

Lector Ministry: Procedures and Training

Ray Erfle (610) 458-7371

Ray.Erfle@gmail.com)

(If you prefer an online version applicable to all parishes which includes numerous commented and timed readings by experienced lectors, see GabrielsHelpers.org)

This is PART ONE of our three-part training how-to.

This document is designed for those who are considering serving in or are new to the lector ministry and for experienced lectors who want to be best of the best. It is also a for the occasional reader of scripture at a liturgical gathering such as a Baptism, Confirmation, a wedding, a funeral or other liturgical occasion.

Should you be a lector?

If you have enjoyed reading to a child, you likely will experience joy in the lector ministry. If you've read to a group of children, you have already demonstrated skills which include some required by a lector. And, when you hear, like Elijah, "a tiny whispering sound" inviting you to share a greater knowledge of and love for the Lord God, being a lector is a ministry you will find fulfilling and rewarding.

Are you nervous or uncomfortable speaking to a group? Concerned about mistakes?

Spend less than an hour with us to get the proclamation tools you need in order to gain the confidence you want. Learn some simple tricks to be error and embarrassment free.

The "great secret" in becoming a better lector is

to practice proclaiming your assigned text multiple times. Out loud. Always practice aloud.

Remember: The secret is . . . to practice proclaiming your assigned text multiple times. Aloud. Always practice out loud.

You'll be amazed how each repetition will reveal a surprising number of small improvements. The cumulative effect will be to nurture in your listeners a "warm and living love for Sacred Scripture."

This *three-part how-to* will enable you become one of the more effective lectors in our parish. You will become closer to our God and Savior. And, once in a while you might experience a flash of the beatific.

How you gain all this, is a wonder-filled experience. And a significant responsibility.

A lector **PROCLAIMS** Sacred Scripture. You are not a talking head dispassionately “reading” a TV news story or some mundane report at a boring seminar.

How are the next two tutorial parts structured?

PART TWO builds your skills and insights using the step-by-step learning process.

It has the *Eight Steps to Success*. These are fundamental proclaiming components and techniques. Included are some familiar scripture texts proclaimed by experienced lectors. See how each of these lectors succeeds in attaining the goal of the lector ministry. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops in their *General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM, #101)* teaches that the goal is 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.”

To determine how close you get to this goal, proclaim the same readings and have someone critique it using the “Lector Feedback Form” provided below. This feedback form assesses several key dimensions of effective proclaiming; the form is also available for downloading at *GabrielsHelpers.org*

PART THREE contains a variety of practical hints, pitfalls and summary of the training package.

Who helps you with your training / familiarization?

Your primary source will be your parish lector coach: Ray Erfle

You can contact Ray by phone (610-458-7371) or by email (Ray.Erfle@gmail.com).

The first one hour meeting will start at the Baptismal Font in the narthex (rear of the church).

We’ll walk through each action you will routinely take both before and during your assigned Mass.

How are lectors scheduled at Saint Elizabet Church?

Lector assignments are usually on a quarterly schedule communicated by the Ministry Scheduler software and posted on the bulletin board outside the daily Mass chapel at church. Prior to being included on the schedule, you will need to inform the parish office of your preferences regarding the time(s) of the Mass you are available to serve as a lector.

Lectors are typically assigned to read once a month. When you need a substitute for a particular Mass, the scheduling application has an easy to use function for arranging a substitute.

Parishes often have some unique non-speaking procedures and customs in place for their parish liturgies. Well in advance of your first assigned lector date, you will be given in-person instruction on what, why, when, where and suggestions on how to accomplish these mini-tasks.

What training texts and other resources are available for you?

At the beginning of each liturgical year Saint Elizabeth Parish provides for all lectors a personal copy of the *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers and Proclaimers of the Word*. **This is a KEY to your success.** For each Sunday, solemnity and feast day this guide contains the two lector readings, the Responsorial Psalm, usually sung by a cantor, and the Gospel, proclaimed by the priest or deacon. Included in the workbook is a brief explanation for each text. Also included are pronunciation and helpful proclaiming tips.

From this work book you will readily grasp the common theme or core message of the first reading and the Gospel. The theme will guide you in determining what portions of your assigned text to emphasize, when to make eye contact, when to pause and what voice tones, emotions and inflections to use.

Additional parish resources also include instructional and reference volumes, a pronunciation book for biblical names of persons and places and Bible commentaries explaining the sacred texts in much greater depth. The Adult Spiritual library is in the Holy Spiritual library in the Holy Family Room accessible through the church narthex.

