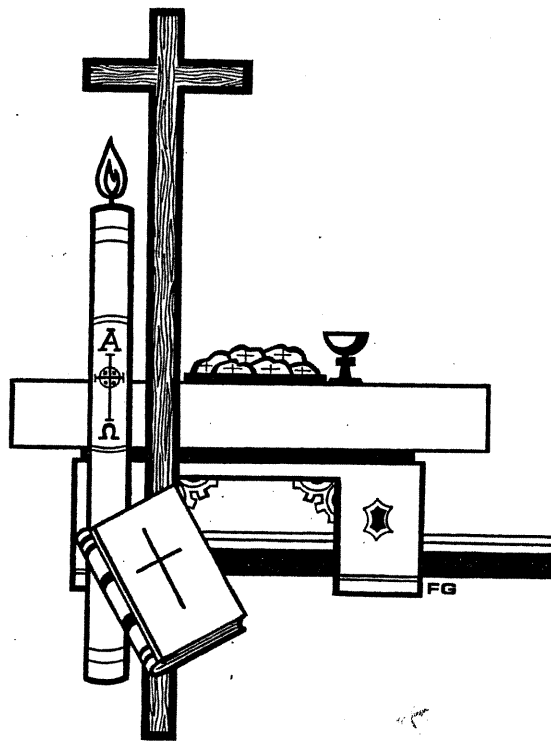


Office for Worship
Diocese of Norwich

Guidelines for
MINISTERS OF THE WORD



March 2007

Introduction

The Office for Worship, together with the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, has prepared the following guidelines for the ministry of lectors at the weekend Masses. With some adaptation, they can also be applied to other liturgical celebrations as well.

In these guidelines, we hope to provide some education about liturgical requirements and rituals, while keeping in mind that parishes may practice some local customs which are appropriate. These guidelines, therefore, are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in liturgical customs. Instead, they are produced in a spirit of helping our diocesan faith communities to experience the Word of God as a powerful and prayerful celebration. Thus, although certain practices may vary, all lectors observe some basic, essential principles involved in the ministry of the Word.

We suggest that lectors in each parish community meet together periodically to discuss the theological, spiritual, and practical aspects of their ministry. These guidelines may also serve as suitable material for study at these gatherings. Other resources are listed in these guidelines as well.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Typical Edition (GIRM)* has been printed and instituted since the last publication of the diocesan guidelines for liturgical ministers. This most recent edition of the *GIRM* tells us that 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.” These revised diocesan guidelines will reflect the teachings of this most recent version of the *GIRM*.

The Ministry of the Word

1. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Lectors, in taking the Word and proclaiming it to the assembly, are, in large measure, responsible for the extent to which the people of God grow in their faith. They are the medium through which the living Word of God is received and absorbed by the faithful. This ministry of the Word is practiced with the highest level of reverence and dignity.
2. The Eucharistic celebration is the manifestation of the real nature of the Church, and the Church consists of both lay and clerical ministries. According to liturgical tradition and the teaching of the Church, the first two readings are proclaimed by lay people who have been trained for this ministry. Theologically, and liturgically, then, clergy proclaim these readings only if qualified lectors are not present.
3. Although many of the missalettes or hymnals used by parishes also contain the Lectionary readings, the hearing members of the assembly are invited to *listen* to the proclamation of the Scriptures rather than follow them in the printed text. In the act of communal listening, worshippers experience not only unity among themselves, but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the Word. While education of the assembly by the parish’s liturgy director, or committee, is important in this area, the best

invitation to listen to the Word of God is effective, compelling proclamation by the reader. Lectors who confidently and comfortably proclaim the readings in a way which truly delivers the intent of the message make people want to listen to them.

4. That being said, we must also remember to be sensitive to the needs of the deaf and hearing-impaired members of our parish communities, who may need to use a printed text of God's Word in order to fully participate in the worship.

Requirements of Lectors

5. The ministry of the Word of God requires skill in public reading, awareness of the unique demands of proclamation in the liturgy, and knowledge of certain principles of liturgy. New lectors proclaim the Word after satisfying the requirements for commissioning established by the Office for Worship.

