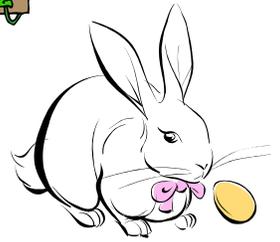




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# Guidelines for Celebrating Secular Holidays during the Liturgical Year.

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- I. General Recommendations for Environment and Art
- II. Liturgical Seasons of the Year and the Secular Holidays
- III. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This booklet is a resource for parishes and missions as you plan special celebrations throughout the year. The liturgical seasons of the year should be the guiding factor for the celebrations of liturgies. While many secular holidays fall within the liturgical calendar it is important that we are conscious of the intrinsic difference in these celebrations from the liturgy.

Certain environment, art, colors, activities, etc. are appropriate for use in the liturgical celebration. Additionally, we may include an awareness of the secular holiday to draw people into a deeper holiness. However, it is important that we maintain the dignity of our liturgical celebrations and rituals and do not allow the secular holidays to take priority.

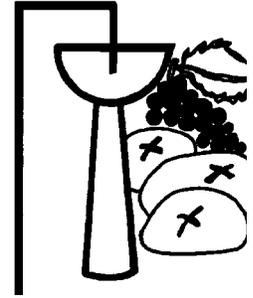
It is not essential that every secular holiday is celebrated. However, if you choose to celebrate one, please consult this guide. If you have questions about the information in this booklet or the appropriateness of celebrating secular holidays within the liturgical year, please contact the Diocesan Liturgical Commission at **903-534-1077** or **903-693-3766**.



THE WINGED MAN: MATTHEW



Issued October, 2005



## Section I – General Recommendations for Environment and Art

1. For planning of seasonal environments as well as feasts and various Sundays of the liturgical year we do not need a theme. We have a theme. It is the Paschal mystery and our participation in it. We are not decorating the Church.
2. Liturgy must make demands. To be true to itself and to protect its own integrity. Basically there are two demands that must be made: if it is not of high quality and if it is not appropriate. But this takes some understanding of these two words, quality and appropriateness. Whatever the style and type of any piece, there is no art that has a right to a place in liturgical celebration if it is not of high quality and if it is not appropriate. But this takes some understanding of these two words.
3. Quality is understood only by contemplation, by standing back from things and really trying to see them; trying to let them speak to you. Cultural habit has conditioned us to look at things in a more pragmatic (practical) way: “What is it worth?” “What will it do?” “Who donated it?” Contemplation recognizes the personal hand stamp of the artist, the honesty and care that went into the object’s making, the pleasing form and texture. Quality means love and care in the making of something, honesty and genuineness with any materials used and the artist’s special gift in producing a harmonious whole, well-crafted work. This applies to music as well.
4. Appropriateness is another demand that liturgy rightfully makes upon any art that would serve its action. The work of art must be appropriate in two ways: it must be capable of bearing the weight of mystery, awe, reverence and wonder, which the liturgical action expresses; it must clearly serve (and not interrupt) the action which has its own structure, rhythm and movement.

Because a work of art is beautiful does not necessarily mean it is liturgically appropriate; for example, Michelangelo’s statue of David would distract the assembly from Eucharistic celebration even though it might lead some to contemplative prayer when experienced within a different context.

The following questions need to be asked: Is it artistic? Does it have grace and beauty, balance in color and form – both as a single work and in its setting within the larger space? What feeling does it convey? Does it speak to the mood of the season or feast? Does it enhance the readings of the day?

5. In placing anything in the Church environment the following questions need to be kept in mind: Where will it be placed? On what will it be placed? Will it be placed on various levels of boxes or stands or directly on the floor? What will be around it, in back of it, in front of it? Coverings: What will be draped on the boxes or stands? What liturgical colors are called for? What other colors are best at this time? Color carries messages such as joy, warmth and penitence. What will the material be made of? Will it be draped, puddled, pulled taut or laid in generous folds? What feelings are you trying to evoke? What texture of material is best? Example, satin and lace are not appropriate for Lent. It just does not feel right.

