



# OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

## Archdiocese of Newark

### Guidelines for Lectors

#### Introduction

The Office of Divine Worship has prepared the following guidelines for lectors. These guidelines apply to those ministering during Mass as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general principles on this important liturgical ministry. These guidelines define the intention of liturgical law relative to the proclamation of the word, the demands of proper liturgical practice, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

These guidelines are sourced in the rituals and liturgical documents of the Church, most notably the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*. Those involved with the training and coordination of lectors should be familiar with these documents.

It is highly recommended that lectors in each community meet together regularly to discuss the theological, practical and spiritual aspects of their ministry. These guidelines could serve as suitable material for study at such gatherings.

#### Terms

For the purposes of this document, the term “lector” and “reader” will be used interchangeably. In both cases, they refer to lay men or women who are entrusted with the ministry of proclaiming the Word of God in the Church’s liturgies. They should not be confused with the instituted Ministry of Lector which is ordinarily reserved for those preparing for ordained ministry.

The abbreviations used in this document are listed below:

BLS	Built of Living Stones (USCCB)
CSL	Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Vatican II)
GIRM	General Instruction of the Roman Missal
LMI	Lectionary for Mass: Introduction

The above documents are available in various publications and can also be found on-line via web search.

#### Ministers of the Word

According to ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers called lectors. “By tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is

ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector..." (GIRM, 59) It is not the ordinary practice of the Church for ordained ministers to proclaim these readings.

"Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available." (LMI, 52). The parish community should strive for enough trained lectors to fulfill this goal, especially on Sundays when there is more than one reading before the Gospel.

The Gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest proclaims the Gospel. In concelebrations when no deacon is present, a concelebrant, proclaims the Gospel (GIRM, 59; LMI, 49-50).

Announcements and/or any commentary during the celebration are read by someone other than the lector (See GIRM, 105, b). When a deacon is present, he normally announces the intentions of the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful), from the ambo. (GIRM, 177)

### **Proclamation of the Word**

The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. In and through them God speaks to the gathered faithful. The ministry of the word, therefore, is treated seriously and with great dignity.

The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy. It is proclaimed. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction, and appropriate pace. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith and also rouses faith in those who hear the word proclaimed.

Ideally, members of the assembly listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and do not read along in missalettes. In the act of communal listening, the worshipers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the word.

### **Requirements**

All liturgical ministers, especially the ministers of the word, must be properly trained for their ministry. The ministry of the word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding and a love of the Scriptures. Normally, only properly trained lectors are scheduled for liturgy (LMI, 55).

Lector formation workshops are offered through the Office of Divine Worship twice each year. (For information visit [www.rcan.org/worship](http://www.rcan.org/worship)) Parishes may take responsibility for training lectors on their own; however, each parish must teach their readers the particulars of proclaiming God's word in their specific worship space according to liturgical norms.

Ideally, the readings at weddings and funerals are proclaimed by lectors of the parish who have been properly trained. However, for pastoral reasons, family members or friends may carry out this ministry. The parish should provide assistance and guidance so that God's word is proclaimed with clarity and dignity.

Lectors are fully initiated (baptized, confirmed and admitted to first Communion), practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the word which they proclaim. They must be in good standing with the Church. In

the event that a lector falls out of good standing, he or she may be asked to step down until restored. It is the pastor's responsibility to make this determination.

On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated may serve as lector during a liturgy. Proper training for this ministry is expected. Candidates should not be asked to proclaim the Word of God at celebrations at which they are receiving a Sacrament of Initiation such as confirmation or first Communion.

Lectors do not require a mandate to read at Mass; however, lectors should be blessed before they begin this ministry. This blessing can take place, preferably at a Sunday Mass, any time after the lectors have been properly trained. The Rite of Blessing is found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 61, page 775.

Those who are presently lectors should periodically participate in enrichment programs such as bible study, Scripture sharing and/or proclamation techniques.

### **Preparation for Proclamation**

In order that the Liturgy of the Word might be effective, all lectors are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical. Spiritual preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke a response from the assembly. Practical preparation involves mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciations and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery. Rushing into the sacristy just before Mass to "look at the readings" should be avoided. (LMI, 55).

Resources for lectors are available through the Office of Divine Worship or at [www.rcan.org/worship](http://www.rcan.org/worship). The readings for each day of the liturgical year are also posted on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving at least 15 minutes before the liturgy, locating the readings in the *Lectioary*, arranging the microphone, making sure that the sound system is properly functioning, and attending to any other duties as required by the parish. If the lector is to read the petitions for the Universal Prayer, these should be reviewed before the liturgy begins.

During preparation, lectors should be aware of anything that might distract from the proclamation of the word or from the dignity of this ministry. Such distractions include: leaning on the ambo, placing hands in pockets, shuffling from side to side, wearing inappropriate or immodest clothing or wearing anything that draws undue attention to the lector.

