



Nourishing Solidarity: Celebrating Mass in a Catholic social services environment

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Celebration of the Mass is a central part of Catholic identity, and a workplace Mass has much to offer all who work as part of Catholic social service organisations. To make this a reality in our pluralist work environments, we need thorough planning and the harnessing of the many talents that abound in our workplaces.

Celebrating Together

Celebrating together is a valued aspect of most workplaces. Celebrations of various sorts are means of commemorating a special event, such as a birthday, Christmas or a particular achievement.

Celebrations can also be a powerful way of deepening solidarity and community. Eating and drinking together, sharing stories and generally engaging warmly with one another, manifests mutual acceptance and can even overcome hostility and effect reconciliation. It also assists productivity – we tend to cooperate more effectively with those we have a positive relationship with.

Celebrating Eucharist

In the Catholic tradition, the central celebration is the Eucharist, or the Mass, and Catholics usually talk about “celebrating the Eucharist” or “celebrating Mass”. It parallels what any family or workplace celebration achieves: it nourishes and deepens our unity, our fellowship by eating and drinking together and reflecting on the great stories contained in the Jewish and Christian sacred writings, the Bible.

It also commemorates, what is for Christians, the most important event of all – the death and rising to new life of Jesus. For Catholics, this is a commemoration that is far more profound than a simple “memory”, but is more like a genuine “entering into” or “re-experiencing”, of the deepest effects of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Celebrating the Eucharist is a way of entering into Jesus’ challenge to be transformed, like him, to a qualitatively different and new kind of life. This is a challenge to the community to be transformed themselves as well as to be transformers of the world in which they live.

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The Eucharist then, with its rich symbolism, is closely aligned to giving one's life for justice, exactly as Jesus did, something that should strike a chord with all those who work in a faith-based Social Services organisation.

Why Celebrate a Workplace Mass?

Because of this understanding of the Eucharist, in many Catholic health, aged care, education and social service organisations, Mass is celebrated, whenever appropriate.

It is celebrated by a worshipping community, and is as a time for personal renewal, for strengthening spirituality in the workplace through much needed reflection and meditation.

It is celebrated as a communal commitment to work for peace and justice and the transformation of the world. A shared celebration is a means of growing together and deepening staff solidarity around its vision and mission.

It is a powerful sign of the organisation's Catholic identity.

This is not to say that the Mass is the only form of liturgy or worship in which Catholic organisations would engage. There is a great richness of other blessings and rituals that are available, which are lay-led in many organisations; and a spirit of prayer enriches many workplaces. And, indeed, these other forms of spiritual engagement help build and nourish a culture of loving service in a way that complements the contribution that a Mass can make.

But the Mass does have a special place, and that is the focus of this short article.

The Role of the Eucharist in a Catholic Organisation

Our Catholic Social Service agencies have a diverse workforce. People from many religions and none, and from many and varied cultures and political opinions come together and cooperate in their organisation's commitment to supporting and walking alongside some of the most marginalised and hurt people in the community.

So, while everyone in an organisation might share a commitment to a mission of service and work for justice, and identify with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, in many organisations and workplaces there might well not be the natural affinity for the Mass as a unifying and nurturing experience that one would find in, for example, a parish setting. Indeed, in some cases, there could be a perception that the Mass is only for Catholic staff, and might thus be perceived by some as a divisive rather than a unifying element.

Experience has shown, however, that within a diverse community of co-workers, the celebration of the Eucharist in the workplace, if well prepared and sensitively promoted, can play an important and positive role for all staff.

When done well, an invitation to join colleagues in a Mass is an invitation to those who are not Catholic to share with those who are in a space that is very important to us – there are no 'outsiders', only contributors to our mission.

Such a celebration would always be invitational, and the Mass a place where all ought to experience welcome, warmth and complete acceptance whatever their status in life, background or views. It is a celebration of commitment to being brothers and sisters, not just fellow employees. Such invitations must always be personal.



