

Diocese of El Paso  
Tepeyac Institute and Office of Worship  
Guidelines for Lectors



**Official Church Documents**

These guidelines are in accord with the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2000 (GIRM)*, the second edition of the *Lectionary for Mass for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America (LM)*, and *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*.

**Formation and Commission**

In the Diocese of El Paso lectors are to be trained and prepared at Tepeyac Institute and commissioned by the bishop to fulfill their ministry of proclaiming the Word of God. Their commissioning is for a three year period. After that period the minister discerns with the pastor if he/she should renew the ministry for another three year period. The formation should include theological, spiritual, pastoral, liturgical and skill preparation.

The liturgical assembly truly requires readers.... Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are certain suitable laypeople who have been trained to carry out this ministry. (LM, no. 52)

Their preparation must above all be spiritual, but what may be called a technical preparation is also needed. The spiritual preparation presupposes at least a biblical and liturgical formation. The liturgical formation ought to equip the readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and of the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. The technical preparation should make the readers more skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment. (LM, no. 55, paragraph 2)

## **I. Elements of the Liturgy of the Word**

1. The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them. The homily, the Profession of Faith, and Prayer of the Faithful, however, develop and conclude this part of the Mass. For in the readings, as explained by 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 the faithful through his word. By their silence and singing the people make God's word their own, and they also affirm their adherence to it by means of the Profession of Faith. Finally, having been nourished by it, they pour out their petitions in the Prayer of the Faithful for the needs of the entire Church and for the salvation of the whole world. (GIRM, no. 55)

Readings from Sacred Scripture and the chants between the readings form the main part of the liturgy of the word. The homily, the profession of faith, and the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful carry it forward and conclude it. (LM, 11)

2. In the absence of an instituted lector, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture. They should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, 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, no. 101)

3. Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts. (GIRM, no. 45)

4. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided. During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, accommodated to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the first and second reading, and lastly at the conclusion of the homily. (GIRM, no. 56)

5. By tradition the office of proclaiming the readings is a ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector, and the Gospel by a deacon or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant. If, however, a deacon or another priest is not present, the priest celebrant himself should read the Gospel. Further, if another suitable lector is also not present, then the priest celebrant should also proclaim the other readings. (GIRM, no. 59)

*Commentary:*

*New to the revised GIRM is the stress upon sacred silence after the readings. There should be a significant pause after the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> reading.*

*The priest or deacon, after the homily, should return to his chair to observe silence before beginning the Creed or Prayer of the Faithful.*

## **II. The Biblical Readings**

7. In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable to maintain the arrangement of the biblical readings by which light is shed on the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history. Moreover, it is unlawful to substitute other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God. (GIRM, no. 57)

8. In the celebration of Mass the biblical readings with their accompanying chants from the Sacred Scriptures may not be omitted, shortened, or, worse still, replaced by nonbiblical readings. (LM, 12)

*Commentary:*

*No readings except those selected from Sacred Scripture may be read during the liturgy of the word at Sunday Mass or any liturgical celebration such as a wedding or funeral. During the celebration of Mass no one may substitute the readings of Sacred Scripture for non-scriptural readings.*

## **III. The Ambo**

9. In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always proclaimed from the ambo. (GIRM, no. 58)

10. In a Mass with the people the readings are always to be proclaimed at the ambo. (LM, 16)

11. There must be a place in the church this is somewhat elevated, fixed, and of a suitable design and nobility. It should reflect the dignity of God's word and be a clear reminder to the people that in the Mass the table of God's word and of Christ's body is placed before them. (LM, 32)

12. Either permanently or at least on occasions of great solemnity, the ambo should be decorated simply and in keeping with its design. (LM, no. 33)

13. Since the ambo is the place from which the word of God is proclaimed by the ministers, it must of its nature be reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (the Exsultet). The ambo may rightly be used for the homily and the prayer of the faithful, however, because of their connection with the entire liturgy of the word. It is better for the commentator, cantor, or director of singing, for example, not to use the ambo. (LM, no. 33)

*Commentary:*

*A side podium can still be used for the Prayer of the Faithful if necessary. A microphone or secondary podium used for announcements should be set far from the ambo.*

