

# **DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS**

**Office of Worship**

**Diocese of Honolulu**

**DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS**  
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## Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION .....	3
II. MINISTERS OF THE WORD.....	3
III. PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES.....	3
IV. FORMATION .....	4
V. COMMISSIONING.....	4
VI. PREPARATION FOR MASS.....	5
VII. LANGUAGE.....	5
VIII. SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD .....	5
IX. NUMBER OF LECTORS.....	6
X. ATTIRE.....	6
XI. DICTION.....	6
XII. SILENCE .....	7
XIII. THE LECTOR IN THE LITURGICAL CELEBERATION.....	7
Introductory Rite.....	7
The Liturgy of the Word.....	7
The First Reading.....	7
The Responsorial Psalm .....	8
The Second Reading .....	8
The Gospel Acclamation.....	8
The Universal Prayer.....	8
Concluding Rite.....	9
XIV. USE OF THE LECTIONARY FOR MASSES WITH CHILDREN.....	9
XV. THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS AND FUNERALS.....	9
XVI. CONCLUSION .....	9

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Office of Worship has prepared the following guidelines for Lectors. These guidelines apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass, as well as other liturgical celebrations.
2. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide some principles for this important liturgical ministry of the Church. These guidelines summarize the intention of liturgical law relative to the proclamation of the Word, the demands of proper liturgical practice, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.
3. Ritual practices may differ from parish to parish, reflecting the variations allowed by law. Determination in this regard comes under the pastor's authority. These guidelines, therefore, are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in liturgical customs. Instead, they are produced in a spirit of helping our parishes experience the proclaimed Word of God as a powerful celebration by offering some basic, essential principles required by the very nature of the liturgy. (SC 37)

## **II. MINISTERS OF THE WORD**

4. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. In and through them God speaks to the gathered faithful. The ministry of the Word, therefore, is treated seriously and with great dignity. (*GIRM 29, 55; LM 49,51*)
5. The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy, it is *proclaimed*, yet not with theatrical show. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate volume and pace. It demands the ability to evoke faith in others by demonstrating one's own faith. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith. It also rouses faith in those who hear the Word proclaimed. (*LM 14, 55; GIRM 101*)

## **III. PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES**

6. A person with a strong faith, along with a knowledge and command of communication skills, can be one who proclaims the Word of God. In the selection of candidates and in review of those exercising this ministry, the following considerations may be helpful: (SC 29)
  - Candidates should demonstrate by their lives a fidelity to the Catholic faith.
  - Candidates should be persons who have gifts and skills in public communication and reading. Such skills include eye contact, enunciation, diction, inflection, pacing, projection and pronunciation. (*LM 14, 55*)
  - Candidates should have a love and reverence for the Sacred Scriptures along with a basic understanding of the Bible, the Lectionary, and the Liturgy of the Word. (*LM 55*)

- Candidates should have a basic knowledge of Sacred Scripture including: the plan of salvation, the organization of the books of the Bible, the variety of genres and literary forms of its books, and should engage in some form of regular study of them. (*CCC 109, 110*)

- Candidates should understand the importance of this ministry and appreciate the need for study and preparation as well as the ministry's connection to Christian life and practice.

#### **IV. FORMATION**

7. All liturgical ministers, especially the ministers of the Word, must be properly trained for their ministry. The ministry of the Word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding and love of the scriptures. (*LM 52, 55; GIRM 101*)

8. Lectors are to be trained in a reading style that is clear, audible, and intelligent, for it is the first means of properly transmitting the Word of God to the assembly. The voice of the lector should correspond to the genre of the text itself and should be suited to the form and the solemnity of the celebration. Only properly trained and commissioned lectors should be scheduled for the liturgy. (*LM 4, 55; GIRM 38, 101*)

9. Regular, periodic formation and study days should be scheduled for all lectors in the parish. Days of recollection, evenings of prayer and fellowship are important follow-up and support systems to those serving in this ministry. A process of periodic review of their ability to proclaim the sacred text in the liturgy may also be helpful in improving the competency of lectors.

10. Lectors should be provided with a copy of a resource for the preparation of the readings for the Liturgy of the Word. Parishes should also provide access to biblical commentaries, texts and liturgical reference materials for their study and preparation.

11. Parishes may find it helpful to select a coordinator of lectors in order to facilitate training and formation events along with scheduling for specific liturgies. This person may also represent the lectors on the parish liturgy committee.

12. The Office of Worship, in addition to its own programs, can assist pastors and chaplains with this training and formation.

#### **V. COMMISSIONING**

13. Following their formation period, it is the responsibility of the pastor, chaplain, or his delegate to determine the suitability of the candidates who will exercise this ministry. It is recommended that those who will serve the parish community as lectors receive the Church's blessing following their period of formation and before assuming this ministry. The blessing

should normally take place during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The texts are those in the *Book of Blessings: chapter 61, nos. 1831-1846*.

