



St. Michael Catholic Church

READER (PROCLAIMER) PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

***“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”
– Psalm 119:105***

“When scripture is read in the church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the gospel. The readings must therefore be listened to by all with reverence.” (GIRM, 9). Christ is equally present in both Word and Sacrament within liturgies.

In the absence of an instituted Lector, other lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture. (cf: GIRM 101) Lay readers are called forth from among the community and trained to proclaim the Word of God, in such a way that it touches the hearts of the assembly and challenges them to live that Word. (cf: GIRM 101) The Word proclaimed is not merely a human message but, as St. Paul says, “the Word of God at work within you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). Lay readers are “*extra-ordinary*” ministers of the Word.

It is good to remember that the Church’s prescribed Lectionary provides only the text of God’s Word. It is the skill and responsibility of the Reader who, by proclaiming it properly and well, gives it renewed life in the ears of its listeners. Readers must read well and understand what it is they proclaim. As a Reader, our duty is to proclaim, not simply to read the prescribed or chosen, written Word. To **proclaim** means to declare, to announce, or to celebrate (the Good News).

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Church Instructional Document/References used within:

- GIRM - General Instruction of the Roman Missal
- LM - Lectionary for Mass

The Reader Ministry is a two-fold ministry:

1. Reader (Proclaimer): One who proclaims the Living Word of God to the congregation during the liturgy of the Mass, processes in with the Book of the Gospel (in the absence of a Deacon).
NB: The Word of God for the Mass is proclaimed from the ambo (GIRM 58, 309, LM Intro 16)
2. Commentator: To welcome the congregation and visitors to the Mass. To help foster a spirit of warmth, welcome and hospitality. In the absence of a Deacon, to be the voice of the parishioners in reading the petitions (e.g., Prayer of the Faithful).

What are the prerequisites to become a Reader?

1. One should be fully initiated within the Roman Catholic Church (i.e., have received the Sacraments of Baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation). *
2. If married, you must have been validly married within the Catholic Church.
3. You must be a registered member of the St. Michael parish and completed the parish's Reader training.
4. Comfortable speaking to large groups of people.

* May be waived by the Pastor on a case-by-case basis.

** Must be able to understand what they are reading.

What are the expectations and responsibilities of Readers and commentators?

1. **Prepare, prepare, prepare!** Have you ever been reading a book and had to reread a section when you got to the end because it didn't make sense? If we don't prepare well, it shows and that is what our

parishioners experience when they hear the Word of God at Mass.

- a. Take time to understand what the reading is about.
 - b. Practice difficult words. Ask someone (especially the priest) if a word continues to be challenging.
 - c. A small, word pronunciation book may be in the sacristy to help you with correct pronunciation of difficult words.
 - d. Practice reading to someone who can offer you constructive feedback or suggestions.
2. **Inflection.** The Word of God is not a drama presentation, but it does convey a message, which should be proclaimed appropriate to its intent and context. (cf: LM Intro 55) Such as:
 - a. A joyful reading should sound joyful.
 - b. Questions should be clearly heard like questions and statements as statements.
3. **Speed of speech and pauses.** After you arrive at the ambo, pause briefly before you begin reading. The silence will focus the attention of the church. Read slowly. You may feel that you are reading uncomfortably slow but remember most parishioners are hearing the reading for the first time. This gives them time to process the content. After you finish the reading and before you say, "The Word of the Lord", **pause** for a count of 3-5 seconds and **then** say, "The Word of the Lord."
4. **Eye contact.** As you prepare a particular phrase or sentence, it might strike you as particularly meaningful.

This might be a good time to look directly at the parishioners as you speak. Though eye contact is valuable, nodding up and down too much can result in distraction or a disconnected reading also.

5. **All Glory belongs to God.** Often, when you proclaim, you will receive positive feedback and compliments. Humbly accept this affirmation of your calling to Proclaim; knowing that it is really God's Word that has moved their hearts. It is a blessing to be a part of helping others to hear God's message. With this in mind, here are some guidelines to please keep in mind as you bring God's Word to the assembly:
- a. **Appropriate dress.** What we wear should not detract from people focusing on God's Word. Clothing with words, sports teams, etc., is generally inappropriate. Clothing should also be appropriately modest and in good taste and repair.
 - b. **No gum chewing.** Gum can make it hard to understand the scripture proclaimed, no matter how much practicing you have done.
 - c. **Posture and Attitude.** It is truly an honor to proclaim God's Word. Let your posture and attitude reflect that. Smile and stand with confidence. This puts the parishioners at ease as they listen.
 - d. **Share your experiences.** You are sharing the Living Word of God. Sometimes you might experience new insight or understanding when preparing, proclaiming or listening to the homily. Share with friends and family how God's Word is truly living and you have experienced it. This builds faith. This also encourages others to be of

service and to prepare for and participate in the Mass more fully. This is not your own mini-homily to others, but a sharing in faith about what you experience.

