



Celebrant's Guides: Mass

Planning a Mass: an A to Z for the Perplexed

It often happens that a particular group – a class in a Catholic school, a prayer group, a music ministry team – is asked to plan the celebration of a Mass. Although the Church has set out rules for what options are available and what variations might be made, these rules are not well-known, and are not printed in “popular” editions of the Missal. This document is offered to help groups plan celebrations of the Mass in accordance with the mind of the Church.

The main text is in three parts:

FIRST, a note about “liturgical days”. So many of the rules depend on what kind of day it is, that it is essential to understand this before undertaking any other planning.


SECONDLY, an A-Z guide in which we shall walk through the Mass item by item, to see what is permitted. Working from beginning to end is the best way to understand the shape of the Mass, but is not the best way to plan a Mass. (The reader might usefully read [Celebrating the Mass](#), which includes a wealth of more general pastoral and liturgical advice, rather than this present document, which is geared towards preparing music and spoken contributions for particular celebrations of the liturgy. On the other hand, that document does not incorporate all the concessions for children’s Masses which are included here.)

FINALLY, we shall look at what might be the best order to plan a Mass in, using the rules we’ve just looked at.

If you have a reasonable knowledge of liturgy already, feel free to jump straight to Part Three and let that guide you to the useful parts of this document. Otherwise, read on!

Before we begin:

This document is based on the rules current for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Other English-speaking countries will follow the same rules, with a few minor variations. Most of the rules come from the 2002 [General Instruction of the Roman Missal](#) (GIRM), published for England and Wales by the [Bishops’ Conference](#) in 2005, and from the [General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass](#) (GILM), to be found in Volume I of a three volume set of Lectionaries (the book from which the Scripture Readings are read). The Bishops have published their own “pastoral introduction” in tandem with the 2002 GIRM in a document called [Celebrating the Mass](#) (CTM). There are also numbered rules (“rubrics”) within the Order of Mass which can be found from page 386 of the [Roman Missal](#) (here labelled RM-OM). These documents set out how Mass is to be celebrated in the whole Roman Catholic Church, and part of our sign of Catholic unity is not to go beyond the variations which are permitted by these rules. You will find that there is plenty of scope for creativity within the options available.

 In certain parts of the Mass, the rules allow that a “suitable minister” may speak. This allows some leeway for participation, since all baptised Christians are called to “minister” according to their ability. So at a school Mass, for instance, a teacher might give one or two sentences of introduction after the priest’s greeting, or a pupil might lead part of the penitential rite.

There is also a [*Directory on Masses With Children*](#) (DMC) which sets out special rules for Children's Masses. A "Children's Mass" is a Mass celebrated for a congregation which entirely or mostly consists of "children who have not yet reached the age of pre-adolescence" (DMC 6), who have not yet, or have only recently, made their first Holy Communion (DMC 1). So these rules apply for a Mass celebrated in a primary school (even on a Holy Day when there might be a small number of visitors from outside), but they **do not apply** to a Sunday Mass which is designated the "family Mass" and perhaps has a special Liturgy of the Word for Children in parallel with the adult service. Such a Sunday Mass may make use of one, *but only one*, of the concessions allowed for a Children's Mass, with the bishop's permission (DMC 19).

In the text, note the following symbols:



- for a Mass for adults at which many children are present



- for a Children's Mass (i.e. the congregation are entirely or mostly children).

The document also recognises that "even greater adaptations" (DMC 6) may need be made when mentally or physically handicapped children are to be involved.

Singing is an essential part of the celebration of Mass. Some parts are so important that they should always be sung. An indication of the importance of singing a part is indicated by quavers, so that ♪♪♪♪♪ indicates that it is essential to sing this part, ♪♪♪♪ is strongly recommended. On more important occasions, it would be proper to sing ♪♪♪ parts. The lower rated parts indicated ♪♪ or ♪ should not be sung unless all the higher rated parts are also being sung, otherwise your celebration is emphasising the least important parts of the Mass at the expense of the core celebration. The ratings are taken from [*Singing the Mass*](#), a document produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1997.

In general, a sung part of the Mass (except those which belong to the priest alone) should be sung by the *whole congregation*. A cantor (solo singer) or choir, if present, should **help** the congregation to sing, perhaps by singing the verses with everyone taking part in the chorus, or by singing lines which the congregation echoes.

Instrumental music, without singing, may be used during Mass, but its purpose is to cover an action taking place (usually a procession of some sort). The music is there to enrich the celebration of Mass, and its length should be chosen to cover the action taking place rather than to perform a musical piece for its own sake. Instrumental music is not to be used, however, during Advent or Lent (see below for exceptions).

Part One: The Liturgical Day

The rules about how the Church's calendar is worked out can be found in the preliminary part of a Roman (altar) Missal, from page *lxxxiv*, in the [General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar](#) (GNLYC). Fortunately, someone in your diocese will have done most of the hard work already, and the simplest thing to do is to beg, borrow or buy a copy of the diocesan directory (yearbook) for the current year and check its [calendar](#) (sometimes called an *Ordo*). If your parish or school is run by a religious order, the order may have its own calendar which celebrates its own special saints, too. There are only a few technical terms you need to be aware of:

Solemnities are very important saints' days and celebrations of the lives of Jesus and Mary. They deserve to be celebrated with all the trimmings available: incense, bells, and as much singing as possible. This is when you should sing the ♫♫ or ♫ rated Mass-parts, if at all.

