



Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Office for
Divine Worship
(213) 637-7262

3424
Wilshire
Boulevard

Los Angeles
California
90010-2241

CATHOLIC SCHOOL MASS GUIDELINES
Office for Divine Worship & Department of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of Los Angeles

INTRODUCTION

The sacred liturgy is at the heart of the Catholic identity of a Catholic School. The Eucharist is the celebration of the mystery of Jesus Christ, particularly His Paschal Mystery—His Passion, Death and Resurrection, Ascension, and pouring forth of the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy, God Himself acts to sanctify us, especially in the Eucharist. This sacred action is not just symbolic or ceremonial—it is the real and living work of our redemption accomplished by Christ through the Holy Spirit and with His Church. Although liturgies include ceremonial elements, they are far more than just rituals or formalities. In each liturgical celebration, we participate in sacred action that is both human and divine.

Through the sacraments such as the Eucharistic celebration (Mass), something real and transformative takes place—they not only signify the gracious work of Christ, but actually confer His grace, bringing about a necessary and profound change within us. Unfortunately, it is easy to lose sight of this reality and focus instead on the outward signs, thus forgetting the deep spiritual effects the sacraments intend to bring about.

When we gather for school Masses, we are participating in the public worship offered by the Mystical Body of Christ—by Christ the Head and all of us, His members. These celebrations are privileged moments of grace where the Church worships and gives glory to the Father through prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. The Father, in turn, bestows us with His blessings through the Word and the Holy Spirit. Most especially, we are nourished by the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of this profound spiritual reality, our school Masses should be approached with reverence, intentionality, and faithful preparation. Every aspect of the celebration—from music, environment, and readings, to the roles of students and faculty—should reflect the dignity and unity of the liturgy. Our Catholic faith is expressed by the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist. The faith of the Church is expressed in the liturgy: *lex orandi, lex credendi*—what we pray is what we believe. Thus, it is of special concern and importance that we follow the established liturgical guidelines for a faithful celebration of our Catholic faith.

“Full, conscious, and active participation” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14) of students takes place through responses, singing, bodily posture, attentive listening, sacred silence, and prayer. At the same time, interior participation is essential for a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist. True engagement requires faith, ongoing conversion, and a receptive inner disposition. Simply being present at Mass is not enough; more than physical attendance is needed to be spiritually nourished. It is through active openness to God that we are able to receive the full spiritual richness the Eucharist offers.

These guidelines are intended to support the planning and celebration of school Masses so that they may be both spiritually enriching and liturgically sound, thus helping our students to encounter Christ and grow in the life of the Church.

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Lumen Gentium, 11).

The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324).

The administration, faculty, and students are to share in a school celebration of the Eucharist at least monthly in high schools and weekly in elementary schools. In addition, school communities are expected to offer the celebration of Mass as a school community on Holy Days of Obligation when those fall on a school day. To the extent possible, staff members are invited to prioritize and participate in these celebrations (ADLA Administrative Handbook, chapter 4.3.5).

The weekly (elementary schools) and monthly (high schools) celebration of the Mass is an important part of school life. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist you in the planning and preparation for this important celebration.

PART I:

Preparing for Liturgical Celebrations at Schools

Catechetical Preparation

- Liturgy should permeate all aspects of school culture and life, especially during religious instruction and Religion/Theology classes.
- Teachers, catechists, and clergy (as needed) must help students understand the signs, prayers, and gestures of the Mass.
- Rehearsals should never replace prayer, but rather, help students feel confident and reverent.

Priest's Responsibilities

- The priest is a shepherd who cares for his flock, including students, guiding them ever closer to Jesus.
- His presence should be welcoming, approachable, and compassionate.
- The priest is the celebrant and educator of the faith and should preside with warmth, simplicity, and fidelity to the rite.
- Students see the priest during Mass not just as a person leading it, but as someone who represents Jesus Christ and helps bring them closer to God. Through his actions and words, he helps make the mystery of Jesus' love and sacrifice more real.
- The presider invites participation through a warm, reverent tone and brief, clear homily directed at students.
- The presider should recognize the general stage of spiritual development of the congregation and help them come to a deeper encounter with Christ through the liturgy.
- The tone of the presider should be joyful, warm, and encouraging while also remaining reverent.
- A mission-focused priest helps young hearts to hear the Gospel in a way that speaks to their circumstances. He actively engages with the students, making the message of and about Jesus clear, relatable, and joyful, and encouraging their participation in the liturgy. Every word, gesture, and moment of the Mass becomes an opportunity to plant and water seeds of faith, to encourage them in discipleship, and to foster a sense of belonging to the Church. In this way, he helps students not simply attend Mass, but to live the Gospel and take up Christ's mission.

