



Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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Office of the Bishop

POLICY

Using *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* in Situations When Sunday Mass Cannot Be Celebrated

May 2009

CONTEXT: The Presbyteral Council formed a committee in March 2008 to study the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, second edition, [SCAP] as well as the needs and experience of the diocese. The council received its final report and discussed its contents during the 04 May 2009 meeting. Upon the recommendation of the council, the bishop approved the following policy.

It is the Church's desire that Mass is celebrated every Sunday in every parish. There are occasions, however, when it is not possible. These two emergency plans provide ways

- for parishes to keep Sunday holy in both unplanned and planned emergencies,
- for the diocese to provide catechesis on these celebrations,
- for the diocese to provide training and formation for deacons and lay leaders of prayer,
- and for pastors and parish life coordinators to provide ongoing formation and oversight.

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Emergency Plan I – an unplanned emergency

PLAN: When an unplanned emergency, for example, the illness of the assigned priest, a storm, or a severe travel advisory, will prevent the celebration of Sunday Mass or Masses (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday celebrated late on Saturday), the parish will:

1. Have in place and use a telephone tree and/or e-mail tree to notify parishioners:
 - a. Mass will not take place on Sunday (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday celebrated late on Saturday).
 - b. The reason is: _____.
 - c. Available Masses in nearby parishes are: _____.
 - d. If you cannot travel to Mass, you are excused from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass this weekend.

2. Use other broadcast means, as local radio and television announcements, if available.
3. Care for those who do not get the notice of no. 1 and/or no. 2 above and come to the church for Mass. The deacon or lay leader of prayer trained to use *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* will first determine:
 - a. which liturgy in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* will be used – see the list in Item 5.e.i below – and
 - b. if there are sufficient reserved hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion.
 - c. NOTE:
 - i. Since this is an unplanned emergency, there likely would not be sufficient reserved hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion. If this is the case, one of the options in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* without Holy Communion is used.
 - ii. If there are sufficient reserved hosts for the assembly, however, Holy Communion may be given as provided in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.
4. NOTE: Preaching during this unplanned emergency liturgy, even by a deacon, does not take place.
5. Have the deacon or lay leader of prayer announce the following to those assembled in the parish church using these or similar words:
 - a. We lament that Sunday Mass cannot be celebrated in this church today since Father _____ is unavailable because of _____.
 - b. If conditions permit, you are encouraged to travel to the next parish church, [name] _____ in [city] _____ for Mass(es) at [time] _____.
 - c. Because of this grave situation, those who cannot travel to another place for Mass are excused from the obligation to participate in Mass this day.
 - d. You may go home and spend some time in honoring the Lord's Day by personal or family prayer.
 - e. Or you may remain here. We have permission and are prepared for:
 - i. A liturgy using the approved ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* consisting of (one of the following has already been determined at Item 3.a above):
 - Morning Prayer,
 - Morning Prayer with Holy Communion,
 - Evening Prayer,
 - Evening Prayer with Holy Communion,
 - Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, or
 - Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion.
 - ii. If the use of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* is not possible, encourage some community prayer before dispersing, for example, a song and the Lord's Prayer.

6. One or two days after the use of this Emergency Plan I, the pastor, parish life coordinator, the minister of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, or another member of the parish staff will place a phone call (217.698.8500) or send an e-mail to the Vicar General / Moderator of the Curia that includes:
 - a. The reason Mass could not be celebrated.
 - b. The steps taken to inform parishioners.
 - c. What liturgy or prayer took place in the parish church, if any, and the approximate number of participants.
 - d. Whether or not Holy Communion was given within the liturgy.
 - e. Other information of what was said and what took place.

Emergency Plan II – planned absence of a priest with permission

PLAN: When it is known by at least the Sunday of the week before that Sunday Mass (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday celebrated late on Saturday) cannot be celebrated because a priest is not available, then a predictable or foreseen situation exists.

REQUIRED PERMISSION: The pastor or the parish life coordinator calls the Vicar General / Moderator of the Curia to discuss the situation of a planned absence of a priest on Sunday and to get permission to use this Emergency Plan II.

1. Sufficient hosts are consecrated at the last Mass to provide for the distribution of Holy Communion on the following Sunday that will use a rite in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.
2. Preaching during this planned emergency liturgy, even by a deacon, does not take place.
3. The pastor or the parish life coordinator announces to the people at every Sunday Mass (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday) the following, using these or similar words:
 - We lament that Sunday Mass cannot be celebrated in this church next weekend since I am or Father _____ is unavailable because of _____ and no other priest is available.
 - Go to Mass at _____
 - A list of current Mass schedules for near by parishes is readily accessible.
 - Because of this grave situation, those who cannot travel to another place for Mass are excused from the obligation to participate in Mass that day.
 - Recall this norm in the ritual book and supporting documents: only one celebration of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* is permitted on the weekend (i.e., on the Sunday) in a given church.
 - Come here on [day] _____ at [time] _____.
 - We have permission and are prepared for liturgy using the approved ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* consisting of (one of the following has already been determined):
 - Morning Prayer,

Morning Prayer with Holy Communion,
Evening Prayer,
Evening Prayer with Holy Communion,
Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, or
Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion.

