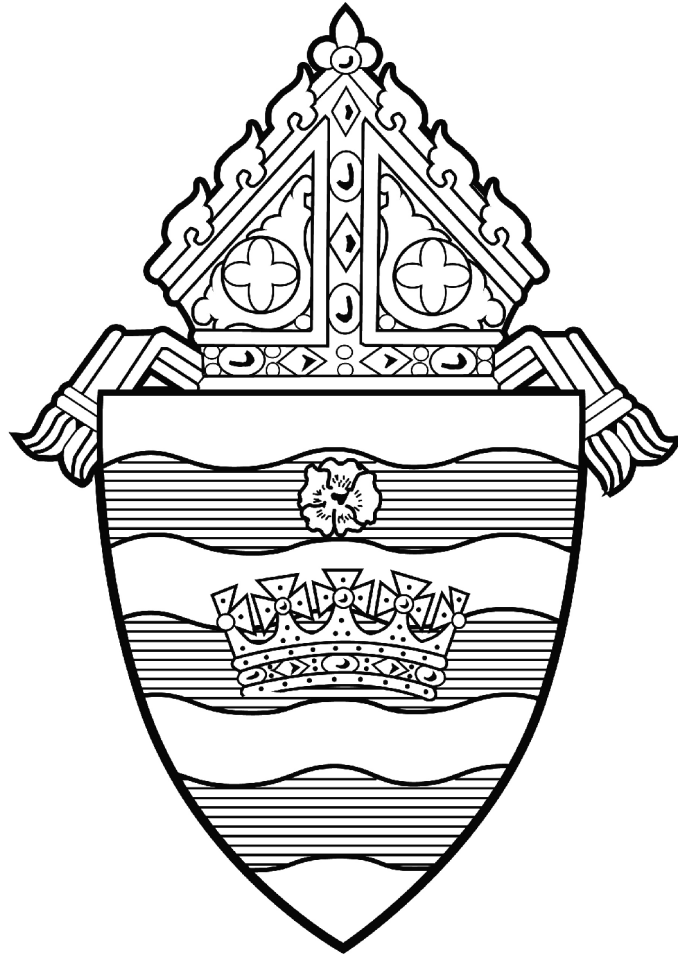


**Archdiocesan Manual  
for Parish Trainers of  
Lectors**



Office of Divine Worship  
Archdiocese of Atlanta

November 2009



Thursday 27 March, 2008

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

St. John tells us that “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” In speaking of the second person of the Most Holy Trinity as the Word of God, St. John teaches us that God is a God who reveals Himself, who speaks to us, who shares His very being with us. The sacred scriptures are a privileged place of that divine self-revelation, especially as they are proclaimed within the liturgical assembly. With this great gift in mind, I am pleased to present to you our *Archdiocesan Manual for Parish Trainers of Lectors*. It is my hope that this manual may be of assistance to you as you develop and enrich the lector programs in your parishes, so that the Word of God, who took flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may also take flesh in the minds and hearts of all who hear that Word proclaimed throughout the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Wishing you all of God's abundant blessings in your work of proclaiming the Word of God, I remain,

Fraternally in Christ,

‡Wilton D. Gregory,  
Archbishop of Atlanta

WDG/trb

# Archdiocesan Manual for Parish Trainers of Lectors

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## **The Role of the Lector in the Church**

From the very beginning, Christians have gathered together to hear the word of God, and, from the very beginning, there have been individuals entrusted with the task of reading the word. That service to the church has developed over the course of time, but it is good to know something about the history of the lector in order to better understand the role of the lector in the Church today.

### ***Minor Orders***

From the earliest times, the church had a number of minor orders which were responsible for performing various ministerial functions in the liturgy. These orders (porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte) were ordained to carry out a specific ministerial function in the mass. Over the course of time, these minor orders came to be used only as stages of preparation of candidates for the priesthood, and so most parishes would not have ordained lectors. As clerics in minor orders were rarely found in parishes, their functions came to be taken over by laity or other ordained ministers. In the case of the lector, the epistle came to be read habitually by the subdeacon, or, more frequently, by the priest, himself. In 1972, as a part of the post-conciliar liturgical renewal, Pope Paul VI suppressed the minor orders, and replaced them with two ministries: Lector and Acolyte. These ministries were no longer ordained, but were simply instituted, with the local bishop selecting men of particular talent, and appointing them permanently for the role.

