



Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church Lector Corps

THE HISTORY OF THE LECTOR

The office of reader, or lector, is among the oldest, if not the oldest of liturgical lay ministries. In the early church lectors were frequently appointed on a permanent basis. They were selected on the evidence of their ability to read well, and it was expected that they show forth in their lives the truth of the lessons they read. The normal expectation was that one or more lectors would exercise their ministry at every celebration of the Eucharist. In the Middle Ages, however, the office declined in importance as, increasingly, it became customary for the lessons to be read by persons in “major orders”

The present Prayer Book has restored this ancient function to the laity, but not as a permanent office. According to the rubric (p. 354), the reader or readers are to be “appointed by the celebrant.” In actual practice, however, the readers are frequently assigned on a rota basis, and this is clearly the better way, since it gives them opportunity to study and rehearse the passages to be read.

In order to underscore the dignity and importance of the ministry of lector, it is desirable that those assigned to read at a particular service not function as acolytes or ministers of communion at the same service.

THE MINISTRY OF THE LECTOR

This diocese trusts that its Lay Ministers are spiritually mature, active in the life of the congregation they serve, faithful attendees at worship, and supportive of their parish both financially and otherwise. All lectors should have knowledge of the structure and content of Holy Scripture and understand the origins of the scriptures. They should know how to find books of the Bible, locating chapter and verse, particularly half-verses. The lector should be well acquainted with the contents and organization of the prayer book. They should be familiar with the order of worship and where and when they will be reading.

Helping the congregation hear the scriptures and have a meaningful corporate prayer experience is the primary ministry of the Lector. So it is important that the lector keep some key points in mind.

- The Lector should be in place at the lectern before the previous portion of the service is complete.
- Eye contact with the congregation is important before beginning the reading, so the reader can be assured that the congregation is seated and ready to listen. Continue to use eye contact with the congregation only if you are comfortable doing so. If you are not comfortable making eye contact it can be distracting to the congregation.
- A “dramatic” reading of the text is not appropriate. Trying to make your voice sound “better” or more “worshipful” will only lead to artificiality.
- Project your voice, remembering the projection is not the same as shouting.
- Speak more slowly than your habitual speech, remembering to enunciate carefully.
- Practice out loud. Good speaking is a muscular activity, it needs practice.

PREPARATION PRIOR TO YOUR ASSIGNED SERVICE

The Lector must study and practice before reading at the service. To be an effective Lector, it's more important to be a good listener than a good reader. You must listen to and understand what the Bible is saying.

To help you understand the Bible, study your passage in a good New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Annotated Bible. Suggested are:

- The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha (NRSV)
- The HarperCollins Study Bible with Apocrypha (NRSV)

Read the introduction to the book/books you are reading, the footnotes and the comments at the bottom of the page. To read well, you have to have a good understanding of what your passage means. When was it written, why, to whom, by whom? Who are the characters and where are the places? What kind of literature is it? (Poetry-Psalm 23, Narrative-Genesis 1, Letter-Romans 1:7-12, Sayings-Proverbs 25:1). What happens before and after your passage?

You might also use a Bible Dictionary, a Bible Commentary, and/or a regular Dictionary to help you. A wonderful resource is available in the Saint Michael book store.

- A Lector's Guide and Commentary to the Revised Common Lectionary

Read the passage aloud to yourself to hear what God is saying. Remember, the way you listen and understand the words you are saying directly affects the way the person in the pew understands and makes sense of it.

WHAT TO AVOID

Some lectors in the Episcopal Church start by looking at the text with suspicion, as if they have never seen it before. And sometimes they have not. But they go bravely ahead in a flat "reading" voice. This leads to reading about 30% faster than they should. The reader also plows through commas, periods, and paragraphs. If an unusually difficult Old Testament word comes along, it gets mangled. The reader tends to pick up speed, coming to the end suddenly and then finish with a rising inflection. – And the congregation gives silent thanks.

