

# *Ministers of the Word*

Guidelines prepared by the Liturgy Office of the  
Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

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*The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ.*<sup>1</sup>

*Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations... He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.*<sup>2</sup>

The Church has always regarded the Scriptures, together with Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. Inspired by God both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition present God's very word, and is a single sacred deposit of the word of God which is entrusted to the Church. By adhering to it the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the community of faith, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.<sup>3</sup>

The ministry of the word of God is exercised in a variety of forms, for example in the liturgy and in catechesis. It is exercised by a variety of ministers. Within a Diocese this ministry is primarily the responsibility of the Bishop, and is exercised in collaboration with his priests, deacons, catechists.

This document confines itself to considering the ministry of the word in the Liturgy. In particular it is concerned with lay ministers of the word but it is valuable to place these ministries within the context of all liturgical ministers who serve in the Liturgy of the Word. The focus is the Liturgy of the Word at Mass but many of the principles and practical guidance will apply to other liturgical celebrations.

Great care should always be exercised in the preparation and celebration of the Liturgy of the Word such is the nature and value of the word proclaimed in the Liturgy. It is particularly important that those called to be liturgical ministers of the word should have the skills necessary for what is entrusted to them, so that through what they do they may serve the life and mission of the Church.

*The Church is built up and grows when she gathers to listen to God's word. In the liturgical celebration God's many wonderful, past works in the history of salvation are symbolically presented anew. God in turn makes use of the assembly of the faithful who celebrate the liturgy in order that his word may speed on in triumph and his name be exalted among all peoples.*<sup>4</sup>

## The Unity of Word and Sacrament

It is from the scriptures that the prayers and songs of the Liturgy draw their inspiration and their force, and that the actions and signs of the Liturgy derive their meaning. The revision of the Liturgy required by the 2nd Vatican Council has ensured that the intimate connection between the liturgical rites and the scriptures has been made more apparent. In all the rites of the Church there is now a more ample, varied and suitable provision of scripture. This is most obvious in the case of the celebrations of the sacraments, where each celebration includes a Liturgy of the Word, the two realities so closely connected as to form one act of worship.

In the Liturgy of the Word God himself speaks with his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit. Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word.<sup>5</sup>

Thus at Mass<sup>6</sup>, in the word of God the divine covenant is announced; and in the Eucharist the new and everlasting covenant is embodied and renewed.<sup>7</sup> By hearing the word proclaimed in worship, the faithful again enter into the unending dialogue between God and his chosen people, a dialogue sealed in the sharing of the Eucharistic food. The meaning of communion is proclaimed in the word; the message of Scripture is made actual once again in the communion banquet. The proclamation of the word is thus integral to the Mass and at its very heart.

## The Liturgy of the Word

The readings from Sacred Scripture and the chants between the readings (Psalm and Gospel acclamation) form the main part of the Liturgy of the Word. The homily, Profession of Faith, and Prayer of the Faithful (general intercessions) expand and complete this part of the Mass.

- In the readings God speaks with his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit; Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word.
- By their silent listening and pondering, and by their singing and acclamation, the people make God's word their own, and begin to respond to it in their hearts.
- The homily is an integral part of the liturgy to assist the assembly to hear the voice of the Lord in his word.
- Finally, having been nourished by this word, the assembly affirms its acceptance of it by the profession of faith and makes petition in the Prayer of the Faithful (general intercessions), praying for the needs of the entire Church and for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>8</sup>

The *Lectionary for Mass*, revised at the direction of the Second Vatican Council, has opened up the treasures of the Bible, so that richer fare might be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* speaks extensively of the place of the word of God in the plan of salvation and in the life of the Church. All who share in the ministry of the word will want to study this Introduction and take its teaching to heart.<sup>9</sup>

The richness in the quantity and in the variety of readings in the Lectionary challenges those who are called upon to proclaim the Scriptures at Mass. Each of the individual sacred authors reflected on the meaning of God's action in history from their own perspective. They employed various literary forms to convey the message of salvation, ranging, for example, from narratives and the poetry of the psalms to prophetic oracles and parables, from theological expositions to apocalyptic visions. A reader will proclaim the word of the Lord more fully and effectively if he or she has an awareness of the literary form of a particular reading or psalm.<sup>10</sup>

