



Norms for Readers

I. Introduction

In the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and of the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed [...] When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel³². In the hearing of God's Word the Church is built up and grows, and in the signs of the liturgical celebration God's wonderful, past works in the history of salvation are presented anew as mysterious realities. God in turn makes use of the congregation of the faithful that celebrates the Liturgy in order that his word may speed on and be glorified and that his name be exalted among the nations. Whenever, therefore, the Church, gathered by the Holy Spirit for liturgical celebration, announces and proclaims the word of God, she is aware of being a new people in whom the covenant made in the past is perfected and fulfilled.³³

In the celebration of the Mass with the people, the readings are always read from the ambo. The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore, the readings are to be read by a reader, but the Gospel by a Deacon or, in his absence, by another Priest.³⁴

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.³⁵

II. The Ministry of Reader

In this document, the term "reader" refers to any member of the faithful or any person in religious or consecrated life who has been deputed – in the absence of an instituted Lector – to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture at Mass, except the Gospel. At Masses

³² The Holy See, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, (GIRM), 28-29.

³³ The Holy See, *Order of the Readings for Mass*, 7

³⁴ GIRM, 59.

³⁵ GIRM, 101.



without a deacon, a reader also announces the intentions during the Universal Prayer of the Faithful. Readers also may be employed to make parish announcements, typically before Mass or following the Prayer after Communion. “If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons given in the Missal are not recited by the faithful, the reader may read them at the appropriate time.”³⁶

The following norms recognize that there is a distinction between an instituted Lector and a member of the faithful who has been deputed to proclaim the readings of Sacred Scripture at Mass. In the Diocese of Bridgeport, only seminarians and deacons are installed formally as lectors; this occurs during their formation. Thus, in this document, the term “reader” always refers to a person deputed to proclaim the Sacred Scriptures according to the norms prescribed herein.

Readers also may be employed to proclaim the Word of God in the various liturgical rites, which within the context of parochial life include the *Rite of Baptism*, the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, the *Rite of Confirmation*, the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the *Rite of Marriage*, the *Liturgy of the Hours*, and celebrations of the Word of God. Such celebrations may occur on pilgrimage, mission, retreat and special days of penance.

III. Specific Norms Governing the Service of Readers

1. Only those persons who are selected by their respective pastor or chaplain and fulfill the requirements mandated by the law of the Church are eligible to serve as readers in the Diocese of Bridgeport. Those requirements include:
 - a. Being at least 16 years old;
 - b. Being a fully-initiated Catholic Christian who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist;
 - c. Being of good, moral character;
 - d. Not being bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
 - e. Demonstrating a reverence and respect for Sacred Scripture;
 - f. If married, being in a valid marriage according to the prescriptions of the current Code of Canon Law;
 - g. Being in full compliance with the norms of the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

2. Attire worn by a reader at Mass must be neat, clean, modest and bear some degree of formality. Albs are not permitted for use by readers in the Diocese of Bridgeport. Furthermore, athletic attire, as well as all varieties of shorts, t-shirts, jeans and

³⁶ *GIRM*, 198.



sneakers never are permitted as appropriate attire.³⁷ The only exception would be the use of sneakers by those who do so for safety or medical reasons.

3. In the Diocese of Bridgeport, young people under the age of 16 may function as a reader at Masses celebrated with his or her school, during the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and at parish Masses where a large number of children and young families may be present, provided it is permitted by the pastor or episcopal chaplain on a case-by-case basis. Such instances require that the young person must be properly prepared and competent to exercise the ministry.³⁸
4. Readers always must proclaim the scriptural readings within the liturgical rites using the editions of the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America*.
 - a. The scriptural readings prepared in the *Lectionary for Mass* are based on the Neo-Vulgate as the typical edition of Sacred Scripture for liturgical use. The English translation contained in the *Lectionary for Mass* has been approved as the sole translation to be used in the celebration of Mass in all the dioceses of the United States of America. It is therefore unlawful to use any other translation of Sacred Scripture for the celebration of Mass other than that provided in the *Lectionary for Mass*.
 - b. Since liturgical books serve as “signs and symbols of higher realities, care must be taken to ensure that they truly are worthy, dignified and beautiful.”³⁹ For these reasons, “the books of readings used in the celebration are not to be replaced by pastoral aids, for example, by leaflets printed for the preparation of the readings by the faithful or for their personal meditation.”⁴⁰
 - c. It is not permitted to use electronic devices from which to read Sacred Scripture during the celebration of the Liturgy.
5. The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* is principally intended for use at Masses which are primarily for children and not the ordinary Sunday Mass.⁴¹

³⁷ “During the celebration of the Mass with a congregation a second priest, a deacon and an instituted reader must wear the distinctive vestment of their office when they go up to the ambo to read the word of God. Those who carry out the ministry of reader just for the occasion or even regularly but without institution may go to the ambo in ordinary attire, but this should be in keeping with customs of the different regions,” *Order of the Readings for Mass*, 54.

