

Diocese of San Bernardino – Guidelines for Parish Readers

Office of Worship April 27, 2018

1201 E. Highland Avenue ♦ San Bernardino, CA 92404

(909) 475-5335 ♦ Fax (909) 474-4915 ♦ worship@sbdioocese.org ♦ Website: sbworship.com



Documentation

“The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL) §14

“Lay people can receive a temporary assignment to the role of lector in liturgical actions. Likewise, all lay people can exercise the roles of commentator, cantor or other such, in accordance with the law.” (Code of Canon Law [CIC] Can. 230 §2)

“Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism and distribute Holy Communion, in accordance with the provisions of the law.” (Can. 230 §3) Following the liturgical renewal promoted by the Council, the lay faithful themselves have acquired a more lively awareness of the tasks that they fulfill in the liturgical assembly and its preparation, and have become more widely disposed to fulfill them: the liturgical celebration, in fact, is a sacred action not simply of the clergy, but of the entire assembly. It is, therefore, natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful. In this way there is a natural transition from an effective involvement of the lay faithful in the liturgical action to that of announcing the word of God and pastoral care.” (Christifideles Laici, 23 §5)

“Servers, readers, commentators and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought to discharge their office, therefore, with the sincere devotion and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God’s people. Consequently, they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, in the measure proper to each one, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, §29)

“In the absence of an instituted lector, other lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, people who are 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.” (General Instruction to the Roman Missal [GIRM], §101)

“The Church has always required proper preparation of those who exercise a ministry. In the same way, CIC, canon 231, states that ‘lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly.’ Lay ecclesial ministers, just like the ordained, need and deserve formation of high standards, effective methods, and comprehensive goals. ‘To set high standards,’ said Pope John Paul II, ‘means both to provide a thorough basic training and to keep it constantly updated. This is a fundamental duty, in order to ensure qualified personnel for the Church’s mission.’ . . . Effective formation methods address the whole person: emotions, imagination, will, heart, and mind. It is the whole person who ministers, so the whole person is the proper subject of formation. ([p.33] Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord - Part B. Formation for Lay Ecclesial Ministry [A USCCB publication])

“The four areas of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—that provide a framework for the formation of deacons and priests provide a framework for lay ecclesial ministers as well.” ([p.34] Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord - Part B. Formation for Lay Ecclesial Ministry [A USCCB publication])

I. The Ministry of the Reader

1. The term “Reader” is to distinguish a person appointed by a pastor, parochial administrator or pastoral coordinator to proclaim the Word of God from a “Lector” who has been instituted to this office. This office is one of the spiritual steps on the path to ordination and is conferred on permanent deacons as well on some male lay ministers. The Diocese of San Bernardino does not have instituted lectors except as part of the preparation for the diaconate.
2. Readers are to strive to live Gospel values and to be Christ’s presence in all areas of their lives.
3. Those invited to this ministry agree to be trained and are willing to continue their formation and education through parish and diocesan workshops and retreats.¹
4. Readers are committed to faithful and reliable presence at those liturgies to which they have been assigned.

II. The Relationship of the Parish and the Reader

1. Following their training, Readers should be commissioned to service in their parish.²
2. In addition to the training and formation offered by the Diocese, ministers can expect to receive instruction and continuing spiritual and liturgical formation from their pastors or other parish or institutional leadership, especially regarding the specific ways in which this ministry is practiced in the individual parish or institution. Clear parish/institution guidelines and expectations are essential.
3. Parishes may determine the dress for Readers; appropriate and dignified clothing expressive of an attitude of service and reverence.³
4. Readers can be expected to serve for an indefinite period of time or for a specific period, as determined by the parish/institution.
5. Parishes will provide schedules with ministry assignments and clear expectations about what to do when a minister cannot be present for a scheduled assignment.

III. The Role of the Reader

1. The Reader is to proclaim the Word of God to the assembly.
 - a. The Reader is the critical component that brings the Word of God to life.
 - b. It is the Reader who breathes the breath of life into words on a page.
2. The First and Second Readings are to be proclaimed by the Reader.⁴
3. In the absence of a Deacon, the Reader may also be asked to read the Prayers of the Faithful.
4. The Reader is part of the Entrance Procession. In the absence of a Deacon, the Reader is to carry the Book of Gospels (preferred). However, if there is no Book of Gospels, the Lectionary is not carried in the procession.

