

# **MINISTRY OF LECTOR**

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In 1998 and in 2003, two new documents affecting the role of the Lector at Mass were promulgated: the revised *Lectionary for Mass* and accompanying *Introduction*, and the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. The following guidelines serve to bring the practices of Lectors in the Diocese of Owensboro into accord with these two new documents.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ministry of Lector has made a positive contribution to the proclamation of God=s Word in the celebration of Eucharist, sacraments, and other liturgies. Readers bring the living word of God to the assembled faith community. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* reminds us that “*when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel*” (GIRM 29). The ministry of the word, therefore, should be treated with great dignity.

The word of God is not merely read, but proclaimed, within the liturgy. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate pace. It demands the ability to evoke faith in others by demonstrating one’s own faith. As a ministry which presupposes faith it should rouse faith in those who hear the word proclaimed.

Ideally, the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the scriptures and not read along in a participation aid. In the act of communal listening, the worshipers experience not only unity among themselves, but the very presence of Christ speaking to them in his word.

## II. SELECTION

*“It is necessary that those who exercise the ministry of reader . . . be truly suited and carefully prepared, so that the faithful may develop a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the sacred readings.”* (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass 55)

The ministry of the word requires an understanding of the Scriptures, knowledge of the

principles of liturgy, and skill in public reading.

Readers are to be fully initiated, practicing Catholics who have by their actual Christian living shown that they have taken their faith seriously.

Family members or friends may be allowed to read during funeral or wedding liturgies even though they are not formally trained and commissioned as readers. The parish, then, may want to provide an experienced reader for guidance and instruction.

Also, in other special situations and for pastoral reasons, (for example, at parish school and religious education liturgies) exceptions may need to be made in allowing children who are not fully initiated to serve as lectors.

### **III. FORMATION**

Formation for ministry takes time and is an opportunity for ongoing adult faith development. Some type of formation should be required of all entering into any liturgical ministry. The following are some of the topics which may be covered in formation sessions:

- 1. Baptism:** the call of all Christians to enter into a relationship with God and with the Church.
- 2. Ministry:** the call of all Christians to join with Jesus in his mission to bring all humankind into one People under the Father's love.
- 3. Praying Scripture** should be the primary mode of preparation for the Lector.
- 4. Introduction to Scripture** can be a basic session giving an overview of Scripture. Lectors should be encouraged to continue their formation by taking courses which may be offered in Scripture.
- 5. Practice proclaiming the Word** in the presence of others: learning techniques of operating and adjusting the microphone, projecting the voice, and reading with understanding.

## IV. COMMISSIONING

After the completion of the period of formation, persons may be called forth in a community celebration (Sunday Eucharist, weekday Eucharist, or liturgy of the Word outside Eucharist) to be commissioned as lectors.

The recommended period in this ministry is four years. Renewal of this period of commitment may be made upon mutual agreement of the individual and the parish community.

1. This enables individuals to terminate their ministry with comfort when personal reasons may so dictate.
2. It opens the door for others to participate in this ministry.
3. People tend to be more faithful when duties accepted will be completed within a specific time frame.
4. This gives people an opportunity to offer their services in other ministries.
5. Since this ministry requires a great deal of growth and skill on the part of the individual, ongoing formation should also be provided.

The pastor officiates at the commissioning service. A rite for blessing lectors can be found in the *Book of Blessings* (Chapter 61).

## V. CLOTHING

Lectors should be dressed in a way that expresses the respect and dignity proper to the Liturgy of the Word within the Eucharist and the Eucharistic Assembly. *“In the dioceses of the United States of America, acolytes, altar servers, lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing”* (GIRM 339).

## **VI. PREPARATION**

Remote preparation for the ministry of reader includes spiritual, scriptural, and practical dimensions. Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message, either alone or in a group.

Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke response from the assembly. Such preparation includes finding the passage in the Bible so that the section before and after the passage may be read, to get a deeper sense of the meaning.

