

Engaging Children and Teens in Livestream Liturgies

UPDATED 8/17/20

In our parishes and schools we are always striving to engage children and young people in the Mass. In our current environment, when some can only participate in Mass via livestream, and those who do attend in person must keep social distance and avoid some of the most significant ways they can participate—e.g., singing, bringing up gifts, sharing the peace, etc.—fostering full, conscious, and active participation becomes an even greater challenge. This is largely uncharted territory and we are all feeling our way. We have come to realize that this new reality will likely be with us longer than anyone hoped or expected! There is no formula for a perfect livestream or a foolproof way to engage young people from home. The following are some general considerations.

General Principles for Livestreaming

- Aim for bright images and clear, crisp sound.
- Use the space that works the best for livestreaming – that might not be the main altar in the church!
- Prepare to spend a lot more time preparing. Everything will take more time and more thinking through than it used to.
- During this time when we cannot be close together physically, try to provide an intimate and close up feeling to the Mass by moving the camera close to the action.

Limitations of technology

- Some parishes and schools have sophisticated equipment for livestreaming. Others are dependent on a phone. Know what is possible in your place.
- The technology you are using will determine, in part, what you are able to do.
- If the level of technology you have access to feels inadequate, keep in mind that technology is only as good as your use of it—so think of limitations as challenges to re-envision and re-think what you are doing and be especially creative.

Ways to engage during Mass

- “Remote preparation,” i.e. well in advance, is key. The homeroom teacher and parents can help make Mass, whether in person or virtual, a more rewarding experience by preparing in advance for a special feast, talking through the Gospel reading, or highlighting something special to look for or listen for in the liturgy. If some part of the Mass connects with the curriculum for the week, invite the students to pay extra attention to those words/rituals beforehand. Having a conversation after Mass is over, by joining in a group reflection on what they saw/heard/experienced will help create an expectation of paying attention (and a certain accountability as well). If the priest has time to put together some highlights from his homily in advance to help support this, all the better!
- Younger children might be invited to “draw something you saw during Mass,” “write down three things the priest said today,” etc., and share/discuss later with their

classmates. The class might come up with a “mission statement” or action item for the week based on this sharing which each child could hang up in their room for the week.

- If you are able to have some children present at the Mass, then having them proclaim the readings and the prayers of the faithful, lead the responses, and prepare the liturgical environment (decorations) is important. Students participating from home will feel more engaged when they see familiar faces.
- If you are not able to gather in church, consider elements children could prepare at home that could become part of the environment in the church (drawings? Items for a food bank or other collection?).
- Different classes can still prepare the intercessions, even if they can’t read them in person (or on screen).
- The Catholic Church in Singapore offers a pretty remarkable Mass for Children each Sunday – an example can be found here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgIDe0xxDWM> Notice that the first 20 minutes or so is a pre-recorded introduction to the liturgy with the active participation of a number of children. Technology permitting, different classes could be invited to prepare something like this to help the whole school get ready for Mass.

Ways to engage from home

- Encourage the whole family to participate in the livestream together with the student. Encourage them to prepare a special environment for participating in Mass from home. Set up a home altar with a crucifix, candle, flowers, a favorite statue or icon, etc. Share pre-Mass rituals at home just as you would as if you were on your way to church, to help shift into a prayerful mindset. Join in the postures and gestures of the Mass from home.
- Consider asking students wear their school uniform on Mass days! It creates a sense of continuity and normalcy and serves as a reminder of the importance of the Mass.
- Encourage singing. We can’t do this in person, but we certainly can virtually!
- If interaction/chat is possible during the Mass, consider how to use this. Perhaps inviting participants to offer their own intentions, whether during a time of preparation before Mass, or during the Mass itself, would be a possibility.
- This is an opportunity to help children and young people make the pattern of the liturgy part of their own prayer. An example I created for adults is attached – it could also be used for teens or adapted for young kids. Something like this might be helpful for encouraging quiet, internal prayer during the Mass.

