

DIOCESE OF GALLUP

SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST

POLICY

(January 10, 2022)

I. THE NEED FOR *SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST*

The need for *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP)* in the Diocese of Gallup has been recognized for some time. Such celebrations have been used in the diocese at least since the 1990s. Because of the declining number of priests and the great distances and isolated circumstances of a number of parishes and missions in the diocese, it has not been possible to have Sunday Mass at some of the parish and mission churches every Sunday. This is an unfortunate situation. For the foreseeable future this situation will get worse. Yet it is still very important that the local Catholic communities come together on Sunday as a liturgical assembly even when there is no Priest to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with them. In this way the People of God in the local community can pray together, give worship to God and be built up together into the Body of Christ. The Sunday assembly at a *SCAP*, although not gathered together for the Mass, is strengthened and sanctified through their unity in Christ with the entire Church by celebrating the Lord's Day together as one.

The Church Universal and the Church in the United States has addressed this problem by recommending that the faithful of a community that is not able to have Mass on Sunday because of the lack of a Priest come together as a Sunday assembly and have a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest*. These are not so much liturgical assemblies "without a priest" as they are liturgical assemblies "in the absence of a Priest" or, better yet, "in expectation of a Priest." (*SCAP*, 21) The Holy See through the Congregation of Divine Worship issued a *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (Directory)* in 1988. In the United States the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy issued a statement on the matter adapted to the situation in the United States, *Gathered in Steadfast Faith (GSF)* in 1991 and a *Ritual, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP)* for these celebrations in 1994. The *SCAP Ritual* was revised in 2007 and updated for the current translation of the prayers of the *Roman Missal* in 2010 and published in 2012.

II. KEEPING HOLY THE LORD'S DAY: THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS AND *SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST*

On Sunday, keeping holy the Lord's Day by coming together in the liturgical assembly has been the practice of the Church from the earliest of days and "was regarded as essential in the life of a Christian." (*GSF*, 12) Sunday is the preeminent day for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Ideally the Christian community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist and enters into the saving act of Christ and is sanctified and made into the Church by participating in the Eucharistic Sacrifice (Mass) and receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. (*GSF* 15, 16) "By the tradition

handed down from the apostles and having its origin in the day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day, which, with good reason, bears the name of the Lord's Day or Sunday. The Lord's Day is the first holy day of all." (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106 SC; *Directory*, n. 8; *SCAP*, n. 1)

Sunday is an "indispensable element of our Christian identity" and the Sunday assembly celebrating the Eucharist is formative, creative and builds up the Church. (*Dies Domini*, 30 DD) If there is no Priest to celebrate the Eucharist with the community on Sunday, it is recommended that the Sunday assembly come together without a priest to celebrate the Lord's Day so that weekly gatherings of the people can take place and "the Christian tradition of Sunday be continued." (DD, 53; *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1248.2 CIC; *Directory*, 2,6) "Yet the objective must always remain the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the one way in which the Passover of the Lord becomes truly present, the only full realization of the Eucharistic assembly over which the priest presides in persona Christi, breaking the bread of the word and the Eucharist." (DD 53) When the Sunday assembly does not celebrate the Eucharist, the Mass, such a celebration is not a "complete celebration of the Lord's Day." (*Directory*, 2)

The fundamental point of the *Directory* issued by the Holy See was to ensure that the celebration of Sunday is done in the best possible way everywhere regardless of circumstance: "This means remembering that the Mass remains the proper way of celebrating Sunday, but also means recognizing the presence of important elements even when Mass cannot be celebrated." (*Directory*, intro) The desire of the *Directory* is not to encourage or facilitate other Sunday assemblies without the celebration of the Eucharist (the Mass), but rather to guide and prescribe what should be done when it has to be decided to have a *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

When the People of God come together as a liturgical assembly for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ is present in different ways: in the assembly of the faithful; in his Word proclaimed in the Scriptures and explained; in the person of the sacred minister (the Priest); and, above all, in the Eucharistic species, the Body and Blood of the Lord. (SC, 7) In the Sacred species the whole Christ is present substantially and permanently, body, blood, soul and divinity. The presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species is the real presence of Christ 'par excellence.' (*Mysterium fidei* 39) Yet Christ is still present in liturgical celebrations apart from the Mass.

