

## *Guidelines for Readers*

There is something elemental and sacred about the voice. Genesis tells us that God *said* and creation came into being. The prophets *spoke* “the Word of the Lord.” And Jesus typically healed people by speaking. The church recognizes the sacred mystery of the voice and continues to have sermons preached, prayers spoken, hymns sung, and scripture lessons read aloud. Private reading of the Bible sends the message to the brain through the eyes (or through the fingers if one reads in Braille!). The church is happy about such private reading. There should be more of it. But in corporate worship it asks people to look up from book or paper and *listen*. It is a time to give full attention to the word which enters the mind through the ear by means of a human voice. As a lector it is your voice that carries the Word of God.

The readings are never just a series of words; they are stories or messages, or ideas, and your job as a lector is to *communicate* those stories, messages and ideas. It is important to read through the text several times to be sure you understand it. Some of the paragraphs in the letters of Paul, especially, are difficult to understand and therefore difficult to read.

### *On Sunday Morning:*

Please come to the office/sacristy area no less than twenty minutes before the service begins. If you are involved in a procession or helping to serve communion you will get your instructions there.

If you are reading the Old Testament, normally you will go to the pulpit while the congregation is being seated after the Prayer of the Day.

If you are reading the Epistle, normally you will go to the pulpit as the Psalm is concluding. It is better if you do *not* wait until the last note has died away before you go to the pulpit, but once you are there it is good if you allow people the 4 or 5 seconds they need to look up from their books and ready themselves to listen to the reading.

When you introduce a passage you say, “The Old Testament/Epistle Reading is from the \_\_\_<sup>th</sup> chapter of \_\_\_,” giving the chapter and name of the book. You need not give verse numbers. At the end of the reading, say, “The Word of the Lord,” and allow the congregation to respond, “Thanks be to God,” before returning to your seat.

As a lector you are one of the leaders of the service. You can provide helpful leadership throughout the service. For example, if you know when to stand and sit you can lead the congregation. If you know when to say “Amen” or “Thanks be to God” and then speak these responses clearly and confidently it helps the congregation a great deal.

Finally, all people are fallible. Of course, those who don’t care enough about the worship life of God’s people to *prepare* to lead them, shouldn’t lead them. But suppose you have practiced and prepared yourself and know what to do and still make a mistake. So what?

The church won't be ruined, and God sees the heart, and if your friends abandon you, you didn't need them anyway!

The following suggestions, prepared by Karen Peterson Wilson of the Speech-Theater Department, are meant to help you fulfill your important role of public reading for the church.

- 1) Do a few warm ups. Athletes and musicians would never consider performing without some form of warm up prior to performing or playing. Tongue twisters, moving your shoulders and head, deep breathing exercises all help to warm up the vocal mechanism.
- 2) Keep good posture. It sometimes helps to stand with more of your weight on the balls of your feet instead of your heels (makes you look more interested and involved in the material if nothing else.)
- 3) Practice before you read, no matter how familiar you are with the material. Practice *out loud*. It does more harm than good to whisper the material in your room and then go to the Chapel and read aloud. If you find it useful, try reading your material to another person for suggestions and comments.
- 4) Enunciate. Finish the ends of words and sentences. If you are not sure how to pronounce a word, use the dictionary.
- 5) Speak slowly, use pauses. Remember, there is no need to rush.
- 6) Speak to your audience (but don't speak down to your audience). Try to maintain some eye contact with them.
- 7) Try to speak with some sense of vitality, energy, and variety. Remember, your interest in the material communicates to an audience. Concentrate on what you are saying, trying to communicate honestly the meaning and message of the words.
- 8) If necessary, "map" your material to assist you when you are reading. Write a note or draw a symbol in the areas where pauses would be useful, where you need to be more aware of rate or variety in expressiveness, where you would like to be sure to look at the congregation, etc. These symbols merely act as visual reminders when you are reading (most good speakers use such a system).
- 9) Analyze your rate—is it too fast, too slow, monotonous, or do you use poor phrasing? Analyze your loudness—is it good or unsatisfactory? Do you overuse force as a form of emphasis? Analyze your pitch—is it too high, too low, does it lack variety, are the pitch changes too exaggerated? Analyze your vocal quality—is it nasal, flat, strident, weak, etc.? Analyze your diction—do you use indistinct articulation, do you drop certain sounds, is it too rapid or too slow, do you mispronounce any words, does your speech sound affected? Analyze the general impression of your speaking. Does it suggest friendliness, alertness, self-assurance, vitality, poise and responsiveness?

Remember: speech should always be well groomed, articulate, understandable and effective.