

Eucharistic Processions



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Eucharistic Processions

“The procession with the Blessed Sacrament...reminds us that we are called to go out and bring Jesus to others. To go out with enthusiasm, bringing Christ to those we meet in our daily lives.”

Pope Francis, Homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, 6 June 2021



INTRODUCTION

A Eucharistic Procession, just like Eucharistic Adoration, is an extension of the worship of Jesus Christ, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. The supreme act of adoration and the source and summit of the Christian life is the celebration of the Mass, and that celebration is prolonged and intensified through Eucharistic worship outside of the Mass. In Eucharistic Processions, the missionary aspect of the Eucharist is emphasized as we go forth into the world. Not only gazing upon our Eucharistic Lord, but walking with him, we experience what the disciples did 2000 years ago as they walked with Jesus, proclaiming the Good News to the world. A parish community that undertakes a Eucharistic Procession has made the decision to publicly proclaim its belief in Jesus' True Presence in the Eucharist. By this public witness of faith, the parish invites people in the community to encounter the Risen Lord present in the Eucharistic Host. For those who participate in the procession, it is an opportunity not only to proclaim their faith but also to grow in their faith. The procession is, finally, an invitation to Jesus himself to be a part of our daily lives, to be immersed in the world in which we live.

“We entrust these streets, these homes, our daily life, to his goodness. May our streets be streets of Jesus! May our houses be homes for him and with him! May our life of every day be penetrated by his presence.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily on Corpus Christi*, 26 May 2005

Eucharistic Processions became more prominent as the worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass grew in popular devotions and as the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist became more of a central focus of theological study. In the 13th Century, when the Solemnity of Corpus Christi was established for the universal Church, Eucharistic Processions quickly became a part of that celebration. Over the following centuries, Eucharistic Processions spread more and more throughout the Church.

The Church has consistently encouraged the development and growth of Eucharistic Processions. In many parts of the world today, Eucharistic Processions are a very important form of Eucharistic piety. Different cultures have developed traditions surrounding Eucharistic Processions including street decorations, songs, prayers, and other devotions. Reintroducing Eucharistic Processions where they have faded in popularity can be a powerful way to renew and rediscover both belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist as well as the missionary call that every Catholic shares: to bring Jesus to the world.

This document is meant to be an aid for any parish that would like to plan a Eucharistic Procession, especially parishes that have not recently or have not previously organized a procession. In this document you will find guidance on the logistical aspects of planning a Eucharistic Procession

- Inviting a leadership team and initial planning
- Planning your procession route
- Roles and procession order
- Liturgical considerations

In addition, this document includes ideas to make the procession evangelizing and catechetical for all involved. The guidance found here is primarily for Eucharistic Processions, most especially the procession for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

PLANNING

Initial Steps

- o The planning for a Eucharistic Procession starts with the pastor who will either take on the primary responsibilities or delegate them to a designated chairperson to lead the planning. The pastor must remain involved throughout the process.
- o Before any planning begins, the pastor is to receive permission from the Diocesan Bishop to hold the procession (cf. *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, 101; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 944 §1)
- o Invite a group of parish leaders to begin planning your Eucharistic Procession together with your pastor. This group should include people from a variety of parish groups and ministries, especially those whose input will be necessary for planning. If this will be the first procession that your parish has organized, planning should begin 4-6 months in advance.
- o Consult the proper liturgical books for preparing a Eucharistic Procession. Your pastor will likely have access to these:
 - o *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass* (nos. 101-108)
 - o *Ceremonial of Bishops* (nos. 385-394).
 - o *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*
 - o Any instructions on processions promulgated by your bishop or diocesan office
- o Choose a date for your Eucharistic Procession. The Eucharistic Procession on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, which is celebrated on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday in the dioceses of the United States, holds a special place in the life of a parish or city (cf. *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, no. 102).
- o Consider your parish's history, demographics, and local circumstances. The liturgical texts on processions leave many details of the procession open to variations based on local traditions. Your procession should be an organic reflection of your parish community.
- o Begin inviting parishioners to be a part of a larger logistics team which will be in charge of the physical preparations (altars, biers, booklets, etc.) as well as keeping the procession moving smoothly on the day of the event