## Diversity of Ministry within the Liturgy of the Word

*The eucharistic celebration is an action of Christ and the Church, namely, the holy people united to and ordered under the Bishop. For this reason, the eucharistic celebration pertains to the whole Body of the Church, manifests it, and has effects on it. It also touches the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their different orders, duties, and actual participation in the Eucharist. In this way, the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart," expresses its cohesion and its hierarchical ordering. Therefore, all, whether ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, by virtue of their office or their duty, should do all but only those parts that belong to them.*<sup>11</sup>

*In the liturgy the members of the Church, the Body of Christ, are united with each other and with Christ their head. They are united in and by the principal actions of gathering, listening to God's word, praying for life of the Church and the world, giving thanks, sharing communion and being sent out for the work of loving and serving God.*<sup>12</sup>

Ideally there should be a diversity of ministry to effect a worthy celebration of God's word. The diversity of ministries exercised exhibits the hierarchical and communitarian dimensions of the liturgical assembly. It is a bishop or priest who presides over the whole of the Liturgy of the Word and who preaches the homily. By contrast, traditionally, the role of proclaiming the readings is ministerial not presidential. Therefore a reader should proclaim the readings, and a deacon, or, in

his absence, a priest other than the celebrant should announce the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> Still other ministers are involved in enabling the singing of the psalm and gospel acclamation.

God speaks to the assembly through the ministers of the Liturgy of the Word, clergy and lay readers. They mediate to the assembly the presence of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Their ministry is exercised in the service of the assembly, helping them to hear the living word of God, and enabling them to begin the work which belongs to the assembly of pondering that word in their hearts and beginning to respond to it in prayer.

Ministers assist the wider assembly by means both of their work of proclamation, and by their modelling for the assembly the work which is common to all of listening to the word proclaimed.

## **Bishop**

The diocesan Bishop, the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care, is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of its entire liturgical life. In celebrations at which the Bishop presides, the mystery of the Church is revealed, especially at a eucharistic celebration led by the Bishop at which the presbyterate, deacons, and people participate. For this reason, the solemn celebration of Masses of this type ought to be an example for the entire diocese.<sup>15</sup>

As the role of proclaiming the readings is ministerial and not presidential the Bishop's principal office at the Liturgy of the Word is that of preaching. The other roles are normally to be performed by other ministers, ordained and lay.

Since the office of preaching is proper to the Bishop he should preach the homily himself whenever he presides at a celebration of the liturgy.<sup>16</sup>

The presidential role of the Bishop is also indicated by the blessing he gives to the deacon who will proclaim the Gospel (or, in the absence of a deacon, to the priest). After the proclamation and as a sign of reverence for the Gospel proclaimed the gospel book may be presented to the Bishop for his venerating of it by a kiss. On more solemn occasions the Bishop may also bless the assembly with the Book of the Gospels.<sup>17</sup>

## **Priest**

When a priest presides at the celebration of the liturgy he leads the people in prayer, in listening and responding to God's word, and in offering the sacrifice through Christ in the Spirit to the Father. He proclaims the message of salvation in preaching and gives the Bread of eternal life and the Cup of salvation.

- Through his liturgical presidency, the priest encourages the participation of others and coordinates them into one harmonious action. Rather than appropriating the functions of others, he is responsible for seeing that everything is done well.
- By tradition the role of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. Therefore, a reader should proclaim the readings, and a deacon or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant should announce the Gospel. If, however, a deacon or another priest is not present, the priest celebrant himself should read the Gospel.
- The homily is ordinarily given by the presiding priest. Preaching is an integral part of the liturgy, and a homily must be given at all masses when the community gathers on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. It is recommended on other days, especially on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season, as well as on other festive days and occasions when the people come to church in greater numbers.<sup>18</sup>
- In some circumstances the priest (or another minister) may also facilitate the conscious participation of the assembly by brief and helpful introductions before the readings.

