

PRAYER AND LITURGY POLICY

As Scripture says, 'Trust in Him, and He will act' (Psalm 36:5). Let us rise, then, at last, for the scriptures stir us up, saying, 'It is high time for us to rise from sleep' (Romans 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: 'If you hear His voice today, do not harden your hearts' (Psalm 94(95):8; Hebrews 3:15).

Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 19

Downside's vision, as a Catholic and Benedictine school with Christ at its centre, is to be a bright light in education and to inspire service in our world.

School Vision Statement

I. Our Charism and Context

“The celebration of Catholic liturgies and prayers as an integral part of the learning and teaching should enable the School community to become reflective, experience the presence of God and should develop a mature spiritual life.” (Rt Rev. Marcus Stock (2012), Christ at the Centre, Catholic Truth Society, 23.)

This new liturgy policy is commensurate with To Love You more dearly (Prayer and Liturgy Directory) approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, October 2023. However, the longstanding practice of the School, led for centuries by monks, is for worship and prayer to take place regularly in the spirit of the Holy Rule. What follows encapsulates the approach developed by the monastic community over many years, which has been continued and improved following their departure on 12 March 2022 (Solemnity of St Gregory the Great according to the EBC ordo.)

I.1. A Catholic and Benedictine School

I.1.1. Guided by our Benedictine charism, and encouraged by the teaching of Bishop Bosco and his predecessor Bishop Declan, our guiding principle is for prayer and liturgy to remain both Catholic and Benedictine. Within such a framework, that is intentionally universal and hospitable to all, every member of our community is included in opportunities for prayer and reflection. Additionally, missionary outreach and servant leadership are fruits of prayer and liturgy, *inspiring service in our world.*

I.2. Our Benedictine History and Charism

I.2.1. Founded in 1606 in Douai, the Community of St Gregory the Great came into being one thousand years after the death of their patron. The fledgling Benedictine monastery was encouraged in their beginnings through the support of Abbot Philip de Caverel (Abbot of St Vedast, Arras), and the patronage of Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia (Sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands). From the beginning, the forerunner of Downside Abbey and School had been a place of formation and prayer.

- I.2.2. Among early monks of the community were the martyrs St John Roberts († 1610), St Ambrose Barlow († 1641) and Blessed Philip Powell († 1646). Barlow and Roberts were canonised together in 1970 by Pope St Paul VI, all three having made the ultimate sacrifice in service of the people of God in England and Wales.
- I.2.3. When in 1795 it became necessary for the community to move on, owing to the French revolution, they were welcomed to the home of Sir Edward Smythe, an ‘Old Gregorian’ who had studied in Douai at St Gregory’s. For almost 20 years, the community remained at Acton Burnell, Shropshire. Then in 1814, the community walked to Stratton-on-the-Fosse, initially based in the Old House, surrounded by the rolling fields of the Mendip district of Somerset.
- I.2.4. Our spirituality and charism as a School community is inseparable from all the above. Whilst Downside School has been an entity legally independent of the Community of St Gregory the Great since 2019, we are stewards and beneficiaries of over four centuries of Benedictine life and learning. We are guided most fundamentally by the witness and teaching of St Benedict and Pope St Gregory the Great, and rely on the model of prayer and service provided by our house patrons mentioned above.

I.3. St Benedict: Prefer Nothing to the Love of Christ¹

- I.3.1. St Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries has been lived on this site for over 200 years. Each Friday all staff hear from the Rule, guiding our prayer and work even today. The balance of St Benedict’s approach, bringing both *Ora et Labora* into the daily pattern of bringing glory to God, remains central to our self-understanding.
- I.3.2. The person of Jesus Christ is central for St Benedict, and *Christ is at the centre* of the School’s vision. Our vision remains evident in our encounter with Christ’s real presence in Word, Sacrament and Service.

I.4. Pope St Gregory the Great: A School of the Lord’s Service²

- I.4.1. Pope St Gregory the Great famously styled his universal ministry with the words: *servus servorum Dei* – servant of the servants of God. St Benedict likewise saw the monastery as a School of the Lord’s service.
- I.4.2. The vision of both saints is canonised in the phrase *service in our world*, within our own vision. Our refreshed vision statement emphasises the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in the life and mission of our School. Inspired by reflection on the gospel message, seeds are sown in the hearts of pupils to reach out to others, encountering the heart of Jesus through humble service.

