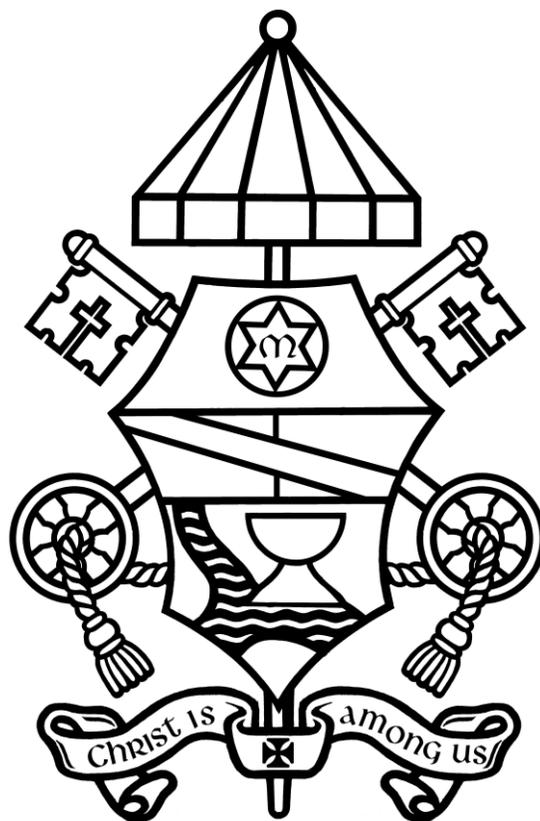


THE BASILICA OF  
SAINT MARY  
OF THE ASSUMPTION



LITURGICAL MINISTRY HANDBOOK

# Lectors

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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“The sacred liturgy is at the center, at the heart, of the life of the Church. It gives life to the Church. It builds up the Mystical Body of Christ. It manifests the nature of the Church. It empowers the Church to carry out her mission.”

- Cardinal Francis Arinze  
Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship  
and the Discipline of the Sacraments

**THE MOST IMPORTANT** thing that we do as Catholics is celebrating the Holy Mass! It is through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that the Lord breathes life into the Church and fashions the Church and each Christian more fully into the image of Jesus Christ.

By virtue of baptism in Christ, every Catholic is called to participate in the Mass in a **“full, conscious and active”** way, as demanded by the Second Vatican Council (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #14). Does that mean that everyone should take on a ministry in the Mass? **No!** Pope John Paul II clarified this when he said: “Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. **Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it.**” (*Ad Limina* Address to Bishops of the United States, 1998). By attentively listening, singing, saying the responses, and entering into prayerful silence each of us does in fact fulfill the mandate of the Second Vatican Council.

But some of the faithful are also **called upon to fulfill various liturgical roles** and so **assist the entire assembly** in entering more fully into the mysteries being celebrated. “The faithful, moreover, should not refuse to serve the People of God gladly whenever they are asked to perform some particular ministry or function in the celebration” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #97).

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## **THE ROLE OF THE LECTOR IN THE SACRED LITURGY**

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“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts. For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, **so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.**”

-Isaiah 55:8-11

Drawing from the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that “in the readings, as explained in the homily, **God speaks to his people**, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present in the midst of his faithful through his word” (#55). Thus the **reading of Scripture is an essential component of the Mass**, and

a **central part of our spirituality**. The importance of the office of lector in the Church is thus made clear: the lector proclaims the very Word of God to the faithful!

**One cannot underestimate the nobility of such a task.** The Catholic Church has always honored the scriptures in a special way, as the Second Vatican Council beautifully states: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body” (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, #21). Within the sacred liturgy, the lector takes on a privileged role in proclaiming this most sacred Word to the faithful gathered for worship and spiritual nourishment. Called to humble service, the lector stands as a servant of the Word and as a servant of the people, as he offers to the people a word that is not his own, but rather “comes forth from the mouth of God” (see Matthew 4:4).

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## **QUALIFICATIONS**

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For a person to be commissioned as a Lector at St. Mary's Basilica, he or she must meet the following requirements:

1. Be a Baptized and Confirmed member of the Church.
2. Be a person of upstanding Christian character, striving to live the faith to the best of his or her ability.
3. Practice Catholic morality as taught by the Magisterium and explained in the Catechism.
4. Attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation (either at St. Mary's or some other Catholic Church).
5. Be in a lawful marriage in the eyes of the Church (if you are married).
6. Be a registered member of the parish.
7. Have the ability to proclaim the Sacred Scripture to the community.

