

Celebrating the Sacraments

Anglican Catholic Future invited me to lead a workshop on the theme of ‘Celebrating the Sacraments’ at their 2014 Festival, *Life Abundant*, held in Southwark Cathedral on 13 September. The topic lies close to the heart of the catholic identity of the Church of England, and it might have provoked one of several responses. Celebrating the sacraments could mean *performing* them, but I did not want to take that line – thinking about the nuts and bolts of how the sacraments can be celebrated well – since it could easily become overly critical and overly clerical. Alternatively, I might simply have outlined an account of the theology of the sacraments, but since I had already done that, in *Why Sacraments?*,¹ and since some of the participants had already read that book, that would not have been a good use of people’s time.

The approach I took, instead, was to think about *celebrating* the sacraments in the sense of *rejoicing* in them. For convenience, I suggested that we approach the question of how to celebrate or rejoice in the sacraments from three angles: as individuals, as congregations among ourselves and then, finally, as congregations turned outwards, celebrating the gift of the sacraments with people around us.

We discussed the standard seven sacraments, so central to the faith and practice of the church both West and East,² and also the idea of entering into the idea of sacramentality itself. That produced a four-by-eight chart and, in the hope that it may be of interest for some other parishes, chaplaincies or other Christian communities, as they think about the sacramental life of the church, I reproduce it here, with gratitude to participants at the workshops for the suggestions they added.

If you have comments to make about the chart, and suggestions of additions, please contribute me at apd31@cam.ac.uk. I would be please to hear if it has been useful in your local setting.

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¹ London: SPCK, 2013; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

² I justify attention to all seven from an Anglican perspective in *Why Sacraments?*, chapter six: ‘How Many?’.

	As individuals	As congregations	In our locality
Baptism	<p>Observe the anniversary of your baptism: your <i>re-birthday</i>.</p> <p>Make use of a holy water stoup, if your church has one, to make the sign of the cross with the water in memory of your baptism.</p> <p>Consider that you stand in as close a relationship to the grace of baptism as the day you received it: the only impediment is being in a state of serious sin – if so, do something about that by going to confession.</p> <p>Practice piety towards the font.</p> <p>Make it a priority to attend baptisms as a moment of rejoicing.</p> <p>A priest might keep a record of every baptism he or she has performed – and pray for these people regularly.</p> <p>Taking duties as a godparent seriously.</p>	<p>Have at least some baptisms as part of the main Sunday service, when the most people are present</p> <p>If a baptism is held outside the main service, encourage some members of the congregation to attend to underline that this is entry into corporate membership of the body of Christ.</p> <p>Have baptisms during the Easter Vigil, if you celebrate it, and celebrate the Easter Vigil if you do not.</p> <p>Hold courses on the vocation of the laity.</p> <p>Install a holy water stoup, if you do not have one.</p> <p>A congregation keeps a record of every baptism that is performed: we might make sure that a card is sent out on at least an important anniversary.</p> <p>Put some well-chosen paragraphs of introduction and commentary in the parish baptism booklet.</p>	<p>Remind people that we perform baptisms, so that the invitation comes first, and then we work with what comes in terms of instruction: for a while we the parish notice board where I was curate said ‘We baptise babies (and adults)’.</p> <p>The comment about sending out cards on anniversaries bears on this.</p> <p>We might invite the recently baptised and families with recently baptised children (if they are not already regularly in church) to the Feast of the Baptism of Christ.</p> <p>This might be done on the Christmas card or leaflet with service times.</p>
Eucharist	<p>Think about preparing for receiving Communion, which might involve looking at the readings beforehand, arriving early for prayer, practicing a more intentional examination of conscience, or coming with something to pray for, to unite to the sacrifice of Christ (an ‘intention’ for the Mass)</p> <p>Make Eucharistic worship the centre of your worshipping life</p> <p>To do that, think about your rule of life: when will you commit yourself to attending Mass – on Sundays and the principle festivals, or also on major feasts, on certain days during the week?</p>	<p>Introduce some Eucharistic devotion: it comes in different ‘degrees’, including prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in a ciborium, or before the Sacrament displayed in a monstrance, or Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.</p> <p>Allow people to ask for weekday Eucharists to be offered for particular concerns.</p> <p>Hold for preparation for first Communion (perhaps for adults, and for children, and another class for the parents of children preparing for first Communion).</p> <p>Put some prayers for preparing for Holy Communion in the parish Mass booklets, or give them out on separate cards.</p> <p>A ‘teaching’ or annotated Eucharist gives opportunity to comment on various aspects of the rite.</p> <p>Put some well-chosen paragraphs of introduction and commentary in the parish Mass booklet.</p>	<p>Have a Eucharistic procession, perhaps on Corpus Christi or on the Patronal feast.</p> <p>Make it clear that we will remember people’s requests for prayer at the Mass, with Requiem Masses as a particularly obvious example. We do not make enough of prayer for the dead as an opportunity for mission.</p> <p>There may be occasions when the Eucharist can be celebrated in someone’s home.</p>

