

HOLY COMFORTER CHARLOTTE

Liturgical Customary for Lectors

I. INTRODUCTION AND UNDERSTANDING

Why customaries? A “customary” is simply a collection of practices and customs that a group holds as important. At Holy Comforter, our liturgy is very important. Our Anglican tradition and practice has long held that we are actively shaped--molded and formed--through our liturgy. Worship is not a passive activity. Those of us called to serve Christ through serving in the liturgy understand this. Liturgy is important, and deserves our best.

Our approach to liturgy. Our approach to liturgy at Holy Comforter is often summed up in a single phrase: Holy and Simple.

- **Holy.** Our worship is sacred time, time set apart as different from the other moments of our lives. While it is unquestionably true that God speaks to us well beyond the church doors, it is also true that the worship we offer inside our doors is meant to say, “Something remarkable is happening here. Something mysterious. Something powerful. Something HOLY.” *Our worship MUST reflect that the remarkable, mysterious, powerful, holy love of the living God. Our worship must reveal that God is alive, and that we, God’s people, are very much alive with his hope.*

- **Simple.** Our *Book of Common Prayer* sets forth the shape and details of our liturgy. We follow its rubrics—and the traditions that formed them--closely. Many people are surprised to find that Episcopal liturgy, with all of its apparent similarities week to week and year to year, is full of dozens and dozens of decisions that a parish and its clergy must make. *The best way to keep liturgy HOLY is to keep liturgy SIMPLE. Fussiness is distracting, to the people trying to worship and to the people being fussy.*

- The entire point of the worship service is God. Period. We set down liturgical customs and practices so that our parishioners might see God--not us--every week. When a sermon is well-preached, God is praised, not the preacher. When the scriptures are well-read, God is praised, not the lector.

Consistency is what enables us, from person to person and from year to year, to offer the best worship we know how. I want us to be alive in our work and consistent in our practices. Such “lively consistency” in the liturgy helps ensure that, while our individual gifts and talents might vary from week to week, our worship quality does not. Many churches offer customaries that are very long and tedious. This customary is short and tedious. (Ha, ha!) This customary is intentionally short, hoping you will read it completely, refer to it often, and suggest improvements as needed. It is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of a lector’s ministry but rather a collection of the basic customs and practices that help us keep our worship special.

II. A FEW COMMON QUESTIONS

Why lay lectors?

Reading scripture in worship is among the oldest worship practices of our tradition. It was already a very old practice when Jesus himself, early in his ministry, read from Isaiah in synagogue worship (see Luke 4). Jesus was not an ordained priest, and the church maintains that the body of Christ is most fully represented in worship when as many people as possible are included. Gone are the days of a single priest reciting an entire service, start to finish, in a foreign language. We've long since set Latin aside, and in the process we have come to reclaim lay voices prominently in worship.

Scripture, or screenplay?

Holy scripture is powerful. It has inspired women and men for millennia to do great things in the name of Christ. A lector's call is to "give voice to scripture," to make the printed word audible and alive, but NOT to enact scripture. *You are lectors, NOT actors.* Occasionally even experienced lectors, even well-meaning ones, lapse into this freshman mistake. Give voice to scripture, with energy and purpose. Let the Holy Spirit soar.

What do the most experienced lectors do?

It is NOT a sign of experience or professionalism, in worship or sports or music or theater (speaking of acting), to show up for a service or game or performance without practicing. The best athletes and performers still practice, until they retire. Ignoring practice and developing a habit of "reading it cold" are not signs of experience and capability. Rather, they often suggest a waning commitment to this ministry. Remember always, reading scripture is CENTRAL to our worship. It is essential. You are giving breath to the living word of God.

What is the difference between a lector and an intercessor?

An intercessor is an experienced lector who also feels called to lead prayer--and who has the additional skills to do so. This sound trivial, but it is profoundly true: *scriptures are to be read by lectors, but prayers must be prayed by intercessors.* Scripture is timeless and (essentially) unchanging, and has a voice of its own. Prayers, by contrast, will be unpredictable and variable each week. One sure fire way to deaden a congregation's prayers is to expect a lector to simply read them out loud.