More Resources on livestreams

Father Ricky Manalo, CP, a composer and theologian, has collected some examples of noteworthy livestream liturgies around the country. He also reflects on general principles for livestreamed liturgies. Some of this material might be helpful/thought-provoking:

- General Principles: <https://www.rickymanalo.org/livestream-online-liturgies>
- Walk through the Parts of the Mass: <https://www.rickymanalo.org/livestream-online-worship-part-two>

General Guidance for Masses with Children

Many people don't know that there is an official Church document on Masses with Children! Called the *Directory for Masses with Children*, it was promulgated in 1973 and includes great background and practical ideas for celebrating Masses with children and youth. You can find the text here:

<https://adoremus.org/2007/12/31/Directory-for-Masses-With-Children/>

Need help with a liturgy question? Don't hesitate to contact us!

Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy, St. James Cathedral,
Liturgy Consultant for the Archdiocese of Seattle, claughlin@stjames-cathedral.org

Jennifer Day, jennifer.day@seattlearch.org, Liturgy Office

Teresa Chudecke, Teresa.chudecke@seattlearch.org, Liturgy Office

THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY

Understanding and Praying the Mass

1 A Prayer before Mass

O God, my God,
Mass is about to begin.
You have called me to be part of this liturgy:
you want me to be here today.
Help me to enter into the Mass
with heart, mind, and voice:
with my whole self.

Around me are the others you have called:
not strangers, but my family in faith.
Help me to recognize your presence in them.
May we honor each other's gifts,
put up with each other's weaknesses,
treasure our unity and rejoice in our diversity.
As we celebrate Mass together,
may we truly become what we receive:
the Body of Christ for a world in need.
Amen.

2 A Prayer before the Liturgy of the Word

"If today you hear God's voice,
harden not your hearts."
(Psalm 95)

Come, Holy Spirit,
Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding!
Open my ears to the Word,
so that I may believe what I hear,
understand what I believe,
and love and live my faith more effectively.
Amen.

3 A Prayer at the Preparation of the Gifts

Lord Jesus,
as the altar is prepared,
prepare me to celebrate this Eucharist
with an attentive mind and a receptive heart.
Draw me closer to you
and to my brothers and sisters
in this shared prayer.

As the collection is taken,
open my eyes to the needs around me
and show me
how to share my substance with others.

As the bread is brought forward,
receive all I have accomplished this week
as my offering to you.

As the wine is poured out,
receive my failure, pain, and suffering
and transform them.

As the water and wine are mingled,
make me more like you,
so that the Holy Spirit may have room to act in me.

As the priest washes his hands,
I ask you to bless him and all priests.
Make them worthy servants of your mysteries,
and faithful ministers to your holy people.
Amen.

*May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands,
for the praise and glory of his name,
for our good and the good of all his holy Church.*

4 A Prayer before Communion

Lord Jesus Christ,
as I come to this feast of faith,
strengthen my faith in your presence.
Receiving your Body,
may I be united with you
and with all who share at this table.
Receiving your Blood,
may my sins be washed away.
In this holy moment,
I bring before you
my needs, my sufferings, my regrets;
my hopes, my thanksgiving.
As I walk towards this altar,
I bring with me those I love
and those I find it difficult to love.
As I join in this holy banquet,
I pray for all families and all nations,
that peace and unity may flow from here
to touch every corner of the world.
Amen.

5 A Prayer after Mass

Lord Jesus Christ,
you welcomed sinners and dined with them.
Today, you invited me to your table,
not because I am worthy
but because of the greatness of your love.
The Bread of Life and the cup of salvation,
your very Body and Blood,
you have placed in my hands.
May my participation in this mystery
help me to pattern my life on yours,
to empty myself of self
and serve you in others
until I gather once more
with this beloved family of yours
around the table of life.
Amen.