

# **Lector Handbook**

## **St. Michael the Archangel Parish**

### **San Tan Valley, Arizona**

#### **Prayer for Lectors:**

*Heavenly Father, I ask for your grace as I proclaim your Word to the people of my Parish. I ask that when I speak it will be your voice they hear, and be inspired to live according to that Word.  
I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **THE MINISTRY OF LECTOR**

Scripture itself tells us that God's word is "living and active." His Word is not primarily a written text that is fixed and codified, but a Word spoken and proclaimed in the midst of a community of faith. His Word brings forth creation and whenever it is spoken anew it recreates. It is by his Word that Israel was brought into being and continually challenged to renew its faithfulness to Him; it is by His Word that the Church was called into being and constantly challenged to renew and reform itself.

101. In the absence of an instituted lector, other lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, people who are truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared, so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for Sacred Scripture. (General Instruction for the Roma Missal)

#### **LECTOR QUALIFICATIONS**

Men and women who take on the ministry of Lector are presumed to be of good faith, eager to serve their fellow Christians and willing to engage in ongoing formation into effective service. At St. Michael's, there is no definitive age, since maturity and talent is based on the individual, but lectors must have received the sacrament of Confirmation. The mere wish or willingness to serve as Lector does not qualify one for the ministry. Basic abilities are required but it is not necessary that the Lector be highly gifted in communication techniques. What is important is that the Lector has the charism for the building up of the community. It also requires an adequate vocal instrument, self-confidence, maturity, poise and sensitivity to the diversity of one's audience, and a love of Scripture as part of the requirement.

You must be an active parishioner. This would involve many things. The minimum would be two precepts of the Church: You must be a regular contributor to the financial support of the parish and you must attend Mass weekly and not only be seen

when you are scheduled to read. Also, there should be no ecclesial impediments to your ability to serve (i.e.: being in an irregular marriage, living together without benefit of marriage, not having been baptized in the Catholic faith and so on)

One lector is assigned to each mass, However, lectors can trade their assignments with other lectors. It is understood that unforeseen last minute needs do arise and therefore every lector is asked to be open to receiving requests for schedule changes from fellow lectors. When a schedule is disseminated, if a lector is assigned to a mass that they seek to revise, the lector must contact (telephone, e-mail) all other lectors to find a lector to switch assignments with. The lector assigned remains responsible for being sure their assignment is covered.

There are two special holiday assignments which are disseminated (one for the Christmas/New Years, and one for Palm Sunday/Easter Sunday). It is important that you make advance contact with the Lector Coordinator if you have special vacation needs during these holiday periods.

**Tools to Help Lector Trade Assignments:** At St. Michael's, the lector coordinator distributes a lector contact list with each new quarterly schedule noting the phone and e-mail contact information for all lectors. A lector e-mail list has been established. A helpful tool in advertising lector assignment switches. However, realize only those lectors that have e-mail addresses are on the list. The lector contact list also provides a column for "Mass Typically Attends" which also helps lectors find another lector to switch with for a particular mass time.

**YOUR PART.** Because the ministry of Lector is such an important office or better still such an awesome task, your external "attitudes" and "appearances" are noted by the worshiping community. Because as a Lector you bring the printed Word to life—making it flesh—you give voice to God's healing and strengthening Word as it goes out to the people. It is important, therefore that you be at one with the parish priests as an active builder of unity within the parish. Therefore, one should bear in mind the following:

1. **Dress Appropriately-** People do talk. Therefore, Men are to be attired in jacket and tie; Women in a modest dress, skirt or pant suit. No short skirts or sleeveless tops. No cleavage or open backs. Flashy colors also detract from the Word. The key is to become "transparent" so that the Word itself, not the reader, is placed in the foreground.
2. **Commitment:** You receive a schedule and are aware of your assignments in advance. It will be your responsibility to get a substitute. The only real excuse for not fulfilling your obligation would be an unexpected last minute illness or emergency. In such cases you are asked to contact the second lector assigned to your mass, so they are aware in advance that they will need to do all readings at that mass.

