As we approach the holy seasons of Advent and Christmastime, please accept the following notes for your consideration and reflection. Please share these notes with those most directly involved with the Liturgical planning, preparation, and implementation in your communities.

**ADVENT**

- The new liturgical year commences with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent has two distinct themes: the coming of Christ at the end of time (the first two weeks) and the coming of Christ in time at Bethlehem some two millennia ago (the last two weeks). It is a time marked by sober, devout, and joy-filled expectation. The musical choices, readings and prayers, vesture and environment all assist in marking the character and purpose of this season. Christmas Carols and Christmas decorations should be strictly reserved for the celebration of the Christmas season.

- During Advent, musical instruments and the use of decorations “should be marked by a moderation that reflects the character of this season” without the anticipating the full joy of Christmas prematurely (cf. Ceremonial of Bishops #236). Parishes and communities should bear this principle in mind regarding outdoor decorations as well.

- “The liturgical color for the season of Advent is violet or Roman purple. In order to distinguish between this season and the specifically penitential season of Lent, the brighter and redder hues of violet, not indigo hues, may be used during Advent. Blue vestments are not authorized for use in the United States” (from the Paulist Press Ordo, 1.) Rose vestments may be worn the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), but are not to be worn throughout that week.

- The *Gloria in excelsis* is not sung on any of the four Sundays of Advent. It is only sung on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and the Feasts of Saint Andrew (November 30) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12). The only text permitted to be used is from the revised translation of the Roman Missal, Third Edition when sung in English.

- Prior to December 17, Advent Preface I is used. When commemorating memorials of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, the corresponding preface may be used in place of this seasonal preface. After December 17, when the intensity of the season increases, Advent Preface II is used and the “O” Antiphons begin to be recited. It is recommended that the traditional Advent chant “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” be reserved for this later period of
time since it corresponds to the use of the “O” Antiphons in the Liturgy of the Hours and the weekday Masses.

• During Advent, Eucharistic Prayer IV is not to be used because it contains a fixed preface which cannot be replaced. You are permitted to use an Advent preface with one of the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses for Reconciliation, the use of which aids in emphasizing the penitential character of the season, as well as Eucharistic Prayers I, II, or III.

• Advent Wreaths, when used in the Church, are not to be treated with the same prominence as the Paschal Candle during the Easter season. The wreath is devotional, not liturgical in character. The wreath may be placed in the narthex or gathering space. If placed in the presbyterium (that is, sanctuary), “it should not interfere with the celebration of the liturgy, nor should it obscure the altar, ambo, or presidential chair” (Book of Blessings #1512). The wreath may be blessed one time at one of the Masses for the First Sunday of Advent using the prescribe rite in the Book of Blessings (#1517-1519), or at another suitable time. This rite calls for the blessing to follow the general intercessions (as prescribed in the Book of Blessings.)

• Priests are invited to make use of the excellent liturgical commentary found in Pastoral Companion to the Roman Missal by Fr. Paul Turner. This was distributed during their annual workshop. In addition to commentary, Fr. Turner also provides homiletic indications and useful introductions/conclusions for the Prayer of the Faithful.

• A sample communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance during the Advent season is included below.
The Christmas Season begins with the Vigil Mass for Christmas and continues in unbroken celebration through (and, therefore, including) the Baptism of the Lord (N.B. which occurs on Monday, January 8, 2018 this year). Among the principal celebrations of this season, due attention is given to the Octave of Christmas, the Feast of the Holy Family (N.B. which occurs on Sunday, December 31, 2017 this year), the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1), the Solemnity of the Epiphany (January 7, 2018), and the Baptism of the Lord (N.B. which occurs on Monday, January 8, 2018 this year). Christmas carols may be sung throughout the Christmas season up to and including the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Of special note during this season, we must also make mention of the new optional memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus (January 3) restored by the Roman Missal; as well as the special prominence of the North American Saints commemorated: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (January 4); Saint John Neumann (January 5); and Saint André Bessette (January 6) who was canonized October 17, 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI. In a unique way, this “triduum” of North American saints provides rich pastoral, catechetical, and homiletic opportunities for the Church in America and in especially our diocese.

The Church provides a Vigil Mass for Christmas and three Christmas Masses, each with its own unique character and thematic focus: Mass during the Night (traditionally “Midnight Mass”), Mass at Dawn, and Mass during the day. These three traditional Masses, having been celebrated by the Church for many centuries, each have their own euchology (prayer texts) and scriptural readings. Priests are permitted to celebrate the three traditional Masses, provided they are celebrated at their proper times. A priest who celebrates three Masses on Christmas Day may accept three Mass offerings (cf. Code of Canon Law, 951, § 1).