III. PREPARING FOR LITURGY (EXPECTATIONS OUTSIDE OF WORSHIP)

- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!
 - Practice out loud. Be aware of arc and flow of the reading, not just its tricky names and words.
 - Practice ALL lector readings for the service, not only yours. You might need to read more than yours if another lector calls in sick Sunday morning.
 - You do not need to practice the Gospel (the Deacon is expected to practice that), but you might also read it to get a flavor for all of Sunday's scripture.
- Get to know "The Lectionary Page," found at online at <http://www.lectionarypage.net/>
 - This is a great source to find your readings for a service, and to look ahead. Note:
 - Nov 27, 2022 – Dec 2, 2023 is Year A, if a choice, use Track 1 through May 28
 - After Pentecost, May 28, 2023 use Track 2
- Offer constructive feedback, as appropriate, to other lectors ... and be open to receiving feedback. Be specific, and be kind. Attend lector workshops, not just as a way to practice but also as a way to meet your fellow lectors.
- If you know you cannot make a scheduled service, please find a replacement and inform the vergers for that service. Email is appropriate for substitutions made more than 24 hours before the service. *Within 24 hours, please call the vergers.*
- If just before the service you are sick and unable to read, please call the church at 704-332-4171. On Sunday mornings, ask the Vestry Person on Duty (VPOD) to relay your message to the vergers.
- ON SUNDAY:
 - Arrive on time, and check in with the vergers 15-20 minutes before the service begins.
 - Lectors and intercessors are invited to pray with the altar party before the service, presently in the Narthex.
 - Check the lectern! Confirm not only your reading but that it is also correctly placed on the lectern. Every lector is expected before every service to visually confirm that the lectern is properly set.

IV. DURING THE LITURGY: SPEAKING AND LEADERSHIP

1. INTRODUCING AND CONCLUDING HOLY SCRIPTURE

- The BCP offers the preferred form for introducing a scripture reading in the Eucharist; see BCP 357.
 - For the vast majority of our worship, introduce the reading with:
 - "A reading from _____." where the blank is the name of the book from which your reading comes. For example, "A reading from Deuteronomy."
 - If the reading is from a prophet: "A reading from the prophet Amos."
 - If the reading is from one Paul's epistles: "A reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians."
 - WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T GUESS. YOU CAN NEVER GO WRONG INTRODUCING A BOOK SIMPLY BY ITS NAME: "A reading from Isaiah." or "A reading from Galatians."
- Do **NOT** offer chapter and verse citations. (*This is a BCP option we might add later, but not at this time.*)

- When introducing a Psalm (see below), do **NOT** give BCP page number **unless you expect people to turn to that page in the Prayer Book**. If it's printed in the bulletin, why send people to the prayer book?
- End scripture readings with a short pause, then, "**The Word of the Lord.**"
- For special liturgies, a lector's instructions may vary based on tradition. PLEASE READ AHEAD AND PRACTICE. For example, at the Great Vigil of Easter and at Lessons and Carols services, the introductions and endings are different than the usual Sunday Eucharist. Be flexible, and be prepared.

2. READING HOLY SCRIPTURE

- Read the scriptures to make the words audible and clear. Read with energy and purpose; this is the Word of God, after all! Please do not "act out" the lesson, verbally or otherwise. Your interpretation of what is important or urgent or sad in the text might not be what others hear that day. Allow the words themselves stand on their own. Give the Holy Spirit room to breathe.
- Give life to punctuation, too! This is essential. Commas, semicolons, question marks, periods, parentheses ...each of these means something different in the text, and these all must be relayed verbally to the congregation. Give pauses where they are due.
- If a reading begins immediately with a speaker speaking, identify him or her for the listener. It is common, for example, that a Sunday Gospel will begin in the middle of one Jesus' teachings. In this case, the deacon prefaces Jesus' words with, "**Jesus said,**" **even if this is not in the text itself**. For example, the Gospel for 5 Epiphany is Matthew 5:13-20, taken from within the Sermon on the Mount. Though Matthew 5:13 doesn't say "Jesus said," an experienced reader (and a quality lectionary book) will add this.
- **During Advent and Lent, Intercessors should pause 3-5 seconds after each response before beginning the next prayer.**

3. LEADING A PSALM [What, Where, (How Much), and How]

- The standard practice (default) at Holy Comforter is to read the Psalm in unison.
 - **Do NOT give BCP page number unless people are expected to open their Prayer Books.**
 - Once you begin a unison psalm, please do not speak directly into the microphone. Rather, step back (or aside) from the mic and let your voice blend in with the people
- Skilled lectors will note **this general pattern to introducing psalms** (or any communal reading):
 - *Your task: help the congregation find the text, gracefully and with an artful blend of patience and pacing*
 - #1 "WHAT": name the reading
 - "The psalm appointed for today is Psalm 119 ..." (or "a portion of Psalm 119")
 - #2 "WHERE": name where folks are expected to find it "... as found on your bulletin insert." "... as printed in your bulletin."
 - OR (only if not printed!): "... as found in the Prayer Book on page 769."
 - Pause! give congregation time (*pause! pause! let the people follow where you want to lead them*)
 - this pause especially important IF folks are expected to open a Prayer Book
 - #3 "HOW MUCH": only if necessary, announce any partial sections
 - "Let us read verses A THROUGH B, in unison."
 - **This step is NOT NECESSARY if the text is pre-printed correctly in the bulletin**
 - #4 "HOW": announce the style, i.e., how the reading will happen ("in unison")