6. Enter the Church and walk around. How will it look from all vantage points? Is it attractive from all viewpoints? Do not forget the presider's viewpoint. Will it be distracting? If supplementary materials will be used, flowers, plants, etc., they should be placed in the secondary positions so that they add to, but do not distract from, the major symbols. Major symbols are: the crucifix, the altar, the ambo, the baptismal font and the Paschal Candle. We are not decorating the sanctuary. Does the end result have integrity? Is it balanced with neither too little nor too much for the eye to behold? Usually the guideline is "less is better" or ask yourself is a simple, subtle feeling expressed?

You want to enhance the prayer life of the community. Begin with yourself. Does it speak to you in a prayerful way? Does it draw you into prayer? If it does not then it should not be there. Always look at the environment through the shade cast from the scriptures.

Sometimes the absent symbol speaks volumes. The absence or void may evoke a longing for the presence of that which is missing. Lenten environments are better when we start with what can we take out of the sanctuary more than what should we put in it. Lining the sanctuary with cactus and broken pots only speaks to one interpretation of a desert experience not calling the person to reflect on their own experience of longing. For many of the secular holidays there is no place for it in the Liturgy.

In general, if it is seen in all the stores as a holiday decoration it does not belong in the Church environment. These types of holiday decorations are more appropriate in the parish hall. First thought needs to be what liturgical season are we celebrating? Then does this other fit in?

7. Flags: The national flag is not a decoration in our churches. The flag is a symbol of our nation; therefore it must be treated with deep respect when it is displayed in our churches either in the sanctuary or any other part of the church.

(Memo on "Displaying the Flag of the United States in Church" from Bishop Alvaro Corrada to all deacons and priests on December 29, 2004.

For additional information regarding use and displaying the flag please refer to the bishop's document.)



## Section II - Liturgical Seasons of the Year – and Secular Holidays

### *SECULAR HOLIDAYS:*

Secular holidays explanation: In the United States, there are ten federal holidays set by law. Four are set by date (New Year's Day, Independence Day, Veterans' Day and Christmas Day). The other six are set by a day of the week and month: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day and Thanksgiving. All but the last are celebrated on Mondays to create three-day weekends for federal employees.

### *LITURGICAL SEASONS:*

The Church follows time according to the birth and resurrection of Jesus. The calendar establishes the pattern for the seasons and feasts that occur each year. It cycles between the major celebrations in the life of Christ: the death and resurrection and the Incarnation.

### *BOOK OF BLESSINGS:*

The celebrations of blessings holds a privileged place among all the sacramentals created by the Church for the pastoral benefit of the people of God. By celebrating a blessing the faithful can also sanctify various situations and events in their lives. The Congregation for Divine Worship has published the **Book of Blessings**, approved by Pope John Paul II effective May 31, 1984 in Latin. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States with approval published the English version January, 1989.

## **Advent**

(four weeks prior to Christmas - through December 24) When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. (CCC 524)



## **Christmas**

(December 25 – January 11) In the liturgical year the various aspects of the one Paschal mystery unfold. This is also the case with the cycle of feasts surrounding the mystery of the Incarnation (Annunciation, Christmas, Epiphany). Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season (General Norms, 32). The Christmas season extends from Evening Prayer I of Christmas through the baptism of the Lord.

**Christmas Day**, December 25 – This is the feast of the Nativity, the Birth of Jesus.

The most widely celebrated holiday of the Christian year, Christmas is observed as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus. Christmas customs are centuries old. The mistletoe, for example, comes from the Druids who, in hanging the mistletoe, hoped for peace and good fortune. Comparatively recent is the Christmas tree, which was first set up in Germany in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Colonial Manhattan Islanders introduced the name Santa Claus, a corruption of the Dutch name of St. Nicholas who lived in fourth-century Asia Minor.

*Christmas Ideas:* Las Posadas; simple meal with the Holy Family – grapes, bread, juice; Jesse Tree; Advent Wreath; Calendar of days leading up to the birth of Jesus; adopt a child or a family for gifts; encourage exchange of gifts with the family of homemade items or cherished items; encourage children to give some of their own toys and clothing to someone in need; focus on needs vs. wants.

*Things to Avoid:* Meal with Santa; list of wants; calendar of 25 more shopping days ‘til Christmas; don’t use Santa as a lever for good behavior.

**December 26/Kwanza:** This secular seven-day holiday was created by Black Studies professor, Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966 to reaffirm African values and to serve as a communal celebration among African peoples in the diaspora. Modeled on first-fruits celebrations, it reflects seven principles, the *Nguzo Saba*: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. Note in the bulletin that there are seven principles regarding this holiday as mentioned above.