A Christmas manger or nativity scene may be blessed one time at one of the Christmas Masses. “If the manger is set up in the church, it must not be placed in the presbyterium [that is, sanctuary]. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful” (Book of Blessings #1544).

The three prefaces for Christmas are completely interchangeable, unlike the Advent prefaces. Eucharistic Prayer IV is not to be used because its preface may not be replaced with another one. At Christmas Masses and during the Octave, Eucharistic Prayer I is especially appropriate while including the proper form of the Communicantes: “Celebrating this most sacred night (day) . . .”

During the recitation of the Creed, all are to genuflect on one knee at the words, “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.” When the Creed is chanted, all are to genuflect on two knees.

The Proclamation of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the Roman Martyrology is included in Appendix I of the revised edition of the Roman Missal. “The text may be chanted or recited before the beginning of Christmas Mass during the Night. It may not replace any part of the Mass” (Roman Missal.) The text may be proclaimed before the entrance procession by a deacon, a lector, or some other minister.
• On the Feast of the Holy Family, a special Blessing of a Family found in the *Book of Blessings* (#62-67) may be used. This Feast falls on a weekday from time to time, for which only one reading is proclaimed before the Gospel in that circumstance.

• When celebrating the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on January 1, only the proper texts and readings of the solemnity may be used. Masses for peace or other special needs may not be used on this Holy Day.

• The third edition of the *Roman Missal* includes now a Vigil Mass for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. These proper prayers are to be used at any evening Mass the night before Epiphany. On the Epiphany of the Lord, Eucharistic Prayer I is especially appropriate while including the proper form of the *Communicantes*: “Celebrating this most sacred day . . .” The *Ceremonial of Bishops* indicates a “suitable and increased display of lights” (#240) for the celebration of the Epiphany. After the Gospel, a deacon or cleric, vested in a cope, may go to the ambo and announce to the people the movable feasts of the current year; the chant for this is found in Appendix I of the *Roman Missal* (cf. *Ceremonial of Bishops* #240.) The Epiphany of the Lord bears the full significance of the celebration which includes its “three mysteries”: the adoration of the child by the Magi, the baptism of the Lord, and the wedding feast at Cana.
SAMPLE COMMUNAL PENITENTIAL SERVICE FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

From Rite of Penance

ENTRANCE CHANT

“Come, O Long Expected Jesus” [tune: Stuttgart]

GREETING

Minister: Grace, mercy, and peace be with you
from God the Father
and Christ Jesus our Savior.

All: Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Minister: My brothers and sisters, Advent is a time of preparation, when we make ready to celebrate the mystery of our Lord’s coming as man, the beginning of our redemption. Advent also moves us to look forward with renewed hope to the second coming of Christ, when God’s plan of salvation will be brought to fulfillment. We are reminded too of our Lord’s coming to each one of us at the hour of our death. We must make sure that he will find us prepared for his coming, as the gospel tells us: “Blessed are those servants who are found awake when the Lord comes” (Lk 12:37). This service of penance is meant to make us ready in mind and heart for the coming of Christ, which we are soon to celebrate in the Mass of Christmas.

PRAYER

Minister: My brothers and sisters, we look forward to celebrating the mystery of Christ’s coming on the feast of Christmas. Let us pray that when he comes he may find us awake and ready to receive him.

Lord our God,
maker of the heavens,
as we look forward to the coming of our redeemer
grant us the forgiveness of our sins.
Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.
Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-7a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85:2-14
“Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”

Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-12

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Homily

Examination of Conscience

After the homily, the examination of conscience takes place. A period of silence should always be included so that each person may personally examine his conscience.

Act of Repentance

Minister: Christ our Lord came to call sinners into his Father’s kingdom. Let us now make an act of sorrow in our hearts and resolve to avoid sin in the future.

(recited by All) I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord God.

Minister: Lord our God, you know all things. You know that we want to be more generous in serving you and our neighbor. Look on us with love and hear our prayer.
Lector: Give us the strength to turn away from sin.

All: Hear our prayer.

Lector: Help us to be sorry for our sins and to keep our resolutions.

All: Hear our prayer.

Lector: Forgive our sins and have pity on our weakness.

All: Hear our prayer.

Lector: Give us trust in your goodness and make us generous in serving you.

All: Hear our prayer.

Lector: Help us to be true followers of your Son and living members of his Church.

All: Hear our prayer.

Minister: God does not want the sinner to die, but to turn to him and live. May he be pleased that we have confessed our sinfulness, and may he show us his mercy as we pray in obedience to his Son.

All: Our Father . . .

Minister: Almighty and eternal God, you sent your only-begotten Son to reconcile the world to yourself. Lift from our hearts the oppressive gloom of sin, so that we may celebrate the approaching dawn of Christ’s birth with fitting joy. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Announcements can be made in preparation for individual confessions.

The celebration may conclude with an Advent song as well as a blessing or dismissal.