



Mass Etiquette

In the past, communities had very detailed rules on 'how one should behave'. Seating arrangements at dinner maintained a person's status in the family or society; it was considered essential that a woman cover her head while attending Mass. But today, we don't have lifestyles that are as structured, although this may vary. Times and attitudes have changed; different cultures have differing views of acceptable behaviour. The suggestions offered here are simple reminders, intended to help all parishioners develop the habits that make our common worship full, rich and prayerful. It's about respecting the sanctity of God's house and the Mass, and about being considerate of others.

Naturally, there may be times when we arrive late, are unprepared, are dressed inappropriately or forgot to silence our cell phone or beeper. Sometimes our children will be noisy or fidgety. Accidents happen. How we act on such occasions is part of etiquette. But mainly, etiquette is about habits, not the rare slip or unavoidable occurrence.

Everyone who worships wholeheartedly and without needless distraction will appreciate good parish etiquette. This may be their only opportunity for meditation and spiritual reflection during the week. This is also a celebration that we share as a community and we must be mindful of the feelings of others. Just remember the 3 "R's":

Reverence - Respect - Responsibility

The way we worship is a reflection of our beliefs

Before Leaving Home

Even before we head out, we can set the tone for the quality of our worship and its ultimate benefit by our attitude. What are my expectations for Mass today? Am I wanting it to be a fruitful and rewarding celebration or is my attendance merely a "duty" or "chore"?

A look at the day's readings beforehand may enhance your understanding of the messages or themes being presented.

Don't forget that you should not eat for one hour before receiving Holy Communion.

Don't bring food or beverages into the church (except for medical reasons).

Dressing Appropriately

As "business casual" has become the dress code in many workplaces, it is becoming more difficult to know how to dress for Mass.

The Liturgy is the Lord's inclusive banquet. Mass is neither a nightclub nor a beach picnic and even in today's casual society what is appropriate dress for one activity is not necessarily what should be worn in the other. So what is the dress code?

Err on the side of dressing up, not down; presume that most people will wear their better, newer clothing and do likewise.

Let modesty guide your choice of clothing. Choose clothing that will not be distracting to you or to others.

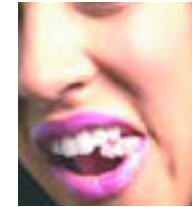
Consider regional and ethnic expectations regarding Sunday dress.



Arriving

Arriving before Mass in good time should be a priority. Every parish, of course, wants all who gather to participate from the moment they arrive to the closing hymn. Good planning helps us to be on time most of the time. Here are some habits to develop for arriving.

Chewing gum is inappropriate during Mass. Please dispose of any in the waste bin BEFORE entering the body of the Church. Ensure children do not have gum and do not dispose of it under the pews.



Parking

Use the Church parking lot. If necessary, parking is only permitted on the south side of St. Francis Avenue. Obey all traffic and parking signs. NO ONE IS EXEMPT FROM OBEYING PARKING BY-LAWS WHEN ATTENDING CHURCH. THE CHURCH IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY TICKETS OR FINES. Ambulances and fire trucks are too large to get through small neighbourhood streets when vehicles are parked on both sides; it could mean the difference between life and death for someone. Be aware that all roadways within the church property are designated fire routes.

Bless yourself with holy water upon entering the church. Holy water is blessed with solemn prayer, to beg God's blessing on those who use it, and also reminds us of our baptism.

Genuflect upon entering and exiting the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. It is a sign of reverence towards the presence of Christ. Keep silence at all times in the Chapel.

Make space for others to sit, especially during crowded Masses and please remember pew seating should not be reserved in respect of others.

Pick up a hymn book, when available, upon entering Church and return at the conclusion of the Liturgy to the hymnal bookcase. PLEASE DO NOT LET SMALL CHILDREN PLAY WITH THE HYMN BOOKS. They are costly to repair or replace.

Where is the Best Place to Sit with Children?

Select a place that will best help everyone in your group to participate fully, appropriate to the child's maturity level.

Older children may enjoy being at the front where children's interest can be stimulated. There, they can see the priest, the servers, the lector, the celebration.

Children aged 4-10 can be registered in the "Children's Liturgy" at the 10:30 Mass. A popular program, it is geared to their level of understanding.

If you have small children you may find sitting to the side a good solution. It will be easier to take them out for a while to calm them down if they become loud or distracting to others. Please do not use the Blessed Sacrament Chapel or the entrance foyer for this purpose.

There's nothing wrong with taking your child out if they become loud. The washrooms and outer halls are good places to settle down a restless child. PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PLAY IN THE NARTHEX (foyer). The sound travels into the church, further disturbing other worshippers.

Bring babies in carriers rather than strollers. These fit safely on the pew. A stroller in the aisle makes Communion difficult for people to walk up and return to their seats. If you need to use a stroller, consider sitting at the back of the Church.

The choir section contains wires, electrical equipment and microphones. Please refrain from sitting in this section if you have babies or children who may become restless.

During Mass

Actively participate in the Mass. Responding and singing are an important part of the Mass. It makes the experience more spiritually fulfilling and encourages the other parishioners to participate as well.

