

Sample Formation Session

Lectors

Recommended Resource: **A Well-Trained Tongue** by Aelred Rosser

I. Welcome & Introductions

II. Opening Prayer

(Include an effective proclamation of a scripture passage as a part of the prayer.)

III. Presentation I: Who is the Lector? Characteristics & Spirituality of the Lector

(Review Handout A)

IV. Presentation II: Effective Proclamation Skills

A. Begin with a discussion of the proclamation of scripture in the Opening Prayer. Invite the participants to share their ideas on what makes an effective proclamation.

B. *Review Handout B: Proclamation Tips and Techniques*

Provide the participants with an overview of:

1. breath control
2. variation in melody, speed, volume, etc.
3. stage fright

IV. Presentation III: Overview of the Lectionary and the Liturgical Year

(See sections 4 & 5 of A Well-Trained Tongue.)

V. Presentation IV: Steps to Effective Preparation for Ministry of the Word

(Refer to Section 6 of A Well-Trained Tongue for more information and ideas.)

Review the 12 Steps to Effective Preparation for Ministry of the Word – Handout C.

VI. Presentation V: References to the Liturgy of the Word in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

A. Before Mass, the Lectionary is placed on the ambo since it is not carried in procession. (118b, 120d) If the Book of the Gospels is used after the second reading, the Lectionary is removed and placed on an appropriate shelf or table.

B. The Book of the Gospels is carried in procession, slightly elevated, and placed on the altar. (120d, 122) It is not carried out at the end of Mass. (BCL, Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter, XXXVI, No. 22)

- C. If the tabernacle is in the sanctuary, the priest and ministers, not carrying sacred items, genuflect to it when arriving at the sanctuary and at the end of Mass, but not during Mass. They make a profound bow to the altar. (274) Therefore, when reaching the altar, deacons/lectors carrying the Book of the Gospels omit the sign of reverence to the altar (and tabernacle if applicable). (173, 274)
- D. The Word is always proclaimed from the ambo. (58) It is preferable that different readers proclaim the first and second readings but each reading is proclaimed by a single reader except the Passion. (109)
- E. Any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. (56) Periods of silence are appropriate before the readings, after the first and second reading and after the homily.
- F. It is preferable that the Psalm be sung from the ambo. (61) Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Psalm. (61) At the Gospel the procession with the book can include the censer and ministers with candles. (133)
- G. When there is a deacon, he normally announces the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful (177), or a cantor, lector or one of the lay faithful may do so. (71) The assembly responds with an invocation or with silence. (71)

VII. Summary of Guidelines and Procedures for Ministers of the Word
(Review Handout D)

[Click here to return to Table of Contents](#)

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Who Is the Lector? Characteristics and Spirituality of the Lector

- I. The role of the lector at its most basic level is to take the Word of God, stored temporarily on the printed page in the lectionary, and to make it a spoken and living Word of God.
- A. God's Word is not just a set of statements -- it is multi-layered revelation of God.
 - B. Before the Word was written down, it was preached.
 - C. God is still revealing God's self to us through these very same words of scripture. The liturgy documents remind us that Christ is just as present in the Word that is proclaimed as he is in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine.
 - D. It is important for us as lectors to be people of the Word -- to see how this Word applies to our own lives. (*We can't effectively proclaim a message that we don't understand.*)
 - E. The call to the ministry of lector is a call to conversion. *How is my life changing because of the scriptures and because of this ministry?*
 - F. The spirituality of the lector begins with baptism. My gifts belong to the community that calls them forth. We are servants to the community.
 - G. *What is the relationship between my daily life and my ministry as reader? Does it make any difference outside the church doors?*

Our ministry must reach outside of ourselves. We need to be proclaimers of the Good News wherever we go.

The most important thing to remember, is that we don't do any of this alone. This is God's work we are about. There comes a point where we let go and let the Spirit work through us.

The Lector's Prayer:

"The Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart that I may worthily proclaim the words of salvation."

