THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

A TREATISE

Submitted to the Faculty of the

School of Theology and Religious Studies

Of The Catholic University of America

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

For the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Ardella Edwards

Washington, D.C.

2013
Since the decline in the number of priests in the United States, after the Second Vatican Council, the number of lay ministers has grown. The ministry of lectors has largely been entrusted to the laity. In the Mass at the Liturgy of the Word the lector is the minister who orally brings the Scriptures excluding the Gospels to the assembly. It is not sufficient to pass out programs or missalettes to the congregation and have them read silently. The task of the liturgy of the Mass is two-fold: to render proper worship to God, and to insure the sanctification of the congregation. The task of the lector is a delivery of the Scriptures that sanctifies both the lector and the assembly.

There are many resources for public speaking, and delivery techniques. There seem to be no resources for spiritual direction or formation for lectors. The lector should prayerfully and faithfully proclaim the Word of God. To do so, the lector must be grounded in his or her faith, with an understanding and knowledge of the Scriptures.

This project in ministry designed, implemented and evaluated a formation program for lectors. The program was offered to ten lectors, with four two-hour sessions two weeks apart. The main foci were lectio divina and mystagogical reflection techniques. The program was well received and participants recommended it for novice lectors, and as a refresher for veteran lectors.
This treatise by Ardella Edwards fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Doctor of Ministry approved by Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., Ph.D., as Director, and by Rev. Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, D.Min., Ph.D. as the Director of Doctor of Ministry Program.

____________________________________
Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., Ph.D., Director

____________________________________
Rev. Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, D.Min., Ph.D.,
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER I**  Need of Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors  
Introduction:  Context/Issue  
2  
Background:  Theology/Spirituality  
8  
Early Development of the Role of Lector  
15  
Impact of the distinction between clergy and laity  
18  
Vatican II Contributions  
25  
The Power of the Word  
33  
Formation of Lay Lectors  
40  

**CHAPTER II**  Practical and Spiritual Formation Techniques  
Project methods  
49  
*Lectio Divina*  
56  
Mystagogy  
64  

**CHAPTER III**  Project Completions  
Participants  
81  
Parable of the Prodigal Son  
82  
Evaluations  
98  
Summary  
102  

**APPENDICES**  
105  

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**  
119
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION – CONTEXT/ISSUE
Introduction: Context/Issue

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, describes the function of the liturgy to be two-fold: to render proper worship to God, and to insure the sanctification of the assembled Christians. Lectors have an important role in the liturgy. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that laity can be permitted to perform the ministry of lector, with Canon 230.2 stating that: “Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation.” Lectors proclaim the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in the absence of a cantor the responsorial psalms. In the absence of a deacon they also read the prayers of the faithful. The preference is for an ecclesially installed male to serve as lector. In reality, many lay men and lay women are temporarily designated as lectors.

There are many books, self-study courses and internet resources for lector training. And further the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* notes that:

“Many aids are now at the disposal of the laity who devote themselves to the apostolate: namely, seminars, congresses, recollections, retreats, frequent meetings, conferences, books and periodicals; all these enable them to deepen their knowledge of holy scripture and catholic doctrine, nourish the spiritual life, and become acquainted also with world conditions and discover and adopt suitable methods.”

There do not seem however, to be any programs that emphasize spiritual formation for lay lectors, that is, guidance in their personal appropriation of the Word to

---


3 *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, No. 32, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 440.
aid them in their quest for holiness and in their ministry. “A training, at once many-sided and complete, is indispensable if the apostolate is to be fully effective. This is required, not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of lay people themselves, but also by the variety of circumstances, persons and duties to which they should adapt their activity.”

The U.S. Catholic Bishops in their statement *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* claim: “The Church’s pastoral ministry exists to sustain the work of the Gospel. One way it does this is by nourishing and strengthening lay men and women in their calling and identity as people of faith, as contributors to the life and work of the Church, and as disciples whose mission is to the world.” The Church needs to nourish and sustain, to provide spiritual formation for its lectors. Further in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* the U.S. Catholic Bishops state: “We acknowledge that, together with successes, some of our catechetical efforts have fallen short. It is time to identify and address these shortcomings and build on our strengths so as to forge a more balanced and mature catechetical ministry.”

