



Worship Office

Archdiocese of Newark



Liturgy Note

Concerning the Position of the Christmas Manger

Updated October 6, 2023

The documents of the Church are clear that the manger or crèche should not be located near the altar, or in the area where the liturgy is celebrated. In other words, the manger should not be placed near the altar, pulpit or presidential chair. It should also not obstruct other liturgical areas, for example the font or tabernacle.

From *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*

299. 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...

From *Book of Blessings, Introduction of Chapter 47, "Order for the Blessing of an Advent Wreath"*

1544. If the manger is set up in church, it must not be placed in the presbyterium*. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful.

*The presbyterium is "that part of the church where bishops, priests and ministers perform their ministry. Large enough to permit the sacred rites to be readily seen and carried out, it is usually in an elevated part of the church..." *Dictionary of the Liturgy*, Catholic Book Publishing 1989

From *Built of Living Stones*

124. Plans for seasonal decorations should include other areas besides the sanctuary. Decorations are intended to draw people to the true nature of the mystery being celebrated rather than being ends in themselves. Natural flowers, plants, wreaths and fabric hangings, and other seasonal objects can be arranged to enhance the primary liturgical points of focus. The altar should remain clear and free-standing, not walled in by massive floral displays or the Christmas crib, and pathways in the narthex, nave, and sanctuary should remain clear.

125. These seasonal decorations are maintained throughout the entire liturgical season. Since the Christmas season begins with the Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and ends with the baptism of the Lord, the placement and removal of Christmas decorations should coincide with these times...

128. Objects such as the **Advent wreath**, the Christmas crib, and other traditional seasonal appointments proportioned to the size of the space and to the other furnishings can enhance the prayer and understanding of the parish community.

It should be noted that the Christmas crèche is an object of devotion. Placement of the crèche should foster intimate prayer. Ideally, it should be placed where people, especially families with children, can conveniently draw near.