

# Catholic Diocese of Superior

## Guidelines for Reader

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide some principles and general observations on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. 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.

Ritual practices may vary from parish to parish; such variation may be legitimate. These guidelines, therefore, are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in liturgical customs. Instead, they are produced in a spirit of helping our parishes experience the proclaimed Word of God as a powerful celebration by offering some basic, essential principles required by the very nature of the liturgy (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* #37).

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

### MINISTERS OF THE WORD

1. According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lectors or lay ministers called readers. Use of the term “lector” is reserved for those individuals officially installed as such by the bishop and who are preparing for ordination to the diaconate and/or priesthood. “Readers” are those members of the laity who proclaim the scriptures in the liturgy.

The practice of ordained ministers (bishops, priests or deacons) proclaiming those Scriptural readings other than the gospel, is improper (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* #51). The use of two readers — one for each reading — is encouraged. The parish community should strive for enough trained readers to fulfill this goal (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* #52).

2. The Gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest proclaims the Gospel. In concelebrations, one other than the presiding celebrant proclaims the Gospel (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* #49, 50; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* #59).

3. Announcements and/or any commentary during the celebration should be read by someone other than the readers. General Intercessions may be read by the deacon (preferably), the cantor, the reader or someone else (*Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* #53).

## PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

4. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Priests, deacons and readers 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.

5. 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.

6. Ideally, members of the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and refrain from reading along in missalettes. In the act of communal listening, the worshipers should experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the Word (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #45).

Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just my listening but our listening together for the Lord's word to the community (*Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* #20 National Conference of Catholic Bishops).

## REQUIREMENTS

7. 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 love of the scriptures. It is highly encouraged to have only properly trained and commissioned readers scheduled for liturgy (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #55).

Ideally, the readings at weddings and funerals are proclaimed by readers 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.

8. Readers must be baptized, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim. If married, their marriages must be recognized by the church.

9. Normally, readers are commissioned for their ministry during a Sunday Mass. The rite of commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings* [Chapter 61, p. 775].

10. Those who are presently readers should periodically participate in enrichment programs such as Bible study or other workshops on Scripture and/or proclamation techniques.

## PREPARATION

11. In order that the service of the Word might be effective, all readers are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical. Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message. Scriptural 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. It is unacceptable to arrive at the sacristy immediately prior to the Mass and “look at the readings” as if this would constitute adequate advanced preparation.

12. Readers ought to arrive at least 15 minutes before the liturgy, locating the readings in the *Lectionary*, 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 readers are to read the petitions for the General Intercessions, these should also be reviewed before the liturgy begins.

## SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

13. 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 crucial to attend to these symbols and safeguard their integrity. The symbols that are integral to any celebration of the Word are: the reader(s), the book(s), the ambo, and the processions. A brief word on each of these is in order.

14. Readers are members of the worshiping assembly and are expected to participate in the entire liturgy.

15. The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the *Lectionary* and the *Book of Gospels*. The readings are always proclaimed from these

liturgical books, and never from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory and made from throw-away materials. There are four volumes of the current *Lectionary*: one for Sundays and holy days; two for weekdays, and one for Ritual Masses, Votive Masses and Masses for Various Needs and Occasions. The *Book of Gospels* is a separate book and contains only the gospel texts for Sundays, solemnities and major liturgical rites.

16. The ambo is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God just as the altar is the symbol of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo, a dignified and prominent place. Candles may be placed around the ambo without obscuring it.

The ambo is to be used for the proclamation of the Word, namely, the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel and the Homily. It may also be used for the Prayer of the Faithful and the Easter Proclamation. A lectern or cantor's stand should be used for leading songs and making announcements. All scripture readings take place at the single ambo, including the psalm, whether sung or spoken (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #31, 33).

## PROCEDURE

17. Among the actions in the Liturgy of the Word, processions are important. Readers are to take part in the entrance procession. They walk immediately in front of the deacon or presider and behind the altar servers. The deacon or one of the readers carries the closed *Book of Gospels* by holding it with uplifted arms and hands so that it is displayed to the assembly and then places it on the altar. The *Lectionary* is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* #120, 128, 172, 194).