These introductions should be prepared in advance, and ‘situate’ the readings rather than explaining them.

- The priest leads people in prayer. Thus although another minister will read the intentions for prayer, it is the priest who will introduce the Prayer of the Faithful and also lead its concluding prayer. The priest too will lead the assembly in the Profession of Faith on those days it is required.<sup>19</sup>

The priest will often have a key role with regard to the preparation of the liturgy.

- The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be truly heightened if the texts of the readings, the prayers, and the liturgical songs correspond as closely as possible to the needs, spiritual preparation, and capacity of the participants.
- In planning the celebration of Mass, the priest should pay attention to the common spiritual good of the people of God, rather than his own inclinations. He should also remember that choices are to be made in consultation with those who perform some part in the celebration, including the faithful in regard to the parts that more directly belong to them.<sup>20</sup>

## **Deacon**

The deacon is ordained for service in communion with the Bishop and the college of presbyters. The deacon’s service for the people of God is the diakonia of liturgy, word, and charity.

- The deacon’s principal function in the Liturgy of the Word is to proclaim the Gospel reading. On occasion, he may be invited to deliver the homily. The deacon also ordinarily announces the intentions in the general intercessions.<sup>21</sup>

## **Reader**

In proclaiming the word of God, readers exercise their responsibility in mediating the presence of Christ. God speaks to the assembly through them, and, the impact of God’s message will depend significantly on their conviction, their preparation, and their delivery. The reader has responsibility for not simply reading the word, but assisting the assembly to hear the word. This will require the reader to be attentive to the assembly, and careful to allow for times of pause and silence as the assembly prepares to listen and, once the reading has been proclaimed, as it takes the word of God to heart. It also requires that the diction of the reader is such that he or she can be readily understood by the assembly to whom they minister.

The richness in the quantity and in the variety of readings in the Lectionary challenges those who are called upon to proclaim the Scriptures at Mass. Each of the individual sacred authors reflected on the meaning of God’s action in history from their own perspective. They employed various literary forms to convey the message of salvation, ranging, for example, from narratives and the poetry of the psalms to prophetic oracles and parables, from theological expositions to apocalyptic visions. Those who proclaim the word of the Lord more fully and effectively if they have an awareness of both the literary form of a particular reading or psalm and its context.<sup>22</sup>

- Both to assist the assembly to appreciate the genre and context of the different passages of Scripture and to involve more people in active ministry, it is better to have a different reader for each reading.<sup>23</sup>

## **Ministers of Music**

The psalm and the gospel acclamation (and the Sequences sung at various times during the Liturgical Year) are integral and constitutive elements of the Liturgy of the Word. They are intended to be sung. A psalmist, a cantor, an organist, other instrumentalists, a choir, and a director of music

assist the assembly's singing of them. These ministers of music exercise a liturgical function within the assembly and by their role help to add beauty and solemnity to the celebration.

- The psalmist has the special task of drawing the assembly into the proclamation of the word of God in the psalm by introducing the psalm responses, alleluia or Gospel acclamation to the assembly, and by singing the verses of the responsorial psalm and the alleluia and Gospel verses.<sup>24</sup> The psalmist may also introduce all antiphons to the assembly and sing the verses of the psalms used. The psalmist should have the ability to sing, and an aptitude for correct pronunciation and diction.<sup>25</sup> The role of the psalmist and cantor may be carried out by one person.
- The cantor's function is to lead and encourage the assembly in singing. The cantor also introduces and teaches new music to the people.<sup>26</sup>
- Other elements that may be sung in the Liturgy of the Word include the Profession of Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful
- Ministers of Music can also have an important role in assisting the clergy and other liturgical ministers to develop confidence in using the chants provided in the Roman Missal for the dialogues, acclamations, intercessions and readings of the Liturgy of the Word.<sup>27</sup>

### **Liturgy of the Word with Children**

In order to assist children to a full and active participation in the Mass, and in particular that they might be more easily nourished by the word of God the Church allows for a Liturgy of the Word to be celebrated in a separate place to the Liturgy of the Word celebrated with the adults of the assembly.

