



GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS

INTRODUCTION

The Office for Worship has prepared the following guidelines for lectors (for both instituted and commissioned lay persons) for Holy Mass in the Diocese of Orange, as well as at other liturgical celebrations.

The proclamation of the Word of God is central to the life of the Church. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal teaches, “[i]n the readings, as explained by the homily, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation and nourishing their spirit” (GIRM 55). The lector’s ministry makes the living Word audible and effective so that the assembly may hear, interiorize, and respond in faith.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide principles regarding this important ministry of the Church. They define the contents of the liturgical law on this matter, the demands of good liturgy, and the expectations of the universal and local Church. Lectors serve the assembly by proclaiming Sacred Scripture with faith, dignity, and love, fostering in the faithful “may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture” (GIRM 101).

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD / LECTORS

“The Church has always venerated the Sacred Scriptures just as she venerates the Body of the Lord. In the Sacred Liturgy, the faithful are nourished from both the table of God’s Word and the table of Christ’s Body” (DV 21). The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a service to the Church. In the liturgy, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ continues to proclaim the Gospel through the Church. The lector therefore serves not merely as a reader, but as a minister through whom the faithful hear the living Word of God. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. The ministry of the Word should, therefore, be treated seriously and with great dignity.

Preparation for this ministry includes not only practicing pronunciation and delivery, but also prayerful reflection on the Scriptures so that the lector first receives the Word before proclaiming it (cf. LM 55). Through prayer, meditation, and study of the Scriptures, the lector allows the Word to take root in his or her own heart, so that the proclamation offered to the assembly flows from personal faith and reverence. The ministry of the lector is therefore both a liturgical service and a lifelong invitation to deeper conversion through the Word of God.

In the liturgy, the Word of God is not merely read. It is proclaimed, yet not with theatrical show. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate 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.

The Church recognizes two forms of service as a lector: the instituted lector and the commissioned (non-instituted) lector. An instituted lector is a member of the faithful who has been formally instituted into this stable ministry through the Church's liturgical rite, in the Diocese of Orange this is reserved for men in formation for Holy Orders. In addition to proclaiming the readings (except the Gospel), the instituted lector may announce the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful and proclaim the Responsorial Psalm when no psalmist is present (cf. GIRM 99).

When an instituted lector is not present, other qualified laypersons may be commissioned or designated to perform the tasks an instituted lector would. These lectors should be truly suited for this ministry and receive careful spiritual, biblical, and practical formation so that their proclamation of the Word of God fosters in the faithful a deeper love for Sacred Scripture (cf. GIRM 101).

For the purposes of this document, the term “lector” will be used to refer to both instituted and commissioned lectors, unless otherwise specified.

Whenever an instituted lector is present, the exercise of the ministry of lector belongs to him in preference to a commissioned (non-instituted) lector.

The proclamation of the readings before the Gospel ordinarily belongs to the lector. However, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal provides for the following exceptions:

- If no instituted or commissioned lector is present, the deacon may proclaim the other readings in addition to the Gospel, provided no other suitable lector is available (cf. GIRM 176).
- If neither an instituted or commissioned lector, nor a deacon is present, the priest himself proclaims all of the readings from the ambo (cf. GIRM 135).

Therefore, the ordinary order of preference for proclaiming the readings before the Gospel is:

1. An instituted lector.
2. A commissioned (non-instituted) lector or other suitable lay reader.
3. The deacon, if no suitable lector is available.
4. The priest, if no lector or deacon is available.

The Church encourages the use of multiple lectors when several readings are assigned, allowing the ministry to be shared among those who are properly prepared. "[I]f there are several readings, it is well to distribute them among a number of lectors" (GIRM 109).

Accordingly:

- When there are two readings before the Gospel, it is preferable that each reading be proclaimed by a different lector.
- A single reading is never to be divided between two or more lectors. The only exception is the proclamation of the Passion of the Lord on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, which may be divided among multiple readers in accordance with the liturgical rubrics.
- When only one qualified lector is available, that lector may proclaim all of the readings preceding the Gospel.

