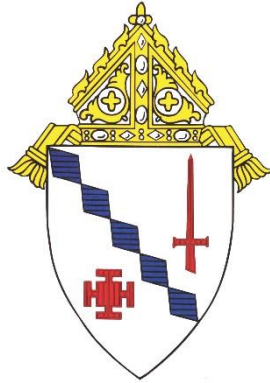


GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS



DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA

2022

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Abbreviations:

GIRM: General Instruction of the Roman Missal

LM: Lectionary for Mass

Adapted from published guidelines from the

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DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS

I.

INTRODUCTION

The *Office of Sacred Liturgy* has prepared the following guidelines for parish laypersons who publicly read scripture, referred to as Lectors or Readers. These are to apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide some general observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. They 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 differ from parish to parish, reflecting the variations allowed by law.

Determination in this regard comes under the Pastor's authority. 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.

It is hoped that lectors and the pastoral leadership in each community will meet together regularly to discuss the theological as well as the practical and spiritual aspects of their ministry. These directives could serve as suitable material for study at such gatherings.

II. DIRECTIVES

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

1. The proclamation of the *Word of God* is truly a service to the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. The ministry of the Word should, therefore, be treated seriously and with great dignity.
(*GIRM 55*)
2. The *Word of God* is not merely read during the liturgy. It is proclaimed, yet not with theatrical show. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate pace. It demands the ability to evoke faith in others by demonstrating one's own faith. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith. It also rouses faith in

those who hear the Word proclaimed. (*LM Intro 55*)

3. Ideally, the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and not read along in a missalette. In the act of communal listening, the worshippers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the *Word*. Pastors and lectors need, however, to be attentive to special needs of the hearing impaired. (*LM Intro 7, 37*)

REQUIREMENTS

4. The *Ministry of the Word* requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding of the Scriptures. Only properly trained and commissioned lectors should be scheduled for liturgy.

(GIRM 101, LM Intro 14)

For pastoral reasons, family members or friends may be allowed to read during funeral or wedding liturgies even though they are not formally trained and commissioned as lectors. However, the parish should provide assistance to them so that God's Word is properly proclaimed.

5. Lectors for Mass are fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim.

On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated, that is, both confirmed and has received first Eucharist, may be permitted to lector during a liturgy. Proper training, however, is expected.

6. All lectors should be commissioned for their ministry, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The

blessing used for this commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings, Chapter 61*.

7. Those who are presently lectors should periodically participate in enrichment programs.

PREPARATION

8. To make the service of the *Word* effective, all lectors are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical:
 - a) Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message.
 - b) Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text.
 - c) 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.

9. Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving in ample time before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary, arranging the microphone, making sure that the sound system is properly functioning.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

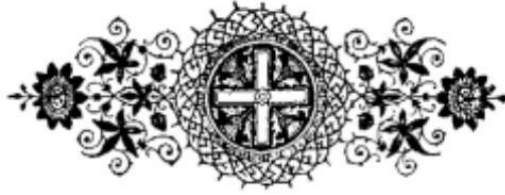
10. In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been recognized. However, the lector **is not at liberty** to change the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy to accommodate a personal desire for inclusive language. (*LM Intro 111*)

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

11. According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers. (*GIRM 59*)

Since the use of two lectors - one for each reading - is encouraged, the parish community should strive for enough lectors to fulfill this ideal. (*GIRM 109, LM Intro 52*)

12. The *Prayers of the Faithful* are part of the Liturgy of the Word. When a deacon is not present, the lector or cantor announces the intentions from the ambo. If the intentions are sung, a cantor is to be assigned the function of announcing the intentions. (*GIRM 138, LM Intro 53*)



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 important to pay full attention to the symbols of liturgy. Symbols that are integral to any celebration of the *Word* are: the *lector(s)*, the *book(s)*, the *ambo*, and the *processions*. A brief word on each of these is as follows:

a) The Lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and thus must participate actively in the entire liturgy. It is

inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the *Liturgy of the Word*.
(*GIRM 91*)

b) The Word is contained in permanent, dignified, and well-bound books - the *Lectionary* and the *Book of Gospels*. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books.

Non-biblical readings are never to be substituted for the readings or *Responsorial Psalm*.

(*GIRM 57, 349, LM Intro 12, 35, 36*)

The *Word of God* is not to be proclaimed from a missalette nor participation aid, both of which are transitory or throw-away materials. (*LM Intro 37*)

c) The Ambo is the symbol of the presence of the *Word of God* in the Church just as the altar is the symbol of the *Sacrament of the*

Eucharist.

