Guidelines for Readers

The following guidelines for readers reflect current liturgical practice at St. Francis Xavier parish in Parkersburg, WV, for Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and Holy Days; the guidelines accord with the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) as implemented in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. They begin with discussion of the meaning and importance of this ministry, give specific instructions for readers during the Mass, and conclude with a list of additional suggestions or requirements that will help readers maintain the dignity and meaningfulness of the liturgy. Separate instructions are given for first and second readers since two readers are preferred; on occasion, one reader may need to serve both functions. Also note that the role of each reader may change if a deacon is participating in the Mass.

What is a reader?--Some reflections on this ministry

- Through Baptism, we are all called to be a “holy people and royal priesthood” (I Peter 2:9), whose right and privilege it is to participate in Christ’s own ministry. How we do so varies from person to person, but the most important way is “conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (GIRM, Intro. 5). Since the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church” (GIRM, Intro. 5), all of us have an “individual right and duty to contribute” (GIRM, 58). Some are called to do so in a more particular way through liturgical ministries, such as reader.

- From the Church’s beginnings, Christians have gathered to hear the Word of God, a practice which originated with Jewish worship. In the Gospels, we hear of numerous occasions when Jesus was gathered in the temple or in the synagogue to hear the scriptures. This was a part of his ordinary life that we continue to this day. According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers. (GIRM 59) When no deacon is present, the lector announces the intentions from the ambo. (GIRM 138, LM Intro 53)

- 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)

- In order 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)

- What are the qualifications for readers? GIRM lists two that are fairly general: readers are to be “truly suited to perform this function” and “should receive careful preparation.” In general, “truly suited” means individuals who are confirmed Catholics living in communion with the Church and who are able to proclaim the readings in a manner that expresses the dignity of scripture.

- “Careful preparation” varies from parish to parish. It can mean informal one-on-one training with someone who “knows the ropes” or it can be much more formal. St. Francis Xavier’s program focuses on technical skills, biblical formation, liturgical formation, and spiritual formation.

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.

- The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly 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 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. (GIRM 58, 309, LM Intro 16)

What specifically does a reader do during Mass?—The “mechanical” details

First Reader

Procession and Introductory Rite
• Arrive 15 minutes before the Eucharist. Gather with the other ministers in the sacristy.
• The Lectionary will be on the counter in the Sacristy. Please make sure the ribbon is set to the readings you are expecting. If you are uncertain or have any questions, please ask the priest/presider.
• The intercessions for that day will be in the Lectionary. Once both readers are prepared, take the lectionary and intercessions to the ambo.
• At one minute prior to the start of the Liturgy, Read the Introduction to the Mass of the Day. This will conclude with announcing the purpose of the second collection if there is one that day.
• If the celebrant chooses to process with the Book of the Gospels, process immediately preceding the celebrant with the Book slightly elevated. If the celebrant chooses not to process with the Book of the Gospels or if a deacon is serving with the celebrant, take your normal seat in the congregation, preferably close to the ambo.
• Upon reaching the bottom of the altar stairs, stand to the celebrant’s left, but do not make a profound bow or genuflect with the celebrant when you are carrying the Gospels. After the celebrant makes his bow or genuflection, ascend the altar steps, place the Book of the Gospels on the altar with the front cover facing the congregation, make a profound bow to the altar, and move to your place in the congregation, preferably close to the ambo.

Liturgy of the Word

• After the collect of the day (or after the dismissal for the Children’s Liturgy of the Word), wait for the congregation to be seated, approach the altar, make a profound bow before entering the sanctuary as a recognition of the centrality of the altar (no genuflection or sign of the cross is necessary), go to the ambo, and proclaim the first reading.
• Proclaim the first reading of the day, and after a slight pause, say, “The word of the Lord.” After the congregation answers, “Thanks be to God,” leave the ambo, make a profound bow to the altar, and resume your place in the congregation so that the cantor can lead the responsorial psalm for the day. If there is only one reader, be seated in the chair near the ambo while the cantor proclaims the responsorial psalm, then return to the ambo after a short pause.
• Arrive 15 minutes before the Eucharist. Gather with the other ministers in the sacristy.

Liturgy of the Word

• When the cantor finishes the responsorial psalm, approach the altar, make a profound bow before entering the sanctuary in recognition of the centrality of the altar (no genuflection or sign of the cross is necessary), go to the ambo, and announce the second reading.