When the deacon carries the *Book of Gospels*, it is advisable for the readers to carry the parish hymnal in the entrance procession and actively join in the singing.

If there is no deacon, one of the readers carries the *Book of Gospels* in the opening procession and places it on the altar.

18. When carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the reader does not genuflect or bow. If not carrying anything, the reader simply walks with folded hands, makes a profound bow to the altar before going to his/her seat (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* #173, 195).

19. Since the readers 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. From there they come forward to proclaim the Scripture readings. In some parishes, however, it is customary to seat the readers in the sanctuary.

20. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the reader approaches the ambo slowly and reverently. The reader pauses before beginning the first reading and waits until the assembly is settled and silent. After completing the reading, the reader may pause slightly before saying "The Word of the Lord," and remains at the ambo until all have responded "Thanks be to God."

It is fitting to observe a period of silence (30 - 60 seconds) after the first and second reading as well as after the homily. This is to facilitate the "dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit." (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #28, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* #128, 130).

The first reader returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the Psalm is intoned. The second reader approaches the ambo after the Psalm and returns to his/her seat before the Gospel Acclamation, after allowing for a period of silence, as described above.

When only one reader proclaims both readings, he/she is seated during the singing of the Psalm.

21. After the second reading and the accompanying pause, all stand for the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. During that time, the deacon or priest carries the *Book of Gospels* from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be accompanied by candle bearers and

thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the Liturgy of the Word in that it accentuates the prominence of the Gospel and heightens the expectation to hear it.

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 in the Liturgy of the Word. If so, the *Book of Gospels* is incensed after the Gospel is announced and before it is proclaimed.

22. The General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) are introduced from the chair by the presiding celebrant and announced by the deacon, reader or other minister. The intercessions may be announced at the ambo or at a lectern or cantor stand (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #31, 33, 53).

The person announcing the intercessions remains in place until after the presiding celebrant has offered the concluding prayer.

23. According to local custom, the readers may join the presider and other ministers in the final procession, but neither the *Lectionary* nor the *Book of Gospels* is carried.

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. (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #28).

## SOME USEFUL HINTS

24. Ministers of the Word are not to add their own words to the texts. The words of announcement (“A reading from.....”) and conclusion (“The Word of the Lord”) are intended to be read exactly as printed in the *Lectionary*.

25. The announcement of the reading (“A reading from .....””) and the ending, (“The Word of the Lord”) need to be distinguished from the reading itself. Readers make this distinction by observing a pause of two or three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase. Both are stated in a matter of fact tone without special emphasis.

26. If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, the reader simply begins the recitation with the antiphon in the *Lectionary*. It is not necessary to announce “The Responsorial Psalm is...”.

27. Anything that might distract from the proclaimed Word or from the dignity of this ministry is to be avoided. Such distractions may include: leaning on the ambo, placing hands in one’s pockets, shuffling from one foot to the other, wearing inappropriate or immodest clothing or wearing jewelry that draws attention to the person of the reader.

28. At the conclusion of any scripture reading (including the Gospel) it is inappropriate to elevate the book while declaring “The Word of the Lord” or “The Gospel of the Lord.” Nor is it proper to make any gesture toward the book. This is because God’s presence is to be recognized in the act of proclamation and not in a printed text or bound book.

## CONCLUSION

“The Sacred Scriptures, above all in their liturgical proclamation, are the source of life and strength. When this word is proclaimed in the church and put into living practice it enlightens the faithful through the working of the Holy Spirit and draws them into the entire mystery of the Lord as a reality to be lived.” (Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* #47).

May these guidelines be a practical tool that enables this liturgical proclamation to be done more effectively so that the Word of God may be lived more authentically.

(The structure of this document was adapted from the *Guidelines for Lectors* issued by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and used with permission.)

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Memorial of St. Jerome