

Considerations for the Use of Technology in the Liturgy



Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments
Version 1.0 – August 2020

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This document will be updated from time to time, as the situation requires.

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Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments
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FOREWORD

The Book of Revelation, especially chapters 4 and 5, provides a vision of the heavenly liturgy which through the ages has inspired the Church in its liturgical worship: the door opening to heavenly realities, the One seated on the throne, the elders falling down in worship, the opening of the scroll, harps and incense, the prayers of the saints, and the acclamation of the multitude in their worship of the Lamb with their Amen.

It is in that same spirit of profound reverence and of sharing in the heavenly liturgy that the Church continues to guide and assist its members in their liturgical worship. As the Second Vatican Council states, “the liturgy, ‘through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,’ most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 2).

For this reason, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* ([GIRM](#)), no. 22, reminds each Bishop to be “vigilant” in ensuring that the dignity of all liturgical celebrations, and particularly the Eucharistic celebration, is “enhanced and, in promoting such dignity, the beauty of the sacred place, of the music, and of art should contribute as greatly as possible.”

Modern technology should be a means of enhancing and should not supplant the liturgical practices. We must always keep uppermost in mind the Holy and Sacred in our liturgical celebrations. Technology is a means and not an end in itself. We must remain astute and wise in its use and be directed by the Spirit of God and the guidance of the Church.

The following considerations are to assist English Sector diocesan Bishops in Canada on advising their parishes how to use various forms of technology when celebrating the liturgy. The liturgical act of offering praise and thanksgiving to God requires attentive eyes and ears, and engaged minds and hearts. When technology aids our reverent attentiveness and active participation, its use can be truly worthwhile and beneficial.

Executive Committee of the
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

August 2020

PART I

PRINCIPLES FOR THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE LITURGY

Preamble

1. Digital display of images and text is commonplace in Canadian society. Technological advancement in display system software has created unparalleled capacity for access to, transmission of, and projection of visual imagery and digital text. It may seem unavoidable and even natural to introduce this technology into the liturgical environment.
2. The Church has continually embraced emerging media in the service of its mission. Oral proclamation, written text, gestures, symbols, art, architecture, song, and musical instruments have given expression to the Church's communal prayer.
3. In the 21st century, rapid and wide-reaching technological advancement means the Church has to choose how best to harness digital realities to support liturgical worship. Sound amplification is one such innovation. Despite potential problems in its use, today it serves the valuable purpose of enabling a more audible proclamation of the Scriptures, a fruitful dialogue between the celebrant and assembly, and the introduction of a balanced sound with musical instruments normally unheard in the context of communal song.
4. Visual digital technology is another innovation. It has potential benefits, but also potential drawbacks and pitfalls. Its strengths and weaknesses need to be identified.
5. How do we evaluate the assets and liabilities when considering expanding technology's presence in the liturgy? Does it enhance the liturgical act of the people or detract from the rich development of ritual, symbol, spoken word, and song? If it detracts, how can this be avoided?
6. This first part of this document sets forth general principles of Catholic liturgical worship which need to be taken into account when deciding whether to introduce any particular application of digital technology into the liturgy. The second part provides suggestions so that, if it is used, digital technology will be employed in a way that supports the experience of the Church at prayer.

Foundations of Catholic Worship that Frame These Considerations

7. Christian worship is the work of Jesus Christ and his People, through the power of the Holy Spirit, offering praise and thanksgiving to God the Father. *In the liturgy of the Church, God the Father is blessed and adored as the source of all the blessings of creation and salvation with which he has blessed us in his Son, in order to give us the Spirit of filial adoption (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1110).* It is a communal act that flows from the Paschal Mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and reveals the Church's sharing in the redemption of all creation through Christ. Our participation in this work of Christ is "the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 2*).

8. The communication which takes place in the liturgy is never a simple matter of a "message" from a "sender" to a "receiver." Liturgical meaning is communicated by a more complex action. As the liturgy draws us into the life of the Trinity, we address the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

9. This dynamic nature of participation is ritually embodied in the gathered community's engaged senses, shared postures and gestures, responses, and moments of silence. This liturgical participation is encouraged in many ways, and it fashions us into a communion of believers who are united in their participation in the eternal offering of Christ.

10. Liturgical worship takes place within a sacramental worldview, in which human beings encounter the divine especially in and through the gift of creation. We approach God through embodied encounter with other human beings, in actions which make use of the fruits of the earth. At the heart of liturgical worship are words which are spoken and actions and objects which are physical. While Christian worship has at times appealed most heavily to the sense of sight or of hearing, it is experienced in its fullness by involving all the senses. Sacramental worship is not primarily perceived, but enacted.

