

Procedures and Guidelines for Lectors

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Thank you for being a liturgical minister at St. Mary+Our Lady of Peace! The ministry of Lector is one of the most visible roles of service in the sacred liturgy. We are grateful for your faithful service, careful preparation, and loving commitment to proclaiming the Good News in word and deed.

ROLE OF THE LECTOR

“When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 29).

What, then, must we do to properly receive the Word of God proclaimed at Mass? The *General Instruction* tells us that “the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone” (no. 29), and that those who read the Scriptures at Mass must be “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” (no. 101).

As generous distributors of God’s manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received. The one who speaks is to deliver God’s message. The one who serves is to do it with the strength provided by God. Thus, in all of you God is to be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:8-11a)

SPIRITUALITY

Lectors should strive to live the Catholic Faith in spirit and in truth. Regular Mass attendance, daily prayer (especially meditation on the Scriptures and Eucharistic Adoration), regular Confession, and participation in faith formation and the life of the parish are key. To proclaim the Word of God in a compelling and powerful manner, Lectors should heed the Lord’s invitation to ongoing conversion and friendship with Him. We cannot give what we do not have, so we rely on the Lord to fill us with his strength.

Consider this prayer as the basis for your spirituality as Lector: *The Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart that I may worthily proclaim the words of salvation.*

PROCEDURES

Preparation

Practice the readings several days in advance of your assigned Mass. Read the texts aloud, pray about them, and consult Bible commentaries and pronunciation guides as needed. You can access the readings online at <http://www.usccb.org>.

The Workbook for Lectors has excellent guidelines for pronunciation, understanding and context, and even voice inflections and emotions you might convey in your reading. Make time to read and take advantage of these suggestions and to practice them in your preparation.

Reflect on the meaning of the readings in prayer so that you can convey the full meaning when you proclaim the reading at the Mass.

Your goal is not to memorize the reading, but to be so familiar and comfortable with the words that you do not stumble or hesitate while reading. Getting the words correct is more important than eye contact, but if you can look up at key points of the reading (looking out over the heads is best), then do so. Practice as you will proclaim at the Mass: Proclaim the reading slowly, clearly, reverently but with enthusiasm. Proclaim as if you are telling a story, but not acting. Let them know what you are saying is important, especially at the key points of the reading.

If you think you are reading too slowly, you are not. Give the people time to hear and understand each word. Pause when suggested in the Workbook. Project your voice. Many Lectors lean into the mic and speak too softly. You should speak with energy, keeping the mic at the proper distance.

Note: You should use the Workbook and other aids in practice, but at the Mass you will always be reading from the Lectionary.

Arrival at Mass

Lectors should arrive 20-25 minutes before Mass. Please show up if you are scheduled for a Mass. If you cannot attend on a day that you have been scheduled, it is your responsibility to find a substitute (see Scheduling section below for additional information). Please be respectful of the Eucharist and the ministry; do not wait until the day that you have been scheduled to find a substitute. All liturgical ministers need ample time to prepare to serve in the Eucharistic celebration.

Before Mass

After checking in with the sacristan, proceed to the ambo and check that the lectionary is turned to the correct readings for the day. Note any differences in the layout of the

reading from that of the Workbook so that you do not miss any parts of the reading. Check that the sound system and microphone are “on” and working.

Leave the Lectionary open on the ambo to the first reading. At the ambo, take care not to place books on top of announcements or other papers or move those papers as you may be moving the priest’s or deacon’s homily, or other papers needed during Mass.

Locate the Mass introductions, read through to be familiar with what you will be reading, and leave beside the Lectionary so as to be ready to begin Mass. Make note of the names of the priest, deacon, visiting clergy and the title and number of the entrance hymn in order to properly announce them.

If there is a choice of readings, or a short version, check with the priest or deacon to see which reading to proclaim as their homily may depend on the reading.

Check with the musicians to see if the Cantor will sing the Responsorial Psalm, or if the Lector will be reading it.

Determine if the priest or deacon prefer that the Lector read the Prayers of the Faithful. Priests usually prefer that the Lector do this in the absence of a deacon. You may assume this to be the case unless the priest instructs you otherwise. If you are reading the Prayers of the Faithful, locate the Prayer book and mark the proper page prior to Mass. Read through the prayers and be prepared to add the names of the Pope (Francis), our Archbishop (Aquila, pronounced a-kwil-a), and others as indicated by a red ‘N’ in the text of the prayer.

Determine if the priest or deacon prefer that the Lector read the announcements (done at the end of the Mass). Typically, the deacon or the priest will do this. Visiting priests often prefer that the Lector do this in the absence of a deacon.

During Mass

At the start of Mass, the Celebrant will signal you that he is ready. At this signal, stand and read the introduction. After announcing the opening song, proceed to your seat in the assembly. Come to the center aisle and bow slightly toward the altar at the bottom of the sanctuary steps before returning to your pew.