A lector may perform the proclamation of the Word as proper worship due to God. However, *Sacrasanctum Consilium*’s second function remains to be fulfilled, that is to insure the sanctification of the lector and the assembly. For this purpose lectors should be firmly grounded in a spirituality centered on the Word to proclaim the Word of God effectively and reverently. Consequently a common basic spiritual formation

---

4 Ibid., 436.
6 Ibid., 12.
program for lay lectors in which they can grow individually and communally in their faith is called for. “The lector has a daunting responsibility. The lector’s voice needs to carry God’s voice. The lector does not just pronounce words. The lector communicates a divine message.”  

The USCCB report *Lay Ecclesial Ministry* reflects the concerns and issues raised by lay ministers for continuing education in their ministries. The Lectionary for the Mass in its introduction states that there must be laity “trained” suitably to carry out the mission of lector, stating that such preparation should be primarily spiritual and secondarily technical. Yet, in experience, training is offered only for technical aspects of ministry. “Besides spiritual formation, solid grounding in doctrine is required: in theology, ethics and philosophy, at least, proportioned to the age, condition and abilities of each one. The importance too of a general culture linked with a practical and technical training is something which should by no means be overlooked.”

As Zeni Fox noted: “In 1972, Pope Paul VI reflected on changes occurring in the Church … [and] declared that the offices of lector and acolyte would be conferred by installation, would be called ministries, and could be committed to laypeople. However, these ministries were limited to men, a constraint which some see as the reason why installation of lay ministers is seldom used.” The vision of the Vatican Council II

---


10 *Apostolicam Actuositatem, No. 29, The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 437.

regarding the unique ministry of lay men and lay women have been slow to be implemented.

“Nevertheless, the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.”\textsuperscript{12} If liturgy has been hailed as the source and summit of the formation of the faithful, then the celebration of the Mass is the epitome of liturgy. Due to its sacred position among liturgies there are detailed instructions on who may proclaim the Scriptures. Only those ordained to Holy Orders (deacons, priests, and bishops) may proclaim the Gospel. Other readings (Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms) should be proclaimed only by an ecclesially installed male lector.

The Code of Canon Law 230.1 states: “Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte.” However, in Canon 230.2 it is noted that: “Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector during liturgical actions by temporary designation.” There is no implied preference for male lectors in this section of Canon Law 230. In my experiences in small rural parishes the number of female lectors far outweighs male lectors.

Throughout the history of Christianity, from the apostles, to disciples and to the current faithful, the lector has played an important role in liturgies. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states: “By tradition, the function of

---

proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector.”13 By virtue of our baptism we are members of the common priesthood. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Pet. 2:9) As baptized Christians we are all members of a royal priesthood, chosen to announce the praises of God, to proclaim the Word, the Good News.

“All taking part in liturgical celebrations, whether ministers or members of the congregation, should do all that pertains to them, and no more, taking into account the rite and liturgical norms. Servers, readers, commentators, and member of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical ministry. They ought, therefore, to carry out their functions with the sincere piety and decorum which is appropriate to so exalted a ministry and which God’s people rightly expect.”14

Those called to the ministry of lector have a great duty to proclaim the Sacred Scriptures. “The apostles, on whom the church was founded, following the footsteps of Christ ‘preached the word of truth and brought churches to birth’. It is the duty of their successors to carry on this work so that ‘the word of God may speed on and triumph’ (2 Thes. 3:1), and the kingdom of God be proclaimed and renewed throughout the whole world.”15

The USCCB in Lay Ecclesial Ministry16 reported that lay ministers express their need for continuing education. I agree with the USCCB statement that there is a need for both formal practical education as well as spiritual formation. A good theological

---

14 Sacrosanctum Concilium, Nos. 28-29, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 128.
15 Ad Gentes Divinitus, No. 1, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 443.
16 Lay Ecclesial Ministry, 26.
background and honest spiritual reflection and formation are essential to being a lector who not only participates in the worship of God, but also insures the sanctification of the parish community. Spirituality begins at home. Lectors must be good role models (practice what they preach). “However, let everyone be aware that the primary and most important contribution they can make to the spread of the faith is to lead a profound Christian life.”17