³⁸ “It should not be presumed that children should proclaim the word of God in the celebrations in which this *Lectionary* is used. Some younger children are able to read the Scriptures competently, but the witness of older children, teenagers, or adults, ministering graciously and reverently to young children engaged in liturgical prayer, is more conducive to the children’s growing reverence for the word of God, than the peer ministry of embarrassed or ill-prepared children,” *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*, 23.

³⁹ *Order*, 35.

⁴⁰ *Order*, 37.

⁴¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forward to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*.



- a. “Therefore, priest celebrants should not use this *Lectionary for Masses with Children* exclusively or even preferentially at Sunday Masses, even though large numbers of children are present.”⁴²
- b. The scriptural readings that are contained in *the Lectionary for Masses with Children* “may be used at Sunday masses when a large number of children are present along with adults, or when the children have a separate liturgy of the word, or for masses at which most of the congregation consists of children (e.g., school masses).”⁴³ In making the decision for its use at Mass, pastors and chaplains must realize that the age level of the intended audience of children of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* “are children of elementary grades (preadolescents).”⁴⁴

6. Required Formation

- a. Upon completion of the required diocesan formation, each candidate will receive a diocesan mandate to serve as a reader in the Diocese of Bridgeport. The mandate will be sent to the candidate’s respective pastor or chaplain, indicating that all diocesan formation requirements have been fulfilled.
- b. Mandates are for a three-year term of service, renewable for additional terms, upon the approval of the respective pastor or chaplain. This renewal does not require the approval of the diocesan bishop.
- c. Those candidates who receive a diocesan mandate from the bishop may serve as a reader only in the place designated in the mandate. No reader is permitted to serve in any other location without the express consent of the local pastor or priest celebrant.
- d. If any reader wishes to serve on a regular basis in a parish or institution other than the one for which he or she has received a mandate, the reader must present his or her mandate to the pastor or chaplain of the “secondary” site and receive written approval from the same pastor or chaplain. A copy of the approval letter to serve in the secondary site must also be sent by the reader to The Leadership Institute for proper record keeping
- e. Students of sufficient age who apply for a mandate to serve in their respective Catholic high school also may receive a mandate to serve in their home parish, pending the approval of their pastor, which must accompany their application for formation.
- f. Faculty members of any Catholic high school located in the Diocese may seek a mandate to serve in their respective high school and if interested, may also seek a mandate to serve in their home parish, with the approval of their respective pastor.

7. Sufficient pastoral need allows the temporary deputation of a baptized Catholic to read at a specific ceremony, such as that of the family member who wishes to

⁴² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*, 13.

⁴³ *Introduction*, 12.

⁴⁴ *Introduction*, 15.



participate in a unique way at a funeral Mass or at a wedding. Such permission can be given by the respective pastor or chaplain on a case by case basis. However, permission must not be given in situations where there is merely a desire to accommodate a family's request to have a person who is unqualified serve in this ministry.

8. Permission for a non-Catholic Christian to read during the celebration of Mass must be obtained from the pastor or vicar general.⁴⁵
 - a. A non-Catholic Christian student who attends a Catholic school within the Diocese may read at Eucharistic celebrations celebrated with the school only with the explicit permission of the local pastor or school chaplain.
 - b. A non-baptized person never may serve as a reader at any Eucharistic celebration.⁴⁶

IV. Formation and Installation as a Reader

To exercise the ministry of reader, each candidate must complete the following three steps:

Step One: Required Diocesan Formation

Those selected to be readers by the pastor of their parish or chaplain of their school or institution must be "truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared,"⁴⁷ involving a special level of preparation which enables them to proclaim the Word of God. This becomes even more important in the liturgical context when one realizes that "every liturgical action is by its very nature steeped in Sacred Scripture."⁴⁸

Unlike other forms of oratory, the proclamation of Sacred Scripture requires a unique focus of attention, based on two principal areas of concentration: a particular stress on the varied spiritual elements involved in Sacred Scripture, and a familiarity behind the technical requirements involved in delivery. This means that the type of formation required of those considered to become readers is a spiritual preparation encompassing both biblical and liturgical elements, while exposing them to the technical demands involved in presentation:

⁴⁵ "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," Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 133.