The Readings

Once the celebrant (priest) has concluded the Opening Prayer, approach the center of the altar and bow toward the altar prior to ascending the steps and taking your place at the ambo. Take your time, bow reverently, and walk slowly.

If people are still being seated at this time, wait for them to take their seats.

Begin the First Reading: “A reading from the book of...” Pause for two to three seconds, then continue with the text. Read slowly, loudly, clearly, and with dignity. Make eye contact with the assembly. After the last line of the reading, look up, pause for two to three seconds and say: “The word of the Lord.”

If the Psalm is not sung (such as at a daily Mass): Remain at the ambo. Pause in silence for the length of a prayerful Hail Mary. Then proceed to read the Psalm.

- Do not introduce the Psalm by saying: “*The Responsorial Psalm is...*” or similar words.
- Do not repeat the response with the congregation.

Confirm with the Cantor the movements of the Lectors/Cantors between the first reading, the Psalm and the second reading prior to the beginning of Mass.

- After the first reading, the Lector should proceed to the center aisle in front of the altar together with the Cantor, bow reverently to the altar, and return to your seat.
 - a. Likewise, when the Cantor has completed the Responsorial Psalm, the second Lector (which is usually the same person as the first Lector) should come forward to the center of the altar, and the Cantor and second Lector should bow together.
 - b. Discuss this with the Cantor in advance.

Proclaim the second reading in the same manner as above.

- Again, if people are being seated, wait for them.
- Introduce the reading as per the introduction printed in the Lectionary. Note that the wording is often different, such as “A Reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians”.
- At the end of the reading, if a deacon is present, slowly close the Lectionary (careful not to bump the microphone) and place the book on a shelf of the ambo, not covering up papers or other books that will be needed later in the Mass.
- If no deacon is present, leave the Lectionary open to the Gospel reading. This may mean you need to turn a page.

After the second reading, slowly walk down the steps to the center of the front of the altar, bow reverently, and return to your seat in the congregation.

During the Creed

If no deacon is present and the priest has directed you to read the Prayers of the Faithful, slowly make your way to the center of the altar during the Creed (at the words “on the third day” you want to be moving), bow reverently, then proceed to the ambo arriving before the priest begins the introductory prayer.

- After the priest gives the introductory prayer, read each prayer in the Prayer Book for that date.
- Leave the ambo upon finishing the last petition, do not close the Prayer Book, and quietly return to your seat while the Celebrant concludes the Prayers of the Faithful with a prayer.
- You do not need to bow to the altar as you leave as the Ushers will be coming up the aisle to start the collection.

Announcements

If you will be reading the announcements, come forward after the Prayer After Communion. Leave the ambo upon finishing the last announcement and quietly return to your seat while the Celebrant gives the Final Blessing.

GUIDELINES AND TIPS

Dress Code

Lectors should dress neatly, in a way consonant with the dignity of their role. Good taste and common sense are the best guides in this area. What you wear sends signals to the assembly about how seriously you take your ministry. Dress how you proclaim – with dignity and respect. Never wear anything that will detract from the scripture. The focus must always be on the reading, not the reader.

- ✗ Please avoid wearing jeans, shorts, sportswear, sandals, shoes with loud heels, and distracting patterns and colors.
- ✓ Men are encouraged to wear dress slacks and blazer/suit jacket.

Body Language

The moment you step forward you are sending signals to your listeners. Are you reverent, dignified and sincere or hurried and anxious or cavalier? These signals come from how you carry yourself and what you wear.

You should adopt a good posture, if physically able to do so, and walk with hands folded or kept naturally at your side. Walk at a reverent pace, slower than usual. Do not bounce, swagger or sashay and above all, do not run or appear hurried. One can usually tell how a reading will go based on the Lector's approach to the ambo. Those who race to the ambo will generally race through their reading. On the other hand, those who approach in a focused, deliberate manner will also proclaim that way.

Posture

Upon reaching the ambo stand squarely behind it. Stand on two feet, not one. Do not lean. Place your hands lightly on the ambo. Always strive to appear dignified, not nervous or casual. Do not put your hands anywhere other than on the lectionary or ambo or comfortably at your sides. Do not put your hands in your pockets, on your hips, behind your back or in folded arms. These gestures are uninviting and distracting. Above all, do not use your hands at any point during the reading. It is theatrical, inappropriate and will annoy your listeners.

Announcement Line

The announcement line tells the listeners from whom or from where the reading comes, (e.g., the book of the prophet Isaiah). Proclaim the announcement line loudly and clearly. You will get the assembly's attention if you start out in a positive, dignified, and determined manner. If you rush the announcement line, you are likely to rush the rest of the reading.

Pause for **two to three seconds** after the announcement line is read. This will give the assembly a chance to place the prophet, era or Biblical location in their minds and ready them to actively listen to the passage.

