



St. Francis de Sales Parish

Holland, Michigan

The Ministry of the Lector

What (is the ministry? How did it come into being?)

Until the changes of Vatican II in the 1960s, the priest read the Scriptures first in Latin at the altar with his back to the people, and then in English at the pulpit. The readings were passages from the Epistles and Gospels arranged in one set of readings that was repeated year after year. On Sundays a homily usually followed, but rarely did the homily have much to do with the Scripture passages just heard.

Through our present Lectionary, the Catholic community now experiences the Bible in a depth and breadth unknown for hundreds of years. Over the course of three years, we now have proclaimed and preached most of the New Testament and carefully chosen selections from the Old Testament, including the poetic words of the Psalms.

This worship tool has been so powerful that many other Christian communities in our country and abroad use an ecumenical version of our lectionary (called the Common Lectionary) for their Sunday worship: Lutherans, United Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and the United Church of Christ use this Common Lectionary. Who would have thought this possible even a few years ago?

Why (is it important?)

The ministry of lector is pivotal to our liturgical celebrations. As the Second Vatican Council observed

The church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both, the word of God and of the body of Christ, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. (*Dei Verbum*, No. 21)

In other words, there are two tables at Mass: the table of the word and the table of the Lord's body and blood. From each of these tables, we are fed and receive the bread of life.

As a help toward celebrating the memorial of the Lord with eager devotion, the faithful should be keenly aware of the one presence of Christ in both the word of God (it is he himself who speaks when the sacred Scriptures are read in the church) and above all under the Eucharistic species. (No. 4)

Effective proclamation of the word is an intrinsic part of the whole celebration.

Lectors are ministers, rather than just readers. They, like the priest and other ministers, function as vessels through which God meets his people, especially in the proclaimed Word. They are people of faith who have also developed the skills to effectively bring forth God's Word. Lectors are ministers of the word and servants to the people of God, not performers.

Two excellent resources can help us as we prepare and proclaim

- [The Ministry of the Lector](#) is a powerful and thoughtful reflection on serving as a lector.
- [This YouTube video](#) has helpful and practical ideas about how to enhance your preparation and ministry.

Who (can serve and is served?)

Lectors are people who follow a Christian life of service to others, have received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation and are joyful and grateful witnesses who give thanks for life's blessings and bring God's presence to others. Training is required so that lectors understand and perform their responsibilities appropriately.

Where (is the ministry to be performed?)

In Church, specifically at the ambo (the lectern on the altar platform) for the proclamation of Scriptures and the cantor stand (the lectern stand near the choir) for the reading of petitions and announcements.

How (is the ministry performed?)

At home:

Preparation is essential.

- At least once or over several days (if possible), study the texts. The scriptures for each Sunday (with helpful commentaries) can be found at <http://liturgy.slu.edu> The depth of your understanding will be clear to the congregation.

- Read all the lectionary readings—even the psalm and Gospel so you can see what ideas or themes connect the readings from the Old and New Testaments.
- Think about the type of passage you will read: Is it a story? A dialogue between people? A letter? A parable?
- Ask yourself questions: Why has this been written? Where is its climax? What about the tone—comforting? scolding? warning? informative? intimate?
- Pick out the most important sentence or phrase. Try to communicate it above all else. Learn to stress the phrase/word in various ways; a hushed voice often is more effective than a raised voice.
- Look up all the words (especially proper names) to be sure you know their meaning. [This site](#) has an audio pronunciation guide. If you trip over a word when you're proclaiming, move on. Your job is to convey the meaning of the passage as a whole.
- Practice reading the passage aloud several times, especially those with long sentences (like the letters of Paul).
- Consider yourself a "proclaimer of the word of God." You will be learning and fine tuning the skills of a proclaimer, not those of an actor, radio announcer, or toastmaster.
- Read the Scriptures daily. Pray for enlightenment about what you've read. Consider signing up for [a daily email of the scriptures for each day](#) or a [daily Gospel reflection from Notre Dame](#) (Tom Eggleston has written some of the reflections)
- Allow the Scriptures to influence your daily life. This is the best part of serving as lector; the Scriptures begin to form you.
- Check and read aloud the petitions and any announcements on the parish website on Friday (<http://www.stfrancholland.org/bulletins>). If you're not sure how to pronounce the name of a parishioner mentioned in the petitions, please check with Phil.