Any necessary announcements are to be kept completely separate from the homily; they must take place following the prayer after Communion. (LM, no. 27)

14. In order that the ambo may properly serve its liturgical purpose, it is to be rather large, since on occasion several ministers must use it at the same time. Provision must also be made

for the readers to have enough light to read the text and, as required, to have modern sound equipment enabling the faithful to hear them without difficulty. (LM, no. 34)

*Commentary:*

*While words like pulpit and lectern are in common usage, ambo is the proper liturgical word.*

*The dignity of the ambo is stressed and its dignity and purpose are to be guarded.*

*The ambo is not a storage cabinet.*

*The ambo is not to be used for announcements or special presentations by guest speakers. Its sole purpose is for the proclamation of the word (readings, homily, and prayer of the faithful).*

*Other times when the ambo may be used are specified in the rubrics of the various rites; e.g. the presentation of candidates for ordination.*

*While important, the symbolic importance of the ambo is second to that of the altar. Seasonal decorations for the ambo should be simple. A candle, flowers can be placed on the side of the ambo. In other words, the decorations should not distract but should enhance the proclaiming activity.*

*During the Easter Season it is customary to place only the Paschal Candle by the ambo; all other candles used at other times of the liturgical year are removed.*

*Announcements are not part of the liturgy of the Word; nor are they part of the rite of Eucharist.*

*Any announcements are made after the Prayer after Communion which has concluded the rite of receiving Communion. The Prayer after Communion is not a concluding prayer and should not be used as such.*

15. If there are several persons present who are able to exercise the same ministry, nothing forbids their distributing among themselves and performing different parts of the same ministry or duty. For example, one deacon may be assigned to take the sung parts, another to serve at the altar; if there are several readings, it is well to distribute them among a number of lectors. The same applies for the other ministries. But it is not at all appropriate that several persons divide a single element of the celebration among themselves, e.g., that the same readings be proclaimed by two lectors, one after the other, except as far as the Passion of the Lord is concerned. (GIRM, no. 109)

*Commentary:*

*More than one lector should serve especially at Sunday Mass where two readings are proclaimed.*

*During Holy Week it is traditional that the gospel be read in parts. Other than this special liturgical time the readings are never read in parts. The only exception would be Masses for Children.*

The liturgical assembly truly requires readers, even those not instituted. Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are certain suitable laypeople who have been trained to carry out this ministry. Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available. (LM, no. 52)

Their preparation must above all be spiritual, but what may be called a technical preparation is also needed. The spiritual preparation presupposes at least a biblical and liturgical formation... The liturgical formation ought to equip the readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and of the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. The technical preparation should make the readers more skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment. (LM, no. 55, paragraph 2)

*Commentary:*

*At Sunday Mass, it is advisable to have one lector proclaim the first reading and a second lector proclaim the second reading.*

*Several liturgical commentators have noted that no. 109 means that the Gospel, or any reading of scripture, may not be divided into various parts for proclamation with the exception of the Passion as proclaimed on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and on Good Friday.*

*The reading of scripture in parts at Masses where the Lectionary for Children is used may be continued.*

#### **IV. The Responsorial Psalm**

16. After the first reading comes the responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the word of God.

The responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should, as a rule, be taken from the Lectionary. (GIRM, no. 61)

It is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. Hence, the psalmist, or the cantor of the Psalm, sings the verses of the Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. The entire congregation remains seated and listens but, as a rule, takes part by singing the response, except when the Psalm is sung straight through without a response. (GIRM, no. 61)

...it is necessary that the psalmist have the ability for singing and a facility in correct pronunciation and diction. (GIRM, no. 102)

17. As a rule the responsorial psalm should be sung. There are two established ways of singing the psalm after the first reading: responsorially and directly. In responsorial singing, which, as far as possible, is to be given preference, the psalmist, or cantor of the psalm, sings the psalm verse and the whole congregation joins in by singing the response. In direct singing of the psalm there is no intervening response by the community; either the psalmist, or cantor of the psalm sings the psalm alone as the community listens or else all sing it together. (LM, no. 20)