The national patron saint's day is normally a solemnity, and this should be listed as such in the *Ordo*. The patron saint whom your church is named after, is a solemnity within that church, as is the anniversary of the date when the bishop dedicated the altar of the church – and because these are local to your parish, these two dates are *not* to be found in the *Ordo*. If you are choosing a date for a special service (e.g. confirmation), avoid solemnities unless the readings of the day fit – you cannot change the readings for a solemnity.

The holiest days of the Church's year outrank even solemnities, and so the notes above apply *a fortiori* to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil; Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension and Pentecost; and also to Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, Easter Week, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Eastertide.

Feasts are other important celebrations of Our Lord, Our Lady and the saints. If a Feast of the Lord (e.g. the Presentation or the Transfiguration) falls on a Sunday, it trumps the normal Sunday readings, so beware when planning Sunday celebrations! Otherwise, the Sundays of the year are more important than Feasts, and generally the music and effort you put into a Feast should be similar to that expended on an ordinary Sunday during the year. Both Sundays and Feasts deserve the ♫♫♫ rated parts of the Mass to be sung. (*Beware: sometimes the word "feast" is used in a more general way to mean "a named day", and in this context it includes both solemnities and memorias.*)

Memorias are the other saints' days and less important celebrations of Our Lady (e.g. Our Lady of Lourdes). Usually the saint gets a brief mention in some of the prayers but the ordinary weekday readings are used. Some Memorias are obligatory, others are optional (i.e. the priest is free to remember the saint or use the ordinary weekday prayers).

Feria is a name sometimes given to an ordinary weekday which has no special celebration on it.

The **Seasons** of the Church's Year are:

Advent (the 4 weeks up to Christmas),

Christmastide (from Christmas Eve night to the Sunday after January 6),

Lent (six and a half weeks leading up to Easter),

Eastertide (seven weeks from Easter to Pentecost)

The rest of the year is dubbed "**Ordinary Time**".

During the Season of Lent, the word "Alleluia" is never, *ever*, used during liturgy, and care should be taken in choosing hymns to ensure that it is not lurking in any of the verses.

On the weekdays and Sundays of Advent and Lent, being seasons of waiting, the church is not decorated with flowers, and musical instruments are only allowed when they accompany singing. Exceptions can be made on solemnities and feasts, on “Gaudate Sunday” (3rd in Advent) and “Laetare Sunday” (4th in Lent), and on “special occasions”.

Whenever you are planning a Mass, it is important to know the season and the rank of the day, whether you are planning *for* a special saint’s day, or trying to avoid one in order to celebrate a special event. If you are celebrating another sacrament within Mass, you would normally use the special prayers of a “Ritual Mass” and pick Scripture readings from a wide selection provided in Volume III of the Lectionary. But if the sacrament is to be celebrated on a solemnity, or a Sunday of Advent, Lent or Eastertide, you must use the readings and Mass texts of the day. Ritual Masses can be found from page 750 of the Roman Missal, check the particular one you are celebrating for any special rules about what days it can be celebrated on.

On weekdays of ordinary time, you may also choose from a selection of “Masses for various needs and occasions” which have both Mass prayers (Roman Missal page 789 onwards), and readings in Lectionary Volume III. Or you may offer a “votive Mass” in honour of some mystery of Our Lord or Our Lady, or an apostle, using the Mass texts found in the Roman Missal from page 853 onwards. If there is a pressing need, such Masses may also be celebrated on Memorias, and even weekdays of Advent, Christmastide and Eastertide. If a Mass is celebrated for a “special group”, any appropriate reading relevant to the group may be used, as long as it appears *somewhere* in the three-volume Lectionary (which has a scriptural index at the back of each volume). (GIRM 358)


Otherwise, the text to be read is normally the text for the calendar day given by the *Ordo*. On Memorias, the reading is that of the weekday which would be celebrated in the absence of the saint (GIRM 357), except in a few cases (e.g. St Mary Magdalene) where the *Ordo* says “reading proper”, which means that you take the reading from St Mary Magdalen in the “Saints” section of the Lectionary. Feasts and solemnities always take proper readings.


Part Two: The Mass Part By Part

A “Gathering Song” may be sung while waiting for the Mass to begin. This is not mentioned by the Missal, because it is not part of the Mass itself; it is a good way of warming up the congregation, stopping them from talking too much, or filling in time while a visiting bishop is late getting ready. Such a song would usually have a theme about gathering for worship, or perhaps a message reflecting the readings to be proclaimed.

