

Church Ordering

The character and beauty of the place and its furnishings should foster devotion and show forth the holiness of the mysteries celebrated there

For the celebration of the Eucharist, the People of God normally are gathered together in a church or, if there is no church or if it is too small, then in another respectable place that is nonetheless worthy of so great a mystery. Churches, therefore, and other places should be suitable for carrying out the sacred action and for ensuring the active participation of the faithful. Sacred buildings and requisites for divine worship should, moreover, be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities.

The People of God, gathered for Mass, has a coherent and hierarchical structure, which finds its expression in the variety of ministries and the variety of actions according to the different parts of the celebration. The general ordering of the sacred building must be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly and allows the appropriate ordering of all the participants, as well as facilitating each in the proper carrying out of his function.

All these elements, even though they must express the hierarchical structure and the diversity of roles, should nevertheless bring about a close and coherent unity that is clearly expressive of the unity of the entire holy people. Indeed, the character and beauty of the place and all its furnishings should foster devotion and show forth the holiness of the mysteries celebrated there.

GIRM 288, 294

Some Questions

- Does the church afford appropriate comfort to those who gather there for worship?
- Does the arrangement and design of the principal fittings - altar, ambo, presidential chair, font – engage with the relationship between the theological realities they express?
- Is proper space provided for the worthy exercising of the various musical ministries - choir, instrumentalists, cantor etc.

Further References

Sacrosanctum Concilium 122–129

General Instruction of the Roman Missal
288–318

Celebrating the Mass 93–106

Letter of Pope John Paul II to Artists (1999)

Spiritus et Sponsa 5

Practical Points

- Careful use of flowers, banners etc. can enhance the order of the church by indicating the key focuses of a particular celebration
- The dignity of altar, ambo, font is respected when they are used only for their intended purpose. Appeals for money, or the leading of singing, for example should not be done from the ambo, the table of the word, but elsewhere
- When a re-ordering has retained the previous high altar, but introduced a new altar for use at Mass, the old altar is not to be decorated in any special way (GIRM 303)

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Questions for Groups

1. What is good about current practice?
What concerns do you have?

4. Who is most directly involved in these matters, e.g. liturgical ministers?
What formation/information is necessary to engage them in the renewal of current practice?

2. In what ways does the documentation affirm or challenge your current practice?

5. How will the assembly be engaged in the process?
What, in particular, needs addressing at Sunday and/or weekday celebrations?

3. Prioritise the issues you have identified.

6. How will you know whether the formation has worked?