### ***The Instituted Lector***

Pope Paul VI stated in *Ministeria Quaedam* that “Ministries may be assigned to lay Christians; hence they are no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the sacrament of orders.” Indeed, it seems that he anticipated that most parishes would have instituted lectors and acolytes who would serve at liturgical functions. However, due to the commitment represented by the instituted ministries, together with the fact that they may only be received by men, in most dioceses only candidates for Holy Orders receive these ministries. Hence, instituted lectors are usually either seminarians or candidates for the permanent diaconate.

The reader is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly, he is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, except for the gospel in the Mass and other sacred celebrations; he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist; he is to present the intentions for the general intercessions in the absence of a deacon or cantor; he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful; he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. He may also, insofar as may be necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations. That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions, he is to meditate

assiduously on sacred Scripture.

Aware of the office he has undertaken, the reader is to make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord. (Ministeria Quaedam, 5)

While this description of the ministry of instituted lectors gives us some insight into the role of all lectors, it also give us the significant note that there may be “other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scripture in liturgical celebrations.” These “other faithful” are the individuals that we commonly refer to as lectors in our parishes.

## ***Non-Instituted Lectors***

Not all lectors are formally instituted. In fact, many parishes will not have a single instituted lector, and very few will have an adequate number to proclaim the readings. In response to this pastoral reality, the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM)* provides the following:

In the absence of an instituted lector, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture. They should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so that the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture. (GIRM, 101)

Thus we see that when instituted lectors are not present, it is appropriate for other lay people to read the readings at mass. Thus, most parishes have programs for non-instituted lectors, who are scheduled to read at the various masses throughout the week. The rest of this manual will treat the training and preparation of these non-instituted lectors.

## **Qualifications to serve as a Lector**

The two requirements for lectors listed in the *General Instruction* are that they be “truly suited to perform this function,” and that they “should receive careful preparation.” The *General Introduction to the Lectionary* provides a more detailed description of the qualifications for non-instituted lectors:

The liturgical assembly truly requires readers, even those not instituted. Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are qualified laypersons who have been trained to carry out this ministry. Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available. (General Introduction to the Lectionary, 52)

In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, in order for an individual to be regarded as “truly suited,” it is required that they be a fully initiated Catholic living in communion with the Church. Thus, a lector should have received both First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and should not be living in an invalid marriage or in any other state of grave sin. Being “truly suited” also implies the necessary native talents to serve as a lector. Thus, individuals who are not able to proclaim the readings in a clear manner that expresses the dignity of scripture may not be suited for this service in the church. Parishes may develop their own criteria for service as a lector. They might want to consider as a starting point the norms given by the

USCCB for instituted lectors:

A layman who is to be installed in the ministries of lector or acolyte on a stable basis must have completed his twenty-first (21) year of age. The candidate must also possess the skills necessary for an effective proclamation of the Word or service at the altar, be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church, be free of any canonical penalty, and live a life which befits the ministry to be undertaken. (Complementary norm to Canon 230§1, November 17, 1999)

Lectors are to receive careful preparation. This preparation includes training programs offered by the parish, and their own personal preparation. This preparation will be further described below.

### ***Non-Catholic Lectors***

In certain circumstances, there is a desire to have a non-Catholic serve as a lector. These circumstances are governed by the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*. The directory states:

The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader. (Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, 133)

Therefore, while non-Catholics are not prohibited from serving as lectors on exceptional occasions, such as a wedding with parties of mixed religion, or an ecumenical gathering, it is necessary to obtain the permission of the Archbishop before a non-Catholic serves as a lector.