A. The Entrance

The entrance song opens the celebration as the priest and ministers come in. (GIRM 47; RM-OM 1, CTM 140) If incense is used on solemn occasions, the altar is incensed during the entrance. (RM-OM 2, GIRM 123, CTM 141)

A1:  The Missal’s preferred option is to sing the antiphon with gradual psalm. This is a one-line verse provided in the Missal for every Sunday and feast (ordinary weekdays use the verse from the previous Sunday), used with a psalm, but most lay congregations won’t be familiar with singing psalms or antiphons. (GIRM 48)

A2:  An appropriate hymn for the entrance is one which refers to the feast of the day, to the current season of the year, or to the general idea of gathering for prayer. (GIRM 47-48)

A3: If it is not possible to sing anything at all, the entrance antiphon should be read aloud (possibly over suitable background music), by the whole congregation, some of them, a reader, or else by the priest (who may incorporate it into words of introduction after giving the Greeting: B, below). (GIRM 48)

Entering in silence is not an option for Mass. The sombre effect of a silent entrance is reserved for Good Friday.



Some, or all, of the children may enter in procession with the priest. (DMC 34)

B. The Greeting

The first part of the greeting is given by the presiding priest, who chooses one of the three options in the Missal, and then reads the Entrance Antiphon (see A3) if there was no singing or read antiphon during his entrance. (RM-OM 2-3)



Next, the presiding priest, a deacon, or a lay minister, may very briefly introduce the Mass of the day; a visiting priest may also be welcomed by a deacon or lay member of the congregation at this point. (RM-OM 2-3, GIRM 50, CTM 143)





Children present should be acknowledged with a few words of greeting directed to them. (DMC 17)



C. The Penitential Rite, or its equivalent

A penitential rite normally takes place at this point in the Mass. It may, however, be replaced by another ritual action on certain occasions, such as the recitation of psalms (when the “Divine Office” is celebrated together with Mass), or the reception of a body for a funeral. (CTM 149)

C1. At *Sunday Masses*, the priest may use a rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water. An appropriate song (concerning baptism, water, cleansing, etc.) may be sung during the sprinkling. This is particularly recommended for the Sundays of Easter. (CTM 147)

C2. The *I Confess* may be said by all present, followed by an echoed or congregational sung  “Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.” This is particularly recommended for Lent. (CTM 145)

C3. The priest may lead the congregation in a short formula, which concludes: “Lord show us your mercy and love / And grant us your salvation.” This is followed by an echoed or congregationally sung  “Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.” This is particularly recommended for Ordinary Time. (CTM 145)

C4.  Another form of the penitential rite has this structure: 

You came to do something wonderful, Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

You did something else amazing, Christ have mercy.


Christ have mercy.



You will carry on doing wonderful things, Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

This (like C2 and C3) is topped and tailed by the priest giving an invitation to call to mind our sins and giving the “absolution”, i.e. “May almighty God have mercy on us...” – but the core part above need not be led by the priest. Although it has a threefold structure, all three lines are addressed to Jesus Christ, and all three statements must speak of the goodness of Jesus, not the sinfulness of man. So *never* compose statements of the form, “For the times we sinned against You, Lord have mercy.” That’s not appropriate here. (GIRM 52) CTM 145 recommends this form as suitable at all times of the year except Lent.

In forms C2, C3 and C4 the English words “Lord have mercy” may be replaced with the Greek words, “Kyrie eleison”, likewise “Christ have mercy” with “Christe eleison”.

 The hymn, *Look around you*, is often used for this rite. Its chorus alone would be a suitable conclusion to C2 or C3, but adding the verses would be rather meaty. Used as the core material of C4, the hymn fails the test of acclaiming the Lord, since the verses speak of humanity’s plight.

  The Penitential Rite may be omitted if the Gloria is used. (DMC 39)

D. The Gloria

♪♪♪ The Gloria is sung (or at least said) on all Sundays except those in Advent and Lent; and also on solemnities and feasts, even those within Advent and Lent. It would be most inappropriate to follow a sung penitential rite with a said Gloria.

❶ The so-called *Peruvian Gloria* (Glory to God / Glory to God / Glory to the Father) is not a proper Gloria, since it is not a setting of the words of the Gloria. It may have a use as a Trinitarian hymn of praise, but its proper place is not the Gloria slot. (CTM 148)

😊😊 To help children sing the Gloria, a musical setting may be used which is not a strict rendering of the liturgical text. (I'm not sure if this stretches to include the Peruvian...) (DMC 31)

😊😊 The Gloria may be omitted if the Penitential Rite is used. (DMC 39)

#. The Collect, or Opening Prayer

♪ This is the priest's responsibility. (GIRM 54, CTM 150)

This is the first of several parts of the Mass not lettered in this A-Z but marked #. All these parts are the presiding priest's responsibility, but a planning group might offer suggestions on what is appropriate. See the notes in Part Three.

E. The First Reading


💬 This is never to be read by a priest or deacon, unless there is no lay person present competent to read it. (GIRM 59) But the person who reads it should be capable of doing so clearly.


The only words of introduction to spoken are those printed in black type in the Lectionary: "A reading from the Book of ..."; likewise, the conclusion is "This is the Word of the Lord." Nothing more is needed, or appropriate. (RM-OM 7) A well-prepared and brief word on the background of the readings, to help contextualise them, may be spoken before the reading is proclaimed. (CTM 160)


😊😊 This reading may be omitted if it is too hard for children to understand. (DMC 42)


F. The Responsorial Psalm


The whole of this psalm – not merely the one-line antiphon – is a response to the First Reading; and since it is the congregation's response, they ought to proclaim at least some part of it collectively. Psalms are the songs of the Hebrew Bible, and by nature are meant to be sung; being part of Scripture, they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and no other form of song can adequately substitute for them. A suitable psalm which can be sung easily may be chosen to replace one which is harder to sing. (GIRM 61, CTM 162) These principles govern the rules which follow:

F1.  The “ideal” form is that a cantor sings the one-line antiphon, with no prior introduction, which the congregation echoes. Then the cantor sings the verses, with the congregation singing the antiphon after each verse.

