Thank you for sharing Christ with others through Children’s Liturgy of the Word. We are blessed to have caring people within our community who see the importance of ministering to our children.

This handbook designed to help you understand the format of Children’s Liturgy of the Word, as well as to give you specific directions and hints for performing your duties as a Leader, Timekeeper, or Reader.
**What is Children’s Liturgy of the Word?**

Children in grades K-5 are invited to experience God's Word during Mass at a level appropriate to them. Following the gathering song and opening prayer, the children — led by an adult leader — process to Pastor’s Hall, where the Word is read using the Children’s Lectionary (Bible). The homily and prayers enrich the children’s understanding of the scripture readings. Children rejoin their parents in Church when the collection is taken up. All children in grades K-5 present at Mass are invited to participate, and no pre-registration is needed.

**Calendar**

Children’s Liturgy of the Word takes place during the 11:00 Mass on most Sundays of the school year (September – May). There is no Children’s Liturgy of the Word on the Sunday after Christmas, on Palm Sunday, on Easter Sunday, or on specific weekends noted on the schedule.

**Schedule**

The schedule and materials are emailed from the Liturgy Office to all Leaders, Timekeepers, and Readers. Take time to review these, especially noting when you have been scheduled. If you are unable to participate when you are scheduled, it is your responsibility to call and switch with someone or find a replacement. **If you trade time slots, please also trade materials, since each week has different readings.**

**Format**

- Procession from Church to Pastor’s Hall (immediately after Opening Prayer, when the congregation is seated)
- Lighting of Candle / Prayer of the Day
- Proclamation of Word
  - Old Testament Reading
  - brief silence (10-15 seconds)
  - Psalm - **sung**
  - brief silence (10-15 seconds)
  - New Testament Reading, if there is one
  - brief silence (10-15 seconds)
  - Gospel Acclamation – **sung**; **STAND**
  - Gospel Reading - **STAND**
- Homily/Breaking Open the Word
- Prayer of the Faithful (intercessions)
- Procession from Pastor’s Hall to Church
Setup
Setup is done by the Leader and one or both of the Timekeepers.

- Arrive 15 minutes before Mass.
- Find the Children's Lectionary in the vesting sacristy (near the gathering space). Make sure you grab the correct one for the current cycle (A, B, or C).
- One of the Timekeepers needs an Assisted Listening device from the gathering space.
- In Pastor’s Hall…
  - The Children’s Liturgy of the Word materials are located in the room behind the kitchen.
  - Plastic containers hold the tablecloths, table runners, candles, matches, and Advent wreath.
  - A small round wooden table may be used, or one of the long wooden tables from the hall works as well. A white tablecloth is provided to cover the table.
  - Remove chairs and tables from the kitchen end of the hall. Keep one chair for the leader. All children sit on the floor.
  - Close the partition to give the room intimacy and privacy.
  - Plug in the CD player. Practice the psalm and Gospel Acclamation with the CD. These must be sung, not spoken.

Liturgical colors for table covers:
- Advent = purple (purple and pink on the 3rd Sunday of Advent)
- Lent = purple
- Ordinary Time = green
- Christmas season, Easter season, and feast days = white
- Pentecost = red
- When in doubt, match the colors of the priest’s vestments.

Cleanup
After Mass, return to Pastor’s Hall to…
- Open the partitions
- Put away the round table, candles, cloths, CD and CD player
- Reset the tables and chairs into a “square” formation on the kitchen end of the hall.
Leader

Your ministry is to open the hearts of the children to the Word of God and allow them to respond to God’s Word in prayer and life.

As the Leader of Children’s Liturgy of the Word, you are given the authority to proclaim the Gospel and to break open the Word, i.e., to preach. Recognizing this role will move you to prayer and to the necessary preparations worthy of this honor. You are being entrusted with a special role of sharing your faith – in your actions, how you carry yourself, as much as what you say – with our children. You are also the “key” to a smooth, effective experience of the Liturgy of the Word for the children. Preparation and flexibility are necessary.

Preparation the Week Before

- Read and reflect on the readings and the commentary and guiding questions in your packet.
- Allow your experience of faith to help you “break open the Word” in your homily preparation.
- Contact your other team members. Solicit their ideas, remind them that they are scheduled, answer any of their questions, be prepared to help find substitutes if necessary.
- Explore the use of talents of other team members, e.g., in a “living” gospel reading, in homily presentation, in song leadership.