Some Principles for Liturgical Space

11. All the baptized are the people set apart, a holy priesthood; all are called to be holy; therefore the entire assembly area should speak of "holy space."

12. Simplicity, clear line of sight, and the presence of only necessary furnishings allow people to experience quiet and prayer.

13. Liturgical centres are determined by liturgical action, the orientation of the assembly, the place of the ministers who serve, and the choice and arrangement of furnishings.

14. Liturgical foci include:

- font
- ambo
- altar
- chair for the Priest Celebrant
- paschal candle

15. Primary liturgical symbols include:

- processional Cross
- Book of Gospels
- bread
- wine

Use of Technology in the Liturgy

16. Digital media's immediacy and intensity have a great deal of appeal. With careful use, it offers the possibility of drawing us deeper into the liturgical action. However, it can also direct our attention away from the Lord, others, and the world around us. What has the potential to be an aid to communication and mutual revelation also risks becoming a means of separation and isolation. Liturgy is participatory; any use of media must support that.

17. Anything that reduces the assembly to passive observers and draws attention away from the primary symbols and foci of the liturgy should be avoided. The immediacy and force of digital imagery runs the risk of taking the assembly's attention away from these symbols and rites. This can distance the assembly from the liturgical action.

18. The Church has long embraced visual arts of various kinds to support the central elements of our worship. At the same time, there has always been a temptation to minimize the liturgy's primary symbols, reducing their communicative richness. When this has occurred, visual arts have often expanded beyond their supportive role, drawing the focus to themselves. With digital technology's capacity to be vivid, prominent, and stimulating, this risk is even greater today. When using digital imagery to make connections between the readings, the seasons, and people's lives, care must be taken to ensure that this harmonizes with, rather than overwhelms or even replaces, the central aspects of the liturgical celebration.

19. Before we seek to enhance the liturgy with digital media, we need to ensure that the central aspects of the liturgy are rich, full, authentic, and capable of engaging the attention and imagination of the assembly.

20. Artistic use of digital media may consist of imagery, but as with all visual art, the representational exists to support and not supplant the primary symbols. Actions and symbols should not be duplicated by the projection of images.

21. Liturgical symbolism is by its nature multivalent, rich in potential meaning. The full wealth of prayer texts, readings, and hymnody, and the interaction of the assembly with this richness, is imbued with grace. In all liturgical planning and preparation, care must be taken that this richness never be reduced to only a few predetermined “themes”. The reductionist superimposition of thematic visual imagery should be avoided.

22. Recent experience demonstrates that the most common use of projection technology is to provide the assembly with the lyrics of songs and hymns. This is sometimes extended to other sung and spoken texts, even the entire Ordinary of the Mass. Just as excessive reliance on print materials can create the impression that the liturgy is primarily a text, rather than the action of Christ and of his Church (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 36), great care and restraint should be used in the projection of texts as well.

PART II

SCREENS AND PROJECTION

Determining the Necessity, Installation, and Content for Projection

Determining Necessity

23. It is important to decide whether the use of digital technology will truly be an aid to worship. There are a variety of factors which need to be taken into consideration.

The current celebration of liturgy in the parish:

- Has enough consideration and effort gone into developing the liturgical elements and ministries to ensure a worthy celebration of the liturgy?
- What worship aids have been made available and to what effect?

The regular review and development of liturgical practice may reveal areas of improvement which may obviate the use of digital technology.

Architecture of the church and integrity of the sanctuary:

- Does the design and furnishing of the sanctuary lend itself to the placement of screens or monitors? Considering sightlines, artwork, beauty, and symmetry, would the introduction of the equipment negatively impact the integrity of the building's design?
- What conversations are needed before the placement of a screen, monitor, and projection equipment in the building? It is advisable to include the Diocesan Liturgy Commission in these discussions.
- How will natural light impact the projection used with screens and monitors?
- Is there an unobtrusive designated area for control of the equipment?

Cost:

- The introduction of quality equipment involves significant expense. Does the parish have the resources available to ensure that the best equipment is installed?
- Is there assurance that the system will be used regularly once installed, or will its novelty wear off?
- What is the estimated lifespan of the equipment?
- What are the consultation and installation fees?
- Will it be necessary to hire a professional to operate the equipment?
- Has the cost of copyright fees and licensing permissions for the projection of music and liturgical texts been considered?