⁴⁶ Pontifical Council on Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, "Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism," 133.

⁴⁷ *GIRM*, 101.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini*," 52.



The spiritual preparation presupposes at least a biblical and liturgical formation. The purpose of the biblical formation is to give readers the ability to understand the readings in context and to perceive by the light of faith the central point of the revealed message. The liturgical formation ought to equip the readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the Liturgy of the Word and the significance of its connection with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. 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.⁴⁹

These essential elements are explored in the mandatory program of spiritual preparation, scriptural instruction and ministerial formation for readers conducted through The Leadership Institute of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Details about this coursework and its accompanying schedules are available from the Institute.

Step Two: Formal Delegation by the Pastor or Episcopal Chaplain

All diocesan mandates are issued directly by the bishop, declaring a candidate to be eligible to serve in his or her designated parish, school or healthcare facility. Each mandate applies solely to the exercise of this ministerial service in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

The final decision to install and allow a candidate to exercise the ministry of reader rests with the local pastor or chaplain.

The mandate to read the Scriptural readings in the Diocese of Bridgeport automatically terminates if the person moves out of the Diocese. The mandate can cease at any time by decision of the bishop in consultation with the pastor of the parish or the chaplain of the school or institution to which the mandate applies. Those who have taken an absence from service for one year or longer may apply again for another diocesan mandate with the approval of their pastor or chaplain.

Step Three: Commission by the Local Dean or Pastor

Appointment as a reader is through approval by one's respective pastor or chaplain, after the Bishop has received an attestation that a candidate has fulfilled all formation requirements and issued a diocesan mandate.

Once the diocesan mandate has been received, all candidates for the ministry of reader ordinarily will be commissioned by the respective dean in which the parish, school or

⁴⁹ *Order*, 55.



institution resides. This ceremony normally will take place once per year per deanery, employing the *Order for the Blessing of Readers* contained within the *Book of Blessings* (found in Chapter 61 of the American edition). Though this ceremony serves to mark the official commencement of one's ministry as a reader, service as a reader may begin in the mandated parish, school or institution as soon as the mandate is received, even before the blessing occurs.

With the permission of the respective dean, the commissioning of a reader who has received a diocesan mandate also may be done by the local pastor or episcopal chaplain.

Students and faculty members who have received a diocesan mandate and wish to serve as readers in their respective high schools may be commissioned during a Mass attended by their school community with the permission of the diocesan bishop. Such permission must be sought in writing.

V. Continuing Formation

Readers should strive to develop their abilities as proclaimers of God's Word beyond their initial training. Preparation, prayer, study, and practice are keys to their development as effective readers, and these practices should be fostered by one's own parish, school or institution. This continuing formation at the parish level should help readers "to discern God's will through a familiarity with the word, read and studied in the Church under the guidance of her legitimate pastors,"⁵⁰ as well as help them "to appreciate and experience the essential meaning and value of the liturgical action [...] in which the word of God is celebrated as a timely and living word."⁵¹ Such formation can only help readers to deepen their love of Sacred Scripture and of its relation to the liturgical rites.

While such opportunities for enrichment will be provided by The Leadership Institute, pastors and chaplains should provide additional opportunities to their readers. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, formation days, retreats, theological lectures and spiritual presentations. Parish priests, deacons and chaplain are encouraged periodically to meet with readers to review their service and to obtain advice regarding any ministerial challenges which they may have encountered.

VI. The Ordinary Exercise of the Ministry of Reader

⁵⁰ *Verbum Domini*, 84

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52.



This description of the ministerial service of the reader is based on the liturgical directives found in *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Typical Edition* and those found in the *Order of the Readings for Mass*. For this reason, they are considered normative for use in all Roman Rite ecclesiastical institutions in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

1. The Introductory Rites

At the discretion of the local pastor, readers may process in with the celebrant at the beginning of Mass and recess out with him at the end of Mass. In the entrance processional, they would follow the instituted acolytes and EMHCs. If there is no deacon, and if the priest celebrant of the Mass so desires it, the reader may process in holding the *Book of the Gospels*, slightly elevated.⁵² Readers do not process with the *Lectionary for Mass*.

“Upon reaching the altar, the reader 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* on it. Then the reader takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers.”⁵³ Since one’s ministerial service as a reader is focused on the word of God, it is proper for readers to be seated close to the ambo during the Liturgy of the Word. This not only helps to focus their attention on the proclamation of the Word, but also minimizes unnecessary movement back and forth between the ambo and the nave.