Before Mass

- Arrive at church at least 15 minutes before Mass.
- Sign in at the Liturgy bulletin board in the gathering space.
- Check that the other team members (timekeepers and readers) have arrived.
- Go to the vesting sacristy and find the Children’s Lectionary (either on the counter or on the bookshelf). Locate the correct readings for the day and move the ribbon to that place.
- Consult with the Presider or musicians to be aware of special events, such as baptisms, RCIA rites, other blessings, etc., which will affect the time allotted between the procession from church and return to the assembly. These will require adjustments to your liturgy.
- Set up Pastor’s Hall as described above.
- Then, keeping the Children’s Lectionary with you, find a seat in the church assembly (near the front, near the center aisle).

Mass

- Participate in Mass as usual.
- After the Opening Prayer, remain standing as the congregation sits. Do not wait for an invitation or announcement from the Presider.
- Immediately process up the center aisle. Using both hands, hold the Children’s Lectionary high. This is the holy book of God’s Word.
- Pause before the altar and reverence the altar by bowing.
- Slowly turn to the left and process toward the music area and door to the working sacristy. Other team members will intermingle with the children. Process quietly through the sacristy and down the hallway to Pastor’s Hall.
**Children’s Liturgy of the Word – This mirrors what is happening in church.**
- After children are seated (on the floor, not in chairs) in Pastor’s Hall, light the candle, read the Prayer of the Day (Opening Prayer), and introduce the first reading.
  - First Reading – Reader
  - Responsorial Psalm – Timekeeper #1 or other designate (note: refrain is always sung)
  - Second Reading – Reader (note: some weeks there is not a second reading)
  - Gospel Acclamation – sung  **ALL STAND**
  - Gospel – Leader  **ALL STAND**
  - Homily – plan for 5 to 7 minutes. Be aware of Timekeepers and their signals. Allow them to handle children’s behavior or other needs. Wrap up the homily when the Timekeeper signals that the homily in church is finished (unless there is a baptism or other event).
  - Prayer of the Faithful (intercessions) – Leader
  - If there is extra time at this point, you may lead a question/discussion about the homily, open it up to the children’s intercessions, etc. This is not a time for socializing or games.
  - Closing Prayer – if time permits.
  - Extinguish candle before leaving Pastor’s Hall

**Returning to the Assembly**
Bring the children quietly into the sacristy, lining up by the entrance into church. When the offertory song begins, children come back into church. Try to avoid walking on the floor grate near the music area. Some children may have coins to place in the collection basket. Check that all children find their families before you sit down.

**Homily Tips**

The Introduction to the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* (10):

*Because the explanation of the scripture readings is so important at Masses with children, a homily should always be given. However, in order that they might not be deprived of the riches of God’s word, especially if the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of children, and with the consent of the pastor or rector of the church, one of the adults participating in these celebrations may speak to the children after the gospel.*

- This is one rare opportunity where a non-ordained member of the Catholic Church is empowered to preach. You are preaching. This is not a talk. Be reverent. You are breaking open the Word of God.
- Prepare! This is important; take it seriously.
- Pray!
- Reflect! Use and study the resources you are given. The resources will help you give the official teaching of the Church (we want the Gospel according to Matthew/Mark/Luke/John, not the Gospel according to you). Take the Word and the resources, and run them through your life experiences.
- Don’t try to do all the suggestions in the resources. Choose a few points and do them well. Be flexible.
- This is a solemn, beautiful moment. The children are already spiritual; you are not making them that. We don’t give them spirituality; we draw it from them.

- Good proclamation is important. The Word of God becomes flesh – comes alive – in the proclamation of the Word. Use the Children’s Lectionary (it is a strong symbol).

- Your homily message must be focused. Be able to say your whole homily message in one brief sentence. During the week before, work on it a little each day to refine it. Convey a clear message to the children.

- Dialogue is a good technique.

- Have the children use their senses – close your eyes…see…hear…smell…

- A proper visual aid can be helpful, but is not necessary. Note: This is not Religious Ed or Sunday School; no arts or crafts, no snacks. They should come back to church with nothing in their hands.

- Homily length: 5-7 minutes.

- During the Prayer of the Faithful you have some time for flexibility. Stop early if necessary. If time, ask the children “Who or what do you want to pray for?” The intercessions mailed with your materials are just suggestions.
Before Mass
- Arrive at church at least 15 minutes before Mass.
- Sign in at the Liturgy bulletin board in the gathering space.
- Let the Leader know you are here.
- Be aware of special events, such as a baptism, an RCIA rite, other blessing, which will affect the time allotted between the procession from church and return to the assembly. These will require adjustments to Children’s Liturgy of the Word.
- Decide who will act as Timekeeper #1 and #2.
- #1 – Before Mass, get an Assisted Listening device from the usher or in the back of church to take with you during Children’s Liturgy of the Word.
- Help with the setup of Pastor’s Hall.