- Pause! then start reading holy scripture, together
- Remember, a leader is not effective if his/her followers don't know where to go or what to do
- Do not end psalms in the Eucharist with the *Gloria Patri* (this is a Daily Office practice)

- Responsive styles (between lector and congregation) for reading psalms
 - *These forms may be used by experienced lectors*
 1. By whole verse: lector begins with first verse; people read second verse; then alternating
 2. By half verse: lector reads to asterisk; people complete the verse; continue, alternating.
(This only works in your copy of the psalm text is marked with asterisks, as is done in the BCP.)
 3. Responsive reading led by the lector is preferred when a congregational reading "jumps" somewhere in the middle from one place to another, responsively among parts of the congregation (lector starts psalm but does not lead it thereafter)
 4. Left side and right side: Lector should always begin with his/her side, of course!
 5. Men and women: Lector should always begin with his/her own gender, of course!

(NOT PREFERRED - when navigating the psalm is tricky in any way because the lector releases leadership to the congregation.)

V. DURING THE LITURGY: MOVEMENT

1. SIMPLE, GRACEFUL MOVEMENT

- Above all, move with grace and purpose.
- Our call toward simplicity in worship means that our movements be simple, direct, and intentional. You are part of the liturgy; move with purpose but not rushed. Rushed or abrupt movements call attention to your movements and not to the larger liturgy.
- When possible, do not move during prayers.
- When moving from your seat to the lectern, take the most direct path. Again, do not rush.
- Sit very near the front of the church, on the aisle, to minimize transit time.

2. REVERENCING THE ALTAR

- When serving in the liturgy, all lectors are asked to reverence the altar going to and leaving the lectern. (Note: If a member of the choir or an acolyte crosses the center line of the church, they should reverence when they get to the centerline; otherwise, no reverence is necessary.)
- HOW: a reverence is a simple quarter-to-half bow at the waist, facing the altar.
- WHERE: reverence is done on TOP OF the chancel step, even with the lectern itself
- WHEN TWO LECTORS MEET EN ROUTE TO/FROM THE LECTERN: both reverence together.
 - Departing lector on the left (lectern), the arriving lector on the right (pulpit) side of the aisle

- If both are arriving or departing together, either can be on left or right
- Lector on the right cues the reverence
- TURNING AND TURNING AROUND (the same customs as for clergy and altar servers)
 - TURNING LEFT OR RIGHT after reverencing
 - *The rule: make the most direct turn in the direction where you are immediately headed.*
 - It is simple: if you're headed left, turn left. If headed right, turn right.
 - TURNING AROUND ("spinning" -- this is where it gets fun)
 - *The rule: when reverencing alone, spin around to your right. When reverencing as a group, spin around to the inside.*
 - If YOU are the inside of the group--that is, if you are the center person in an odd-numbered group--you cannot spin to the inside. Thus, spin around to your right.
- Turning and spinning, like all liturgical movements, should be done with grace and not rushed

3. TIMING (OR, BETTER, GRACEFUL ANTICIPATION)

- The congregation optimally should not have to watch and wait long for a lector to arrive.
- Anticipate your move so you can move quickly and gracefully.
- For lectors reading the first lesson in a typical Sunday Eucharist:
 - Start moving to the lectern when the Collect of the Day begins ~~ends~~.
 - People will naturally be settling down (from standing or kneeling to sitting).
- For lectors reading a second lesson:
 - Start moving to the lectern in the last verse of the Psalm
 - With the first lector, who is leaving the lectern, reverence the altar together. (First lector leaves lectern to time arrival with second lector at the top step.)
- Prayers – Intercessors start moving during the last paragraph of the Nicene Creed. "We believe in the Holy Spirit....."

VI. CONCLUSION

Serving Christ in this holy way--by reading no less that Holy Scripture in the Holy Eucharist--is a very big deal. Practice your craft, pray often, and have fun. Life is short, indeed. Let us offer our blessings abundantly, living in faith, sharing our hope, and loving our God.