Communion

Your hands should be clasped in front in a respectful manner while you are in line and then raised up to receive communion. Your hands should remain clasped until you return to your seat.



You must consume the host immediately in front of the Eucharistic minister or priest. You must not walk away with a host or divide it among other members of the family.

Small children are welcome to receive a blessing instead of the Eucharist if they have not had their First Holy Communion. Children should indicate this by crossing their arms across their chest.



Non-Catholic visitors attending Mass are also welcome to receive a blessing, BUT NOT HOLY COMMUNION. Adults also should indicate this by crossing their arms across their chest.

Leaving

Please remain in your place until the closing hymn is finished. The time after Communion and the concluding rites (with announcements) are both important to the communal aspect of the liturgy as a whole.

Clean up before you leave. Ensure you are bringing all your belongings with you and please return hymn books to the shelf after the service.

Pick up a bulletin as you leave to stay informed of parish events.

Please be courteous and patient when exiting the parking lot.

Our children at Mass

Children are welcome at all Masses. Most children are likely to be baptized members of the parish. We are committed to their ongoing faith development. Children need to be part of worship to learn how to worship. We adults need them among us to help us remember that we are all children before God. It is only normal to expect young children to be somewhat distracting to parents and sometimes to others. Etiquette includes how to keep distractions to a minimum and what to do when they occur. Children are a special gift to every worshipping community. We must always remember to be a welcoming community. Children and teens are not only the Church of the future - they are the Church of NOW!

Children are in need of guidance and our good example is most necessary.



The Bible says that children should be taught from infancy. As parents you are well aware of how quickly young children understand, and how very quickly they learn. To teach your child that church is a special place, you have to start when they are very small.

Attending Eucharist is a very special privilege and children should be encouraged to behave appropriately. When children misbehave they (and you) are missing out on the opportunity to appreciate the wonder and mystery of the liturgy, they are also not learning to pray or show respect.



Teaching Children Etiquette Takes Planning

Making it through Mass with a child can be a true test of faith. Between keeping your child under control and warding off the stares of some pew-sitters, you may feel that no one in your family is getting anything out of church. If you have your heart set on some kind of "ideal church experience", wherein your neatly dressed children sit quietly for every minute of the service, you're probably out of luck. But that doesn't mean your family should give up and stay home. Try these tips for getting more than a headache out of worship time.

Dress for the part (see also Dressing Appropriately). Special clothes send a clear signal that the outing to church is not the same as an outing to the playground. It is true that the state of our heart is far more important than the state of our attire. But what does it say about the state of our heart when we cannot be bothered with presenting ourselves in a special way to receive Our Lord? Children pick up on this very quickly. When they see a little extra effort going into the attendance at Mass they absorb that this is an important event. If they see no special attention given to Mass attendance they will think of it as no more than an afterthought.

Communicate your hopes and expectations

Clearly to your children. Explain that Church is a place where people speak quietly and move calmly. Before leaving home talk to your children about prayer, the parts of the Mass and what they will see and hear when they attend the liturgy.

Keep children in the pews with you. Do not allow children to wander up and down the aisles or especially up the steps of the altar. Children in the Narthex (foyer) must not be allowed to scale the glass wall by the baptismal font as this can be dangerous.

Encourage your child to learn and participate in the actions of the Mass; making the sign of the cross, sitting, standing, kneeling, listening, responding and singing.



Don't offer incentives to be bad. For example, threatening to leave church if behaviour does not improve will backfire because, for a restless child, leaving church is exactly what they want. Make sure the alternative to being in church is less attractive than sitting through Mass. Absenting yourself and your child benefits no one.

Offer praise for good behaviour after Mass. Acknowledging your child's good behaviour will reinforce their continued good efforts.

Infants and Very Young Children

Provide soft toys for babies and toddlers during Mass.

A children's Mass book could be helpful for your child to follow the Liturgy.

It's not necessary to bring toys to church. Toys, crayons or other items that make sound or could damage the pews do not help children to understand why they are at Mass.

Please do not bring food into church. It is not in keeping with the worshipful atmosphere of the Mass.

Keep feet/shoes off the pews, kneelers and

hymnal holders.

What should I do if...:

....I arrive after Mass has already begun?

Know that it is better to be present, even if late, than it is to be absent from the Mass altogether. Remember all the parking rules still apply.

Ask an usher for assistance if you are trying to find a seat.

Choose an appropriate time to join the congregation such as during a song, but not during the readings or prayers. It is best to wait for the right moment to enter.

A person arriving after the Gospel should not receive Holy Communion.

..... if I am driving an older person to Mass?

Drop them off at the east or west doors which are handicap accessible, then find an appropriate parking spot.

.....if I want to bring communion to a sick family member?

Please see a priest before Mass to make arrangements.

Fostering Hospitality

All etiquette is based on hospitality. Since parish liturgy is about extending the Lord's hospitality to others, etiquette must reflect the inclusiveness of the kingdom Jesus described in the Gospels. How we act at Mass should help us pray, listen and worship as well as help our neighbours do the same.