The Gospel is read by the deacon, or in his absence the priest.

Note: During the proclamation of the Passion of the Lord on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, the deacon, by virtue of his proper role in proclaiming the Gospel, has first priority to proclaim the Passion. The priest proclaims the Passion when a deacon is not present. When multiple deacons are present, they should all participate, with the various parts of the Passion distributed among them (cf CB 273). Qualified lay lectors may proclaim the various parts when needed, according to the liturgical rubrics. The introduction, “The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ...” is proclaimed by the deacon or, in his absence, the priest, never by a lector.

The dignity of the ambo reflects the dignity of the Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy. From the ambo, God speaks to his people, and Christ himself is present in his word when the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed in the Church. As the altar is the table of the Eucharist, the ambo is the table of the Word, from which the faithful are nourished by Sacred Scripture and called to respond in faith. For this reason, the ambo is to remain a place set apart for the proclamation of the Word and those elements intimately connected with it (cf. GIRM, no. 309; Introduction to the Lectionary, nos. 32, 49).

The ambo is reserved exclusively for the proclamation of the Word of God (readings, Responsorial Psalm, Gospel, homily, Easter Proclamation (Exsultet), sequences, and at times the Prayer of the Faithful). Appeals, announcements, Words of Remembrance, the Rosary, or any other non-liturgical elements shall be provided from a different suitable space (e.g., a lectern, the sanctuary steps, or another designated location). This preserves the sacred character of the ambo as the place from which God speaks to his people.

REQUIREMENTS

It is the responsibility of the pastor to establish, recruit, train, commission, and oversee the ministry of lectors within the parish. While the pastor may establish additional parish norms and practices suited to the needs of his community, they must be consistent with and may not diminish or contradict these diocesan guidelines. All lectors serving in the Diocese of Orange are to follow the norms established by the Bishop of Orange.

The following are the requirements for serving as a lector at parish Masses in the Diocese of Orange:

- To be eligible for this ministry, candidates must be fully initiated in the Catholic Church (Baptized, Confirmed, and received First Holy Communion).
- They must be of at least 16 years of age (or older per pastoral discretion). In exceptional cases, younger candidates may be recommended individually to the Pastor for his approval.
- They must have skills in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding of the scriptures
- They should be persons who sincerely strive to live the Gospel message in their communal and individual lives.
- They shall faithfully participate in the Sunday Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church and, when serving as a lector, receive Holy Communion at the Mass in which they minister.
- They are to wear proper attire. (See section below on Dress and Attire.)

All Lector Coordinators are required to comply with the Background Screening and Safe Environment Training requirements of the Diocese of Orange.

Lectors who regularly assist with liturgical preparation in the sacristy or other preparation areas where minors (such as altar servers) are present should also complete the Diocese's required background screening (LiveScan fingerprinting) and follow the Diocesan Policy for Safe Environment compliance. While the ministry of lector does not ordinarily require contact with minors, compliance with these requirements is expected whenever a lector's ministry places them in regular or recurring proximity to minors before, during, or after the liturgy.

Pastors and parish ministry coordinators are responsible for ensuring that all ministers who serve in environments where minors are present comply with diocesan Safe Environment policies. For more information on the steps that need to be taken to be in compliance please contact your parish Record Custodian or contact Esther Ramirez in the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection at 714-282-3069 or eramirez@rcbo.org.

DRESS AND ATTIRE

Lectors proclaim the living Word of God in a sacred ministry that places them visibly before the assembly. For this reason, the Church asks that lectors present themselves in a manner that reflects reverence, humility, and the dignity of the ministry entrusted to them.

The manner of dress for lectors should never draw attention to the individual, but rather support an atmosphere of prayer and devotion, allowing the faithful to focus on Christ speaking through the proclaimed Word.