18. To foster the congregation's singing, every means available in each individual culture is to be employed. In particular, use is to be made of all the relevant options provided in the Order of Readings for Mass regarding responses corresponding to the different liturgical seasons. (LM, no. 21; paragraph 2)

19. When not sung, the psalm after the reading is to be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God.

The responsorial psalm is sung or recited by the psalmist or cantor at the ambo. (LM, no. 22)

*Commentary:*

*In responsorial singing the cantor and congregation sing the response (refrain) together and the cantor sings the verses; or, the cantor and congregation sing the response while the verses are recited.*

*Optional psalms provided for different liturgical seasons are permitted. For example, a parish may adopt one particular Psalm for a particular liturgical season such as Psalm 51 for Lent.*

*The cantor may sing the responsorial psalm from the choir if need necessitates.*

#### **V. The Acclamation before the reading of the Gospel**

20. After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the *Alleluia* or another chant indicated by the rubrics is sung, as required by the liturgical season. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel and profess their faith by means of the chant. It is sung by all while standing and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated if this is appropriate. The verse, however, is sung either by the choir or by the cantor.

- a. The *Alleluia* is sung in every season other than Lent. The verses are taken from Lectionary or the *Graduale*.
- b. During Lent, in place of the *Alleluia*, the verse before the Gospel is sung, as indicated in the Lectionary. It is also permissible to sing another psalm or tract, as found in the *Graduale*.

(GIRM, no. 62)

21. When there is only one reading before the Gospel:

- a. During a season when the *Alleluia* is to be said, either the *Alleluia* Psalm or the responsorial Psalm followed by the *Alleluia* with its verse may be used;
- b. During the season when the *Alleluia* is not to be said, either the psalm and the verse before the Gospel or psalm alone may be used;
- c. The *Alleluia* or verse before the Gospel may be omitted if they are not sung.

(GIRM, no. 63)

*Commentary:*

*The “Alleluia” must be sung whenever there are two readings before the gospel (e.g., Sunday Mass); if it cannot be sung, it is omitted. When there is only one reading before the gospel (e.g., Daily Mass) it is preferable to sing the “Alleluia,” but if it cannot be sung it may be omitted or recited. This is a change from the 1981 Lectionary for Mass.*

*The gospel verse should be omitted when not sung.*

22. The Sequence, which is optional except on Easter Sunday and on Pentecost Day, **is sung** before the *Alleluia*. (GIRM, no. 64)

### **Additional parts of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word**

23. The purpose of the *Symbolum* or Profession of Faith, or Creed, is that the whole gathered people may respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily and that they may also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist. (GIRM, no. 67)

#### *Commentary:*

*A sermon is didactic and is used for teaching, for example, stewardship, Lent, etc. A homily is a brief reflection on sacred scripture as it applies to daily life.*

24. In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world. (GIRM, no. 69)

25. It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he invites the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it. The intentions announced should be sober, be composed freely but prudently, and be succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community.

The intentions are announced from the ambo or from another suitable place, by the deacon, or by a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful. (GIRM, no. 71)

#### *Commentary:*

*If the lector is reading the intentions, she/he should be prepared. It is preferable that these intentions be written before hand, or taken from an approved text. Avoid using loose leaf pages. A ceremonial binder can be used.*

*The deacon proclaims the petitions if present.*

*The practice of including a silent moment for people to add their own personal intention is discouraged by some since petitions are public petitions.*

*The petitions for the prayer of the faithful are “petitions,” not forms of thanksgiving.*

26. The celebrant introduces the prayer; a deacon, another minister, or some of the faithful may propose intentions that are short and phrased with a measure of freedom. In these petitions “the people, exercising its priestly function, makes intercession for all men and women,” [GIRM, 43] with the result that, as the liturgy of the word has its full effects in the faithful, they are better prepared to proceed to the liturgy of the Eucharist. (LM, no. 30)

#### *Commentary:*

*The Creed is not recited when the congregation has renewed its baptismal promises. The Renewal of Baptismal Promises takes the place of the Creed.*

*The prayer of the faithful may take place at the ambo because of its association with the proclamation of the word or at a side podium such as the one where announcements are made.*

