

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN INTITUTED LECTOR AND A LAY PARISH READER? AN INSTITUTED ACOLYTE AND AN ALTAR SERVER?

The lay ministries of Lector and Acolyte were established by Pope Paul VI in 1973 [after the Second Vatican Council (1963-1968)] with the apostolic letter “*Ministeria Quaedam*.” They [were] to be given to **male-only** candidates for Holy Orders. These ministries [was] also open to **male** laity not aspiring to sacred orders, but few dioceses have made use of this possibility.

(cf: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19720815_ministeria-quaedam.html)

In order to confer them, the following conditions [were to] be met for admission to the ministries:

- a) The presentation of a [handwritten] petition that has been freely made out and signed by the aspirant to the Ordinary (the local bishop) who has the right to accept the petition;
- b) A suitable age and special qualities to be determined by the Conference of Bishops;
- c) A firm will to give faithful service to God and the Christian people.

9. The ministries are conferred by the Ordinary through the liturgical rite *De Institutione Lectoris and De Institutione Acolythi* as revised by the Apostolic See.

10. An interval, determined by the Holy See or the Conferences of Bishops, shall be observed between the conferring of the ministries of reader and acolyte, whenever more than one ministry is conferred on the same person.

11. Unless they have already done so, candidates for ordination as deacons and priests are to receive the Ministries of Reader and Acolyte, and are to exercise them for a suitable time, in order to be better disposed for the future service of the Word and of the Altar. Dispensation [or exceptions] from receiving these ministries on the part of candidates is reserved to the Holy See.

12. The conferring of ministries does not bring with it the right to support or remuneration from the Church [i.e., it is not a position commensurate with any monetary gift or salary].

The essential norms of this document were later incorporated into canons 230 and 1035 of the Church’s Code of Canon Law (1983).

“Canon 230 §1. Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte.

Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.”

[... it does not appear that one may become an acolyte without passing through lectorate]

Canon 1035 §1. Before anyone is promoted to the permanent or transitional diaconate, he is required to have received the ministries of lector and acolyte and to have exercised them for a suitable period of time. “§2. There is to be an interval of at least six months between the conferral of the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate.”

With respect to the functions of these ministries the *General Introduction to the Roman Missal* (GIRM), it states:

“Chapter IV ...

C. The Duties of the Acolyte

Introductory Rites

187. [If] only one Acolyte is present, he should perform the more important duties while the rest are to be distributed among several ministers.

188. In the procession to the altar, the Acolyte may carry the Cross, walking between two ministers with lighted candles. Upon reaching the altar, the Acolyte places the cross upright near the altar so that it may serve as the altar cross; otherwise, he puts it in a worthy place [such as a side sacristy, out of sight]. Then he takes his place in the sanctuary.

189. Through the entire celebration, the acolyte is to approach the priest or the deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to them and to assist them in any other way required. Thus it is appropriate, insofar as possible, that the acolyte occupy a place from which he can conveniently carry out his ministry either at the chair or at the altar.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

190. If no deacon is present, after the Prayer of the Faithful is concluded and while the priest remains at the chair, the Acolyte places the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal on the altar. Then, if necessary, the Acolyte assists the priest in receiving the gifts of the people and, if appropriate, brings the bread and wine to the altar and hands them to the priest. If incense is used, the Acolyte presents the thurible to the priest and assists him while he incenses the gifts, the cross, and the altar. Then the Acolyte incenses the priest and the people.

191. A duly instituted Acolyte, as an extraordinary minister, may, if necessary, assist the priest in giving Communion to the people. If Communion is given under both kinds, when no deacon is present, the Acolyte administers the chalice [of the Precious Blood] to the communicants ...

192. Likewise, when the distribution of Communion is completed, a duly instituted Acolyte helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels. When no deacon is present, a duly instituted acolyte [may carry] the sacred vessels to the credence table and there purifies, wipes, and arranges them in the usual way.

“193. After the celebration of Mass, the Acolyte and other ministers [process out of the sanctuary area] ...

D. The Duties of the Lector

Introductory Rites

194. 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 [after the altar servers or Acolyte] in front of the priest ...

195. 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 [does not bow] and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then the lector takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers.

The Liturgy of the Word

196. The Lector reads from the Ambo, the readings that precede the Gospel. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the Responsorial Psalm after the first reading.

197. When no deacon is present, the Lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce ... the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful [also known as the General Intentions].

198. If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons in the Missal are not recited by the faithful, the [Priest or] Lector may read them at the appropriate time.

The best presentation of these ministries comes from the discourse that the bishop delivers before conferring the ministry that is found in the rite itself.

Before conferring the Ministry of Lector, he states:

“Dear sons in Christ: Through his Son, who became man for us, God the Father has revealed the mystery of salvation and brought it to fulfillment. Jesus Christ made all things known to us and then entrusted his Church with the mission of preaching the Gospel to the whole world.

As readers and bearers of God’s word, you will assist in this mission, and so take on a special office within the Christian community; you will be given a responsibility in the service of the faith, which is rooted in the word of God. You will proclaim that word in the liturgical assembly, instruct children and adults in the faith and prepare them to receive the sacraments worthily. You will bring the message of salvation to those who have not yet received it. Thus, with your help men and women will come to know God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ, whom he sent, and so be able to reach eternal life.

In proclaiming God's word to others, accept it yourselves in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Meditate on it constantly, so that each day you will have a deeper love of the Scriptures, and in all you say and do show forth to the world our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Before conferring the Ministry of Acolyte, he states:

"Dear sons in Christ, as people chosen for the Ministry of Acolyte, you will have a special role in the Church's ministry. The summit and source of the Church's life is the eucharist, which builds up the Christian community and makes it grow. It is your responsibility to assist priests and deacons in carrying out their ministry, and as special ministers to give holy communion to the faithful at the liturgy and to the sick. Because you are specially called to this ministry, you should strive to live more fully by the Lord's sacrifice and to be molded more perfectly in its likeness. You should seek to understand the deep spiritual meaning of what you do, so that you may offer yourselves daily to God as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Jesus Christ.

In performing your ministry bear in mind that, as you share the one bread with your brothers and sisters, so you form one body with them. Show a sincere love for Christ's Mystical Body, God's holy people, and especially for the weak and the sick. Be obedient to the commandment which the Lord gave to his apostles at the Last Supper: 'Love one another as I also have loved you.'"

WHAT'S NEWS IN THE CHURCH THIS YEAR!

Last Sunday, on Sunday, January 23, 2022, Pope Francis embraced (for the first time in our, modern day) the formal revision of both Ministries of Lector and Acolyte to now include women (which, much like those before them, after formal training, written petitioning and formal acceptance by the local bishop will be invited to receive the formal and blessed institution into the

Ministries of Lector and/or Acolyte

within the liturgy of a Roman Catholic Holy Mass presided by the Diocese's Bishop).



While this is still relatively “*new news*” for many of our U.S. bishops, pastors and liturgists, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and our own diocese's Bishop Golka have not yet published their own guidelines, policies and procedures in this regard, however. I hope to notify you soon!