6. A wonderful way to help educate the assembly about the call to liturgical ministry, in general, is to commission lectors, as well as other liturgical ministers, for their ministry during a weekend Mass. The Church has a standard Rite of Blessing for readers (See the *Book of Blessings*, #1827-1846), but parish liturgy coordinators may explore other liturgical resources for alternate commissioning rites. Celebrating the rite in the presence of the parish assembly affords the priest an opportunity to offer a liturgical catechesis, and to highlight the specific ministry of the readers of God's Word.

7. Whenever possible, it is recommended that a person serve in the ministry of lector for three years. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that others will have a chance to enter into this ministry. At the same time, a time-limited term allows lectors the opportunity to serve in another liturgical ministry or to retire, if desired.

8. In smaller parishes, with fewer trained lectors, it may be necessary to extend the terms of lectors. However, pastors, liturgy directors, and committees, need to work at ministry development as part of their regular worship program, in order to encourage as many lay persons as possible to participate as ministers in the liturgy of the parish.

9. Commissioned lectors are encouraged to participate periodically in enrichment programs and to review their role as proclaimers of God's Word. For this purpose, the Office for Worship provides formation workshops and training. Parish liturgists are urged to avail themselves of training in order to serve as resources for those who wish to serve as lectors.

10. For pastoral reasons, family members or friends may be allowed to read the Word of God during funeral or wedding liturgies, even though they are not formally commissioned as lectors. However, these individuals are encouraged to practice, with a lector, or parish trainer, for effective proclamation. During these special liturgical

celebrations, the Word of God is always proclaimed from the Lectionary, not a marriage preparation booklet, or paper with a reading printed on it.

11. In the Liturgy of the Word with Children, the readings are proclaimed by commissioned lectors, or those who coordinate the liturgy, who can be sensitive to the children's needs and abilities. In this situation, the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* can be used in place of the regular version.

Preparation

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on the Liturgy:

Those engaged in liturgical roles need to be well-prepared for those roles and to know how to carry them out with reverence, dignity and understanding. Obtaining the proper preparation requires a further gift of time on the part of the person being prepared as well as on the part of those in the parish responsible for the training of liturgical ministers. Finally, the practical task of assigning individuals to particular Masses and organizing the distribution of roles is another indispensable element in the fabric of well-ordered liturgical ministry in a parish.

12. The actual reading of the Word of God is critical to the celebration of the Mass. God's Word is, above all, proclaimed; that is, it is presented to the assembly with the power, conviction, interpretation and seriousness which the Word demands. For the liturgy of the Word to be truly effective, lectors must be well prepared, for their ministry. This preparation is threefold: spiritual, technical, and exegetical.

13. The focus of spiritual preparation is the acknowledgment of one's role as a proclaimer of God's Word, and involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message.

14. Technical preparation involves practicing delivery of the readings aloud, attending to matters of articulation, emphasis, inflection, pace, and mastering difficult words and pronunciations. In technical preparation, care is always taken that the manner of proclaiming is never in any way dramatic or theatrical, since this would draw attention to the one reading, and take away from the content of the Word being proclaimed.

15. Exegetical preparation requires that the lector become thoroughly familiar with the text so as to proclaim it interpretively and evocatively without being tied too closely to the printed page. An understanding of the historical and theological contexts of the reading helps the lector in his or her technical preparation, specifically, the overall tone, emphasis, and inflection of words and phrases.

16. Lectors are urged to prepare their assigned readings well in advance of Mass, with the aid of a preparation guide, which will help with technical and exegetical aspects of the readings. Parish liturgy directors or coordinators can assist with finding

a preparation guide which works best for the lectors in a given parish.

17. In addition, many lectors have found that recording and playing back their readings is a simple and effective way to check for clarity of diction, phrasing and overall delivery. Some lectors may also benefit from a monthly preparation gathering with other ministers of the Word, during which there is an opportunity to have their reading critiqued by their colleagues.

18. Parishes which allow children or adolescents to serve in the ministry of lector are certain that these young readers understand their role, prepare the readings, are able to proclaim God's Word to the assembly, and are never a distraction from the Word being proclaimed. Similarly, when children are in the role of cantor of the Responsorial Psalm, parishes ensure that the children who serve in this role are able to understand the words that are being sung, articulate them accurately, and effectively carry out the goal of a Liturgy of the Word that is reflective and meditative.