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

Planning your route

- o Plan the route for your procession
 - o The procession is not permitted to remain inside the church building. (*Notitiae* 11 (1975), 64)
 - o There is a preference for the procession to begin in one church and end in another, but in many places, this is not possible and a loop back to the original church is more appropriate (HCWEOM, no. 107).
 - o At the very least, plan to process around the parish grounds; however, *strongly* consider taking the procession into the streets, since a significant aspect of the procession is to give a public witness of faith.
 - o Keep in mind the needs of your parishioners: is the route accessible for people with wheelchairs or families with strollers? How long will the procession take?
 - o You may wish to rent a golf cart or plan for someone to drive a van behind the procession in case anyone might need a ride.
- o Along the route, you may plan for 1 to 4 stations where the procession will stop for prayers and **benediction**. These stations are not required.
 - o Stations should be set up in areas that allow for the entire congregation to gather around them, such as outdoor shrines, parks, or even parking lots.
 - o The “altars” for the stations should be arranged with altar cloth, corporal, 4-6 candles, monstrance stand if available, etc. The surrounding area should also be decorated in a dignified way with flowers, banners, artwork, etc. Flowers may be placed in front of or around the “altar” but never upon it, keeping in mind the minister’s need to access the altar.
- o Assign individuals to be in charge of preparing the station(s) prior to the procession and to go ahead of the procession to make sure everything is set with candles lit.
- o Consider how the route might be decorated for the procession. For example, certain cultures have beautiful traditions arranging “carpets” of flowers along the route of Eucharistic Processions. Invite parish groups to help decorate the route following the traditions of your community.
- o **Apply for and receive proper permits and licenses from local authorities.** You may need to adjust your route based on recommendations from police and/or town/city authorities. Police can assist with traffic control and public safety during the procession. You should be prepared to pay a fee for this necessary service.

Benediction: *Solemn blessing when a bishop, priest, or deacon blesses the congregation with the Eucharist in the monstrance. The bishop, priest, or deacon, wearing a humeral veil, picks up the monstrance and traces the sign of the cross with it over the people. Benediction typically occurs at the end of a period of adoration or at the end of a Eucharistic Procession.*

Procession Order – Personnel and roles

In a Eucharistic Procession, every person has a place and a role. The celebrant (bishop or priest) who carries the monstrance is central and essential, but other groups of people precede and follow him, actively participating in the worship of our Eucharistic Lord. The liturgical books offer some guidance on the order of the procession, but much is left open to local variation.

The Roman Missal gives no indication of the procession order, and elsewhere we read that “Eucharistic Processions should be arranged in accordance with local customs in regard to the decoration of the streets and the order followed by the participants.”(*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, 104) When discussing the Eucharistic Procession for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Ceremonial of Bishops gives the following guidance which can be helpful to order the procession:

The procession is then formed in this order: first the crossbearer, accompanied by acolytes carrying candlesticks with lighted candles; next, the clergy; deacons of the Mass; canons and presbyters, wearing copes; concelebrants; visiting bishops, wearing copes; the minister carrying the bishop’s pastoral staff; two censerbearers carrying censers with burning incense; the bishop carrying the blessed sacrament; a little behind him the two deacons assisting him; the ministers who assist with the book and miter. All carry candles, and torchbearers escort the blessed sacrament. (Ceremonial of Bishops, 391)

Of course, in a parish setting, many of these roles would not be needed since there would not be a bishop present. Also, this gives no indication of how the congregation should be arranged. What follows is a **suggested** order that might be more suitable for most situations and can be used if desired and adjusted as needed. You should also consult any diocesan instructions which might clarify the proper order for your local church.

