

On the Ministry of Parish Lector

What does the Church require of lectors? In *Ministeria Quaedam* Pope Paul VI stated that “Ministries may be assigned to lay Christians; hence they are no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the sacrament of orders.” He seems to have expected that most parishes would have instituted lectors and acolytes—men permanently appointed by the bishop to serve at liturgical functions. Today most dioceses limit those roles to seminarians or candidates for the permanent diaconate. However Pope Paul VI also allowed for lay persons to be appointed on a temporary basis to proclaim Scripture during liturgy and these are the persons we commonly refer to as parish lectors. Pope Paul VI’s description of the ministry of instituted lectors gives us insights into the role of noninstituted lectors:

The reader is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly, he is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, except for the gospel in the Mass and other sacred celebrations; he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist; he is to present the intentions for the general intercessions in the absence of a deacon or cantor; he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful; he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. He may also, insofar as may be necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations. That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions, he is to meditate assiduously on sacred Scripture. Aware of the office he has undertaken, the reader is to make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord. (*Ministeria Quaedam*, 5)

The *Roman Missal*, comprised of the readings and prayers for Mass, gives us this direction:

In the absence of an instituted lector, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture. They should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so 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. (*GIRM*, 101)

The *General Introduction to the Lectionary* gives details about lector significance and qualifications:

When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, all must listen with reverence to the readings from God’s word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy. (29)

In texts that are to be spoken in a loud and clear voice, whether by the priest or the deacon, or by the lector, or by all, the tone of voice should correspond to the genre of the text itself, that is, depending upon whether it is a reading, a prayer, a commentary, an acclamation, or a sung text; the tone should also be suited to the form of celebration and to the solemnity of the gathering. (38)

The liturgical assembly truly requires readers, even those not instituted. Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are qualified laypersons who have been trained to carry out this ministry. Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available. (52)

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship advised on the Second Edition of the *Lectionary for Mass* in their February-March 1998 newsletter, “The first means of effectively communicating the word of God is to assure that the readings are proclaimed in an audible, clear, and understandable voice. Thus, even the singing of a reading ‘must serve to bring out the sense of the words, not to obscure them.’” (LFM 16)

Lector Qualifications and Skills

The ministry of lector at St John Vianney Parish requires that a person . . .

Essential requirements

- Be a fully initiated Catholic (i.e., have received both First Eucharist and Confirmation);
- Live in communion with the Church;
- Is not in a state of grave sin.

Natural gifts

- Possesses a reasonably good reading voice;
- Exhibits stage presence.

Attainable skills

- Demonstrates familiarity with and understanding of the reading and expresses its mood;
- Consistently uses tone and rate appropriate to text and employs effective pauses and emphasis;
- Projects voice well and can be heard and understood throughout the assembly;
- Uses the microphone correctly;
- Moves with grace and dignity, appears comfortable, and handles the sacred books with reverence;
- Has good pace within the liturgy;
- Dresses modestly and suitably for liturgy;
- Is faithful to the lector schedule and arrives on time;
- Continues personal faith development and participates in required lector training and workshops.

For reflection

Which of these qualifications do you readily recognize in yourself?

Are any essential requirements problematic for you? If so, please talk over the matter in private with the pastor.

Which natural gifts are not present? If your gifts lie elsewhere, God may want you to serve the parish in a different way. What are one or two other gifts you do have?

Which skills present a challenge, large or small? The lector trainers or a lector coach can help.