### ***Children as Lectors***

While the ability of the lector to proclaim the readings is of primary importance, this does not exclude the possibility of children serving as lectors in masses for children. In those masses (where the congregation consists entirely or primarily of “children who have not yet entered the period of preadolescence,” the special norms for masses with children permit children to act as lectors. Specifically, they state:

[Children] should have special parts in the celebration: for example ... proclaiming the readings (Directory for Masses With Children, 22)

In these masses, it would also be appropriate to use the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. In general, however, lectors should have at least received the sacrament of confirmation, and be chosen according to their competence at proclaiming the Word of God.

## **Preparation for Serving as a Lector**

As the lector serves an important liturgical role in proclaiming the Word of God, it is necessary that they not only be suited for the task, but that they also prepare themselves carefully for their service to God and the Church. This preparation consists in two elements: remote preparation and proximate preparation.

### ***Remote Preparation***

One of the tasks of the lector, in preparation for his work in proclaiming the Word of God, is to develop a knowledge and familiarity with scripture and its proclamation that will enable him to proclaim the word in such a way that the Christian assembly may benefit deeply from it. This preparation consists, first of all, in the lector nourishing his own prayer life with the study of the Sacred Scriptures, especially through the practice of regular scriptural reading. Secondly, this preparation consists in learning the vocal techniques of proclamation, so that he may make use of the resources of the human voice in such a way that the intonation, pitch, pacing, and timbre of his speech may most effectively convey the content of the sacred writings. This preparation can take the form of workshops or programs conducted by the parish to assist lectors in developing their proclamation skills.

### ***Proximate Preparation***

Before reading at mass, the lector will want to ensure that he has a true familiarity with the scriptural texts that he is to proclaim. This preparation will need to involve the advance study of the scriptural texts to be proclaimed, possibly in their context within the whole of scripture, and within the context of the liturgical year and the other readings for that day. This proximate preparation may also consist of practice in reading the scriptural texts, which should take care to avoid a sense of the dramatic, while presenting the readings in all of their depth and richness.

### ***Dress***

The lector's task is to help the gathered assembly to encounter God in His Word. Thus, everything that the lector does during mass should aid the faithful to focus on the scripture, and not on himself. This means that the lector's dress should not distract from the reading of the Word of God, but should rather express the dignity of the Word, and the importance that the lector assigns to his service. While standards for dress vary from community to community and from time to time, the lector's dress should not be in any way revealing or distracting, and should correspond to the importance of the Word of God. Pastors may adopt concrete requirements for lectors' dress, in order to assure that this service is carried out with fitting modesty and decorum.

## **Commissioning of Lectors**

Unlike Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, non-instituted lectors do not need a special commissioning to serve at mass. However, most parishes will want to implement a training program that must be completed before an individual serves as a lector at mass. If it seems appropriate in the pastor's discretion, he may want to include a formal commissioning at the conclusion of this training.

This would be appropriately done using the Order for the Blessing of Readers, found in Chapter 61 of the *Book of Blessings*. This blessing may be given either within mass, or within a separate celebration of the Word of God.

## **The Role of the Lector at Mass**

The role of the lector at mass is described in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, numbers 194-198. However, this description is intended to present the role of an instituted lector. Regarding non-instituted lectors, the GIRM simply states that “in the absence of an instituted lector, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture.” (GIRM 101) However, the norms given for instituted lectors can also serve as useful guides for the role of non-instituted lectors in the mass.

### **Introductory Rites**

While the norms in numbers 194 and 195 of the *General Instruction* are directed towards instituted lectors, it would seem that non-instituted lectors may also take part in the procession at the beginning of mass, and may also carry the Book of the Gospels (though not the lectionary) in the absence of a deacon.

In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing approved attire, may carry the Book of the Gospels, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest but otherwise along with the other ministers.

Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. If he is carrying the Book of the Gospels, he approaches the altar and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then the lector takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers. (GIRM 194,195)

If, however, the blessed sacrament is in the sanctuary, the lector genuflects together with the celebrant upon approaching the altar. A lector carrying the book of the Gospels would bow his head. (GIRM 274)

### **The Liturgy of the Word**

The lector carries out his primary function during the Liturgy of the Word. Here he proclaims God's Word to His people so that, strengthened by the words of Holy Scripture, they might come to a deeper love of God and a fuller Christian life.