## **CATECHETICAL BACKGROUND**

Scripture itself tells us that God's word is "living and active." His Word is not primarily a written text but a Word spoken and proclaimed in the midst of a community of faith. His Word brings forth creation and whenever it is spoken anew it recreates. It is

by His Word that Israel was brought into being and continually called to renew its faithfulness to Him; it is by His Word that the Church was called into being and constantly challenged to renew and reform itself.

God's Word, therefore, is a Word with a power beyond all other words. He speaks this Word to reveal Himself to us but also to reveal to us our own deepest nature. It is this Word which tells us that we are His people, that our destiny is intrinsically interwoven with His life. And, more than this, it is by this Word that He makes Himself present to us. For this reason, the Church has never known a sacramental celebration apart from the proclamation of God's Word. Indeed such a celebration could not be a sacrament. God establishes his presence by his Word and the power of that presence once again calls a community into being to receive God's work and to graciously respond.

The real presence of another speaking to us demands a response; and so too, the Word of God. He calls us by this Word so that we can live by this Word. As we understand the Word more and more deeply, we come to recognize that we must change—thus, the fruit of God's Word truly heard and attended to always produced renewal, a renewal that has at its heart is a recognition of our origins as his people.

God has spoken his definitive Word to us in Jesus Christ. It is He who is the living and effective Word of God in the worshipping community. The ultimate purpose, therefore, of celebrating God's Word is not to read biblical texts but to **encounter Jesus** in a manner that elicits from us a unified response of living fidelity. Our celebration of the Word in the Eucharistic celebration is above all else a celebration of the presence of Jesus.

A sacramental celebration of the Word of God is never mere reading of texts. It is the public proclamation in the midst of the assembled faithful of who God is, where God can be found and how God works through us. It is a sacramental event. When the Word is truly proclaimed and heard—things happen. It becomes the experience of the power and presence of the living God in this community, here and now. It is the discovery that the great works of God are not simply history but are enacted anew in our own community as we gather to worship.

### ***Preparation at home***

1. Always read all three scripture readings. The first reading has been chosen according to its relationship with the gospel. You will be able to see what ideas or themes connect the gospel with the reading from the Old Testament. You can see when there are (and when there are not) connections with the second reading as well.
2. Identify the type of passage you are to read. Is it a story? Is it a dialogue between different characters or voices? Is it a prophecy, a letter, a series of laws, a parable, a witty saying, or a song? The depth of your understanding will be visible to the congregation.
3. Ask yourself a few questions about the meaning of the passage, such as: What lies behind the writing of this passage? Where is its climax? What is the tone – comforting, scolding, warning, informative, or intimate?

4. Use your imagination to visualize action passages and narratives. See in your mind's eye what is taking place. Imagine how those involved are feeling, why they act the way they do.
5. Pick out the most important sentence or phrase. Try to communicate it above all else.
6. Check the pronunciation of unfamiliar names in the scriptures or intentions in the workbook. If you happen to trip over one while proclaiming, move on; your job is to convey the meaning of the passage as a whole. A good pronunciation web-site to use is found at <http://netministries.org/Bbasics/bwords.htm> or <http://www.lectorprep.org>. You will be able to hear the pronunciation of the word in question.
7. Pray with the text, letting a given phrase or admonition sink slowly inside you. (— *The Lord is my shepherd*, can become —Lord, be my shepherd...) Some texts are especially appropriate for this, while not all will be as accommodating.
8. After you understand the essence of the passage, practice reading aloud in front of a mirror or for family or friends. Notice how often you look up and make eye contact as you read.
9. Read intelligently, in a lively manner, and when indicated, conversationally.
10. Vary your treatment of any text parishioners know well (Christmas texts are among the most familiar.); that way your proclamation won't fall flat or become hackneyed.
11. Articulate deliberately the consonants at the ends of words – the d's and t's, for example, as in God (rather than Gaw) and not (rather than naw). Sometimes the whole meaning rests on such words.
12. Learn to stress a phrase or word in various ways: a hushed voice often works better than a raise voice.
13. Rehearse several times any Bible passages with run-on sentences (typically in Paul's letters) or any text where the meaning is apt to be lost to listeners. Your task is to communicate meaning.
14. Consider yourself a "proclaimer of the word of God." It is the skills of a proclaimer that you will be developing and using, not those of an actor, radio announcer, or toastmaster.
15. Consider nonverbal communication. Let your body language and facial expressions help you express the message of the reading. Posture, gesture, and facial expression should complement your words.
16. Observe and learn from other lectors when you are not scheduled to lector.
17. Ask several people to give you honest feedback on your lecturing skills. Use these constructive feedbacks to improve your skills.
18. Allow the Scriptures, more and more, to influence your daily life. This is the best part of being a lector; the Scriptures begin to form you...