Sunday is the "Primordial Feast Day" of the Christian Community and on this day the Assembly of the Church has celebrated the Paschal Mystery of Christ by celebrating the Eucharist from apostolic times (the Mass). (*Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, n. 4) Holy Mass is the re-presentation of the Paschal Mystery (the sacrifice, death, resurrection and glorification of Christ) sacramentally in time. It is the Center, Source and Summit of the entire life of the Church, the Body of Christ. The "Eucharist makes the Church" and nothing can substitute for nor take the place of Mass. (SC, 10; DD, 53; *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 26)

When it is not possible to have Mass on Sunday because of the lack of a priest to preside at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass, it is still important for the Christian Community to gather as a liturgical Assembly to affirm and build the Body of Christ. *A Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* assembles the community to pray, worship, listen to the Word of God, and (if done) receive Holy Communion. At the same time this reminds the Christian community assembled that it awaits and anticipates a Priest coming to celebrate the Mass with them so that they may celebrate the Lord's Day fully by actively participating in the sacramental self-oblation

(Sacrifice) of Jesus Christ, his resurrection and glorification. The Paschal Mystery is made real and accessible in time through the Eucharistic celebration (Mass). The Faithful offer themselves with Christ's sacrifice at Holy Mass and in turn are sanctified through Holy Communion (real or spiritual). The "Eucharistic Celebration cannot take place without a Priest, even though the reception of Holy Communion which they receive in this kind of celebration is closely connected with the Sacrifice of the Mass but not equal to it. Any confusion among the faithful between a *SCAP* and the Eucharistic Sacrifice is to be carefully avoided." (*SCAP*, 17) Rather, these celebrations should create in the community a greater desire of the "faithful to be present at and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist." (*Directory*, 21)

III. DETERMINING WHEN A *SUNDAY CELEBRATION IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST* MAY BE NEEDED

There are three situations in which a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* may be the best remedy to gather the faithful unable to have Sunday Mass because of the lack of a priest into a liturgical assembly to celebrate the Lord's Day:

A. Regular or Ongoing *SCAP*: The multiple parishes and missions under the pastoral care of a Pastor (or Parish Administrator) are at a substantial distance from each other and it is impossible to offer Mass at all of them each Sunday and Holy Day. There is no other priest to celebrate the Eucharist with these communities and it is a practical impossibility for the faithful of these communities to participate in Sunday Mass at another church.

B. An Unforeseen Emergency *SCAP*: This could be necessitated by a sudden illness of the priest, a death in the family of the priest, or any other unforeseen circumstances that would take the priest away from the community for which he normally celebrates the Sunday Mass. There is no other priest to celebrate the Eucharist with the community and it is a practical impossibility for the people of the community participate in Sunday Mass at another church.

C. A Non-Regular Foreseen *SCAP*: This could be necessitated by a vacation due to the priest, a planned absence for medical care or another justified planned absence. There is no other priest to celebrate the Eucharist with the community and it is a practical impossibility for the people of the community to participate in Sunday Mass at another church.

If after a reasonable effort on the part of the Pastor or Parish Administrator in conjunction with the Diocese to provide a priest for a Mass on Sunday, no priest is available given the above circumstances, the Diocesan Bishop can allow for *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* so that the weekly liturgical assembly can continue and the Christian tradition of Sunday be preserved. (*SCAP*, 10, 14; *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 162-164, *RS*; *Directory*, 24-25)

IV. Other General Directives for *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*

A. If a *SCAP* is to be celebrated, the Faithful are to be informed and they are to be given information about the times and places of other Masses in other churches. A *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* does not fulfill the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Days of precept. This would apply to areas of the Diocese of Gallup where the missions or parishes are not so far apart as to prohibit attending Mass at another church e.g. the Gallup and Farmington areas.

B. Normally only one *SCAP* should be celebrated at a parish or mission on Sunday.

C. If there has been a Mass celebrated at a parish or mission church on Sunday of a given weekend, a *SCAP* is not to be celebrated there that weekend. (*Directory*, 21)

D. Because Sunday is the Lord's Day, a *SCAP* should normally only be held on Sunday. (Solemnities and Feasts on other days would be an exception.) (*SCAP*, 15)

E. When even a *SCAP* is not possible, the faithful are urged to devote themselves to prayer individually or with their family or groups of families. (*CIC*, 1248.2; *Directory*, 32)

F. The Pastor or another priest responsible for the particular Christian community should celebrate Mass on another day of the week when possible and the faithful are urged to participate. The Pastor should also provide opportunity for the celebration of the other sacraments especially the Sacrament of Penance at a convenient time. (*SCAP*, 21)

G. The celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) should take place as often as possible at a church where *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* are celebrated with regularity. Mass should be celebrated there at least a few times per year. (*Directory*, 26; *SCAP*, 20) The Eucharist should be renewed regularly and reserved in the tabernacle where *SCAPs* take place.

