



**Report of the
Liturgical Spirituality of the IHM Motherhouse 2020-21**

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Submitted by:
Rob Carroll, Liturgy and Music Minister

Liturgy happens within time and space but is essentially timeless in nature. As I come around within the calendar year pulling out liturgy planning files I created myself rather than my predecessor I'm able to reflect back on the volume and variety of prayer experiences we had here even within this time of COVID when many of them could not be shared with the larger church who might come through the chapel doors.

It is probable the Coordinating Council last met via the internet and many may have joined the celebration of Founder's Day in 2020 the same way. That liturgy was still a time when singing was minimized. Entrance and "Exit" songs were only one verse or just a refrain. No Glorias. Instrumental music accompanied no gift processions but only the movement of cruets and books from a small table to the larger table, the altar. The latter is still occurring today albeit we're singing more. No water in the font; no cups to share at communion; no multi-person processions save for special liturgies; the same for the presence of a choir. The wider Church is almost back to pre-COVID functioning this fall but IHM must remain slightly behind by taking baby steps toward fully returning to what was prior to March of 2020. Whether it will all return permanently or partially remains to be seen. For in the course of almost 20 months, our community continues to change and, I'd say, evolve.

Since approximately the beginning of November 2020 we've celebrated the Christian burial of 25 sisters and 1 Associate here in the IHM motherhouse chapel. These liturgies are by and large planned ahead of time with very little alteration except for the liturgical ministers. Improvements to funeral planning were spearheaded by Marianne Gaynor covering the entire process with DPOA; LC Admins; Mission Counselors; Pastoral Care; Liturgy; etc. Continued improvement should be worked on especially in regard to the funeral planning and involvement of the liturgist. Doing so would help provide more options to sisters planning their funerals (how many times did we sing Jerusalem, My Destiny or How Great Thou Art?). Although fewer, thank God, especially challenging is the process of planning funerals of sisters residing outside the motherhouse. In time as the process Marianne Gaynor published gets implemented more fully I these opportunities will be improved.

New experiences of formal liturgical prayer have become almost the norm in the past year. Remaining on the topic of end-of-life, the sisters and lay residents experienced the visitation of a deceased resident in chapel seemingly for the first time. This event was met with a bit of hesitation. The resident who passed away was not known well by the sisters and there was some disagreement with the allowance of the

visitation in the chapel and an insistence that the scheduled Liturgy of the Word be celebrated regardless. I made the decision to change that by replacing the Liturgy of the Word with a Morning Prayer of Remembrance for the deceased. The initial resistance dissipated after the experience of the prayer and, in fact, has raised some questions of why such a prayer couldn't occur for sisters and residents during the time between a death and the funeral liturgy. We've not made this a practice, but it will likely continue to have discussion as the motherhouse begins to review the needs for liturgy and, in this case, the needs of healthy grieving which, in my opinion, must be examined here.

The topic of grieving was addressed recently in the Spirituality Committee on which my position is a required member according to the job description. I shared at that meeting that I was taken aback since being here that 99% of the time no prayers for the sick and especially critically ill are heard at liturgy. Most sisters write their own Prayers of the Faithful, but it is rare that a prayer naming those in most need is heard. That practice is now changing with some clear guidelines to assure privacy. Along with it is the removal of the names of those who have made a stipend/donation for a mass. Although the Holy See allows churches to "bundle" intentions when there are more intentions than masses, the fact we get so few mass requests was causing the same names to be read every time we celebrated Eucharist. Now, the names of these people are placed on the altar for the priest to see and keep in mind as the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed and the list is published on Channel 12.

As stated above, with the onset of COVID and the retirement of Fr. Bob Schramm as the Sacramental Minister, the celebration of Eucharist has gone from five to six days week to one on a Sunday. Weekday eucharist is only on rare occasions or holy days. This has been beneficial for the experience of hearing the Word broken open by sisters and lay people and the inclusion of new forms of prayer either in the standard Liturgy of the Hours or a "hybrid". Continued improvement here is in the adjustment of the texts used by presiders. These texts were meant for Communion Services and not a Liturgy of the Word. They are quite wordy and do not encourage full, conscious, and active participation by the assembly. They are running their course and will either be eliminated or the possibility of occasional use at a Communion Service is an option. The Liturgy Committee will review these practices this year.