Proclamation Tips and Techniques

1. Preparation

- a. Arrive at the church at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.
- b. Familiarize yourself with the microphone. Is it on?
- c. Check Lectionary pages for your readings.
- d. Any difficult words?
- e. Pray

2. How to Handle Nervousness

- a. Above all, admit to being nervous. Honest admission of your nervousness lessens its power over you.
- b. Realize that nervousness is usually undetectable by the assembly.
- c. Prepare adequately. Preparation is the best deterrent for last-minute panic.
- d. Arrive early. Getting to church with no time to spare is unsettling for you and the other ministers.
- e. Do some deep breathing before you start the proclamation.
- f. Calmly offer your proclamation as a gift of love to the assembly.
- g. A way to control shaking is to hold the Lectionary in your hands during the proclamation.
- h. If you make a mistake . . .
 - If the mistake has not altered the meaning of the text, **relax** and continue.
 - If the mistake has altered the meaning of the text, **relax** and re-read that section. Do not offer an apology.

3. Your Body Speaks

- a. Walking and Standing.

Walk with purpose. Stand with feet planted firmly on the floor.
- b. Carrying the Book of the Gospels.

Hold the book so that you are comfortable.
- c. The correct place for proclamation.

The unity of the Liturgy of the Word clearly demands that the first two readings and the Gospel are all done from the same lectern. Proclaim from a large, dignified Lectionary, not a flimsy paperback.

4. Volume

- a. Project your voice.

Do not rely on the microphone system. Get familiar with the mike system in your church. Arrange to have a practice session with another lector. Turn off the system. Take turns doing the following exercise. One of you stands in the back of the church, the other at the lectern. The lector at the lectern repeats each sentence with greater voice projection until he or she can be easily heard by the one in the rear of the church. In all likelihood, you'll need that level of projection when the church is full of people at the Sunday liturgy.

- b. Volume is more than just loud or soft. It is also pitch and variety.
- c. The following text is good for practicing volume. The tone of your voice should echo the "weight" of the occasion and the text itself. The exultation in Zephaniah's voice calls from the reader something more than a storyteller's tone. But notice that in the second paragraph, the mood changes. You will want to not read the whole reading with the same tone.

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

**Sing aloud, O daughter Zion: shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,
He has turned away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.**

**On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who give victory;
He will renew you in his love;
the Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.**

5. Enunciation

- a. Exaggerate
- b. Watch final consonants
- c. Guard against lazy lips and lazy tongue
 - Be aware that your diction in ordinary conversation probably falls short of what you need for proclamation.

- Use a tape recorder during practice to discover which sounds you tend to slur. Do you say “Peter and Paul” or “Peter n Paul”? Are you saying “lent” or “lend”?
 - Diction exercises:
 Say B D F L M P T V rapidly and distinctly.
 Say this phrase: “Use the lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue.”
- d. Read the following passage aloud, paying particular attention to how you are forming the words. Do this several times. The goal of improved articulation is to sound natural and clear to your audience.

Luke 11:14

**Jesus was praying in a certain place,
 and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him,
 “Lord, teach us to pray,
 as John taught his disciples.”**

**He said to them, “When you pray, say:
 ‘Father, hallowed be your name.
 Your kingdom come.
 Give us each day our daily bread.
 and forgive us our sins,
 for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
 And do not bring us to the time of trial.**

6. Faith Conviction

- a. Express your feelings in public.
- b. Proclaim with enthusiasm, conviction, interpretation, and present the invitation to celebrate Eucharist. Is your “The Word of the Lord” an expression of faith or a sigh of relief?

7. Pace

- a. Read slowly. Consciously slow down from the very beginning.
- b. Vary the rate.
- c. Some texts require a slower proclamation simply because they are dense in meaning. Others are particularly solemn or particularly brief. A very brief reading must be proclaimed slowly, lest it be over before the hearers had a chance to focus on it. Still other readings can profit from a degree of briskness. Consider the following passage, the second reading on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, Year A. It is one of the briefest readings in the entire lectionary. It should take

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

A reading from the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

**Brothers and Sisters,
put things in order, listen to my appeal,
agree with none another,
live in peace;
and the God of love and peace will be with you.
Greet one another with a holy kiss.
All the saints greet you.**

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you.**

The Word of the Lord.