IV. Authorization to Celebrate *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*

A. Permission to hold *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* on an ongoing basis at a particular parish or mission is granted by the Diocesan Bishop. (*Directory*, 24)

1. After discerning the need for a *SCAP* with parish staff and the community affected, the Pastor or Parish Administrator should write a letter to the Bishop requesting permission to hold these celebrations. He should explain the circumstances and the need and provide assurances that a properly trained Deacon or Lay Leader of prayer will lead the celebrations.

2. The Pastor or Administrator will also make it known that the community of the faithful are or will be prepared for these celebrations. This will include instruction on the differences between the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

B. Notification of the Dean (Vicar Forane) of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* when these celebrations are occasional or celebrated in an emergency situation.

1. If a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* is planned but occasional the Pastor or Parish Administrator is to inform the Dean of the situation before the celebration takes place. There should be properly trained and delegated leaders for the celebration i.e. a Deacon or a trained Lay Leader. The faithful are to be informed ahead of time and properly instructed and prepared for the celebration.

2. If a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* is celebrated in an emergency situation (e.g. sudden illness of the Priest responsible for the community), the Pastor or other responsible person will inform the Dean or the Diocese of the situation as soon as possible after the celebration has taken place. A properly trained and delegated leader should lead the celebration i.e. a Deacon or Lay Leader. To the degree possible the faithful are to be instructed and prepared for the celebration.

V. Leaders of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*

If a Deacon is available to preside at the celebration, he is to do so. If there is no Deacon available to preside, then a Lay Leader of prayer who is delegated and properly trained can lead the celebration.

Deacons

A. A Deacon is the primary assistant of the Priest. He is ordained to proclaim the Gospel, preach the Homily, preside at various sacraments and distribute Holy Communion. He is called in a special way to lead these Sunday Celebrations (*SCAP*). So when a Deacon is available and properly trained, it falls to him to lead these Celebrations.

B. When a Deacon presides at a *SCAP* he acts in the usual manner of a Deacon in regard to the prayers, greetings, Gospel and Homily, gestures, the giving of Communion, blessings and dismissal.

C. During a *SCAP* the Deacon is to use a chair other than that of the Priest which is left vacant as a symbol that the community is awaiting a Priest. (*Directory*, 29; *SCAP*, 23-24)

D. It is assumed that Deacons have been trained to lead a *SCAP* and are delegated by the Bishop to do so in virtue of their ordination to the Diaconate. They are appointed to lead these celebrations by the Bishop under the direction of the Pastor who is responsible for the community. (*GSF*, 29)

E. If possible, the Deacon is assisted in the celebrations by various ministers: Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Music Ministers, Cantors, etc.

Lay Leaders of Prayer

A. If no Deacon is available to lead a *SCAP* then a Lay Leader of prayer can lead the celebration after proper training and appointment by the Bishop.

B. The Pastor chooses candidates to be appointed to be Lay Leaders of *SCAPs*. He sees to their preparation whether in the parish or by a program of preparation established by the Diocese. After their preparation they are appointed by the Bishop as Leaders of prayer to lead these celebrations for a period of three years renewable upon review.

C. The appointment of Lay leaders for *SCAPs* is made know to the community by a commissioning ceremony according to that found in the *Book of Blessings*, “The Order for the Blessing of those Who Exercise Pastoral Service,” or a similar ceremony.

D. The Pastor and the pastoral staff of the parish or mission are to carefully discern who is chosen as a candidate to be a Lay Leader of prayer. The qualifications should include the following:

1. They should be fully initiated into the Church having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. And they are not to be in any irregular situation that would prohibit them from ministering and participating in the life of the Catholic Church.

2. They are to understand that this ministry is a pastoral responsibility and involves a serious commitment. They should be available to lead the faithful in prayer when called upon to do so.

3. Since they are to lead prayers, conduct the ministry of the Word and give Holy Communion, the Pastor should first choose from among those already commissioned to do ministry in the parish i.e. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, Acolytes, etc.