• Proclaim the second reading of the day, and after a slight pause, say, “The word of the Lord.” After the congregation answers, “Thanks be to God,” place the lectionary at the side of the ambo (off the reading desk), leave the ambo, make a profound bow to the altar, and resume your place in the congregation.

• If there is no deacon serving with the celebrant, go to the ambo after making a profound bow to the altar before entering the sanctuary, and be in place by the end of the Creed. After the celebrant introduces the Prayer of the Faithful, read the petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful. After the last petition, which usually commemorates the deceased or the mass intention, turn toward the celebrant and wait for him to conclude the Prayer of the Faithful.

• After the Prayer of the Faithful and the congregation is seated, announce the purpose of the day's second collection, leave the ambo, make a profound bow to the altar, and return to your place in the congregation.

Recessional

• At St. Francis Xavier, readers do not recess with the celebrant and the altar servers.
• The Book of Gospels is never carried in the Recessional.
• After the liturgy, the second reader returns the Lectionary and the Intercessions and Introduction to the Mass to the Sacristy counter and makes certain the ambo light is off.

Are there any additional suggestions/requirements, or “tips” for effective reading, or specific “do's and don'ts”?–These are offered in no particular order
The reader schedule for Sundays and Holy Days is prepared quarterly based on readers' availability and preferences (please try to be flexible). The schedule is posted to St. Francis Xavier's website (www.stx-pburg.org), and copies are also made available in the back of the church.

If for any reason you are unable to read as scheduled, it is your responsibility to find a substitute, either on a one-time or an extended basis. There are regular substitutes posted to the readers' schedule, or you can make arrangements with another qualified reader. The celebrant should not be expected to find a substitute at the last minute.

It's vitally important for readers to prepare themselves through prayer, familiarization with the day's readings, checking pronunciation, etc. Resources are readily available online or through books aimed at helping readers prepare. St. Francis Xavier parish maintains a copy of Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word in the sacristy for readers' use. The Workbook is especially useful for determining the essential meaning of the day's readings, gives suggestions for words and themes to emphasize, and even provides a key to pronunciation of biblical names. A separate pronunciation guide is also available in the sacristy.

If you are reading the petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful, make sure that you know the mass intention (prayers for deceased parishioners are marked by a + in the bulletin) and that you know how to pronounce the parishioners' names, whether deceased or living. When in doubt, ask someone!

Dress appropriately; after all, it is the Lord's banquet. This means no jeans, shorts, t-shirts, low-cut blouses, flip-flops, or spaghetti straps. Perhaps the best standard of dress would be “business casual” at a minimum. For greater feasts, more formal attire would be appropriate.

When you arrive, check with the celebrant to make be sure there are no changes or additions. Place the lectionary on the ambo, and the Prayer of the Faithful on the ambo shelf, turn on the ambo light, and adjust the microphone. Return to the sacristy and make sure the sound system is on (only one button is necessary: power on).

Tips for Effective Readers
A general note about liturgical “pacing”: each part of the Eucharistic liturgy has a beginning and an end, and it is important to allow an appropriate pause between each part to give the assembly time to absorb what has passed and prepare for what is coming. A good example is the responsorial psalm. Some readers want to make sure they're ready at the ambo immediately after the psalm so as to keep things moving. The intention is laudable, but the psalm is as much a “reading” as the Old Testament lesson or the Epistle for the day, and deserves a pause before the second reading. This is not so much a matter of letting a specified number of seconds elapse as it is being sensitive to the assembly's need to reflect on the psalm before listening to the second reading.

After announcing a reading, count “1-1000, 2-1000” (i.e., two seconds or so) before beginning to read. Don't rush. Speak into the microphone but don't crowd it. Be aware of your speed, inflection, and eye contact. Readings should not be memorized or performed, but “proclaimed” (see above). Above all, read it like you mean it!

One problem readers face today is that people are not used to being read to and may not know the background or context of the readings. The goal of the reader should be to help listeners overcome these problems. Know your readings!

The least helpful thing a reader can do is to speak in a monotone. Readers should avoid this by freely using variations in pitch, speed, pauses, emphasis, etc. to put life into the reading. At the same time, these variations should flow from the reading itself and be aligned with the type and the meaning of the text.

Readers should be careful about going too fast. No one can speak as fast as he or she can read, so don't try. If it sounds to you as though your speed is OK, it is probably too fast. If you find yourself out of breath, you are going too fast.

The acoustics of our church also necessitate that your pacing be measured. When you speak even at a normal conversational pace, some of your words will get lost in the space.