- o Remember: the following order is only a suggestion. Work with your pastor and planning committee to determine the procession order that works for your parish.
- o It is important that the order of the procession is clear to everyone involved. Banners and biers and other items for the procession (canopy, torches, etc.) should be lined up exactly where they should begin. Instructions should be announced to the congregation and be printed in the procession booklet. Members of your logistics team should be ready to help the congregation line up in their proper places.
- o Anyone who will be leading groups or carrying items and all volunteers should rehearse the end of Mass/adoration, the formation of the procession, the route itself, and all liturgical necessities (holding the canopy, moving from inside to outside the church building, stopping at the station altars, etc.). Servers should be especially well trained in their roles.
- o Groups such as the Knights of Columbus Honor Guard, the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, the Knights of Malta, and others should process in full uniform either in front of the celebrant with the monstrance or directly behind him.
- o Depending on your route, your logistics team will likely be working with police to keep roads blocked and the procession moving in the right direction. Someone on your logistics team should also help set the pace by staying in front of the procession and coordinating with the Crossbearer and/or Master of Ceremonies.
- o Consider having volunteers who are able to distribute water bottles throughout the procession or at least at the station altars. On particularly hot days, it may even help to have volunteers with spray bottles to cool people, especially the servers.



Crossbearer

While the cross leads the procession, it is helpful to have a Master of Ceremonies who can help the cross bearer set the pace and stop as needed so that the procession stays together.

- **Candle bearers**

Those who recently received 1st Communion

In many places, the children who have just received their 1st Communion are given a place of honor in the Corpus Christi Procession sprinkling flower petals at the front of the procession.



- **Additional Clergy**



Thurifers and boat-bearer

The *Ceremonial of Bishops* calls for two thurifers who proceed directly in front of the Blessed Sacrament. It will also be necessary to have someone holding the boat with additional incense.



- **Canopy and canopy holders**

Celebrant with Monstrance under canopy

“Whether or not a baldachin (canopy) is held over the bishop as he carries the blessed sacrament depends on local custom” *Ceremonial of Bishops*, 391.



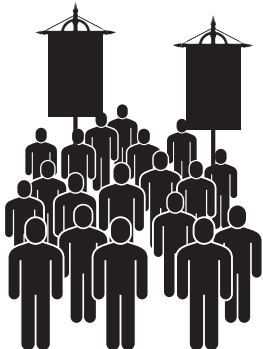
- **Deacon(s) of the Mass**



- **Torch-bearers escorting canopy**



- **Choir**



Faithful

Among the groups of the faithful, ministries, confraternities, and lay associations should process together under their own banners. These groups or others can also carry biers displaying statues of Our Lady or other saints.

*gray text indicates optional elements

Liturgical Items

While there is room for local variation in planning a Eucharistic Procession, many of the liturgical aspects remain constant. The following are some of the liturgical items that you will need to prepare for your procession. As with other aspects of the Church's liturgy, the use of these items developed for both practical and spiritual reasons. In the weeks leading up to the procession, it would be helpful to teach parishioners about some of the spiritual symbolism behind these items, especially the less common ones, that they will see during the procession.

Your parish will likely have most of these items. If you do not have any that you need for your procession, consider asking parish groups such as the Knights of Columbus to help fundraise for them. Please note: Some of these items are optional.

Monstrance – Liturgical vessel used to display the Blessed Sacrament for public veneration. The name “monstrance” comes from the Latin word, *monstrare* which means “to show.” Made with precious metal, they are often designed to look like the sun with the Sacred Host displayed in a transparent glass “luna” in the middle and golden beams radiating outward. Other designs look like the façade of a church with the Eucharist in the middle. In either case, the symbolism reminds us that Jesus, in the Eucharist, radiates his love and grace out into the world and into our lives.



Chasuble/Cope – If the procession occurs after Mass, the bishop or priest may continue to wear the chasuble, the vestment he wears for the celebration of the Mass. At the end of Mass, before the procession begins, he may also change into a white cope, the liturgical vestment worn by the bishop or priest similar to a cloak with an open front that is clasped together at the chest.



Photo by John Whitman

Humeral Veil – Liturgical vestment worn over the cope on the shoulders (Latin – *[h]umera*). The humeral veil allows the priest or bishop to hold the monstrance without touching it with his hands. This is a reminder that we are not focusing on the action of the priest; rather, it is Christ himself who walks with us and blesses us during benediction.