Coordinating School Liturgies

- Collaboration among school administrators and staff, liturgy coordinators/campus ministers, music ministers, and clergy is essential.
- Students should be prepared beforehand, especially for readings, prayers, processions, and liturgical roles.
- Reverent postures (sitting, standing, kneeling genuflecting, and bowing) need to be encouraged and explained beforehand.
- Educators and staff need to ensure that all students feel welcomed regardless of religious background or special needs.
- Adapted liturgical materials (large print, visual aids, simplified texts) should be provided as needed.
- After the Mass, follow-up discussions in classrooms are encouraged. Example questions are: What did you hear, see, or feel? What did Jesus say or do for you? What does Jesus want you to do? Who is Jesus asking you to be? Can you imagine Jesus being your friend? What does having Jesus as your friend look like? Is Jesus King of your life? Do you know that Jesus is your Savior? Do you know that Jesus saved you? If Jesus died for us and loves us, what would our response be? Outside the celebration of Mass, how do you find or recognize the presence of God?
- Teachers and catechists should reinforce the connection between liturgy and life.

Click the link to Access a [“Check-off list for Mass”](#)

Sacred Vessels

Chalices and ciboria must be made of precious metal. Glass, wood, plastic, or even pottery are never acceptable. Inexpensive ciboria made of precious metal can be purchased through any church supply vendor. Please refer to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 327-334:

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/girm-chapter-6>

Location

If there is a choice between a nearby parish church that can accommodate the student body and a gym, please choose the church. If Mass is to be celebrated outdoors, some shade should be available to students.

Environment and Setting

- The church or worship space should be arranged to foster visibility, attentiveness, and participation (e.g., presider facing the students, dignified yet simple decor).
- Symbols should be clear and appropriate, not childish or cluttered.

The environment should reflect the liturgical season and foster prayer while avoiding distraction.

Seating in Gym/Auditorium Spaces

The use of folding chairs in the gym is preferred to the use of bleachers if the size of the student body can be accommodated in chairs rather than bleachers, and if the requisite manpower exists to set them up. Large student bodies usually use a combination of bleachers and chairs.

Sacred Music

When music is used at Mass, the following should be sung:

- Entrance Hymn
- *Kyrie*
- Gloria (Sundays, Feasts, and Solemnities only)
- Responsorial Psalm
- Acclamation before the Gospel with verse (*Alleluia* outside of Lent)
- Preparation of Gifts (Offertory)
- *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy)
- Mystery of Faith (Memorial Acclamation)
- Great Amen
- *Angus Dei* (Lamb of God)
- Communion Hymn
- Recessional Hymn

Other parts of the Mass may be sung. If drums, percussion, or amplified instruments such as guitar or bass are used, they should be subdued and not dominate the music.

- Singing is essential for engaging students; hymns and songs should be age-appropriate, liturgically and theologically sound, and singable.
- Hymns and songs that reflect the themes of the liturgy should be used.
- Refrains and responses should be rehearsed ahead of time, when necessary, to encourage participation.

Please refer to *Music Guidelines for Eucharistic Celebrations* from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Office for Divine Worship:

<https://lacatholics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Liturgical-Music-Guidelines-Oct.-2023-YP.pdf>

PART II:

Liturgical Roles

Commentator

Schools may choose to include the role of a commentator within the liturgy. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM, 105b), the commentator's purpose is to provide brief explanations and introductions to aid the faithful in understanding and participating in the Mass. These remarks should be pre-written, approved, and delivered with reverence.

Lectors

Lectors should be fully initiated (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion) practicing Catholics whose lives bear witness to the Word they proclaim. In addition, they should possess the human maturity expected of those called to serve in the Christian community. On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a baptized Catholic young person who is not yet fully initiated (i.e. no Confirmation) may serve as lector during a liturgy. Proper training for this ministry is expected. The reading of Scripture and the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) during a celebration of Mass in the Catholic Church is to be done by Catholics. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Archbishop may permit a baptized non-Catholic to take on the task of reader (ED 133, cf. CDW, Non-Catholic Readers at Mass).

Experienced lectors should proclaim the readings. It is important that lectors know how to use a microphone properly, and to read clearly, distinctly, and audibly so that all may hear and understand. If they are inexperienced in reading at liturgy, they will need to sufficiently practice in advance.