Vary the pacing for a more meaningful reading rather than using a fixed pace. Don't be afraid to increase tempo or slow it down to emphasize points. Use pauses for emphasis.
Don't put too much emphasis on pronouns. It's the nouns and verbs that are important.

Make sure you carefully and clearly pronounce the little words: a, an, the, of, and, you, etc. This is one of the things that helps make meaning clear. In everyday speech, many people skip, slur, or smudge these little words.

The reader's speaking style should be clear and audible, and delivery (phrasing, emphasis, etc.) should be appropriate to the text; some scripture is poetic in form, or prophetic, or simple narrative. Therefore, adjust your reading to reflect these different forms. Your demeanor should reflect them as well. Nothing is more confusing to listeners than a joyful text read with a somber face.

Try to look up at the congregation occasionally. Don't keep your head down all the time. The best times for looking up are at the ends of paragraphs or sentences. As you read, get the next line or sentence in your mind, then look up and say it from short-term memory. With practice, this is easier than it sounds.

It's OK to follow your place in the book with your hand; this will prevent you from losing your place when you look up at the congregation.

Prepare by reading aloud. This will help you figure out the meaning of the text, establish the proper speed and rhythm, get the punctuation and pauses right, and fix the reading in your mind because it is going in both your ears and eyes at the same time.

Speak up. The microphone is not speaking, you are. Many people get too close to the microphone and speak softly. Stand further back and speak loudly and clearly. You will command much more attention and your voice will have much better tone and timbre. Plus, it will help prevent “popping” your “p's” and “t's.” If the microphone is too sensitive, you can prevent “pops” by pronouncing “p” more like “b” and “t” more like “d.”
## “Do’s and Don’ts” for Readers

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<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare beforehand</td>
<td>Prepare at the last minute (e.g., in the sacristy five minutes before Mass).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read thoughts and ideas.</td>
<td>Read just the &quot;words.&quot;</td>
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<td>Make your voice convey a message.</td>
<td>Speak in a monotone (the Word of God is not the label on a cereal box!).</td>
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<td>Read to people.</td>
<td>Read at people.</td>
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<td>Try to understand the feeling, purpose, and intention of the biblical author.</td>
<td>Take the punch out of a reading (thinking that it sounds “holier”).</td>
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<td>Try to understand what kind of literature you are reading: poem, statement of law, story, fable, faith witness, song, psalm, historical narrative, letter, mystical encounter, or prophecy.</td>
<td>Approach each reading as if all scripture were the same.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read slowly! (Remember, people listen more slowly than they read.)</td>
<td>Read at your ordinary speed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasize key words and phrases</td>
<td>Read as though each word is equally important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Come to a definite conclusion.</td>
<td>Ramble.</td>
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<td>Ask someone for assistance with difficult names and meanings.</td>
<td>Slur, skip, or muffle words you do not know.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not be afraid to stop and begin anew if you make a mistake.</td>
<td>Use the machine-gun tactic (i.e., never slowing down or pausing).</td>
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<td>Read your passage aloud in practice.</td>
<td>Try to read “cold.”</td>
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<td>Speak up.</td>
<td>Expect the microphone to do all of the work.</td>
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<td>Space yourself properly from the microphone.</td>
<td>Allow your voice to explode into the microphone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to yourself.</td>
<td>Be unaware of what you're doing, or be so aware that you hurry through a reading.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pronounce your words clearly.</td>
<td>Speed through words and give a blurred sound.</td>
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<td>Look at your audience.</td>
<td>Glue your eyes to the book.</td>
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<td>Take in breath through your nose.</td>
<td>Gasp through an open mouth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check the lighting and the visibility of the book before you begin.</td>
<td>Hold the material in front of your face.</td>
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<td>Have your material organized before you begin.</td>
<td>Give the appearance of being unorganized (even if you're not).</td>
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<td>Wait until people are listening.</td>
<td>Read to a community that is doing something else at the time (e.g., standing, sitting, answering, etc.)</td>
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<td>Stand up straight with both feet on the ground.</td>
<td>Slouch over the pulpit or stand askew.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use facial expressions to give more life to your reading.</td>
<td>Read in a “dead-pan” fashion.</td>
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<td>Create an experience, an encounter with the Word. Have the people remember what they heard.</td>
<td>Be a bore or draw attention to yourself in a way that interferes with the congregation's encounter with God's Word. You are there for God and His people, not yourself!</td>
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For reader training, qualification, or questions about these guidelines, contact the Pastor.

**Abbreviations used**
- GIRM  General Instruction of the Roman Missal
- LM  Lectionary for Mass