## **VI. PREPARATION FOR MASS**

14. To make the proclamation of the Word effective, all lectors are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical. Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message. Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke a response from the assembly. Practical preparation involves mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciations and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery. It is unacceptable to rush into the sacristy just before Mass to “look at the readings.” (*LM 55; CCC 109,110*)

15. Lectors should be required to arrive at least 15 minutes before the liturgy; this allows them time to locate the readings in the Lectionary, make sure they are the proper readings assigned for the day (noting the proper lectionary cycle, A, B, or C; or I, II on weekdays), arrange the microphone, and make sure that the sound system is properly functioning. If a lector is to read the petitions for the Universal Prayer, these should be reviewed before the liturgy begins. This is especially important if the names of persons are to be read (e.g. among the sick, or those who have died).

## **VII. LANGUAGE**

16. In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been recognized. The Lectionary, however, is a liturgical book that belongs to the whole Church, thus the lector is not at liberty to change the approved scriptural texts for the liturgy to accommodate a desire for inclusive language. (*LM 111*)

17. In the preparation of other texts, such as the Universal Prayer or commentary of any type, language which is inclusive referring to human beings can be used, but references to God should not shy away from calling him Father.

## **VIII. SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

18. God speaks to the faith community at worship through symbols. To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word, it is important to pay full attention to these symbols. The symbols that are integral to any celebration of the Word are: the Lectionary, the Book of the Gospels, and the ambo. (*CCC1154*)

19. The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. These books in themselves are signs of God's Word and should be permanent, dignified and well-bound, and are not to be replaced by other pastoral aids. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books and never from a missalette or participation aids. Non-biblical readings are never to be substituted for the readings or Responsorial Psalm. (*GIRM 57, 349; LM 12, 35, 36, 37*)

20. The ambo is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God, just as the altar is the symbol of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo, always of a suitable design and dignity and located in a prominent place. Candles and other decorative elements may be placed around it but without obscuring the ambo. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed Word, namely, the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel, including the Homily and the Universal Prayer, and the Exsultet at the Easter Vigil. A lectern or cantor's stand is used for leading of song and making announcements. (*LM 16, 32, 33; GIRM 58, 309; BLS 61*)

## **IX. NUMBER OF LECTORS**

21. Each of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word should ideally have its own lector; this includes a psalmist for the Responsorial Psalm. A single reading, except in the expressed case of the singing or reading of the Passion of the Lord, is not to be divided among lectors. (*LM 52; GIRM 99,109*)

22. The lector should not ordinarily exercise another liturgical ministry during the same Mass. Announcements and/or any commentaries during the celebration are ideally read by someone other than the lector. (*CS 28; GIRM 99*)

## **X. ATTIRE**

23. Attire should be appropriate, modest, and should express the dignity associated with the role of proclaiming the Word of God and the solemnity of the particular celebration. Recreational and athletic clothing are considered inappropriate. The lector should never dress or do anything to draw attention to her/himself at any time. (*GIRM 339*)

## **XI. DICTION**

24. Lectors must always keep in mind how their reading is being heard. It is never enough simply to say the words on the written page, but to say them in such a way that they are clearly understood and that their meaning has its proper impact. In large churches, lectors should keep in mind that they must compensate for reverberation by slowing their pace or by paying special attention to clear diction of each word or phrase. Lectors should also be warned against the

temptation to trail off at the end of a sentence, thus making it more difficult for listeners to understand.

## **XII. SILENCE**

25. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in a manner that promotes meditation. Therefore, any haste that impedes recollection is to be avoided. A silence, observed by all, to reflect on the Word of God, occurs before the Liturgy of the Word and after each reading and the homily. Catechesis on the purpose and appropriate use of this silence should be offered to the community by pastors and chaplains. (*LM 28; GIRM 45, 56, 66*)

## **XIII. THE LECTOR IN THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATION**

### ***Introductory Rite***

26. The lectors can take part in the entrance procession of Sunday or sung Masses. In a Mass without the Deacon one of the lectors, paying attention to posture and pacing, solemnly carries the closed Book of Gospels immediately in front of the celebrant or concelebrant, holding it slightly elevated. Upon reaching the altar the lector places the Book of the Gospels upon the altar then goes to his or her seat. The Lectionary is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins opened to the first reading. (*GIRM 44, 49, 120, 128, 194, 195; LM 17*)

27. If there is no opening liturgical song or communion song and the antiphons in the Missal are not said by the faithful, a lector may recite them at the appropriate time (*GIRM 48, 87, 98, 198*).

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

28. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. (*GIRM 42, 128, 130, 310; LM 16, 28*)

### ***The First Reading***

29. Once at the ambo the lector waits until the assembly is seated and quiet before beginning the reading. (*GIRM 196*)

31. The reading is announced using only the introductory text given in the Lectionary "*A reading from...*" . The reading designation "First Reading;" "Second Reading" is not read, nor is the superscript written above the reading itself. After a brief pause, the reader proclaims the Word of God with a tone of voice and in a manner that corresponds to the genre and literary form of the Sacred Scripture.

