

Diocese of Saint Augustine Norms and Guidelines for Lectors

Ministers of the Word

1. The purpose of the lector's ministry is to proclaim the Word of God in the liturgical assembly. This proclamation must be done clearly and with understanding so that all gathered in worship may be nurtured and grow as they are fed from the table of God's Word. In proclaiming the Scriptures, the lector becomes a voice through which the Spirit speaks in the worshipping community. When lectors are preparing to proclaim the Word of God, they are not simply practicing for a delivery of the text, but conforming themselves to the Holy Spirit who speaks through them. "The Word of God, as proclaimed in the Sacred Scripture, lies at the heart of our Christian life and is integral to all our liturgical celebrations."¹
2. As ministers of the Word, lectors must allow the Scriptures to be deeply rooted in their lives. This requires more than a passing familiarity with the printed word. It also demands prayerful study and consultation with various resources that will assist in the comprehension of the sacred text. The lector must also practice the skills of public proclamation. Because of the dignity, importance and responsibility of this particular ministry, pastors and those charged with the responsibility of coordinating parish worship, should take great care in assessing both the spiritual maturity and abilities of those who aspire to this ministry. No one should exercise this ministry who has not been properly prepared.

Pastoral Considerations in the Selection of Candidates

3. A person with a strong faith and a knowledge and command of communication skills can be one who proclaims the Word of God. In the selection of candidates and in review of those exercising this ministry, the following considerations may be helpful:
 - Candidates should have received the Sacraments of Initiation of the Church (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) and regularly attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and frequently participate in the sacraments."²
 - Candidates should be persons who have gifts and skills in public communication and reading.
 - Candidates should have a love and reverence for the Sacred Scriptures and engage in some form of regular study of them.
 - Candidates should understand the importance of this ministry and appreciate the need for study and preparation as well as the ministry's connection to Christian life and practice.

Formation

4. Candidates for the ministry of lector should complete an adequate program of preparation and instruction. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd typical edition) states that

those who serve in this ministry “should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, 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.”²

Those who aspire to this ministry should be formed in a basic theology of the Word of God as well as its importance in the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Preparation should also include a basic background in biblical theology. Candidates should complete a period of instruction that lasts from 6 to 8 hours in order for them to have a foundation in the ministry of reader. A listing of resource materials is available from the Diocese’s Office of Liturgy.

Commissioning and Terms of Service

5. Following their formation period, it is the responsibility of the pastor or his delegate to determine the suitability of the candidates who will exercise this ministry. It is recommended that those who will serve the parish community as lectors receive the Church’s blessing following their period of formation and before assuming this ministry. The blessing should normally take place during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The texts are those in the *Book of Blessings* (chapter 61, nos. 1831-1846).

Parishes may consider a normal term of service as three years, where this is possible. This can allow for a broader sharing of this ministry by others and frees persons to serve in only one ministry at a time. Please refer to the Diocese’s “General Norms for Liturgical Ministers,” no. 8.

Continuing Formation

6. Regular, periodic formation and study days for readers should be scheduled on an annual basis for all lectors in the parish. Days of recollection, evenings of prayer and fellowship are important follow-up and support systems to those serving in this ministry. A process of periodic review of their ability to proclaim the sacred text in the liturgy may also be helpful in improving the competency of readers. At a minimum, parish readers should be required to complete 2 hours or continuing formation in their ministry every three years.
7. Lectors should be provided with a copy of a resource for the preparation of the readings for the Liturgy of the Word. Parishes should also provide access to biblical commentaries, texts and liturgical reference materials for their study and preparation.
8. Parishes may find it helpful to select a coordinator of lectors in order to facilitate training and formation events along with scheduling to specific liturgies. This person may also represent the lectors on the parish liturgy committee.

The Lector in Liturgical Celebration

9. The ministry of the lector is to proclaim the Word of God. The reader should not exercise another liturgical ministry during the same Mass. When possible, individual readings should be proclaimed by different readers. It is always preferable that each reading in the Liturgy of the Word be proclaimed by a different minister.
10. One's general appearance, apparel and accessories worn during the liturgy should reflect the dignity of the role of one called to proclaim the Word of God. Lectors are to be given the "General Norms for Liturgical Ministers" of the Diocese of Saint Augustine and are to be fully acquainted with the dress code as published in those norms.
11. Liturgy calls for a solemn formality that is neither pompous, nor stiff. The movement of the lector should be dignified and graceful. In the procession to the sanctuary, the lector may carry the *Book of the Gospels* in the absence of a deacon. The *Book of the Gospels* is carried slightly elevated and the lector walks in front of the priest-celebrant (or the concelebrants, if there are any). The lector reverences the altar then places the *Book of the Gospels* on the altar un-opened. The *Lectionary* is never carried in procession. It is placed on the ambo prior to the liturgy.
12. The *Lectionary* is the proper book of the lector. Since the *Lectionary* and the *Book of the Gospels* are signs of God's presence, care should be taken to ensure that they are worthy and beautiful. Worship publications, particularly missalettes, are not to be substituted for these books.
13. It is appropriate that, as a member of the assembly, the lector be seated in the assembly rather than the sanctuary.
14. The Scripture readings are proclaimed from the ambo. This should be easily visible to the entire assembly. It is highly recommended and encouraged in the Diocese of Saint Augustine that both the sanctuary and the ambo should be accessible and equipped for persons with disabilities to serve as liturgical ministers."⁴
15. In approaching the ambo and returning to one's place in the assembly, the reader should walk in an unhurried and dignified manner. The lector reverences the altar with a profound bow as he/she passes in front of it.
16. During the actual proclamation of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector should remember that God is speaking in the reading. "[Christ] is present in His Word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church."⁵ The lector should wait until the assembly is seated and quiet before beginning the reading.
17. Following the proclamation of the Scripture reading a period of sacred silence is to be observed. A 20-30 second pause allows the assembly to reflect in the Word that has been proclaimed. The lector should stand at the ambo with head bowed during this time.