<p>A reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah: <i>(two to three second pause)</i> Thus says the Lord...</p>
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Eye Contact

Your goal is not to memorize the reading, but to be so familiar and comfortable with the words that you do not stumble or hesitate while reading. **Getting the words correct is more important than eye contact**, but if you can look up at key points of the reading (looking out over the heads is best), then do so.

Here are some of the best times to look directly at your assembly:

- when you first get to the ambo
- when you proclaim the announcement line
- at the end of a sentence

- during key words or phrases
- just before the closing line (i.e. “*The word of the Lord*”)
- during and after the closing line.

It is also important to span the entire congregation when making eye contact – left, center, right, front, and back.

Pronunciation

There are basic pronunciation guides available that phonetically spell out the pronunciations of the Biblical names of people and places. For instance, Barrabus may be listed as buh-RAB-us or Capernaum as kuh-PER-num. Did you know the name Baruch is pronounced BAIR-uhk, not buhROOK? A pronunciation guide is available in the sacristy for your reference, or you may wish to purchase your own.

Please consult these resources as you prepare your reading and practice so you feel comfortable with the pronunciation. The congregation will appreciate your smooth handling of difficult words. On the other hand, lack of preparation is never as obvious as the Lector who comes to a difficult word, stops and then stumbles through it. This can be easily avoided with careful attention to detail in advance and practice!

Enunciation

Enunciation is different from pronunciation. The latter involves using the tongue, lips and teeth to phonetically make the correct sounds of a word. Enunciation means that the speaker clearly articulates all the sounds that make up the word. For instance, a common mistake in enunciation is to drop the “d” or “t” sound from the end of a word. This is a dangerous practice in proclaiming because very often, it is precisely the inclusion of the “d” or “t” that separates one word from another. For instance, “mend” has a totally different meaning than “men”. Likewise, “sent” without a clearly enunciated “t” might be interpreted by listeners as “sin”. Say “Peter and Paul” not “Peter n Paul”.

Pace

What do you think are the two biggest complaints about Lectors’ performance? One is pace and the other is volume (i.e., “They read too fast” and “I can’t hear them”). Pace refers to how quickly or slowly one speaks. (It does not mean how much time one takes between thoughts or phrases; that’s pausing.)

The best pace for a particular passage depends on the content of the reading but as a general rule, Lectors should proclaim at one-half their normal speaking voice. That’s right, **one-half**.

Slowing down accomplishes several things. First, people do not listen as fast as you may speak. People need time to digest what you are saying to them. Unless you slow down, they may not be able to keep up and will simply tune out. At that point, you've lost them and all that practice and preparation would have been for naught. Secondly, slowing down helps achieve clearer pronunciation and enunciation. Very importantly, slowing down brings an added dimension of power to the reading. Try it and see the difference for yourself.

Volume

The other of the two most common criticisms that listeners have of Lectors is they cannot be heard. Sometimes, the problem is equipment-related but more often than not, it has to do with the Lector's ability to project, voice quality and/or their use of the microphone.

Not all Lectors have the ability to create effective volume. Some have small or naturally soft voices; others do not breathe correctly and still others may not realize that **the volume they hear in their own voice at the ambo is not nearly as loud beyond the first few pews as they may think.** Additionally, elements throughout the worship space will absorb sound, from carpeting to winter coats.

The keys to projecting effectively are:

- proper breathing
- a natural gift of volume
- correct microphone usage
- confidence.

Microphone Usage

It is crucial to find just the right spot or zone that will enable you to maximize your volume without creating explosive or popping sounds. These distracting and unwelcome noises occur most often on “p” and “t” sounds and are created by speaking too closely to the head of the microphone. The rush of air that comes from your mouth on these consonants (and others as well) generates a strong force of air that is magnified unpleasantly through the sensitive head of the mike.

This can be easily avoided by positioning the microphone head a little above your mouth (nose level) or a little below (chin level) so the rush of air goes above or below the head. The key is that you should be able to project your voice and speak with enough volume that the microphone is not too close to your mouth.

Chin level is preferred to nose level because the microphone may block the view of your face and facial expressions are an important component of proclaiming, but ultimately, you have to go with the microphone position that best projects your voice.

Pausing

Silence is golden, at least in the right spots. The proper use of pausing is essential to effective proclaiming.

Let's consider some obvious places to use the pause:

- to provide a segue when the reading is changing direction
- to allow listeners to absorb an important point
- to provide space between multiple thoughts in the same sentence
- to take a breath
- before and after quotes to offset the quote from the character or narrator
- before the closing line, "The word of the Lord".

Keep in mind that pauses used too frequently within a sentence or paragraph will create a choppy effect. Strive for smoothness and fluidity. Pauses that interrupt a phrase or grouping of words in the wrong places can change the meaning or intended feeling. Pauses that are too long or too frequent can kill the pace of the reading and create drag.

