



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON



Liturgy of the Word with Children

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."
(Mt 19:14)



To find out more about the ideas and resources shared in this document please contact our **Marriage and Family Life Adviser:**

Deacon Simon South

E: simon.south@abdiocese.org.uk

With thanks to our diocesan Music & Liturgy Adviser, the diocesan Safeguarding Team and our Marriage & Family Life Adviser for their support in helping to produce this booklet.



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FOREWORD

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.” (Rom 12:13).

The ambition behind this document, reflects a desire to share the many good works being done across the parishes within our Diocese. Driven by a synodal listening to those who actively bring the Word of God to the young children of the parish on a regular basis, and seeking to learn from each other, the aim is to provide a practical resource that is both filled with joy, and learned experience. The hope is that we can bring you a resource that is inspiring for our children, helping them to come ever closer to the Lord, as we strive to help them encounter Jesus in their liturgy, and prepare and guide them to actively participate in the full mystery of the Eucharist.

Bishop Richard’s Pastoral Plan “The Word Who is Life” calls us all to become “communities of communities” and “welcoming schools of discipleship, founded in prayer” (see paragraph 1.5 below). A positive step towards achieving this ambition is our desire to share the gifts, blessings and abilities the good Lord has given to each and every one of us; encouraging us to work in a sharing and respectful way, focused on the glory of God’s Kingdom, while also laying the spiritual foundations for our future generations:

[I] invite everyone in the Diocese – lay faithful and religious, deacons and priests – to join with me in forging our parishes into communities of saints, into strong, lively and welcoming schools of discipleship. May they be communities where the Lord is known and loved; where the liturgy is experienced as an encounter with the wonder of heaven; where daily prayer is a natural part of life; communities of healing, where all are welcomed, their dignity as children of God always recognised; where young people grow in deep love for the Gospel, for the sacramental life of the Church and for prayer; where all know the riches of the Faith and seek to share it with others.

– The Word Who is Life

This guide for delivering Children’s Liturgy, makes frequent reference to the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales’ guidelines for **Liturgy of the Word with Children** (LOWC) as well as sharing a variety of resources from across the Diocese.



INTRODUCTION

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and exhort one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” (Col 3:16).

Each Sunday, we come together in faith, to celebrate in Word and Sacrament, the mystery of our Lord’s death and Resurrection and the eternal hope this brings to us all. The celebration of the Mass includes everyone, both young and old; we are all in “communion” with Christ and with each other.

With this in mind, and in accordance with the Directory for Children’s Masses, we must consider that “it is appropriate that young children are not neglected because of their inability to participate or to understand what happens and what is proclaimed in the celebration”. As you lead the young people to a better understanding of Christ as the living Word of God, you have a blessed opportunity to help them to build a relationship with Jesus as friend (Jn15:15), brother and sister (Mk3:32). Planting the seed of an intimate faith in their hearts, which God willing, will blossom over the years into a lifelong, deep companionship.

It is important to remember that Children’s Liturgy of the Word is **liturgy**, ritual, communal prayer and not catechesis (religious instruction). Nor is it child minding to allow the grown-ups some peace. It is a liturgical celebration of a community of children, gathered in and through the Word of God.

With this ambition, we are drawn to the hope that has led us to the Liturgy of the Word with Children (LOWC). The key objective for us all, as we plan and lead the Children’s liturgy must be to “prepare the children for the full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy of the parish”.

Our LOWC should always -

- Proclaim the gospel of the day, in a way in which children can relate to - along with an explanation of the central message of the reading - in an engaging and interactive way.
- There may be rare occasions when the content of the gospel reading for the day is not age appropriate, for example if relating to adultery or violence. In this situation it is fully acceptable to build your reflection on either the first reading, psalm or second reading of the day. You might want to discuss this with your Parish Priest.
- Bring the message of hope and love in a way that our young people can understand and embrace.
- Strive to help children to learn to pray together in a way that helps them to give thanks, while forming them in their hearts to embrace the true presence of Christ at the Eucharist (for ideas and planning resources see p.18).



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

“Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area: they are educators because they are parents.”

Pope St John Paul II, Letter to Families, 1994.

Pope Francis often used the analogy of “smelling of the sheep” when referring to those who are passing on the faith. In reality, he was calling us to meet people where they are in their faith journey. For those involved in sharing the faith with young children, this includes understanding the challenges and realities that their families face on a daily basis.

