

GUIDELINES FOR THE MINISTRY OF READER

Diocese of St. Petersburg

INTRODUCTION

“Always . . . Christ is present in his word” (*Lectionary for Mass [LFM]*, no. 4). In proclaiming the word of God, readers exercise their responsibility in mediating the presence of Christ. God speaks to the assembly through them. The impact of God's message will depend significantly on their conviction, their preparation, and their delivery. Their reverence toward the Scriptures is important because the Church sees an intimate link between "the table of God's Word" and "the table of the Eucharist." From the one, the divine covenant is announced and the Church grows in wisdom; from the other, the covenant is renewed and the Church grows in holiness (*LFM*, no. 10).

The rich abundance and variety of readings in the *LECTIONARY* challenge those who proclaim the scriptures at Mass. The individual sacred authors reflected on the meaning of God's action in history from their own perspective and in their own style. They also employed various literary forms to convey the message of salvation. These range from narratives and the poetry of the psalms to prophetic oracles and parables, from theological expositions to apocalyptic visions. An awareness of the literary form of the particular reading and a knowledge of the sacred author's style will enable the reader or psalmist to proclaim more fully and with greater understanding the tone and content of the text. Using extra-biblical sources such as Bible commentaries can help the reader to discover the meaning and purpose of a particular scriptural passage.

Genuine ministry is about humble service. A model of ministry for readers is John the Baptist who had to decrease so that the Messiah could increase (cf. John 3:30). It also was said of him that, *"He was not the light, but came to testify to the light"* (John 1:8). In order to serve the community and give faithful testimony to the Word, the reader must put aside personal agendas and needs.

- ◆ Both to involve more people in active ministry and to assist the assembly to appreciate the genre and content of the different passages of scripture, it is better to have a different reader for each reading. (*LFM*, no. 52)
- ◆ The responsorial psalm is meant to be sung by a cantor at the ambo. Even singing the response alone (with the verses recited) fosters the assembly's singing and helps them to understand and meditate on the psalm's spiritual meaning. If necessary, however, a reader may recite the entire responsorial psalm. When the psalm is not sung, it is to be proclaimed in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God. (*LFM*, nos. 20-22; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002* - 3rd typical ed. [*GIRM 2002*], nos. 61 & 309)
- ◆ In the absence of a deacon, a reader carries the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* slightly elevated before the presiding priest in the entrance procession and places it on the altar. The *LECTIONARY* is not to be carried in procession; rather, it is prepared with the Sunday readings at the ambo before Mass begins. The *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* is not carried in the procession at the end of Mass. (*GIRM 2002*, nos. 120d., 128, 194-195; *Book of the Gospels [BG]*, nos. 9 & 22)

REQUIREMENTS

Those who fulfill the ministry of reader should be members of the parish community and of sufficient age and competency to undertake this ministry. A rudimentary knowledge of the Bible, a willingness to learn about the scriptures, and possession of the skills necessary for effective oral proclamation are deemed essential for this ministry.

SEATING

The proper place for the seating of readers is within the assembly. They should be seen coming forth from the assembly and returning to it when their ministry has been completed. However, there may be circumstances when the reader may need to be seated in the sanctuary.

TRAINING & ONGOING FORMATION

Each parish should have in place an extensive and continuous training program for those who proclaim the scriptures in liturgy. Above all, the preparation and training of each individual reader must be spiritual. Spiritual preparation might include opportunities for praying and sharing, breaking open the word, and scripture study. The reader also must have the technical skills necessary to read publicly, use the power and potential of their voice, and make use of the sound systems that are available to enhance the volume of the speaking voice.

Reader formation is to include the following four elements:

- **Spiritual preparation**
- **Biblical formation**
- **Liturgical formation**
- **Technical preparation**

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Further, readers should be instructed in the basic elements of the liturgy. They should be made aware of the distinctions between the liturgical seasons, rites and books, encouraged to dress appropriately, and be present in sufficient time preceding the liturgy to receive instruction regarding any particular circumstance that may affect them in their ministry. Readers should always be prepared to read even when they are not assigned.

PROCEDURES DURING THE LITURGY

A. Introductory Rites

In the absence of a deacon, the reader carries the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* slightly elevated in procession. The reader follows the altar servers in the entrance procession. (If a deacon is present, the deacon carries the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS*.) Without bowing, the reader places the

book on the altar and then goes to their seat. (BG, no. 9)

- ◆ Only the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* is to be carried in the procession. The *LECTIONARY FOR MASS* should already be placed on the ambo (pulpit) opened to the appropriate Sunday readings.

B. Liturgy of the Word

To promote meditation, brief moments of silence should be included between the readings (GIRM 2002, nos. 45 & 56); therefore, the Liturgy of the Word should not be rushed. Following the Opening Prayer, the first reader goes to the ambo (pulpit) to proclaim the first reading.

The reader waits for the assembly to settle. Making eye contact, the reader announces the reading, pauses a moment, and then begins the passage. The *LECTIONARY* calls for a very simple introduction: “A reading from the book [letter] of. . .” There is no need to embellish this with chapter or verse.

At the conclusion of the reading, the reader pauses a moment, makes eye contact, and announces: “*The Word of the Lord.*”

Communication Skills:

- Eye contact
- Enunciation
- Diction
- Inflection
- Pacing
- Projection
- Pronunciation

At the conclusion of the first reading, the reader should remain still and silent for a moment and then return to their seat. The cantor then sings the responsorial psalm at the ambo (pulpit). (LFM, no. 20; GIRM 2002, nos. 61 & 309)

At the conclusion of the psalm, the second reader then moves to the ambo for the proclamation of the second reading. The reader follows the same procedure as for the first reading, without embellishment. When they have concluded this reading, the reader removes the *LECTIONARY* from the ambo and returns to their seat.

In the absence of a deacon, a reader or a cantor may lead the intentions of the general intercessions at the ambo following the presider's introduction to these prayers (LFM, nos. 30-31; GIRM 2002, no. 71). When the priest finishes the prayer after the intercessions, the reader returns to their seat.

C. Concluding Rites

If the reader is seated in the sanctuary, after the final blessing and dismissal, the reader may take their place in the procession line facing the altar. When the presiding priest and the other ministers bow, the reader bows. All the ministers then turn and leave in procession in the same order and manner as at the beginning of Mass. Neither the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* nor the *LECTIONARY* is carried out of church. The presumption is the Word of God has been proclaimed and is located in the hearts and minds of the faithful. They become the “Living Word” that leaves the church.

INSTALLATION OF READERS

The *BOOK OF BLESSINGS*, Chapter 61, provides an "Order for the Blessing of Readers" which should be used in the commissioning/installation of new readers. Readers should be commissioned for a specified period, perhaps two years. This will allow both the reader and the parish community to benefit from this ministry. Recertification and commissioning would be dependent upon parish policy and programs.

As with all liturgical ministries, it is best for the individual and the parish if a person serves in only one ministry at any given liturgy. Thus, a person should not be a reader and an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at the same Mass.

Office of Worship / Revised June 2003 / Reviewed May 2021