



DECREE

PROMULGATION OF THE  
POLICY ON *AD ORIENTEM* WORSHIP  
AS  
PARTICULAR LAW OF  
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Whereas, the diocesan bishop is charged with protecting the unity of the Church and exercising vigilance, especially as regards the celebration of the sacraments and the worship of God (cf. canon 392, *CIC 1983*); and

Whereas, “bishops are the principal dispensers of the mysteries of God, as well as being the governors, promoters, and guardians of the entire liturgical life in the church committed to them” (*Christus Dominus*, 15); and

Whereas, there exists a legitimate desire amongst the People of God of this Archdiocese for worship in both a *versus populum* and an *ad orientem* posture, both being permissible options according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* as interpreted by the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (*GIRM*, 299, and *Responsum Congregationis* of 25 September 2000);

**I, Dennis M. Schnurr,  
Archbishop of Cincinnati,**

hereby decree that the  
**POLICY ON *AD ORIENTEM* WORSHIP**  
dated 21 December 2022

be promulgated as particular law of this Archdiocese  
coming into force thirty days from the issuance of this decree.

Current practice is to be brought into accord with this policy by the effective date as noted above.

  
Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr  
Archbishop of Cincinnati

  
Reverend Jason A. Williams, J.C.L.  
Chancellor

Given from the Chancery of the Archdiocese,  
Cincinnati, Ohio,  
this 21<sup>st</sup> day of December 2022.

# Policy on “*Ad orientem*” Worship

## Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Dec 21, 2022

### POSTURE

In regard to the arrangement of the sanctuary, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states: “The altar should be built separate from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible.” (GIRM 299)

Since the celebration of Mass *versus populum* (facing the people) is “desirable wherever possible”, this should be the regular practice in churches, oratories, and chapels of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, nearly all of which have a freestanding dedicated altar.<sup>1</sup>

When a freestanding altar is present, and pastoral practice indicates that the priest celebrant adopt an *ad orientem* posture on occasion, the following norms should be observed:

1. On Sundays and other days of obligation, there must be at least one Mass offered *versus populum* in every church, oratory, or chapel in which public Mass is scheduled.
2. On other days when public Mass is celebrated, there must be at least one Mass offered publicly *versus populum* in each Family of Parishes.

For pastoral reasons, permission for exceptions to the above norms may be sought in writing from the Archbishop via the Chancellor.

The Chancery must be informed in writing in advance of implementing a parish Mass schedule which includes Masses regularly celebrated *ad orientem*.

With regards to other Masses (e.g. weddings, funerals), priests should consider the pastoral needs of the families, guests, and others participating.

### ALTAR

“In building new churches, it is preferable for a single altar to be erected, one that in the gathering of the faithful will signify the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church. In already existing churches, however, when the old altar is so positioned that it makes the people’s participation difficult but cannot be moved without damage to artistic value, another fixed altar, skillfully made and properly dedicated, should be erected and the sacred rites celebrated on it alone. In order that the attention of the faithful not be distracted from the new altar, the old altar should not be decorated in any special way.” (GIRM 303)

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<sup>1</sup> For more background on this question, cf. Congregatio pro Culto Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, *Responsum Congregationis die 25 septembris 2000*, in *Communicationes*, N. 2, December 2000.

Therefore, the following norms should be observed:

1. When a freestanding altar is present the celebration of Mass - whether *versus populum* or *ad orientem* - may take place ONLY on said altar, NOT on the older “high” altar.
2. If the freestanding altar is dedicated, but not fixed (and thus “moveable”), it may NOT be moved from the sanctuary for the purpose of using the older altar.

Any permanent changes to the arrangement of a church, oratory, or chapel are subject to the [archdiocesan policy on Renovating and Reconfiguring Churches](#) and will be studied and evaluated by the Archdiocesan Committee for Sacred Art and Architecture before being presented to the archbishop for approval.



[www.catholicaoc.org/worship](http://www.catholicaoc.org/worship)