Taking this into consideration can allow us to think about how and what we need to share – and the support that we need – in proclaiming the Word, so that it starts to talk to the heart of our children. **Points to consider include:**

- **Parents are the first catechists/teachers of our faith.** Where are parents on their faith journey in your parish? What support, formation do parents need to be able to fulfil this task as “first catechist”? Is there any help that the other catechists or clergy can give to parents to help in their formation and own encounter with the Lord?
- **Is prayer something which happens naturally and regularly in the family home?** How can this be encouraged? Encouraging parents to pray together at home with their children is a good foundation stone for family faith and supports your work.
- **How are you communicating with parents about the things you are working on?** What support do you need from parents going forward, between the Liturgy?
- As you think about your “lesson plan” for the week or weeks ahead, **are you sharing this with your Parish Priest/Deacon?** What about sharing this with the parents too?
- What about **a note/handover for the children to give their parents after Mass**, outlining the messages you have shared with the children? This might be a positive way of engaging them, while also encouraging them to affirm the teaching at home.
- **Do you have a Permanent Deacon in the Parish?** They may be a great resource and support for you in building the faith of parents in general.



PRACTICALITIES TO CONSIDER

“Do everything with love.” (1 Cor 16:14).

Before you start to build your liturgy, you must think **safety first**. This includes both the safety of the children and the safety of the members of your team. We should never do anything that puts either of these groups in a difficult or compromising situation.

Are the premises safe and is the supervision adequate?

The leader to child ratios can be found in the Diocesan Safeguarding Guidelines (below) which are taken from national policy (see the Appendix for website details). There must always be a minimum of two adults when children are present.

Supervision ratios should always take into account the number of children attending, their ages and whether any of the children have particular needs or challenges.

As far as child protection procedures are concerned, there is no restriction on the age of children participating in these sessions, as long as the number of supervisors is adequate.

Do you have the right people supporting you?

It is important that leaders and regular helpers have gone through the diocesan “Safe Recruitment” process, completing a DBS check and safeguarding training where required. There is e-learning available from the Diocese, to explain the guidelines relating to working with young children and vulnerable people. The training we use is the CSSA Level 3 Safeguarding for Volunteers in the Catholic Church.

For clarification or further information regarding safeguarding, please speak with your Parish Safeguarding Representative or the Diocesan Safeguarding Office;

T: 01293 651148

E: safeguarding@abdiocese.org.uk

Safety of the location

It is important that you **keep a Register of Attendees** each week - and that this record is kept in a safe, locked drawer when not in use.

Is the location secure for young children? A designated “door person” may be a good idea, to stay by the door; this will ensure that the safety of the group is maintained both from uninvited people wandering in and youngsters wandering out.

Consideration should also be given to the ease of accessibility for those with particular needs; are the lighting levels in the venue adequate? Is the location safe for enquiring hands and fingers? Are plug sockets covered or out of reach, are door closers safe for little fingers? Are fire extinguishers available and tamper proof? Are trip hazards and sharp objects highlighted to group leaders and helpers?

These points are not exhaustive; more details can be found within the relevant risk assessments which can be found in **SafetyToolbox**, an online Health and Safety management tool used by the Diocese (your parish clergy should be able to arrange access for you).

DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Source: Arundel and Brighton 'Safeguarding Guidelines Booklet'

The core participants for the LOWC are those children who have not yet received their first Holy Communion. However, it is important to take into consideration the needs and spiritual maturity/understanding of the individual child. This is something that can be discussed with the child's parents/guardians and taken into consideration in your planning process. Understanding that the objectives are "to prepare the children for full participation in the liturgy", you may find that you have a few older children in your liturgy group who may need specific support and care, which will also need to be reflected in your supervision/leader numbers.

The government publication "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (2023) defines a child as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

The Church has a legal and moral duty of care to any child or young person placed in its charge and, quite rightly, parents or carers expect that anyone in a position of trust for their children, is fully aware of and adheres to the Church's National Child Protection Policies. The following points will help you; however, if you have any doubts or concerns, always consult your Parish Priest, Safeguarding Representative or the Diocesan Safeguarding Office;

T: 01293 651148

E: safeguarding@abdiocese.org.uk

Important points to consider:

- **Keep an up-to-date register of group contact information:** each child's name, address, telephone number, email address, special medications, doctor's name and address (if shared by their parent/guardian), telephone number and permission to be "in loco parentis". Ensure that there is always access to a parent or carer's phone/mobile in case of emergency.
- Ensure a **minimum of two leaders** is always present, maintaining the gender balance of the group where possible. In larger groups/clubs, the following adult-to-children supervision ratios should be adhered to, as a minimum:
 - Children under 5 years:**
1 adult leader to every 3 children
 - Children aged 5-8 years:**
1 adult leader to every 6 children
 - Children aged 8-11 years:**
1 adult to every 10-15 children
- During any activities taking place away from the normal meeting place, a **risk assessment** should be undertaken, and the supervision ratios should be increased accordingly (a risk assessment template is available in SafetyToolbox).
- For any activities away from the normal meeting place, parents/guardians need to have signed a **consent form** (see the Appendix for Liturgy of the Word Attendance Permission Slip). For events outside of the parish, please see the Safeguarding page on our Arundel and Brighton webpage. Ensure that someone knows where the group will be when they are away from the normal meeting place.
- **Do not permit any photographs or videos** to be taken or displayed of parish or youth group events without parental consent. Never show a photograph of a child or young person with personal details (including their name) to someone not part of your team.
- Be especially vigilant at youth events where young people may be prone to share images, without consent, on **social media** such as Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram and X (Twitter) and always warn young people in your risk assessments of such events about the potential dangers of online predators and cyberbullying.

BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Mt 7:7).

In all we do, our first steps should always be to seek the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer; turning to God before planning your liturgy and bringing your team together in the name of the Lord before you begin your Sunday experience with the children.

We should always be seeking God’s blessing and guidance in all that we do in His name. Furthermore, as we lead the children, we are giving of ourselves, we are sharing our own faith witness with them.

Our Lord regularly reminds us in the gospels about the strength and affirmation that comes when we take time to find our quiet place and pray.

When you are ready to begin to plan or build your team: you might find the LOWC leadership objectives a helpful starting point to reflect and discern the skills and charisms your team has or potentially still needs. Where are the current strengths? Where are the skill gaps? Who can bring these skills to your team?

The Role of the Liturgy of the Word with Children (LOWC) Team

- To lead the celebration of the Word with children.
- To work with the priest presiding at Mass and any other appropriate ministers - and to seek advice when needed.
- To work with others to form and inform LOWC, with regular planning meetings.
- To work with others to ensure that the Liturgy of the Word with Children is conducted in accordance with Diocesan Safeguarding Procedures.
- To prepare the venue and to ensure the safety and well-being of the children.
- To use appropriate books and equipment provided by the parish.
- To attend training and (where possible) formation sessions and be open to deepen your own faith and understanding.

(Source: CBEW LOWC guidelines)

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts forms one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor 12:12).

Once you are clear how many children will be attending, you can plan the number of leaders/ helpers you require.

What gifts and skills do your group have and need? None of us have all the skills needed, this is part of the gift and blessing of our wider community; collaborating together we find the skills that are missing from our team. Do you have a natural administrator and organiser, a storyteller, someone who is gifted in leading prayer?

Remember that it takes time to build a team, don't lose hope. The Lord will always be with you on your journey.

Having chosen your team, it is a good idea to reflect on the following points:

- 1. What ongoing formation are you going to undertake with your team?** The team's faith needs to be fed and nurtured too. The Diocese can support you, for more details contact the Marriage and Family Life Adviser, Deacon Simon South;
E: simon.south@abdiocese.org.uk
- 2. Who are going to be the successors for the future within your team?** It's always good to look to the future. Their roles in supporting our young people to hear and respond to the Word of God offer a wonderful opportunity for them to grow in their own discipleship.



Understanding the strengths and gifts of your team

If you would like to explore the charisms within your team, please contact our Marriage and Family Life Adviser, who will be happy to talk you through a discernment process, "Called and Gifted", which aims to identify the individual gifts that each member brings to the group.

E: simon.south@abdiocese.org.uk

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

“Train a child in the way they should go, and they will not deviate from it, even in old age”.
(Prov 22:6).

With your team in place, you can start to think about the message and ways of proclaiming God’s Word to the children. Remembering that this is primarily a liturgy and not a catechesis session - we are also striving to prepare our children to become part of the full Eucharistic experience, helping them to become comfortable with sitting still and praying together, and highlighting the importance of putting the needs of others first and praying for other people.

This may be something to share with parents/ guardians and seek their support with; encouraging them to pray together at home regularly, say Grace before meals, and sit quietly as a family for a few moments, perhaps taking it in turns to share what they are thankful to God for from their day and embracing the gifts of grace they have received.

As you prepare your liturgy session, here are some helpful points to help keep focused:

Points to consider as we build our liturgy for children

- Liturgy is the praise and worship of God.
- Liturgy is the source and summit of the life of the People of God.
- The function of liturgy is to build up the members of Christ’s Body, to strengthen them in proclaiming Christ in their lives and the world.
- Liturgy is action and symbol; it speaks to the whole person, it involves all the senses: sight, touch, sound, taste and smell.
- Participating in liturgy forms our habits because we are ritual people and learn through repetition and copying.
- In liturgy, we discover the riches of prayer, through word and gesture, silence and stillness.
- The purpose of adapting liturgy for children is to lead them into full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy of the parish.
- Liturgy with children, as with adults, demands dignity, clarity and simplicity.