Timothy O’Malley writes: “The lector speaks the truest words in the most beautiful way in order to attract the assembly to take up the way of life proclaimed in the text, to write it upon their hearts.”18 “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.” (Jas 1:22) Further O’Malley writes “But, with the presentation of the covenant and law inscribed into text comes the gap between speech and action, between proclamation and practice, between scripture and ethics.”19 The Lectionary for Mass states that: “The liturgical assembly truly requires readers, even those not instituted. Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are suitable lay people who have been trained to carry out this ministry.”20 And further it states that:

“It is necessary that those who exercise the ministry of readers, even if they have not received institution, be truly suited and carefully prepared, so that the faithful may develop a warm and living love of the Sacred Scripture from lectionary to sacred readings. Their preparation must above all be spiritual, but what may be called a technical preparation is also needed. The spiritual preparation presupposes at least a biblical and liturgical formation. The purpose of their biblical formation is to give

---

17 Ad Gentes Divinitus, No. 36, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 489.
19 Ibid., 28.
20 Lectionary for Mass, xxv.
readers the ability to understand the readings in context and to perceive by the light of faith the central point of the revealed message."\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Background – Theology/Spirituality}

In ancient times the written word, be it by scroll, tablet, or book, was rare and expensive and usually only available to the elite. The words written recount our stories, our histories, be they ancient or contemporary. With the expense of the written word, many tales, stories and histories were committed to memory and presented orally. Still, we are a storied people. “Stories have a tremendous moral power. For good or evil, they can challenge, influence and even transform us.”\textsuperscript{22} We relish recounting our stories, everything from bedtime stories to family histories. As children, even if we could read, we delighted in our parents reading to us. We enjoyed the relationship with our parents, the timbre of their voices, their facial expressions that brought the story to life.

Dr. Raymond Studzinski, a priest and professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, commenting on spiritual direction writes that “Storytelling is a process of retrieving and reworking the past which provides people with a solid footing in the present and helps them anticipate the future.”\textsuperscript{23}

Kevin Irwin notes that:

“To assert that we are dealing with a story that must be told implies that Scripture is composed not of eyewitness accounts or accounts that aim for eyewitness accuracy, but of texts/stories crafted out of retelling (admitting, however, that one test of kerygmatic authenticity in the Lukan corpus is “eyewitnesses” such as Matthias in Acts 1:15-26). Texts that have

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., xxvi.
\textsuperscript{23} Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B.. Spiritual Direction and Midlife Development. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 110-111.
emerged from acts of storytelling are thus restored to their native context when proclaimed liturgically."24

Lectors proclaim these scriptural stories to the assembled at liturgies to be absorbed in context and text, and woven into their hearts and lives as Christians, to be acted upon in their daily lives. Irwin further notes “The two-edged sword of the Word can both cut through well worn habits of vice and virtue and foster new habits of virtue. At all times, however, the Liturgy of the Word is an experience of salvation for the contemporary Church since through it Christ once more accomplishes salvation ‘for us and for our salvation.’” 25 We are a storied people, and we are people of the Christian stories. “If in fact liturgy is our present experience of the eternal liturgy where the Father is adored in spirit and truth, then Christian worship is different from synagogue liturgy since the Spirit is active among the baptized to bring it to all truth in Christ through the Scriptures. The Spirit abiding in the Church enlivens the liturgical assembly always to hear and experience the Scriptures anew.”26

Our Christian stories, our Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. These stories have inspired Christians for thousands of years. “Remembering is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit enables people to make inspired connections between their personal stories and the story of Jesus.”27 To remember is to keep something or someone in mind for one’s attention and consideration, to recall the memory and remind one of its importance in one’s life.