Identifying and training technical support:

- Is there a pool of parishioners from which to draw people to support this ministry?
- What commitment of time will be necessary to develop the materials to be presented and displayed during worship? Will this be limited to Sundays or extended to other liturgies, such as Masses with children, weddings, and funerals?
- How will volunteers be trained in an understanding of Catholic liturgical practice and become proficient in the technical aspects of the display systems?

Installation

24. If it is decided to use digital projection technology, careful consideration will need to be given to the type of equipment used, the size and position of the visual display, a designated area for control, etc. The following points will assist in making these decisions.

- a) Consultation with qualified technicians will be necessary to ensure the selection of proper equipment and installation. They will need to be made aware of these guidelines.
- b) What type of system will be used? Will it use projection onto a screen or another surface? Will it use a monitor to present the data, as does television?
- c) If a projection system is chosen, can the material be effectively projected on a blank wall, or does it require a screen? Can the projector be situated unobtrusively? Will it be affixed permanently?
- d) The position and size of a screen or monitor are important.
 - The placement of the screen or monitor should be inconspicuous and discreet, in harmony with the focal points of the chair for the Priest Celebrant (*GIRM*, no. 310), the altar (*GIRM*, nos. 298-308), and the ambo (*GIRM*, no. 309).
 - The screen or monitor needs to be viewable by the entire assembly.
 - A single screen is preferred. However, if multiple screens are required, they should be synchronized and controlled from a single location.
- e) Operating equipment and control:
 - Where will the equipment be located to be inconspicuous?
 - Will this control station be a separate space from the assembly?
 - Is the technician able to see the liturgical action clearly?
 - What means will be in place so that the technician will be able to communicate discreetly with the music ministers?

Content for Projection

25. The central focus in the liturgy is speech, song, and the liturgical actions. Aids for worship must be at the service of the liturgy and never become a focal point, a substitute, or an addition to the norms of a given Rite.

26. The sole purpose of the use of digital display technology is to aid the full, active, and conscious participation of the assembly.

Only what is necessary for actual participation is projected. Memorized responses are not to be displayed (e.g. The Lord's Prayer).

27. Hymnody, Chant, and Sung Responses:

- a) Hymns, chant, or sung responses not included in parish hymnals may be displayed.
- b) Sung antiphons and refrains which are more infrequent and not well known, such as those sung during baptismal or funeral liturgies, or during annual solemnities and feasts, such as a sequence, may be displayed to encourage sung participation.
- c) Proper copyright and permission for use must be displayed for works not in the public domain. For more about this serious legal issue, refer to your diocesan policy on copyrighted material and the CCCB Rights and Permissions Policy at <https://esubmitit.sjpg.com/cccb/images/Previews/Rights and Permissions Policy.pdf>.

28. The Prayers and Responses Proper to the Assembly:

- a) It may be helpful to display texts for the assembly if:
 - The prayers and responses that are proper to the assembly are not well known, such as at funerals and weddings.
 - Prayer texts are used infrequently during the liturgical year.
 - Children are beginning to participate more fully in the liturgy and need assistance.
- b) It is not appropriate to display the prayer texts proper to the Priest Celebrant, deacon, or reader.
- c) Prayer texts approved for use in Canada are copyrighted material. Permission for use must be obtained. Please refer to your diocesan policy on copyrighted material and the CCCB Rights and Permissions Policy at <https://esubmitit.sjpg.com/cccb/images/Previews/Rights and Permissions Policy.pdf>.

29. Liturgy of the Word:

- a) Proclamation is spoken to the assembly; full participation and reception involves listening and interiorization. Projection of the proclaimed Scriptural texts should be avoided, and the moments of silence observed. Those affected by hearing loss can be assisted by hearing devices, a missalette, and/or other printed resources.

30. Announcements:

- a) To preserve the prayerful atmosphere of the church, the projection of advertisements and notices in the liturgical space is best avoided.

31. Images:

- a) The projection of images related to parts of the Mass, the Scriptures, and the liturgical season is discouraged. Excess images risk making a liturgy overly thematic, even didactic.
- b) The beauty and artistry of the liturgical space, as well as seasonal decoration, should be enough to inspire our Catholic imagination.
- c) It is never appropriate to display images of a deceased person during the funeral rites.