The Mass celebrates the life, death and continuing presence of Jesus Christ working to bring about a new world of justice, peace and commitment to those most disadvantaged and left behind. Celebrated well, the Eucharist in the workplace can deepen reflection on this mission of justice and inspire great commitment to social change.

As a key source of Catholic identity and one of the most profoundly important ways that Catholics engage with in living their life of faith, the Mass can be such a central ritual in a Catholic organisation, witnessing to the identity and mission of the organisation, and witnessing very clearly to a shared commitment to Catholic Social Teaching.

Making it Work

A Eucharist that speaks to a whole organisation doesn't just happen. It takes a strong commitment and lots of detailed work. Parishes, schools, indeed all parts of the Church, are aware of this. But, for a pluralist community within a Catholic organisation, it takes on a heightened importance.

A planned approach is vital, to introducing the occasion, especially situating the Eucharist in the context of other workplace celebrations. So too are attractive and engaging promotional materials – posters, emailed flyers - and brief explanations during scheduled staff meetings, etc. Adequate lead time is important, as is sharing the information and invitation effectively across the relevant community – this would usually involve a range of people working together around promoting and preparing for the event.

It is quite amazing at times to discover what resources we have to hand in our organisations that might facilitate the organisation of a workplace Mass. Here are some steps that might assist in organising such a celebration:

1. **Form a small Team:** Working as a team affirms the importance of a workplace Mass as a collaborative and collegial enterprise. A team can ensure that planning encompasses all relevant dimensions: timing, location, invitations, publicity, associated hospitality, etc.
2. **A logistics team** can ensure that the room is prepared with appropriate seating, aisle space and an altar table. You may also consider name tags if you are inviting people from outside the organisation; and setting up beforehand for a cup of tea after Mass doesn't just happen.
3. **Find Champions:** In most workplaces there will be someone, probably several people, who will “champion” a workplace Mass. They can be encouraged by the Team to promote the idea and support the required practical arrangements. But mostly they can gently encourage colleagues to “give it a go”.
4. **Recognise talent and involve as many as possible:** The Eucharist should model the idea of the Church as the entire People of God so the more people who can be encouraged to play a role and get involved, the richer the experience will be for everyone.
 - Every workplace has its fair share of musicians who can be encouraged to use their talents for a Eucharistic celebration.
 - Those who are artistic can see to the altar/table decorations, candles, flowers and so on.



- Others can bring to bear particular features of an organisation or program – linkages with the Aboriginal community, for example, or a heritage associated with a particular Saint or religious congregation.
- Welcomers and ushers can make everyone feel welcome and at home; readers are required and so is an assistant Eucharistic Minister to help the priest at Communion time.
- Everyone can be asked if they have special prayer intentions to be included in the celebration.

5. Work closely with the celebrating priest:

- It is important that the priest feels comfortable celebrating Mass in the less formal surrounds of a busy workplace and that he feels welcome and at ease.
- A celebrant who knows the organisation and the people is often better placed to establish rapport, and can often gain greater resonance as they invite all participants into the celebrating community. Building relations over time can be a great help – thinking and working ahead is necessary.
- Welcoming the priest and ensuring that he is briefly oriented to the organisation is important. It is also important to brief him so that he can help those attending to better understand the meaning of each part of the celebration.

6. Location is important: We need a location that is accessible, inviting and serene. A comfortable room of appropriate size on the work premises can be more suitable than an off-site chapel or church setting.

7. Symbols are also very important in creating an ambience conducive to reflection and prayer so the Team should not underestimate the influence of table decorations, a crucifix, flowers, and so on.

Assistance is available

Remember also that the staff members at Catholic Social Services Victoria are always ready to assist with further information and practical advice, including working with member organisations to engage a priest who will readily celebrate a workplace Eucharist. There is nothing to lose and much to be gained.

We have been inspired over the years by the richness and warmth of the celebrations of the Mass in many organisations. Sharing the insights gained across organisations and programs is a privileged part of our role.