19. As ministers of God's Word, lectors demonstrate their awareness of the dignity of their role in the liturgy by dressing appropriately. While lectors are not required to wear special robes or albs when they are performing their ministry, they are careful to ensure that their form of dress reflects reverence for the Word of God.

20. It is also important for lectors to prepare for the practice of their ministry by arriving at church in ample time before the liturgy begins, locating the readings in the Lectionary, which is placed at the ambo, reviewing the Prayer of the Faithful (the intercessions), and ensuring it is placed at the ambo, arranging the microphone, and determining that the sound system is on. Lectors in parishes in which deacons serve will also want to be aware ahead of time whether the deacon is scheduled for that Mass, a factor which will determine whether the lector is responsible for carrying the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession, and for reading the intercessions in the Prayer of the Faithful. Finally, lectors are encouraged to join in prayer with the other liturgical ministers in the sacristy after preparations are completed.

Entrance Procession and Seating

21. Lectors participate in the entrance procession, and establish their place in the procession depending on whether a deacon is present. When a deacon is *not* present, the lector walks in the procession immediately in front of the celebrant, solemnly carrying the Book of the Gospels by holding it, slightly elevated, in front of him or herself. Only the Book of the Gospels, and not the Lectionary, is carried in the entrance procession. When a deacon is present, the lector walks in the entrance procession, without carrying the Book of the Gospels, in front of the deacon.

22. When carrying the Book of the Gospels, the lector, arrives at the sanctuary, makes the appropriate reverence to the altar, places the book on the altar, and goes to his or her seat in the sanctuary. It is customary, in some parishes, for the lector to open the Book of the Gospels, so that it stands upright, with its cover to the assembly, on the altar. In other

parishes the Book of the Gospels might be placed on a stand on the altar, depending on local practice. In either case, the Book of the Gospels is visible on the altar as a symbol of the presence of God's Word with the assembly.

23. Liturgy committees are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the seating for liturgical ministers is conducive to both a smooth flow and meditative atmosphere during the liturgy. The best seating arrangements are those which allow ministers to reach their necessary positions with ease so as to cause as little distraction as possible for the assembly.

24. Lectors, in particular, take their seats in the sanctuary, near the other liturgical ministers. Care is taken that the lector is seated, if possible, in a place which is near the ambo, and that there is sufficient room for the lector to step or sit aside when the cantor comes to the ambo to lead the Responsorial Psalm. If the lector is seated in the sanctuary on a side opposite the ambo, the lector remains standing after the Opening Prayer, and walks to a position to bow toward the altar before proceeding to the ambo.

25. If lectors remain in the sanctuary area after the Liturgy of the Word, they, and all other liturgical ministers in the sanctuary, stand during the Eucharistic Prayer, if no kneelers are available.

26. Parishes who have many trained lectors available may opt to have two lectors for each regular weekend Mass, one to do each reading. One reading is never "shared" by two readers. Arrangements pertaining to which lectors read the first two readings and the Prayer of the Faithful vary, and are best discussed by a parish's liturgy committee.

Proclaiming the Word of God

27. The Word of God is proclaimed from the ambo, which is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God in the Church, just as the altar is the symbol of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at and around the ambo. The ambo is to be used for the readings (including the singing of the Responsorial Psalm by the cantor), the homily, the general intercessions, and the *Exultet* during the Easter Vigil. All other necessary reading, such as parish announcements, are conducted at a designated podium or lectern.

28. Although some aspects of liturgy preparation invite creativity and some artistic freedom, the actual reading of the Scriptures is not one of them. All who proclaim God's Word, whether clergy or layperson, read only the words that are printed in the Lectionary or Book of the Gospels. No words of the text are changed, and none are added, either to the introduction or the closing of the scripture readings. The lector begins a reading by saying, "A reading from the Book of ..." He or she does *not* say "The first reading is from ...". Similarly, at the reading's conclusion, the lector reads, "The Word of the Lord," and nothing else.

29. The *GIRM* instructs that "it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, accommodated to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit,

the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared.” Lectors are encouraged to observe these periods of silence both prior to the first reading, and after the first and second readings. It is recommended that the assembly observe a brief period of silence, as well, after the homily.