*Sometimes... if the place itself and the nature of the community permit, it will be appropriate to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, room. Then, before the Eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own Liturgy of the Word.*<sup>28</sup>

The Liturgy of the Word celebrated with children shares its principal features with the Liturgy of the Word celebrated with the rest of the Church. It includes proclamation and reflection on the scriptures proclaimed. It is a liturgy and not a catechetical session or a crèche. One way of ensuring that its liturgical quality is preserved is to ensure that those who lead the Liturgy of the Word—the reader, cantor and homilist or preacher—are recognised as members of the parish's team of liturgical ministers.

Guidelines for such a Liturgy were published in 1996 by the Department of Christian Life and Worship of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

### **Lay Readers — Coordinator**

A suitable layperson or persons should be invited to help co-ordinate this ministry in a parish. They should work with the priest to ensure ongoing spiritual and liturgical formation. Similarly they should help the priest to develop good practice. They should liaise both with the parish liturgy group and the Diocesan Liturgy Commission.

As is made clear above the reader carries out his or her ministry as a member of a team of ministers. It is important that there is in place in each parish a system in which ministers may be advised of what is planned for the liturgy at which they will assist.

## Selection

*The faithful should not refuse to serve gladly the people of God whenever asked to perform some particular ministry or role in the celebration.*<sup>29</sup>

An indication of the skills required of readers is given above in the description of their ministry. In addition to ensuring that ministers are appropriately skilled, it is desirable that the group of people invited to such ministry should be representative of the parish as a whole: young and old, male and female, married and single, able and disabled. Adults invited to ministry should be baptised and confirmed Catholics, regularly participating in the life of the parish, and of good standing within the parish. Ministry as a Reader is one example of the sort of ministry that young people might be invited to consider after they have been confirmed. Their presence amongst the team of ministers would offer great witness to their peers, and to the wider Church, of the important place young people have in our parishes. Caution should be exercised about inviting young children to read simply because a particular Mass is seen as a 'Children's Mass' or a 'Family Mass'. Always priority should be given to choosing those to minister God's word who can do so for the greater benefit of those gathered to hear it.<sup>30</sup>

A variety of reasons may prevent people from offering their services as ministers of the word, from recognising the skills that they have. For this reason it is right that those responsible for inviting people to the service of the parish, should take special care to consider how particular support and encouragement might be given to those belonging to the more marginalised groups within the parish community and how their skills can be developed for the benefit of all

In an ideal world no-one should be invited to exercise more than one liturgical ministry in the parish at the same time. If this cannot be achieved then they should not be expected to exercise more than one ministry at any single celebration of the liturgy.

In all cases Diocesan Child Protection policies and procedures will be followed; the Local Child Protection Representative (Local CP Rep) in the parish will advise, and will liaise with the Diocesan Child Protection Co-ordinator or Officer (CPC/CPO) as required. The national procedure for selection for volunteers will be followed, including the completion of an Application Form, taking up references, an interview and an Application for a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure at Enhanced level, before any individual can be formally accepted to exercise such ministry in the parish.

## Formation

Readers, commissioned ministers of the word, need proper preparation if they are properly to fulfil their responsibilities to the liturgical assembly.

A general programme for formation for all liturgical ministers is in preparation. Further specific formation is needed for those entrusted with the work of proclaiming the word. Such formation needs to be both spiritual and technical. It needs to include liturgical, theological, biblical, and practical components.

- Through liturgical formation readers will acquire an understanding of the Mass as a whole, with particular emphasis on the parts of the Mass for which they have specific responsibility. They are to be helped to learn the intimate connection between the two principal parts of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They should be assisted to understand also the principles by which the readings for particular seasons and days have been selected for the Lectionary and the relationship between them

- Through their theological and biblical formation they are to be helped to deepen their understanding of God's revelation through the word, of the cycle of Scripture readings and to perceive the revealed message of the Scriptures through the light of faith.
- Through technical preparation they are to be helped to become more skilled in the art of reading publicly, both with the power of their own voice as well as with the help of amplified sound equipment.
- Through being helped themselves to establish a regular pattern of prayer, informed by the spirit of the Liturgy, but not confined to it, they will learn to be able to offer support and guidance in prayer to those whom they serve.