The following are the general principles for dress and attire:

- Attire should be modest, respectful, and dignified, reflecting the sacred nature of the liturgy.
- Clothing should be neat, clean, and appropriate for Mass, avoiding anything casual, distracting, or expressive of personal agendas.
- Lectors should dress in a way that reflects service to the Church, not personal expression.
- Albs or other clerical vesture are not appropriate for commissioned lectors, who serve as members of the worshipping assembly.

The following are specific guidelines for men and women:

- Men are expected to wear dress slacks, a collared dress shirt, and dress shoes. A jacket and tie are encouraged when possible.
- Women are expected to wear dresses, skirts, pants suits, or other modest and dignified attire appropriate for the sacred liturgy.
- All clothing should reflect Christian modesty and be suitable for approaching the ambo and proclaiming the scriptures.

To preserve the reverence of the liturgy and avoid distraction:

- Holiday-themed attire or accessories such as Christmas sweaters, reindeer antlers, Halloween costumes, Easter-themed clothing, or other novelty items are not permitted.
- Casual clothing such as jeans, t-shirts, athletic wear, or tennis shoes is not permitted.
- Immodest clothing that is overly tight, revealing, or inappropriate is not permitted.
- Visible tattoos, body piercings (such as ear plugs/gauges), or distracting jewelry are not permitted while serving.
- Clothing or accessories that display political messages, social movements, or ideological statements are not permitted, including pins, logos, or symbols (e.g., pride/rainbow pins).

The Sacred Liturgy is not the place for personal, political, or social expression. Lectors are asked to set aside personal preferences while serving, in order to witness to the unity of the Church and the centrality of Christ in the proclaimed Word.

These guidelines for dress and attire are not intended to judge or exclude, but to foster reverence, unity, and devotion within the celebration of the Mass.

Pastors are welcome to establish a uniform dress code for lectors at their parish.

PROCEDURES DURING HOLY MASS

"In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people... so that they may learn to offer their very selves" (GIRM 95). All liturgical ministers, including lectors, should show the greatest reverence for the proclaimed Word by their demeanor, attire, and actions.

Lectors arrive 15–20 minutes early (or earlier for special liturgies) to review the Lectionary, check the microphone, and pray. The lectionary should be placed on the ambo before the beginning of the Mass, it is never carried in the procession.

Instituted lectors may participate in the entrance procession and, in the absence of a deacon, carry the Book of the Gospels. Commissioned (non-instituted) lectors do not participate in the entrance procession, as this distinguishes their role from that of instituted lectors. However in the absence of a deacon or an instituted lector, they may carry the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession, but they do not take their places in the sanctuary.

After the Collect, all are seated. The priest may briefly introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word before the readings begin (cf. GIRM 128). This introduction, when used, belongs to the priest alone. The lector does not add commentary or additional introductions.

When it is time to proclaim the reading, the lector approaches the ambo with dignity and reverence, never hurriedly. If the lector passes in front of the altar enroute to the ambo, a profound bow to the altar is made before proceeding. Likewise, if the lector does not pass in front of the altar, a profound bow is still made towards the altar upon approaching the sanctuary before arriving at the ambo. After proclaiming the reading and observing the appropriate period of silence, the lector returns to his or her seat in the same reverent manner (cf. CB 72).

When two lectors are assigned, the first lector returns to his or her seat after the first reading and before the Responsorial Psalm begins. The second lector approaches the ambo following the Responsorial Psalm and returns to his or her seat before the Gospel Acclamation. When only one lector proclaims both readings, he or she returns to their seat before the Responsorial Psalm and returns to the ambo for the second reading.

While proclaiming the Word of God, the lector should maintain a reverent and dignified posture. The Lectionary is placed on the ambo and should not be lifted from the ambo. Throughout the proclamation, the lector should avoid gestures or mannerisms that distract from the Word of God, such as leaning on the ambo, placing hands in pockets, shifting unnecessarily, or drawing attention to oneself. The focus should always remain on the Scriptures being proclaimed rather than on the minister.

