

# ST. MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH MANUAL FOR READERS

## INTRODUCTION

*“But you are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”*(1 Pt. 2:9).

All liturgical ministers are members of the body of Christ, the “holy people and royal priesthood” who participate in Christ’s ministry of redemption and salvation. In the Mass, the lay faithful exercise this ministry in various ways, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been “conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal ‘GIRM’, Third Typical Edition, 2002*), a participation “to which the Christian people have a right and duty by reason of their Baptism” (GIRM, #18).

Some of the faithful are called to serve God’s people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it deserve nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help lay liturgical ministers in the ministry of reader (AKA lector) to acquire a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, their ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve.

## I. THE MINISTRY OF READER

*“The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue that I may speak to the weary a word that will rouse them”* (Is. 50:4).

Proclaiming the word of God has always been a fundamental part of Christian liturgy. The earliest Christians, firmly rooted in the traditions of the Jewish temple, incorporated the stories of God’s mighty and saving deeds into their own worship rituals. They knew, as we do today, that God’s word is powerful and active, “*achieving the end for which (God) sent it*” (Is. 55:11). God’s word continues to reach the ears of the weary through the voice of the reader for “when the Scriptures are read in Church, God himself is speaking to his people . . .” (GIRM #29).

Since “by tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential,” (GIRM #59), it properly belongs to ministers other than the presiding priest. This includes Deacons who are ordained clergy and ordinary ministers of the Gospel, as well as instituted readers and other lay people who are “truly suited to perform this function and receive careful preparation...” (GIRM #101)."

Requirements of effective readers include competence in public speaking, training and practice in technical skills and on-going formation. Above all, they must be “doers of the word, not hearers only” (James. 1:22), with a mature and lively faith that is evident from the way they live. The ministry is not for everyone and determining who would make an effective reader calls for careful discernment on the part of the minister and his or her pastor. But blessed are they who accept the challenges of this ministry, whose “well-trained tongues” still speak to the weary on God’s behalf. It is essential that we always remember that all ministries belong to the Church and are for the Church. Reader is not a ministry of the individual, but a sharing of individual gifts with the community. Humility in the service rendered is an essential quality of every church minister.

## **II. FORMATION**

The lay faithful who are called to formal ministry have the right to adequate formation from their parish communities before being assigned to service in the assembly. Many technical skills are required for successful proclamation within a liturgical setting. Ongoing opportunities for biblical, liturgical and spiritual formation are needed as well.

### **State of Individual Ministerial Calling**

- One called to a ministry should discern that they possess gifts particular to the ministry; good voice, clear enunciation; humble demeanor; modest appearance (if in doubt whether you possess these gifts, ask your spouse or a good friend)
- Some gifts are natural while others are “nurture-able.” Some just are - and others can be developed.
- Love of sacred scripture – Proclaimers of the Word must regularly read and develop a love of scripture if they are to proclaim it with sincerity
- State of Grace – Reconciliation on a regular basis; Frequent communion (mass on Sunday and Holy Days of obligation); Prayer on a daily basis;

### **Technical Skills**

Technical skills include:

- Learning the basics of public speaking.
- Learning to properly work with different types of microphones.
- Becoming familiar with the operation of the sound system.
- Practicing movements with grace and dignity while learning the specifics of the liturgical space.
- Becoming familiar with the arrangement and reverent handling of the sacred books.

## Ongoing Formation

Biblical formation includes:

- A basic introduction to the structure and content of the Bible (self study) and the Lectionary (regular reader training sessions and materials provided by the parish or diocese).
- Ongoing Scripture study to foster a greater love for God's word (Parish Bible Study, FORMED resource, etc.).

Liturgical formation includes:

- A basic knowledge of the structure and theology of the Mass.
- An understanding of the connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- A grasp of the importance of symbol and ritual in Catholic worship.

Spiritual formation includes:

- Participation in holy hours, benediction, reflection, and Christian community prayer on a regular basis throughout the liturgical year.
- Developing a private prayer life which includes Lectio Divina.
- Regular participation in the sacraments.

## III. PREPARATION

Those who exercise a liturgical ministry are expected to develop their ministerial skills by taking advantage of the training and formation opportunities offered by the parish or through the Diocese of St. Petersburg (i.e. LPMI). Our parish also offers scripture studies designed to enhance the experience of the Liturgy of the Word for all adults. In addition, they have a serious responsibility to prepare in an immediate way the readings they are scheduled to proclaim, "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).

