



COURAGEOUSLY
Living the Gospel

DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Office of Worship

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GUIDELINES FOR THE MINISTRY OF READER

Diocese of St. Petersburg

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INTRODUCTION

“Always . . . Christ is present in his word” (*Lectionary for Mass [LFM]*, no. 4).

In proclaiming the word of God at Mass, readers undertake the important ministry of mediating the presence of Christ as God speaks to the assembly through them.

The authors of sacred scripture convey God’s action in salvation history with unique perspectives and literary styles ranging from poetry, prophetic oracles, parables, theological expositions, narratives, and apocalyptic visions. This rich variety of readings in the *LECTIONARY* invites those who proclaim the scriptures at Mass to an awareness of a particular reading’s literary form in order to match that reading’s appropriate tone and content since the impact of God’s message hinges in part on the reader’s faith, preparation, and delivery.

A model of ministry for readers is St. John the Baptist who recognized his calling to decrease so that the Messiah could increase (cf. John 3:30). The reader is invited to follow the example of this “fore-runner” in recognition that, as with St. John the Baptist, *“He was not the light, but came to testify to the light”* (John 1:8).

PREREQUISITES FOR EXERCISING THE MINISTRY

The man or woman who desires to exercise the ministry of reader, the individual should meet the following prerequisites:

1. Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church¹
2. Ability to effectively proclaim the text
3. Attainment of sufficient age and competency
4. Demonstration of a rudimentary knowledge of Scripture with a willingness learn more

¹ *“The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader.”* Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Directory for the Application of Principles and norms on Ecumenism, 133.



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SEATING

The proper place for readers to sit is within the assembly in order to demonstrate a coming forth from the assembly and returning to it at the conclusion of their ministry; however, exceptional circumstances may necessitate that the reader be seated in the sanctuary.

TRAINING & ONGOING FORMATION

Each parish should have in place an extensive and ongoing reader training program comprised of the following four elements: **spiritual**, **biblical**, **liturgical**, and **technical** formation.

- **Spiritual**
Potential enrichment might include opportunities for praying and sharing.
- **Biblical**
Potential enrichment might include breaking open the word and scripture study.
- **Liturgical**
Potential enrichment might include discussion of appropriate dress, the importance of arriving sufficiently early to receive potential instruction regarding a liturgy's particularities, and the distinctions between liturgical seasons, rites, and books.
- **Technical**
Potential enrichment might include instruction on public oration, the use and potential of one's voice, and knowledge of how a sound system enhances the volume of the speaking voice.

Technical Communication Skills:

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

LITURGICAL NORMS

A. Introductory Rites

A reader may carry the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* slightly elevated in the entrance procession, behind the altar servers, only when a deacon is not present at Mass. Without bowing, the reader places the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* on the altar and then walks to his/her seat.² The *LECTIONARY FOR MASS* should never be carried in the entrance procession but should be simply placed (without ceremony) on the ambo prior to the entrance procession.

B. Liturgy of the Word

To simultaneously promote meditation and prevent inappropriate hurry, brief moments of silence should be included between the readings (*GIRM*, nos. 45 & 56).

Following the Collect (Opening Prayer), the first reader walks to the ambo to proclaim the

² *Book of the Gospels*, 9.



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first reading (bowing to the altar where necessary). After waiting for the assembly to fully settle, the reader announces the reading, pauses a moment, and then begins the passage.

The *LECTIONARY* calls for a simple introduction: “*A reading from the book [letter] of ...*” The chapter and verse are not proclaimed. At the conclusion of the reading, the reader pauses a moment, makes eye contact, and announces: “*The Word of the Lord.*” After the assembly’s response, the reader should return to his/her seat.

The cantor then sings the responsorial psalm at the ambo.³

At the conclusion of the psalm, the second reader then moves to the ambo to proclaim the second reading (bowing to the altar where necessary).⁴ The reader follows the same procedure as that of the first reading (see above). After the assembly’s response, the reader removes the *LECTIONARY* from the ambo to make space for the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* and returns to his/her seat.

When a deacon is not present, a reader or cantor may lead the petitions of the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) at the ambo following the celebrant’s introduction.⁵ When the priest finishes the prayer after the intercessions, the reader returns to his/her seat.

C. Concluding Rites

Neither the *BOOK OF THE GOSPELS* nor the *LECTIONARY* is carried out in procession.

COMMISSIONING OF READERS

The *BOOK OF BLESSINGS*, chapter 61, provides an “Order for the Blessing of Readers” which should be used in the commissioning or recommissioning of 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 with recertification and recommissioning dependent upon parish policy and programs.

³ 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 foster understanding and meditation 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. (*Lectionary for Mass*, 20-22; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 61 & 309).

⁴ Whenever there is more than one reading, these readings ought to be assigned to different readers, if available; this allows more people to be involved in ministry and helps the assembly appreciate the different genres and content found in scripture (*LFM*, no. 52).

⁵ *LFM*, 30-31; *GIRM*, 71.