

# **Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. Does SCAP replace the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist?**

No, SCAP should not be regarded as the ideal solution for the shortage of priests, nor should it be seen as a convenience. SCAP is considered a temporary measure. Although reception of Holy Communion in a SCAP service is closely connected with the sacrifice of the Mass, it is not equal to it. Thus, it is always important at a SCAP to include prayers for vocations. However, when the celebration of the Eucharist is not available, attendance at SCAP does fulfill the Sunday obligation.

### **2. May a lay person celebrate SCAP?**

Yes. In the absence of both a priest and deacon, at the request of the pastor, the bishop may appoint lay persons to serve as leaders for SCAP. The lay leader is responsible for leading the prayers and distributing Holy Communion when it is included in the celebration. Lay leaders are to be selected by the bishop. They are to be chosen from those whose lives are consistent with the Gospel and who are acceptable to the community. They are to be appointed for a definite time and are presented to the community in a liturgical celebration using prayers from the Order for the Blessing of Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service found in the *Book of Blessings*.

### **3. Why does the deacon or the lay person not sit in the priest's chair?**

The empty priest's chair is a symbolic reminder that the community is awaiting the presence of a priest. SCAP should not be considered a celebration without a priest; rather, it should be viewed as a celebration "in the absence of" or "in expectation of a priest."

### **4. May a lay person who celebrates SCAP preach?**

In the Diocese of Salt Lake City, a lay person is not permitted to preach or offer a reflection. Instead, a lay person may read a prepared homily that the pastor has provided. SCAP provides that lay preachers must have completed a process of discernment and have completed the program for training, certification and commissioning by the diocese.

**5. What does a lay leader wear when celebrating SCAP?**

In the Diocese of Salt Lake City, a lay leader of prayer always vests in an alb, which is the garment of all the baptized.

**6. Must Holy Communion always be distributed at a SCAP?**

No. Holy Communion is permitted but not required. In some circumstances, it may not be possible to distribute Holy Communion during the Sunday celebration. In that case, those present should be reminded that Christ is present in the gathered liturgical assembly and in the Scriptures proclaimed.

**7. What Scripture readings should be used at a SCAP?**

The Sunday readings that would ordinarily be read at Mass should be used.

**8. What songs are appropriate at a SCAP?**

Sung prayer is an important dimension of our faith expression. But care must be taken that the songs chosen do not refer to Eucharist or eating and drinking of both the body and blood of Christ.

**9. Should SCAP be used in place of weekly Mass?**

No. When daily Mass cannot be celebrated, the Church prefers the faithful to gather for Morning or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours. If this is not possible, the faithful are encouraged to gather to celebrate a simple Liturgy of the Word. If the pastor or lay leader feels it is essential, Holy Communion may be distributed during this service. The leader should use the format found in the *Holy Communion Outside Mass*.

**10. Is SCAP approved by the Vatican?**

The revised text of SCAP was approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in November, 2003 and submitted to the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for their review. On October 23, 2004, the Congregation noted that the text did not require confirmation by the Holy See but did suggest several editorial adjustments.

### **11. What is the difference between Holy Communion and Sunday Eucharist?**

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the gathered assembly participates fully in the sacrifice of Christ. Sunday Mass is “the only true actualization of the Lord’s Paschal Mystery and is the most complete manifestation of the Church...” (Introduction to SCAP, p. 15) The celebration of the Eucharist expresses fully the Paschal Mystery. The celebration of the Eucharist cannot take place without a priest who is in the place of Christ as head of the church, his body, (*in persona Christi capitis*) and offers the sacrifice in the name of the entire Christian people. The reception of Holy Communion is closely connected with the sacrifice of the Mass but is not equal to it. The celebration of SCAP, with or without Holy Communion, should increase the desire of the faithful to be present at and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist.

### **12. When should SCAP be celebrated?**

SCAP services are to be occasional. They are to be held only when and where approved by the bishop and always under the ministry of the local pastor. There can be only one SCAP service in one place on any given Sunday. SCAP is never to be celebrated in a community where Mass has been celebrated that weekend.

### **13. What is the Liturgy of the Hours?**

The Liturgy of the Hours has since ancient times been the Church’s way of “Praying without ceasing.” In union with Christ, the Church offers her prayers of praise and petition to God the Father for the salvation of the world (BILOH 2). “The purpose of the liturgy of the hours is to sanctify the day and the whole range of human activity.” (GILOH 11).

The SCAP is always to be celebrated with one of the chief offices: Morning or Evening Prayer. The liturgy of the hours belongs to the “whole Body of the Church” and is never a private affair (GILOH 20). It is the daily prayer of the Church in which all people – priests, deacons, religious, and the laity – gather in one heart and mind to give praise to God. The fact that the ritual book for SCAP places the Liturgy of the Hours first in the order of permitted forms of celebration suggests it is the preferred form of celebration for SCAP services with the Sunday assembly.

### **14. Do we have to use the ritual? Why?**

Yes. The bishop has directed that the use of the new ritual begin with the season of Advent 2009. There are many good reasons for doing so. The 2007 revised edition

lessens the likelihood of confusion between the reception of Holy Communion and the celebration of the Eucharist. By faithful adherence to the new ritual, those who gather for worship will not only experience the Lord's presence in the Scriptures and in Holy Communion, but will also increase their awareness of Sunday Eucharist as the true actualization of the Pascal Mystery.

#### **15. What is the role/purpose of the Act of Thanksgiving?**

The Act of Thanksgiving is a communal response in which the faithful praise the glory and mercy of God. It is part of the communal response to the Word of God when Holy Communion is not received. When Holy Communion is distributed, the Act of Thanksgiving is an expression of gratitude for the gift of Christ's body which forms us more fully into his body in the world.

#### **16. What is the Liturgical Year?**

It is the cycle the Church follows in celebrating the mysteries of the Incarnation, Redemption, and Sanctification. It begins with the season of Advent, followed by the seasons of Christmas, Lent, Easter, and ordinary time. Beginning with the season of Advent and continuing through the entire Church year, the faithful immerse themselves into the story of salvation history and deepen their relationship with Christ. Over the course of the liturgical year, we hear about all aspects of God's relationship with his people, the stories of struggle, joy, war, healing, dying, and rising.