Before Mass:

1. Pray for God's help in your ministry:

Prayer of a Lector

Lord, invest me with Your power as I prepare to proclaim Your message. I have prepared my reading; I have tried to take within me the meaning of what I am about to proclaim. Help me to proclaim, not just with my lips, but with my whole heart and soul. Make me a hollow reed so that Your voice will be heard by all who hear me.

Free me of excessive concern over my performance. Convert any feeling of nervousness into energy for proclaiming Your word with power and authority. May Your Spirit live in me and fill the holy words that I proclaim. Amen

2. Dress appropriately and simply.
3. Arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.
4. Sign in with the Mass Coordinator.
5. Go to the sacristy to take another look at the Lectionary, petitions, and announcements to ensure there have been no changes or additions. Before Mass begins, make sure the Lectionary is put on the ambo (either by a lector or the sacristan) and the binder of petitions and announcements is put on the cantor stand (either by a lector or the sacristan).
6. Occasionally, the Lectionary has two options for a reading. The default is the first reading listed. Phil will inform you if the second listed option should be proclaimed instead.

During Mass**❖ Lector #1**

Unless there is a deacon present (the Mass coordinator will know if this is the case), this lector is part of the entrance procession, carries the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated, and walks between the altar servers and the priest. Unlike the servers and priest, you do not bow in front of the altar. Instead you proceed up the ramp to the front of the altar, reverently place the closed Book face down on the altar, and bow at the altar before returning to your pew.

Note: The lector does not process at the end of Mass.

Lector #1 proclaims the first reading from the Old Testament. This lector goes to the ambo after the priest leads the Opening Prayer and the congregation sits. If there is a Children's Liturgy of the Word, wait for their dismissal before you come forward. Approach the ambo as reverently as you would approach the altar and bow toward the altar. Christ is present in God's word and Eucharist, the "two tables" of the liturgy. Look at the congregation before you proclaim; give them a few seconds to settle in their pews. Read from the Lectionary; do not add or change any words. Pause at the end of the reading before you chant "The Word of the Lord." Learn how to chant by listening to the example at [this site](#). Wait for the congregation to chant "Thanks be to God" before you return to your pew.

Lector #1 reads the petitions/prayers of the faithful. You approach the cantor stand at the end of the Creed, typically when you hear "I confess one Baptism.." so that you are at the cantor stand, facing the priest, when the priest begins the prayer. Read the petitions as written, do not make any changes. Wait for congregation to make their response, typically "Lord, hear our prayer." Again, be sure you can pronounce any proper names. Remain at the cantor stand and turn toward the priest while he proclaims the final prayer. Then return to your pew.

[**ONLY** at the 5pm Mass on Saturdays, Lector #1 also reads any announcements.]

[**ONLY** at 12:30 Mass on Sundays, a Third lector reads the petitions, and someone from la bienvenida reads the announcements]

❖ Lector #2

Lector #2 proclaims the second reading. This lector goes to the ambo after the cantor has sung the psalm response; wait 5 seconds or more before you come up so there is time for reflection and meditation. Approach the ambo as reverently as you would approach the altar and bow toward the altar. Christ is present in God's word and Eucharist, the "two tables" of the liturgy. Look at the congregation before you proclaim. Read from the Lectionary; do not add or change any words. Pause at the end of the reading before you chant "The Word of the Lord." Learn how to chant by listening to the example at [this site](#). Wait for the congregation to chant "Thanks be to God." Then close the Lectionary, hand it to an altar server, and return to your pew.

Lector #2 makes any announcements. These are made from the cantor stand and are found in the three-ring binder. You should come to the cantor stand when the priest asks the congregation to sit for the announcements. Again, wait a few seconds to let the congregation settle in their pews. Please pause

between the announcements, and do not add or change any announcement. Return to your pew after the announcements have been read.

Using the microphone

Please do not change the position of the microphone. Feel free to stand closer or farther away if you are concerned that your voice may be too loud.

If the microphone is malfunctioning because of feedback or lack of sound, wait a few seconds to see if the AV technician can make corrections. Then proceed, projecting your voice as much as possible if the microphone is not operative.

After Mass

Collect the Lectionary and the three-ring binder and return them to the sacristy.