**January 1 – Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God / World Day of Peace / New Year’s Day:** A federal holiday in the United States, New Year’s Day has its origin in Roman times when sacrifices were offered to Janus, the two-faced Roman deity who looked back on the past and forward to the future. Prayer of the Faithful is for Christian unity around the world.

*Epiphany Ideas:* Telling story of the Three Wise Men; have children or adults dressed as kings bring up gifts. Blessing of homes is encouraged. The Merienda de Reyes is truly a multicultural event. The Spaniards brought the tradition of celebrating the Epiphany and sharing the Rosca to the New World. The Rosca, oral sweetbread, decorated with candied fruit, is served with tamales and hot chocolate. Hidden inside this rosca is a plastic figurine of the Baby Jesus. The person who gets the Baby Jesus is the host for the celebration in the following year.

**Third Monday in January/Birthday of Martin Luther King** It is a federal holiday observed on the third Monday in January that honors the late civil rights leader. It became a federal holiday in 1986. In 1999, New Hampshire became the last state to officially honor the holiday. Suggestion for celebrating this day is to participate in an ecumenical celebration within the civic community.

**January 22 , 1973 Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade / Cemetery of the Innocents –** We affirm our respect for the sacredness of every human life from conception until natural death. The anniversary of the Supreme Court decision (Roe vs. Wade) legalized abortion throughout the United States. To remind the country of the price of abortion in human terms we can participate in “Cemetery of the Innocents” which is an ecumenical effort to place crosses to show how many babies are killed each day in Texas.



## Ordinary Time

(January 12 – Tuesday before Ash Wednesday) Ordinary Time is a period of 33-34 weeks that are in the yearly cycle that are not designated to celebrate a specific mystery of Christ. They are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all aspects.

## Lent

(Ash Wednesday – Holy Saturday ) This is the liturgical season of forty days which begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with the celebration of the Paschal mystery (Easter Triduum). Lent is the primary penitential season in the Church's liturgical year, reflecting the forty days Jesus spent in the desert in fasting and prayer.

The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting, almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works.) CCC 1438

### *Regulations for Fast and Abstinence -*

All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. The law of abstinence forbids the eating of meat. The law of fasting allows only one full meal and two lighter meals in the course of the day and prohibits eating between meals. In the United States, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence; all other Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence only. Some form of penance is especially encouraged on all Fridays throughout the year. Pregnant women and people who are sick are not obliged to fast. Others who feel they are unable to observe the laws of fast and abstinence should consult a parish priest or confessor.

### *Ash Wednesday and Lent Suggestions -*

No regular TV programming; watch biblical videos or lives of the saints; encourage random acts of kindness; encourage giving alms; have your family listen to classical music programming rather than regular music choice; play board games rather than go out to eat or to the movies.

### *Ash Wednesday and Lent – Things to Avoid:*

Force children to fast; force silence; no parties/social gatherings during Lent. Don't give up something and then do it on Sundays because Lent doesn't count on Sundays.

### **February 2, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord / Consecrated Life Awareness**

Suggestions for celebrating this day could be to have a special liturgy offering prayers for vocations, especially to the Consecrated Life. A focus on the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience could be mentioned and perhaps explained in a formation session. Additionally, you may prepare a booth with information on vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Also you may invite one of the sisters or priests who are in religious life to give a talk at your parish.

**February 12/Lincoln's Birthday:** A holiday in many states, this day was first formally observed in Washington, DC, in 1866 when both houses of Congress gathered for a memorial address in tribute to the assassinated president. Prayers of the Faithful for government leaders, especially president.

**February 14/Valentine's Day, St. Cyril and Methodius:** This day is the festival of two third-century martyrs both named St. Valentine. It is not known why this day is associated with lovers. It may derive from an old pagan festival about this time of year or it may have been inspired by the belief that birds mate on this day. Prayers of the Faithful are for couples married and those engaged; blessing of married couples.

*Valentine's Day Ideas:* Encourage knowledge of Saint Valentine; encourage love of one another; encourage sending blessings of God's love; random acts of kindness. Children could "prepare" a special meal or snack for parents.

**World Marriage Day** – Sunday closest to Valentine's – suggestion to include prayers for married couples; blessing of those who are married and those who are engaged.