Question: To be a better lector, which is more important: your public speaking mechanical skills or knowing the common theme of the first reading and Gospel?

Answer: Both are mandatory. The text has to be readily heard, presented clearly to be easily understood, delivered with enough time to be absorbed and with appropriate emotional engagement **and** with the core message (or theme) being made readily apparent.

Steps for the day of your assigned Mass

Please arrive at church about 15-20 minutes before your assigned Mass. Sign-in on the bulletin board outside the daily Mass chapel, near the robing sacristy.

Pick up a *Breaking Bread* hymnal and locate the readings for that day.

If your reading has two optional lengths, ask the celebrant which he prefers. Ask the homilist (it may be the celebrant or the deacon) if he wants you to emphasize any words or phrase in your reading.

Next go to the ambo (pulpit) to ensure the *Lectionary* turning ribbon marks your reading and the microphone is pointed toward and about six inches from your chin. Position the lectionary as desired. Consider silently practicing this reading from beginning to end. Note the opening hymn. Then return to the sacristy.

Normally there are two lectors at each weekend Mass so confirm the other lector is present. If he/she is not on hand, you will probably be needed to proclaim both readings.

If a deacon is NOT present . .

Confirm a deacon is present to carry the *Book of the Gospels* and read the *General Intercessions*. Only rarely will a deacon not be present for a weekend Mass. If no deacon, the lector assigned the first reading will carry the *Book of the Gospels* during the entrance procession, preceding the celebrant and following the other lector. Carry the *Book of the Gospels* at forehead height.

As soon as you reach the first step in front of the altar, without stopping, go up the steps to the right side of the altar, walk around the altar to face the congregation and place the *Book of the Gospels* (closed) in the center of the altar, make a simple bow toward the altar then go directly to the first pew where both lectors are normally seated.

The *Book of the Gospels* is not returned at the end of Mass.

Also, in the absence a deacon, the *General Intercessions* will be read immediately after the Credo by the second lector, who remains in the sanctuary after his/her reading. Before Mass begins it may be helpful to ask the celebrant for the correct pronunciation of difficult names of the sick and/or departed.

If a choir / cantor is not present . .

The first lector reads the Responsorial Psalm immediately after the first reading then returns to the lector pew without bowing.

When a deacon is present . . Five minutes before the entrance procession begins both lectors line up at the Baptismal Font. The first lector follows the cross bearer and acolytes (carrying the candles) by six feet and the second lector follows the first also by six feet. If requested by the celebrant, the lectors may walk side-by-side behind the altar servers for the entrance procession and the recessional. Please carry a hymnal and join in the singing of the entrance hymn as you process up the main aisle.

At the first step in front of the altar, move to the right. When the celebrant genuflects, you do the same (but if you are not able to genuflect, simply bow toward the altar instead) then walk into the first pew (reserved for lectors). After the celebrant says the Collect and sits down at the chair, the first reader stands up, moves toward the ambo, makes a simple bow toward the altar, and then goes up the steps to the ambo for the first reading. When you reach the ambo, stand with equal weight on both feet. If necessary adjust the position of the *Lectionary* and the stem of the microphone so that your chin is about six inches from the mic. Consider placing the fingers of one hand on the text as a place holder and the other hand under the *Lectionary* to re-position it during your reading. Upon completion of the first reading, the lector turns the page to the second reading using the turning ribbon then returns to the first pew without another bow toward the altar.

Immediately after the cantor completes the Responsorial Psalm and reaches the bottom step, the second reader goes to the ambo in the same fashion as the first reader. Upon completion of the reading, the second lector closes the *Lectionary* and places it on the ambo shelf then returns to the first pew without another bow toward the altar.

When it is time for the distribution of Holy Communion, the usher will indicate when the lectors should enter the Communion line. Note that one Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is usually stationed next to the lectors' pew to distribute gluten-free hosts to those who request them. A second EM distributes Holy Communion to the choir before moving over for the rest of the congregation, starting with the lectors in the first pew.

After the final prayers, the priest, deacon and altar servers will line up on the floor in front of the altar for the recessional. Both lectors will step out of their pew and stand to right of the servers, genuflect (or bow as needed) along with the priest and deacon then recess down the aisle in the same order as in the entrance procession.

***** END OF Part One*****

LECTOR FEEDBACK FORM

Please give your candid guidance on how I could read more effectively. Many thanks.

