

# NORMS FOR LECTORS

Diocese of Covington

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1998 and in 2002, two 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 norms serve to bring the practices of lectors in the Diocese of Covington in accord with these two documents.

The ministry of lector has made a positive contribution to the proclamation of the Word of God 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 (2002)* 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.

Throughout, these norms define lectors as those lay people temporarily commissioned by the pastor for the proclamation of the Scriptures in the liturgy, not those in the permanent ministry of Reader. An official Reader is one who has been permanently installed in this ministry (*Ministeria Quaedam, 1972*).

"The liturgical assembly truly requires readers, even those not instituted. Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are certain suitable laypeople who have been trained to carry out this ministry" (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, #52*).

## 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. The persons who serve in the role of lector are chosen by their respective pastor / parochial administrator / parish life collaborator / chaplain. Chosen persons must be fully initiated, mature members of the Church, who have by their actual Christian living shown that they have taken their faith seriously. They should embody the Christian life of service and be willing to grow in their love for the Eucharist.

The following are qualifications for a person to serve as lector in the Diocese of Covington. A lector must:

1. be Catholic and have received all of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation);
2. live his or her life in such a way that their love for the Eucharist is evident by their regular participation in the Eucharistic liturgy;
3. demonstrate acceptance of the teachings of the Church by his / her way of life;
4. be adequately formed to carry out this ministry as the Church intends, and take part in continuing formation through parish and / or diocesan workshops and / or retreats;
5. be chosen by their pastor / parochial administrator / parish life collaborator / chaplain for a four year term renewable;
6. be at least sixteen (16) years of age;
7. not labor under any canonical penalty whether imposed or declared (e.g., not be in an invalid marriage, not be a laicized cleric; see RS 168);
8. commit to a faithful and reliable presence at the liturgies to which they have been assigned.

Catholic family members or friends who are trained lectors should be asked to read during funeral or wedding liturgies.

### **Masses with Children**

At Masses with children (Masses with mostly children and few adults) exceptions may need to be made by the pastor or chaplain in allowing children who have not reached the age of 16 to serve as lectors. If a child under the age of 16 is selected to proclaim the Word of God at a Mass with children, he or she must be well prepared to proclaim the Scriptures competently. The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children* states:

"All liturgical ministries are exercised for the sake of the prayer of the assembly. Therefore, ministers should be selected on the basis of liturgical competence. It should not be presumed that children should proclaim the Word of God in the celebrations in which this Lectionary [*Lectionary for Masses with Children*] is used. Some younger children are able to read the Scriptures

competently, but the witness of older children, teenagers, or adults, ministering graciously and reverently to young children engaged in liturgical prayer, is more conducive to the children's growing reverence for the Word of God, than the peer ministry of embarrassed or ill-prepared children" (#28).

### III. FORMATION

Before a person can serve as a lector at Mass, the candidate must participate in a parish training program. Lectors should participate in yearly spiritual growth and training programs offered by their parish or the Diocese.

**Parish Formation Program:** The parish training program for lectors will include the following:

1. Reflection on the nature of liturgical ministry, the mystery of the Eucharist and the theology of the Mass.
2. Renewed appreciation of the ritual nature and structure of the Mass, especially the importance and role of the baptized assembly and the multiple liturgical roles within it.
3. An introduction to Sacred Scripture and its proclamation.
4. An introduction to the basic skills of oral interpretation, which may include a practicum.
5. Rehearsal of the practical function (including proper use of the microphone) of the lector at Mass. The lector will receive resources that assist in proclaiming the sacred text.
6. Spirituality of the liturgical minister.
7. Ongoing enrichment.

### IV. COMMISSIONING

Lectors are commissioned by the pastor / chaplain for a term of four years renewable. After the completion of both the Diocesan and parish formation programs, the candidates will be called forth in a community celebration (Sunday Eucharist, weekday Eucharist, or Liturgy of the Word outside of the Eucharist) to be commissioned by the pastor as lectors. A rite of commissioning 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

Preparation to exercise the ministry of reader at a particular liturgy has two parts, remote and immediate preparation. Immediate preparation means arriving with ample time before the liturgy begins, locating the readings in the Lectionary and checking the sound system. Remote preparation has three dimensions:

- 1) **Scriptural** preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke a 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.
- 2) **Spiritual** preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message, either alone or in a group.
- 3) **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.

## VII. LANGUAGE

No one (neither the lector nor the priest or deacon) may change texts approved for the liturgy.

## VIII. PROCEDURES AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

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).

### A. Introductory Rites

1. "In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing approved attire, may carry the Book of the Gospels, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest but otherwise along with the other ministers" (*GJRM*, #194). The lector should only carry the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession when there is no deacon present. The *Lectionary for Mass* is never carried in procession (*GIRM*, #120). It should be placed on the ambo before Mass begins.
2. "Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. If he is carrying the Book of the Gospels, he approaches the altar and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then the lector takes his own place in the sanctuary (until the conclusion of the liturgy of the Word) with the other ministers" (*GIRM*, #195).

## **B. The Liturgy of the Word**

1. "The lector reads from the ambo the readings that precede the Gospel. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the responsorial Psalm after the first reading" (*GIRM, #196*).
2. "Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available" (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, #52*).
3. "When no deacon is present, the lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce from the ambo the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful" (*GIRM, #197*).
4. The lector does not process out with the other ministers.

## **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 is one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to fully participate in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a reader to participate fully 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*). This includes funerals and weddings as well.

"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 (*Introduction to the 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*).

## **X. SILENCE**

To enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, an appropriate time of silence should be appropriately observed after the first reading, responsorial psalm, 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*).

## **XI. 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.