**Third Monday in February:** President's Day (Washington's Birthday.- Feb. 22)

**March 2nd - Texas Independence Day** is one of several holidays unique to Texas and is celebrated throughout the state of Texas as Texas Independence Day. Unlike most states in the union, the State of Texas was for a short period an independent nation having been declared so by representatives sent from various colonies established in present-day Texas including Nacogdoches. Meeting at Washington-on-the-Brazos, these representatives declared Texas to be an independent nation on March 2, 1836. It is appropriate to mark the date with a display of the Texas flag in the much the same way as July 4th is commemorated.

**March 17: St. Patrick's Day.** St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, has been honored in America since the first days of the nation. Perhaps the most notable part of the observance is the annual St. Patrick's Day parade in several American cities.

**March 19: Feast of St. Joseph** As this day is a celebration of the life and death of Joseph the husband of Mary, many observe the "St. Joseph's Table." It is a solemnity of particular importance to Italians (especially Sicilians). The St. Joseph Table is a tradition where the community shares a meal honoring St. Joseph. The purpose of the table is threefold: faith, family, and community. Money is collected for the poor and no one goes hungry. Icons of the Trinity, Holy Family and other saints are included in the environment of the three tiered table. The table is blessed by a priest and children dressed as the Holy Family taste every food before it is served.

## Easter

(Easter Sunday – Pentecost) The greatest and oldest Christian feast, which celebrates Christ’s Resurrection from the dead. Easter is the feast of feasts, the solemnity of solemnities, the “Great Sunday.” During this season is also included the Ascension and Pentecost.

Easter – 50 days. This is not a time for bunnies, eggs and Easter grass. Look again to our major symbols. The placement of the Paschal Candle, symbol of the presence of the risen Christ, remains in the sanctuary near the altar or ambo through vespers on Pentecost Sunday.

*Easter Ideas:* Attend Mass together as a family; create a diorama of empty tomb; relate how new life is symbolized by different items, i.e., butterfly, egg.

*Easter-Activities to avoid:* Don’t bring “Easter Bunny” into Easter story don’t create Easter Egg Hunt as part of liturgical ritual.

**April 21st - San Jacinto Day** - On April 21, 1836, General Sam Houston led Texan troops in a surprise attack that sealed the future state's independence from Mexico. The battle took place near the mouth of the San Jacinto River near present-day Houston. Like Texas Independence Day, San Jacinto Day is celebrated throughout the state as a state holiday, and it is appropriate to observe the date with a display of the Texas flag.

**Second Sunday in May/Mothers’ Day** as proposed by Anna Jarvis of Philadelphia in 1907. West Virginia was the first state to recognize the holiday in 1910, and President Woodrow Wilson officially proclaimed Mothers’ Day a national holiday in 1914.



*Mothers’ Day Ideas:* Remember all mothers, living and deceased, in the prayers of the faithful and at-home prayers; special blessing for mothers during Mass; encourage children to be extra-nice on Mothers’ Day; encourage children to prepare a special meal or snack for mothers; encourage children to take on mothers’ chores at least for the day; reception after Mass for mothers by fathers and children. Blessing given to all mothers; rose or flower given to all mothers as they leave or enter church; flowers in front of the Mary statue placed in honor of all mothers. Another suggestion is to have a Marian Hymn at the liturgy. Special prayers may be said for all women who, desiring this gift, were never given the gift of being a mother.

Book of Blessings: This is a very important celebration in our American culture and the ritual provides a way to harmonize this celebration within the Liturgy. Taking into account the proper Liturgical texts of the day, the celebrant in the homily may choose to reflect on the gift of motherhood as experienced in the Christian family. Celebrated on the second Sunday of May the preacher may also integrate the role of Our Lady as Mother of the Church into the celebration. Another theme particularly apt for the Paschal Season is the image of the Church as Mother, nourishing us with the Holy Sacraments born of the Sacred Heart of Jesus through His Paschal Mystery. The rite as described in

the Book of Blessings should be followed, 1724-1728. Special intentions are included in the prayers of the faithful. Mothers in the parish could present the gifts. In the Concluding Rites of the Mass the prayer over the people is used, 1728. Then, the assembly is blessed as normal. It would be particularly appropriate to have a special brunch for all the mothers and/or special devotions to honor the mother of God with a Liturgy of Word, the Litany of Our Lady and some Marian Hymns.