Through such formation they will gain the competence to perform the particular ministry with which they have been entrusted.

All liturgical ministers need to work collaboratively. There is therefore an advantage in ensuring that at least some part of the initial and ongoing formation of Readers is done together with other ministers.

## Continuing Support and Formation for Ministers

*"I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Timothy 1:6).*

Writing to the priests of the Church, Pope John Paul quoted the above words suggesting that they could be applied to the ongoing formation to which all priests are called by virtue of the "gift of God" which they have received at their ordination.

*Paul asks Timothy to "rekindle," or stir into flame, the divine gift he has received, much as one might do with the embers of a fire, in the sense of welcoming it and living it out without ever losing or forgetting that "permanent novelty" which is characteristic of every gift from God, who makes all things new (cf. Rev. 21:5), and thus living it out in its unfading freshness and original beauty.<sup>31</sup>*

Such renewal of the gifts of God comes about not as the result only of the priest's own efforts at renewal and development, but is the fruit of collaboration, a working together of the priest with God himself. Through this joint work it is finally God who renews his original gift.

What is said about the priest is true also of the lay ministers too and their responsibilities to the graces given them and the work entrusted to them.

*Regular opportunities should be made available for liturgical ministers to pray together and be renewed in their ministry. These occasions may provide for their continuing formation and for the improvement of their abilities to assist the assembly in its worship.<sup>32</sup>*

All ministers have a personal responsibility to seek to be people of prayer and live faithfully with the Church. But in addition to this the community of the Church has a responsibility to its ministers to ensure there are opportunities for them to come together for shared reflection and study. It is important to make sure also that the first formation ministers are offered is not also the last. Offering programmes of continuing formation as part of a parish's call of a person to exercise ministry is one way of ensuring that ministers are helped to avoid exercising their ministry simply by 'habit'.

Opportunities should be provided, at least once a year, for the ongoing formation of parish ministers. There are advantages in ensuring that at least sometimes such opportunities for formation should be provided for both clergy and lay ministers together. These occasions may be organised at a Diocesan level, and/or more locally.

Such times should normally include the following three aspects

- Spiritual renewal – an opportunity to reflect together on the saving mysteries of God's reconciling love.



- Ministerial renewal – an opportunity to reflect together on the experiences of ministry; to consider any particular challenges to effective ministry that have presented themselves; to deepen understanding of the nature and context of the particular ministry being undertaken; to develop their particular skills.
- Liturgical renewal – an opportunity to reflect together on the on-going challenge of how to implement still more fully the vision of liturgy presented in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and to enact still more faithfully the revised rites of the Church.

A further simple way of supporting and resourcing parish ministers is the parish's offering to take out subscriptions to any suitable journal for them, or through the building up of a good parish library/resource centre.

Encouragement might also be offered for ministers to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the faith and their ministry through undertaking further academic study. In addition to courses offered by the Diocese or by local colleges, there is an increasing wealth of courses that are offered by way of Distance Learning methods. These offer valuable opportunities to study the scriptures, liturgy, theology, and different aspects of pastoral ministry. Not all ministers will have time or inclination for such courses. But many will have the aptitude and willingness to take advantage of such opportunities. The offering of a simple word of encouragement may reap great benefits for the minister and their parish.

## Commissioning

With the exception of instituted Lectors, those called to assist as ministers of the word are to be formally commissioned for a given period, or deputed for a particular occasion.<sup>33</sup>

The formal commissioning of ministers may be carried out by the Bishop himself, or at his delegation, by the Dean or by the Parish Priest of the parish in which they are to function. In such cases these ministers are always commissioned for a particular place and period of time. The commissioning Minister should make clear the nature and the duration of the mission being given.

One-off commissionings should occur rarely. They may prove necessary at weddings, funerals or special masses when other ministers of the word are not available. The priest should know the person he is asking and ensure they understand fully what they are about to do. An ideal candidate for such a one off commissioning may well be one already commissioned to serve in another place.

