

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 members of the body of Christ, the “holy people and royal priesthood” who participate in Christ’s ministry of redemption and salvation. In the Mass, the lay faithful exercise this ministry in various ways, 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, Third Typical Edition, 2002—GIRM, #5*), a participation “to which the Christian people have a right and duty by reason of their Baptism” (*GIRM, #18*).

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 deserve nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help lay liturgical ministers to acquire a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, their 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 #29).

Since “by tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential,” (GIRM #59), it properly belongs to ministers other than the presiding priest. This includes deacons, instituted lectors and other lay people who are “truly suited to perform this function and . . . receive careful preparation . . .” (GIRM #101). Requirements of effective lectors include competence in public speaking, training and practice in technical skills 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. Ongoing 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

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 movements with grace and dignity while learning the specifics of the liturgical space.
- Becoming familiar with the arrangement and reverent handling of the sacred books.

Ongoing Formation

Biblical formation includes

- A basic introduction to the structure and content of the Bible and the Lectionary.
- Ongoing 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.
- An understanding of the connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- A grasp 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 an immediate way the readings they are scheduled to proclaim, “so that the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture.” (GIRM #101).

For lectors this immediate preparation includes

- Becoming familiar with all of the readings for the assigned day 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 an 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.
- The Lectionary is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (GIRM #118b).
- Only *The Book of the Gospels* is carried in procession, not the Lectionary, and it is “slightly elevated” (GIRM #120d).
- When a deacon is present, he carries *The Book of the Gospels* (GIRM #172).
- When a deacon is not present, one of the lectors may carry *The Book of the Gospels*, (GIRM #120d) and the other lectors walk ahead of the lector who is carrying it; or *The Book of the Gospels* may simply be placed on the altar.
- 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 approaches the sanctuary, bows to the altar (GIRM #275), and moves to the ambo.
- 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 carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them” (GIRM #91), 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.
- Eye contact is essential to effective proclamation, as is an unhurried pace and clear and correct pronunciation.
- Lectors should proclaim each reading exactly as contained in the Lectionary, without changes or additions of any kind.
- When the passage is completed, the lector should pause again and make eye contact before announcing, “The word of the Lord,” then step back for a brief period of silence before returning to his/her seat in silence.
- After the second reading the lector should step back for a brief period of silence, then remove 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.
- In the absence of a deacon, one of the lectors may announce the petitions for the general intercessions from the ambo.

V. FURNISHINGS AND SACRED BOOKS

The Ambo

- The ambo is a sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter proclamation (*Exsultet*) (GIRM #309)
- 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, announcements, witness talks, etc.

The Sacred Books

- During the Mass, readings are proclaimed from *The Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary for Mass*.
- 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 (parish communities) possess a beautifully designed Book of Gospels, separate from any other book of readings” (*Lectionary for Mass* #36).
- The Diocese of Columbus has provided every parish in the diocese with a beautiful *The 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 for Mass* 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” (*Lectionary for Mass* #37), the Lectionary is treated with great reverence and respect, but is not carried in procession.
- Since the books from which we proclaim are symbols of Christ’s presence, missalettes and paper copies are not worthy of liturgical use.
- During the reading of the Passion, the only scripture selection permitted to be read in parts, each lector should receive a copy of the reading in a suitable binder or cover.

VI. GLOSSARY

Ambo	A sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the responsorial 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.
<i>The Book of the Gospels</i>	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.
<i>Lectionary for Mass</i>	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.
Parts of the Mass	The Mass is divided into four main parts. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductory Rites - 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.
<i>Sacramentary/Missal</i>	The book containing the prayers used by the priest during Mass.
Sanctuary	The sacred space around the altar usually set apart in some way from the rest of the church building.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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

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

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

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

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

VIII. CONCLUSION

This handbook was prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It addresses your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd edition, 2002), the current directive of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

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 among 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 the Office of Liturgy, 197 East Gay Street, Columbus, OH 43215, 614-221-4640, or to LITMailbox@colsdio.org.

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.

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