25 Ibid., 99.
26 Ibid.
27 Studzinski, 135.
Stories entertain us, educate us, challenge us, and guide us. “Stories teach us morality in two ways: first, by forming and re-forming our personal and communal character, and second by giving concrete directions about how we ought to behave in a particular setting.”\(^{28}\) And so in the early church, given the rarity and expense of scrolls and books, and with limited literacy the “family” history of Christianity was told orally. “Now, what was once preached by the Lord, or fulfilled in him for the salvation of humankind, must be proclaimed and extended to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), starting from Jerusalem (see Lk 24:27), so that what was accomplished for the salvation of all may, in the course of time, achieve its universal effect.”\(^{29}\)

Stories can be read, stories can be told – alone or conversationally. The texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament are orally proclaimed (told alone by the lector). The responsorial psalms are orally proclaimed (told conversationally by the cantor or lector and the faithful in the assembly).

“There are times when people’s own stories are brought into direct confrontation with the sacred story as articulated in the Scriptures and celebrated in the Christian community. This enables people to see more clearly the sacred dimensions of their own life stories and they can also make explicit connections (or contrasts) between their own life experiences and what has been described in revelation.”\(^{30}\)

O’Malley describes Jesus Christ as a lector. “Deed and act are one in Christ in the same way that humanity and divinity are perfectly expressed in one person. In the Gospel account of Luke, Jesus introduces his ministry at Nazareth through becoming a lector:

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 82.
\(^{29}\) Ad Gentes Divinitus, No.3, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 446.
\(^{30}\) Studzinski, 113.
He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. To let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then, he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. (Luke 4:16-22).  

Virginia Meagher and Paul Turner also refer to Jesus as a ‘lector’ in their *Guide for Lectors*: “The story of Jesus in the synagogue also says something about the role of a lector. As a lector, Jesus had made the word of God part of his life. He was familiar with the scriptures. He had absorbed their thoughts into his own.” I believe it is paramount that a lector absorbs the scriptures prior to proclamations. Regarding contemporary lectors Meagher and Turner note that “The Spirit of God came upon Jesus in a very special way. When he read that passage from Isaiah long ago, he absorbed its meaning as no other lector ever could or ever will. However, the Spirit of God is also upon you. God has placed the Spirit within you, a Holy Spirit who speaks to you, a Holy Spirit who uses you to proclaim the word of God.”

The early disciples had no scripture other than the Torah (Pentateuch) and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. The evolving ‘Christian Scriptures’ (later to be identified as the New Testament) were not written; they were an oral tradition. Marcel Metzger comments that: “Thus, the liturgies of the first centuries proclaimed the instructions and

---

31 O’Malley, 30.
32 Meagher and Turner, viii.
33 Ibid., 1.
prayers in a living manner, according to schemes that had become traditional and were transmitted from memory.”

This early oral tradition stressed relationships – relationships among each other, and a relationship with God.

“Both images of self and images of God become comprehensible in the framework of the stories within people’s lives”. … A story … is a narrative account that binds events and agents together in an intelligible pattern. We do not tell stories simply because they provide us a more colorful way to say what can be said in a different way, but because there is no other way we can articulate the richness of intentional activity – that is, behavior that is purposeful but not necessary. For any good novelist knows there is always more involved in any human action than can be said. To tell a story often involves our attempt to make intelligible the muddle of things we have done in order to have a self.”

Human experience has an inherently narrative character. It is an incipient story, stored in memory as a temporal succession of moments. In an important study on narrative and experience, Stephen Crites has noted:

‘Storytelling is not an arbitrary imposition upon remembered experience, altogether alien to its own much simpler form. Images do not exist in memory as atomic units, like photographs in an album, but as transient episodes in an image-stream, cinematic, which I must suspend and from which I must abstract in order to isolate a particular image. The most direct and obvious way of recollecting it is by telling a story, though the story is never simply the tedious and unilluminating recital of the chronicle of memory itself.”

The early disciples read the Torah and Hebrew Scriptures, and may have interpreted its laws, psalms and prophecies to the assembly. Meagher and Turner in their Guide for Lectors explain that:

---

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
"Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then Nehemiah, that is His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all the people: ‘Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep’ – for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law (Nehemiah 8:8-10). When was the last time the beauty and the joy of hearing the word of God proclaimed in our assemblies made the people weep?"  