Other Details and Helpful Hints

Check-in at least 15 minutes before the Mass. It is also good to check-in with the Presider, Deacon or sacristan for any instructions or changes in the liturgy affecting the prescribed reading(s).

When proclaiming, it is good to **confirm** that the Lectionary is on the ambo and opened to the appropriate page **before** Mass begins. This also gives you a chance to see how the readings appear and if you will need to turn pages to continue a reading.

The second Reader is asked to always place the lectionary on the ambo shelf (below) after their reading; so, the ambo is clear for the Presider or Deacon to place the Book of the Gospels on it.

Always **reverence the altar** when approaching and departing—even when just checking to make sure everything is in order before the start of the liturgy.

What if the microphone doesn't work? Read LOUDLY.

What if you make a mistake? Move on as smoothly as possible. Reread a sentence only if a word or grammar error changes the meaning of the sentence. Do not apologize and do not make disgusted or distracting sounds at yourself. It is always embarrassing to make mistakes, but we all do—we're human. The goal is to not detract from the Word. Preparation and experience help decrease the number of errors we make.

GUIDELINES:

1. It is very important that you are familiar with the teachings of the Old and New Testaments. This is best done by reading the Bible privately on a regular basis. Learn to know the form of the text. Is it a story, a letter, or poetry? In performing your duties as a Reader, you need to know how to proclaim these various types of material.
2. Regardless of your assignment as the first or second reader, knowledge of all the readings for a Sunday liturgy is vital. First, you should go over the readings early in the week. Next, consider reading the entire chapter from which the excerpt has been taken. Try to look at the introduction to the particular book and any footnotes. If you have difficulty with pronunciation or the meaning of the word, look it up. Your reader's workbook is very helpful in your preparation each week also.
3. **Never read publicly what you have not practiced in private.** Practice during the week, reading aloud in front of a mirror or to your family or friend(s). Learning to read **slowly and distinctly** is a very important skill.
4. Be open to and accepting of constructive criticism. It will help you to become a much better reader overall.
5. As soon as you receive your schedule, check your assignments and be sure you are able to fulfill the scheduled requirements. If you will not be available on an assigned date, you are responsible to find a replacement for the scheduled Mass. Your replacement needs to be notified as soon as possible; as that person needs time to prepare also. If another scheduled Reader does not show up, it is ideal if you are prepared to do

both readings, if such a situation should arise.

6. Please, only one ministry. per person. per liturgical celebration. Many people attempt to fulfill dual roles (i.e., Reader and Extraordinary Holy Minister of Communion, etc.), but no one should serve in more than one liturgical position at the same Mass, unless it is *absolutely necessary* to do so. (cf: GIRM 110)
7. Our "**Sunday Best**" describes the type of clothing to be worn. The Sanctuary is not an appropriate place for soiled sneakers, flip-flops, running shoes or any other sports footwear.
8. The readings are always proclaimed from approved liturgical books. Non-biblical readings are never to be substituted for the readings or Responsorial Psalm. (cf: GIRM 57, 349, LM Intro 12, 35, 36)

BEFORE THE MASS:

1. Arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the liturgical celebration.
2. Check-in with the Priest, Deacon or sacristan.
3. Make sure the Lectionary is placed on the ambo and opened to the correct page for that Mass.
4. If there is no Deacon of the Mass, Reader #2 will read the intercessions (in the lectern's binder). **Read them ahead of time** and ensure that the binder is placed on the lectern before the liturgy begins.
5. Wear one of the medallions provided for Reader, if available.

6. Remember that if the other Reader has not checked in, and they have been unable to find a **prepared** alternate from the assembly, you will be the person performing both Mass reader proclamation duties.
7. Take quiet time and center yourself, so the Word of God moves through you. You are the living vessel, which God is skillfully using to proclaim His Word. Refer to the last page of this handbook for a helpful Reader's Preparation Prayer.

THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATION: According to the teachings and tradition of the Catholic Church, the readings (other than the Gospel) are proclaimed by trained, lay ministers. (cf: GIRM 59)

1. **The Procession (Reader #1):** In the absence of the parish Deacon, Reader #1 carries in the Book of the Gospels. The order of the procession is: incense (if used), Cross, candle bearers/servers, reader, priest. The servers should be approximately 4 pews ahead before the reader proceeds. The Book of the Gospels is generally carried slightly elevated (e.g., hold it up at a comfortable height, so you can see where you are going.) When processing in, continue up the steps to the altar and place the Book of the Gospels on the stand in the center of the altar; return to in front of the altar to bow, and then go to your pew. Please, do not bow while holding the Book of the Gospels before or as you enter the sanctuary.
2. **The First Reading (Reader #1):** Approach the sanctuary stairs and **reverence the altar**, after all are seated following the Opening Prayer. After reverencing the altar, proceed to the Ambo, take a moment behind the ambo to compose yourself and for the assembly to get settled and ready to listen before you start the reading.