Confirmation	<p>Observe the anniversary of your confirmation.</p> <p>Consider that you stand in as close a relationship to the grace of confirmation as the day you received it: the only impediment is being in a state of serious sin – if so, do something about that by going to confession.</p> <p>Get involved in confirmation preparation.</p>	<p>Take confirmation preparation seriously.</p> <p>See if the confirmation preparation group can carry on after in some different form, or join a larger group.</p> <p>Make a confirmation in the parish a matter of celebration.</p> <p>Hold courses on the vocation of the laity.</p> <p>A congregation might keep a record of every confirmation that has performed for members: we might make sure that a card is sent out on at least an important anniversary.</p>	<p>This one is difficult: perhaps try to get some coverage of confirmation in a local newspaper? They like people-focused happy stories.</p> <p>Suggest confirmation to parents of children being baptised.</p>
Marriage	<p>For married people: observe the anniversary of our marriage with some prayers, and perhaps by going to Mass.</p> <p>Consider that you stand in as close a relationship to the grace of marriage as the day you received it: the only impediment is being in a state of serious sin – if so, do something about that by going to confession.</p> <p>Get involved in marriage preparation.</p> <p>A priest might keep a record of every marriage that he or she has performed – and pray for these people regularly.</p>	<p>Take marriage preparation seriously (which most Anglican parishes do).</p> <p>Hold a marriage renewal course or day.</p> <p>Put some well-chosen paragraphs of introduction and commentary in the parish marriage booklet, and some prayers for those who are already married, or thinking about marriage.</p> <p>Make the most of marriage sermons as an opportunity to talk about the sacrament.</p>	<p>Offer to bless the renewal of marriage vows: I know a parish that did this collectively, to great effect, on the day of the last Royal Wedding.</p> <p>A congregation keeps a record of every marriage that has performed in the parish: we might make sure that a card is sent out on at least an important anniversary (while also being sensitive to the fact that a tragic proportion of couples today do not stay together)</p>
Ordination	<p>For deacons, priests and bishops: observe the anniversary of our ordination.</p> <p>Deacons, bishops and priests can reaffirm ordination vows on Maundy Thursday at the Chrism Mass.</p> <p>Think about bowing to the celebrant in the Eucharistic procession (and maybe even some old-fashioned signs by which to acknowledge the office of bishop, such as genuflection or kissing the episcopal ring).</p> <p>Consider – those in orders – that you stand in as close a relationship to the grace of ordination as the day you received it: the only impediment is being in a state of serious sin – if so, do something about that by going to confession.</p>	<p>Celebrate significant anniversaries of an ordination as a congregation: the diaconate as well as the priesthood.</p> <p>Mark significant anniversaries of the bishop’s consecration and translation.</p> <p>Draw attention to the expectation that parishes will produce vocations to the ministry and work on this, drawing on diocesan and national resources.</p> <p>Blessing vestments publically.</p> <p>Make something of blessing after a priest’s first Mass.</p>	<p>Try to have ordinations covered in the local media: they like good <i>stories</i>.</p> <p>Make something of these stories on social media.</p> <p>Wear a clerical collar (or even a cassock) around the parish.</p>

Penance	<p>Avail yourself of the sacrament of reconciliation.</p> <p>If it is new to you, talk to someone about it: a priest, spiritual director or someone else.</p>	<p>Holding a service of penitence and reconciliation during Lent, with opportunities for personal confession and absolution</p>	<p>Advertise the availability of this sacrament: on the notice board, on the internet and by whatever other means – and perhaps giving a short explanation or gloss (the form of words should be a little different for the un-baptised, and for the complete remission of sins we should encourage them to be baptised).</p>
Unction	<p>Avail yourself of the sacrament of anointing</p> <p>But also treat the sacrament seriously by not being anointed for light ailments</p>	<p>Holding healing services, perhaps at a regular weekday Mass or Sunday evening once per month</p> <p>We should have sermons on all of the sacraments but with anointing, in particular (and maybe confession), a steady repetition of the message may be needed before people think of this as something to resort to when the need arises.</p> <p>Receive the oils from the Chrism Mass into the parish church, publically, with the rite suggested in <i>Common Worship</i></p>	<p>Advertise healing services (although we probably ought not to anoint the un-baptised – we however have prayer with the laying on of hands).</p>
Sacramentality in General	<p>Read about the sacraments</p> <p>Talk to a spiritual director about the place of the sacraments in your life</p> <p>Think about the place of blessing in your life of piety – which is not a sacrament but is in that territory, and is called a ‘sacramental’ – and similarly with other sacramentals, such as processions, pilgrimages, the use of the body in prayer, and so on.</p>	<p>Preach on the sacraments.</p> <p>Hold a discussion groups on the sacraments.</p> <p>Think about the theology and practice of blessing within the life of the local church³ – and similarly with processions, pilgrimages, the use of the body in prayer, and so on.</p>	<p>Put material on the parish web site and on social media.</p> <p>Work on the sacraments in school assemblies.</p> <p>Offer to talk about the sacramental life of the church to local schools as part of their RE provision.</p>

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³ I have a book on this subject (*Blessing*, London: Canterbury Press, 2014).