27. In a special way, care must be taken to ensure that the liturgical books, particularly the Book of the Gospels and the Lectionary, which are intended for the proclamation of the word of God and hence enjoy special veneration, actually serve in liturgical celebrations as signs and symbols of higher realities and therefore be truly worthy, dignified, and beautiful. (GIRM, no. 350)

28. Because of the dignity of the word of God, the books of readings used in the celebration are not to be replaced by other pastoral aids, for example, by leaflets printed for the preparation of the readings by the faithful or for their personal meditation. (LM, no. 37)

*Commentary:*

**Only** the Lectionary and Book of Gospels are used for the proclamation of the word. Lectors should never read from missalettes or any other “disposable” worship aid.

Great care must also be taken for funerals, weddings and quinceañeras where at times those reading Sacred Scripture do so from a piece of paper (a photo copy from a Lectionary or other liturgical book) pulled from a pocket or simply carried to the ambo folded and undignified in appearance.

Volume 4 of the new Lectionary contains readings for Weddings and various ritual Masses.

At least the use of a ceremonial binder should be considered during special celebrations in order to preserve the dignity of proclaiming the word of God.

### **The Gospel**

29. The proclamation of the Gospel always stands as the high point of the liturgy of the word. Thus the liturgical tradition of both West and East has consistently made a certain distinction between the books for the readings. The Book of Gospels was always fabricated and decorated with the utmost care and shown greater respect than any of the other books of readings. In our times also, then, it is very desirable that cathedrals and at least the larger, more populous parishes and the churches with a larger attendance possess a beautifully designed Book of Gospels, separate from any other book of readings. (LM, 36)

30. The Book of Gospels is not carried in the procession at the end of Mass. (Introduction to the Book of the Gospels, no. 22)

*Commentary:*

The Book of Gospels is ordinarily carried in procession by the deacon. A lay minister may process with the Book of Gospels in the absence of a deacon.

The Book of Gospels is placed upon the altar.

The deacon, or lector, carrying the Book of Gospels in the opening procession does not bow to the altar (a brief pause before the altar followed by a slight nod of the head is often suggested) but proceeds to the altar and places the Book of Gospels upon the altar.

When placing the Book of Gospels upon the altar, it does not matter if the Book of Gospels is standing or lying flat upon the altar. What is most important is symbol/action of the Book of Gospels being placed upon the altar and being taken from the altar for proclamation. Since there is often the problem of getting the Book of Gospels to stand upward when being placed upon the altar it may be practical to lie it flat upon the altar. In some instances placing a

*stand upon the altar to keep the Book of Gospels upright can become troublesome as the removing of the stand becomes a rite in itself.*

*A deacon or priest always gets the blessing from the bishop as the singing of the gospel acclamation begins. The priest or deacon makes a deep bow before the bishop and asks his blessing.*

*A priest does not receive a blessing to proclaim the Gospel from a priest celebrant.*

*The Book of Gospels is not carried in procession at the close of Mass.*

*Only one book is carried in procession, not multiple Lectionaries or the Lectionary with the Book of Gospels.*

When the Book of Gospels is not used:

The Lectionary is not carried in procession, only the Book of Gospels. If the Book of Gospels is not used the lector carries nothing in procession.

Numbers 120 and 128 direct the preparation of Mass and state that the Lectionary is placed at the ambo before Mass and never carried in procession:

Describing the procession, "...a lector, who may carry the *Book of Gospels* (though not the Lectionary), which should be slightly elevated;" (#120);

Describing the Liturgy of the Word, "...the lector goes to the ambo and, from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass, proclaims the first reading" (# 128).