When placing the *Book of the Gospels* on the altar, the reader is to process into the sanctuary around to the center of the altar facing the people and place it face up directly on the central axis of the altar. The reader then walks back in front of the altar, makes a profound bow to the altar while standing directly in the middle and in front of it, and then proceeds to sit where assigned.

2. The Liturgy of the Word

Following the opening Collect of the Mass, as the assembly seats itself, “the reader goes to the ambo and, from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass, proclaims the First Reading, to which all listen. At the end, the reader pronounces the acclamation ‘*The Word of the Lord*’, and all reply, ‘*Thanks be to God*’. Then a few moments of silence may be observed, if appropriate, so that all meditate on what they have heard.”⁵⁴

⁵² *GIRM*, 120.

⁵³ *GIRM*, 195.

⁵⁴ *GIRM*, 128.



If the instituted lector or reader is so trained, “the reading, taken from the approved editions, may be sung in a way suited to different languages.”⁵⁵ Chanting the Scriptural readings is most appropriate, especially on more solemn occasions. If the readings are so chanted, the singing “must serve to bring out the sense of the words, not obscure them.”⁵⁶

While “as a rule the responsorial psalm should be sung,”⁵⁷ if there is no psalmist or cantor to chant the Psalm, the reader will recite the psalm at the ambo “in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God.”⁵⁸ If the responsorial psalm is chanted, the reader takes his seat near the ambo while the psalmist or cantor chants the psalm.

“If there is to be a Second Reading before the Gospel, the reader proclaims it from the ambo. All listen and at the end reply to the acclamation [...] Then, if appropriate, a few moments of silence may be observed.”⁵⁹ This reading may also be chanted.

If the *Book of the Gospels* is employed at the Mass, the reader will take the Lectionary off the ambo at the end of the Second Reading and place it either on the ambo shelf or on a table located nearby, to make ready for the *Book of the Gospels*. If a deacon is ministering at the Mass, the reader will then leave the ambo and return to the reader’s assigned place in sanctuary, bowing to the altar if necessary. If there is no deacon ministering at the Mass, the reader will remain in place near the ambo while waiting to announce the intentions listed in the Universal Prayer of the Faithful.

During the Acclamation before the reading of the Gospel, the reader stands at his place and either sings or recites the Acclamation, as does the assembly. The reader remains standing during the reading of the Gospel and should be seated during the homily.

When there is no deacon assisting at Mass, and when the reader is engaged to announce the intentions during the Universal Prayer of the Faithful, he/she walks to the ambo when the period of silence after the homily is complete, to arrive at the ambo in time for the priest celebrant to introduce the Universal Prayer. At Masses on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, when the Profession of Faith (also known as the symbol or creed) is recited following the homily, the reader should begin to approach the ambo at the final *credo* (“I believe in the Holy Catholic Church”). “For the prayer of the faithful the celebrant presides at the chair and the intentions are announced at the ambo.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Order*, 14.

⁵⁶ *Order*, 14.

⁵⁷ *Order*, 20.

⁵⁸ *Order*, 22.

⁵⁹ *GIRM*, 130.

⁶⁰ *Order*, 31.



Once the priest celebrant introduces the Universal Prayer, the reader announces first the supplication of the faithful, and then the intentions, individually. After all the intentions of the faithful have been announced by the reader, he/she waits at the ambo until the priest celebrant concludes the Universal Prayer.

Since the ministry of the reader at Mass is complete at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, it is appropriate for readers to exit the sanctuary following the Universal Prayer and take their place in the front row before the Sanctuary entrance, with the EMHCs.

If readers are to make parish announcements, they should be made before the Processional Hymn or after the Prayer after Communion, or at the discretion of the pastor of the parish or the chaplain of the school or institution. Ideally, announcements should be made from a pulpit that is distinct from the ambo, as these are public service announcements which have neither a liturgical purpose nor a scriptural connection.

3. The Concluding Rites

If readers participated in the entrance procession, they would ordinarily recess out during the recessional, taking their place as before following the instituted acolytes and EMHCs. Readers should refrain from leaving before the priest celebrant reverences the Processional Cross at the end of the recessional. The *Book of the Gospels* is never recessed out.

VII. The Reader at Ritual Masses and Liturgical Celebrations

Ritual Masses such as those of Christian Funerals and Matrimony have their own readings; readers must consult the priest celebrant to ascertain which readings will be proclaimed at these Masses. Readers should follow the norms elaborated above in exercising their ministry.