#### ***Approaching the Ambo***

As number 260 of the GIRM notes, the readings should read from the ambo or a lectern. If the lector is not seated in the sanctuary, then he makes a profound bow to the altar before he enters it. If the lector is already in the sanctuary, he proceeds directly to the ambo. (cf. GIRM 274)



## ***The Readings***

In reading the scriptures, the lector should have the goal of communicating God's Word with His people. This means that his comportment should aid all present to focus on the Word of God and to appreciate its full depth of meaning. Thus, the lector's physical posture should express the dignity of the Word, and should help the faithful to focus on the Word itself, rather than on the lector's movements or gestures. Of principle importance is the way in which the lector makes use of his voice in the proclamation of the Word. The *General Introduction to the Lectionary* gives a few simple criteria:

A speaking style on the part of the readers that is audible, clear, and intelligent is the first means of transmitting the word of God properly to the assembly.

(General Introduction to the Lectionary, 14)

The best use of inflection, pause, projection, phrasing, emotion, articulation, parcing and pace require careful preparation and training. In applying these techniques of proclamation, however, the lector should remember his basic task of presenting the Word of God. Thus, a style of reading that would present simply dull recitation of words should be avoided, as should a style that would turn the reading of scripture into a dramatic act.

## ***Concluding Rites***

In those cases where lectors are seated in the sanctuary, they will also process out of the church together with the celebrant. In this case, the lectors precede the celebrant to an appropriate location at the foot of the altar, where they bow together with the celebrant, and process out of the church before him at the end of mass. (cf. GIRM 179)

## **Other Functions of the Lector at Mass**

The *General Instruction* calls for the lector to assume the functions of other ministers when they are not present at a particular mass. There are three particular cases that call for this auxiliary function, and they each impose different tasks and requirements on the lector.

### ***The Psalm***

While number 61 of the GIRM indicates that “it is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung,” number 196 points out that: “If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the responsorial Psalm after the first reading.” In this case, the lector will want to allow a short pause after the first reading, followed by the reading of the psalm. The *General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* states in number 22 that, “when not sung, the psalm after the reading is to be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God.” As the psalm serves to “[foster] meditation on the word of God,” (GIRM 61) the lector's recitation should take this feature into account, allowing the psalm to assist the congregation in achieving a greater appropriation of what they have heard in the first reading. On Sundays, the psalm is followed by the second reading, which is proclaimed in a manner similar to the first.

## ***The Prayers of the Faithful***

Another auxiliary function supplied by the lector is the reading of the prayers of the faithful in those cases where no deacon is present.

When no deacon is present, the lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce from the ambo the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. (GIRM, 197)

In this case, the lector should take into consideration the difference between the intentions and the readings from scripture. As the intercessions are prayer texts, they should be prayed by the lector, and not simply read. The lector's way of praying should also assist and invite the rest of the assembly to pray.

## ***The Entrance and Communion Antiphons***

The *General Instruction* provides one additional auxiliary function for the lector:

If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons in the Missal are not recited by the faithful, the lector may read them at the appropriate time. (GIRM, 198)

In masses where a choir or cantor is not available to sing the entrance and communion antiphons, they may be recited by the lector. This sort of reading poses unique challenges, as the antiphons are descended from musical texts, but in this case, they are being read, not sung, by the lector. Thus, the reading of the antiphons must accomplish the function of inviting the community to prayer at these times, while providing a few words to stimulate meditation. At the same time, however, the antiphon should not be distracting or an interruption from the flow of the mass, but simply a few words that deepen the appreciation of the liturgical actions taking place during the entrance or communion processions.

## ***The Commentator***

Another function sometimes exercised by lectors is the role of the commentator. While this is a distinct liturgical role that may or may not be employed by an individual parish, it is important that commentators receive proper training.