So Remember

- Pace: Read at the "rate of comprehension" Give the holy words a chance to sink in.
- Use your Conversational Voice: Read as if you were telling the congregation something they were hearing for the first time. You are reading the Holy Word, not a list of specifications.
- Punctuate: Commas are put in place to help clarify the passage. So pause. A period calls for an even longer pause. And a paragraph calls for enough time to allow the congregation to assimilate the content of what you have just said.
- Rest: The Bible is full of good dramatic happenings and profound ideas. When you read on, wait. Give it a chance to sink in.

PREPARATION IMMEDIATELY BEFORE YOUR ASSIGNED SERVICE

- Arrive 30 minutes before your assigned service and check in with either the Master of Ceremonies or Master of Acolytes in the Drake Room.
- Extra copies of the lessons are available in the Drake Room. Make sure you have picked up the correct date as there is usually an entire months of lessons in the wall mounted lector bin.
- Please pay attention to the introductory heading on each lesson, it is there to assist you;

Prior to the service please check the service bulletin to determine if both the lesson and the epistle will be read. If only one is listed ask the celebrant which lesson to read during the service. If you have any other questions concerning the readings please speak with the celebrant.

- Please make sure you have picked up the correct date as there is usually an entire months lessons in the wall mounted lector bin.

AT THE LECTERN

- Use the microphone. (You may request a mic check with Tommy Thedford, the SMAA IT director, to assure you are using the correct voice volumn if you arrive 30 minutes prior to your assigned service.)
- Keep your feet flat.
- Breathe deeply.
- Project your voice, articulate so people can physically hear you.
- Don't rush through the reading, it's important.
- Think of the person in the back pew who doesn't hear well and keep the sound going back evenly to them.
- Practice in the church; bring someone with you to help and provide feedback.

The Readings

- Please pay attention to the introductory information in the heading, it is there to assist you.
- The Scripture introduction is part of the reading. Please only state what is provided for you. Do not include the verse numbers in the parentheses following the scripture introduction.
- A distinct pause needs to be made between the end of the reading and the acclamation. Pause and count to 4 before saying "The Word of the Lord"

The Psalm

- Please pay attention to the introductory information in the heading; it is there to assist you.

The psalm/canticle is read by the lector at the following services: Saturday 5:30 pm SMC, Sunday 7:30 am SMC, Sunday 8:45 am Church, Sunday 11:00 am Theater, Sunday 5:30 pm SMC. The psalm/canticle will be sung by a cantor at most Sunday 11:00 am Church services. Please check the bulletin to verify an antiphon is listed for the 11:00 am Church service. If an antiphon is not listed the lector will lead the congregation in the psalm/canticle.

Please note: Saturday 5:30pm Candlelight Mass the lector only reads the first line of the announcement below. OMIT "Reading aloud and together". Please check with the musicians prior to the service to determine when the refrain will be inserted.

- The Psalter introduction is part of the reading. Please only state what is provided.

Prayers of the People

- Be familiar with the form you will be reading. Don't read it "cold". If you pray the prayers you will engage the congregation, not bore them.
- Please do not break into a set of petitions when it does not allow for it.
Example: If using Form III on p. 387, wait until the end to add petitions, names from the prayer list, etc
- Only read what is provided for you to read. Do not embellish or ad lib.
- Please give a few moments pause between lector phrases and the congregation response.
- There is not to be a break between the first and last name.
- Please make sure to pronounce words and names that are used week in and week out correctly.
Examples: the president's name, the names of any clergy, or words such as diocesan.
Ask if you are in doubt.
- If you do not know how to pronounce the names in the "For those whom our prayers have been asked" section check with Bonita Fredrick, at the reception desk on Sunday mornings, or with one of the priests.
- Take your time.
- Wherever the prayers are marked 'pause', make sure you do just that, remember the if you have asked the congregation to add their own prayers aloud or silently that you need to provide time for them to do so.