



# EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF THE WORD (EMW) HANDBOOK

Resurrection and St. Clare Parishes

**Being the Voice of the Lord**

Speaking the Word of the Lord is serious business for serious people.

Dear EMW,

When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are an element of the greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture the Word of God is addressed to all people of whatever era and is understandable to them, a fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness of the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, by the Homily, as part of the liturgical action. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], no. 29)

Our Parish Lector Program is designed and presented for the formation and development of lectors who proclaim the Word of God in the parishes of Resurrection and St. Clare of Assisi. Did you know Jesus was also a lector? St. Luke writes that "He went into the synagogue, according to his custom on the Sabbath day, and he rose up to read." *Luke 4:17*

The purpose for this manual is to give you direction for lecturing during our parish masses, and to be a guide to help you in speaking the Word of the Lord. Along the way, you will learn most matters concerning the Rite of Lector and many matters concerning liturgical worship. We pray that you will do all you can to grasp their spiritual meaning.

Our parishes are deeply grateful for your decision to be an EMW. Your service and dedication are important parts of our parish life. It is a privilege to proclaim the Word of the Lord, and therefore EMWs are chosen from those who display a desire for a more intimate union with Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ.

We remain yours in Christ,

*Fr. George Gulash*

Rev. George M. Gulash  
Pastor

*Dcn. Nelson Lowes*

Dcn. Nelson E. Lowes Jr.  
Deacon

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## **Introduction**

The Parish Liturgical Ministry has prepared the following guidelines for parish laypersons who publicly read scripture, referred to as Lectors. These are to apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass, as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these notes is to provide some general observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. They define the intention of liturgical law relative to the proclamation of the Word, the demands of proper liturgical practice, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

Ritual practices may differ from parish to parish, reflecting the variations allowed by law. Determination in this regard comes under the Pastor's authority. These guidelines, therefore, are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in liturgical customs. Instead, they are produced in a spirit of helping our parishes experience the proclaimed Word of God as a powerful celebration by offering some basic, essential principles required by the very nature of the liturgy.

It is hoped that lectors and the pastoral leadership in each community meet regularly to discuss the theological as well as the practical and spiritual aspects of this ministry. These directives could serve as suitable material for study at such gatherings.

## **Proclamation of the Word**

The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a service to the Church. 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 (GIRM 55).

The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy. 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 (LM Intro 55).

Ideally, the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and not read along in a missalette. In the act of communal listening, the worshippers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the Word. Father, Deacon, and lectors should be attentive to the special needs of the hearing impaired (LM Intro 7, 37).

## **Requirements**

All liturgical ministers, especially lectors, must be properly trained for their ministry.

This ministry of the Word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding of the scriptures. Only properly trained and commissioned lectors should be scheduled for liturgy. (GIRM 101, LM Intro 14). For pastoral reasons family members or friends may be allowed to read during funeral or wedding liturgies even though they are not formally trained and commissioned as lectors. The parish should however provide assistance to them so that God's Word is properly proclaimed.

Lectors are fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim. On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated (i.e. confirmed

and has received first Eucharist) may be permitted to lector during a liturgy. Proper training, however, is expected.

All lectors should be commissioned for their ministry, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The blessing used for this commissioning is found in the Book of Blessings (Chapter 61). Those who are presently lectors should periodically participate in enrichment programs.

### **Preparation**

To make the service of the Word effective, all lectors are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical.

- Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message.
- Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text.
- Practical preparation involves mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciations and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery.

Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving in ample time before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary (these will be marked or tabbed as usual) and arranging the microphone as necessary prior to reading.

### **Inclusive Language**

In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been recognized. However, the lector is **NOT** at liberty to change the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy to accommodate a desire for inclusive language (LM Intro 111). In the preparation of other texts, such as the General Intercessions or commentary of any type, language which is inclusive could be used.

### **Ministers of the Word**

According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers (GIRM 59). Since the use of two lectors -one for each reading- is encouraged, the parish community should strive for enough lectors to fulfill this ideal (GIRM 109, LM Intro 52).

The Prayers of the Faithful are part of the Liturgy of the Word. When no deacon is present, the lector or cantor announces the intentions from the ambo. If the intentions are sung, a cantor is to be assigned the function of announcing the intentions (GIRM 138, LM Intro 53).

### **Symbols in the Liturgy of the Word**

God speaks to the faith community at worship through persons, actions and objects. To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word, it is important to pay full attention to the symbols of liturgy. Symbols that are integral to any celebration of the Word are: the lector(s), the book(s), the ambo, and the processions. A brief word on each of these is in order.

The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly members and is expected to participate in the entire liturgy. Within the Mass, each lector must participate actively in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the Liturgy of the Word. (GIRM 91)

The Word is contained in permanent, dignified and well-bound books: the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books. Non biblical readings are never to be substituted for the readings or Responsorial Psalm. (GIRM 57, 349, LM Intro 12, 35, 36) The Word of God is not to be proclaimed from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory or throw-away materials. (LM Intro 37)

The ambo is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God in the Church just as the altar is the symbol of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo. The ambo, therefore, should be permanent, solemn, dignified and prominent. Candles and other decorative elements may be placed around it. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed Word, namely, the readings from Sacred Scripture, the Gospel, the homily and the intentions of the Prayers of the Faithful. The Responsorial Psalm is from the Sacred Scripture and ideally is chanted from the ambo. A lectern or cantor's stand is best used for song leading, announcements, etc. All readings take place at the one ambo: it is improper to have two ambos. (GIRM 58, 309, LM Intro 16)