VOLUME Too Low Just Right Too Loud
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

SPEED / PACE Too Slow Just Right Too fast
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

PAUSES Too Many Just Right Too Few
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

WORD CLARITY Mumbled Just Right Too Enunciated
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

TONE / EMOTION Monotone Just Right Too Dramatic
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

EYE CONTACT Too little Just Right Too Much Un-natural ? Hectic
When? Beginning Middle End Various Times

Comments:

ATTIRE Too informal Just Right Too Stylish

POSTURE Too slouched Just Right Too Stiff
Made distracting movements? When?

Comments:

Lector Ministry: Procedures and Training PART TWO

IDEALLY, FIVE DAYS BEFORE your scheduled Mass, begin preparing to proclaim BOTH your assigned reading and the other reading.

Remember: Winging it may be great for angels but you and I usually make proclaiming progress step-by-step.

HERE ARE YOUR EIGHT STEPS TO SUCCESS:

Step 1 Determine the common theme / core message of the first reading and the Gospel.

The first reading, usually from the Old Testament, reflects a theme from the Gospel. Knowing the theme or core message will enable you to bring appropriate tones, inflections and emotions to your proclamation.

Step 2 From the Bible read the sections before and after your assigned text to get a better understanding of the author's core message. This also helps determine what you should emphasize and your tone of voice. There may be more than one core message or theme.

Step 3 Open your *Workbook for Lectors* to your assigned Saturday/Sunday date and read all of it. For both lector readings, using your fingers as a place holder, silently enunciate every word with exaggerated lip and mouth movements. Note any uncommon phrasing and uncommon word order. You are developing verbal "mind muscle" memory. The Workbook has the readings formatted exactly as in the Lectionary which will be on the ambo.

Step 4 Out loud speak each word. Enunciate. Open your mouth. Use the full range of your lips and tongue. Do not drop letters unless silent. This develops more verbal "mind muscle" patterning.

Unsure even a little bit if a pronunciation is correct? Confirm it now. See the Workbook or parish pronunciation book. Or, try Google, How do I pronounce *strangeword*?

Step 5 Find a practice place where you can stand holding the text in one hand and place holder fingers with the other hand. Proclaim so that imaginary congregants sitting 30 feet (or 10 long paces) from you can easily and distinctly hear you. Use this same volume when using the microphone at Mass.

Step 6 Every time and immediately before speaking, inhale deeply.

A quick, deep "belly breath" will:

- a) slow your speaking speed,
- b) comfortably enable each word to reach and easily be heard by rear-most congregants,
- c) eliminate throat strain,
- d) increase the richness of your voice,
- e) enable clearer pronunciation and
- f) facilitate eye contact.

While you proclaim, pause and quickly, deeply inhale at every comma and period as well as at each change of thought, speaker and scene. Only then will you have the optimal lung power to project your voice that will be heard easily in the rear.

Saint Elizabeth's sound system has inherent "dead spots" which your projection needs to overcome.

If the Mass is crowded you must project much more since bodies absorb lots of sound.

Examples: Christmas, Easter, First Communion, Confirmation and other large liturgical occasions.

You are encouraged to increase your lung capacity and power. See Google, muscles of respiration and deep breathing exercises for intercostal muscles and diaphragm, etc.

Step 7 With the rear-most people, make and hold eye contact:

- a) for "A Reading from . . ." (pronounced "Uh reading. . .") pause for two seconds, then
- b) the entire opening line, then
- c) each time when speaking a word or phrase which refers to the theme or core message, then
- d) again for all of the last sentence which is spoken at a decelerating rate, then finally
- e) after a three second pause, proclaim, "The Word of the Lord."

If you hold eye contact with people in the front or middle of the congregation your voice projection will not reach the far rear. It will reach only where you look. Consider making eye contact with people in the front and middle only when you are silent.

The more text you memorize, the easier eye contact becomes.

Step 8 How fast or slowly should I proclaim?

Time how long you take to proclaim each of the four following texts. They are from Isaiah, Corinthians, Hebrews and Philippians.

Then see times by experienced lectors at the end of this step.

And, how well do they accomplish **the goal of the lector ministry**? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in their General Instruction on the Roman Missal paragraph 101 states 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."

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your
voice,

Jerusalem, herald of good news!

Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah:
here is your God!

Here comes with power the Lord God, who rules by
his strong arm; Here is his reward with him, his
recompense before him.

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers
his lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes
with care.

The word of the Lord.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.

But I shall show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love,

I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if

I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing.

For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things.

At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face.

At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The word of the Lord

A reading from the Letters to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters:

Indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

The word of the Lord

A reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Philippians

Brothers and sisters:

I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession.

Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord

The proclaiming times by experienced lectors are:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 Year C Baptism of the Lord Lectionary #21

Beginning with "Comfort. Give comfort to my people. . . ." 1 minute 41 seconds

How warm does "comfort" sound to you? Are you "crying out" with power? Are your "glad tidings" joy filled? Does your shepherd sound caring? Let your tone of voice convey the emotion of the word or phrase.

I Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13 Year C Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary #72

Beginning with "Brothers and sisters: Strive eagerly. . ." 2 minutes 43 seconds

Does your tone vary with the multiple aspects of charity and love? Do your pauses allow enough time for the love's components to be absorbed by the congregants? Does it soar at the end? Very familiar readings can become almost trite. They require different types of emphasis on the individual ideas.

Hebrews 4:12-13 Year B 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary #143

Beginning with "Brothers and sisters: Indeed the word . . ." 41 seconds

With very short readings you should proclaim much more slowly than those of typical length. This slower pace will alert the assembly that something different follows. If spoken at the pace used with texts of "normal" length, you will be done before the congregants would begin to listen.

Philippians 3:8-14 Year C Fifth Sunday of Lent Lectionary #36

Beginning with "brothers and Sisters: I consider everything as a loss. . ." 1 minute 43 seconds

If you have proclaimed this reading well you are to be congratulated! It is one of the more challenging that you will encounter. Because of its uncommon word order and complexity including the 85 word run-on second sentence, your speed should be slower, pauses more frequent, rhythm more variable and greater eye contact more desirable.

Caution: Beware of stone or marble walled churches. They echo, bounce and distort sound. Thus your speed has to be 2/3 of your rate in a "soft" walled church.

***** End of PART TWO *****

Lector Ministry: Procedures and Training

PART THREE

HINTS...

- About 8 hours before Mass, have only water, coffee or tea. NO milk, citrus, or any solid food since these will affect your vocal cords and/or inhibit deep breathing.
- Practice your text aloud again. You can never over practice.
- At your assigned Mass and unsure about some aspect, ask the other lector, sacristan, deacon or celebrant. All are always happy to share. Please, don't hesitate to ask.
- If you are over 6 feet tall, consider reading from the *Lectionary* while holding it elevated from the ambo's bookrest using one hand and with the other hand as a place holder. This will allow better microphone positioning and much more effective eye contact while proclaiming.
- While proclaiming if your "T or P words" have an explosive pop sound, back away slightly from the mic.
- Ask a spouse, astute friend, peer lector or experienced usher positioned in the rear of the church to critique your proclamation. A *Lector Feedback Form* listing the aspects of proclamation was discussed in PART ONE and is free for printing at GabrielsHelpers.org
- To be video recorded, either opt to serve at a "streaming Mass" on Saturday at 5:30 or Sunday at 9:30 or volunteer when a substitute lector for a streaming Mass is requested. This recording will be a wonderful lesson in humility and powerful incentive for more focused practice.

COMMON PITFALLS...

- Speaking too fast. Slow way down. Speed kills.
- And a monotone is almost worse. Virtually all readings require appropriate pauses, inflections and emotions.
- Do not assume the amplification system will carry your voice to the far rear. Don't be shy. BOOM it.
- A pause means pause one or two or three seconds, depending. Help the listener absorb.
- If your Mass has multiple readings with multiple lectors like the Easter Vigil, consider writing your text's Lectionary page number on your palm. Someone may have inadvertently moved the marker for your page.

What can you do when you have practiced a particular text and are ambivalent about some aspect of your proclamation?

One solution is to be still, pray, reflect, review and contemplate. Focus on attaining the **lector's mandated goal . . . that after "careful preparation . . . the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture."** (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal #101*)

A word of caution. If after significant experience as a "deputed lector" you start to feel relaxed, comfortable and a little cocky about your skills, you absolutely will make elementary proclamation mistakes. Common errors are not proclaiming some of the words as written or simply losing you place while making eye contact. The best balm for bright red blushing and a bruised ego is to determine what caused the mistake. Consider revisiting Session 2, *Eight Steps to Success* to identify the oversight then practice the cure. And have a big bite of humble pie. As you prepare for your next assignment, remember that a little "attack of butterflies" is healthy.

Now, each listener will be able to easily hear, understand, process, retain and, hopefully, "develop in their hearts a warn and living love for Sacred Scripture.

Lord, we give thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.

Thank God for being allowed to proclaim "The word of the Lord"

***** BEGINNING *****