

# Diocese of Portsmouth

## Guidelines for Readers

References are to

*GILM* : *General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass*, 2nd editio typica, 1981

*GIRM* : *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, 2005

*DAPNE* : *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993

*CB* : *Ceremonial of Bishops*, 1989

"The sacraments are sacraments of faith, and faith has its origin and sustenance in the word." ...  
"The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God's word and at the table of the eucharist."  
(*GILM*, para 10)

"Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action."  
(Benedict XVI, Post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, March 2007, para 45)

### *Reading in church*

**1** Reading in church is about **proclaiming** God's holy word. In this, more is required than simply reading a text aloud. The reader is a channel for communication of the inspired word of God in the scriptures to the whole assembly.

This is a ministry of service which implies formation for the reader that is not only technical but also spiritual – i.e. biblical and liturgical (cf. *GILM* 55).

### *Qualifications*

**2** Readers can be of any age so long as they are able to communicate God's word clearly and effectively, and give some evidence of living in accordance with the values inherent in what they are proclaiming. They should be baptised members of the Catholic Church (the Bishop may in exceptional circumstances waive this requirement, cf. *DAPNE* 133).

### *Preparation*

**3** Readers should prepare themselves as far in advance as possible, reading the text, studying it and reflecting on it and praying on it, as well as reading it **aloud** a number of times. Some readers will begin their preparation on Monday for the following weekend. In some communities all the readers for the weekend Masses meet together earlier in the week, sometimes with the homilist(s), to read and reflect upon the readings in common.

The ideal is for the reader to have read the text aloud a sufficient number of times to know sections of it virtually by heart and to have internalized it to some extent. This enables readers to raise their heads from the printed page to make **eye-contact** with members of the assembly from time to time, a practice which is highly recommended. All ministry is about relationships between people, and reading is no exception to this.

### *Be present for the entire Mass or service*

**4** The presence of readers for the entire Mass is a sign that they are part of the worshipping assembly which is structured according to a variety of functions and ministries (cf. *GIRM* 91).

Ministers should ideally arrive 10 minutes before the service begins, and sign in or make their presence known in whatever way is customary.

### *Place in the church*

**5** Ministers should take their place among the general body of the people, somewhere convenient for reaching the sanctuary easily.

### *Dress*

**6** Ministers of the Word should dress in a manner appropriate to their holy ministry and one which is acceptable in the locality. No distinctive garb or insignia are used.

### *How many readers?*

**7** Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers (*GILM* 52). This not only helps avoid any possible monotony with the use of the same voice, but, more importantly, reflects the fact that the two readings will be different in literary form and will accordingly need a different style of proclamation. See also **16** below.

### *Entrance procession*

**8** If there is a Book of the Gospels, if it is to be placed on the altar, and if no deacon is present, a reader may carry the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession, walking ahead of the priest. On reaching the altar, the reader may bow with the other ministers; the reader then places the book on the altar (cf. *GIRM* 194-5). If a deacon is present, he will carry the Book of the Gospels.

It is commendable that the book not be laid flat on the altar but be stood in an upright position by opening it to a < configuration, so that all may see the symbolic presence more clearly.

(Some churches display an open Book of the Gospels on a special lectern that people pass as they enter the building. In this case the book is then solemnly processed from this lectern to the ambo by the priest or deacon after the 2nd Reading of the Liturgy of the Word.)

### *When to approach the sanctuary*

**9** The best time for readers to move to the sanctuary is while everyone is seating themselves and getting comfortable. Readers should only start to move **after** the 'Amen' response to the Opening Prayer of the Mass has been said by all.

In some churches, on a Sunday or feast day, both readers approach together. In other churches, the 2nd reader only approaches when the singing of the Responsorial Psalm is completed. Either practice is appropriate.

The reader(s) should move as unobtrusively as possible. This has implications for manner of dress and for footwear.

The reader(s) may bow to the altar, a symbol of the presence of Christ, as they pass (cf. *CB* 72), while remembering that Christ is also present in the very proclamation of the word. They do not need to genuflect towards a tabernacle (cf. *CB* 71), nor bow to the presiding priest.

### *The place for the Word*

**10** The readings are proclaimed from the ambo (lectern) (cf. *GIRM* 58, 196), the special place for the Word. The Responsorial Psalm may also be sung from the ambo or another suitable place (cf. *GIRM* 61). The intentions for the General Intercessions are also announced from the ambo (cf. *GIRM* 197) or another suitable place (*GIRM* 70). In exceptional circumstances (for example in celebrations involving children or persons with disabilities) the readings may be proclaimed from another more suitable location.

### *The Book of the Word*

**11** The readings are normally to be proclaimed from the Lectionary (or Book of the Gospels). Pieces of paper or missalettes are not appropriate for the proclamation of the word, since they lack the necessary dignity (cf. *GILM* 37). In particular, pieces of paper should not be carried openly to the ambo or taken out of a pocket and unfolded at the ambo.

On special occasions, when a reading is not available in a Lectionary or bible, a piece of paper, ideally in a folder or some other suitable container, may be used, but it should be left on the ambo **before the service begins**. The same is true of the intentions for the General Intercessions. Many ambos have a shelf for this purpose.

A reading proclaimed from somewhere other than the ambo may require the reader to use a folder, or alternatively a server could hold a lectionary or missal for the reader.