**PLEASE NOTE: It is essential that lectors be present at the liturgies for which they are assigned, or make arrangements for a replacement.** Simply contact any of the other lectors and ask them to cover for you. If you are unable to find a replacement, please at least call the rectory so that the priests can find a replacement before Mass. Also note that the schedule is usually made out for several months at a time, so please notify the Director of Religious Education, who handles the scheduling, if you will be out of town for several weeks or months. Those who consistently fail to fulfill their assigned duties may be removed from the schedule.

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## **PREPARATION**

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The reading of Sacred Scripture is an integral component of the Holy Mass. Those who undertake this ministry of Lector therefore have a grave duty to communicate the **highest form of reverence through their words, actions, and appearance.**

Appropriate dress is essential to maintain the standard of reverence proper to the Mass. ***Appropriate dress does not include*** blue jeans, T shirts, tank tops, shorts, flip-flops, or low-cut necklines. Ideally men would wear suit jackets and/or ties with a dress shirt, and ladies would wear dresses or appropriate dress clothes.

***Adequate time spent in prayer and study is essential for the effective proclamation of the Word of God.*** Although the lector is reading the Sacred Scriptures to the assembly of the faithful, he or she should comprehend the readings, which often requires study and reflection. An understanding of the meaning\* behind the reading can lead to a more faithful proclamation of the Word of God.

Moreover, ***the recitation of sacred scripture within the liturgy is unlike any other form of public speaking.*** Through this ministry the lector seeks to be a pure vessel through which the Lord may truly speak to His people. To be a true instrument of the Word, the lector needs to let that Word sink into his or her own heart and be formed by the truth that it contains, which can only happen through prayer.

Finally, one must not neglect the practical dimension of this ministry. Learning the proper pronunciations\* of the biblical terms, and practicing the readings by saying them out loud are key components to being truly prepared. Smooth pronunciations of words and phrases, as well as the correct intonations that ***only can be achieved through practiced reading,*** are essential to being an effective minister of the word.

\*The Lector Workbooks, provided annually by the parish, provide commentary, pronunciation guides, and reading suggestions for each of the readings used in the Mass. Also, one should never hesitate to ask the priest about pronunciations.

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## **LITURGICAL PROCEDURE**

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Lectors should make arrangements to sit (with their families) in the ***first three pews of the basilica.*** Given the size of our basilica, sitting even halfway back draws undue attention to the lector as they walk up to read the General Intercessions after the Creed.

Having already arranged for a seat with the congregation, the lector is to go the sacristy. ***Lectors need to be present in the sacristy at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.*** When entering the sacristy he or she is to first sign in using the Liturgical Ministry Sign In Book by the sink. Next please locate the Lectionary, Book of the Gospels, and General Intercessions. At least five minutes before the Mass begins, and after checking the readings, the lector is to set out the Lectionary and General Intercessions. The lector then returns to the sacristy to await the entrance procession.

When the deacon is not present for Mass, the lector follows the altar servers in the entrance procession and carries the Book of the Gospels. As a lector, you are to take seriously the Word of God and realize the **treasure** that you carry in the procession.

As you carry the Book of the Gospels, raise it slightly so that it can be seen. Dramatic or garish gestures with the book are not appropriate. Upon reaching the steps to the sanctuary, lower the book and make a bow to the altar. Go immediately up the right side of the altar, place the book flat on the altar, step back and bow. Then proceed to your seat which will be located along the wall to the side of the pulpit.

After the priest has read or sung the Opening Prayer for Mass, the lector proceeds to the ambo (pulpit). Introduce the reading by saying, “A Reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians.” **DO NOT** say “***The first reading is*** A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians.”

***PLEASE NOTE: Because the basilica is so large and the echo is so pronounced, lectors should speak slowly and clearly.***

There should be a slight pause between the introduction to the reading, and the actual text itself. Likewise there should be a pause between the text and the closing phrase “The Word of the Lord.” **DO NOT** say “***This is*** the Word of the Lord.” The lector then returns to the seat along the wall.

***PLEASE NOTE:*** On special occasions, two lectors may be scheduled for the same Mass. If the first reading is the only reading assigned to the lector, he or she goes to the center of the altar, bows, walks down the steps and takes his or her place with the congregation.

The cantor then leads the faithful in the Responsorial Psalm. In the absence of a cantor, the lector will simply read the Psalm. Be sure to pause appropriately if reading the Psalm, and give the people an indication of when to say the response.

