

A Handbook for Lectors

A THEOLOGY OF LAY LITURGICAL MINISTRY

"But you are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt. 2:9).

All liturgical ministers are, first and foremost, members of the Body of Christ. Through their baptism they are the "holy people and royal priesthood" whose right and privilege it is to participate in the ministry of Christ. How the lay faithful exercise this ministry in the world varies, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been "conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the eucharist" (General Instruction Of The Roman Missal - GIRM, Introduction #5).

Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the "action of the whole Church" (GIRM, Introduction #5), everyone in the assembly has "an individual right and duty to contribute their participation" (GIRM #58). Some of the faithful are called to serve God's people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it need nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help you grow in a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, your ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve.

I. THE MINISTRY OF LECTOR

“The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue that I may speak to the weary a word that will rouse them” (Is. 50:4).

Proclaiming the Word of God has always been a fundamental part of Christian liturgy. The earliest Christians, firmly rooted in the traditions of the Jewish temple, incorporated the stories of God’s mighty and saving deeds into their own worship rituals. They knew, as we do today, that God’s word is powerful and active, “achieving the end for which (God) sent it” (Is. 55:11). God’s word continues to reach the ears of the weary through the voice of the lector for “when the Scriptures are read in Church, God himself is speaking to his people” (GIRM #9).

Since “by tradition the reading of Scripture is a ministerial, not a presidential function” (GIRM #34), it properly belongs to ministers other than the presiding priest. This includes deacons and lay people who “are truly qualified and carefully prepared” (GIRM #101). Effective lectors require a degree of competence in public speaking, as well as training, practice and on-going formation. Above all, they must be “doers of the word, not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22), with a mature and lively faith that is evident from the way they live.

The ministry is not for everyone and determining who would make an effective lector calls for careful discernment. But blessed are they who accept the challenges of this ministry, whose well-trained tongues still speak to the weary on God’s behalf.

II. TRAINING AND FORMATION

The lay faithful who are called to ministry have the right to adequate training from their parish communities before being assigned to service in the assembly. Many technical skills are required for successful proclamation within a liturgical setting. On-going opportunities for biblical, liturgical and spiritual formation are needed as well. The Office of Liturgy has resources to assist parishes with the important task of lector training and formation.

Technical skills include:

- Learning the basics of public speaking.
- Learning to work with a microphone.
- Becoming familiar with the operation of the sound system.
- Practicing to move with grace and dignity while learning the specifics of the liturgical space.
- Becoming familiar with the arrangement and reverent handling of the sacred books.

Biblical formation includes:

- A basic introduction to the structure and content of the Bible and the Lectionary.
- On-going scripture study to foster a greater love for God's word.

Liturgical formation includes:

- A basic knowledge of the structure and theology of the Mass.
- A deeper understanding of the connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- An understanding of the importance of symbol and ritual in Catholic worship.

Spiritual formation includes:

- Parish gatherings for prayer, reflection and fellowship on a regular basis throughout the liturgical year.

III. PREPARATION

Those who exercise a liturgical ministry are expected to develop their ministerial skills by taking advantage of the training and formation opportunities offered by their parish or through the Office of Liturgy. In addition, they have a serious responsibility to prepare in a more immediate way for the readings they are scheduled to proclaim, “so that the faithful will develop a warm and lively love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the reading of the sacred texts” (GIRM #101).

For lectors this more immediate preparation includes:

- Becoming familiar with all of the readings for the day assigned well in advance of the liturgy.
- Praying with the readings and reflecting on what they mean.
- Consulting a commentary or lector’s preparation book for deeper understanding of the readings.
- Practicing intonation, phrasing and correct pronunciation for the assigned passage by reading it out loud.
- Arriving in enough time to become calm and unhurried before the liturgy begins and to check for any changes or special instructions.
- Dressing in a way that reflects the importance and dignity of this ministry.
- Serving when scheduled and notifying a responsible authority and/or arranging for a substitute when not available.

IV. DURING THE LITURGY

The Entrance Procession

- When the lectors are in the entrance procession they follow the other ministers and precede the clergy.
- Only *The Book of the Gospels* is carried in procession, never the *Lectionary* (GIRM #120d). The closed *Lectionary* is placed on the ambo before Mass begins.
- When a deacon is present, he carries *The Book of the Gospels*; otherwise one of the lectors.
- The other lectors walk in front of the lector carrying *The Book of the Gospels*.
- Upon approaching the altar, those in procession reverence it with a deep bow. *The Book of the Gospels* is placed on the altar and all move to their designated places.

The Liturgy of the Word

- After the opening rites each lector in turn moves to the ambo. Bowing to the ambo, book, assembly, priest or tabernacle is not necessary (GIRM #275).
- Whenever possible the first and second readings should be assigned to different lectors. When the psalm is not sung it should be assigned to a third lector. Assigning the readings to different lectors heightens the importance of each reading.
- Since during the liturgy “all should do only, but all of, those parts that belong to them in virtue of their place within the people of God” (GIRM #5), lectors should not perform other ministries during the same celebration at which they are reading.