F2.  The congregation may sing the psalm all the way through. If there is a hymn based on the psalm, they could sing that, as long as it is a fairly close rendering of the psalm text.

F3.  A cantor alone could sing the whole psalm to the congregation. This does not engage the congregation so actively, but may be appropriate for an irregular psalm or one with an extra-long antiphon.

F4.  Musical variations on the option above are possible, e.g. dividing the congregation into two halves to sing alternate verses – though this would not be very effective with a psalm with only three stanzas.

F5.  The people’s response may be sung, with the verses recited.

F6. If no-one can sing any part of the psalm, it must be recited by a reader or the whole congregation. This recitation might be enriched with instrumental music. (GIRM 61, CTM 162)

G. The Second Reading



A second reading is provided for Sundays, solemnities, and some feasts. The same notes apply as for the First Reading.





This reading may be omitted if it is too hard for children to understand. (DMC 42)

H. The Gospel Acclamation

The Gospel Acclamation is a verse beginning and ending with “Alleluia”, except in Lent when “Glory and Praise to You, Lord Jesus”, or some similar formula, is substituted. (GIRM 62) The Gospel Acclamation should be long enough to cover the time taken for the minister reading the Gospel to go to the lectern.

It is permissible to use a separate book of Gospel readings, distinct from the Lectionary. Such a book is carried in during the entrance procession and placed on the altar, until the Gospel Acclamation, when it is carried in procession to the lectern. (CTM 165)

H1.  The Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. It deserves to be sung in, usually with the congregation singing “Alleluia” and the cantor providing a verse. (GIRM 62)

H2.  If an appropriate Psalm has been sung by the congregation with “Alleluia” as its response, and there is no second reading, this can double up as the Gospel Acclamation with no further chant required. In Lent, the responsorial psalm may itself serve as the acclamation. (GIRM 63a,b)

H3. If it is not possible to sing the Gospel Acclamation, it may be omitted at a Mass without a second reading. (GIRM 63c)

I. The Gospel

The Gospel is read by a deacon; if there is no deacon, by a concelebrating priest; or if there is no other priest, by the one presiding. If incense is being used, the book is incensed. If there are processional candles, they accompany the minister reading the Gospel to the lectern. (RM-OM 11-12, GIRM 59, CTM 165-166)



If the Gospel of the day is too hard for children to understand, a reading suitable to the season may be chosen from the Lectionary or directly from the Bible. (DMC 43)

J. The Homily

A homily may be given at any Mass, and *must* be given on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. It is normally given by the presiding priest, but may be given by another priest or deacon. (RM-OM 14, GIRM 66, CTM 167-169) The homily at Mass must always be given by an ordained minister, since his ordination makes him a set-apart sign (sacrament) of Christ the Teacher. (Canon Law, 767)

Unlike a sermon (which is a talk on any moral or religious subject), a homily is a talk which explicitly draws on the Scripture readings or prayer texts used at this celebration of Mass, to make its point. (GIRM 65)



Children present should be spoken to at an appropriate level in some part of the homily. (DMC 17) Or the homily should be crafted for children in such a way that adults will also learn from it. (DMC 19)



A lay adult may preach the homily, especially if the priest is not gifted at speaking to children. (DMC 24)



The homily may take the form of a dialogue with the children. (DMC 48)



Pictures drawn by the children may be used to illustrate the Homily. (DMC 36)



If only one reading was used, a hymn may now be sung. (DMC 46)

K. The Profession of Faith (Creed)

The Creed is used on all Sundays, on solemnities, and solemn local occasions. (GIRM 68) The Apostles' Creed may be used "where permitted" (RM-OM 399); policy may vary from diocese to diocese on this, but nationally (CTM 170) the Apostles' Creed is permitted on Sundays of Lent and Eastertide. If the Apostles' Creed is to be used with a congregation only acquainted with the Nicene, it would be important to provide the words in printed form.

K1. If a baptism or confirmation is taking place, the Creed is omitted in favour of the "question and answer" renewal of baptismal promises. There is no permission given in the Missal to do this arbitrarily on other occasions.