The commentator, who provides the faithful, when appropriate, with brief explanations and commentaries with the purpose of introducing them to the celebration and preparing them to understand it better. The commentator's remarks must be meticulously prepared and clear though brief. In performing this function the commentator stands in an appropriate place facing the faithful, but not at the ambo. (GIRM, 105b)

The challenge of the commentator's role is to provide necessary information without distracting the faithful or obscuring the sacred context of the mass. Thus it is important that the commentator's role be exercised as discreetly as possible.

## ***Singing the Readings***

While the readings at mass are most commonly recited, they may also be sung, especially on particularly solemn occasions. These occasions call for a lector who is skilled in the art of singing. The style of singing is particular to the unique role of the readings in the liturgy:

The readings, taken from the approved editions, may be sung in a way suited to different languages. This singing, however, must serve to stress the words, not obscure them. On occasions when the readings are in Latin, they are to be sung to the melody given in the *Ordo cantus Missae*. (General Introduction to the Lectionary, 14)

In those cases where a greater degree of solemnity is desired, but where it seems inadvisable to sing the entire reading, the conclusion to the readings may be sung, while the rest is recited:

At the conclusion of the other readings, ... *the word of the Lord* may be sung, even by someone other than the reader; all respond with the acclamation. In this way the gathered assembly pays reverence to the word of God it has listened to in faith and gratitude. (General Introduction to the Lectionary, 18)

## **Lectors and other Ministries**

The celebration of the mass calls for the use of many different ministries. In general, it is preferable that a different person perform each distinct liturgical function so that one individual does not perform multiple roles in the same mass. If, however, a shortage of properly trained individuals makes this impossible, it is permissible to have one individual perform multiple roles. (cf. GIRM, 110) In particular, it is worthwhile to note that the role of the lector is distinct from that of the commentator and the psalmist, and that these are ideally exercised by different individuals.

## **Special Circumstances**

Questions will occasionally arise regarding the best way to approach certain unusual circumstances that may appear in the life of a parish. While it is impossible to anticipate every eventuality, a few cases will be treated here. Other unusual cases can be referred to the Archdiocesan Office of Divine Worship.

### ***Dividing Readings among Various Lectors***

The suggestion will occasionally be made that two lectors ought to divide a single reading between themselves. However, closer reflections will indicate that this approach does not properly respect the unity of the scriptural text, and for that reason is not permitted:

But it is not at all appropriate that several persons divide a single element of the celebration among themselves, e.g., that the same reading be proclaimed by two lectors, one after the other, except as far as the Passion of the Lord is concerned. (GIRM, 109)

In the case of the passion narratives on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, lectors may be assigned to take the role of the narrator and the voice, while the part of Christ is read by the priest celebrant.

### ***When no Trained Lector is Available***

It will occasionally happen that no trained lector is available at a mass. In these cases, unless another individual is available with the requisite skills, the readings are read by the priest celebrant:

Further, if another suitable lector is also not present, then the priest celebrant should also proclaim the other readings. (GIRM, 59)

This role could also be fulfilled by the deacon.

## **Training Lectors**

In the course of a lector training program, it is necessary to introduce the lectors to a number of different skills important for their service. They need to learn how to approach the ambo, the technique of speaking into a microphone if one is used, the importance of the Word of God, techniques for preparation, and especially the techniques of proper proclamation. While the Archdiocese does not have any mandatory requirements for the training of lectors, the “Proclaim the Word!” lector training program is made available by the Archdiocese of Atlanta in order to better prepare lectors for their service to the Church. A successful lector training program will not only teach lectors the mechanics of their work, but will also help to impart the necessary proclamation skills, while at the same time building in the lector a deeper appreciation for the Word of God and their own Catholic faith. A strong lector program can also form the parish lectors into a community where each member supports the other in faith.

## **For More Information**

For more information, the Office of Divine Worship of the Archdiocese of Atlanta may be contacted at the following address:

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More information on the *Lectors Proclaim!* program can be found on the internet at:

[www.lectorsproclaim.org](http://www.lectorsproclaim.org)