¹ Canon 231 §1 “Lay people who are pledged to the special service of the church, whether permanently or for a time, have a duty to acquire the appropriate formation which their role demands, so that they may conscientiously, earnestly and diligently fulfill this role.

² All new readers should be commissioned, preferably during a Sunday Mass or a Liturgy of the Word where at least some members of the community are present. See *Book of Blessings for Order for the Blessing of Readers*.

³ Wearing “Sunday best” clothing is most appropriate. A distinctive cross or other appropriate symbol may be worn, to clearly identify the Reader. The use of white or colored stoles or scapular-like collars is strongly discouraged as they have no liturgical meaning or tradition for this ministry. Generally, albs are not recommended although they may be appropriate in some pastoral situations.

⁴ “The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to read by a reader, but the Gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another priest.” *GIRM* §59; “the reader has a proper function in the liturgy and should exercise this function even if ministers of higher rank are present.” *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* §51

The Reader may or may not be part of the recessional procession according to local practice. Neither the Book of Gospels nor Lectionary are carried out ritually at the end of Mass.

5. The Reader is first and foremost a member of the Assembly. As a minister he/she sets an example and is committed to participating fully, actively and consciously in the entire liturgy.

6. Ministry does not end at the door of the church, but continues into the secular realm as we share in the prophetic ministry of Christ.⁵

IV. The Formation of the Reader

1. The formation of the Reader includes, but goes beyond, the technical aspects of the ministry. “Their preparation must above all be spiritual, but what may be called a technical preparation is also needed. The spiritual preparation presupposes at least a biblical and liturgical formation.”⁶

2. A Biblical formation is necessary to “give Readers the ability to understand the readings in their proper context and to perceive by light of faith the central point of the readings.”⁷ The Reader must first of all understand the reading itself and its relationship to the other readings and the Gospel.

a. Scripture study enables the reader to see the larger picture rather than only a specific reading. Because opening the Scriptures up to the People of God “is essential to promote that warm and living love for Scripture”⁸ that the Fathers of Vatican II sought to achieve, it is essential that those who proclaim those scriptures work toward a fuller understanding of them.

b. There are various ways to achieve a more thorough understanding of Scripture. Many parishes have Bible Study Groups or those who meet to read and discuss the Sunday readings. Through the Diocese there is also a more complete Bible Study course. Contact the Diocese for more information.

c. The use of a good Study Bible is encouraged. It has a reader’s guide in the beginning that goes into detail regarding each book of the Bible. The Lector Workbook⁹ is another resource for parishes to use. There are also various Bible Commentaries available.

3. “The liturgical formation ought to equip the readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and of the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist.”¹⁰ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first liturgical document from Vatican II, makes clear the importance of liturgy. “Still, the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows.”¹¹

a. Because the liturgy is comprised of many different rites and rituals, it is important for Readers to understand these rites and rituals and the overall flow of the liturgy. It is two millennia old and has grown with

⁵ Through their participation in the *prophetic mission* of Christ, "who proclaimed the kingdom of his Father by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word", the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. United to Christ, the "great prophet" (*Lk* 7:16), and in the Spirit made "witnesses" of the Risen Christ, the lay faithful are made sharers in the appreciation of the Church's supernatural faith, that "cannot err in matters of belief" and sharers as well in the grace of the word (cf. *Acts* 2:17-18; *Rev* 19:10). They are also called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out every day in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even "through the framework of their secular life". *Christifideles Laici* #14

⁶ *Lectionary for Mass* #55

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,(CSL)* #24

⁹ “*Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers and Proclaimers of the Word*” *Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL*

¹⁰ *Lectionary for Mass* #55

¹¹ *CSL* #10

every century. Understanding the relationship between past and present celebrations helps to understand “why we do what we do”.

b. The readings for the day are predetermined. The homily, music, choice of optional rites and environment ought to work together in such a way that they enhance the Word and anticipate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, presenting a logical and continuous flow allowing the assembly to pray and worship as one body.

c. The nature of Liturgy is ritual. Repetition, knowing what to expect, is part of what makes it ritual. This repetition is what allows the assembly to act as one body, The Body of Christ, from beginning to end. Chaos in any part of the ritual action disrupts this important part of the Liturgy.