Practical preparation involves mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciation and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery.

The *Workbook for Lectors* published by Liturgy Training Publications is a wonderful aid in preparing to proclaim.

Immediate preparation is also expected. This includes arriving in ample time before the liturgy, locating the readings in the *Lectionary for Mass*, and checking the sound system.

## **VII. LANGUAGE**

The ongoing revision of liturgical texts addresses the issue of language with great care. The lector is not at liberty to change texts approved for the liturgy.

## **VIII. MINISTERS OF THE WORD**

According to the ancient tradition and teaching of the Church, the readings other than the gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers. A different lector for each reading is encouraged. It is not appropriate for several persons to divide a single reading with the exception of the Passion of the Lord.

The gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest celebrant proclaims it. At a concelebrated Mass when there is no deacon, the gospel is

proclaimed by a concelebrant, rather than the presiding celebrant. (GIRM 59)

## **IX. SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the liturgy of the word, it is important to pay attention to the symbols of the liturgy. Symbols that are integral to any celebration of the word are: the lector(s), the book(s), the ambo, and processions.

The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to fully participate in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a reader to participate actively only in the liturgy of the word.

The word is contained in permanent, dignified, and well-bound books: the *Lectionary for Mass* and the *Book of the Gospels*. The readings are always proclaimed from the official liturgical books. “*Because of the dignity of the word of God, the books of readings used in the celebration are not to be replaced by other pastoral aids, for example, by leaflets printed for the preparation of the readings by the faithful or for their personal meditation*” (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, 37).

The place for the proclamation of the word of God is the ambo. It is to be somewhat elevated, fixed and of a suitable design and nobility to reflect the dignity of God=s word (Lectionary for Mass, 32). The ambo is reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter proclamation (the Exsultet). It may also be used for the homily and the prayer of the faithful. Since the dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it, a smaller lectern or cantor stand is best used for song leading and announcements. (GIRM 309)

Processions are important liturgical actions. Lectors may take part in the entrance procession. The deacon (or lector if there is no deacon) should solemnly carry *the Book of the Gospels* which is always placed on the altar. The *Lectionary for Mass* is never carried in procession (GIRM 120) and should have been placed beforehand on the ambo.

The gospel procession is an important ritual action in the liturgy of the word even though it may not be expressed fully at every liturgy. After the second reading and the pause

thereafter, the deacon, or priest when there is no deacon, carries the *Book of the Gospels* from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be preceded by the censer bearer and by servers with candles. When incense is used, the *Book of the Gospels* is incensed after the introductory dialogue and before the gospel is proclaimed. The *Book of the Gospels* is not carried out in the recessional. (GIRM 133-134)

## **X. MINISTRY OF MUSIC**

Psalmody is designed to be sung; it loses much of its power when it is recited. Since the responsorial psalm at Mass is a part of the liturgy of the word, a psalmist or cantor may appropriately sing it from the ambo.

The gospel acclamation serves as the people's greeting to the Lord and as an expression of their faith through song. When there is only one reading before the gospel, the gospel acclamation may be omitted if it is not sung. Otherwise, it may not be omitted. (GIRM 63)

## **XI. SILENCE**

To enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the word proclaimed, moments of silence should be appropriately observed after the first and second reading, and after the homily. *"The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided"* (GIRM 56).

## **XII. SEATING**

Lectors are seated either in the sanctuary with the other ministers or in a place in the assembly that allows easy access to the ambo. At the time of the liturgy of the word, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried.

When there are two lectors, each is seated while the other proclaims, and both are seated while the psalm response is sung.

## **XIII. PROCEDURES AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST**

### **A. Before the Eucharist**

1. Lectors should arrive at least fifteen minutes before the Liturgy begins and make their presence known to the presider.
2. Make sure the microphone is on and adjusted to your height.
3. Find the passage in the Lectionary and note the page and number. Mark the page with the ribbon.