¹ Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 4: The tools of good works

² Rule of St Benedict, Prologue

1.5. Teaching of the Diocese of Clifton

- 1.5.1. Our Bishop Declan set out something of his vision for prayer and liturgy in his teaching document: *A Future Full of Hope*. He describes the *kerygma* as the heart of the gospel. He reminds Christian people of their calling as disciples who come to know Jesus in prayer. Bishop Declan emphasises that our liturgies be celebrated in such a way that Christ's word and presence is known. Liturgy then is connected to our lives and enables us to joyfully take up the command: *Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life*³.

2. Responsibility

2.1. Governance

The governors, as guardians of the Catholic School's life and mission will ensure that:

- prayer and liturgy are central to the Catholic life of the School and therefore are in line with the guidance set out by the Prayer and Liturgy Directory;
- there is a named person(s) who is responsible for prayer and liturgy in the School (the Prayer and Liturgy Coordinator);
- the prayer and liturgy policy is updated regularly and shared with all stakeholders;
- there is a budget for prayer and liturgy that reflects its centrality to the life of our School.

2.2. Head

The Head, as the spiritual leader of the School as a Catholic community, ensures that:

- prayer and liturgy are central to the Benedictine, Catholic life of the School, and is also in line with the guidance set out by the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*;
- he works in partnership with the leader(s) for prayer and liturgy;
- those responsible for prayer and liturgy in the School have been given; appropriate training and formation to ensure that all guidance is followed and adhered to;
- there are suitable resources for prayer and liturgy in the School.

2.3. Prayer and Liturgy Coordinator (Priest Chaplain)

Those responsible for prayer and liturgy ensure that:

- prayer and liturgy are central to the Catholic life of the School and therefore are in line with the guidance set out by the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*;
- there is an Annual Plan of Provision for prayer and liturgy across the School year which identifies liturgical seasons and key celebrations, as well as opportunities for the celebration of the Sacraments;
- there is daily planned prayer for all pupils, appropriate to age and ability, as outlined in the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*;

³ A Future Full of Hope, Clifton Diocese

- pupils are supported in their liturgical formation to take an active role in the planning, preparation, and delivery of prayer and liturgy according to their age and capacity, and in a manner which facilitates their progressive participation;
- resources to support the planning of prayer and liturgy are appropriate and readily available to staff and pupils;
- induction on prayer and liturgy takes place for new members of staff as required
- staff have access to effective training and formation opportunities;
- monitoring and evaluation of prayer and liturgy take place regularly and feed back into planning for future liturgies;
- monitoring of prayer and liturgy is reported to the headteacher and governing body to support whole School development and the Catholic life of the School;
- there is collaboration with local clergy and parishes;
- liaison with the Diocesan Advisory Service and others is maintained to ensure that the school keeps updated with best practice.

3. Overview of Prayer and Liturgy provision

3.1. Liturgical Formation

- 3.1.1. Schola Cantorum members, altar servers and readers are thoroughly prepared for their liturgical ministries after Hymn Practice and during the week.

3.2. Prayer and Liturgy for Houses and Tutor groups

- 3.2.1. For St Benedict, prayer was at the heart of the spiritual life of the community. In keeping with the saint's vision, prayer in common should be *nothing harsh, nothing burdensome*⁴. Each house assembly and tutor period would normally enable pupils: *to listen with goodwill to holy reading. To be frequently occupied in prayer.*⁵

3.3. Daily Prayers

- 3.3.1. At morning and evening assembly, each house reads morning or evening prayers from the appropriate School prayer book for the season. Ordinary time, Advent, Lent or Easter.
- The HsM⁶ delegates a senior prefect to arrange for different members of the house to read the scripture reading.
 - Tutors are expected to lead the Angelus at lunchtime registration with their tutor groups. In Easter time the Regina Caeli is used. It is good practice to involve different pupils in the lunchtime prayers. Tutors are provided with resources to lead prayer – it is pleasing to note that tutors themselves have produced all such resources, rather than chaplaincy colleagues.

⁴ Rule of St Benedict, Prologue

⁵ Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 4: The tools of good works

⁶ Hereafter signifying the House Master or Mistress

3.4. House Masses

3.4.1. In the first half of each term, every house celebrates Mass together. The senior boys houses (Fourth Form- Upper Sixth Form) usually celebrate at 8.30pm on an evening when the HsM is on duty, to ensure their attendance.

