



**STATEMENT ON THE SUNDAY ASSEMBLY  
WHEN THE PRIEST IS ABSENT  
APPENDIX C**

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

1. "Jesus rose from the dead 'on the first day of the week.' (Mt. 28.1) ... For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day ... Sunday:  
We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day [after the Jewish Sabbath, but also the first day] when God, separating matter from darkness, made the world; and on this same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead."  
(# 2174 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and quoting St. Justin, I Apol.67:PG 6, 429 and 432.)
2. "*The Lord's Day is the original feast day, and it should be presented to the faithful and taught to them . . . . Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance, shall not have precedence over Sunday which is the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year.*" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #106*)  
It is clear that the Church teaches us to gather, and we believe that Jesus is present in the Assembly whether or not the Eucharist is celebrated. In the light of this, each Catholic community is urged to consider the paramount importance of coming together in prayer each Sunday even when the Eucharist is not celebrated.
3. In the present circumstances where there is such a shortage of priests, and particularly in regions where supply priests are more difficult to secure, it is imperative that parishes and missions observe the diocesan directives on the organization of viable liturgical commissions. Such a commission should be a part of every parish council. There should be no parish without trained readers, ministers of the Eucharist, and ministers of music and hospitality. In each place where Mass is celebrated there should be a core group which will be able to plan and carry out a Service of the Word or Service of the Word and Communion, when a priest cannot be present, just as when Mass is celebrated. Each parish is directed to "cultivate liturgical knowledge and art." (*Vat II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, #5*)
4. At times priests need to be away from their parishes. They are entitled to time off each week, ample vacation time, and adequate time for continuing education. They are expected to travel monthly to participate in support groups, are expected to attend bi-annual Presbyterate meetings and are to make an annual retreat. Many priests serve on diocesan committees and must travel to meetings. At times sickness or pressing family concerns will cause them to be away from the parish. In any of these circumstances, it may happen that celebration of the Eucharist in a parish may not be possible for a period of time or on a given weekend.
5. If a substitute priest is available, the pastor is to arrange for a priest to celebrate the Eucharist.
6. At the present time a substitute priest is often not available. While our retired priests are generous in offering help whenever they can, they are retired and cannot be expected to fill every need. Priests who work in special ministries work full time at



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their assigned duties and should not have to carry the additional burden of supply work except when they are free to do so. In the light of these prevailing circumstances, a pastor or pastoral administrator may prudently determine that an appropriate service may take the place of the Eucharist when he/she is away from the parish.

7. When the Eucharist is celebrated “in a place nearby,” parishioners may be asked to go there for Sunday Mass. (*Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, #18)
8. The priests of the Diocese are asked to study and follow the “Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest,” published by the Congregation for Divine Worship (1988) and the new ritual, Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (2007). The people are to be prepared for such celebrations and Lay Leaders are to be trained as needed.

Revised 2007  
Most Reverend Anthony M. Milone  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings  
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