## Vesture

It is not required that readers wear distinctive vesture and in England and Wales it is not usual that they should. This helps to make clear the lay nature of this ministry. However, it is the Diocesan Ordinary who is to establish approved practice within his diocese.

## Renewal of Commission

It is desirable that a fixed term be set for the exercise of any particular ministry. There should be an established process for re-appointing ministers at the end of their term, when this is considered appropriate. However care should be taken that this renewal is not taken for granted and that the opportunity for introducing new ministers is not lost. There are obvious advantages in having a team of experienced ministers. However having a team that remains the same year in year out quickly removes from the congregation as a whole the sense that they too might properly be called to share in these various forms of ministry and service.

Where a minister is willing to continue in ministry, but has perhaps renewed their commitment several times, it may be beneficial to suggest that they consider a 'fallow' year, perhaps including encouragement to take the opportunity during that year to develop their skills in a particular aspect of the ministry, drawing on the resources available in diocesan and national courses, retreats etc.

It is appropriate that renewal of commissioning take place in the same liturgy at which new ministers are commissioned.

Promises might be renewed annually on Bible Sunday (held at different times in different Christian churches, but commonly on the 2nd Sunday of Advent in Roman Catholic churches), on the Sunday nearest to a feast of St. Paul or one of the Evangelists, on the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church or the Patronal Solemnity. This renewal may well take place alongside other liturgical ministries.

The practice of the renewal of commitment to parish ministries on Holy Thursday is not recommended. The Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper is the start of the celebration of the Paschal Triduum as a whole. It would also impose an unnecessary element on a liturgy which is already rich and significant.

## Practicalities

### Before Mass

In preparing to hear the Gospel proclaimed, the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word, Christ's faithful people trace the sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips and heart.

The three-fold focus of that preparation is also a useful summary of the preparation a reader should make during the week before proclaiming the word. Such preparation is often most beneficially carried out in a small group (of readers and others, such as musicians and catechists who will use the Sunday readings in their catechetical work during the week.)

- **Understand the reading.** Considering what the writer is trying to say; what it means to me and my community; how it relates to the other readings and prayers at Mass; considering what God is saying in this word today.
- **Practising the proclamation of the reading.** Speaking the words out loud, to see what challenges the work of proclaiming has in store; considering how to speak it so as to give fresh and authentic voice to God's living word.
- **Spending time in prayer.** Expressing one's love for God, and learning to trust in God's love for us. Praying for the community one is called to serve, that together, and through God's word, all might come to live in unity with God and with each other?

### On arrival at church

- All ministers should arrive in good time for the celebration of Mass. In some parishes the principal ministers spend time together in prayer before Mass. In others a list of ministers assisting at Mass is provided so that ministers may sign in, so any unexpected absences will be noticed in time.
- The reader should arrive at church in good time to check the Lectionary is open at the right place and ensure that the amplification system is switched on. Early arrival will also allow musicians and other ministers to advise if there are any last minute changes to what had been previously planned.

## During Mass

- The readers may form part of the procession at the beginning of Mass. In the absence of a Deacon a reader may carry the Book of the Gospels which should be then placed on the altar. The Gospel Book should be held in both hands and raised so that it may be seen by the whole congregation. The Book is placed on the altar. The lectionary should not be carried in procession.<sup>34</sup>

In England and Wales it is usual for the readers to take their places within the assembly until they have to fulfil their ministry. It is more expressive of the nature of their service and their relationship to the assembly if they come forward from their place among the people to minister and to return there after. This is the case whether or not they take part in the entrance procession.

After the conclusion of the Opening Prayer the reader should approach the sanctuary, bow to the altar and then proceed to the ambo. If there is more than one reader and or a psalmist, all may approach at the same time, or separately at the appropriate time for each. If several ministers of the word approach at the same time suitable seating should be provided near to the ambo for those not directly involved at any one time. Local circumstances will determine what the better local practice will be. This should then be observed by all ministers. If it is agreed that ministers will come forward together it is important that they are seen by the assembly to be listening to the word, not simply waiting to minister.