K2. The usual form is for everyone to recite together the Nicene Creed, "***We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty...***", bowing during the words "by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man". On Christmas Day and on the Annunciation (March 25th), everyone should genuflect during the words "and was made man". (CTM 170)

K3. It is also permitted for the congregation to be divided into two parts, reciting alternate parts of the Creed. (GIRM 68)

K4. 🎵 The Nicene Creed may be sung. Since it is the statement of faith made by all present, it must be a setting which everyone can sing, either all together, or in alternating groups. (GIRM 68)

K5. 😊😊 The Apostles' Creed, "***I believe in God, the Father almighty...***" may be used in place of the Nicene on some occasions, but children should be introduced to the Nicene too. (DMC 39, 49)

😊😊 To help children sing the Creed (Apostles' or Nicene), a musical setting may be used which is not a strict rendering of the liturgical text. (DMC 31)

L. The Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions, or Bidding Prayers)

The *Prayer of the Faithful* is the part of the Mass where the congregation asks God to supply particular named needs. It is not obligatory to include such prayers, but is "fitting" to do so whenever Mass is celebrated with a congregation. (GIRM 69, CTM 173)

😊😊 Pictures drawn by the children may be used to illustrate the Bidding Prayers. (DMC 36)

The text for the Prayer of the Faithful may be composed from scratch by those planning a Mass, but there are sample formulae in the Roman Missal from page 995 which may be helpful. The format is as follows:

The Prayer is topped and tailed by the presiding priest, who begins by inviting the congregation to offer prayers to God, and concludes by addressing God the Father, making the prayer "Through Christ Our Lord" or in similar words.



The core of the prayer should be read by a deacon, if available, otherwise by a member of the congregation. (GIRM 71) (In practice, at weekday Masses especially, the presiding priest might *ad lib* the core, too.)

This core consists of a number of statements – the *biddings* – directed not to God, but to the congregation, requesting them to pray for a named need. Each bidding is followed with either a period of silence, in which each member of the congregation prays mentally, or a common response sung or spoken by all. (CTM 173)

L1. Two common invitations and responses in England and Wales are:

“Lord, in your mercy / **Hear our prayer.**”

and

“Lord hear us / **Lord, graciously hear us.**”

❶ A common form in the U.S.A. (which visiting American priests should be warned is not well-known in the U.K.) runs:

“We pray to the Lord / **Lord hear our prayer.**”

L2. 🎵 It is also possible to use a sung response, such as the Taizé chant, *O Lord hear my prayer*. In this case the biddings may be spoken over a background of quiet music.

L3. Any other response may be used, as long as it is clearly communicated to the congregation by verbal or written instruction, so that all may respond together. Bear in mind that an over-long response will not be easily memorised while biddings are being spoken.

There is a prescribed sequence of intentions which should be followed in writing the biddings (more than one bidding may be included on each topic): (GIRM 70)

[a] for the needs of the Church (which includes all Christians)

[b] for public authorities and the salvation of the world

[c] for those burdened by any difficulty

[d] for the local community

To this list may be added intentions for the sick and the dead.

In preparing the intentions, *think globally*. Our Christian duty is to pray for the whole world, so, even if you are inspired by a local need, expand your vision to the world, and add the local need by way of an “especially” clause, e.g. “we pray for all who work for justice and peace throughout the world, especially members of *Pax Christi*”.

On a “special occasion” (e.g. a wedding or funeral), the biddings may be more focused on the event at hand. (GIRM 70)

❶ It is customary, in England and Wales, to include the Hail Mary before the conclusion of the Prayer of the Faithful. This is said to be due to a verbal permission, never confirmed in writing, given to English bishops when visiting the Pope in the mid 20th Century. Notably CTM 173 does not mention this custom, but does state that “the Roman Rite does not envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers” in this rite, which is addressed to the Father.

A template for typical bidding prayers, then, would look as follows:

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Presiding Priest: God our Almighty Father wants us to tell him our needs.
Let us offer Him our prayers.

Deacon or Reader: For the Church, that her members be blessed, Lord hear us.
All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: For the members of all Governments, that they may be given
wisdom to rule justly, Lord hear us. **All:** Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: For those suffering from needs X and Y, that God might provide for them,
Lord hear us. **All:** Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: For our own parish community, that we may receive the grace to grow
as God desires, Lord hear us. **All:** Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: For all who are sick, especially N, O, and P, Lord hear us.
All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: For the repose of those who have died recently, or whose
anniversaries fall about this time, especially D, C and B, Lord hear us.
All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Deacon or Reader: Let us ask Mary to pray for us and with us. *Hail Mary*

Deacon or Reader: For the private intentions which we offer in a moment of silence
... (prolonged pause) ... Lord hear us. **All:** Lord, graciously hear us.

Presiding Priest: Heavenly Father, you have commanded us to tell You our needs.
We make this prayer, in trusting faith, through Christ Our Lord. **All:** Amen.


M. The Preparation of the Gifts (the so-called offertory)


At this part of the Mass, the altar is prepared for what is to follow: a chalice, the Missal and the appropriate linen are laid out. Meanwhile, if a collection is to take place, it happens now. (GIRM 73, CTM 175-184)

① The money offered through a collection forms part of the “gifts” together with the bread and wine which will be symbolically presented to the priest. So it is wrong to send up the bread and wine first, while the collection is still taking place. All the gifts go together as one offering, though only the bread and wine are received with prayers and placed on the altar. (CTM 180)



Children may be asked to bring forward the gifts. (DMC 18, 34)

M1:  An appropriate hymn for the preparation of the gifts is one which refers to the readings just heard, the feast of the day, to the current season of the year, or to the general idea of offering gifts to God. The hymn should last at least until the priest places the gifts on the altar. (GIRM 74, CTM 180)

M2:  This is a point during Mass where it is appropriate for a soloist, choir or instrumental piece (except in Advent or Lent) to cover the practical actions taking place. The music should last at least until the priest places the gifts on the altar. (GIRM 74)

M3: If there is no music at this point, the priest *may* say audibly the prayer he would otherwise say quietly upon receiving the gifts, “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation...” with the congregation responding, “Blessed by God forever!” (RM-OM 17-21)

① The appropriate way to use the hymn, *Blest are You Lord God of all creation*, is as part of option M3: the priest sings the verses upon receiving the gifts, and the congregation responds with the chorus, “Blessed be God, forever, amen...”. If used as the hymn for option M1, we end up using a liturgical text out of sync with the action and minister it is associated with, and that’s messy.