When you finish the reading, if necessary, turn the page so that the second reading is visible, step back and pause for 3-5 seconds before leaving the sanctuary. At the base of the stairs, turn to face the altar, wait for the cantor/psalmist, bow again in reverence, and return to your pew.

Note: The Responsorial Psalm is generally not done by a Reader, but by a cantor or psalmist from the music ministry. The cantor approaches the altar after the first Reader has left the sanctuary. There is a deliberate pause between such movements to consciously denote and acknowledge the transition from or end of, one part of the liturgy to the beginning of the next part. (cf: GIRM 102)

3. **The Second Reading (Reader #2):** Approach the ambo and reverence the altar when the cantor or psalmist has finished and left the sanctuary.
4. When you finish the reading, step back and pause for 3-5 seconds before leaving the sanctuary. After the reading, the second Reader is asked to close the Lectionary, place it on the ambo shelf below, leave the sanctuary, at the base of the stairs turn to face the altar, bow again in reverence, and return to your pew.
5. **The Intercessions (Reader #2):** In the absence of a Deacon, a reader announces the intentions. (cf: GIRM 138, LM Intro 53) During the concluding words of the Profession of Faith, approach the lectern at the words "We believe in the Holy Spirit...." You should be at the lectern facing the presider before he starts the Introductory Prayer to the Intercessions. As a reminder, please reverence the altar before entering the sanctuary.

4. After the Introductory Prayer by the priest, proceed with the intercessions. When finished, turn to the presider for the Closing Prayer. After the priest is finished with the Closing Prayer, please return to your pew.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Read what is written in the Lectionary. Please, **do not ad lib.**

Speak clearly and distinctly. Stand with even weight on both feet and with reverence, directly behind the ambo/lectern. Do not lean on the ambo/lectern. Adjust the microphone by gently holding it by the top (not the microphone part) and bend it up or down. The microphone should be pointing toward your chin and not directly in front of your mouth. Keep a “hands-length” distance away from the microphone to avoid sounding muffled. Proclaim as though the microphone is not there. Breathe through your mouth, as you speak.

Silence. GIRM 56 / Lectionary for Mass: Introduction #28: *“The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders reflectiveness must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the Word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer. Proper times for silence are after the first and second readings and the homily.”*

Provide brief, silent pauses before and after the body of the reading. Example: “A reading from the Book of Genesis” **PAUSE**.....then begin to read the passage. At the end of the reading, *(pause)*.....then announce, “The Word of the Lord”. Receive the assembly’s response, “Thanks be to God” and do not move until after they have responded. Pause briefly (3-5 seconds) before returning to your pew.

IMPORTANCE TO OUR CHURCH:

To nourish the Spirit of the community with the Word of God.

MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

1. *Clearly and understandably proclaim the Word of God to the assembly.*
2. *Understand the importance of the ministry.*
3. *Spend at least 2 hours in preparation for the readings and to study the scripture associated with the readings to better understand its content and context.*
4. *Attend workshops for Reader training and recurring ministry formation, if/when available.*

REQUIREMENTS FOR READERS

1. *Must be comfortable standing in front of an assembly proclaiming the Word of God.*
2. *Be able to speak loud and clear.*
3. *Must be of age appropriate (at least 14 years of age). The only exception will be during children’s liturgies. The child then must, as a minimum, be a student in the 5th grade and satisfactorily complete preparatory training before actually reading the Word of God in a scheduled liturgy. The training will be conducted, and a determination of suitability will be at the discretion of the pastor.*
4. *Have good oral communication skills to proclaim the Word and pray the intercessions effectively.*
5. *Must attend on-going training, workshops, formation on the ministry or spirituality – **at least once a year.***

LITURGICAL MINISTRY

At the St. Michael Catholic Church, readers must be registered and active members of the parish. Liturgical ministers are called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the community.

Readers are gifted to reveal Christ in the proclamation of God's Word. Consider this ministry always as an honor and a privilege—not an inferred or actual right.

Some reflections from Scripture on the Word of God

“Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes, the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is a great reward.” (Psalms 19:7-11)

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell and great was its fall!” (Matthew 7:24-27)

“They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:16-17)

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Reflect on your own experiences

Do you have a favorite scripture passage? What is it? Why is it so special?

Do you have any favorite songs at church? Do you know what scriptures they are based on?



(penitens.blogspot.com/2004/10/proclaim-word.html)

READER'S PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you for calling me to be a Proclaimer of the Sacred Scripture at Your Eucharistic celebration. Be with me as I become aware of Your Presence within me. Help me to reverently and diligently prepare myself for the proclamation of Your Word, by studying the sacred texts before Mass, and by striving to be a better Catholic. By my physical action of reading, help me as I become the instrument through whom You become present to the assembly in Your Word and through which You impart Your teachings. Let nothing in my manner disturb Your people or close their hearts to the action of Your Spirit. Cleanse my heart and my mind and open my lips that I may worthily proclaim Your Word.

(Amen.)

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