



Advent and Lent Nights of Mercy

✚ During the season of Advent, the Church prepares for the Lord’s Nativity and looks forward to his Second Coming at the end of the ages. During Lent, she prepares for the celebration of Christ’s Death and Resurrection. As a part of these unique moments of grace in the life of the Church, Catholic communities customarily offer expanded opportunities for the Sacrament of Penance. During the National Eucharistic Revival, communities are encouraged to incorporate Eucharistic adoration as well, inspired by the tradition of “Nights of Mercy.”

Over the last two decades, a number of communities have found creative ways to connect the celebration of adoration and Penance with evangelization and culture. In the [Nightfever](#) model, for example, street evangelizers invite passersby into the church building to light a candle and pray for peace. There, these men and women encounter the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, the Christian community at prayer, and healing in the Sacrament of Penance. Outside the church building, there are opportunities for hospitality, conversation, and counsel.

Another model is [Catholic Underground](#), a monthly event sponsored by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in New York City. The night begins with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which includes the celebration of Evening Prayer, opportunities for Confession, and Benediction. Following this time of prayer, there is an experience of community and culture—anything from music to poetry, visual art to dance, film to drama. The night is a response to an insight of St. John Paul II: “The Gospel lives always in conversation with culture. If the Church holds back from culture, the Gospel itself falls silent.” ^[1]

While these two models occur in urban settings, the celebration of adoration and Confession with opportunities for evangelization and culture can take place in any context. Below, you’ll find some helpful considerations for you and your community as you discern how you might host a Night of Mercy as a part of the National Eucharistic Revival.

[1] John Paul II, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, no. 4, Acta Apostolicæ Sedis 94 (2002), p. 480.



Who's hosting?

- ◆ A Night of Mercy can be hosted by a parish or group of parishes, a city, a diocese, a Newman/Catholic center, or some other kind of community. An important consideration at the outset is whether your community should host this initiative individually or collaborate with other groups.

Whom are you targeting?

- ◆ When it comes to evangelization, it's important to know whom you are targeting. The Nightfever model tailors its approach to ages 16–35. Whom are you reaching out to? What's the best way to invite and welcome them?

What's your setting?

- ◆ Is your community in an urban, rural, or suburban area? While the Nightfever model with street evangelizers works well in an area with a high volume of foot traffic, evangelization will likely look different in other contexts.
 - ◆ Nights of Mercy frequently make use of not only the main church building for adoration and Confession but also other sites for alternative moments of encounter. The church basement, hall, or grounds can be a place for hospitality as people leave the church building or an alternative spot for those who only spend a short time there or choose not to enter that space at all. When weather permits, an outdoor setting is a helpful way for the community to be present to those it doesn't regularly encounter.
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When? How Long?

- ◆ During Advent and Lent, many dioceses coordinate days and times when every church is available for confessions, for example, the [Light is On For You](#) initiative. A Night of Mercy could easily connect with this kind of event.
 - ◆ The Nightfever and Catholic Underground models noted above occur monthly on Saturday evenings. You and your community could plan to host **a single night once during the season of Advent or Lent.**
 - ◆ Nights of Mercy have also been held on several **consecutive nights at different churches in a single area.**
 - ◆ These nights are also a natural place for an Advent or Lent mission and could likewise occur at **a single location for two or three nights in a row.**
 - ◆ The length of the event will vary depending upon its format. Can people arrive and leave as they wish? If so, the event might take place for two or three hours. If the program is more structured, an hour for adoration generally works. Some time for hospitality or culture could follow. You might even conclude that time of fellowship with prayer.
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Suggestions for Adoration and Confession

Art and Environment

- ◆ The top of the altar is covered with a white cloth. On the altar, there is a corporal, 4 or 6 candles, a monstrance, and, if necessary, a stand for the monstrance. Additional items should not be placed on the altar.
- ◆ There should be a certain harmony between the way the altar is ornamented for the celebration of Mass and the way it is ornamented for adoration so that the Eucharistic celebration shines forth as “the Church’s supreme act of adoration” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 66) and Eucharistic adoration is seen in light of its relationship to the Mass.
- ◆ It is important to observe moderation in the decoration of the altar and the sanctuary. During Advent, moderate floral decorations that do not anticipate the full joy of Christmas may be used. During Lent, the altar may only be decorated with flowers on Feasts, Solemnities, and the Fourth Sunday of Lent.
- ◆ The lighting in the church may be dimmed in a way that still allows those gathered to read from participation aids and walk around safely.

Adoration

- ◆ The Order for Exposition and Benediction is found at *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, nos. 93-100.
 - ◆ It is fitting that the period of adoration include readings from Scripture, prayer, silence, and song. A balance should always be preserved between silence and the spoken or sung word.
 - ◆ Readings may come from the Votive Mass of the Most Holy Eucharist (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. IV, nos. 976-981) or the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol. IV, nos. 995-1000).
 - ◆ Many communities pray Evening Prayer or Night Prayer during adoration. Others pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet.
 - ◆ Regarding the sacred music at adoration, a few things should be kept in mind:
 - Sacred music and those who lead it serve the prayer of the community. The chief purpose of sacred music is never entertainment.
 - While songs with first person singular pronouns (I/me) are not excluded, first person plural pronouns (we/our) are generally preferred.
 - As noted above, a balance should always be preserved between silence and the spoken or sung word.
 - During Advent, the organ and other musical instruments are played with a moderation appropriate to the liturgical season that does not yet convey the full joy of Christmas. During Lent, the organ and other musical instruments are allowed only for the purpose of supporting the singing.
 - ◆ Participation guides are helpful for those who will attend. If the format is less structured, you might prepare a simple guide for how to spend the time.
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Confession

- ◆ Provide resources to assist those in attendance with an examination of conscience and a guide for Confession if possible.
 - ◆ Be attentive to the number of confessors that you'll need for the amount of confessions you anticipate. On average, a priest can hear 10-12 confessions in an hour.
 - ◆ Be prepared to welcome and assist those who haven't been to Confession in a while.
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Suggestions for Evangelization and Culture

Hospitality

- ◆ Plan a way to welcome people as they enter the church building.
- ◆ Offer some space for moments of encounter outside the church building, i.e., the basement, hall, grounds, etc. Here, members of the community (both clergy and lay) can offer hospitality as people leave the church building and visit with those who choose not to enter that space at all. This space could also be an opportunity for those who don't choose to go to Confession but would like to talk to a priest.
- ◆ Following the model of Catholic Underground, you might plan a time for music, poetry, visual art, dance, film or drama following adoration.

Witness

- ◆ Some Nights of Mercy incorporate witness from clergy or the lay faithful, frequently about an encounter with the Lord in the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance.
 - ◆ Normally, this style of preaching and witness, especially if it is lengthy, is most appropriate before adoration begins.
 - ◆ If the witness is being given by a layperson inside the church building, he or she needs to receive permission from the diocesan bishop (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 766 and USCCB complementary norm). When speakers are from outside of the diocese, you may need to obtain a letter of suitability from their diocese—whether the witness occurs in the church building or elsewhere.
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Evangelization

- ◆ If there is a lot of foot traffic around your church building, it may be appropriate for street evangelizers to go out in pairs and invite people into the church building (to light a candle, pray for peace, etc.). These evangelizers sometimes carry candles. They may visit or pray with those they encounter and even accompany them into the church building.
 - ◆ Be discerning about who serves as a street evangelizer. Good candidates listen well, are respectful, warm, and inviting.
 - ◆ Offer some kind of formation to the volunteers who will engage in this ministry.
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