#. The Prayer Over the Gifts

♪ This is the priest’s responsibility. (RM-OM 26, CTM 185)

N. The Dialogue before the Eucharistic Prayer

♪ Here the priest says or sings a three-part dialogue to which the congregation responds. The musical setting is given on page 402 of the Missal. (RM-OM 27, CTM 190)

The Lord be with you. / **And also with you.**

Life up your hearts. / **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. / **It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**

😊😊 The priest may comment at this point by explaining why we should give God thanks and praise. (DMC 22)

#. The Preface

♪ This is the priest’s responsibility, and always ends with a phrase indicating that we are now joining the angels in singing a hymn of God’s praise. (RM-OM 27, CTM 191)

O. The Sanctus (Holy Holy)

O1. ♪♪♪♪ The Sanctus is one of three high points surrounding the Eucharistic Prayer. It is the hymn of the angels, and deserves to be sung. It may be sung in Latin (“*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus dominus Deus Sabaoth...*”) or English (“Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might...”). The whole congregation should have some part, either by singing the whole thing, echoing lines after a choir or cantor, or at least singing the “Hosanna in the highest” after two verses by a choir or cantor. (GIRM 79b, CTM 192)


O2. If it is really not possible to sing here, the congregation recites the text.

😊😊 To help children sing the Sanctus, a musical setting may be used which is not a strict rendering of the liturgical text. (DMC 31)

#. The Eucharistic Prayer (the Canon of the Mass)

♪ This is the priest’s responsibility, but includes a part for the congregation’s response at its heart, cued by “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:”. (GIRM 778-79, CTM 186-199)


P. The Eucharistic Acclamation

P1.  This is the second of the three high points. Since there are four options permitted in England and Wales, someone – the presiding priest, or a cantor or choir – will need to start it off, thus indicating the chosen text. (CTM 195) Don't forget that if the part includes a sung "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith," you will need to make sure our priest knows it.

P2. If it is really not possible to sing here, the congregation, duly cued, recites the text.


❶ Contrary to popular belief, although there are four "standard" Eucharistic Prayers and four possible acclamations, they are not paired together. Any of the four acclamations may be used in any Eucharistic Prayer. (CTM 195)

Q. The Doxology and Great Amen

Q1.  The "Doxology" is the "Through Him, With Him, In Him..." which concludes the Eucharistic Prayer. This is part of the priestly prayer, and is only to be sung by the ordained priests concelebrating – so they need to know the setting you've chosen! The people's response is the "Amen" at the end, called the "Great Amen" both because of the importance of the Eucharistic Prayer, and because of the strength which should be given to it: this is the third and final pinnacle of the Eucharistic Prayer. (CTM 198-199)

Q2. If it is really not possible to sing here, the congregation is to proclaim **AMEN**.

R. The Lord's Prayer

 The "Our Father" is the family prayer of the People of God. It should be prayed in a way which enables everyone to join in. This means that it should NOT be sung unless there is a setting which all present know well (as might be the case within a prayer group); there may be a place for background instrumental music. (GIRM 81, CTM 201)

S. The Sign of Peace

The deacon, or else the presiding priest, *may* invite all present to exchange a sign of peace. (The invitation is optional, but the exchanging is mandatory: GIRM 82, CTM 204.) This is done "according to local custom".

❶ Neither the Missal nor the musical ratings from the Bishops of England & Wales expect that any music at all will be used while this is taking place; CTM 204 states that "the sign is sufficiently strong and expressive in itself not to need explanatory song or commentary". In practice, some prayer groups have developed the practice of singing a song about peace or fellowship (e.g. *Peace is flowing like a river*) during an extended sign of peace. It could be said that this practice is certainly not appropriate when the "rated" parts of the Mass are not being sung, nor when it detracts from the solemn reception of Holy Communion which is to follow. But there may be circumstances where it is appropriate in context.

T. The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

T1. 🎵 “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us” is to be sung by the people while the priest breaks the Body of Christ. A cantor or choir should begin the chant as soon as the priest begins to break the Host, and the normal form is to have cantor or choir alone sing the first part, with the congregation responding “have mercy on us”. (GIRM 83) Traditionally this phrase is sung twice before “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: grant us peace”, but the “mercy” phrase may be repeated for as long as it takes to break all the large Hosts, before using the “peace” phrase. In this case, a clear musical cue is needed to indicate to the congregation when to use the final ending. Extended musical settings are in order as long as the threefold repetition is included. The Latin form, “Agnus Dei...” may be used in place of the English.