Processional Cross – Cross held by an altar server (crucifer or crossbearer) leading the procession. By lifting the cross high, the procession offers the answer to the world’s sufferings and difficulties and invites people to follow, as Pope Francis has said, “...Christ’s Cross is like a beacon that indicates the port to ships that are still afloat on stormy seas.” (*General Audience*, March 31, 2021.)



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

Candles/torches (at least two) – Processional candles held by altar servers alongside the processional cross. Additional torches can be used to escort the Blessed Sacrament. It is also appropriate for others in the procession to carry small candles.

Thurible(s) with incense – Metal censer held by chains in which incense is burned. The incense symbolizes both the prayers of the people rising up to God as well as the great beauty and mystery of the Eucharist. In a Eucharistic Procession, two thuribles can be used as they alternate incensing the Blessed Sacrament.



Boat – Container for holding the incense held by an altar server near the thuribles so that they can be refilled along the route.



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

Processional canopy/baldachin – Square or rectangular cloth covering for the Blessed Sacrament during a procession. The canopy is carried by four or more people with upright poles. The canopy, while not strictly required, adds dignity to the procession by making a sacred space for the Eucharist throughout the procession. It is reminiscent of the tent of the Lord’s presence where God dwelt with the Israelites in the wilderness.

Ombrellino – smaller, circular canopy held by one person. Typically is used inside the Church to cover the Blessed Sacrament as the priest brings it to the processional canopy.



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

Bells – handheld liturgical bells that can be rung along the route and during benediction. The bells indicate to the public that the procession is approaching so that they can prepare for the arrival of Jesus in the Eucharist. Just as the arrival of a king would be announced with trumpet blares, the King of kings’ arrival is announced through the streets with bells and songs.

Stations – Depending on the length of the procession route, one to four altars can be prepared where the Blessed Sacrament can be placed, prayers offered, and benediction given. See page 3 for a description of how to prepare a station altar. Ask your priest if he would like a kneeler or a pillow in front of the altar.



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios



Processional Banners – Banners for various confraternities or lay associations in the parish. These should be made from high-quality material. People should process with their particular group's banner if used.

Processional Bier(s) with devotional statues – Wooden structures that hold statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary or other saints such as your parish's patron. The bier is typically carried on the shoulders of four or more people and can represent that the communion of saints is also present among the faithful. It is important that the focus of the procession remains on the Blessed Sacrament and not on the statues of the saints.



Booklets with instructions and music for congregation. It is appropriate for songs and prayers be recited throughout the procession to focus the congregation and the public on the Blessed Sacrament. Booklets are helpful for guiding these songs and prayers.

Other Items – megaphone or sound system if necessary for leading prayers. Invitational material to hand out to onlookers as the procession passes by.

Sequence of Events

Based on the proper liturgical books, the following is a standard sequence of events for a Eucharistic Procession.

- o The procession begins after Mass or after a lengthy period of public adoration. If the procession occurs after Mass, the Host to be carried in the procession should be consecrated at this Mass.
- o After the Communion of the faithful, the monstrance is placed on the altar and the consecrated Host is placed in the monstrance.
- o Those who have particular roles in the procession (those carrying the canopy, banners, biers, etc.; those leading groups of the faithful; altar servers; etc.) should be arranging themselves for the beginning of the procession insofar as that does not interfere with the conclusion of Mass.
- o The celebrant says the Prayer after Communion but omits the Concluding Rites.
- o Wearing a cope (or chasuble), the celebrant kneels before the altar and incenses the Blessed Sacrament.
- o Putting on the humeral veil, the celebrant goes up to the altar, genuflects and takes the monstrance, holding it with hands covered by the veil.
- o The procession forms with the crossbearer leading the Blessed Sacrament to the canopy. Be prepared to wait as groups gather in the appropriate order.
- o Processing along the planned route, the choir leads the faithful in songs and prayers worshipping Christ in the Eucharist and expressing faith in the Real Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.
- o If stations have been set up, the procession stops at each one along the route. Placing the monstrance on the altar, the celebrant kneels before the Blessed Sacrament and leads the faithful in prayers, a reading from the Gospels, and/or a brief period of silent adoration. Then, Eucharistic Benediction is given before the procession continues. Benediction at the station altars is not “Solemn Benediction” and the typical prayers at Benediction are omitted.
- o At the end of the procession, Solemn Eucharistic Benediction is given as the final blessing. After Benediction, the Blessed Sacrament is removed from the monstrance and placed in the tabernacle.