Prayer experiences have expanded to celebrating special feast days and creation-centered days e.g. seasonal solstice/equinoxes; Earth Day; Opening/Closing prayers for Season of Creation; etc. in new ways other than a Liturgy of the Word. The incorporation of ritual action has become a hallmark of these liturgies. Examples are the bowls of vigil lights lit by assembly members; the planting of zinnia and tomato seeds at the Spring equinox prayer and then a month later on Earth Day a blessing of the sprouts that grew in the planters that sat on the library south windowsills were a delight (and surprise) by all; the distribution of herbs: mint=strength; thyme=inspiration; sage=wisdom at the Morning Prayer for the Feast of St. Hildegard of Bingen; and many more. We use various non-scriptural writings including feminist rituals from resources shared by community members. New forms of inclusive Prayer of Jesus (Our Father) have been introduced and widely accepted. The richness of these liturgies is overwhelmingly positive, and I get truly flooded with thank you's and requests for more. We will continue these experiences and experiments.

The Church year's liturgies of Christmas and Holy Week were well planned and prayed. COVID, actually gave way to an internal Lessons and Carols which was a delightful prayer on Christmas Eve and will be prayed again this year. The Holy Week liturgies were beautifully prayed thanks to the gifts of the liturgical ministers who participated. Good Friday with Nancy Ayotte presiding was a standout for all.

Similarly, the 175th Anniversary Mass and Jubilee in Summer, 2021 were joyful celebrations and went without any issues even with Cardinal Tobin showing up only minutes before the 10:00 start!

Our Sunday liturgies continue to be new experiences with a different presider almost every week. I've been fortunate to have a pool of, by and large, new faces from both retired/semi-retired diocesan priests to religious. By and large these have been good experiences. The pool will only get smaller as time continues however and the realities of Sunday Communion outside of mass is in the future. Due to a couple presider no-shows we've proven that these liturgies are solidly within the wheelhouse of the liturgical ministers however I foresee a similar issue happening when the current group of regular sister-presiders declines because of age and physical challenges. The other impact is on funerals for which finding a good presider with theology and liturgical style acceptable to the community is more difficult. This has prompted my suggestion and subsequent agreement of the Liturgy Committee and LC to provide another option on new Funeral Planning sheets: Funerals outside of mass. Again, the improvement opportunity here is with the sister-presiders and preachers who would need to be better prepared for this ritual and the reality of preaching without much lead time.

Liturgical ministers continue to be a source of wonder for me. Their insights and their dedication are delightful. For now, our numbers are adequate. I've recently needed to call in two laypeople who had been servers pre-COVID. If we ever return to the practice of eucharist with the cup then our pool of Eucharist Ministers will not be sufficient without help from the outside. If that number loses even one more person I will need to call the laypeople who previously helped to see if they are vaccinated and willing to come to help with that ministry. The music ministry also is in need of more members. The challenge of the recent Delta variant exposure caused me to need to end my planned rehearsals with the choir that became approximately 20 members at 175th and Jubilee this summer. A realistic number is likely 12-15 people made up of residents and Monroe area sisters/associates. The growth in choir membership and the cantor pool and the possibility of an instrumental ensemble to join Agnes and Rosemary is a goal I have for the coming year once the restrictions are lifted. My hope is that in the coming months before the holidays the Delta surge will lessen and I can build up momentum for all these ministries again.

The approach to the new liturgical year with Advent therefore is one of true anticipation. For now, we remain in COVID status quo hoping for an eventual opening up to the public. **I also continue to hope to find an assistant to help with the administrative duties that come with all the above events central to the motherhouse liturgical life, and also a growing number of weddings, confirmations, and other special events that use the chapel and require my presence. So, by the grace of God, we go.**