### ***Before Mass***

1. Take a look at the Lectionary before mass, noting your readings and how they look different from the workbook. Make sure the ribbon is on the correct page for the first reading and placed in the ambo.
2. Check any pronunciations of words and names in the scriptures and Book of Intentions that you are unsure of with the celebrating priest.
3. Review the intentions making sure you can read any handwritten additions to them. **MAKE SURE THAT THE INTENTION PAGE IS SET TO THE CURRENT SUNDAY – CHECK THE HEADING.** If it is not set to the right Sunday, please find the right place in the book. It should be the same as the heading in your Lector book for this Sunday – for example, 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time.
4. If anxious, take a few deep, slow breaths to calm yourself.
5. Check with the celebrating priest to be sure there are no changes to the standard procedure because of special liturgies (Communion, Anniversaries, special blessings, etc.) or additional participants (priests, servers, speakers, etc.).

### ***While Reading***

1. As Father sits after the Gloria, walk up for the first reading.
2. Approach the ambo as reverently as you would approach the altar. Christ is present in God's word and in the Eucharist, the two tables of the liturgy. You may make a slight bow to the altar when you approach the ambo.
3. Make sure that your face can be seen over the ambo.
4. Begin by adjusting the microphone, if necessary, to your height. If it makes a noise when you touch it, ignore it.
5. Look out at the congregation for a second, moving your head to scan the entire horizontal space as you introduce the reading. This is a time-tested way to attract the congregation's attention and focus it on the Scripture.
6. Start with —A reading from the... (Do **not** say —The first reading is...) Finish with —The Word of the Lord, stand at the ambo for a moment of silence (recite the —Hail Mary silently), then sit on the chair behind the ambo for the Responsorial psalm, if the choir is singing it.
7. Do **not** say – Responsorial Psalm. Just recite the response. Raise your hand for the people to respond. Do not respond with them, ever. Let them respond on their own time. Then read the verse, lift your hand for the people to respond. Continue until the Psalm is finished.
8. Pause for a moment of silence after the Psalm before starting the second reading.
9. Start with —A reading from the... (Do **not** say - The second reading is...) Finish with —The Word of the Lord, stand at the ambo for a moment of silence (recite the —Hail Mary silently). Then return to your pew.

10. Prayer of the Faithful—after the Profession of Faith and short prayer, go up to the ambo and say —Our response today is...”Lord, hear our prayer.”, read the intercessions, pausing each time for the congregation to respond. Be sure to include the final intercession, the intention of the Mass. Stay standing while Father reads from the book of prayers. Then return to sit in your pew.

11. Receive communion with the congregation.

12. Remember to project your voice so that the people in the last row of pews can clearly hear you. Microphones only amplify your voice. Use them effectively so that your voice is not inaudible or overwhelmingly loud.

13. Remember to pause between the end of the reading or intention and the closing words ("The Word of the Lord", "We pray to the Lord")

14. Speak slowly, clearly enunciating each word. Good proclamation requires more precise enunciation than ordinary conversation. Pause in appropriate places (refer to your workbook).

15. One rule of thumb: if you sound to yourself as if you are speaking too slowly, you are probably speaking at the right speed!

16. The ideal method is to make eye contact with parishioners in all areas of the Church. Eye contact should be made while speaking, not just during pauses. It will take practice to be comfortable with making eye contact while speaking. You may discretely use your finger to follow the reading if you are afraid of losing your place while making eye contact.

17. Stand quietly and straight. Avoid shifting from one foot to the other or slouching.

18. Remember to modulate your voice – its pitch and volume. Use variations to make the text clear to the assembly.

19. Use your judgment about phrasing. There should be a musicality to your speech as you move more quickly over the least important phrases to linger over the most important ones.