*Reminder:* Do not turn the Sunday liturgy into a mother's day celebration. The Sunday liturgy takes precedence.

## **Ordinary Time**

(Pentecost – first Sunday of Advent) Ordinary Time is a period of 33-34 weeks that are in the yearly cycle that are not designated to celebrate a specific mystery of Christ. They are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all aspects

**May 5 – Cinco de Mayo** – commemorates the victory of the Mexicans over the French army at the Battle of the Puebla in 1862. This holiday has become popular along the U.S. Mexican border and in areas of large Mexican heritage. It is a celebration of Mexican culture of food, music, beverage, and customs unique to Mexico.

**Last Monday in May/Memorial Day** since 1971. From 1868 to 1970 it was celebrated on May 30 and was called Decoration Day for part of that time. Memorial Day became a federal holiday in 1971 that is observed on the last Monday in May. It originated in 1868 when Union General John A. Logan designated a day in which the graves of Civil War soldiers would be decorated. Originally known as Decoration Day, the holiday was changed to Memorial Day within twenty years becoming a holiday dedicated to the memory of all war dead. Prayers are for all who have died serving our country. Mass may be celebrated in cemeteries. Display of the flag is encouraged. (See Section I: Guidelines for Environment and Art, # 7 on the Use of Flags)

BOOK OF BLESSINGS: The celebration of Mass on this day should be strongly encouraged with the texts of the Mass chosen from the Masses of the Dead in the Roman Missal. Appropriate music and hymns should be chosen that express Paschal faith. As part of the entrance procession the national colors may be carried by the Knights of Columbus or the military or any civic authority. It would be appropriate to have military or ex-military practicing Catholics to serve as ministers of the Liturgy. Special intercessions should be used for the Mass, which takes into account present circumstances and suffrage for the faithful departed. The procession with the gifts should include veterans and spouses. At the recessional, patriotic hymns could be sung. In the Narthex a place could be decorated with photographs, flowers, candles and perhaps a Book of the Dead, those who have fallen in battle.

**Santacruzán - held in the month of May**, is celebrated in honor of the Blessed Virgin and commemorates the finding of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem by Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. A unique part of Philippine culture in a colorful religious and folk celebration, the Santacruzán is one of the most festive and colorful festivals in the Philippines. This celebration includes a Mass, a parade of Filipino attire, Filipino folk dances and songs, and oftentimes of a Queen.

**June 14/Flag Day:** This day commemorates the adoption by the Continental Congress on June 14, 1777 of the stars and stripes as the U.S. flag. Although it is a legal holiday only in Pennsylvania, President Truman, on August 3, 1949, signed a bill requesting the president to call for its observance each year by proclamation. (Refer to Section I: Guidelines for Environment and Art. # 7 – Use of Flags.)

**June 19<sup>th</sup> – Juneteenth :** Signing of the emancipation proclamation. This is celebrated in many cities in our diocese. President Abraham Lincoln signed the document that prohibited anyone from being made a slave.

**Third Sunday in June/Fathers' Day:** The exact origin of the holiday is not clear, but it was first celebrated June 19, 1910, in Spokane, Washington. In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed a proclamation making Fathers' Day official. Blessing is given to all fathers; prayers for all fathers and those who have died; flowers in front of the St. Joseph statue (if they have one) for all fathers who have died.

Book of Blessings: Again, this is an important day in our culture. The Liturgy invites us to celebrate this day in a similar way to Mothers' Day. Preaching could be focused on the way Jesus reveals God as Father or attention could be paid to Saint Joseph, the foster father and protector of Jesus on earth. The rite described in the Book of Blessings is followed, 1729-1733. This takes the same form as Mothers' Day intentions in the prayers of the faithful; fathers present the gifts and a special prayer over the people, 1733. Special devotions could be held in honor of Saint Joseph and/or a special meal for the Fathers. Spiritual fathers should also enjoy the day.

**July 4/United States of America Independence Day:** the day of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, celebrated in all states and territories. The observance began the next year in Philadelphia. Prayers are given in thanksgiving for our freedom; bulletin note explaining the holiday. There is a special Mass in the missal for this day. It is important that the identity of our country was founded on one nation under God. (Refer to Section I Guidelines # 7 on the Use of Flags.)