**Dress Code:** An important part of preparation is appearance. Lectors should appear appropriately dressed in accord with the dignity of their ministry. The attire of the lector speaks of the importance of the Word of God in the liturgy. Regardless of their cost, blue jeans, shorts, and t-shirts are always inappropriate attire. The clothing of the lector should not distract from the Word of God. Bare shoulders, bare midriff, low necklines, and tight clothing will distract and possibly offend the assembly. The purpose of the ministry of lector is to focus the assembly's attention on the presence of God in the proclaimed word rather than to the particular minister who is proclaiming it.

Parishes are free to create their own, more specific dress code for lectors and other liturgical ministers. These should be in writing and circulated among all liturgical ministers. Note that in the Archdiocese of Newark Lectors do not wear albs, robes, stoles or any kind of clerical vesture.

### **Symbols in the Liturgy of the Word**

God speaks to the faith community at worship through persons, actions, and objects. To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word, it is important to pay full attention to these symbols. The symbols that are integral to any celebration of the word are: the proclaimer (lector, deacon, priest), the book(s), the ambo, and the processions. A brief word on each of these is in order.

#### **Proclaimers**

“Christ is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church.” (CSL, 7). This quote from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* should be at the spiritual heart of anyone who proclaims the Word of God in the liturgy. Christ uses the voice of the deacon or lector to speak his word to God’s people in the here and now.

“The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to be read by a reader...” (GIRM, 59)

“...lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, people who are truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared, so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for Sacred Scripture.” (GIRM, 101)

When a deacon is present, he proclaims the Gospel and normally announces the intentions of the Universal Prayer. (GIRM, 175-177)

Those who proclaim the Word of God minister as one of the worshipping assembly and are expected to participate in the entire liturgy. As ministers of the Mass, they should be role models of prayer to others by fully participating in the entire liturgy through prayer, singing, active listening, posture, etc.

#### **Books**

The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the *Book of the Gospels* and in the *Lectionary for Mass*. Both of these are available in permanent, dignified, and beautifully bound books, with large print for ease of proclamation. The *Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary for Mass* may be put into ornate covers. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books and never from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory and made of materials intended for recycling.

There are four volumes to the current *Lectionary for Mass*:

- I        Sunday Readings  
          *Sometimes further separated into three books: Year A, B, C*
- II        Weekdays Year 1 (and Saints)
- III       Weekdays Year 2 (and Saints)

### **Ambo**

“There must be a place in the church that is somewhat elevated, fixed, and of a suitable design and nobility. It should reflect the dignity of God's word and be a clear reminder to the people that in the Mass the table of God's word and of Christ's body is placed before them. The place for the readings must also truly help the people's listening and attention during the liturgy of the word. Great pains must therefore be taken, in keeping with the design of each church, over the harmonious and close relationship of the ambo with the altar.” (LMI, 32)

“From the ambo only the readings, the Responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) are to be proclaimed; likewise it may be used for giving the Homily and for announcing the intentions of the Universal Prayer. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should stand at it.” (GIRM, 309) (Use of the ambo is also permitted for such proclamations as at Christmas, Epiphany and the solemn intonation of the Alleluia at the Easter Vigil).

### **Processions**

Lectors are to take part in the entrance procession. They walk immediately in front of the *Book of the Gospels* which is carried by the deacon. If there is no deacon present, the lector carries the Gospel book in front of the priest or concelebrants if there are any. (GIRM, 120 d). If there is a second lector present, he or she walks immediately in front of the Gospel book (not beside it).

The *Book of the Gospels* is carried closed. It is raised slightly by the person carrying it so that it can be seen in procession. It is placed flat in the center of the altar. It is not placed upright on its own or in a stand.

The *Lectionary* is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (GIRM, 120, 194). When not carrying the Gospel book, the lectors should be carrying a missalette in procession for use when singing. The person carrying the Gospel book in procession should not, however, carry anything else, (missalette, eyeglasses, purse, etc.).

When carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the lector does not genuflect or bow. When not carrying the Gospel book, he or she makes a profound bow at the waist to the altar before going to his or her seat. (GIRM, 173, 195, 274)

Lectors may sit in the sanctuary; however, since the lectors are a part of the worshipping community, it is appropriate that they sit in the assembly in a location that gives them easy access to the ambo, and come forward from there to proclaim the readings. (GIRM, 195)

When it is time to proclaim a reading, the lector approaches the ambo with reverence. If the lector passes in front of the altar, she or he bows to the table. The lector pauses before beginning the first reading while the assembly is settling. After completing the reading (The Word of the Lord), the lector remains in place for a period of silent reflection before leaving the ambo. (GIRM 128; LMI, 28).

The first reader returns to his/her seat after the period of silence and before the Psalm is intoned. The second reader approaches the ambo after the psalmist has exited the ambo. After completing the second reading, the lector remains in place for a period of silent reflection before leaving the ambo. (GIRM 128; LMI, 28).

When of necessity only one lector proclaims both readings, he/she is seated during the singing of the Psalm. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried.