4. “The technical preparation should make the readers more skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment”¹² There is a lot more in that short sentence than it would seem. The technical preparation encompasses not only preparation, vocal technique and technical issues, but the art of proclamation. The reader does more than just read. He/She must be able to assist the assembly to become involved in the readings by understanding that their role is not to read but to proclaim.

a. Preparation is the process necessary for proclaiming the Word of God to the Sunday Assembly. It involves reading the passage prayerfully and then reading for context and content, determining the literary type of the passage, i.e. story, history, letter, prophetic, etc. A story isn’t the same as a letter, for example. Each has its own feel and style. Preparation also involves going to the Scriptures and noting what comes before and after this particular passage. It may be necessary to read a whole chapter, or on occasion, the whole Book. Reading it aloud to see where a word should be stressed is also important. Determining where the appropriate pauses falls, and adjusting the subtle vocal punctuation, make a passage come to life for the assembly. It is important to read the passage aloud several times, as often as needed. Check for the correct pronunciation of every word. Do not guess – use a pronunciation guide and ask the Pastor or other knowledgeable person.

b. Vocal technique is many things. First it is learning to breathe so as to support the voice, achieve a full voice rather than a timid one, and not “run out of air” before finishing a sentence. Breathe, support the voice with that breath and use it to project the voice in a controlled manner.

This breath support allows the use of “vocal punctuation” or pacing a reading. Too many pauses and the reading is choppy, too few and everything runs together. Pace is important. Too fast and people may miss portions, but too slow and they lose interest.

Next is learning to be “transparent”, to get out of the way of the reading. Become a window – the attention is not on the reader but on the reading. This means standing still at the ambo, not fidgeting. Place one hand on the Lectionary to follow the passage with a finger (it avoids losing the place when you look up) and the other where it will be comfortable through the whole reading. Another part of being transparent involves dress. For women flashy or jangling jewelry, sequined blouses, etc. draw attention to the reader. This is a time for “Sunday best” rather than Friday night casual. The Assembly should leave remembering the reading not the reader.

In all of this practice is always the key. It takes time and repetition to be prepared to proclaim the Word. Failure to prepare is the most serious omission a Reader can make. The assembly is counting on you to proclaim the Word of God.

c. The most important technical issues a reader must deal with is the art of using a microphone. Every parish has its own sound system and microphones. Basically there are two types – the omni-directional and mono-directional. The omni-directional mike will pick up the voice even if the reader is not speaking directly into it. The mono-directional (shaped like an ice cream cone) requires the reader to speak directly into it. Both take practice to use most effectively.

¹² *Ibid note #1 above*

d. The art of proclamation is what you do after all the practice. It involves presence at the ambo and eye contact. Rather than looking at the Lectionary for the whole reading, the effective Reader makes eye contact with the assembly. The Reader is telling the assembly a story or reading a letter, so engage them. When reaching the ambo, check to be sure the book is set to the correct reading, then look up and greet your assembly with a smile. Be sure the assembly is seated and ready to hear the Word. Take a breath and, while looking at the assembly, announce the reading – you should know it by heart. Pause, look down and proclaim the reading. At various places look at the assembly. It takes practice but staying in contact with assembly assists them to take an active part in the readings. At the end of the reading, pause before beginning the ending dialogue. Above all, don't rush.

Note: This does not mean dramatization or performance. It is using all the vocal skills at our disposal to bring Scripture to life, to make it understandable.

e. The ministry of Reader is one that requires the expenditure of time, several hours rather than a few minutes. It is not for everyone and not everyone has the necessary time to devote to fulfilling the ministry well. Periodically people may need time off to stay fresh in the ministry.

Proclaiming God's Word is an art, but it is not artiness. It involves prayerful preparation and the use of those vocal skills and techniques needed to make the Word of God come alive for the Assembly.

V. Safe Environment Training

a. All minor readers (under the age of 18) must participate in safe environment training offered by the Office of Catechetical Ministry. All adults working with minor readers (age 18 and older) and coordinators must participate in Virtus Training offered by the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

b. All adults are responsible for the general supervision of minor readers. At least two adults who are background-checked and safe environment-trained (altar server coordinators, readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, masters of ceremonies, sacristans, music ministers, deacons, priests, etc.) must be present when readers who are minors are present and they must understand that they are fulfilling this supervisory responsibility.