20. Address yourself, when proclaiming, as much as you do the assembly gathered to worship. This is an attitude the congregation will understand and appreciate.

### ***After Mass***

1. Check the Lectionary to see if it is open to the first reading for that Sunday and marked with a ribbon, if there is a Mass following the one you are attending.

## TERMS USED

**LECTIONARY:** (Latin-*lectionarium*=a reading) The liturgical book containing the biblical texts used in the Eucharist and in the Sacraments. The Lectionary is published in four volumes:

VOLUME I—Contains the Sunday readings arranged according to the liturgical year from Advent to the Solemnity of Christ the King, in three cycles, A,B,C. Cycle A focuses on the Gospel of Matthew; Cycle B on Mark and Cycle C on Luke. The Gospel of John is read on the last three Sundays' of Lent, the Sundays of Easter, and from the 17th to the 21st Sundays of Ordinary time in Cycle B and on other important solemnities of the Church year.

VOLUME II— Year I—Weekday readings arranged according to the liturgical year. Includes readings for Commons or readings for celebrations of Mary and the saints.

VOLUME III—Year II—Weekday readings arranged according to the liturgical year. Includes Commons for celebrations of Mary and the saints.

VOLUME IV— RITUAL MASSES— readings for various rituals (weddings, baptisms, confirmation, funerals, etc) or for various occasions: for the Church, for civil needs, for various public needs, for particular needs.

**AMBO:** (Greek-*ambōn*=raised edge) or pulpit (Latin-*pulpitum*=wooden platform) or lectern (Latin-*lectus*=to read) is the place from which the Word of God is proclaimed and explained. The lector and priest should use it for all scripture readings, including the psalm whether recited or sung, and the Prayer of the Faithful.

## **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD: STRUCTURE AND NATURE**

The Mass has two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Readings from scripture and the chants between the readings form the main part of the Liturgy of the word. The homily, profession of faith, and general intercessions or prayer of the faithful develop and complete it. In the readings, explained by the homily, God speaks to his people of redemption and salvation and nourishes their spirit; Christ is present among the faithful through His Word. Through the chants the people make God's word their own and express their adherence to it through the profession of faith. Finally, moved by this onward, they pray in the general intercessions for the needs of the Church and for the world's salvation (*General Introduction to the Roman Missal, 33*)

*Outline of the Liturgy of the Word:*

**First Reading** - A proclamation from the Hebrew Scriptures (or Acts during the Easter season), that ends with "The Word of the Lord."

**Congregation responds**— "Thanks be to God."

**Responsorial Hymn**— taken from the Psalms -sung or recited

**Congregation responds**—singing or reciting the refrain—the refrain picks out an important aspect of the liturgy of the day or season.

**Second reading**—a proclamation from the New Testament (Acts of the Apostles, Paul or other Epistles), ending with "The Word of the Lord."

**Congregation responds**— "Thanks be to God."

**Gospel Acclamation:** According to the season of the year, the Gospel is preceded by the Alleluia or other chant (during Lent). Its purpose is to solemnize the proclamation of the Gospel and prepare for it. It should always be sung and is omitted when not sung.

**Gospel Reading**—A proclamation taken from one of the four gospels—central part of the Liturgy of the Word—by standing for the acclamation and gospel text, all show their reverence, the people recognize and acknowledge that Christ is present and speaking to them.

**Homily**—integral part of the liturgy—given on Sundays and on all Holydays of obligation; recommended on weekdays whenever possible because it is a necessary source of nourishment of the Christian life. It is the living interpretation of God's word for today and encourages members of the community to praise God and ask his help in this Eucharist, living during the week what they celebrate on Sunday.

**Profession of Faith**—Nicene Creed—the community responds and assents to the word of God which it has heard proclaimed and interpreted; it also calls to mind the essential teaching of the Church before the celebration of the Eucharist

**General Intercessions**—Prayers of the Faithful—in this prayer the people exercise their priestly function by interceding for all people. The Presider opens/leads the invitation to prayer. The lector reads the petitions, and then the Presider concludes with a prayer to the Father.

*The Liturgy of the Eucharist then begins with the procession of gifts at the Offertory.*