

## **Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office for Worship**

### **Guidelines for Preparing the Liturgical Environment**

#### 1. Some Basic Liturgical Principles Applicable to the Worship Environment:

- a. God's hospitality, a love for all people and all creation, is foundational to the celebration of the Mass. We must establish and maintain an environment in our worship spaces, and in our parishes in general, that is openly hospitable and inclusive of all people. The message of God's love is for all humanity, saints and sinners alike!
- b. The documents of the church tell us that there is a fourfold presence of Christ in the liturgy: in the people gathered, in the Word of God proclaimed, in the minister and in the Eucharist. When preparing the liturgical environment, this understanding needs to be reflected in all we do.

**"In the liturgical assembly, Christ's presence is realized in all the baptized who gather in his name, in the word of God proclaimed in the assembly, in the person of the priest through whom Christ offers himself to the Father and gathers the assembly, in sacramental celebrations, and especially in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood."** (Built of Living Stones No. 22)

- c. Liturgy is corporate action and public worship.
- d. The assembly is the primary liturgical minister.
- e. We decorate our worship spaces based on liturgical principles, not according to the latest secular fashion. We need to resist the temptation to create a décor in the worship space that is parallel to seasonal decorating in our homes.
- f. Ethnic cultural details may be reflected in the liturgical environment if they first support the liturgical focal points and the ritual action.

#### 2. Some Basic Artistic Principles Applicable to the Worship Environment:

- a. Every area of the worship space and every person who participates in the liturgy should feel included.
- b. Everything in the worship space should reflect the beauty of God's creation.
- c. Everything decorating the worship space should be of a substance, quality and authenticity that reflects a noble simplicity. No area of the space should be cluttered or dirty.
- d. Everything used to decorate the worship space for the various feasts seasons of the liturgical year should be rooted in a ritual integrity. No decoration should be superfluous. All decorations should support the ritual action of the liturgy.

#### 3. *Built of Living Stones (BLS): Art, Environment and Worship, 2007*

All who serve in the ministry of the liturgical environment need to be familiar this document from the U. S. Catholic Bishops.

**No. 18 "Churches, therefore, must be places suited to sacred celebrations, dignified, and beautiful.**

**No. 23 "Gestures, language, and actions are the physical, visible, and public expressions by which human beings understand and manifest their inner life...These human actions as well as physical objects are also signs by which Christians express and deepen their relationship to God."**

**No. 123 "The tradition of decorating or not decorating the church for liturgical seasons and feasts heightens the awareness of the festive, solemn, or penitential nature of these seasons. Human minds and hearts are stimulated by the sounds, sights, and fragrances of liturgical seasons, which combine to create powerful, lasting impressions of the rich and abundant graces unique to each of the seasons."**

**No. 124 "Decorations are intended to draw people to the true nature of the mystery being celebrated rather than being ends in themselves."**

#### 4. Five Focal points of the Ritual Action in Eucharistic Liturgy

- a. The assembly area: Remember, the assembly is the primary liturgical minister. One simple way to include the assembly in the seasonal décor is to invite them to wear the liturgical color of the season or feast.
- b. The altar – the Table of the Eucharist
- c. The ambo – the Table of the Word

- d. the presider chair
- e. the baptistery

## 5. Seasonal Character to Remember When Decorating:

- a. Advent – subdued; quiet anticipation of the kingdom; the already and the not yet!
- b. Christmas – the celebration of “God with us” revealed to all
- c. Winter Ordinary Time – the stories Jesus told and what they reveal to us about God
- d. Ash Wednesday/Lent – renewing our commitment to be the self- sacrificing presence of Christ in the world, while journeying with the elect towards their baptism; strong sense of self examination and spiritual renewal
- e. The Triduum – Three day celebration of Christ’s Paschal Mystery - passion, death, resurrection and mission; the three days run from sundown to sundown Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday evening.
- f. Easter season – 50 days of celebration of redemption; resurrection is real; we are raised to new life
- g. Summer/Fall Ordinary Time – continuing reflection on the stories of Jesus and how God is further revealed to us through those stories and through the life, words and works of Jesus Christ.

## 6. Liturgical Colors:

Advent – purple

Christmas – white (not red and green!)

Ordinary Time – green

Lent – purple

Easter – white

Palm Sunday and Pentecost – red

Corpus Christi - white

For other feasts, please check the Ordo.

## 7. Other Areas or Points for Consideration

Gathering Space – can be simply decorated to reflect the spirit and color of the liturgical season

The Ambry – be sure the containers for the oils are of quality and always kept clean and beautiful

Reconciliation Chapel – keep it uncluttered. Do not use the space for storage.

The Crucifix and/or the Processional Cross– can be highlighted with simple fabric draping for appropriate feasts and seasons

Candles/Paschal Candle – be sure they are always clean and beautiful

Area for the Musicians – keep it uncluttered and clean, especially during the celebration of the liturgy

Ritual Books – all books used in the liturgy need to be clean, in good shape and have an orderly place in the sacristy

Vestments – should be kept clean, **laundered**, and pressed

Vessels – all objects used at Mass should be of a quality and substance that is beautiful and dignified so as to carry the weight of the mystery we celebrate at Mass.

## 8. When the Worship Space is used for other Devotional Prayer Practices

The worship space is decorated for times of public worship, although it is often used for other private devotional personal prayer times. The worship space often includes devotional images. These images, if they are permanent in the worship space, should be understated and never dominate the environment.

- a. The Tabernacle – the tabernacle is never decorated or highlighted. It is the respectful and holy place for keeping the reserved sacrament for sharing at a later time with the sick and homebound.
- b. Eucharistic Adoration is a prayer form of personal choice. Its primary goal is to extend the celebration of the Mass, allowing for further contemplation of our commitment to live as the body of Christ.
- c. Stations of the Cross – does not call for any seasonal decorating
- d. Sacred Images/Marian and Other Devotions – can be decorated on specific and appropriate feasts