### *Proclamation techniques*

**12** It is good practice for a reader to wait until the congregation have settled before beginning the reading. Communication requires the full attention of the people as well as the preparation of the reader. Waiting gives readers a 'space' to prepare themselves to proclaim the word and make eye-contact with the people (cf. also **3** above). Doing this may require practice to become natural to the reader.

The manner of delivery should not be rushed (cf. *GILM* 28), and good use of variations of pitch, pace and volume will help to convey the meaning of the text.

A significant proportion of all readers read too quickly, and begin before the people are ready to listen. This can be due to nervousness.

### *Some detailed points*

**13** It is not always necessary to begin the proclamation with the words "A reading from". In particular, saying "The First Reading is a reading" is telling the people twice over something that they do not actually need to know. Slight variations from time to time in the opening formula can draw people's attention and interest, and thus avoid the boredom of routine. For example, a reader might occasionally begin with just the words "From the prophet Isaiah".

**14** A pause of at least 10 and preferably 15 seconds is strongly recommended between the proclamation of the actual scripture text and the reader saying "[This is] the word/Gospel of the Lord". This not only gives the text that has just been proclaimed a chance to be absorbed by the listeners before the conventional concluding formula moves people's minds on to what comes next, but it also provides the reader her/himself with an opportunity to take the word on board and make it her/his own.

Such silent pauses are recommended in *GILM* 28 and *GIRM* 56. A silence of 10 or 15 seconds will at first seem very long to the person reading, but not nearly so long to those who are given this time to pray and reflect. Once again, it may take some time for this to become natural to both reader and congregation.

In the concluding formula, the words "This is" are already disappearing in current practice. It is quite appropriate to say simply "The word/Gospel of the Lord".

**15** Similarly, in the General Intercessions [Bidding Prayers] a 10-15 second pause is highly recommended after the announcement of the intention that the people are being asked to pray about, and before the invitation to respond (e.g. "Lord, in your mercy...").

### *The Responsorial Psalm*

**16** The psalm is normally sung, by a cantor with the people responding (cf. *GIRM* 61). If it cannot be sung, it should ideally be read by a reader **other than** the one who read the 1st Reading, thus demonstrating that the one was a reading proclaimed to us while the other is our response to that reading. See also **7** above.

If the psalm is read, the response (which is only present for the purposes of singing) may be omitted. If it is used, it should **not** be introduced by a phrase such as "The response to the psalm is" or, more baldly, "Response!", but should be spoken immediately.

Some communities have the practice of reciting the psalm verses side-to-side, omitting the response. Others have a sung response by all, with the verses spoken by a reader.

Some readers may be used to reading the psalm straight after the 1st reading. However, it is recommended that a significant gap always be left, not only to give time for reflection on the reading but also to give the reader time to see if in fact the psalm is going to be sung. See also the first paragraph of this section concerning using a different reader for the psalm if it is to be read.

### *The Gospel Acclamation*

**17** The Alleluia or the Lenten Gospel Acclamation "must be sung and during it all stand" (*GILM* 23). If there is no cantor or choir and the reader cannot start off the singing, someone in the congregation will be able to do so; and the number of churches where the Alleluia is sung at all Masses, weekday as well as Sunday, is increasing all the time. The scripture verse does not have to be sung.

When there is only **one** reading before the Gospel:

- ❖ outside Lent either the psalm or the Alleluia may be used, or a (sung) psalm with an Alleluia response;
- ❖ during Lent either the psalm and the Gospel Acclamation may be used, or just the psalm alone;
- ❖ both inside and outside Lent, the Alleluia or Gospel Acclamation may be omitted if not sung (*GIRM* 63).

The practice of reciting the Gospel Acclamation is discouraged.

### *The General Intercessions*

**18** After the brief introduction from the priest, the intentions for prayer are announced from the ambo (or another suitable place, *GIRM* 70) by a deacon, or a cantor, or a reader, or a member of the congregation (*GIRM* 70).

See **15** above concerning silent pauses between the announcement of the intention and the invitation to respond.

### *When to leave the sanctuary*

**19** In liturgy, every movement draws attention to itself. A useful rule of thumb is for ministers only to move when there is some other movement going on, to minimize distraction. (Cf. **9** above concerning when to approach the sanctuary.)

Therefore, for example, the 1st reader should leave the sanctuary as the cantor moves to the music desk, the 2nd reader should go to the ambo as the cantor moves away from the music desk, and so on.

In many parishes, after the 2nd reading the practice is that no one stands until the presiding priest or deacon stands. In such a case, the 2nd reader should remain standing quietly at the ambo until the Gospel reader and people all stand and the Gospel Acclamation begins, and move away at that time.

At the end of the General Intercessions, the person announcing the intentions should not move away until **after** the presiding priest has finished the concluding prayer. The movement will be 'covered' by everyone else sitting down, preparing for the collection, etc, etc.

### *Entrance and Communion Antiphons*

**20** The Entrance and Communion Antiphons are **omitted** altogether if there has been **or will be** any singing at these times (cf. *GIRM* 48 and 87). These antiphons are there to remind us that we should be singing at these points in the rite, and are not themselves primarily intended for recitation. **If there is no singing**, they may be recited by the people. If the people do not do this, a reader may read them at the appropriate time (cf. *GIRM* 198).

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