



Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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December 12, 2019
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The liturgical season of Advent is a time of awe and hopeful expectation as we prepare our hearts, minds, and souls for the arrival of Jesus Christ. God's generous love came to life among us and dwells within us. We follow the light of Christ and find ourselves on a pilgrimage towards the same manger where Jesus enters our lives, once again, with great joy.

As we journey through Advent, on this Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe who is a symbol of strength for the marginalized, we are also reminded of the needs of others, and all those in our diocesan family who go without. The past year has seen pastoral challenges as we have been called to embrace the *poverty of our reality*, and to find new ways to turn our challenges into great joys. Some of our priests have responded to the call to serve more than one parish in the urban areas in order to be able to have priests available, as much as possible, to serve in the rural communities. This reality invites us to explore new models of ministry to provide access to Word and Sacrament, and presents an opportunity to train the people of God to assist the Christian community in the *Sunday Celebration of the Word* in anticipation of a priest.

My hope and prayer is that this Pastoral Letter will assist the Church of the Diocese of Victoria to better understand the full significance of the *Sunday Celebration of the Word*, and the unique privilege of participating in the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist (the Mass). The *Sunday Celebration of the Word* ritual marks a new step in the process of providing a form of Sunday worship for those communities without a priest.

The lack of vocations to the priesthood from our Diocese has meant that some of our communities are unable to participate in the Mass every Sunday. As a result of this need, over 130 leaders have been trained, and entrusted by the Bishop and their Pastors, to facilitate the *Sunday Celebration of the Word*. These leaders count on our prayers and support as they begin this important ministry.

The *Sunday Celebration of the Word* is a true and beautiful liturgy with some limitations, for when we receive holy communion outside the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist (the Mass) it does not make present the fullness of Christ's saving action. When a complete celebration of the Mass is not possible, we continue to gather to be fed by God's Word and by one another. In the Sunday assembly, the faithful actively participate in a true spirit of community, as well as find the opportunity to be renewed spiritually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is paramount that the people of God continue to gather, worship, praise, and support one another on their journey of faith.



The Diocesan Liturgical Commission has discerned these important matters for over a year and continues to recommend a path forward to address the present realities. The documents of the *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, including the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, and *Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours* do not include the distribution of communion on weekdays outside of the Mass. The *Congregation for Divine Worship* states, “if Holy Communion is distributed during such celebrations [Sunday Celebration of the Word], the diocesan Bishop, to whose exclusive competence this matter pertains, must not easily grant permission for such celebrations to be held on weekdays, especially in places where it was possible or would be possible to have the celebration of Mass on the preceding or the following Sunday.”¹

When a community is without a resident priest, or when a priest is absent on a Sunday and is unable to find a replacement, it is most appropriate to celebrate a *Sunday Celebration of the Word* with the distribution of communion led by trained leaders, supported by all ministries, and the parish community. **The distribution of communion in the Sunday Celebration of the Word is purposely reserved for Sundays.** This provision is an extraordinary measure as we continue to strive to keep alive a genuine hunger for the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist (the Mass). Therefore, **weekday liturgies at the churches, other than the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist (the Mass) will not include the distribution of communion.**

When a priest is absent from the parish on a weekday, praying the *Liturgy of the Hours* (Divine Office) is recommended and is most appropriate. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the *Liturgy of the Hours* is the prayer of the people of God, and it invites us to pray constantly to exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. It invites us into a deeper understanding of the Liturgy and the Scriptures, especially the Psalms. (CCC 1174-1178)².

While the distribution of communion in the *Sunday Celebration of the Word* is purposely reserved for Sundays, there is an exception for care homes and nursing facilities. We are called to show compassion, and exercise the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, to comfort the afflicted and to visit the sick. The residents of care home facilities have a right to take part in Sunday worship, and to hear proclaimed in their midst the Word of God in the Sunday readings. In this context, with trained leaders, the *Sunday Celebration of the Word* with the distribution of communion in care homes and nursing facilities would be permitted.

All our parish communities are impacted by the lack of response to the vocational call to the priesthood in our Diocese. It is imperative that we pray for all vocations with renewed vigor, to ensure that families will encourage their children and grandchildren to consider God’s vocational call to the Priesthood, the Diaconate, and Consecrated life. Those faithful assigned to lead the liturgies for the *Sunday Celebration of the Word* in the absence of a priest should strive “to keep

¹ The Roman Curia, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, March 2004

² Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2nd ed. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012



alive in the community a genuine ‘hunger’ for the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist, so that no opportunity for the celebration of Mass will ever be missed.”³

As our Advent journey continues, and we prepare our hearts, minds, and souls to be rooted in the encounter with Jesus Christ at Christmas and in the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist, may the light of Christ illuminate our way, and fill us with renewed love and hope.

In Communion,

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

The fundamental principles of the *Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours* are available in the Ritual approved by the National Liturgical Office for use in Canada (produced by the Publications Service of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Copyright ©Concan Inc., 1995).

For more information and a deeper understanding of Church teaching regarding the Eucharistic Liturgy and reception of communion outside of the Mass please visit the Vatican website at <http://www.vatican.va>

- Congregation for Divine Worship
- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- When to Celebrate?/ 4: The Liturgy of the Hours

³ The Roman Curia, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, March 2004