DESIGN OF PROJECTED MATERIAL (SLIDES) AND TRANSITION ADVICE

32. Slides must be well prepared in advance with consideration of the following points. Simplicity and consistency are very important.

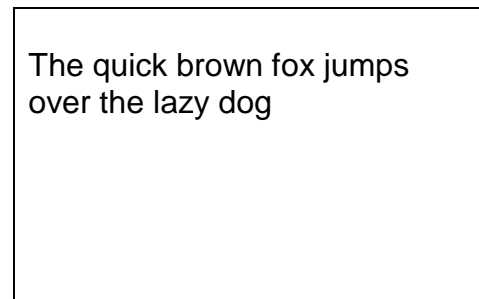
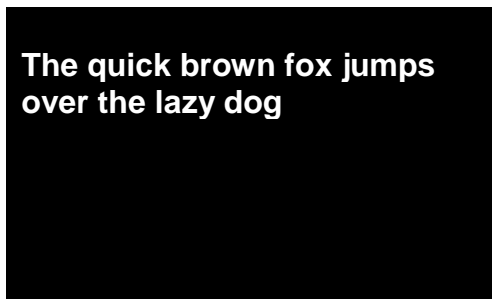
33. Template Slide Design

- a) Create a simple template of the same design for all slides. Be consistent.
- b) Do not use more than one design for the same projection/worship time.

34. Slide Background and Font Colour

- a) Slides should be readable in all light conditions. Test visibility on a sunny day, in overcast conditions, when all the lights are on, and when the lights are dimmed.
- b) The background should contrast with the text colour. For best readability:
 - Use white text on a black (dark) background or a very dark colour of text on a light background.
 - Avoid patterned backgrounds, which may reduce legibility.
 - If you use liturgical colours, make sure the text on the slides is clearly visible.

Compare the samples below:



- c) The primary role of slides is to deliver the message, not to enhance the liturgical season by incorporating its colours or images.

35. Font Choice

- a) Choose a simple font of the same kind and size for all slides.
- b) Use “Bold” or “Shadow” to enhance the definition of the text, if needed.
- c) Make sure the text is readable from the last pew.
- d) Be consistent.
- e) The recommended font is ARIAL or HELVETICA; size may range from 36 to 40.

36. Psalms/Hymns

- a) The text of responses and verses of hymns should be displayed in phrases. No more than one (1) or two (2) verses should be on each slide.
- b) Make sure the transition to the following verses is smooth and on time to make it easy for the assembly to follow. When possible, slides should be programmed to simply fade between slides.
- c) Including the melody lines will be helpful.

37. Position of the Projector

- a) The projector should be as unobtrusive as possible.
- b) If projecting from an angle, use the “keystone” feature to square the slide.

38. Project from a Computer or a USB Drive

To achieve the best quality of display, always project from the hard drive, but have a copy of the slides on a USB drive as a backup.

39. Project on a Wall or on a Screen

- a) To project on a wall is a first option. It does not have to be white; a natural colour is suitable. Using a dark background for slides will cover any deficiencies of the wall.
- b) The screen is an additional object in the sanctuary and not of a liturgical nature. The screen should not dominate in the sanctuary or distract attention from what is happening at the chair of the Priest Celebrant, the ambo, or the altar. Positioning of the screen must be discreet.

40. Animations or Special Effects

The use of animation(s) on slides as well as the use of special effects for changing slides should be avoided.

41. Working in Sync with the Liturgy

It is imperative to be familiar with the flow of the liturgy and to have the slides projected with appropriate timing. The person in charge of projecting needs to be in sync with the celebrant, reader, cantor, and choir.

42. Visual Silence

Periods of silence are opportunities for recollection and to experience not only the presence of God, but also the presence of our brothers and sisters. The adjustment of screens and projectors should be avoided during periods of silence.

During periods of silence, screens should be blank/black.

43. Changing Slides during Prayer

Slides should not be changed during prayer.

- a) Blank/black slides should be placed between each hymn or set of responses when nothing should be projected. Do not turn the projector on and off.
- b) Remember to turn the screen saver off.

44. Copyright

Copyright permissions must always be secured before projecting all liturgical texts, music, and copyrighted images. Copyright owners are listed in all ritual books and in liturgical music resources.

Depending on the text, permission is received through either the copyright owner(s) (author/composer/publisher) or an affiliated licensing agency (e.g. One License). Permissions must be included with every slide in the format indicated by the copyright owner.

The Permissions Department of CCCB Publications can assist in seeking necessary permissions. For more information, please e-mail permissions@cccb.ca.