8. Pausing

- a. The challenge of effective pausing is learning not to fear silence. We as a society tend to not like silence and a lector oftentimes believes they are doing well when there is a steady flow of sound. To be an effective lector, there must be appropriate silence in the midst of the sound.
- b. Consider the following reading from Isaiah. This exhortation in its fervor rephrases itself, introduces new images, asks rhetorical questions, and so forth. Without careful pausing, the text could sound like a jumble of thoughts and be difficult to follow. The following pausing suggests one possible approach.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

**Everyone who thirsts, come to the water: (*medium pause*) and you
that have no money, come (*brief pause*) buy and eat! (*long pause*)
Come, (*brief pause*) buy wine and milk without money and
without price. (*long pause*)**

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread (*brief pause*) and your labor for that which does not satisfy? (*medium pause*) Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, (*brief pause*) delight yourselves in rich food. (*long pause*)

Incline your ear, and come to me; (*brief pause*) listen, so that you may live. (*medium pause*) I will make with you an everlasting covenant, (*medium pause*) my steadfast, sure love for David.

9. Eye Contact.

- a. Pauses and eye contact go hand-in-hand and need to be planned.
- b. Pauses and eye contact at the end of a thought give the assembly time to grasp the concept.
- c. How often should you make eye contact?
 - No hard and fast rule; a few times during the reading should be sufficient.
 - Dangers are either none or too many.
 - A good place to start is after “A reading from . . .” and just before concluding with “The Word of the Lord”.
- d. After each reading, pause with your head bowed. Your bowed head gently invites the assembly to reflect on the Word just proclaimed.

10. Effective Breathing

- a. We have been breathing all of our lives, but many of us do not know how to breathe effectively for public speaking.
- b. Breathing exercise:
Here is a simple exercise that will increase breath control by increasing your lung capacity and strengthening the abdominal wall.
 - Stand comfortably erect, with good but relaxed posture.
 - Breathe in slowly through your mouth on the count of four (one Mississippi, two Mississippi, etc.) The idea is to draw a full, deep breath. The intake of breath should be completely silent; if you can hear it, you are breathing in too quickly. Be careful not to raise your shoulders or to exert any effort trying to expand your chest. And let the abdominal muscles relax completely. You should see some outward movement of both chest and belly.
 - Now you are going to exhale slowly on the count of eight (one Mississippi, etc.). Exhale through the teeth, making a hissing sound (ssssssss). The sound should be very soft on the count of one and as loud as possible on the count of eight as you try to empty your lungs completely. During exhalation, conserve your air as you consciously but gently pull the abdomen to support a steady outflow. The contraction of these muscles will increase as your volume increases. Once again, be very careful not to involve the chest, shoulder, neck or throat muscles. Do not

- The exercise adds four counts to each subsequent exhalation:
Breathe in quietly through the mouth; four counts.
Breathe out hissing, soft to loud; eight counts.
Breathe in quietly through the mouth; four counts.
Breathe out hissing, soft to loud; twelve counts.
... and so on.
 - Caution!! You may find yourself getting lightheaded rather quickly. Don't push yourself too hard; your ability will increase with practice
- c. The following passage will challenge and develop effective breath control. Remember to use your full proclamation voice when reading and to employ the fullest range of focal variety. Do not continue reading after all but a fraction of your breath is gone and your voice begins to sound shaky or pinched. The point is to sustain the natural, full sound as long as you can.

Exodus 19:16

**On the morning of the third day
there was thunder and lightning,
as well as a thick cloud on the mountain,
and a blast of a trumpet so loud
that all the people who were in the camp trembled.**

- d. The following passage is not meant to be proclaimed on just one breath. But it is a good exercise. Passages like these often suffer from a choppy delivery. See how fluid you can make them by using good breath control.