- It is commendable that the HsM attend house liturgies, because in their houses they are *deemed ... the representative of Christ*⁷.
- The girls' houses include junior pupils, so an earlier time of 6.45 pm has been adopted.
- The House Mass is usually in the Old Chapel, but sometimes in one of the chapels of the Basilica of St Gregory the Great (e.g., Crypt or Lady Chapel).
- The House Mass should be far more than a perfunctory celebration. The talents of the House should shine through for the glory of God and for the edification of the house. Therefore, the Priest Chaplain liaises with the St Luke's representative and others to realise the best possible celebration.
 - a) Good practice: Smythe House is blessed with several gifted musicians, who have a tradition of providing polyphony and chant at House Masses.
 - b) Good practice: younger members of the Guild of St Stephen are encouraged to serve at House Masses.
- The Lower Sixth Form house representative of St Luke's is asked to arrange the above with the assistance of volunteers from their houses. A model for such arrangements is provided in the following form:

Dear N,

The Roberts house Mass is next week, on Tuesday 6th February (8:30pm in the **Old Chapel**). It is an opportunity to involve many members of Roberts, and to have a celebration of Mass together as a house.

Please would you prepare some intercessions for this occasion (maybe 4 or 5 prayers)?

The other jobs are summed up by the acronym **PROMS!**

- **P**ayer of the faithful readers (2 or 3 pupils)
- **R**eaders of the first reading and psalm (2 pupils)
- **O**ffertory gifts (2 pupils)
- **M**usicians – could you talk to members of the schola and ask someone to play the organ/piano – e.g., N or a member of the music department? This makes a huge difference to the atmosphere of a house Mass.
- **S**ervers (2 pupils). Arrive early and can double-up as welcomers to hand out the hymn books.

Do let me know if you have any questions. What 2 hymns would the house like to sing?

Many thanks

Fr Michael

⁷ cf. Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 2: The qualities of the Abbot

4. The Eucharist – the source and summit of the Christian life⁸.

In addition to the House Masses mentioned above, the following Eucharistic celebrations occur at Downside.

4.1. Sunday Mass

4.1.1. Every Sunday in term time at 10.00am, all boarders gather in the Basilica for Mass. Several day pupils also attend voluntarily, because they are involved in the Schola Cantorum, or the Guild of St Stephen (altar serving team). Several staff often choose to meet their obligation at the Whole School Mass. At a 'House at Home,' typically all members of the House are present at Mass, including some tutors.

4.1.2. This has always been a beautiful liturgy, thanks in major part to the Schola Cantorum, understood to be the oldest Catholic School Choir in the country.

4.1.3. The School Mass is open to everyone. We have regular visitors. Welcome is one of our Benedictine values. The Heads of School and the Head of Chaplaincy (three senior pupils) lead the welcoming.

4.1.4. The St Luke's representatives in turn organise the readers in liaison with the Priest Chaplain: offertory, collectors, welcomers from their houses. All year groups are involved. The servers team comprises 12 members:

- Six Torches - Fourth/Third Form
- Acolytes - Fifth Form
- Crucifer - Lower & Upper Sixth Form
- Master of Ceremonies 1 - Lower & Upper Sixth Form
- Master of Ceremonies 2 - Lower & Upper Sixth Form
- Thurifer - Upper Sixth Form

⁸ Lumen Gentium 11

4.2. Whole School Masses

- 4.2.1. On the first day of each term, there is a Whole School Mass. This is usually celebrated at 11.35am, to coincide with the beginning of period 3. Whilst the absence of the monks is keenly felt, there is more leeway in the timings of Mass and other liturgies since their departure.
- 4.2.2. In the Michaelmas Term, the Mass at the start of the Academic Year is to invoke the Holy Spirit to assist us in the year ahead. At this Mass, new staff are presented by the Head with a copy of the Rule of St Benedict and exhorted to use it.
- 4.2.3. In the Lent Term, a new year Mass is celebrated, of the Holy Name of Jesus or of the Baptism of the Lord. In 2027, the Mass will fall on Epiphany.

4.2.4. On the following occasions, there is a Whole School Mass (11.35 am), either because it is a Holy Day of Obligation or because there is a Saint's Day that recommends itself, given the many saints that are part of the Downside canon.