32. At the conclusion of the reading the lector pauses and without making any hand or arm gestures nor lifting up the Lectionary then says, “*The word of the Lord.*” This may be sung by the lector if he or she is capable of doing so. The lector, still looking toward those in the nave, waits for the acclamation, *Thanks be to God.* The lector may remain at the ambo for the period of silence that follows the reading, modeling a contemplative stance for the others in the congregation. Then the lector returns to his or her seat. (*GIRM 128, 196; LM 18*)

### ***The Responsorial Psalm***

33. It is preferable for the Responsorial Psalm to be sung. If it cannot be sung then it is proclaimed by the lector at the ambo in a way that is particularly suited to foster meditation on the Word of God. The lector should begin the recitation with the antiphon. Announcing "The Responsorial Psalm" is unnecessary. (*GIRM 61, 129, 196; LM 20, 21, 22*) If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, as, for example, on weekdays, the lector should always speak the response along with the assembly, but in a slightly different tone of voice, because many of the responses are too difficult for the people to remember, and the lector’s speaking them with the assembly gives them the assurance they need.

### ***The Second Reading***

34. The Second Reading is proclaimed in the same way as the First Reading. After the Second Reading, if the Book of the Gospels will be used, the lector removes the Lectionary and places it on the shelf in the ambo or another suitable location. A brief period of silence is observed after the Second Reading. (*GIRM 130, 196*)

### ***The Gospel Acclamation***

35. The acclamation before the Gospel is typically sung. In the absence of a cantor or psalmist, the lector should not lead this chant unless he or she is capable of doing so. When it is not sung, it may be recited by the lector at the ambo. (*GIRM 62, 63, 131; LM 23*) However, if it is sung and the cantor/lector has access to another microphone (if needed), it should be done away from the ambo, so that the deacon or priest who proclaims the Gospel does not have to wait until the cantor/lector vacates the ambo. It is not one of the readings, and therefore may be chanted away from the ambo.

### ***The Universal Prayer***

36. In the absence of a deacon, a lector announces the petitions of the Universal Prayer. The lector is in place at the ambo for the priest celebrant’s introduction to the Universal Prayer and remains at the ambo for the concluding prayer. Only after the *Amen* does the lector return to his or her seat. (*GIRM 99, 197; LM 30, 53*)

37. If the intentions are sung, a cantor is to be assigned the function of announcing the intentions from the ambo or another suitable place. The cantor then remains in place until the *Amen.* (*GIRM 138, LM 30, 31, 53*)

### ***Concluding Rite***

39. The lector may join in the procession at the end of Mass in the same order as in the procession to the altar, if it is the custom of the parish. Neither the Lectionary nor the Book of Gospels is carried in the recessional. (*GIRM 169*)

## **XIV. USE OF THE LECTIONARY FOR MASSES WITH CHILDREN**

40. In the celebration of Masses with mostly children present and with the use of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, the Introduction to the liturgical book provides guidelines for the selection of children as lectors. “All liturgical ministries are exercised for the prayer of the assembly. Therefore ministers should be selected on the basis of liturgical competence. It should not be presumed that children should proclaim the word of God in the celebrations in which this Lectionary [*Lectionary for Masses with Children*] 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.” (*LMC 28*)

41. Children, even if they are not fully-initiated members of the Church, are not excluded from the role of lector in Masses with children. They are to be considered for this role only if they are prepared to competently proclaim the Word of God and serve those who will hear it. It must be clear to them that the Mass is not an opportunity for performance. (*LMC 22, 24, 47*)

## **XV. THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS AND FUNERALS**

42. It is always preferred that in the celebration of the sacraments and funerals that those deputed to proclaim the Word of God are men and women who typically carry out this liturgical ministry with the necessary formation and ministerial competence. The proclamation of the Word of God in every liturgical celebration is first and foremost the announcement of the salvation, and its proper minister serves this mystery and those who will hear it. However, for pastoral reasons, family members or friends may carry out this ministry. During a Confirmation Mass a candidate for Confirmation may be lector when given proper training in advance. The parish should provide these individuals assistance and guidance so that God's Word is proclaimed with clarity and dignity. The person should never be chosen simply for the sake of giving him/her something to do in the liturgy.

## **XVI. CONCLUSION**

43. “When this word is proclaimed in the Church and put into living practice, it enlightens the

faithful through the working of the Holy Spirit and draws them into the entire mystery of the Lord as a reality to be lived.” *(LM 47)*

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BLS</b>	Built of Living Stones
<b>CCC</b>	Catechism of the Catholic Church
<b>GIRM</b>	General Instructions of the Roman Missal 3rd Edition
<b>LM</b>	General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass
<b>LMC</b>	Lectionary for Masses with Children
<b>SC</b>	Sancrosanctum Concilium
<b>SL</b>	Sing to the Lord

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