Proverbs 8:27-31

**When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.**

Steps to Effective Preparation for Ministry of the Word

1. Keep company with the Scriptures on a regular basis through a small group or private study with resources.
2. Pray. Visualize the particular assembly of whom you are a part. Ask God to touch their hearts. Be a witness to God's Word. Let the Spirit of God be upon you.
3. A week ahead, survey all of the readings for the Mass. Connect ideas or focus on the Gospel and Old Testament reading.
4. Read your text silently several times, getting a sense of the pace and flow.
5. Identify the type of passage you are to read, e.g. a story, a prophecy, a parable, a witty saying, an instruction, a song or poetry.
6. Consider: What is the meaning of the passage? Where is the climax? What is the tone and spirit: comforting, warning, informing, intimate?
7. Check pronunciations and words of emphasis. Decide important phrases or words to emphasize. (Verbs are a good choice.) See the Workbook for Lectors for suggestions (Liturgy Training Publications).
8. Use effective communication skills of rate, pausing, articulation, tone quality. Plan and practice where to make eye contact.
9. Practice reading aloud. Several times! Read to another person or tape recorder for feedback.
10. Pray again for personal growth through the specific Scriptures you will be proclaiming and for your ministry as reader of the Word of God. What is its meaning in your own life? Thank God for this privilege. Praise God's faithful love communicated to us through these Scriptures.
11. Enter into the spirit and message of the season of the church year and/or the feast.
12. Before Mass, check the lectionary and the sound system. Then during the Liturgy of the Word, approach the ambo reverently. Look at the assembly in a friendly manner before beginning and as you announce the reading.

Summary of the Guidelines and Procedures For Ministers of the Word

SPIRITUALITY

Effective lectors are reverent, confident and deliberate. They continue to pray, develop and nourish their own spirituality. When proclaiming the Scriptures, their love and faith are evident to the hearers of the Word. Their lives change because they are constantly converted and motivated by the Word of God.

PROCESSIONS

The deacon or lector carries the Book of the Gospels and follows the servers and cross bearer in procession. The book is carried with the binding to the right, with both hands and few inches away from the breast, not held aloft like a banner. Lectors do not bow when holding the book. The Gospel Book is placed on the altar during the procession. The Lectionary is placed on the ambo before Mass. Lectors read from the Lectionary – not from a missalette or a sheet of paper. After the second reading, the lector places the Lectionary on a shelf or a stand. Do not carry out the Lectionary or the Book of the Gospels in the recessional. The Books are always handled with reverence and honor.

COMMUNICATION

Lectors communicate with the assembly in nonverbal ways – body language, dress, posture, attitude, etc. Dress simply and move with a demeanor of honor and reverence.

PREPARATION OF THE LECTIONARY

Lectors review the Lectionary before Mass, noting the markers, the page, and the reading. This is important if another book is used in

preparation. The lector places the Lectionary on the ambo. Check the microphone and the place of seating. Lectors ask the celebrant about the procedure for the entrance and the recessional.

PRESENCE

Liturgy is one integral action – it functions like a symphony. Those who are in leadership roles in liturgical worship should be present from the beginning of Mass to the end. Come early to prepare and to pray. Inner quiet and composure will convey prayerfulness and the Spirit of God.

PARTICIPATION

Liturgy is a celebration, a ritual prayer of the assembly with the leadership of the celebrant and the liturgical ministers. The focus is on expressing and celebrating the immediate faith experience of all present. Those in liturgical leadership enhance this experience with full, active and conscious participation. Dignified and restrained participation shows an alert awareness of the significance of ritual worship.

ATTIRE

Lectors carefully choose their attire for simplicity and appropriateness. On festive occasions all liturgical ministers may wear an alb or consider appropriate clothing with the color and spirit of the season or feast.

[Click here to return to Table of Contents](#)