- The Immaculate Conception (8th December, Annual Mass of Our Lady);
- Ash Wednesday;
- St Gregory the Great (12th March, transferred owing to September 3rd being so close to the beginning of the School year);
- The Passing of St Benedict (21st March);
- Confirmation Mass (with Bishop Bosco, optional but well attended);
- The Ascension of the Lord
- SS Peter and Paul (29th June);
- Prize Day (last day of the Summer Term; in recent years the last Mass of the School year has twice coincided with the Solemnity of St Oliver Plunkett, Martyr and Archbishop of Armagh, enshrined in the Basilica in the north transept);
- SS John Roberts and Ambrose Barlow (9th October);
- All Saints (1st November);
- When the late Queen Elizabeth II died, a requiem Mass was celebrated the next day for the whole School.

4.3. Weekday Masses

4.3.1. There are three optional weekday Masses that pupils and staff may attend:

- Saturday at 8.00am in the Old Chapel.
- Tuesday at 5.10pm in the Old Chapel.
- Friday at 7.40am at one of the nineteen altars of the Basilica of St Gregory the Great.
 - a) The latter is the initiative of pupils, who serve, and sing Gregorian chant each Friday. It provides an opportunity for a mini tour of a small part of the Basilica.
 - b) This Mass is well attended, always double figures, staff and pupils included: pupils are motivated to attend so early in the morning.
 - c) An e-mail is sent out to all pupils, Third Form and above, and to all staff, to give details about the chapel being visited that Friday. The Priest Chaplain uses this weekly communication to remind the School community of times of weekday Masses and how to arrange to go to confession.

4.3.2. During Advent, numerous *Rorate* Masses (by candlelight) are celebrated both in the Abbey Church and in the Old Chapel.

4.3.3. On occasions such as Candlemas and St Blaise's day, optional Masses and blessings of candles/throats carried out.

5. Other Whole School Liturgies

There are occasions during the School year when pupils gather in the evening from 8.30pm–9.00 pm.

5.1. Candlemas

5.1.1. All boarders gather in the Basilica to mark Candlemas. All Upper Sixth Pupils participate in a procession with candles, blessed at the altar. The Schola Cantorum provide fitting music, including the traditional Gregorian chant, and a meditation on the gospel of the day. If Candlemas falls on a Sunday, it is incorporated into the Mass of the day.

5.1.2. Younger pupils (First & Second Form) have their own service in the Old Chapel earlier in the evening, led by the Lay Chaplain.

5.2. All Souls Day

5.2.1. November is the Month of the Holy Souls. On 2nd November or later, depending on the dates of half term, all pupils and staff are invited to submit the names of deceased family and friends they would like to be prayer for.

5.2.2. In the evening, boarders gather in the Basilica. The choir sings; the paschal candle (painted annually by an Art Scholar) is a focus. The names of the dead are read out. At the conclusion, all are invited to light a candle in St Oliver's Chapel.

5.2.3. Younger pupils (First & Second Form) have their own service in the Old Chapel earlier in the evening, led by the Lay Chaplain.

6. Sacrament of Penance (Confessions)

6.1.1. This celebrated weekly on Saturdays at 8.20am in the Old Chapel. Pupils are free to approach the Priest Chaplain should they wish to go to confession at any time; there are also specific opportunities available. If a pupil is not a Catholic, they are encouraged to talk about anything that might be holding them back, whilst not confessing specific sins.

6.1 House Reconciliation Evenings

6.1.2. Each senior house has a Reconciliation evening for pupils during Advent and Lent.

6.1.3. A short service is held in the Old Chapel before 'prep'. This comprises a scripture reading, exhortation and examination of conscience.

6.1.4. The Priest Chaplain usually sits in the House Office (for visibility whilst safeguarding the seal of the confessional).

6.1.5. Pupils may go to confession at any point during 'prep'.

6.2. By appointment

6.2.1. Some pupils seek out the sacrament of penance. They email or approach the Priest Chaplain in person.

6.2.2. Ministers of the Eucharist in the Upper Sixth are encouraged to confess regularly by appointment.

6.3. During Religious Studies Lessons

6.3.1. A recent experiment with First & Second Form whereby all pupils were taught about the Sacrament during a lesson. The following lesson, each pupil was able to step out of the lesson briefly, to go to confession in an empty classroom close by.

6.4. Following a House Assembly

6.4.1. When the Priest Chaplain is visiting a house, pupils may go to confession if they wish.

6.5. Reconciliation Service for First – Third Form Pupils

6.5.1. During Advent and Lent, visiting priests assist with a 45-minute reconciliation service with individual confessions in the Old Chapel.

6.5.2. It is an uplifting celebration and many pupils avail of the opportunity to go to confession, encouraging one another.