4. They should have good interpersonal skills with the expectation that they will be acceptable to the community for whom they will perform this ministry of service. They are to be already involved with the life of the community.

5. Their lives must be consistent with the Gospel. They are expected to lead an exemplary moral life; have an active prayer life; have deep respect for the Eucharist; and have an appreciation for Scripture. They should faithfully participate in the Mass, believe the Catholic Faith and respect the traditions of the Church as expressed in the worship and teaching office of the Church.

6. They must be willing to participate in training for this ministry either at the diocesan or the parish level whether this be their initial training or ongoing formation.

7. They must have the ability to lead a community in prayer and have sufficient public speaking skills. They should carry out this ministry with devotion and decorum as is expected by the People of God. (*SCAP*, 26-30; *Directory*, 31-32; *GSF*, 29-37)

E. During the celebration of *SCAP* Lay leaders are not to lead or preside in the manner of a Deacon or a Priest. They are not to confer blessings, or do introductions or dismissals as a Priest or Deacon does. (*SCAP*, 26; *RS*, 165) The appropriate actions, gestures and words for a Lay Leader of prayer are given in the *SCAP Ritual Book*.

F. A Lay Leader at a *SCAP* does not use the Priest's chair which is left empty as a symbol that the community is awaits the presence of a Priest. The Lay Leader of a *SCAP* sits with the congregation or in a chair near the faithful. "The leadership of this prayer is done best from among the faithful." (*SCAP*, 36)

G. The appropriate vesture for a Lay Leader at a *SCAP* is that decided by the Pastor or according to diocesan directive. An alb or other appropriate attire is used. A cassock and surplis is not to be worn. (*SCAP*, 24,36)

H. The various liturgical ministries involved in a *SCAP* are to be distributed among the various ministers available i.e. Lectors, Cantor, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Music Ministers, etc. The Lay Leader of prayer is not to assume all of these ministries. (*SCAP*, 28,30,37)

VI. 'A Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion' is the Normal *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* Used in the Diocese of Gallup

(There are two forms of celebration for *SCAP*: 1. *Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer* taken from the *Liturgy of the Hours* and, 2. *A Liturgy of the Word*. Both forms can be celebrated with or without Holy Communion. The following pertains mostly to the *Liturgy of the Word* form of *SCAP*)

A. In the Diocese of Gallup the normal *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* is *A Liturgy of the Word* celebrated with the distribution of Holy Communion.

B. The *Ritual Book for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* revised in 2007, updated for the current English translation of the *Roman Missal* in 2010 and published in 2012 by the USCCB is to be used in the Diocese of Gallup for all *SCAPs* in English. The 2007 Spanish edition is to be used at all Spanish *SCAPs*. Earlier editions are not to be used.

C. The proper readings from *The Lectionary for Mass* which follow the Liturgical Year are to be used at all *SCAPs*.

D. The Proper Collects (Opening Prayers) from the *Roman Missal* which follow the Liturgical Year can be used as the Opening Prayer of the *SCAP* or can be used as the conclusion of the Universal Prayer (the Prayer of the Faithful). These are found in appendix 3 of the *Ritual*. These should be used as much as possible to keep the local community in union with the prayer of the entire Church.

E. Provision is made in the *Ritual* for the “Dismissal of Catechumens” if the *RCIA* is being conducted in the parish or mission. Also, the *Scrutinies* can be celebrated in Lent. (*SCAP*, 198)

F. The sacraments of Baptism and Marriage are not to be celebrated at a *SCAP* in the Diocese of Gallup.

G. A *SCAP* is never to be used in place of a *Mass for Children*.

H. Only a Deacon may preach a *Homily* at a *SCAP*. If there is no Deacon prepared to preach, a written text of a homily from the Pastor could be read by a Deacon or Lay leader of prayer. Although a lay person can be authorized by the Bishop to preach in the absence of a Priest or Deacon (*CIC*, 766) such authorization has not been given in the Diocese of Gallup.

I. The altar is to be used only for the Communion Rite as outlined in the *Ritual*. Thus it is improper for the Deacon or a Lay leader to lead any prayers from behind the altar other than the “Behold the Lamb of God...”

J. A *SCAP* is not to be celebrated during the *Sacred Triduum*. It is most appropriate that the community where *SCAPs* are normally held join with another community where the *Triduum* is being celebrated.

Brief Bibliography

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