Lectors should be reading from the Lectionary and never from loose sheets of paper.

Please refer to *Guidelines for Lectors* from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Office for Divine Worship: <https://lacatholics.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Guidelines-for-Lectors-revised-January-2025.pdf>

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) is the correct name for this ministry. They should approach the sides of the altar after the main celebrant has taken Holy Communion and not before. They should not stand behind the altar. An excessive number of EMHC's should be avoided and consideration for concelebrating priests must be made.

While fully initiated Catholic adult EMHC's are preferred, the archdiocese does permit high school students who have received all three sacraments of initiation to serve as EMHC's provided they are properly trained. Training should include the necessity and importance of being in the state of grace when serving in this capacity.

Please refer to *Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Office for Divine Worship:

<https://lacatholics.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/EMHC-Guidelines-revised-January-2025.pdf>

Altar Servers

- Altar Servers should be trained and vested properly, thus fostering respect for the liturgy.
- They must be baptized and have made their First Holy Communion.

Please see *Guidelines for Altar Servers*: <https://lacatholics.org/altar-servers/>

Music Ministers

*Liturgical musicians are first of all, disciples, and only then are they ministers. Joined to Christ through the Sacraments of Initiation, musicians belong to the assembly of the baptized faithful; they are **worshippers** above all else. Like other baptized members of the assembly, liturgical musicians need to hear the Gospel, experience conversion, profess faith in Christ, and so proclaim the praise of God. Thus, musicians who serve the church at prayer are not merely students, employees, or volunteers. They are ministers who share the faith, serve the community, and express the love of God and neighbor through music (Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, 49).*

Liturgical musicians are to be attentive to and focused on the scriptural readings, prayers, homily, and especially the Eucharistic Prayer. They are to faithfully practice full, conscious, and active participation regarding postures, overall demeanor, and when making responses to the various spoken parts of the Mass. All members of the ministry of music, like all liturgical ministers, should exercise their ministry with evident faith and should participate in the entire liturgical celebration, recognizing that they are servants of the Liturgy and members of the gathered assembly (STTL, 32).

It is appropriate and encouraged that music for school liturgies include school choirs or student musicians with adult guidance. For more information on sacred music, please review the guidelines found on pages 3 and 4.

Sacristans

- The Sacristan is responsible for preparing and overseeing the sacred articles and elements necessary for the liturgy, ensuring that all members of the worshipping community can participate fully, consciously, and actively in the celebration.
- The sacristan maintains an organizational plan in the sacristy that is clean and efficient for all vessels, books, linens, vestments, hosts, wine, incense, and candles.
- A knowledgeable sacristan understands both the meaning and purpose of the liturgy as well as the needs of the gathered assembly and carefully provides all that is required for a meaningful, prayerful, and engaging celebration.
- Bread and wine must be set out along with vessels and vestments; linens must be in order, seating arranged, microphones adjusted, and books and candles appropriately placed. These are just some of the many tasks carried out with dedication by our sacristans to ensure the reverent and smooth celebration of the Mass.
- Those who serve as Sacristans at Mass should meet the following criteria for this ministry:
 - Possess sound knowledge of the Order of the Mass.
 - Demonstrate reverence for the sacredness of the Sacred Vessels and the Body and Blood of Christ by their attire and behavior during and outside of the liturgy.
 - Be fully informed about the proper preparation, distribution and disposition of the Body and Blood of Christ.
 - Understand the overall structure of the Mass and the needs of each liturgical ministry (lectors, sacristans, EMHCs, altar servers, music ministry, etc.).

PART III:

Order of Mass

From this section forward:

ES: only applies to Elementary Schools

HS: only applies to High Schools

Introductory Rites

A brief introductory explanation may be given by the commentator before the Sign of the Cross to help focus attention.

Liturgy of the Word

Scripture readings

- On all Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts, and on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, the scripture readings of the day are to be used. Some Memorials have prescribed readings. If special readings are to be selected during weekdays of Ordinary Time, please email the main celebrant well in advance. Only scriptural readings from the Lectionary are to be proclaimed at the liturgy.
- On weekdays (days other than Sundays and Solemnities) it is not necessary to have three readings; one Reading, Responsorial Psalm, and the Gospel are sufficient.
- A simplified introduction to the readings may be offered before the Liturgy of the Word.
- **ES:** Readings may be fewer in number and chosen from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, using simpler biblical texts that still reflect the liturgical season or theme. The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* should not be used when the majority of the congregation are adults (ex. First Communion Masses, Baccalaureate Masses, etc.).

