

Reader Guidelines for the Divine Liturgy

A lay reader may lead certain liturgical services, but the following guidelines pertain only to the epistle reading. Guidelines for reader led services are on the Metropolitan Cantor Institute (<https://mci.archpitt.org/liturgy/ReaderServices.html>).

Role of the Lay Reader

The lay reader is not ordained to the minor order of Reader, but fulfills this role at liturgy. The lay reader (referred to as reader hereafter), however, is very important in the liturgy. The importance of this liturgical role is based on the sacredness of the Word of God, which the reader reads to the faithful.

The reader is to approach the epistle reading with serious and prayerful preparation and great care, because the Word of God is holy. The reader's attention to preparation and prayer should be like the attention and importance one gives to holy icons and other blessed things that are used during the liturgy. Since the epistle is the holy Word of God, the reading must be chanted in such a way as to be clearly understood. This is not so much about volume as it is about how the reading is chanted. Regardless of how experienced one is, preparation is necessary to do this well.

Preparation

Spiritual Preparation

Carefully and slowly read the epistle at least once during the week. It is a good idea to incorporate the reading into your prayer time. As you read the epistle, reflect on its meaning and meditate on how the epistle reading applies to your life. What does it personally mean to you? As a help, consider the parish tract, entitled, *How to Pray with Holy Scripture*. It is available on the free materials racks at church and on the parish website under the *Cantors & Readers* menu. Spiritual preparation is the first and essential step in serving as a reader for liturgy. The holy Word of God should be chanted to the best of the reader's ability. The reader, then, should not neglect the next step in preparation, which is to practice.

Practice

Chanting the epistle should follow the normal tempo, rhythm and inflection of normal speech. The first step in practicing the epistle is to simply read the reading out loud, as if you were reading it (not chanting it) to the congregation. Speak as you would when carefully explaining something to another person. Give the person time to hear and understand you. Pay attention to the commas and periods and other queues that indicate the rhythm of the text. It should follow, generally, the rhythm of normal speech. Think about which words should be emphasized (inflection) and which should not, just as you would in normal speaking. Some

readers have found it helpful to mark up a copy of the reading.¹ The epistle book itself, should never be marked.

After reading the epistle out loud, practice chanting it. As you chant it, pay close attention to the tempo, rhythm and inflection that you used when you were reading the epistle out loud.

Reading the epistle aloud and chanting it should be generally the same, except for the fact that one is read and one is sung. For example, St. Paul writes, “As I see it, God has put us apostles at the end of the line, like men doomed to die in the arena” (1 Cor 4:9-16). Just as in reading this aloud, the chanted reading should slightly pause at the two commas. Also, in reading this passage aloud, which words would you normally stress? If emphasizing a word or putting stress on it does not make sense in normal speech, or for the meaning of the passage, or if it sounds unnatural to emphasize a word in normal speech, the same would be true when chanting it.

Examples of this would be to stress “As” in the passage below or the first syllable in “Reading” when announcing the epistle.

“**AAS** I see it, God has put us apostles at the end of the line, like men doomed to die in the arena” (1 Cor 4:9-16). A **REE**ading from the epistle of St. Paul...

Stressing a word or syllable is done a few different ways. The reader can pause (elongate the note), increase volume, “punctuate” the note, or move up to a higher note. The general rule is to chant the reading as one would normally speak. It is important, then, to practice a reading before chanting it during the liturgy. Chanting the epistle well is to make the reading clear and understandable. Self-evaluation is helpful. The liturgy is streamed and recorded. Listen to yourself, and ask for feedback from others.

¹ If you wish to mark up the reading for practice, here is one method:

> means to speed up (the more of these, the faster)

< means to slow down (the more of these, the slower)

Underline means to individually accent each word

| means to pause (the more of these, the longer the pause)

An arrow (→) means to continue across sentences without any break

Italics means to stress the word(s)

These can be combined where they do not contradict. For example, “<” plus “underline” plus “*italics*” plus “|||” would mean to slow down, individually accent each word, stress the word in *italics*, make a long pause at the end.

For example: < God *loves* you |||

Manner of Reading

The manner in which the reader reads the epistle is also important for the same reasons that the reader is to prepare spiritually and practically to read the epistle. The reader is part of the liturgy just as those who serve on the altar. Each person who serves has a different role, which includes the priest, deacon, reader, cantor, server and trojca bearer. There is a particular manner or way in which each of these roles are exercised. There will be exceptions, for when things do not go as planned; however, the goal should always be to follow what is appropriate for a given role. The following describes the appropriate comportment for the reader.

Appropriate Reader Comportment

- ❖ Always maintain reverence and grace when serving as reader.
- ❖ Do not use an electronic notebook or cell phone for readings or verses.
- ❖ If you use a pew book for the prokeimenon/Gospel verses, avoid doing so in such a way that you must juggle between the two books. Instead of using the pew book, it is recommended to write out or print the prokeimenon and Gospel verses on a half sheet of paper. Place the sheet in the epistle book and chant it from there.
- ❖ The epistle book is kept on a reader stand next to the first pew in the front, on the left side. You may use this stand during the chanting of the reading. If you choose to use the reader stand, then, move it to under the dome for reading, and then, move it back to its original place when done. Leave the epistle book on the stand, but remove everything else (e.g., pew book, sheets).
- ❖ Proceed ahead of time to the place for reading and be prepared to start.
- ❖ In announcing the reading, use the wording on the sheet that is located in the epistle book. If you do not have this memorized, and need the sheet for this, have it ready before it is time to begin the reading. As with using the pew book for verses, the reader should not be juggling anything or looking for something when coming to read.
- ❖ After announcing the reading, wait to begin until after everyone has been seated and are ready to listen.
- ❖ After the reading, the priest blesses the reader with the sign of the cross, saying, "Peace be to you reader". The reader makes the sign of the cross and kisses the epistle book.
- ❖ After chanting the Gospel verses, leave the epistle book on the reader stand and return the reader stand to its normal place. Take everything else with you (e.g., pew book, verses sheet, etc.).
- ❖ The appropriate dress for the reader is business casual.

Final Comments

The purpose of all this is formation in the spirituality and ability of the reader, and the fulfillment of this role in a way that is appropriate for the liturgical reading of the Word of God.