

# The Ministry of Lay Reader

“In all services, the entire Christian assembly participates in such a way that all members of each order within the Church, lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons, fulfill the functions proper to their respective orders, as set forth in the rubrical directions for each service.” [BCP p13]

The proper work of the entire Church is worship of God, commonly expressed in the rites and liturgies of the Church. Being the Body of Christ means that the People of God gather together to offer Him praise and thanksgiving; to petition Him for the various needs of the congregation, the Universal Church, the State, and the World; and to remember His gracious gift to us through the death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The recitation of the Daily Office is traditionally a ministry conducted by the laity. A Licensed Lay Reader appropriately officiates. The Eucharist is properly celebrated by a bishop, or in his absence, a priest, with deacons and lay people participating according to their office and function.

The offices of Lector, Lay Reader, and Lay Eucharistic Minister are often confused, but each has a particular ministry and specific license.

A Lector, typically does not vest and sits in the congregation, going to the lectern to read and returning to the pew [See *Tract #13*]. The Lay Eucharistic Minister also typically does not vest, but approaches the altar at the conclusion of the liturgy to receive the Sacrament for distribution to the sick and shut-in of the parish [See *Tract #14*]. Another type of Eucharistic Minister, more commonly known as the Chalice Bearer, does vest and assists at the communion rail with the distribution of the Body and Blood during the liturgy [See *Tract #16*]. Although in most dioceses the Chalice Bearer must first be licensed as a Lay Reader, the ministry of the Lay Reader has a separate and distinct function from the distribution of the Sacrament of Communion.

## Duties

The Lay Reader is licensed to officiate at non-Eucharistic liturgies, such as Morning and Evening Prayer, the Noonday Office (Sext), Compline, and the Burial Office. In some diocese, when a priest or deacon is not available, the Lay Reader is also permitted by the Ordinary to officiate at Ante-Communion and Holy Matrimony (although the secular authorization for an unordained person to act as a Justice of the Peace is prohibited by several states). The Lay Reader is also often called upon to serve at weekday Masses in many congregations. Though only in unusual circumstances, the Lay Reader may also be assigned pastoral or administrative care of a congregation by the Bishop. Thus to adequately fulfill such a job description the

licensed Lay Reader must be well trained in many aspects of liturgy and pastoral care.

## Authorization

Church canon allows an adult, confirmed communicant, in good standing, to be licensed by the Ordinary of the diocese as a licensed lay leader of worship within a congregation under his jurisdiction.

Title III, Canon 4 specifies that such licensure is done by the Bishop of the Diocese in which the person is canonically resident. The guidelines for selection and training of Lay Readers are established by the Bishop; however, the specific training required must conform to §§ 3-8 of Canon 4. as applicable.

Lay Readers serve under the direction of, and at the discretion of, the Member of the Clergy in the local congregation, this usually being the Rector or Vicar. Licensure is granted at the request, and upon the recommendation of the Rector/Vicar for a period not to exceed three years. Licensure is revocable at any time by the Bishop or the Rector/Vicar. License renewal is determined by the clergy on the basis of “acceptable performance of the ministry.” While the canon limits the term of licensure to three years, many dioceses license (or renew) on an annual basis.

The usual procedure to become licensed as a Lay Reader is:

- a) to consult with the clergy of the parish or mission;
- b) upon their approval, to undergo training by individual or group study, instruction by a trained Lay Reader, clergy, or at a diocesan lay school;
- c) a formal letter of request for licensure is sent to the Bishop, detailing such information as date of birth, baptism, confirmation, length of canonical residence in the local congregation, and reasons for the applicant’s desire to be licensed to officiate in the diocese. Renewal is requested by a letter to the Bishop detailing particulars of the previous years’ ministry and a recommendation for renewal by the Member of the Clergy.