- The Gospel must always be proclaimed by the priest or deacon.
- A brief, clear homily should connect the Gospel to the lives of the students, using examples they understand without diluting the message of faith.
- **ES:** A brief dialogue or reflection may be included in the homily, thus encouraging the engagement of students through questions and examples from daily life.

Book of the Gospels

Although optional, a ceremonial Book of the Gospels (not Lectionary) may be carried in the procession and set on the altar at the beginning of the liturgy. If the school does not have its own ceremonial Book of the Gospels, no book should be carried in the procession.

Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

- Through their baptismal priesthood (baptized persons), the faithful, in response to listening to the Word of God, offer their prayers to God the Father.
- Normally, the Universal Prayer consists of 5 to 6 petitions.
- Please see [USCCB “Universal Prayer \(Prayer of the Faithful\)”](#) for more information.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Students need to be actively encouraged to participate in sung responses, acclamations (e.g. Holy, Holy, Holy and Memorial Acclamation), gestures, and prayerful silence.
- **ES:** A brief explanation before the Eucharistic Prayer may help children understand the meaning of what is to take place.
- **ES:** *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children* may be used. However, they should not be used when the majority of the congregation are adults (ex. First Communion Masses, Baccalaureate Masses, etc.)

Offertory Procession

During the Offertory, “the gifts which will become Christ’s Body and Blood are brought to the altar” (GIRM, 73) by baptized Catholics; these gifts are bread and wine. Other gifts for the poor or the Church and even money may be brought by the faithful, however “they are to be put in a suitable place away from the Eucharistic table.” (GIRM, 73) In other words, only bread, wine, food for the poor, and the collection are to be included in the offertory procession. Anything other than that which will be consumed is not to be included in this procession. Dramatization that prolongs the simple offertory procession prescribed by the liturgy is not appropriate. Other articles related to the celebration may however be brought before Mass or after the Prayer After Communion for a blessing.

The dressing of an altar only takes place during the celebration of the Eucharist when the altar is dedicated or blessed (see *The Order of the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*), and also at the Good Friday Liturgy (see *Roman Missal*, no. 22). The altar needs to be already dressed before the celebration of the Mass. The altar should be covered by at least one white altar cloth (GIRM, 304). It should, at the very least, cover the entire top of the altar table and preferably hang down on either side. It may also have a hanging fringe on the front and/or back of the mesa, but this is not obligatory. It may be plain or adorned in accordance with local tradition. If other cloths are used, the white altar cloth is always the uppermost one.

Only unconsecrated hosts and altar wine are required for the offertory procession and preparation of the altar. Consecrated hosts (hosts consecrated at another Mass and reserved in the school chapel’s tabernacle) may never be used in the Offertory but may be brought and consumed at Communion time.

Sign of Peace

The Sign of Peace is a symbolic sharing of Christ's peace and a sign of unity and reconciliation within the Body of Christ. It is not a social act; it is a sacred moment preparing for Holy Communion. The Sign of Peace happens after the Lord's Prayer and before the *Agnus Dei*, so it should maintain the prayerful tone of the Mass. Students should use simple gestures such as: a handshake (if culturally appropriate), a gentle bow of the head, a smile, or a nod. Students should be taught to do this quietly and respectfully, without turning it into a casual social moment. Students should exchange peace only with those near them, without moving around, to avoid distraction or disorder.

It is completely legitimate to affirm that it is not necessary to invite 'mechanistically' to exchange the sign of peace. If it is foreseen that it will not take place in an appropriate manner... it can be omitted, and sometimes ought to be (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2014).

Music is not included during the Sign of Peace: "In any case, it will be necessary, at the time of the exchange of peace, to definitively avoid abuses such as: – the introduction of a "song for peace," which is non-existent in the Roman Rite." (*Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, 2014).

Fractioning Rite (*Agnus Dei*)

The music/choir director should be informed to begin the *Agnus Dei* when the priest fractions the host before the Invitation to Communion which begins with the words, "Behold the Lamb of God..."

Communion Rite

- Students should be catechized on the Real Presence and approach Communion with reverence.
- Students should be formed on the proper disposition for receiving Communion.
- Those not receiving Sacramental Communion should be encouraged and taught to make a Spiritual Communion.
- Teachers and staff should model reverent reception and posture.
- After Communion, allow a moment of silence or simple song to foster prayerful reflection.