Lectors begin to proclaim by saying, "A reading from ..." as written in the Lectionary. It is inappropriate to add words such as: "The first reading from..."

The lector concludes the proclamation of the reading from the ambo using the proper formula:

"The Word of the Lord."

To which all respond:

"Thanks be to God."

The introduction and conclusion of the readings should be distinguished from the reading itself. Lectors do this by observing a pause of about three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase.

An additional brief period of silence may follow each reading to allow for reflection on the Word of God before the next part of the Liturgy of the Word (cf. GIRM 128).

Sacred silence is an integral part of the Liturgy and fosters meditation on the Scriptures during the Liturgy of the Word. Lectors should proclaim the readings at a deliberate pace, avoiding any haste that hinders recollection. Brief periods of silence should be observed before the reading begins, after each reading, and after the Responsorial Psalm, allowing the faithful to receive the Word of God in their hearts and prepare a prayerful response (cf. GIRM 56, 128; Introduction to the Lectionary 28).

If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, lectors should begin the recitation with the antiphon. Announcing "The Responsorial Psalm is..." or "Our response is..." is unnecessary.

The lector is not at liberty to change the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy to accommodate a desire for inclusive language or another reason. The texts should be read as provided and approved by the Holy See and the Bishop's Conference.

The lector should allow the liturgical dialogue to unfold naturally and should not use gestures to cue the assembly's response. There is no need to raise a hand or otherwise signal the faithful to respond with the acclamation "Thanks be to God", the Responsorial Psalm, or to the responses during the Prayer of the Faithful. The liturgical texts themselves provide the proper cue, and the assembly's participation should arise naturally from the rhythm of the celebration. The lector's demeanor should remain reverent, dignified, and free from unnecessary gestures that draw attention away from the proclamation of the Word.

Familiarity with the Lectionary and Ordo: All four volumes of the Lectionary for Mass should be available in every parish and properly prepared for the celebration (Sundays, Weekdays, Saints, and Ritual Masses, as needed). Lectors and those responsible for preparing the liturgy should consult the Ordo (liturgical calendar) to ensure that the correct readings are used, particularly on solemnities, feasts, memorials, ritual Masses, and other special celebrations. Proper preparation of the Lectionary helps ensure the accurate and dignified proclamation of the Word of God.

The readings and Gospel are to be proclaimed from the proper liturgical books (i.e the Lectionary and the Book of the Gospels). These sacred texts are designated for the proclamation of the Word of God within the liturgy.

Only in special circumstances where additional preparation is required may a properly prepared liturgical binder be used in place of the liturgical books. Under no circumstance should the readings be proclaimed from a worship aid, loose sheet of paper, or any disposable material. The use of the approved liturgical books underscores the dignity and permanence of the Word of God proclaimed in the Church.

Role of Deacons: With or without a Bishop present, the deacon (when present) proclaims the

Gospel and announces the intentions for the Prayers of the Faithful. In the absence of a deacon, the lector may announce the Prayers of the Faithful (see section below).

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The Responsorial Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and constitutes a proclamation of the Word of God. It should preferably be sung, at least as regards the assembly's response, and is ordinarily proclaimed by the cantor or psalmist from the ambo (cf. GIRM 61, 309). If it cannot be sung, it should be recited in a manner that fosters meditation on the Word of God.

In keeping with the Diocesan Music Guidelines, the leadership of music ministry belongs to the musicians. The lector does not proclaim or recite the Psalm when a cantor or psalmist is present. Only in the complete absence of a cantor/psalmist may the lector recite the Psalm in a manner that fosters meditation (cf. GIRM 99, 196). Lectors should coordinate with the music ministry beforehand.

THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL (UNIVERSAL PRAYER)

The Prayer of the Faithful concludes the Liturgy of the Word, in which the faithful exercise their priestly office by offering prayers for the Church and the needs of the world. The priest celebrant directs this prayer from the chair, introducing the intercessions with a brief invitation and concluding them with the closing prayer. The intentions should be sober, succinct, and expressive of the prayer of the entire community.

