

Celebrate!

PRIESTHOOD SUNDAY

What is "Priesthood Sunday"?

Priesthood Sunday is a special day set aside to honor priesthood in the United States.

It is a day to reflect upon and affirm the role of the priesthood in the life of the Church as a central one. Traditionally scheduled for the fourth Sunday of October, we encourage all parishes to choose any Sunday that works best with their liturgical schedule.

This nationwide event is coordinated and sponsored by the USA Council of Serra International.

What happens on Priesthood Sunday?

The lay faithful of all parishes in the USA develop their own special way of marking the day and honoring their parish priests both at Mass and other parish events, such as social celebrations and school activities.

Priesthood Sunday is designed to be an event led by the laity, but you can ask your parish priest to participate by talking about how he experienced and answered his own calling and about priests who have inspired him.

Priesthood Sunday offers an opportunity for priests and their parishioners to build a stronger working relationship. Together, they can dialogue to take an honest look at the challenges of the future and how they can collaborate to meet those challenges as a united force.

What is the USA Council of Serra International?

The USA Council of Serra International is an organization of lay men and women whose mission is to foster and affirm vocations to the ministerial priesthood and vowed religious life in the USA. More than 10,000 Serrans in over 250 clubs nationwide collaborate with their bishops, parishes and vocation directors to fulfill this mission. Through this ministry, Serrans work to further their common Catholic faith.

Visit the USA Council at www.serraus.org.

Turn the page for a complete Parish Planning Guide for Priesthood Sunday!

PARISH PLANNING GUIDE

PRIESTHOOD SUNDAY

STEP ONE: Plan a liturgy

Introduction at Mass

Parishioners and lay leaders may choose to celebrate Mass as a way to observe this special day. The parish liturgy committee may consider mentioning "Priesthood Sunday" in the introduction to the liturgy of the day. For example:

God, through baptism, has given us the gift of his Spirit to be faithful and loving disciples. On this, _____ [The particular Sunday in the Liturgical Year] _____, our parish observes "Priesthood Sunday." God blesses not only our parish, but the entire universal Church with many priests who give of their selves for Christ's people. Their preaching, teaching and witness calls us to be as Christ is: loving, just and compassionate. Their service to the community called Church inspires us to continue the mission of Christ to a world in need.

Suggested Intercessions

The intercessions follow the Creed. After the intercessions, the blessing prayer is proclaimed by the liturgical assembly as a whole or by the chair of the pastoral council.

Introduction:

Trusting in our ever-living God, let us present our prayers of petition.

For the Church, especially for Benedict, our pope, _____ our (arch)bishop, priests and all your holy people:

May they be strengthened in faith, hope and love.
Let us pray to the Lord.

For all nations and governments:
May justice and peace be their goals.
Let us pray to the Lord.

For all who suffer depression, anxiety and trauma:
May they find loving hearts ready to offer healing and compassion.
Let us pray to the Lord.

For those who hear Jesus' call to vocations within the Church:
May our communities support and encourage those contemplating vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life and lay ecclesial ministry.
Let us pray to the Lord.

For all of us gathered to share the life Christ revealed to us in his life:
Empowered by God's Spirit, may our service of Christ's mission be one that is based in faith, hope and love.
Let us pray to the Lord.

Faithful and Gracious God, throughout the ages you have been faithful to your promises.

Stir within us faith to be true to your commands.

Pour forth your love into our hearts to be servants to one another.

Give us constant hope in your covenant that binds us in communion with you and one another.

Continue to strengthen us, and all those who serve you and the church in ministry, especially our priests.

We ask all of these prayers in the name of Christ our Lord.* If the blessing prayer is used the above prayer* is omitted and the following blessing is used. The assembly may be invited to extend both hands over the priest.

In your loving kindness, O good and gracious God, you sent your Son to be our shepherd and guide. Father _____ continues Christ's ministry of working in the vineyard by sustaining and guiding your holy people. Bless Father _____. Let your Spirit uphold him always in his service to the people of this parish. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

If the blessing prayer is used, the above prayer is omitted and the following blessing is used. The assembly may be invited to extend both hands over the priest.*

Blessing Prayer

In your loving kindness, O good and gracious God, you sent your Son to be our shepherd and guide. Father _____ continues Christ's ministry of working in the vineyard by sustaining and guiding your holy people. Bless Father _____. Let your Spirit uphold him always in his service to the people of this parish. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The above blessing is adapted from "Blessing of Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service" from the Book of Blessing (Washington, D.C.: ICEL, 1987), p. 689.

Blessing of the Parish Priest(s)

A member of the parish council or other parish leadership organization, or a deacon, may invite the members of the assembly to join in a blessing over the parish priest(s). This blessing may take place after the prayer after communion. This blessing is an alternate to the blessing following the General Intercessions.