For readers this immediate preparation includes:

- Becoming familiar with all of the readings for the assigned day well in advance of the liturgy.
- Praying with the readings and reflecting on what they mean.
- Consulting a commentary or reader's preparation book for an understanding of the readings.
- Practicing intonation, phrasing, and correct pronunciation for the assigned passage by reading it aloud. Ask if you are unsure of a pronunciation.
- Arriving in enough time to become calm and unhurried before the liturgy begins and to check for any changes or special instructions.
- When there are optional readings, check with the homilist to ensure that the proper readings are proclaimed.

- Dressing in a way that reflects the importance and dignity of this ministry (see dress code).
- Serving when scheduled and notifying a responsible authority and / or arranging for a substitute when not available.

## IV. DURING THE LITURGY

### The Entrance Procession

When the readers are in the entrance procession, they follow the acolytes (altar servers) and precede the clergy.

- The Lectionary is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (GIRM #118b) and is set to the first reading.
- Only *The Book of the Gospels* is carried in procession, not the Lectionary, and it is carried "slightly elevated" (GIRM #120d).
- When a deacon is present, he carries *The Book of the Gospels* (GIRM #172).
- When a deacon is not present, one of the readers may carry *The Book of the Gospels* (GIRM #120d). He or she proceeds to the altar placing the book in the stand. Then move immediately to your designated places. It is desirable that readers sit close to the front of the church.
- During daily mass or other special circumstances, *The Book of the Gospels* *should* be placed on the altar, or the daily lectionary is placed on the ambo.
- Upon approaching the altar, *The Book of the Gospels* is placed in the stand and

### The Liturgy of the Word

- After the opening rites each reader in turn approaches the sanctuary, bows to the altar (GIRM #275), and moves to the ambo. There are no additional bowing or genuflections required. (Note: When the Mass begins all focus is given to the altar where consecration of the Eucharist is to take place)
- Whenever possible the first and second readings should be assigned to different readers. Assigning the readings to different readers heightens the importance of each reading. However, one reader is sufficient for both Sunday readings.
- Since during the liturgy "all . . . should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them" (GIRM #91), readers should not perform other ministries during the same celebration at which they are reading.
- After arriving at the ambo, the reader should wait for stillness before announcing the passage and pause slightly before the passage is proclaimed.
- Eye contact is essential to effective proclamation, as is an unhurried pace and clear and correct pronunciation.
- Readers should proclaim each reading exactly as contained in the Lectionary, without changes or additions of any kind (though we all stumble or make mistakes at some time – be calm and continue without comment.)

- When the passage is completed, the reader should pause momentarily and make eye contact before announcing, “The word of the Lord,” then step back, returning to his/her seat or joining the other reader to proceed to the center aisle to bow to the altar once again.
- After the first reading the reader should step back for a brief period of silence, then remove the Lectionary from the top of the ambo to allow placement of the cantor’s music. After the second reading the reader will again remove the lectionary to make room for the *Book of the Gospels*. This should be done reverently and simply.
- In the absence of a deacon, one of the readers may announce the petitions for the general intercessions from the ambo where an ambo copy of the general intercessions and announcements is kept in a binder.

## V. FURNISHINGS AND SACRED BOOKS

### The Ambo (GIRM #309)

- The ambo is a sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter proclamation (*Exultet*).
- The ambo is also used for the homily and general intercessions.
- It should be a natural focal point during the liturgy of the word and situated so that the faithful may easily see it and hear the readings.

### The Sacred Books

- During the Mass, readings are proclaimed from *The Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary for Mass*. (during normal weekday Mass the *Lectionary* alone is used).
- There has always been a distinction between these books, with *The Book of the Gospels* being accorded “*greater respect than any other books of readings*.” It is very desirable that the parish community possess a beautifully designed Book of Gospels, separate from any other book of readings” (*Lectionary for Mass* #36).
- *The Book of the Gospels* should be treated with the utmost care and respect. It is the book that is carried in procession each Sunday and certain Solemnities from which the deacon or priest proclaims the gospel.
- The *Lectionary for Mass* contains the readings for each Sunday of the liturgical year arranged in a three-year cycle. It is the book from which the reader proclaims – (a two year cycle is used for daily Mass).
- “Because of the dignity of the word of God” (*Lectionary for Mass* #37), the Lectionary is treated with great reverence and respect, but it is not carried in procession.
- The reading of the Passion is the only scripture selection permitted to be read in parts, each reader should receive a copy of the reading in a suitable binder or cover.