A PROCESSION THAT EVANGELIZES

“No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.” St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio no. 3

During Eucharistic Processions, “the Christian people give public witness of faith and to their devotion toward this sacrament” (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, 101). By publicly proclaiming belief in Jesus’ True Presence in the Eucharist, the parish has an opportunity to invite the broader community to ask questions about the Eucharist and encounter Christ as the Blessed Sacrament is brought to them directly on the streets. For this invitation to be well received, attention and care should be given to planning a reverent and beautiful procession that is expressive of the faith of the parish and above all the belief that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. In addition, deliberate steps can be taken, both in the planning process and in the execution of the procession, to evangelize the community more effectively.

Witness of Faith

Whether you are putting announcements in the parish bulletin and your town’s local paper or you are applying for a permit to process through the center of town, you will have opportunities to explain the Eucharistic Procession and why you are organizing one. Individuals who are in charge of these and other aspects of planning should be prepared to explain not only the procession itself but also what Catholics believe about the Eucharist and how Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist has transformed their own lives. They should also feel confident to personally invite members of the community to participate in the procession.



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

In today’s culture, where so many are indifferent or even hostile to religion in general and Christianity in particular, it is the witness of your faith that can build trust and rouse curiosity among members of your community who on their own might not approach the Church. As Pope Francis has said, “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 127). During the weeks leading up to the procession and during the procession itself, you, your planning teams, and the entire parish should be prepared to “bring the love of Jesus to others” and to “...be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence...” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Proclaiming the Good News

As your procession goes through the streets, you will encounter a variety of responses from the people you pass by. Some will hardly notice what is happening, some will be intrigued but keep on their way,

and others will stop what they are doing and watch the entire procession go by, perhaps even asking those in the procession what they are doing. Consider training a group of “street evangelists” who can walk on the outer parts of the procession and be ready to stop and have conversations with people who are intrigued or have questions. These conversations can be brief but powerful. Consider also having cards or pamphlets that give a brief explanation of processions and the Eucharist and that invite people to Mass, Adoration, or another upcoming event that is specifically planned for those who are spiritually open or curious.

Invitation to Community

The procession is also an opportunity to invite parishioners to enter more deeply into parish life. Especially for parishioners who might attend Mass once or twice a month, this extraordinary experience can be the catalyst for more consistent attendance. The procession should also be a celebration and an event that builds the parish community. If possible, plan a social event for parishioners of all ages to attend after the conclusion of the procession.

Intercessory Prayer

Pope Francis reminds us that “One form of prayer moves us particularly to take up the task of evangelization and to seek the good of others: it is the prayer of intercession.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 281) Intercessory prayer is a participation in Christ’s intercession and leads us to pray as he did. Intercessory prayer is a powerful, but too often neglected, foundation for the work of evangelization. Humbly and perseveringly go before God in prayer on behalf of your community. Invite parishioners to devote themselves to praying for the procession and everyone who will be present either in the congregation or on the streets, that they might be open to God working in their lives. Even during the procession, some members of the congregation should be committed to interceding for everyone along the route.



Catechesis

As the date of the procession approaches, the parish should make an effort to ensure that parishioners are aware of what is going to happen and why. Use various means of communication to teach the faithful about the Eucharist and about processions. These could include the Sunday homily, the bulletin, social media pages, emails, religious education classes, youth ministry, adult faith formation and other groups within the parish. Having a strategic and integrated plan to catechize the parish community as a whole will make the procession more meaningful for all involved.

For additional resources go to www.eucharisticrevival.org and www.kofc.org/eucharist



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