

What is the GIRM?

GIRM stands for the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The Roman Missal is made up of two parts: The Lectionary for Mass and what we currently call the Sacramentary, the book with prayers and directions (rubrics) for celebrating Mass.

The first edition of the GIRM was published in 1969. It provides the theological perspective and liturgical laws governing how we celebrate the Mass of the Roman Rite throughout the world. The GIRM has been slightly modified since the Council and has now undergone a further revision.

The Roman Missal itself has also undergone several revisions. The revised Lectionary for Mass for Sundays, Weekdays, Ritual Masses and Various Needs and Occasions has already been translated into English and is now in use in the US. The Sacramentary has recently been revised but is only available in Latin. It will be several years before an approved English translation is available. When it is published, other changes in the way the Catholic Church of the Roman Rite celebrates Mass may be introduced.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council realized that there is a need for ongoing change in the liturgy. "...where necessary, the rites [should] be carefully revised in light of sound tradition and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, CSL #4). This means that even though our liturgical practices may change from time to time, the fundamental beliefs of our faith which undergird the liturgy do not change.

Because our Church believes in inculturating the liturgy into the various cultures "for the

life of the world," bishops of each country have been given permission by the Holy See to adapt certain parts of the GIRM so that the celebration of Mass may be more fittingly celebrated in each land. The United States bishops have adapted some of the norms for dioceses of the United States.

One of the adaptations developed by the US bishops is the Norms for the Celebration and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds. These norms provide direction for the way that Holy Communion is distributed and received in the United States.

Another type of adaptation is an indult. An indult is a special permission to change or modify an existing law. The US bishops have asked for and received several of these.

The upcoming series of articles will be explaining the spirit of Vatican II as found in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and the revised norms and US adaptations found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. *(These documents are available for purchase at any Catholic bookstore or for lending through the Archdiocesan Resource Center. You may also check the Vatican website at www.vatican.va and the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at www.usccb.org).*

One of the criticisms of the implementation of the liturgical changes after Vatican II was that many Catholics did not understand what changes were coming and why they were being made. In fact, many clergy will say the same thing. We hope that through these articles and other archdiocesan catechesis, all will be able to understand better the liturgy that our Church is calling us to celebrate.