The ministries of the Church are many and varied, but God shows God's goodness by sending priests to care for the people of God. Today we ask God to bless Father _____, who faithfully builds up the body of Christ.

Reflection

[It is recommended to preach on either the scriptural readings and/or the liturgical texts for this particular Sunday and perhaps weave that will the suggested reflection below.]

While all of us are called to live our baptismal covenant, some men are called to ordained ministry. These men serve the needs of the Church – the Body of Christ. In many of our communities, dedicated priests offer their time and talent, despite shrinking numbers and larger parish communities, by leading people not to themselves, but to the God of Jesus Christ. As Jeremiah phrased it, they “console [the faithful] and guide them.” The source of their gift(s) for ordained ministry is given from God for the good of the whole community. Priests ask God, “What do you want me to do for you?” What does the God of Jesus Christ want us to do? There is a story told that Blessed Pope John XXIII would always ask in prayer, “Holy Spirit, what would you have me do?” Ministry, as these priests and Blessed John remind us, is always to serve God’s mission in the world, and the church is the light, the beacon of that mission. Not just the ordained pray for guidance, but, like Blessed John, we too long to follow the ways of the Spirit that our faith may not only be strengthened, but that we will serve God’s mission faithfully. Ultimately, ordained priests enable and empower all of the baptized, despite human weaknesses, to deepen faith, grow in hope, and share the gift of Christ’s love with all human persons so that God’s glory will be experienced repeatedly.

Concluding Prayer

You are the giver of every good gift, O God of abundant goodness and mercy. Hear the prayer of your people, and bring us into closer union with your Son, Jesus Christ our Promise of Hope, in whose name we offer this prayer. He is Lord forever and ever.

NEED HELP?
Visit www.priestsunday.org!

Expanded versions of materials in this guide are available at the website. You may also download graphics for parish mailings, bulletin notices, and ads for other print materials.

One afternoon, I was waiting for Mass to start at St. John's and there was no priest. Some nuns were visiting from New York and they said they didn't have a priest in all their parishes anymore, and that Eucharistic services were common.

I thought, "What would it be like if there were no priests?" And I asked myself, "What are you doing about it?"

Elizabeth Shrier, Serra Club of Omaha, NE

STEP TWO: Set up a dialogue

How well do your parishioners and priests know each other? Start a dialogue to exchange concerns and ideas.

Use Priesthood Sunday as a starting point for opening parish communications. Set up an informal parish meeting with your priests. The purpose of this meeting is to give parishioners a chance to listen to priests talk about their everyday lives and need for support, and for the priests to hear the laity's concerns, needs and ideas for mutual support with priests. This meeting requires a little planning:

- Consult with your priest(s) to set a date for the meeting.
- Draw up a meeting agenda.
- Select a volunteer parishioner to record the highlights of the meeting's discussion.
- Decide on a start and end time for the meeting.
- If you need a second meeting, repeat the steps above.

STEP THREE: Celebrate!

There are many ways to celebrate Priesthood Sunday with the whole parish. Here are some ideas:

- Parish pot luck dinner to celebrate "Father's Day"
- Coffee cake reception following Masses
- School essay, poster or poetry contest
- Banner in front of church
- Send press releases and photos to local press
- Photo on cover of parish bulletin along with biography
- Check the www.priestsunday.org "Share Ideas" section to find out what other parishes and institutions are doing to celebrate the event

Celebration planning:

- Form a celebration committee
- Select dates for the committee to meet
- What parish groups would like to participate?
- Select a date for the celebration

Prayer of Affirmation and Strengthening in Holiness for Priests

*This composition is an arrangement of phrases from ancient ordination liturgies (cf. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of the East and West*) that emphasize the call to holiness. Ordinations always began with a Rite of Election. The proclamation which begins this prayer was at the end of that rite and invited the people to affirm the calling by prayer that the person would be strengthened in holiness to conform to their calling, recognizing that both calling and holiness come from God.*

Divine Grace, which always heals that which is infirm and supplies that which is lacking has called our beloved brothers to sacred ministry. Let us pray that they be confirmed and strengthened with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Fill them with grace and counsel, that they may love you with all their hearts, all their minds, and all their strength. Grant them irreproachable conduct, steadfast faith, and good works so that they may help and guide your people with unselfish motivation. Grant them wisdom, let their minds be sober and watchful, so that they may be filled with works of healing and words of instruction. May they teach your people in meekness and serve you in holiness with a undivided mind and a willing soul. May they be the light of your only begotten Son that the word of your gospel may be spread and your name may be glorified in every creature. May they serve at your holy altar with pure hearts and good consciences. Grant that they may prosper in all your commandments and the keeping of your laws, so that they may be able to minister joyfully on the day of your coming.

Find more materials at www.priestsunday.org