbols, gesture, movement and singing heightens the children's experience of the transcendent. A beautifully bound book which is handled with respect, a special place for enthroning the word, gathering the children around to hear the scriptures proclaimed well, these all speak to the children of the sacredness of God's word and influence how they accept and live by it.

Who can attend 'Children's Liturgy'?

After discussion with the members of our Parish Liturgy Team we have decided that only children from 4 years of age to 9 years of age can participate in Children's Liturgy. This decision is based on the fact that if the age bracket is widened it is difficult for the leaders to deliver age-appropriate activities. Also we feel that children older than 9, or who have made their 1st Holy Communion, need to remain with the rest of the assembly for the Liturgy of the Word.

Children with disability are also to be welcomed to participate in Children's Liturgy of the Word. This may require prior contact with the leaders to identify any particular support this child may require.

When does 'Children's Liturgy' take place?

As 'Children's Liturgy' takes the place of the Liturgy of the Word, the children gather with their families at the beginning of the Mass, and after the Entrance hymn, and sign of the cross, Fr David will invite the children who wish to leave for Children's Liturgy to come forward. The children and their leaders will then receive a blessing, be presented with their special Book, Cross and candle and then process out of the church over to the Parish Meeting Room. The children will then return for the Offertory, and to join the rest of the worshipping assembly for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites.

STRUCTURE FOR CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

GATHER

- **Gathering together with the whole assembly.**
When children are to participate in the liturgy of the word in a space separate from the main assembly, they *first gather with the rest of the assembly to sing the Entrance hymn and celebrate the introductory greeting*
- **Processing to the place set aside for the celebration of the word.**
Fr David will formally send the children and their ministers to the place where they will celebrate their own liturgy of the word.

LISTEN

Listening to the Word.

While on Sundays we listen to three readings, for those children participating in 'Children's Liturgy' they will focus on the Gospel.

DO

- **Breaking open the word**

In the breaking open of the word, an explanation of the readings, appropriate to the children's level of understanding, is provided by an adult approved by the parish priest.

In order to engage children's authentic participation, liturgy must respect their need for physical involvement. their internal life is still very much dependent upon what they experience through their senses (LMC #22). Some ways of engaging children's participation which respects their need for physical involvement include: simple role plays, echo mimes, gospel reflections.

- **The leaders will also have access to a special resource sheet, prepared by St Paul's Publications. This sheet provides 'a homily' through the use of a number of activities.**
- **Younger children will also be given a 'sheet' with a picture or drawing that they can use to assist them to 'reflect on the Word of God'**
- **The children will bring these sheets back with them to the worshipping assembly, so they can show them to their families, and hopefully to finish these activities at home.**

Creed & Prayers of the Faithful

If time permits the leaders may use a simple version of the Creed, followed by a time that children through simple petitions can name the needs of the Church, the world, those in need and the local community and bring these to God in prayer.

GO

Rejoining the community

A simple procession leads the children back to rejoin the community for the Preparation of the Gifts. Some of the children will assist with the offertory procession. Children rejoin their families.