

Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 130.2

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP)

Approved By: Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr., DD

Effective: November 25, 2024

Introduction

“The Sacrifice of the Mass is the only true actualization of the Lord’s Paschal Mystery and is the most complete manifestation of the Church” (SCAP 4). The Mass is the most perfect form of worship on Sundays when the community gathers to celebrate the day of the Lord’s resurrection.

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, participation at Sunday Mass is generally possible for Catholics, thanks to the dedicated zeal of priests. At times, however, no priest is available due to sudden illness, conflicting responsibilities, inclement weather, or other reasonable causes. In those cases, the community best gathers for prayer as provided in the USCCB’s 2012 publication, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. This celebration is always to be considered as an exception.

A Sunday service in the absence of a priest includes a Liturgy of the Word and the distribution of Holy Communion, but it differs from the celebration of Mass, in which the priest and the faithful offer the sacrifice of their lives together with the bread and wine. Those elements are consecrated and bestowed on the faithful in Holy Communion.

Alternatives for Sunday Worship

Canon law obliges the Catholic faithful to participate at Sunday Mass (canon 1247), but understands that at times this is not possible (canon 1248, §2). Still, when a priest is unavailable in parts of the diocese and other priests will be celebrating Mass in nearby parishes, the faithful should participate there.

In places where the absence of a priest causes grave inconvenience to the faithful to attend Mass elsewhere, they are dispensed from the Sunday obligation on that day. In those cases, the faithful profitably gather at church without the priest to observe Sunday worship using other forms of prayer, such as parts of the Liturgy of the Hours or eucharistic adoration.

If any Sunday Mass is celebrated at the parish church that weekend, no Holy Communion service may take place at the same location (SCAP, 15 and the Vatican’s 1988 *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 21).

If the priest can celebrate Mass on a weekday near the Sunday of his absence, the faithful are encouraged to participate. Although this does not replace Sunday worship, the practice retains spiritual value (SCAP, 12).

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Holy Communion may be distributed at Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, or Celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word, in accord with chapters I and II of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

Those who wish to provide Morning or Evening Prayer may request assistance from the Office of Divine Worship to obtain printed aids for the day.

Liturgical music should be part of every Sunday celebration, including those without a priest.

Procedures

In the absence of a priest, the preferred presider for these celebrations is a deacon. In the absence of both priest and deacon, a qualified layperson—trained by the diocesan Office of Divine Worship and approved by the pastor—presides. If the parish has no such presider, the bishop or vicar general will recommend one from another parish.

All parishes throughout the diocese are to keep a copy of the 2012 edition of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* in the sacristy.

Formation

The Office of Divine Worship trains presiders for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Pastors may send qualified candidates, preferably known to the local community. Those who complete the training will receive a certificate.

Candidates for Ministry as Presider

“All ministers carry out their responsibilities in virtue of their baptism and the delegation of the Diocesan Bishop” (SCAP, 27).

Pastors should select candidates. Those chosen are to exhibit the following qualities:

- * a close and personal prayer life
- * recognition by and respect from their parish community
- * leadership abilities
- * willingness to learn the art of presiding, the skills for preaching, and the principles of the liturgy
- * availability and willingness to lead their local community in prayer if the situation arises
- * are not in a life situation contrary to church teaching on faith and morals

Pillars of Formation

Collaborative Ministry

“The layperson appointed as lay leader of prayer should regard the office entrusted to them not so much as an honor but as a responsibility...” (SCAP, 30).

The person is to be willing to cooperate with the boundaries of ministry set by the diocesan bishop and pastor.

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The person should demonstrate willingness to cooperate with readers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, musicians, greeters and other ministers.

Prayer

“Lay leaders of prayer should be well trained to lead the liturgical rites found in the ritual book” (SCAP, 38).

Leadership formation will teach familiarity with the pertinent liturgical books, especially *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

It will assist the candidates to become comfortable addressing a congregation and leading them in prayer.

The pastor will ensure that the person is recognized by the congregation as one duly commissioned, trained and entrusted with this role.

Preaching

“Those who preach, when properly delegated, should preserve a diligence in prayer, commitment to the study of Scripture, growth in faith and careful preparation” (SCAP 33).

Formation will include the following areas:

- * grounding in biblical theology and exegesis
- * the role of the lay preacher in the larger community
- * the formation of a homily
- * practice and critique of homilies.

“In the Dioceses of the United States, the Bishops have decided that Holy Communion is permitted, though not required during such celebrations. The diocesan Bishop may decide if Holy Communion is to be distributed during SCAP” (SCAP, 41).

Liturgical Principles

Lay leaders of prayer should be formed in the rituals they may be leading. This may include Liturgy of the Hours or a Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion or any of these services without Holy Communion.

Sample announcement to the parish regarding the use of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest

“By a tradition handed down from the Apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord’s Day or Sunday” (SCAP, 1).

Honoring the paschal mystery by the gathering of God’s people on Sunday, around the sacred altar, presided by a priest, who acts in the “person of Christ,” is the most perfect form of worship within the Church (SCAP, 4) . This should be the goal of all celebrations in our churches and at all times. Catholics should hold

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firmly and be resolved to, as much as possible, participate fully and actively in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass each Sunday.

There may be occasions when, because of illness, inclement weather, or some other grave reason, the celebration of Mass is impossible, and, when it is impossible or impractical for a community to join in the celebration of Mass at a nearby church, the use of the *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* is utilized as a way to ensure that “the community still come together to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord” (SCAP, 14).

The Bishop should ensure that deacons and laypersons be properly instructed and formed in the use of the ritual. Those chosen to be leaders should possess qualities of prayer, leadership, liturgical principles and a knowledge of the ritual itself. As well, they should remember that their role is to be of service to the community in this extraordinary situation (SCAP, 30).

Since these celebrations are for extraordinary times and situations, every opportunity should be used to remind the faithful that this is not the celebration of Mass, which we, as a people, long for with an open heart (SCAP, 36).

The celebration may take different forms. The Liturgy of the Hours (with or without the distribution of Holy Communion) may be used (SCAP, 42-46) or the A Liturgy of the Word (with or without the distribution of Holy Communion) may be used (SCAP, 47-51)

The community gathered for the celebration should always long for the day when they may once again gather for the full celebration of the paschal mystery in the celebration of Mass.

FAQ's from parish on the use of SCAP

Do I still have to attend Mass if I have attended SCAP?

If it is possible to attend Mass, you should. SCAP is to be used only when Mass is unavailable because of illness of the priest, inclement weather or some other grave reason. If you attend a service of SCAP and you have no other option available, you are dispensed from the obligation for participating in Sunday Mass on that day.

The SCAP looks a lot like Mass. What is the difference?

SCAP has some similarities to the Mass, but some huge differences.

- * There is no priest to offer the sacrifice.
- * Although there may be an Act of Thanksgiving, the thanksgiving offered through the eucharistic prayer to God for having given us this sacrificial gift of Eucharist is missing.
- * The person leading the SCAP does not act “in the person of Christ,” as does the Priest, and so the sacrifice of Christ is not made present.
- * While the community is gathering, it gathers, not in the joy of resurrection, but in expectation that the fullness of the paschal mystery may be once again celebrated fully.

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Has the deacon or lay presider been trained? Is the Bishop aware and approve of this?

All those who act as presider for SCAP, whether a deacon or layperson, have been trained in the rite. This training has been extensive. Those who act as presiders understand their important role as leading a community in prayer during an extraordinary time.

The bishop has approved both the presiders and the training they received and has commissioned them in this important role.