- a) The displayed copyright information must contain:
 - Song title/title of the text
 - Copyright year and name of the owner
 - Publisher
 - Your copyright license number
- b) Example of a correct display of copyright information:
Church of God, Elect and Glorious, Contributors: James E. Seddon; Text ©1982, The Jubilate Group. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE# 918908-S

c) Resources:

- **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops:**
[https://esubmitit.sjpg.com/cccb/images/Previews/Rights and Permissions Policy.pdf](https://esubmitit.sjpg.com/cccb/images/Previews/Rights%20and%20Permissions_Policy.pdf)
- **ONE LICENSE:** <https://onelicense.net>
- **International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL):**
<http://icelweb.org/copyright.htm>

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PROJECTION

PART OF MASS	PARTICIPANT	PROJECTION
Before Mass	Preparation/Silence (as per <i>GIRM</i>)	Nothing
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES		
Entrance	Entrance Procession	Hymn
Greeting (Opening Dialogue)	Bishop/Priest & Assembly	Nothing
The Penitential Act	Bishop/Priest, Deacon & Assembly	Nothing (unless the Confiteor is not familiar)
<i>Kyrie</i>	Bishop/Priest, Choir/Cantor & Assembly	Nothing
“Glory to God”	Bishop/Priest, Choir/Cantor & Assembly	Text, if unfamiliar, with melody line, if sung
Collect	Bishop/Priest	Nothing
THE LITURGY OF THE WORD		
First Reading	Reader	Nothing
Responsorial Psalm	Cantor/Choir/Assembly or Reader (when recited)	Refrain
Second Reading	Reader	Nothing
Gospel Acclamation	Procession with <i>Book of Gospels</i> by Deacon or Bishop/Priest	Nothing
Gospel	Deacon or Bishop/Priest	Nothing
Homily	Bishop/Priest or Deacon	Nothing
Profession of Faith	Bishop/Priest & Assembly	Nothing (unless unfamiliar)
Prayer of the Faithful	Bishop/Priest, Deacon (or Reader) & Assembly	Nothing

PART OF MASS	PARTICIPANT	PROJECTION
THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST		
Preparation of the Altar, Presentation of the Gifts		Hymn
Prayer over the Offerings	Bishop/Priest	Nothing
THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER		
Preface Dialogue	Bishop/Priest & Assembly	Nothing
<i>Sanctus</i> / Holy, Holy, Holy	All	Nothing
Memorial Acclamation	Assembly	Nothing
Great Amen	Assembly	Nothing
THE COMMUNION RITE		
The Lord's Prayer	All	Nothing
Prayers & Dialogue that follow the Lord's Prayer	Bishop/Priest & Assembly	Nothing
<i>Agnus Dei</i> / Lamb of God	All	Nothing
Communion Procession	Choir/Cantor & Assembly	Hymn
Prayer after Communion	Bishop/Priest	Nothing
THE CONCLUDING RITES		
Announcements (brief), only if necessary	Bishop/Priest or Designate	A few key points (if necessary)
Final Blessing & Dismissal	Bishop/Priest	Nothing
Recessional Hymn	All	Hymn

(Based on C. Hill, "The Liturgy, the Data Projector, and You," Diocese of Broken Bay, NSW, Australia, 2008.)

CELL PHONES AND TABLETS

45. Liturgical books are signs and symbols that point beyond themselves to higher realms. Their appearance is to be dignified and beautiful.¹

For this reason, “The Missal is reserved for use during the Church’s liturgy. Ipads and other electronic devices have a variety of uses, for example, playing games, using the Internet, watching videos and checking e-mail. This alone makes their use in the liturgy inappropriate.”²

Cell phones and tablets should never be used at the ambo or the altar.

Depending on circumstances and location, it may be appropriate for musicians to use tablets and other similar technology to support the music ministry. Care needs to be taken to prevent any distraction of the assembly.

It is not appropriate for the assembly to use handheld electronic devices during liturgical prayer.

CONCLUSION

46. The liturgical act of offering praise and thanksgiving to God requires attentive and engaged eyes, ears, voices, and hearts. When our use of technology in the liturgy aids our attentiveness and active participation, its use is worthwhile.

¹ *GIRM*, nos. 348, 349.

² New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. Letter on the use of iPads, tablets, mobile phones and e-readers during Mass. April 30, 2012. <https://cathnews.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/lpads-at-Mass.pdf>

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