



August 2017

Scheduling of Christmas Masses

Following are the guidelines of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) for scheduling Christmas Masses as well as the specific guidelines for the Archdiocese of Edmonton. Please review these guidelines carefully when scheduling Christmas Masses for your parish.

CCCB Guidelines:

As published in the National Bulletin on Liturgy, Volume 28, No. 143, Winter 1995, pp. 254-255

Anticipated Masses

It is permitted for the faithful to fulfill their obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass by their participation in the celebration of Mass on the preceding Saturday evening. The Instruction on *Worship of the Eucharist* clearly instructs pastors to “teach the faithful the meaning of this favor” and to “take steps to prevent its lessening in any way the sense of what Sunday is” (Eucharisticum mysterium, no. 28). This same Instruction notes that permission for anticipated Masses is a concession which is meant to enable the faithful in today’s conditions to celebrate more easily the day of the Lord’s resurrection. Finally, the Instruction leaves it to the local ordinary to determine the hours for anticipated Masses.

All of these points apply to the celebration of Mass that, for the same reason, is permitted on the evening before a holy day of obligation.

Normally only one anticipated Mass may be celebrated in a church, and this is permitted only for genuine pastoral need. It is never permitted simply for convenience.

Additional Masses

Where pastoral need exists, additional celebrations of the Vigil Mass may take place prior to the Midnight Mass, and additional celebrations of the Mass at Dawn or Mass During the Day may be scheduled for December 25. (Examples of need would be to provide Mass for a mission which is some distance from the parish church, or to alleviate overcrowding at the other Christmas Masses.)

The following questions will be helpful to pastors and liturgical committees when determining a schedule of additional Christmas Vigil Masses and/or Masses on Christmas Day.

1. Is there a genuine pastoral need for additional Masses in this parish, or are additional Masses being considered simply for convenience?
2. Will the multiplication of Vigil Masses diminish or obscure the importance of December 25 as the day on which the universal Church celebrates the Nativity of the Lord?
3. Can the needs of special groups (e.g. families with young children) be met more properly within a regularly scheduled Mass of Christmas Day?

4. Are there sufficient liturgical ministers available for additional Masses so that a worthy celebration can take place without undermining the quality of celebration during the Midnight Mass or the regularly scheduled Masses on Christmas Day?
5. Will the scheduling of additional Masses place an undue burden on the parish priest, or necessitate his celebrating more than three Masses on the feast of Christmas?

Particular Diocesan Legislation

Pastors and liturgical committees are to respect any diocesan legislation concerning the number of Masses or the hours for Christmas Masses which have been determined by the local Ordinary.

When Christmas is celebrated on Saturday

It is important to keep the celebration of Christmas and Sunday distinct, and to be mindful of the extra demands which are placed upon priests and other liturgical ministers when Christmas and Sunday are celebrated on consecutive days.

The following recommendations will be helpful:

1. If possible, additional celebrations of the Vigil Mass of Christmas are to be avoided.
2. If necessary, only one anticipated Midnight Mass should be celebrated around 10:00 p.m.
3. The regularly scheduled Saturday evening Mass in anticipation of Sunday should be omitted altogether.

When Christmas is celebrated on Monday

Sunday is the original and primary feast day for the Christian people, and the heart of the liturgical year. Christmas, the celebration of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of his birth as our Savior, is a distinct feast. For this reason, the two celebrations should be kept distinct. It is therefore recommended that no Sunday Mass be celebrated on Sunday evening, in order to avoid any confusion between the two celebrations. If possible, additional Vigil Masses for Christmas should be avoided, and if necessary, only one anticipated Midnight Mass should be celebrated around 10:00 p.m.

Specific Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Edmonton

In view of the current situation within the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, and taking into consideration the guidelines of the CCCB, the following guidelines for the scheduling of Christmas Masses in the Archdiocese are established:

1. Anticipated Midnight Masses should be avoided when possible and, when necessary, their number should be kept to a minimum. In no case should the number of anticipated Masses in a parish exceed the number of Masses on Christmas day.
2. For parishes that are clustered or have several missions, the total number of anticipated Masses should not exceed the number of Masses on Christmas day.

3. Anticipated Masses should be scheduled no earlier than 5:00 p.m., unless there are very exceptional circumstances.
4. When Christmas is celebrated on Saturday the regularly scheduled Saturday evening Mass in anticipation of Sunday should be omitted altogether.
5. When Christmas is celebrated on Monday, in order to keep the Fourth Sunday of Advent distinct from Christmas, no anticipated Midnight Mass should be celebrated before 5:00 p.m.

If you have questions, please contact me at divineworship@caedm.ca

Sincerely,



Rev. Paul Kavanagh
Director