After the second reading and the accompanying pause, all stand for the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. During that time, the deacon or priest processes with the *Book of the Gospels* from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be accompanied by acolytes and thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the Liturgy of the Word.

All remain standing for the Gospel. The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the Scripture readings. Incense may be used to reverence the Gospel book before the Gospel is proclaimed.

The lector(s) may join the priest and other ministers in the closing procession. Neither *the Lectionary for Mass* nor the *Book of the Gospels* is carried out in procession at the end of the Mass. As with the *Lectionary for Mass*, the children's lectionary is *not* carried in the entrance or closing processions.

### **Proclamation**

The wording used at the greeting ("A reading from...") and at the conclusion ("The Word of the Lord") **must** be proclaimed exactly as it appears in the *Lectionary* and cannot be changed. It is not the role of the lector to change, add or eliminate any words or make any commentary on the readings. (LMI, 12) It is the role of the assembly to respond, "Thanks be to God," after the Lector says "The Word of the Lord." The lector does not join the assembly in saying this response.

The announcement of the reading ("A reading from...") and the ending, ("The Word of the Lord") need to be distinguished from the reading itself. Lectors make this distinction by observing a slight pause after the former and before the latter phrases. Both are stated in a matter of fact tone without special emphasis.

In recent years, sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been encouraged. It is important to note, however, that the lector is **not** at liberty under any circumstances to change the approved scriptural translations of the Lectionary. In the preparation of other texts, such as the Prayer of the Faithful or commentary of any type, language which is inclusive should be considered.

The lector or Gospel reader does not lift the *Lectionary for Mass* or the *Book of the Gospels* while saying, "The Word/Gospel of the Lord." If it is necessary to remove the book from the ambo after the proclamation, it needs to be reverently placed in a dignified location, e.g., the credence table.

The Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) is introduced and concluded by the priest celebrant. The intercessions are ordinarily announced by the deacon from the ambo. "In Masses without a deacon, the function of announcing the intentions for the prayer of the faithful is to be assigned to the cantor, particularly when they are to be sung, to a reader, or to someone else." The intercessions may be announced at the ambo, lectern or cantor stand when sung. (LMI 53; GIRM, 138)

After the last intercession, the person announcing the intercessions turns and faces the priest until he has concluded the prayer. Then he or she returns to their place.

The intercessions are ordinarily announced by a single person. Persons, including children, should not be called upon to announce the intercessions at Masses during which they are receiving a Sacrament of Initiation (i.e. baptism, confirmation, first Communion).

### **Ministry of Music**

Integral to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word are the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation. Psalmody is designed to be sung and loses much of its beauty when recited. The Responsorial Psalm is taken from the Scriptures and as such is sung or proclaimed from the ambo by the psalmist or cantor. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways: responsorially, antiphonally, or part sung/recited.

When the psalm is not sung, it is usually led by the lector from the ambo. If the same lector is reading the first reading and leading the responsorial psalm, he or she must pause at the end of the reading for silent reflection before beginning the psalm. The lector never says "Our responsorial psalm is..." but rather proclaims the antiphon loud and clear, allowing the people to repeat it, and then continues with the first verse of the psalm.

The leadership of music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. Lectors do not ordinarily function as cantors of the Responsorial Psalm and/or the Gospel acclamation. Conversely, a member of the music ministry does not normally function as a lector.

For information regarding the chanting of the readings, see LMI, 17-18.

### **Silence**

In order to engage the assembly in reflection on the word proclaimed, a period of silence follows each reading. (LMI, 28; GIRM, 128)

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembled congregation, as an opportunity to take the Word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer.

Proper times for silence during the Liturgy of the Word are, for example, after the first and second readings and after the homily (LMI, 28).

These moments of silence must be planned and choreographed so as to be consistent at all liturgical celebrations with all liturgical ministers. It will require the training and coordination of the clergy, lectors and music ministry to assure that these silences are observed at the appropriate times and for the proper duration. The assembly should also be catechized as to the purpose of these silent moments outside of the Mass, such as through the bulletin.

### **Conclusion**

In the hearing of God's word the Church is built up and grows, and in the signs of the liturgical celebration God's wonderful, past works in the history of salvation are presented anew as mysterious realities. God in turn makes use of the congregation of the faithful that celebrates the Liturgy in order that his word may speed on and be glorified and that his name be exalted among the nations. Whenever, therefore, the Church, gathered by the Holy Spirit for liturgical celebration, announces and proclaims the Word of God, she is aware of being a new people in whom the covenant made in the past is perfected and fulfilled. Baptism and confirmation in the Spirit have made all Christ's faithful into messengers of God's word because of the grace of hearing they have received. They must therefore be the bearers of the same word in the Church and in the world, at least by the witness of their lives. The Word of God proclaimed in the celebration of God's mysteries does not only address present conditions but looks back to past events and forward to what is yet to come. Thus God's word shows us what we should hope for with such a longing that in this changing world our hearts will be set on the place where our true joys lie. (LMI, 7)

*Prepared by the Office of Divine Worship  
Archdiocese of Newark - Updated July, 2014*