*(Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales Liturgy Office
Liturgy of the Word with Children: Guidelines, p. 5.)*

PREPARING YOUR HOMILY

This can often be a challenge for many as you explain the message behind the Gospel in a way that is accessible to your audience. Godly Play's website has many very practical suggestions - you can also find some helpful websites in the Appendices at the back of this document.

Try to open a conversation with the children with one or two open questions; one positive question might be "Which part of the story did you like best and why?" Don't rush to gain answers, but allow time for them to think about things first.

Useful websites that may help you to prepare your homily include:

W: www.sermons4kids.com

W: www.wednesdayword.org

PLANNING YOUR LITURGY

What does a good liturgy encounter look and feel like? On the following page is a tool which may help you and your team in the planning process:

LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN PLANNING SHEET

Sunday of the Year Cycle A B C Date Age group

What is the message from this Sunday's Gospel?

How do I make this message appropriate for my age group?

Resources needed: seating / visuals / displays / storytelling props / music / CD player resources

Welcome & Introduction

Penitential Act (Sorry Prayer)

Homily - making the Word accessible and understandable for my group

Intercessory prayers

How are we going to return to the church?

A 'MODEL' LITURGY

1. Children gather with their families in the main body of the church for the introductory rites of the Mass. After the opening hymn and the greeting, the children, together with their leaders, are called forward to the altar rail.
2. A book of the Scriptures is presented to a child or leader to process.
3. All process to a nearby place, where a sacred space has been prepared (with a cloth to reflect the liturgical season, a candle, a crucifix).

Model below based on The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Liturgy Office - LOWC: Guidelines, p. 12.

Practise making the Sign of the Cross

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"

"Sorry prayer" - *an alternative prayer for younger children can be found on the next page*

Lord, because you love me so much, you are always ready to forgive me. You offer me your love and friendship; you give me your peace. Help me to forgive others and share your peace with them. Amen.

Gospel acclamation:

Alleluia, Alleluia (*it's great to encourage the children to sing this together*)

Please stand to listen to Jesus

The Lord be with you. **And with your spirit.**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to ... **Glory to you, O Lord.**

(May the Word of the Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart +++)

Reading

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Explanation of today's Gospel

Helping the children to understand and interact with the gospel message. Storytelling, Godly Play and interactive discussions are all great ways of helping the children to think and learn together. Encourage them to sit quietly after the encounter and to say "thank you" to Jesus.

Intercessory prayer as a community. The Five Finger Prayer (on p.13) is a great way to encourage children to be involved and to think about what they want to pray for.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

All return to the main body of the church for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Do you process back in, join the offertory or process the Lectionary back in?

A 'SORRY' PRAYER

For very young children (Penitential Act)

This prayer offers a lovely opportunity to help young children to explore their relationship with Jesus, explaining the complete forgiveness that we receive unconditionally out of the love that He has for us all. It also offers an opportunity to explore and explain the reality of our humility in saying sorry as the children approach their First Holy Communion. There is a wonderful opportunity to explain the Sacrament of Reconciliation at this point of the liturgy, and the special friendship Jesus has with us, as we give our heartfelt "sorry" with complete trust and hope.

An idea to consider: you will need a whiteboard, washable felt tips, a bowl of soapy water, a cloth, and towels – or alternatively, paper and a waste basket.

Invite the children to draw on the whiteboard or paper to represent something they would like to say sorry for; it could be a picture of an angry face, a sad face, or a picture of mum, dad, a guardian or a sibling, then wash away the pen markings or put the paper in the bin. The analogy being that through Christ's forgiveness our sins are "wiped clean" or thrown away.

Finish with the following prayer – and ask the children to repeat each phrase after you:

"Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us all and that when we say sorry, you forgive us. Help us to learn how to be good. Amen."



POPE FRANCIS' FIVE FINGER PRAYER

Several sources say that this “Five Finger Prayer Guide” was written by Cardinal Bergoglio and has been attributed to him long before he became Pope Francis.

3. The middle finger is the tallest.

It reminds us of our leaders, the governors, and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.

4. The fourth finger is the ring finger, and our weakest finger.

It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick, or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.

2. The next finger is the index.

Pray for those who teach you, instruct you and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.