## Selection

Lay Readers should be chosen carefully. First, they should believe they are called by God through His Holy Spirit to the exercise of this ministry. This call should be affirmed by the clergy and duly recognized by the congregation. Second, they should demonstrate that calling by their faithful attendance at weekly worship, and in their financial support of the congregation. Third, they should be of mature character, exhibiting by their life a commitment to Christ, His Church, and the local congregation.

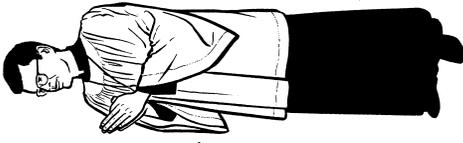
## Training

While Title III, Canon 4, §2 specifies the training required for a Lay Reader assigned pastoral or administrative care in a congregation, it is recommended that at a minimum all Lay Readers should be familiar and have a working relationship with:

- a) the canonical requirements and limitations of the ministry of Lay Reader;
- b) the background and contents of Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament;
- c) the contents and rubrics for various liturgies in the Book of Common Prayer, the Lectionary, and the Hymnal;
- d) a general knowledge of the history, doctrines, and worship of the Church;
- e) the proper use of the voice in reading, including proper pronunciation of Biblical names and places [*see Tract #13 pp3-4*];
- f) the particular customs used in the local congregation.

## Vesture

Each Lay Reader should purchase his or her own vestments so that they will fit properly. The most typical Lay Reader vesture is the Cassock and Surplice, although an Alb with a Cincture is becoming the more popular vestment for the Eucharist. It is appropriate for a



*Cassock and Surplice*

Lay Reader with an undergraduate degree or higher to wear an academic hood when officiating at a non-Eucharistic liturgy. A Tippet (black scarf) may also be worn, especially if the Lay Reader has had some seminary training, or has pastoral or administrative care of a congregation. A seminary-trained Lay Reader may display the seal of the seminary on the ends of the Tippet; a Lay Reader with pastoral authority may wear the seal of the diocese.

## Organization

Most Lay Readers will serve on a rotating basis for the Sunday Eucharist; others may be scheduled for weekday services. Care should be taken that all Lay Readers be provided the opportunity to serve at the primary Mass on Sunday. In many congregations, a Lay Ministry Coordinator is appointed by the clergy to recruit, train, and schedule Lay Readers, Acolytes, Lectors, and other lay ministers.

Membership in a liturgical guild or order, such as the Order of St. Vincent, is highly recommended as a resource for competent information and preparation materials, as well as a fellowship of prayer and support.

However, Lay Readers are organized, there should be, at least, a yearly schedule

of recruitment, training, and congregational recognition made in consultation with the clergy. A service of institution for this lay ministry is best done during a regular Sunday Eucharist.

## Call to Ministry

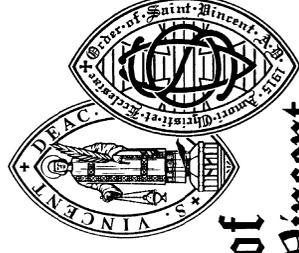
God's call to minister to His People is not only to the clergy, but to all God's people—lay and ordained. In fact, in Anglicanism it is the laity, not the clergy, who are the ministers. And yet, to serve God at his altar as a Licensed Lay Reader is never a right, but a privilege and a proper lay vocation. God needs more lay ministers in commerce and civic areas to evangelize those who do not now know or love Him. An awesome responsibility and sometimes demanding more than we willingly give, yet lay ministry is a call which must not be ignored. May God bless you richly in his service.

*Amori Christi et Ecclesiae*

Contributing Author:  
Mr. Lee Schmidt, OSV  
Licensed Lay Reader  
Church of the Ascension  
Springfield, MO



# The Licensed Lay Reader



The  
International  
Order of  
St. Vincent

St. Vincent's Tract  
No. 17

© Int. Order of St. Vincent 1990.  
All rights reserved. This tract may not be  
reproduced in whole or in part without the  
written permission of the OSV.