Mass
- As soon as the Leader begins processing forward with the Children’s Lectionary, stand up and walk to the front of the aisle.
- As the children come forward, guide them to follow the Leader in a timely but reverent manner.
- Timekeeper #2 joins the middle of the procession. Timekeeper #1 waits until all children have come forward and is the person last to leave the church. Quietly close the sacristy doors.
- Follow the children back to Pastor’s Hall, keeping them as quiet as possible when they are in procession.

Timekeeper #1
- Using the Assisted Listening device, listen to the readings and homily in Church.
- As soon as the homily in church is finished, signal to the Leader that the homily in Church is finished.
- Listen for the intercessions. As soon as they begin (unless there is a baptism or other event happening), make sure the Leader knows that NOW is the time to return to church.
- The Leader will start bringing the children down the hallway to the sacristy.
- Quickly check that the offertory song has begun, then lead the kids through the door near the choir area. Stand near the floor grate by the piano and guide children to walk on the carpet between the grate and steps (not up the steps). Don’t let them go behind you by the cantor; this will distract the musicians, and walking on the grate is noisy. Watch the children as they return to their families or drop their coins in the collection basket. Scan the assembly to be sure no children are wandering or searching for their parents; then return to your seat in the assembly.

Timekeeper #2
- It is your responsibility to maintain order with the children and keep them quiet for the Leader. If necessary, remind them that they are still in church.
- No children may return to the church until the Children’s Liturgy of the Word is completed.
- Help the Leader line up the children and return them to the church at the signal of the other Timekeeper. Stand by the sacristy door as the children pass through it.
• Assist the Leader with other aspects of the Liturgy (psalm, Homily, intercessions) as asked.
• Note: some of the children may have brought coins with them to place in the collection when they return to church. If necessary, remind them to keep these coins in their pocket, purse, etc. – out of sight and quiet.
Readers (children)

Your presentation of the Word is most effective when you are familiar with the readings.

**Preparation the Week Before**
- Read and think about the readings and the commentary and guiding questions in your packet.
- Practice reading out loud. Dramatic reading is not necessary; just use expression. Practice at home with friends and family. Let them remind you to read slowly and clearly. Always read a little slower and louder than you think you should. Ask for help with any words you don't know or can't pronounce.

**Before Mass**
- Arrive at church at least 15 minutes before Mass.
- Sign in at the Liturgy bulletin board in the gathering space.
- Let the Leader know you are here.

**Mass**
- Come forward with the Leader, Timekeepers, and children. Intermingle with the children in the procession to Pastor’s Hall.
- Read your assigned reading when it’s time.
- Read from the Children’s Lectionary, not the pages you were emailed. The use of the Sacred Book is very important.
- Participate with the rest of the group before and after your assigned reading.
- Return with the children to rejoin the congregation in church.
Music

Music is integral to all liturgy and it is therefore integral to a Liturgy of the Word with children. A CD player, CD, and copies of the printed music are provided for you. Practice using these so you are comfortable. Try not to be self-conscious about your singing voice. The children will join with the same spirit with which you lead!

Responsorial Psalm

What do we sing?
We use “A Psalm for All Seasons” by Carey Landry. It is an adaptation of a familiar tune, with verses written for each Sunday throughout the year.

Which refrain text do we use?
Refer to the Leader’s Cover Sheet to see which text to use each Sunday.

Do we have to sing this?
Yes. The psalm is a “song,” so the refrain is always sung. Verses are read from the Children’s Lectionary.

How do we use the CD?
1. Turn the CD on to Track 1.
2. You will hear the piano introduction (the second line of the refrain).
3. The Cantor (Leader or Timekeeper) sings the refrain, then everyone sings it together.
4. Stop the CD.
5. Read verse 1 from the Children’s Lectionary.
6. Sing the refrain without the CD.
7. Read verse 2 from the Children’s Lectionary.
8. Sing the refrain without the CD.

Gospel Acclamation

Which version of the Gospel Acclamation do we use?
- Ordinary Time: Celtic Alleluia – CD Track 2
- Advent, Christmas season, Easter season: Celtic Alleluia – CD Track 2
- Lent: “Glory to You, O Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ.” – CD Track 3

How do we use the CD?
1. Find the correct track.
2. You will hear the piano introduction. Everyone stands.
3. The Cantor (Leader or Timekeeper) sings the acclamation, then everyone sings it together.
4. Stop the CD.