

Why do we hold hands during the Our Father? We as a family feel very uncomfortable with this recent un-prescribed addition to the Liturgy.

Yet another interesting and controversial subject; it one that is very emotionally charged. It can be approached from two perspectives: what does the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) say, or what does the GIRM not say.

What does the GIRM say?: The GIRM does not tell us to hold hands during the Our Father. Therefore we are not required, and should not be asked by the priest or other minister, to hold hands during the Our Father. It cannot be made a liturgical requirement.

What doesn't the GIRM say?: The GIRM doesn't say it is wrong to hold hands either. It is silent on the subject, and in fact gives the congregation no directions at all on how to position our hands during the liturgy. We are not told when we should fold our hands, have them at our sides, or cross them in our lap. None of these hand positions is mandated or disallowed. From this perspective, if someone wants to hold hands with someone else who also wants to hold hands, then there should be no problem.

The problem often arises, however, when there is an implied obligation to hold hands. This can occur when someone reaches out with their hand to someone outside their own personal or family unit. That second person may feel obligated to hold hands so as to not risk offending the first person. Also, the person who submitted this question indicated that Father's decision to hold hands with the altar servers was an implied obligation for the rest of the congregation to do likewise. While I can understand how Father's actions can set the tone, please do not read into his actions a requirement to follow his example.

Here are a few points for consideration. If you do not want to hold hands because it makes you uncomfortable or you feel it is inappropriate, then by all means do not feel obligated to do so. If someone offers their hand, simply smile graciously, continue to pray as you wish, and do not extend your hand in return. If you are one who does like to hold hands, please be conscious of the desires and concerns of those around you. Hold hands with your family members, and only extend your hand to others if you are sure they want to receive it.

Deacon Joe