BOOK OF BLESSINGS: The celebration of the Mass should be strongly encouraged on this day with the texts chosen from the section "Masses for various needs" in the Roman Missal. Appropriate texts include: Mass for Development of Peoples and Mass for Peace and Justice. Appropriate music is chosen. GIRM 37, 47-48, 86-87. In the intercessions, thanksgiving should be made as well as prayer for those who seek to serve our nation through civic service. At the recessional, it is fitting that a patriotic hymn be sung. The Pledge of Allegiance could be recited also.

**First Monday in September/Labor Day:** This is a federal holiday observed the first Monday in September. Labor Day was first celebrated in New York in 1882 under the sponsorship of the Central Labor Union following the suggestion of Peter J. McGuire of the Knights of Labor that the day be set aside in honor of labor. Prayers are made for all those who are unemployed; quote in the bulletin or reference to *Rerum Novarum*.

### **Sunday after Labor Day/Grandparents' Day**

**September 11/Anniversary of the tragic events on 09/11/01** Twin towers in New York City were destroyed when terrorists flew planes into the buildings. Additionally, another aircraft manned by terrorists was crashed. Thousands of people died that day. Refer to the Ordo page 211 for a Blue Mass on October 11 – on the one month following the 9/11 attack to pray for our military.

**Second Monday in October/Columbus Day** (federal holiday since 1971) that commemorates Christopher Columbus' landing in the New World in 1492. This day is also the beginning of the Evangelization of the Americas.

**October 31/Halloween, Eve of All Saints' Day** - formerly called All Hallows Eve and Hallowmass. Halloween is traditionally associated in some countries with customs such as bonfires, masquerading and the telling of ghost stories. These are old Celtic practices marking the beginning of winter.

*Halloween Ideas:* Parade of saints; history of patron saint; family gatherings; encourage creativity in costuming away from culture of death (death is not funny).

*Halloween Activities to Avoid:* Avoid profaning religious symbols. Don't bring pagan symbols into the liturgical celebrations.



**Tuesday on or after November 2/Election Day.** Since 1845, by act of Congress, the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is the date for choosing presidential electors. State elections are also generally held on this day. Prayers for the government leaders.

**November 2, Feast of All Souls / Day of the Dead / Dia de los Muertos** – This day commemorates those who have died. Many celebrate with visits to the cemetery and remembrances of dead ancestors with sharing of food and sweets. Mass may be celebrated at cemeteries.

**November 11/Veterans' Day** is to honor all men and women who have served America in its armed forces. Prayers for those who have died and those who are serving in the military; blessing of families – have them stand who have loved ones in the military.

BOOK OF BLESSINGS: The celebration of Mass on this day should be strongly encouraged with the texts of the Mass chosen from the Masses of the Dead in the Roman Missal. Appropriate music and hymns should be chosen that express Paschal faith. As part of the entrance procession the national colors may be carried by the Knights of

Columbus or the military or any civic authority. It would be appropriate to have military or ex-military practicing Catholics to serve as ministers of the Liturgy. Special intercessions should be used for the Mass, which takes into account present circumstances and suffrage for the faithful departed. The procession with the gifts should include veterans and spouses. At the recessional, patriotic hymns could be sung. In the Narthex a place could be decorated with photographs, flowers, candles and perhaps a Book of the Dead, those who have fallen in battle.

**Fourth Thursday in November/Thanksgiving Day:** A federal holiday observed the fourth Thursday in November by act of Congress (1941), it was the first such national proclamation issued by President Lincoln in 1863. Scholars point out that days of thanks stem from ancient times. Prayers for all those blessings God has given us in thanksgiving.



BOOK OF BLESSINGS: This is a secular holiday with profound religious significance. The highest act of Christian Worship is to give thanks through the Eucharist. This day is celebrated on a Thursday, the day the Mass was instituted. It is celebrated through the ritual of a shared meal. The Eucharist, in essence a sacrifice, is in the form of a meal. Thanksgiving in love is the primary attitude of the Christian. So, it is not surprising that this feast has proper texts in the Roman Missal. The celebration of Mass is most appropriate to celebrate this feast. In addition to the proper texts in the Missal, the Book of Blessings provides a blessing for this day 1755-1780. Options are given for within Mass, during a Liturgy of the Word and a simple rite. Each can be adapted for whatever celebration. After the Homily of the Mass, the intercessions follow and then the prayer of blessing over the food and drink, 1760-1761. The Liturgy of the Eucharist has a proper preface. After Mass it may be an idea to have a special fellowship snack or meal together.