### **B. Entrance Procession**

1. The order of ministers in the entrance procession is as follows:
  - a. The thurifer with burning incense, if incense is used;
  - b. The ministers who carry lighted candles, and between them a minister with the cross;
  - c. A lector, who may carry the *Book of the Gospels* (though not the *Lectionary*), which should be held slightly elevated;
  - d. The priest who is to celebrate the Mass.
2. On reaching the altar, the priest and ministers make a profound bow.

#### *Notes:*

- The bow is to the altar as a representation of Christ, not to the cross.
  - If the tabernacle is in the sanctuary, the ministers first genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament. Otherwise, throughout the Mass those who pass before the tabernacle do not make any signs of reverence toward it.
  - Ministers who carry liturgical objects (such as the Book of Gospels) omit the signs of reverence (both the bow and genuflection).
3. The lectors are seated in the sanctuary or in another area of the church that is easily accessible to the ambo.



4. At their chairs, the lectors then participate attentively in the rest of the introductory rite.

### **C. First Reading**

1. After the presider completes the Opening Prayer, all sit except for the first lector who remains standing.
2. The priest may then, in a very few words, introduce the faithful to the liturgy of the word.
3. The lector walks slowly and reverently to the ambo. It is not necessary to stop and bow or genuflect.
4. The lector begins the first reading from the *Lectionary* already placed there before Mass. If the priest has not made introductory comments, the lector should wait until all are quietly seated before beginning the reading.
5. An acclamation follows each of the readings: “The word of the Lord/Thanks be to God.” This is a way for the people to honor the word of God, receiving it with grateful hearts. (It is not necessary to raise the book as you say “The Word of the Lord.”)
6. A brief period of silence is then observed so that the Word of God might be taken into the hearts of the people by the fostering of the Holy Spirit.

### **D. Responsorial Psalm**

1. The cantor leads the responsorial psalm -- which is generally sung. This is normally done at the ambo. When the psalm cannot be sung, a reader in a meditative style leads it. Even then, when possible, the people should sing the response. Otherwise, it is recited.
2. The “responsorial style” is preferred. However, the psalm may also be sung

straight through, without a response, by the cantor or by all.

### **E. Second Reading**

1. When there is a second reading, the lector goes to the ambo when the psalm is concluded. The text is then proclaimed as described above.

### **F. Gospel**

1. The gospel is proclaimed from the same place, the ambo, from which the First and Second Readings were proclaimed, emphasizing the unity of the Word of God.
2. While the First and Second Readings are proclaimed from the ambo by a minister other than the celebrant, the Gospel is proclaimed by an ordained minister: deacon, priest or bishop.

### **G. General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful)**

1. Following the Creed, the person reading the General Intercessions moves to the ambo as the presider begins the introduction.
2. The intentions are to be sober, composed of few words and express the needs of the community.
3. A common response (“Lord Hear Our Prayer”) works more effectively than a response that changes every week.
4. Intentions are intercessions and not thanksgiving. (The Eucharistic Prayer is our time for giving thanks.)
5. There is a general sequence of the intentions:
  - a. for the needs of the Church;
  - b. for public authorities and the salvation of the world;
  - c. for those oppressed by any need;

- d. for the local community.
6. In special celebrations like confirmation, marriage, funeral, the prayers will refer more particularly to the occasion -- keeping in view the wider world for which the Church intercedes.

## **H. Concluding Rite**

1. The lectors may join in the exit procession.

If this is the case:

- a. After the priest kisses the altar, he -- along with the lectors and other ministers -- make a profound bow to the altar.
- b. If the tabernacle is located in the sanctuary, the priest and ministers also genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament before leaving the sanctuary as at the entrance.
- c. The procession to the sacristy follows the same order as the entrance procession except that the *Book of Gospels* is not carried -- nor, of course, is the *Lectionary* carried.