Always the scriptures should be proclaimed from the Lectionary and never from missalettes or from 'people's missals', which lack the dignity proper to this liturgical ministry.

A suitable period of silence should follow each of the readings and the psalm to allow all to reflect upon the word that has been proclaimed.

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. For this reason, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be clearly avoided. During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, accommodated to the assembly gathered together, in which, by the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response may be prepared through prayer. Such periods of silence may appropriately be observed for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the first and second reading and after the homily.<sup>35</sup>

The lay ministers should normally leave the sanctuary after the second reading even if one of them is to return later to announce the intercessions in the Prayer of the Faithful.

Further guidance is available in *Proclaiming the Word — Guidelines for ministering the Readings at Sunday Mass*, a document of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.<sup>36</sup>

Guidance for the celebration of Liturgy of the Word with children is available in *Liturgy of the Word with Children, Guidelines*, a document of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.<sup>37</sup>

## Diocesan Norms

These guidelines have been issued after consultation with the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Where Norms are approved by a Bishop for his Diocese it is those Norms which establish approved practice for celebrations within the Diocese in question. They take precedence over these guidelines.

The preparation of Diocesan Norms provides a particular opportunity for collaborative working between the Bishop's Liturgy Commission and those responsible with him for adult formation and the sacramental preparation of children. In addition to establishing common practice, the Norms should name the body within the Diocese charged by the Bishop with particular responsibility for their implementation.

## Endnotes

- 1 *Dei Verbum* (hereafter DV), 21
- 2 *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter SC), 7
- 3 DV 21 and 10
- 4 Lectionary for Mass: Introduction (hereafter LM) cf. 7
- 5 Even the first form of the *Rite of Penance*, Rite of Reconciliation of individual penitents, encourages that there be a Liturgy of the Word to proclaim God's mercy and call the penitent to conversion. The second form Rite of Reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution, requires a full celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. *Rite of Penance* 45, 55.
- 6 The word of God is proclaimed in all of the various forms of the Liturgy. For convenience this document confines itself to consideration of the word at Mass. What is said here should be applied as appropriate to the other liturgies of the Church, for example the other sacramental celebrations and to the Liturgy of the Hours.
- 7 General Instruction of the Roman Missal (hereafter GIRM), 28; LM, 10 (texts available on Liturgy Office website)
- 8 Celebrating the Mass (hereafter CTM) 153, For an overview of the structure and elements of the Liturgy of the Word reference should be made to Celebrating the Mass 151–173.
- 9 CTM 149–150
- 10 CTM 42
- 11 SC 28, GIRM 91
- 12 CTM 24
- 13 GIRM 59
- 14 SC 7, GIRM 101, CTM 41
- 15 GIRM 22, Ceremonial of Bishops, (hereafter CB) 12
- 16 CB 17
- 17 GIRM 56, CB, 74
- 18 GIRM 66
- 19 CTM 36, 37
- 20 GIRM 352
- 21 GIRM 171, CTM, 39
- 22 CTM 42
- 23 CTM 41
- 24 GIRM 102
- 25 GIRM 102.
- 26 GIRM 104.
- 27 Roman Missal - p. 1007 ff.
- 28 Directory of Masses with Children 17
- 29 GIRM 97
- 30 Rule of St Benedict, chapter 38. Note should also be taken of GIRM 59 which indicates that in those extraordinary circumstances where no other suitable, i.e. competent, reader is present, then the priest celebrant should proclaim the other readings as well as the Gospel.
- 31 *Pastores dabo vobis*, 70
- 32 CTM 32.
- 33 GIRM 107
- 34 GIRM 120
- 35 GIRM 56
- 36 *Proclaiming the Word* can be downloaded from the Liturgy Office website :[www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture)
- 37 *Liturgy of the Word with Children: Guidelines* can be downloaded from the Liturgy Office website: [www.liturgyoffice.co.uk/Documents](http://www.liturgyoffice.co.uk/Documents), and is available from Decani Books 0845 456 8392