😊😊 To help children sing the Agnus Dei, a musical setting may be used which is not a strict rendering of the liturgical text. (DMC 31)

T2. If not sung, the Lamb of God is said. It is not the priest’s job to begin it: it is helpful if a parish has a clear policy on who (e.g. the duty reader or special minister of communion) is to initiate it, though a leader is not needed if the whole congregation understands that the breaking of the Host is their cue.

U. This is the Lamb of God

Not to be confused with the Agnus Dei, “This is the Lamb of God...” is spoken by the priest after the Breaking of the Body of Christ is completed. (GIRM 84, CTM 208)

V. The Distribution of Communion

The communion song is an audible expression of the unity of the congregation who are now receiving the sacrament of communion. (GIRM 86) This suggests that the communion song should be sung by all present, rather than being the exclusive work of a soloist or small group.

😊😊 It is important to sing a chant now, if possible. (DMC 54)

It is important to acknowledge the distinction between a “communion song”, which covers the period during which priest and people actually receive communion, and a “post-communion song” (W, below), which immediately follows the reception of communion. Always bear in mind the logistical difficulty of how the musicians are to receive communion, if a soloist or choir and/or instrumentalists contribute to a communion song.

V1: 🎵 The Missal’s preferred option is to sing the “antiphon”. This is a one-line verse provided in the Missal for every Sunday and feast (ordinary weekdays use the verse from the previous Sunday). As at A1, the antiphon can be used with a psalm, but most lay congregations won’t be familiar with singing psalms or antiphons. (GIRM 87, CTM 213)

V2: 🎵 An appropriate hymn may be sung. Here, the song’s theme should concern communion with Jesus and/or one another. Even on a Solemnity of Our Lady, this is not the right time for a Marian hymn. Care should be taken in choosing devotional hymns to the Blessed Sacrament, that they are suitable for communion as well as adoration. (GIRM 87, CTM 213)

V3: If it is not possible to sing anything at all, the communion antiphon should be read aloud (possibly over suitable background music), by the whole congregation, some of them, a reader, or else by the priest after his own communion and before distributing communion to the congregation. (GIRM 87, CTM 213) The Missal does not mention the possibility of covering communion with instrumental music; if this is done, it does not make the antiphon redundant.

W. The Period after Communion

This period begins after everyone in the congregation has received communion.

W1. It may be spent as a solemn period of silent prayer – and this is preferable if there has already been music during the procession. (GIRM 88, CTM 215)

W2: 🎵 An appropriate hymn may be sung. Here, the song's theme should be praise of God. Again, even on a Solemnity of Our Lady, this is not the right time for a Marian hymn. But a setting of the Magnificat would be appropriate, and indeed the Benedictus or Magnificat is compulsory at this point when Mass is combined with Morning or Evening Prayer. (GIRM 88)

#. The Prayer After Communion

♪ This is the priest's responsibility. (GIRM 89, CTM 216) Note that if the W1 option for silence has not been used, the priest should say "Let us pray" and then pause for a solemn silence before continuing with the prayer. (RM-OM 140)

X. Announcements

🗨️ Announcements are properly made after the "Prayer after Communion", not before it. Beware of "announcers" jumping up during the post-communion silence! Since everyone stands up for the prayer, it is charitable to invite them to be seated again if long announcements are to follow before the blessing. (GIRM 90a, CTM 215-216, 219)

😊 😊 👤 👤 👤 Children present should be acknowledged with a few words at this point directed to them. (DMC 17, 54)

Y. Blessing

♪ The priest says "The Lord be with You", the people respond, and then the priest uses one of three forms of blessing. (GIRM 90b, CTM 222-224)

Y1. The simple blessing, "May almighty God bless you..."

Y2. A solemn blessing, in which the priest makes three statements and the people answer "Amen" to each, before using the Y1 formula.


Y3. A "Prayer over the people", where the priest makes an extended prayer (with no response from the congregation) followed by the Y1 formula.

Z. Dismissal

The deacon, or else the presiding priest, invites the people to “Go in the peace of Christ”, or “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” or says “The Mass is ended, go in peace”. The ministers then leave the sanctuary. (RM-OM 143-144)

The Missal says nothing about a formal exit procession, nor music at this point. But the use of a “recessional” hymn on major occasions is customary. Various options are therefore available.

Z1. A silent conclusion is permissible, even implied. This would be most appropriate during Advent and Lent, the days of “unfinished business”.

Z2.  An appropriate hymn may be sung. The theme may concern the season or feast of the day, thanksgiving, or the general idea of going into the world to spread the Good News or do God’s work. There’s also a tradition in the Church to mention Mary at the very end of texts and celebrations, so a Marian hymn could be sung here.

Z3. Instrumental music may be used, except on seasonal days in Advent and Lent. An organ voluntary is particularly appropriate. (CTM 225)

Part Three: Planning a Mass

There's a lot of detail in Part Two – far more than you need for many jobs. This section is meant to point you to the information you need for doing different kinds of planning. Letters in **BOLD** refer to sections of Part Two.

