

Guidelines for Situations When Sunday Mass Cannot Be Celebrated



January 2014

*CONTEXT: A Task Force on Sacramental Assistance was formed by Bishop Ricken in January, 2013 to study the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, third edition, [SCAP] as well as the sacramental needs of the Diocese of Green Bay. The Presbyteral Council received a report of the Task Force and discussed its contents during the June 5, 2013 meeting. Following the review of the Presbyteral Council, the Bishop approved the following guidelines on January 14, 2014.*

It is the Church's desire that Mass is celebrated every Sunday (or the Saturday evening Vigil) in every parish. Due to the shortage of priests, there may be parishes where that is not always possible. In addition, there are occasional times when Sunday Mass is not possible for other temporary reasons.

Each parish should have people trained to lead a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest*. Those celebrations would be led by the pastoral leader, a deacon, or a lay leader of prayer trained to use the *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

Plan I – an emergency

PLAN: When an 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/website/facebook/e-mail tree to notify parishioners of the following:
 - a. Announce that Mass will not take place on Sunday (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday celebrated 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, such as local radio and television announcements, if feasible.
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. If the weather permits, and the safety of the parishioners is not in jeopardy, the pastoral leader, 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 4 below – and
 - b. if there are sufficient reserved hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion.

NOTE:

If there would not be sufficient reserved hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion then one of the options in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* without Holy Communion is used. If there are sufficient reserved hosts for the assembly, Holy Communion may be given as provided in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

4. The pastoral leader, deacon or lay leader of prayer will announce the following to those assembled in the parish church using these or similar words:

We regret that Sunday Mass cannot be celebrated in this church today since Father _____ is unavailable because of _____ . You are encouraged to travel to the next parish church, [name] _____ in [city] _____ for Mass(es) at [time] _____ .

Because of this grave situation, those who cannot travel to another place for Mass are invited to remain here for prayer, or you may go home and spend some time in honoring the Lord's Day by personal or family prayer.

If you remain here, we have permission and are prepared for 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.**

It will be led by _____ (pastoral leader, deacon or trained lay leader of prayer).

5. If the use of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* is not possible because no pastoral leader, deacon, or trained lay leader of prayer is available, then someone who is present should encourage some community prayer before dispersing, for example, the proclamation of the Sunday gospel, a song and the Lord's Prayer. There should be some praise of God on the Lord's Day, even if it is simple and brief.

6. One or two days after the use of this Emergency Plan I, the pastor, pastoral leader, the minister of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, or another member of the parish staff will place a phone call (920-437-7531) or send an e-mail to the Vicar General 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 helpful information of what was said and what took place.

Plan II – the foreseen 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 pastoral leader calls the Vicar General to discuss the situation of a foreseen absence of a priest on Sunday and to get permission to use 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. The pastor or the pastoral leader announces to the people at every Sunday Mass (including the anticipated Mass of Sunday) the following, using these or similar words:

We regret that Sunday Mass cannot be celebrated in this church next weekend since Father _____ is unavailable because of _____. You are encouraged to travel to the next parish church, [name] _____ in [city] _____ for Mass(es) at [time] _____.

Those who cannot travel to another place for Mass are invited to spend some time on that day in honoring the Lord's Day by personal or family prayer.

According to the norms 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.

If you cannot go to Mass elsewhere, we invite you to 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**

and led by _____ (pastoral leader, deacon, or trained lay leader of prayer).

3. One or two days after the use of Plan II for which permission was already given, the pastor, pastoral leader, the minister of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, or another member

of the parish staff will place a phone call (920-437-7531) or send an e-mail to the Vicar General 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 helpful 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 (English and Spanish) or [SCAP], third edition, approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Washington DC: USCCB, 2012 (English only)

PREPARING PRIESTS AND PASTORAL LEADERS

2. Present “Guidelines for Situations When Sunday Mass Cannot Be Celebrated” during the annual Clergy Congress or at another day and time. These guidelines will also be reviewed during a gathering of the Deacon community.
4. Provide an overview of the existing diocesan training plan, the course Ministry of Leading Prayer.
5. 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, especially if a deacon is not available.
6. Those who have taken the Ministry of Leading Prayer Course periodically will be asked to participate in a training update which will include discussion of this policy.
7. Clarify the differences in the Plans I and II, when permission is presumed and required, and the simple report to follow each celebration.
8. Training will be provided by the diocese.

NOTE

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.