6.5.3. The safeguarding arrangements are rigorous following the departure of the monastic community.

6.6. Before the Confirmation Mass

6.6.1. It is necessary for all candidates to be in a state of grace on the day of their confirmation, as required by the Church.

6.6.2. On the eve of the Confirmation, local priests attend to help with the sacrament –some pupils prefer to have a priest who they do not know.

7. Other House Liturgies

- 7.1.1. During the Easter Season, the Priest Chaplain visits each of the six houses in turn, for the blessing of Holy Water, and Blessing of all rooms in the House. He is accompanied by a member of House Staff when visiting pupils in their rooms.
- 7.1.2. During the Season of Lent, each house visits the Basilica for Stations of the Cross, usually on a Friday. Six altars are chosen as foci to reflect on a small number of stations. Volunteers assist with prayers and readings, and with carrying the cross.

8. Legion of Mary

At the initiative of two members of staff, the new Legion of Mary gathers in the Chaplaincy Centre for the Rosary each Friday at 9.00pm.

9. Night fever and Eucharistic Adoration

- On a Sunday evening of Advent and Lent, the Gasquet Hall is transformed into an adoration chapel, for an hour from 6.00-7.00pm.
- An image and verse of scripture is projected onto the screen.
- Candles are lit, and servers assist with the transfer of the Blessed Sacrament from the Old Chapel. One server rings a bell, whilst the other opens the doors.
- Gentle music is played, by a staff member or pupil on guitar or piano.
- Pupils drop in for personal prayers as they are passing and may light a candle.
- The evening concludes with Benediction.

10. Prayers with Staff

- At the beginning of Monday briefing with all staff, the Head proclaims the Gospel of the day.
- At Friday briefing, we begin with a reading from the Holy Rule, with excerpts chosen by the Chaplain (Fr Michael).
- Each briefing, and every Senior Management Team (SMT) and/or Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting, concludes with prayer.
- At the start-of-term INSET, the Chaplain begins proceedings with a gospel reading, reflection and prayer.
- A staff *Lectio Divina* session is periodically organised by the Priest Chaplain.
- All staff are welcome at any of the above.

11. Red Wednesday

The Lay Chaplain leads a pupil effort to mark Aid to the Church Need's annual 'Red Wednesday'. There is a para-liturgy in the Old Chapel that evening.

12. Hymn Practice

At the beginning of each Hymn Practice, the Head leads the Lord's prayer at the beginning, and proclaims the gospel for the following Sunday at the end.

13. Liturgy of the Hours

The Chaplain leads a truncated form of the Liturgy of the Hours at each retreat.

14. Retreats

Mass is celebrated at nearly every year group retreat, working with the principles of maximum participation set out above. The Lower Sixth retreat is more outreach based, so prayers are said in keeping with the aims of the retreat.

15. Resourcing

- Prayer and liturgy are central to the School's understanding of itself as a Benedictine, Catholic School, and this is reflected in the annual budget allocation and available resources, including staff time, chaplaincy provision, and dedicated spaces for prayer and liturgy.
- The Benedictine, Catholic character of the School is clearly reflected throughout the building and is particularly evident in the Abbey Church, the Old Chapel, and chaplaincy areas.

16. Training and formation

Any individual training needs will be identified and addressed through training and formation. There will also be the opportunity for whole-staff professional development at least once a year, so that all staff understand the importance of prayer and liturgy and relevant staff are well supported to lead as required.

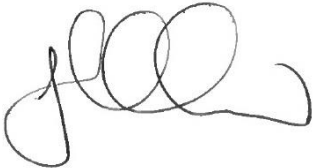
17. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and impact of prayer and liturgy will take place regularly, and at least annually, and involve all key stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff, clergy, and governors. Areas for development will be identified and issues raised will be actioned and evidenced as appropriate.

18. Review

The policy will be reviewed as part of the regular cycle of policy review conducted by the School in conjunction with the Governing Board.

Policy Version Record		
ISSUE NO.	DESCRIPTION OF POLICY REVIEW	DATE
Issue 1	Creation of Policy	January 2024
Issue 2	Policy review	February 2025

Downside School Policy Approval Record	
Reviewed by	School Chaplain (Fr Michael Patey)
Date	11 th February 2026
Authorised by	Chair of the Board of Governing Body
	
Date	27 th March 2026
Next Review	March 2027
Circulation	Governors / all staff / [volunteers] automatically Published on the School's website
Status	Complies with ISI regulatory requirements September 2025