After the cantor sings the Psalm, there should be a short pause. The lector then goes to the ambo and reads the second reading, remembering how to properly introduce and close the reading. Upon the completion of the second reading, the lector is to place the Lectionary on the chair provided for them in the sanctuary. (***There are to be no books left on the ambo after the readings.***)

Once the Lectionary is put away, the lector goes to the center of the altar, bows, walks down the steps and takes his or her seat in the congregation, ***being sure to take the petitions.*** (If the deacon is present for Mass, he will read the petitions.)

***PLEASE NOTE:*** To add to the sense of reverence, lectors are asked to enter and leave the sanctuary walking in straight lines. Please walk directly to the altar, bow, and walk straight down the steps. Do the same when entering the sanctuary.

Touching on the necessity of reverence through our actions in the Mass, the *General Instruction of Roman Missal* provides excellent guidance in the thought: “***The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers...ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity...***” (#42).

The Gospel is then read by the bishop, priest or deacon.

After the Homily, the congregation will recite the Creed. If there is no deacon present for Mass, the lector will need to come forward to read the petitions. Near the end of the Creed (usually at the phrase “We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church...”), the lector should leave his or her seat and proceed to the ambo: ***walk directly up the steps, bow to the altar, and then proceed to the ambo.*** Once at the ambo, the lector should be standing ready to begin the intercessions. Do not stand outside the ambo, step into it and be ready! The priest will give the introduction to the petitions, and the lector may begin. ***The lector should be sure to respond to each petition with the rest of the faithful.*** After the intercessions are read, the priest will say a concluding prayer. The lector should stay at the ambo until that prayer is finished. When it is finished, the lector proceeds to the center of the altar, bows, and takes his or her seat in the congregation again.

The lector **DOES NOT** leave in the recessional at the end of Mass. Simply remain in your place until the Mass is finished.

Following Mass, the Lector is responsible for returning the Lectionary, Book of the Gospels, and the General Intercessions to the sacristy. Please place them in their usual locations, and you may then depart.

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## **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS**

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1. Read the text according to its **tone**. A joyful proclamation should be read differently than a somber description of God's punishment.
2. Putting feeling and emphasis in your reading is important to engage with the congregation, but it's important to **avoid being overly dramatic**. You are the messenger, not the message. Being overly dramatic puts the focus on you and not on the Word of God.
3. Read the text **slowly and clearly**.
4. Make use of **pauses** to bring attention to the reading or to emphasize different points.
5. Maintaining **eye contact** with the congregation will make your reading much more powerful and help the listener connect with what you are saying.
6. The sound system is meant to assist your voice, not replace it. It is important to project your voice to the congregation. To do this, take substantial breaths and speak from your diaphragm (pushing the air out as from your stomach).
7. **Studying** the text will enhance your proclamation. Understanding the reading, and also seeing how it connects with the Gospel and the theme of the Mass, changes the way you proclaim it because you emphasize different points.
8. Prayer is not only the best spiritual way to prepare, but it is also the most practical step to take. **We should never underestimate God's grace!**

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## **CONCLUSION**

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*"Ignorance of Scripture is Ignorance of Christ."*

- St. Jerome

In addition to the serving the needs of the parish, the ministry of lector provides a wonderful opportunity to grow in love for and knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures. The lector should make every effort to take advantage of the

this opportunity by opening the Sacred Scriptures and discovering the meaning behind the texts. By reading the Scriptures and praying with them, the lector can become not only a better lector but a better Catholic Christian.

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## **GLOSSARY**

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- **Altar Cloth** – large white cloth that covers the top of the altar.
- **Ambo (or Pulpit)** – place where the readings are proclaimed.
- **Book of the Gospels (or Evangeliary)** – book that contains only the readings for the Gospels for Mass.
- **Credence Table** – table where vessels used during Mass are placed.
- **Easter Candle** (also called Paschal Candle) – very large candle used during the Easter season, for baptisms and funerals.
- **Lectionary** – book that contains all the readings for Mass.
- **Sacramentary** – book containing all the prayers for Mass.
- **Sacristy** – room where objects and vestments for Mass are stored, and where the priests and servers vest for Mass.
- **Sanctuary** – area at the top of the steps where the altar is located.
- **Tabernacle** – place the Eucharist is kept.

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## **RESOURCES**

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Visit the **LITURGICAL MINISTRY** page on [www.stmarysdre.info](http://www.stmarysdre.info) for the latest schedules and resources.

Contact Joe Schmidt at [stmarysdre@gmail.com](mailto:stmarysdre@gmail.com) or at 373-3643 with any questions.