*If a parish does not have a Book of Gospels the Lectionary is placed at the ambo before the beginning of Mass. The Lectionary is never carried in procession.*

*The Lectionary and the Book of Gospels are not enthroned on a podium separate from the ambo before or after the proclamation of the readings, nor on a place in front of the ambo. For those parishes that have a special place on the front of the ambo for the display of the Lectionary or Book of Gospels neither are ever displayed during the celebration of Mass or any liturgy where the Word of God is proclaimed.*

*Liturgical commentators remind us that the emphasis is upon the spoken word being proclaimed and heard by the assembly, not upon the actual Lectionary or Book of Gospels. To display or hold up either liturgical book weakens the symbol and power of the spoken word.*

*The practice of placing the Lectionary on a podium other than the ambo during the opening procession is not appropriate. Neither the Lectionary nor the Book of Gospels should be put on display, nor placed anywhere except at the ambo (or altar – Book of Gospels) during the celebration of Mass.*

[2008]

## Summary of Guidelines for Lectors

### Do:

1. Before Mass
  - a. Be at the sacristy at least *fifteen (15) minutes* early.
  - b. Insure that the appropriate readings have been marked in the Lectionary before it is placed on the ambo before Mass begins.
2. Entrance Procession
  - a. The Lectionary is never carried in procession. When no deacon is present, the lector may carry the *Book of the Gospels* which is to be slightly elevated.
  - b. Upon reaching the altar, the celebrant and ministers make a profound bow. The lector does *not* bow upon reaching the altar when carrying the *Book of the Gospels* – in some places the lector pauses in front of the altar and makes a slight bow of the head. You go up to the altar and place the *Book* flat on the center of the altar. Reverence the altar as you leave the sanctuary, then take your place with the assembly.
3. Scripture Readings
  - a. Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different lectors, if available.
  - b. After the opening prayer, the lector goes to the ambo, reverences the altar and, proclaims the first reading.
  - c. A short pause should be observed at the conclusion of the reading before saying the acclamation, “The Word of the Lord.”
4. Sacred Silence. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. A brief period of silence (example, 20 seconds) should be observed after the first and second reading and after the homily so that all may meditate briefly on what they have heard. Upon conclusion of the reading you should remain standing at the ambo in a posture of meditation for 20 seconds before returning to your place with the assembly.
5. The Responsorial Psalm. If the Psalm after the first reading cannot be sung, it is recited. In the absence of a psalmist or cantor, the lector sings or recites the Psalm at the ambo.
6. The Gospel Acclamation is sung once the lector has returned to their place in the assembly. Note that the acclamation *alleluia* is not sung during Lent.

7. The Prayer of the Faithful. After the celebrant gives the introduction to the general intercessions, the lector, in the absence of a deacon, may announce the intentions from the ambo. You should be at the ambo ready to announce the intentions before the Creed ends, and remain there until the celebrant has said the concluding prayer.
8. Announcements take place **after** the prayer after communion. If the lector is to give the announcements they are not read at the ambo. The ambo is reserved for the proclamation of the Word and the Prayer of the Faithful only. (
9. Recessional. Neither the *Book of the Gospels* nor the Lectionary is carried out in procession at the end of Mass.

### **Do Not:**

1. Do not rush. Walk slowly and reverently. All your actions should show respect for your ministerial role.
2. Do not serve in more than one ministry per Mass, e.g., do not serve as both lector and eucharistic minister in the same Mass except under extreme circumstances.
3. Do not wear an alb. Do not wear shorts, sneakers, or immodest clothing. Dress neatly in a way consistent with the dignity of your office.
4. Do not give instructions to the assembly, this is reserved to other ministries.
5. Do not handle the Lectionary nor the *Book of the Gospels* as if they were ordinary books. Because of the dignity of the Word of God they should be treated with care and reverence.
6. Do not move the ribbon that marks the readings from page to page. It is there to mark the *beginning* of the readings for that particular Mass.
7. Do not proclaim the Word of God from leaflets, missalettes, or typewritten pages. The appropriate liturgical books should be used for weddings, funerals and quinceañeras.
8. Your speaking style must be audible, clear, and intelligent so that the Word of God may be properly understood by the assembly.
9. Do not raise the Lectionary up to the people while saying, *The Word of the Lord*.
10. Do not substitute songs or hymns in place of the Responsorial Psalm. The Psalm should be taken from the Lectionary.

11. Do not rush from one reading to the other. The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. Proper times for silence are after the first and second reading, and after the homily.
12. Do not make announcements after the homily. They should be made following the prayer after communion.
13. Do not neglect the study of the Bible. The qualified lector is a person who often reads the Bible privately. His or her intimate knowledge of it and enthusiasm for it should be infectious.