1. If you're a music group planning for a Sunday or special occasion

In this case, all you have to plan is music. For a Sunday or Saint's Day, check the *Ordo* to see what the day is, and have look at the appropriate readings in the Lectionary for inspiration. For a special occasion (confirmation, etc.), check the readings with the priest presiding or organising it.

Has the priest chosen which of the four possible Eucharistic acclamations (**P**) is to be used, or are you free to choose? Is the priest going to sing a setting of the whole Eucharistic Prayer (e.g. "Mass of Creation") which has matching Mass parts?

Also, note what Season you are in. Is there a parish policy for using a particular Mass setting for the season? And if it's Lent or Advent, remember: no instrumental pieces!

Good, you have done your homework and found out what is already decided for you. Now you can begin.

Let's start with the Mass setting itself.

♪♪♪♪ You need a Sanctus (**O**), Memorial Acclamation (**P**), and Great Amen (**Q**).

♪♪♪ Next, choose an Agnus Dei (**T**), if this is to be sung.

While we're on Mass parts, let's sort out the introductory rites.

♪♪♪ Is there a Gloria today? (**D**)

♪♪♪ Shall we use music in the Penitential Rite? (**C**)

Now, appropriate hymns around the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

♪♪♪ A communion (**V**) and/or post-communion (**W**) selection.

♪♪♪ And perhaps something for the preparation of the gifts? (**M**)

Next, the Liturgy of the Word.

♪♪♪ How shall we greet the Gospel? (**H**)

♪♪♪ And what is the best way to approach the psalm? (**F**)

Now go back and remind yourself of what the readings are.

♪♪♪ How are we going to begin our celebration? (**A**)

♪♪♪ Will we use music at the end of the Mass? (**Z**)

Finally, icing on the cake.

♪♪ What about a sung response to the bidding prayers? (**L**)

♪ Is a sung "Our Father" appropriate? (**R**)

A sung Creed? (**K**)

Should there be music during the sign of peace? (**S**)

2. If you're a prayer/liturgy group planning for a special occasion

There's more to liturgy than just music, and if you are preparing a Mass for a special occasion, the other two choices you have are of Mass texts and Scripture readings – see Part One to jog your memory. A lot depends on the nature of the special occasion. If it is to celebrate a sacrament or other ritual within Mass, you need to look at the “Ritual Masses” and corresponding Scripture readings. If it's for a house Mass, a prayer group celebration, a school or class Mass, etc., there's much more leeway – as long as you aren't on a Sunday, feast or solemnity (check that *Ordo* now!)

Liturgists generally don't like talking about the “theme” of a Mass. The theme of every Mass is the same – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, true Man, Son of Mary, the only Son of God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Nevertheless, each particular celebration of Mass has a “flavour” added by the choice of Mass texts and readings, and indeed the reason for holding this particular celebration in the first place.

In Part Two, five Mass parts were marked by #. These depend on the choice of Mass texts. The Collect (Opening Prayer), the Prayer over the Gifts and the Prayer After Communion come from the ordinary day of the season, the saint of the day, or the Votive Mass or “Mass for Various Needs and Occasions” picked specially (see Part One). For the Eucharistic Prayer, you can choose from the four in the Missal, two later “Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation”, or the even more recent “Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions” which itself contains four optional sets of texts and is particularly apt in conjunction with a set of “Various Needs” prayers for the collect, etc.. The choice of a Preface is particularly rule-bound and is best left to your priest!

You may also need to choose Scripture readings. If you are celebrating a special occasion in the context of a normal, scheduled, parish Mass it may be better to use the readings of the day; if, however, the Mass is being celebrated specially for your occasion you can feel freer in choosing special readings. The Missal pages for Ritual, Votive and “Various Needs” Masses all give references to where you can find appropriate readings in the Lectionary. This will help you fix the texts for **E, F, G, H** and **I**.

Having chosen your Mass texts and Scripture, you can now get on with music, in the same way as detailed above. You will also need to compose bidding prayers (**L**). And don't forget to involve the celebrating priest in all this planning!

3. If you're planning a Mass for children

First of all, stop! Ask yourself: is it appropriate to celebrate a Mass, or would some other form of prayer service be more appropriate? But if Mass is the right form of celebration, carry on by following the recipes above, and watching out for the symbols which remind you of the variations allowed for children's Masses. Also, note:



Are you going to send out the children for a separate Liturgy of the Word, or integrate them into the main celebration? (DMC 17)



Children may be invited to sing appropriate chants for the Mass. (DMC 18)



Can the children be involved in preparing the room/chapel for Mass? (DMC 22, 29)



Children can be assigned as cantor, choir, instrumentalists and readers. (DMC 22)



Readings of suitable genre can be split into parts for the children to read. (DMC 48)



There are three special Eucharistic Prayers for Children's Masses available, using simplified language.

4. If you're a Liturgy Committee doing long-term planning

Then you need to read Part Two all the way through.

Give particular thought to how you mark different ranks of day. Your parish or institution should be consistent in marking similar ranks with similar effort. For instance, do you use incense on feasts, or only on solemnities? When do you use a separate Gospel book? A processional cross, candles, etc.?

And what is your strategy for introducing different Mass settings. Could you use a particular setting, or two, for each season, to give a coherent identity?

Who writes the Prayer of the Faithful? (L)