The *Liturgy of the Word* takes place at the ambo therefore it should be a permanent, solemn, dignified, and prominent structure. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed *Word*, namely, the readings from *Sacred Scripture*, the *Gospel*, the *Homily* and the intentions of the *Prayers of the Faithful*. The *Responsorial Psalm* is from the Sacred Scripture and ideally is chanted from the ambo or another suitable place.
(GIRM 61)

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

14. An integral part of the celebration of the *Word of God* is the *Responsorial Psalm* and the *Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia)*. Psalmody is designed to be sung - it loses much of its power when it is recited. Since the *Responsorial Psalm* at Mass

is part of the *Liturgy of the Word*, it is appropriate that it be sung/read from the ambo. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways - responsorial, antiphonally, part sung/part recited - lectors should check with the musicians beforehand as to whether anything is expected of them. (*GIRM 61, LM Intro 20*)

The *Gospel Acclamation* is an acclamation thus it is always to be sung.

If it is not sung, it may be omitted or recited.

(*GIRM 63c*)

15. The leadership of the music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. It is preferable for a cantor to sing the *Responsorial Psalm* or at least the people's response. If the *Responsorial Psalm* cannot be sung, then it is to be recited by the lector in such a way as to foster meditation. (*GIRM 61*)

RITUAL ACTION

16. Among the actions in the *Liturgy of the Word*, processions are important. In a Mass without a Deacon, the lector may take part in the entrance procession by solemnly carrying the *Book of Gospels* slightly elevated, making a bow upon reaching the altar and placing the *Book of Gospels* flat on the altar. Alternatively, the *Book of Gospels* may be placed on the altar before Mass.

The *Lectionary* is not carried in procession but is resting on the ambo at the beginning of Mass.
(*GIRM* 44, 120 d, 195)

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 acolytes and thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the *Liturgy of the Word* even though it may not be expressed fully at every liturgy.

17. Incense may be used in the *Liturgy of the Word*. When incense is used, traditionally the *Book of Gospels* is incensed before the Gospel is proclaimed.

The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the Scripture readings.

(GIRM 134, 276 LM Intro 17)

18. The *Book of Gospels* is not carried in the recessional.

SILENCE

19. In order to enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the *Word* proclaimed, “haste that hinders recollection” is to be avoided. A pause should be made after stating “*A reading from...*” and before “*The Word of the Lord.*” Another period of silence should be observed after each reading before the lector moves away from the ambo; also, a brief period of silence should be allowed after the *Responsorial Psalm*. Some catechesis on the purpose and appropriate use of this silence should be offered. (*GIRM 56, LM Intro 28*)



THE SEATING OF LECTORS

20. Lectors need to be seated in a place which allows for easy access to the ambo, preferably among the assembly. At the time of the *Liturgy of the Word*, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. If the lector must pass in front of the altar, he/she bows to the altar before proceeding to the ambo. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. After the reading, the lector returns to his/her seat in a similar manner. (*GIRM 310*)

When there are two lectors, the first returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the *Responsorial Psalm* is intoned. The second lector would then approach the ambo after the Psalm and return to his/her seat before the *Gospel Acclamation*. When only one lector

proclaims both readings, he/she should be seated during the Psalm response.

21. Lectors begin to read by saying, “*A reading from the Book of (Exodus),*” as written in the Lectionary. It is inappropriate to add words or phrases such as, “The first reading...”
22. If the *Responsorial Psalm* is recited, lectors should begin the recitation with the antiphon. Announcing “Responsorial Psalm” is unnecessary.
23. Ministers of the Word should not add or change any words of the texts.
24. The title of the reading such as “*A reading from the Book of (Exodus)*” and the ending, “*The*

Word of the Lord,” should be distinguished from the reading itself. Lectors do this by observing a pause of about three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase. The same tone of proclamation should be maintained for *“The Word of The Lord.”*

25. While proclaiming the *Word*, a lector may hold the *Lectionary* in his/her hands or, place it on the ambo and rest his/her hand on it. Anything that might distract from the proclaimed *Word*, such as leaning on the ambo, hands in pockets, shuffling from one foot to the other or any other extraneous movement should be avoided.

26. The *Lectionary* or the *Book of Gospels* should not be lifted off the ambo while saying: *“The Word of the Lord.”*

27. The lector should never do anything to draw attention to her/himself at any time.

Exaggerated dramatic presentations and overly intentional eye contact is unnecessary in the proclamation of readings. Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion, modest and in keeping with the dignity of the ministry.



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