The details of these periods of silence, their duration and implementation, must be established in the process of liturgy planning in each parish.

30. The introduction to the reading (“A reading from the Book of”) and its closing (“The Word of the Lord”) are distinguished from the reading itself. The lector does this by establishing eye contact with the assembly, introducing the reading, pausing, and then proclaiming the Word. At the end of the reading, the lector again pauses before closing.

31. It is important, particularly prior to the start of the first reading, that the lector pause sufficiently to allow the assembly to be fully seated and settled, following the Opening Prayer, for which they were just standing. The lector waits, with eyes upon the assembly, to ensure that all are ready to hear God’s Word. Although lectors sometimes express discomfort with this pause, it is necessary as a means to set the “meditative” and “reflective” tone of the Liturgy of the Word.

32. In order to enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, in addition to the pause after each reading, an additional pause is held after the responsorial psalm. (Note: The assembly is to be made aware of the purpose of these pauses during a liturgical catechesis by the pastor, liturgy director, or liturgy committee members).

33. While proclaiming the Word, the Lectionary remains on the ambo. The lector may place his or her hands on either side of it to stabilize it, if necessary. Lectors attempt to avoid being a source of distraction by leaning over the ambo, weaving or shuffling feet, or putting hands in pockets, for instance. With the possible exception of using a finger to follow the text, the lector’s hands and posture should be relaxed. The Lectionary is not lifted while saying, “The Word of the Lord.”

34. Pastors and liturgy directors must work together to develop a smooth “flow” to the Liturgy of the Word. Care must be taken that the removal of the Lectionary from the ambo, following the second reading, is done in a graceful manner that does not detract from the meditative atmosphere which, hopefully, prevails in the worship space. Ministers of art and environment are encouraged to evaluate the area around the ambo, positioning, if necessary, a side table which may hold the Lectionary when it is no longer needed, so that the transition to the Gospel reading is accomplished in a reverent manner.

Scope of Ministry

35. Lectors are expected to be aware of the scope of their ministry. For example, the ministries of lector and cantor each contribute separately to the Liturgy of the Word. It is the responsibility of the cantor to sing, and lead, the Responsorial Psalm. However, in

the unusual event that a cantor is absent, the lector begins the Psalm by simply reading the response for the assembly to repeat, and refrains from announcing, "Responsorial Psalm." The assembly will be anticipating the response, especially as the lector looks to them to invite a response.

36. In addition, the Gospel Acclamation is meant always to be sung. However, if it cannot be sung, the lector does not read it; instead, it may be omitted. Similarly, the Gospel itself is proclaimed by a deacon or, in his absence, a priest. The Gospel is never read by a lector or a layperson within the Mass. However, the adult who leads the Liturgy of the Word with children may read the Gospel during that celebration outside of Mass.

37. The intercessions of the Prayer of the Faithful are usually read by a deacon. In the absence of a deacon, however, the lector always reads the intercessions.

38. If there is no singing during the Entrance or Communion rites, and the assembly is not invited to recite the antiphons, usually printed in the missalette, the lector may read the Entrance and Communion antiphons at the designated times.

Recessional

39. The *GIRM* suggests that lectors depart in procession with the celebrant after the concluding rites.

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Resources

Hoffman, Elizabeth, ed. *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*. Third Edition. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

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International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition)*, 2002.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). *Lectionary for Mass*, 1981, 1998 (altered by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops).

The Lectionary for Masses with Children, Years A, B, and C, The Liturgical Press.

The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) in cooperation with the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, 1981, 2003. Reprinted with corrections 2004, 2005, 2006.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, USCC Publication Office, Washington, D.C., 1964.

Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2007 and annually.

Websites

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Committee on the Liturgy, www.usccb.org/liturgy.

www.fdlc.org, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

www.lectorprep.org, a lector preparation site (privately maintained)

www.litpress.org, The Liturgical Press

www.ltp.org, Liturgy Training Publications

www.ocp.org, Oregon Catholic Press, publishers of *Today's Liturgy*

www.rpinet.com, Resource Publications, publishers of *Ministry and Liturgy*.