4. One or two days after the use of this Emergency Plan II for which permission was already given, the pastor, parish life coordinator, the minister of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, or another member of the parish staff will place a phone call (217.698.8500) or send an e-mail to the Vicar General / Moderator of the Curia that includes:
 - a. The reason Mass could not be celebrated.
 - b. The steps taken to inform parishioners.
 - c. What liturgy or prayer took place in the parish church, if any, and the approximate number of participants.
 - d. Whether or not Holy Communion was given within the liturgy.
 - e. Other information of what was said and what took place.

About *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*

THE RITUAL BOOK

1. *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* [SCAP], second edition, approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Washington DC: USCCB, 2007. ISBN: 1-57455-711-4, hardcover, bilingual in English and Spanish, two color printing, three ribbons, 432 pages, size 8.5" x 11" x 2", list price \$59.95.
2. Note that all earlier editions of the ritual book are no longer permitted for use.
3. Contents: Introduction; Morning Prayer with Evening Prayer [with Holy Communion]; Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word [with Holy Communion]; Prayer of the Faithful; Forms of the Act of Thanksgiving; Prayers of the Day for Sunday, Solemnities, and Feasts of the Lord; Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (1988); and Gathered in Steadfast Faith (1991).

PREPARING PRIESTS AND PARISH LIFE COORDINATORS

4. Present "Using *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* in Situations When Sunday Mass Cannot Be Celebrated" during the annual Clergy Convocation 2009 at a day and time convenient for the schedule.
5. Provide an overview of the diocesan training plan.
6. Discuss the expectation that deacons and deacon candidates are required to participate in diocesan training. Parishes, especially those likely to make use of an emergency plan, may send two or more lay persons for training.
7. Clarify the differences in the Emergency Plans I and II, when permission is presumed and required, and the simple report to follow each celebration.

TRAINING

8. Initial training in the diocese will take place on a Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
9. Training will take place at four to seven places in various regions of the diocese on as many dates.
10. Those to be trained:
 - a. all deacons and current deacon candidates are required to participate;
 - b. two or more lay persons from parishes are invited to participate, especially from parishes likely to use either emergency plan; and
 - c. priests and parish life coordinators are encouraged to participate, since they will be responsible for ongoing formation and oversight of these ministers.
11. The four-hour training day will include:
 - a. welcome, prayer, review of the Emergency Plans I and II, details on the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* and the supporting documents, norms, and parish planning;
 - b. Celebration of the Word of God and a break;
 - c. the practical elements of qualities of leaders of prayer, who leads and when, plurality of ministries, posture and gesture, vesture, and a particular focus on the Celebration of the Liturgy of Word [with Holy Communion].
12. Cost will cover participant materials, continental breakfast and refreshments, ritual book, speaker stipends, site use, etc.
13. Following the first year, additional and on-going training will be provided. It will be a regular part of the formation of all future deacon classes.

TEAM FOR TRAINING

14. A team will be formed to provide the necessary training.
15. The Office of the Vicar for Clergy and the Office for Worship and the Catechumenate will gather and form the team as well as oversee the training in the diocese.

DATES FOR TRAINING

16. The initial training will take place in the fall and winter of 2009-2010.
17. Four to seven dates and places will be selected.

APPROVING AND BLESSING LEADERS

18. The pastor or parish life coordinator determines the readiness of deacons and lay persons to lead *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.
19. The pastor or parish life coordinator provides additional ongoing training and formation as needed.
20. The pastor or parish life coordinator then follows this procedure:
 - a. Contact in writing the moderator of the curia.
 - b. Specify the names of deacons and lay persons prepared to lead *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* in the named parish.
 - c. For the lay persons, specify the length of time for the diocesan mandate for one, two, or three years. Deacons do not require a mandate.
21. When the diocesan mandate has been issued, the lay ministers must be blessed for their ministry in the presence of the people during a Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist. The “Order for the Blessing of Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service” within Mass in the

Book of Blessings is used, chapter 60, nos. 1808 and following. Suitable adaptations may be made. Deacons are not blessed.

NOTE

22. ***Code of Canon Law, new English translation 1999.***

CAN. 1248 §2. If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for other grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in the liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in the parish church or in another sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devoted themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families.