18. The Responsorial Psalm and the *Alleluia* (or Verse before the Gospel) are properly sung in the sacred liturgy. The cantor or psalmist may sing the verses of the responsorial Psalm from the ambo or other suitable place.⁶ When the responsorial Psalm cannot be sung, for example, at weekday celebrations of the Mass, then it is recited.⁷ In this case it may be led by the lector⁸ but “it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God.”⁹
19. Following the Psalm, when there is another reading, the second lector approaches the ambo in the same manner as the first and follows the same procedure at the conclusion of the reading. If one lector is proclaiming both passages from Sacred Scripture, the lector may be seated in the sanctuary while the Responsorial Psalm is led by a cantor or psalmist.
20. The *Lectionary* is not to be held up or shown at the conclusion of the readings. The concluding announcement, “The Word of the Lord,” refers to the proclaimed word and not to the *Lectionary*. Therefore, any accompanying gesture is inappropriate. In saying “The Word of the Lord,” the reader should pause and look at the assembly to engage them in responding “Thanks be to God.”
21. Like the responsorial Psalm, the *Alleluia* and verse before the Gospel (or other chant during Lent) is properly sung at all liturgical celebrations before the Gospel. When not sung, the *Alleluia* or verse before the Gospel may be omitted.¹⁰ In the absence of a cantor or psalmist, the lector should not lead this chant unless he/she is capable of doing so.
22. If there is no deacon, the lector may announce the intentions of the General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful). The lector returns to the ambo at the conclusion of the Creed and returns to the assembly when the priest has concluded the General Intercessions with the prayer.
23. At the conclusion of the liturgy, the *Book of the Gospels* is not carried in the procession. As a rule, the lector does not join in the procession at the end of Mass.

Special Considerations

Lectionary Texts and Biblical Translations

24. There is only one biblical translation approved for liturgical use in the Dioceses of the United States – the *Revised New American Bible*. The use of this text applies for all liturgical celebrations in English. Liturgies with other language groups are to use approved texts, as well. [P.N. – The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* has been approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States and may be used in school settings or as part of Sunday worship as outlined in the *Directory for Masses with Children*.¹¹]

Missalettes

25. The use of missalettes by the faithful during the proclamation of the Word of God distorts the liturgical action of the assembly, which is listening. A situation in which the assembly reads

along with the one who is proclaiming the scriptural text, substitutes a private, individual act for the corporate proclamation and hearing of the word of God. Worship resources and hymnals are now available which omit the readings. Parishes are encouraged to move to this dynamic so as to encourage “full, active conscious participation...called for by the very nature of the liturgy.”¹² Instruction and liturgical catechesis on the Liturgy of the Word may be required to assist the parish in understanding this issue.

26. It may be necessary to provide copies of the readings for those who are hearing impaired. The parish should assess the needs relative to the use of sign language during the liturgy and the use of electronic hearing enhancement devices should be incorporated in the design of the sound system.

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- ¹ *Book of Blessings*, “Order for the Blessing of Readers,” no. 1827.
- ² Please note that prescriptions of the *Directory for Masses with Children*, Congregation for Worship (1973) nos. 22, 24 and 47, which permit children to proclaim the readings. When children will be selected to proclaim the readings, special attention should be given to their preparation.
- ³ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd typical edition), no. 101.
- ⁴ Refer to *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture and Worship (Guidelines of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, November 16, 2000, nos. 211-214.
- ⁵ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7. (Hereafter cited as *CSL*.)
- ⁶ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd typical edition), no. 61. (Hereafter cited as *GIRM*.)
- ⁷ See *GIRM*, no. 61.
- ⁸ *GIRM*, no. 196.
- ⁹ *GIRM*, no. 61.
- ¹⁰ *GIRM*, no. 63-c.
- ¹¹ See *Directory for Masses with Children*, no. 17.
- ¹² *CSL*, no. 14.