After Holy Communion

The remaining Holy Communion (consecrated hosts) should be consolidated into one ciborium by the priest or deacon on the altar, not at the credence table. For high school liturgies, the deacon, a concelebrating priest or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion will then bring the Blessed Sacrament to the school chapel at this time rather than wait until after Mass. A server with a lighted candle may lead the person to the chapel. Consecrated hosts exceeding more than one ciborium must be consumed.

Concluding Rites

- A brief word of encouragement may be offered.
- *ES*: Children may participate in a simple sending forth song.

PART IV:

Final Points

Purification of Vessels

The purification of ciboria and chalices should take place immediately after Holy Communion or after Mass. Only the priest purifies at the altar, while a deacon purifies at the credence table or in the sacristy after Mass.

Special or Additional Prayers

If a special or seasonal prayer is being added to the Mass, this would normally take place at the end of the Prayer of the Faithful or after the Prayer After Communion. It is strongly recommended that all of our schools develop the custom of students reciting together a Prayer for Vocations between the closing prayer and the final blessing, or as the closing prayer to the Prayer of the Faithful. An example is as follows:

Archdiocesan Vocations Prayer

Good and gracious God, you have called us through Baptism to discipleship with your Son, Jesus Christ, and have sent us to bring the Good News of salvation to all peoples. We pray you grant us more priests and Religious to build up your Church here within the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Inspire our young men and women by the example of Saint Junipero Serra to give themselves totally to the work of Christ and His Church. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Incense

If incense is to be used during the Mass, please provide a thurible with incense boat and not incense pots.

Concerning The Pastoral Care of Oriental Orthodox Students in Catholic Schools

The demographics of our students in our Catholic schools are constantly changing. Some questions regarding the care of Oriental Orthodox students have been raised. For more information, contact the Office for Divine Worship. Please see the following guidelines: [https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-org-pastoral-care-oo-students-in-catholic-schools_\(1\).pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-org-pastoral-care-oo-students-in-catholic-schools_(1).pdf)

Non-Catholic Students attending Mass

All students are expected to participate in the communal prayer life of their school as well as in their liturgies and retreats in a manner that respects Catholic tradition. However, special care must also be taken to recognize that some students being served at a Catholic school do not profess the Catholic faith. Non-Catholic students normally attend the same religious services and activities held during school hours required of Catholic students, participating to the extent they are able. During Mass, non-Catholics are expected to follow the rubrics of the Mass (i.e., standing, sitting, and kneeling with the community), just as a guest stands for the national anthem when visiting a foreign country without any violation of conscience. Non-Catholic students are invited to join in the celebration of the Mass by their active participation in the communal responses, songs, and prayers—but out of respect for both their faith tradition and the Catholic rites, they cannot partake in the reception of the sacraments until they are baptized and have received formal preparation. Sacramental preparation programs (Penance, Eucharist, etc.) and the reception of these sacraments are reserved for Catholic students only.

The truth, especially as present within the Sacraments, is powerful in its evangelizing effect. In a faithful Catholic school, all personnel make themselves available to students who have open and honest questions about

admission into the Catholic Church. Should students from a non-Catholic background or who have no formal religious background express an interest in joining the Roman Catholic faith, their parents/guardians must participate directly in the discussion with the parish pastor and principal. If students have interest in becoming Catholic with the approval of one parent/guardian, they should be encouraged and welcomed by the school community and referred to their local parish to start the process of Christian Initiation.

Liturgical Movement

The Second Vatican Council's document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) places strong emphasis on the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy. This calls for more than mere passive observation; it encourages genuine participation, both inwardly and outwardly. The introduction of liturgical dance or movement can actually undermine this goal by turning the congregation into spectators rather than participants. Notably, in cultures where folk dance remains a strong tradition, such expressions are rarely incorporated into church worship. Where they are, as in parts of Africa, the entire congregation often participates, rather than just a select few. In Western settings, dance is typically associated with entertainment or courtship rather than worship. If your school includes liturgical movement as part of its practice, please ensure it takes place before the liturgy begins, rather than during the celebration.

Resources:

- Welcoming Children in Worship - <https://welcomingchildren.catholic.edu/>
- Parts of the Mass - <https://lacatholics.org/parts-of-the-mass/>
- OFDW Liturgical Guidelines - <https://lacatholics.org/liturgical-guidelines/>
- [School Mass Planning Sheets](#)

*Office for Divine Worship
Department of Catholic Schools*

*August 15, 2025
Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*