The intentions are announced from the ambo or another suitable place announced by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, they may be read by a lector, cantor, or another designated lay minister (cf. GIRM 71). The faithful, standing, respond to each intention either with a common invocation or by praying in silence.

A common dialogue is:

Minister: We pray to the Lord.

Assembly: Lord, hear our prayer.

The minister should not use hand gestures or other visual cues to prompt the assembly's response, as the prescribed liturgical dialogue itself provides the appropriate invitation. If any cue is given, it should be no more than a natural raising of the eyes toward the assembly following the invitation. This dialogue may be either spoken or sung, according to the nature of the celebration.

In special circumstances, such as multilingual liturgies, the intentions may be divided among multiple deacons, lectors, or other designated ministers. When this occurs, each minister should proclaim complete intentions in the assigned language, maintaining the dignity and unity of the Prayer of the Faithful. Mixing the roles of a deacon and lay ministers within the same Prayer of the Faithful should ordinarily be avoided.

For pastoral reasons, family members may be allowed to proclaim the Prayer of the Faithful at weddings or funerals, per the pastor's discretion.

Those entrusted with proclaiming the intentions should prepare beforehand by practicing

unfamiliar names and places and by ensuring that the intercessions can be proclaimed clearly and deliberately, allowing the faithful sufficient time to respond. The intentions themselves should be brief, inclusive, and ordinarily prepared in advance by the pastor or the parish liturgy team. A lector is not permitted to add petitions or the names of those who are ill or deceased to the Universal Prayer. For more information, please consult the diocesan [Guidelines for the Prayer of the Faithful](#) published in 2024.

ONGOING FORMATION AND PREPARATION

All lectors are expected to participate in periodic diocesan or parish training, workshops, and enrichment on the theology of the Word, proclamation skills, and liturgical updates. Annual formation is strongly encouraged.

COMMISSIONING & BLESSING OF LECTORS

Parishes should publicly commission lay ministers who will proclaim the Word of God before they begin serving as commissioned lectors. This commissioning recognizes their ministry within the parish community and should take place during a liturgical celebration.

The commissioning of a lector is not a temporary appointment and does not expire. Rather, it remains in effect until the pastor determines otherwise. The pastor, exercising his pastoral authority, may remove a lector from this ministry at any time for a just cause.

The commissioning should be celebrated using the Order for the Blessing of Readers found in the Book of Blessings, Chapter 61 (nos. 1827–1846). This rite is distinct from the institution of lectors and serves as the Church's liturgical blessing for lay persons who have been designated to proclaim the Word of God in the parish.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

For special liturgies (e.g., Blue Masses, Funerals, weddings, or other parish celebrations), only **properly trained and commissioned lectors** should be scheduled. If untrained individuals (e.g., guests or family members) are invited for pastoral reasons, a brief rehearsal with the pastor or liturgy coordinator is required to ensure the suitability of the minister. Preparation must always include prayerful reflection on the readings.

For Masses celebrated at Catholic schools, Catholic students who have received at least Baptism and First Holy Communion may serve as lectors, provided they have received appropriate formation and preparation and are capable of proclaiming the Scriptures with clarity and reverence. Schools are encouraged to foster this ministry as part of the liturgical formation of their students. When a Catholic school participates in a parish Mass, whether as part of a regularly scheduled daily Mass or at a special Sunday Mass, qualified Catholic students from the school may also serve as lectors, provided they meet the same requirements for formation, preparation, and ability to proclaim the Scriptures with clarity and reverence.

Abbreviations used

CB	Ceremonial of Bishops
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
GIRM	General Instruction of the Roman Missal
LM	Lectionary for Mass

Approved on September 15, 2026

By:



Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann, J.C.D., D.D., D.Min.



Prepared by the Office for Worship

Diocese of Orange

2026