### **Ministry of Music**

An integral part of the celebration of the Word of God is the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia). Psalmody is designed to be sung: it loses much of its power when it is recited. Since the Responsorial Psalm at Mass is part of the Liturgy of the Word, it is appropriate that it be sung/read from the ambo. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways—responsorial, antiphonally, part sung/part recited—lectors should check with the musicians beforehand as to whether anything is expected of them. (GIRM 61, LM Intro 20) The Gospel Acclamation is an acclamation and it is always to be sung. If it is not sung it is omitted. (GIRM 63c)

The leadership of music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. It is preferable for a cantor to sing the Responsorial Psalm or at least the people's response. If the Responsorial Psalm cannot be sung, then it is to be recited by the lector in such a way as to foster meditation. (GIRM 61)

### **Ritual Action**

Among the actions in the Liturgy of the Word, processions are important. In a Mass without a Deacon, the lector takes part in the entrance procession; solemnly carrying the Book of Gospels slightly elevated and places the Book of Gospels upon the altar. The Lectionary is not carried in procession, but is resting on the ambo at the beginning of Mass (GIRM 44, 120 d, 195). After the second reading and the accompanying pause, all stand for the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. During that time, the deacon or priest carries the Book of Gospels from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be accompanied by acolytes and thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the Liturgy of the Word even though it may not be expressed fully at every liturgy.

Incense may be used in the Liturgy of the Word. When incense is used, traditionally the Book of Gospels is incensed before the Gospel is proclaimed. The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the scripture readings (GIRM 134, 276 LM Intro 17).

The Book of Gospels is not carried in the recessional.

### **Silence**

To enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, "haste that hinders recollection" is to be avoided. A pause should be made after stating "A reading from..." and before "The Word of the Lord". Another period of silence should be observed after each reading before the lector moves away

from the ambo; also, a brief period of silence should be allowed after the Responsorial Psalm. Some catechesis on the purpose and appropriate use of this silence should be offered (GIRM 56, LM Intro 28).

### **The Readings**

Lectors need to be seated in a place which allows for easy access to the ambo, just as usual. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. After the reading, the lector returns to his/her seat in a similar manner. (GIRM 310) When there are two lectors (Resurrection), the first returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the Responsorial Psalm is intoned. The second lector would then approach the ambo after the Psalm and return to his/her seat before the Gospel Acclamation. When only one lector (St. Clare) proclaims both readings, he/she should be seated during the Psalm response. (Just like we usually do at both parishes – there is no change.)

Lectors begin to read by saying, “A reading from the Book of Exodus” as written in the Lectionary. It is inappropriate to add words such as: “The first reading...”

If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, lectors should begin the recitation with the antiphon. Announcing “Responsorial Psalm” is completely unnecessary.

Ministers of the Word **shall not** add or change any words of the texts.

The title of the reading such as “A reading from the Book of Exodus” and the ending, “The Word of the Lord”, 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. The same tone of proclamation should be maintained for “The Word of The Lord”.

While proclaiming the Word, a lector may hold the Lectionary in his/her hands, or place it on the ambo and rest his/her hand on it. Anything that might distract from the proclaimed Word, such as leaning on the ambo, hands in pockets, or shuffling from one foot to the other should be avoided.

The Lectionary or the Book of Gospels should not be lifted off the ambo while saying: “The Word of the Lord”.

The lector should try to refrain from doing anything that would draw attention to her/himself at any time.

### **Effective Proclamation**

All lectors should consider that they are called to proclaim, not merely read, God's Word to the congregation.

- **Volume**

Please ensure that you stand close to the microphone. Adjust microphone at the neck to be at mouth level when reading. Also, without straining your voice, please speak loudly so that everyone can hear His Word. You cannot speak too loudly but you can be too soft. The microphone has a “gate” that blocks sounds below a certain level and the sound technicians can only bring the volume up so high without having feedback. A strong proclamation gets past those issues.

- **Pausing**

The reverence associated with the act of proclaiming the Word can be enhanced through the appropriate uses of pauses. The lector should pause for 2 to 4 seconds at each of the following times during the readings:

- Upon arrival at the ambo
- After stating “A reading from The ...[book of Genesis or first letter of Paul to the Corinthians]
- Before stating “...The Word of the Lord”
- After the congregation responds with “Thanks be to God...”
  - o (The pause at the end of the reading is especially important as this allows time for prayerful reflection on the reading.)
- Before Beginning the Responsorial Psalm

- **Clarity**

The reverence associated with the act of proclaiming the Word can be further enhanced by in a manner that separates each word, saying each sound as clearly as possible, stretching the vowels slightly while keeping the natural rhythm and tempo, and placing the stress on key words.

- **Pace**

Nearly all readers, even the most seasoned veterans, experience an increase in nervous energy when they are proclaiming the scripture in front of the congregation. The most common side-effect of this nervous energy is that reader’s pace exceeds the ability of the congregation to hear and grasp what is being read. To address this common tendency most readers must make a concerted effort to speak slower. Proclaiming the Word at one half the rate of conversational speaking is a good rule-of-thumb.

- **Video Resource**

For other good tip and the importance of the EMW see the following video called Ministry of Lector\_SFPR Training Video, it can be found at this link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ41A0TBv7I>



## **Glossary**

- GIRM: General Instruction of the Roman Missal
- LM: Lectionary for Mass

**Prayer of an Extraordinary Minister of the Word**  
(In Preparation)

Lord, invest me with your power  
as I prepare to proclaim the marvel of 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.

Lord, 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 my feeling of nervousness and  
turn all my apprehension into an energy  
for proclaiming your word with power and authority.  
May your Spirit live in me and  
fill the holy words that I proclaim.

Amen.