### Section III - Frequently Asked Questions on Guidelines for Secular Holidays

*Is there a list of appropriate things to use and not use for art and environment for the different liturgical seasons/secular holidays?*

No. This is where you want to enlist some professional help. Unfortunately there are not a black and white answers to many questions of art and environment for the liturgy. There are of course basic principals. Look back over Section I - General Recommendations for Environment and Art.

*What do we do if the Fire code won't allow "real" Christmas Trees (i.e. a cut tree) in the sanctuary?*

Christmas Trees are not liturgical symbols. The evergreen tree is a symbol of life in an otherwise barren part of the secular year. So any ever green tree, not just a pine tree, with lights could be substituted. Examples: Holly or Magnolia in pots can be used with Christmas tree lights. Christmas is the season of light and life, not a season of pines.

*Aren't poinsettias required as part of the "decoration" for Christmas?*

In our homes and offices, Maybe! At least in our neck of the woods. In our Churches, they are not required. They are used mainly because they are one of the few colorful flowering plants at this time of the year, poinsettias certainly can be used. The real problem comes in when we use them too much. Burying our major liturgical symbols, such as the altar and font, in a sea of flowers, does not point to Christ in Christmas.

*Can a "different" color altar cloth be used?*

GIRM #304 It clearly states that "The uppermost cloth covering the *mensa* (i.e., the altar cloth itself) is always white in color." The very flat top of the altar is the *mensa*. It goes on to say that in the Diocese of the United States of America, other cloths such as Jacobean Frontals may be in other colors. The materials used on the altar should be of high quality and foster the sense of the liturgical season.

*When should Holy Water be removed from the Fonts?*

Holy Water is a reminder of Baptism and should NOT be removed from the fonts before the end of the Holy Thursday liturgy (see Ordo). It would then be replaced with new Easter water after the Vigil Mass of Easter. The idea of removing Holy Water throughout Lent is not proper theologically nor liturgically, and is not to be done.

*Can a crucifix be used on Good Friday:*

Either a cross or a crucifix maybe used for veneration on Good Friday. Only one cross should be used, and it should be noble. That is while not ornate, it should be of high quality so as to inspire reverence. It should be of significant size to be readily seen and easily venerated.

*Why are live plants and flowers considered “better” than silk?*

Remember, it is about creating an environment for prayer, it is NOT about decorating. This is really a question of *genuineness*. Every word, gesture, movement and object must be real in the sense that it is our own. It must come from a deep understanding of ourselves and what we are about. It should not be careless, phony, or counterfeit. The Paschal Mystery is about living, dying, and rising.

*Do we have to use broken pots, sand and cactus for the liturgical environment for Lent?*

No. We do not have to create a diorama of a desert! The environment should call them to this through the scriptures. Not tell them it is a “desert”!! Keep it simple. A single cross with Lenten Purple fabric. Even though we don’t have flowers during Lent, we don’t have to replace them with “something!” Lent is about the reality that something is missing...the season calls each of us to seek out what is missing in our own journey to holiness. The Lenten environment for the liturgical space might be created by looking at what to take “out” of the sanctuary and not placing more items there. Having people reflect on what they need to take “out” of their lives. What is missing from their lives is their desert experience. It is different for everyone. You can’t spell it out for them. If items are used, please take time to READ the SCRIPTURES and prayerfully reflect before you DO anything. Think of using items that are already symbols used in the liturgy on Ash Wednesday or Holy Thursday, such as ashes, a bowl and pitcher (maybe the ones that will be used for Holy Thursday.) See GIRM #305 and it briefly states about flowers and musical instruments in the Ordo pg 51.

*Is it appropriate to carry other “things” up in the offertory procession?*

Please refer to GIRM #73. “At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ’s Body and Blood, are brought to the altar” “It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful.” “It is well also that money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received.” On a regular basis the bread and wine and collection are all that should be in the offertory procession at the Liturgy. Masses for special occasions such as Saints Feasts days, Vacation Bible school, or end of the year Faith Formation may have an item that represents the work of that community brought forward. Masses during May for our Blessed Mother might have flowers presented to Mary, but this type of thing would not be done on an ongoing basis throughout the year.