- After arriving at the ambo, the lector should wait for stillness before announcing the passage and pause slightly before the passage is proclaimed.
- Proclaim each reading exactly as contained in the *Lectionary*, without changes or additions of any kind. Eye contact is essential to effective proclamation, as is an unhurried pace and clear and correct pronunciation.
- When the passage is completed, pause again and make eye contact before announcing “The Word of the Lord”. The lector returns to his/her seat in silence.
- After the second reading the lector removes the *Lectionary* from the ambo to allow placement of *The Book of the Gospels*. This should be done reverently and simply. If no suitable place has been provided, the *Lectionary* may be placed on the credence table as the lector returns to his/her seat following the reading.

The General Intercessions

- In the absence of a deacon, one of the lectors announces the intentions for the prayer of the faithful from the ambo.

The Ambo

- The ambo is a sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) (*Lectionary for Mass*, vol.1, 1998 - NL #33).
- It should be a natural focal point during the liturgy of the word and situated so that the faithful may easily see it and hear the readings (GIRM 309).
- The ambo may also be used for the homily and general intercessions (GIRM 309), but we should find other places for the cantor (with the exception of the responsorial psalm), announcements, witness talks, etc.

The Sacred Books

- During the Mass, readings are proclaimed from *The Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary*.
- There has always been a distinction between these books, with *The Book of the Gospels* being accorded “greater respect than any other books of readings. It is very desirable that the (parish communities) possess a beautifully designed Book of the Gospels, separate from any other book of readings” (NL 33).
- The Diocese of Columbus has provided every parish in the diocese with a beautiful *Book of the Gospels* for liturgical use. *The Book of the Gospels* should be treated with the utmost care and respect. It is the book that is carried in procession each Sunday and from which the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.
- The *Lectionary* contains the readings for each Sunday of the liturgical year arranged in a three year cycle. It is the book from which the lector proclaims.
- “Because of the dignity of the word of God” (NL 37), the *Lectionary* is treated with great reverence and respect, but is never carried in procession.
- Because the books from which we proclaim are symbols of Christ’s presence, missalettes and paper copies are not worthy of liturgical use. When the scriptures are read in parts, for

example during the reading of the Passion, each lector should receive a copy of the reading in a suitable binder or cover.

V. GLOSSARY

Ambo	A sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet), but may also be used for the homily and general intercessions.
Assembly	The people of God gathered for prayer and worship.
Book of the Gospels	The book containing the Gospels that is carried in procession each Sunday and from which the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.
Credence Table	A small table placed to the side of the altar that holds items used during Mass.
Lectionary	The book containing the scripture readings used on Sundays and the readings for Mass during the week.
Liturgical Minister	Someone who serves in a special role during a liturgical celebration.
Missal/Sacramentary	The book containing the prayers used by the priest during Mass.
Parts of the Mass	<p>The Mass is divided into four main parts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductory Rites - The parts of the Mass before the scripture reading, from the entrance song through the opening prayer.• Liturgy of the Word - From the first reading through the prayer of the faithful.• Liturgy of the Eucharist - From the preparation of the gifts through the prayer after communion.• Concluding Rite - The priest's greeting and blessing and the dismissal of the assembly.
Sanctuary	The sacred space around the altar usually set apart in some way from the rest of the church building.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Bergant, Diane, general editor. *Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament Series*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1985.

Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library). New York, New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Connell, Martin. *Guide to the Revised Lectionary*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

The Lector's Ministry, Your Guide to Proclaiming the Word. Mineola, New York: Resurrection Press, 1990.

Rosser, Aelred. *Guide for Lectors*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

For Weekly Preparation

Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers. Published annually by Liturgy Training Publications.

Myers, Susan E. *Pronunciation Guide for the Sunday Lectionary*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

VII. CONCLUSION

This handbook has been prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It defines your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2nd.edition - 1975) the current directives of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

Consultation and study of the *Institutio Generalis Romani 2000* is in progress. the actual text of the new Roman General Instruction cannot be changed, however, emendations can be made for its application in the United States. While the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy continues its work, Bishop Griffin has directed that no changes be made to current liturgical practice within our diocese (protocol #09/00).

We are committed to supporting you in this ministry and in your desire to grow in your understanding of the liturgy you serve. It is our hope that this handbook will be the beginning of a dialogue between liturgical ministers that encourages us to reflect upon why we do what we do and how to enter into "full, active, conscious" participation in the liturgy through the ministry to which we have been called.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to:

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Peace and all good!

A MINISTER'S PRAYER

(Adapted from an ancient Celtic prayer attributed to St. Patrick).

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.