Here is an example of proper pausing:

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Everyone who thirsts, come to the water: (*medium pause*) and you that have no money, come (*brief pause*) buy and eat! (*long pause*) Come, (*brief pause*) buy wine and milk without money and without price. (*long pause*)

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread (*brief pause*) and your labor for that which does not satisfy? (*medium pause*) Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, (*brief pause*) delight yourselves in rich food. (*long pause*)

Incline your ear, and come to me; (*brief pause*) listen, so that you may live. (*medium pause*) I will make with you an everlasting covenant, (*medium pause*) my steadfast, sure love for David.

The following passage will challenge and develop effective breath control. Remember to use your full proclamation voice when reading. Do not continue reading after all but a fraction of your breath is gone and your voice begins to sound shaky or pinched. The point is to sustain the natural, full sound as long as you can.

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

The following passage is not meant to be proclaimed in just one breath. But it is a good exercise. Passages like these often suffer from a choppy delivery. See how fluid you can make them by using good breath control.

A reading from the Book of Proverbs:

**When he established the heavens, I was here,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above, when he
established the fountains of the deep, when he
assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world and
delighting in the human race.**

“The Word of the Lord”

The closing line is actually the most important line in every reading because it reminds us that God is speaking directly to us. He may be using a human voice but the words and the message are His. Take care with this line. Speak it loudly and clearly. Do not hurry through it or mutter it as an afterthought.

As with the announcement line, separate it from the body of the reading with a strong, healthy pause, two to three seconds. Look the assembly in the eye when you proclaim the ending; do not rush away. Give its significance time to sink in. After all, this message that you proclaimed is directly from God. It should leave them with a sense of awe.

...confidence of access through faith in him.

(two to three second pause) **The word of the Lord.**

Action Words

When proclaiming, it should always be your goal to bring the Word of God to life. In order to do this, you should take advantage of action words. Action words have inherent life because people can generally envision the actions indicated. However, action words will remain dormant if you gloss over them, mumble or rush past them. Give them the attention they deserve.

Some words may require increased energy or force, others gentility or quietness; some may be drawn out, others hastened. Remember, action words are verbs (but not all verbs are action words and not all verbs are worthy of emphasis). Try to find those words that will help paint a picture for your readers. Underline the key words and consider how you might emphasize them to help bring the passage to life. Be careful, however, not to overreach in your attempt to add color. Otherwise, you may appear theatrical or insincere and that would be distracting for the listener. Also, be selective in what you emphasize; if you choose everything to stress, the result is that nothing is stressed.

Listener Appreciation

Do not underestimate the congregation's appreciation of the Lector who thoroughly and meticulously prepares his or her reading. They know that you have done this for them and they will be glad in their hearts though they may not actually tell you or thank you personally. No good work, however, remains hidden from our Heavenly Father.

SCHEDULING

Preferences and Contact Information

- Keep your contact information up to date in Ministry Pro using the “Profile” tab.
- Use the “Profile” tab to indicate your preferred Mass time(s) and any dates you are **unavailable**. **Do not** list the dates unavailable in the “Notes” section.
- Two weeks prior to the release of a new schedule, you will receive an email reminding you to update your Profile, including any **unavailable** dates. Schedules will be generated for two months at a time. You will be scheduled based on your indicated availability and your preferred Mass times and locations.
- Once the schedule is posted, you will receive an email informing you of your scheduled ministry times.
- Indicating your availability is an important step toward reducing the number of unfilled assignments. By keeping your Profile up to date, you help to avoid

scheduling issues. Your cooperation in ensuring the proper fulfillment of the liturgical ministries is critical and much appreciated.

Reminders

- Volunteers receive an e-mail reminder *five days* in advance of their scheduled Mass.
- Volunteers receive an e-mail that lists “available positions this week” on *Wednesday*. You will receive this email if there are openings at your preferred Mass time(s) and if you have not listed the date(s) as unavailable. Volunteers also can check the full schedule to sign up for any openings.

Requests for Substitutes

- Requests for substitutes should be made as far in advance of the Mass as possible.
- If your *request for a substitute is not answered*: You are responsible for filling your assigned role. Keep track of when you request a substitute and make sure someone accepts your request. If no one accepts your request or if it is a last-minute need, make an attempt to contact other volunteers using the information in the “Roster” tab on Ministry Pro.
- If the request is left unfilled, it is left up to others at that Mass to fill your assignment. This adds added pressure to the already busy moments prior to Mass. Please assist the priest, the deacons and the other volunteers by making every effort to fill your assignment.

Help with Ministry Pro

There is a Ministry Pro tutorial video available through the “Help” tab. If after watching the video, you still have questions, contact Denise Cook at dcook1205@gmail.com.