1. The thumb is the closest finger to you.

So start praying for those who are closest to you. They are the persons easiest to remember. To pray for our dear ones is a “sweet obligation.”

5. And finally we have our smallest finger, the smallest of all.

Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the other four groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and also you will be able to pray for your own needs in a better way.



APPENDIX

Safeguarding

**If a child or an adult is believed to be in immediate danger telephone 999.
For non-emergency police matters telephone 101.**

You can contact the **Diocesan Safeguarding Team** by email here:

E: safeguarding@abdiocese.org.uk

To contact individual Safeguarding Team members:

Safeguarding Coordinator, Angela McGrory

M: 07585 657090

E: angela.mcgrory@abdiocese.org.uk

Assistant Safeguarding Coordinator, Pierre Serra

M: 07442 092161

E: pierra.serra@abdiocese.org.uk

Safeguarding Office Manager, Bethany Arthur

M: 07391 415362

E: safeguarding@abdiocese.org.uk

For safeguarding information and resources visit the diocesan website:

www.abdiocese.org.uk/safeguarding/resources

The Catholic Safeguarding Standard Agency (CSSA)

www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk

T: 0207 901 1920

Additional Support Services

NSPPC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)

www.nspcc.org.uk

T: 0808 800 5000

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

T: 0800 1111

Stop it Now - Supports anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse and its prevention.

www.stopitnow.org.uk

T: 0808 1000 900

National Domestic Violence Helpline - Run in partnership with Refuge and Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

T: 0808 2000 247

Useful Liturgy Resources

Books for Adults

Sunday: A Book of Readings: Children's Lectionary (Treehaus Publications)
Sunday Weekly Leaders' Guide, Feast Days and Solemnities (Treehaus Publications)
The Liturgy of the Word with Children, by Katie Thompson
Complete Children's Liturgy Book by Katie Thompson
A Child Shall Lead Them – A Guide to Celebrating the Word with Children (Treehaus Communications)
A Handbook for Children's Liturgy, by Barbara Mary Hopper (Canterbury Press)
Raising a Catholic Family Today by John Bosio (Good Will Publishers)

Children's Bibles

The Beginner's Bible for Toddlers (Children 1-5 years) Word Publishing
The Pre-Schooler's Bible (Children 3-5 years) V Gilbert Books
The Lion Children's Bible by Pat Alexander & Carolyn Cox
The Bible for Children (New Jerusalem Version) Darton, Longman & Todd

Websites & Digital Resources

Diocesan website: Links to useful resources from our Music & Liturgy Adviser can be found in the Guidelines & Resources section of the Liturgy & Music webpage:
www.abdiocese.org.uk/faith/liturgy-music

CBCEW Liturgy Office

Weekly resources and readings to help bring the Word of God to young hearts and minds:
liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/LOWC/index.shtml
Liturgy of the Word with Children Guidelines: www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS/LOWC.pdf

Godly Play, ideas and tips on bringing meaning to God's word through interaction:
W: www.godlyplay.uk

Celebrate Trust, great resources with ideas to bring faith to young families
W: www.celebratetrust.org

Wednesday Word, a well-produced weekly reflection sheet that can be shared with families,
W: www.wednesdayword.org

Sermons for Kids, a great child-friendly resource if creating a homily is not something you feel comfortable with.
W: www.sermons4kids.com

Teacher Help, a very comprehensive readings, posters, colouring, lesson plans and topics resource.
W: www.teacherhelp.org

Re:Quest, a resource for RE teachers
www.request.org.uk

Parental Consent Form for Participation in Children's Liturgy

Child's Details

Child's Full Name:

Date of Birth:

Medical Information

Does your child have any condition/s requiring the administration of medications or other treatment?

My child requires the following medications and treatment:

I confirm that I have discussed management/administration/
storage of medications with the event leader.

☐

Allergies

Please detail your child's known allergies:

My child has an EpiPen:

☐

I confirm that I have discussed its management/administration/
storage with the event leader.

☐

Additional Emotional Needs

Does your child have any additional emotional needs, other than the usual needs of a child their age?
For example, have they suffered trauma, have any fears or phobias, or any medical conditions that
affect their behaviour?

We will use this information to help responsible adults to support your child should any difficulties
arise.

Additional Physical Requirements

Is there any other relevant information/specific requirement/s that needs to be known? (e.g. mobility
requirements, physical restrictions, sound sensitivity)

Statement of Consent

I give my express consent to my child, as named above, participating in the Children's Liturgy.

There will be a register kept of all participating in this activity:

Signature:

Parent/Carer's Full Name:

Date:



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON