

Prot. No. B 356/23

HIS EXCELLENCY
MOST REVEREND PETER J. JUGIS, J.C.D.
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE
BISHOP OF CHARLOTTE

NORMS ON THE USE OF DIGITAL SCREENS AND PROJECTION DEVICES IN CHURCHES OF THE DIOCESE CHARLOTTE

Introduction

Digital screens have become ubiquitous in both our personal and communal lives, bringing many helpful advances in communication, commerce, and recreation. When used to their greatest effect, digital screens can help lessen feelings of separation for isolated members of our communities. Additionally, the Church has also benefited from this technology, particularly the livestreaming of Masses that allows those who cannot attend in person to participate in these and other public prayers of the Church.

The use of digital screens and the projection of texts, song lyrics, and imagery have become prominent in many communities of the Evangelical movement, and their usage has become adopted in some Catholic parishes. Throughout the ages, after periods of thoughtful discernment, the Church has both welcomed and rejected various technological advances. Similar consideration should therefore be given to digital screens and projection devices to determine the extent to which they aid authentic Catholic worship without undermining the very nature of the sacramentality or dignity that would recommend against their use. In view of their widespread use, the need has arisen to consider the proper use of digital screen technology in our Catholic worship.

The Use of Screens in Public Worship

When considering screens and projection devices as a means of displaying devotional content or images, it is important to note that elements of the public expression of divine worship – the Catholic

church building and the various appointments and instruments used for the sacred liturgy – are endowed with sacramental capacity and purpose by virtue of Jesus Christ’s Incarnation. Put simply, their natural purposes are elevated for the sanctification of creation. Additionally, they are permanent objects dedicated for sacred use. For example, at Mass architecture and artwork direct us toward heavenly realities. Likewise, vestments transcend everyday attire. Wheat and grapes are made into bread and wine, which are set aside to become the Body and Blood of our Lord. To the contrary, digital devices are not in themselves capable of being truly sacramental. In accord with the Church’s current understanding, the digital images they project essentially lack the permanent sacramentality consistent with the norms for divine worship.

As a means of displaying common text for the congregation, digital screens and projection devices, although seemingly convenient, introduce a new array of practical problems. They are often distracting, unreliable, and prone to glitches that increase the possibility of disruptions to the natural flow of liturgical celebrations. For these same reasons, digital devices are not sufficiently reliable to replace liturgical books in the sanctuary during public acts of worship.

Since liturgical norms never envisioned the use of digital devices, we look to parallel places in the law that address similar technological advancement. Perhaps the clearest parallel is the general prohibition against the use of prerecorded music during Mass (*cf. Sing to the Lord*, no. 93 (USCCB, 2007), *De Musica Sacra* (Congregation of Rites, 1958), and *Musicae Sacrae* (Pope Pius XII, 1955)). Among other reasons, the logic clearly indicates that prerecorded music, like digital displays, is artificial, unnecessary, and lacks due sacramentality.

Nonetheless, it is essential to differentiate between use in the Church’s public worship and use as a personal aid for the faithful. Regarding the latter, personal digital devices have proven to be an acceptable and appropriate use of modern technology as ritual aids. Parishes may even choose to make digital content available for parishioners to access on their personal devices such as using a QR code that links directly to the given Sunday’s music program or readings.

Until such time that the discipline of the Church lawfully incorporates these modern devices into her public worship, it is prudent to regulate their use. Therefore, the following norms regarding the use of screens, projectors, and related digital devices are to be observed in all churches, oratories, and chapels in the Diocese of Charlotte and are to be included in the forthcoming Sacred Place Design Norms of the Diocese of Charlotte.

Wherefore, I now decree the following:

Norms for the Diocese of Charlotte

1. Non-retractable screens, televisions, projectors, or any other screens or digital displays may not be permanently installed in the sanctuary or nave of the Church. Cameras may only be placed in unobtrusive and discreet locations. Retractable screens may be used, but they must be installed such that they are discreet and unnoticeable when retracted.

2. Screens may be installed and utilized in ancillary gathering locations (such as a parish hall, or gym) for the sake of making the liturgical rites viewable when there is an overflow crowd from the church proper.
3. At churches, oratories, and chapels where equipment already exists in the sanctuary or the nave or where the use of screens has become regular practice, their use is to be phased out by December 3, 2023, the First Sunday of Advent. Equipment and screens must be removed by that date unless the equipment is only visible when it is being legitimately used. For legitimate usage see No. 4, 5 and 8.
4. Screens and projectors may not be used during liturgical services in a sacred place unless prior approval is granted by the Ordinary.
5. The only exception to the prohibition on the use of screens with the celebration of liturgical rites at a church, oratory, or chapel is when there is an extraordinary need to share some sort of media message (such as a message from the bishop or the Holy Father). In such cases, the message may be shown before or after the liturgical rites unless otherwise directed.
6. When liturgical rites are celebrated outside a sacred place (such as an arena, convention center, or outdoors), multimedia devices and screens may be employed as is necessary to accommodate the extraordinary circumstances and to temporarily elevate the non-sacred space.
7. Generally, electronic devices may not replace Missals, Lectionaries, or other ritual books used in the sanctuary at public liturgies. Individual exceptions may be made for the sake of accessibility, such as a program designed to assist a reader with dyslexia, or if a particular font or brightness would enable people with sensory sensitivities to better engage the readings. This should be done discretely.
8. During talks, presentations, or other non-liturgical gatherings that can be appropriately offered in a sacred place, the use of retractable or temporary screens is permitted.
9. For those singular occasions when permission is granted for the use of screens and projection devices, all should be aware that copyrighted musical lyrics and notation require licensing or special permissions when displayed or projected. The USCCB and ICEL, which hold copyrights for scripture and official liturgical texts, also have permission policies.

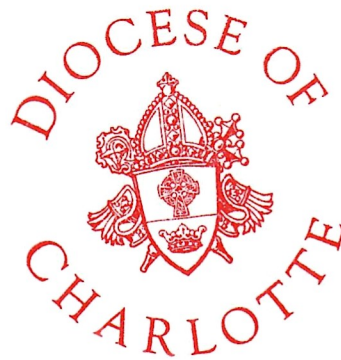
These norms may be revised in the future in accord with the disciplinary laws of the Church should such laws change or evolve in any way.

Through the intercession of Saint Clare of Assisi, the patron saint of television and screens, may we discern how best to draw upon technological advances while safeguarding the integrity and dignity of the sacred liturgy.

I declare and order that these norms will have the force of law beginning on August 11, 2023, the Feast of Saint Clare of Assisi.

+ *Peter J. Jugis*

The Most Reverend Peter J. Jugis
Bishop of Charlotte



Monsignor Patrick J. Winslow

The Reverend Monsignor Patrick J. Winslow
Vicar General and Chancellor
Diocese of Charlotte