

## **ENVIRONMENT AND LITURGY AT GOOD SHEPHERD**

### **Physical Environment**

The architectural design of a building creates a structure for its interior environment. Our church is completely in the round emphasizing the unity and inclusion of the assembled community. The Tabernacle for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is in a separate Eucharistic Chapel near the Marian Garden instead of the nave of the church. Our having a separate Eucharistic Chapel is in harmony with the ancient and venerable tradition found in the four great basilicas of Rome: St. Peter, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major and St. Paul outside the wall. These oldest of Catholic Churches have separate Eucharistic Chapels and an open space in the nave with no permanent seating or kneelers. This kind of interior environment allows for holding appropriate functions in the church space outside of the Masses while respecting the Blessed Sacrament in a separate sacred space. It also allows us to meet, greet and welcome others in the assembly as we gather in community before Masses. Good Shepherd parish is known for being a warm and welcoming community. Before Mass we speak with one another in an appropriate and respectful manner. Persons who desire time for private prayer before Mass are encouraged to go to the Eucharistic Chapel or to the Daily Chapel which are designated for silent personal prayer. When Mass begins there is seating in the main church with the possible exception of Christmas and Easter.

### **Liturgy**

We bow from the waist to the Altar of Sacrifice upon entering and exiting the church since the Blessed Sacrament is not present in the sanctuary. The tolling of the bells calls us to worship as the Commentator invites us to introduce ourselves to the people around us before Mass begins. Once Mass begins our reverence is directed to the altar and ambo. The Bishops in union with the Pope instruct us to full, active and conscious participation during the Liturgy. Since all Sundays are a solemnity of the Lord's Day, all Masses are celebrated solemnly in word, gesture, song and prayer. We have a variety of music including traditional, contemporary and Gregorian chant in keeping with the Rites of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The Homily is based on the Sunday Readings from the Old and New Testaments, a Psalm and the Gospel. Twice monthly there may be a speaker or a video consisting of brief remarks, adult catechesis or a faith formation teaching, usually just before the chair announcements. Sundays are a most advantageous time to address the assembly in these ways because more people are present on Sundays than at any other time during the week. We lead our very young into the Daily Chapel for an age-appropriate Liturgy of the Word. We offer our youth and adults Special Blessings at Mass when timely. Sacraments of Baptism and First Eucharist are celebrated during Sunday Masses for the convenience of the extended family members who travel great distances to be present for these family celebrations. This is liturgical catechesis on such occasions forming us into the community of the one Body of Christ. Children who made First Holy Communion in the past year are welcome to participate in the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening each year for their group experience of Holy Communion. Infants are welcome in our assembly since they are baptized members of the Body of Christ. A cry room is not part of our church, but the narthex is available when needed. Childcare is provided in a separate space from the church on Sundays for preschool children.

### **Participation**

The Sacraments, the Rites of Christian Initiation and the Mass are the Church's communal public prayer which differs from our private prayers and personal devotions. We do not pray the rosary during Mass. Since we do not regularly celebrate the Mass in Latin as we did at a different time in our history, the Mass is now in the vernacular and it is not necessary to draw the attention of the laity by the use of bells for the Consecration at Mass. Our participation throughout the whole of Mass is to listen attentively and to respond prayerfully as the priest leads us in the celebration

of the liturgy. In most areas of our church there are kneelers for a posture of reverential silence and at other areas there no kneelers to accommodate those who may have difficulty kneeling.

### **Holy Communion**

Each week our parish is intentionally evangelizing a number of non-Catholic visitors and seekers whom we invite to attend Mass with us. Because Holy Eucharist is Most Sacred in our Catholic Tradition, we give clear guidance provided by our Catholic Bishops for who is admitted to Holy Communion. The Holy Eucharist in the Catholic Church is essential to the very identity of those who are Catholic. The Bishop of our Diocese is the chief priest and shepherd of the pastors and the laity of the local church. We are all obliged to follow his directives for liturgy and pastoral care as when the Bishop suspends the use of the Communion Cup during the flu season and until he restores its use. A pastor is canonically responsible to the Bishop and for all the souls within his parish boundaries, Catholics as well as non-Catholics. Since there are as many opinions as there are people in any parish, Good Shepherd adheres to the liturgical standards of the Catholic Church. In areas where there are liturgical options, it is the responsibility of the pastor to make decisions in harmony with the interior environment of the church without vitiating the Rites of the Catholic Church, which he must carefully observe. Personal preferences must be put aside.

### **Preparation**

Perhaps all of us could benefit from coming to Sunday Mass better prepared for the celebration of the Word and Eucharist. A fruitful way for us to do so is by taking each of the four readings for next Sunday's Mass found in our Bulletin, the Sunday Missal or other resources and making each one a part of our daily prayer and reflection during the weekdays as our remote preparation before coming to Mass. Listening to the Spirit speaking to us individually through God's Word calls us to conversion of heart, changes our lives and sets us on fire with God's love. When we get to Sunday Mass, the Word is already a part of our lives and the preaching then challenges us with additional spiritual insights. What child would benefit from going to school without having first done their homework ahead of time? Mass will not be boring and we will get so much more out of Mass because we put so much more into it in the first place. Prayerful preparation makes all the difference! Our communal celebration of Mass will come alive as never before. With the priest we discover the art of celebrating and recovering the allure and beauty of Mass. Neither priest nor people are to be rigid or bring artificial attitudes, actions and presumptions into liturgy. Liturgy transforms the church environment into mystery and wonder that is spontaneous, normal and religious. Mass is heaven on earth. We are privileged to enter with the Spirit into a divine realm of eternity with all the Angels and Saints around the throne of God and His Son. Sunday Mass is central in the lives of Catholics. Yet, our world is full of idolatries pulling us away from God for the worship of lesser gods on the Lord's Day. Missing Sunday Mass except when ill can seriously jeopardize our relationship with Christ our Lord. There are no rubrics to determine the length of time for Mass. Time is sublimated into eternity at Mass for we are in the presence of the throne room of God. The infinite God knows no time. How long is Mass is not a question for God and neither should be for us. We are in the presence of God. What is most important is how we participate in the entire Mass from beginning to end. And, since parking is at a distance from the church building, it is advisable to plan on being in church 15 minutes before Mass and expecting to remain until 15 minutes after the hour of Mass. Let us be generous in giving thanks to God for all that the Lord has given us in the past week. Thank you for not leaving Mass after Communion until Mass is ended out of reverence for Christ in the Eucharist. We appreciate it!