General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The Altar

303. In building new churches, it is preferable for a single altar to be erected, one that in the gathering of the faithful will signify the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church.

In already existing churches, however, when the old altar is so positioned that it makes the people’s participation difficult but cannot be moved without damage to artistic value, another fixed altar, skillfully made and properly dedicated, should be erected and the sacred rites celebrated on it alone. In order that the attention of the faithful not be distracted from the new altar, the old altar should not be decorated in any special way.

305. Moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar.

During Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this time of year, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. During Lent it is forbidden for the altar to be decorated with flowers. Exceptions, however are Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and Feasts.

Floral decoration should always show moderation and be arranged around the altar rather than on the altar table.

307. The candlesticks required for the different liturgical services for reasons of reverence or the festive character of the celebration (cf. no. 117) should be appropriately placed either on the altar or around it, according to the design of the altar and the sanctuary, so that the whole may be harmonious and the faithful may not be impeded from a clear view of what takes place at the altar or what is placed upon it.

Sacred Images

318. Thus, in sacred buildings images of the Lord, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saints, in accordance with most ancient tradition of the Church, should be displayed for veneration by the faithful \(^{132}\) and should be so arranged so as to lead the faithful toward the mysteries of faith celebrated there. Care should, therefore, be taken that their number not be increased indiscriminately, and moreover that they be arranged in proper order so as not to draw the attention of the faithful to themselves and away from the celebration itself.\(^{133}\) There should usually be only one image of any given Saint. Generally speaking, in the ornamentation and arrangement of a church, as far as images are concerned, provision should be made for the devotion of the entire community as well as for the beauty and dignity of the images.
Built of Living Stones

THE LITURGICAL YEAR: SEASONAL DECORATIONS

122. During the liturgical year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth through his passion, death, and resurrection to his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation for his coming in glory. In its celebration of these mysteries, the Church makes these sacred events present to the people of every age.\(^{148}\)

123. The tradition of decorating or not decorating the church for liturgical seasons and feasts heightens the awareness of the festive, solemn, or penitential nature of these seasons. Human minds and hearts are stimulated by the sounds, sights, and fragrances of liturgical seasons, which combine to create powerful, lasting impressions of the rich and abundant graces unique to each of the seasons.

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. Since the Easter season lasts fifty days, planning will encompass ways to sustain the décor until the fiftieth day of Pentecost.

126. In the course of the liturgical year, the feasts and memorials of Our Lady and of saints with special significance for the parish afford opportunities to show devotion by adorning their images with tasteful floral arrangements or plants.

127. Fabric art in the form of processional banners and hangings can be an effective way to convey the spirit of liturgical seasons, especially through the use of color, shape, texture, and symbolic form. The use of images rather than words is more in keeping with this medium.

128. Objects such as the Advent wreath,\(^{149}\) the Christmas crib,\(^{150}\) 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.
The use of living flowers and plants, rather than artificial greens, serves as a reminder of the gift of life God has given to the human community. Planning for plants and flowers should include not only the procurement and placement but also the continuing care needed to sustain living things.

**Book of Blessing**

**ADVENT WREATH**

1510. Customarily the Advent Wreath is constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which are inserted four candles. According to tradition, three of the candles are violet and the fourth is rose. However, four violet or white candles may also be used.

1512. If the Advent Wreath is to be used in church, it should be of sufficient size to be visible to the congregation. It may be suspended from the ceiling or placed on a stand. If it is placed in the presbytery, it should not interfere with the celebration of the liturgy, nor should it obscure the altar, lectern, or chair.

**NATIVITY SCENE**

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