## VI. ST. MARY DRESS CODE

It is the word of God which is the focus at the ambo, not the minister. *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30).

### **Men:**

Sunday Mass and Special Occasions (Funerals, Weddings, Solemnities, etc...)

- Dress shirt, with jacket, long pants, and leather shoes (no sneakers). A tie and business suit are encouraged but are optional.

Weekday Mass

- ‘Business casual’ is fine (but please, no shorts.)

### **Women:**

Sunday Mass and Special Occasions (Funerals, Weddings, Solemnities, etc...)

- A modest dress which does not accentuate the shape, or blouse and (modest length) skirt combination, or pants suit, leather shoes with moderate heels or other footwear suitable for a business meeting. Shoulders will be covered.

Weekday Mass

- Business casual.

### **All:**

- No excessive jewelry: A simple chain small cross necklace is appropriate but no rosary beads around the neck, and a minimum of rings
- No sheer / revealing fabrics
- No bright colors or ‘loud’ prints
- No ‘fad’ hairstyles or unnatural colors
- No plunging necklines or ‘slit’ dresses

***The bottom line: All focus should be on the Word proclaimed, not on the proclaimer. Common sense should be the general rule.***

## VII. SCHEDULING

St. Mary uses the Ministry Pro Scheduler (MSP) app. MSP will send out reminders, and options to request a substitute. The minister's Mass preferences, availability and other important messages are communicated through this app by the coordinator and the MPS administrator (Parish Secretary). (Access can also be enabled through <https://secure.rotundasoftware.com>). This app is important and any changes in email addresses, phone numbers, availability, etc. should be kept up to date. The Ministry Coordinators can assist with this, if needed.

If you know you will be unavailable BEFORE the upcoming schedule is made, you should use MSP and contact your scheduler so that you are not scheduled for a particular Sunday.

Once the schedule is made up, it is your responsibility to find a replacement or trade with another EMHC. Use MSP to effect the change in the schedule and communicate this to the ministry lead.

## VIII. GLOSSARY

**Ambo** - A sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter proclamation (Exultet). It also be used for the homily and general intercessions.

**Assembly** - The people of God gathered for prayer and worship.

**The Book of the Gospels** - The book containing the gospels that is carried in procession each Sunday and from which the priest or deacon proclaims the gospel.

**Credence Table** - A small table placed to the side of the altar that holds items used during Mass.

**GIRM** – The General Instruction of the Roman Missal is the detailed document governing the celebration of Mass of the ordinary form of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church since 1969. It is printed at the start of recent editions of the Roman Missal (3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

**Lectionary for Mass** - The book containing the scripture readings used on Sundays and the readings for Mass during the week.

**Liturgical Minister** - Someone who serves in a special role during a liturgical celebration such as the Mass.

**Parts of the Mass** - The Mass is divided into four main parts...

- **Introductory Rites** - from the entrance song through the opening prayer.

- **Liturgy of the Word** - from the first reading through the prayer of the faithful.
- **Liturgy of the Eucharist** - from the preparation of the gifts through the prayer after communion.
- **Concluding Rite** - the priest's greeting, blessing and the dismissal of the assembly.

**Missal** - The book containing the prayers used by the priest during Mass.

**Sanctuary** - The sacred space around the altar usually set apart in some way from the rest of the church building.

## IX. CONCLUSION

This handbook was prepared to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It addresses your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, and the current directive of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. The clergy and staff of St. Mary Catholic Church are committed to supporting you in this ministry and in your desire to grow in your understanding of the liturgy you serve. It is our hope that this handbook will be the beginning of a dialogue among liturgical ministers that encourages us all to reflect upon why we do what we do and how to enter into "*full, active, conscious participation*" in the liturgy through the ministry to which we have been called.

## X. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### Resource Materials

- Diocese of St Petersburg, Guidelines for the Ministry of Reader, 2003
- Bergant, Diane, general editor. *Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old and New Testament*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1985.
- Senior, Donald et al, *Catholic Study bible*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library). New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- Connell, Martin. *Guide to the Revised Lectionary*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.
- *The Reader's Ministry, Your Guide to Proclaiming the Word*. Mineola, NY: ResurrectionPress, 1990.

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- Rosser, Aelred. *Guide for Readers*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

### For Weekly Preparation

- *Workbook for Readers and Gospel Readers*. Published annually and supplied to each reader by the parish.
- USCCB.Org daily readings. Most Sunday readings are available as audio files to help you better prepare for reading.

Note: If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to Deacon David Lesieur.