When the language of the New Testament was not yet recorded in a written format, the apostles and disciples orally proclaimed the story of Christ’s birth, his preaching and parables, his death and resurrection. Robert Kinast states: “All language has a theological character insofar as it is a human participation in God’s original Word.” Sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet claims that: “one cannot be a human being without language.” During the persecution of Christians in the first two centuries, the Scripture readers (who could be referred to as lectors) were special targets for persecution due to their public proclamation of the Scriptures. “The power and significance of the biblical word at worship can be glimpsed in the early experience of the church. During times of persecution, lectors (or readers, or proclaimers) – whose ministry was to prepare and proclaim the word at worship – were among those local church leaders who were particular targets.”

Their proclamations threatened the stability of Judaism; Scripture proclaimers were regarded as religious revolutionaries who should be suppressed by any and all means, including torture and executions. The lectors challenged both the devout Jews and those Gentiles who wished to hear more about Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

---

37 Meagher and Turner, 29.
Those lectors had great faith in the Word of God, and were not easily silenced. They knew that the sacred stories evoked responses in their audiences. As then, still today the Scriptures evoke responses of the listeners. “[M]any people discover that a sacred story has given shape and form to their own personal stories. … These sacred stories expressed in the Scriptures have had their effect. Christian believers come to deeper understanding of their own stories in the light of these.”\(^{41}\) Out of necessity these lectors then began to preach in hiding, in house churches which were protected by the porters who allowed or denied admission to worshippers.

According to theologian Marcel Metzger:

“The early Christian community did not take the initiative of separating itself from the Jewish community; on the contrary, it believed that from within this chosen people, it was welcoming the full realization of the ‘plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God’ (Eph 3:9, ff) and ardently wished to communicate this revelation in order to obtain the conversion of Israel (Rom 11). It was official Judaism which decided to exclude the Nazorean’s followers, whom it considered to belong to a sect gone astray.”\(^{42}\)

The Essenes (a Jewish sect of the time), for instance, were viewed with suspicion due to their lives of solitude, purity and self-denial. Modern Judaism still has factions: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform groups. The followers of Christ were viewed with suspicion of heresy; yet the disciples did not intend a ‘new sect’ or a ‘new religion’. They firmly believed that Christ was the culmination of the Old Testament prophesies. Like Jesus his followers were not intent on abolishing the law and the prophets but were

\(^{41}\) Studzinski, 112.

\(^{42}\) Metzger, 16.
convinced that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law and prophets. Jesus’ disciples and followers preached the Good News.

The early disciples recounted the sacred stories as do lectors today. After thousands of years these stories continue to make a vibrant impact on the listeners. "The sacred stories can also engender a new discernment of God’s presence in events which have been taken for granted or even dismissed as not a locus for God’s presence and activity. Choices can now be deliberately made on the basis of what advances the story of a person’s life in accord with the paradigm provided by the sacred stories."\(^{43}\)

_Early Development of the Role of Lector_

Eventually, according to Metzger, the early Christians were effectively barred from synagogues (c. 70 A.D.) yet they retained both the Hebrew Scriptures (which they believed were fulfilled in Jesus Christ) and the Jewish tradition of worship, including the reading of the Torah (scriptures). This biblical form of prayer and worship evolved into the Christian Mass which includes both the Liturgy of the Word (scriptures) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (sacrifice). “In fact, Christian prayer, like Jewish prayer, is fundamentally the prayer of a people conscious of being God’s peoples, and the liturgy is organized as the structured prayer of a community. In a historical study, one can give an account of liturgical institutions only by taking into consideration their communal destination.”\(^ {44}\)

\(^{43}\) Studzinski, 114.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 15.
In his book *Models of the Church* Avery Dulles, S.J. suggests there are many models of church. Dulles cites five models of church: 1) institution, 2) mystical communion or community, 3) sacrament, 4) herald, and finally 5) servant. I think the model of community best reflects the early Christian church. “Christians commonly experience the Church more as a companionship of fellow followers on the same journey than as a union of lovers in the same house.”

We have some early writings concerning the liturgy of the Mass. Meagher and Turner report:

“The proclamation of scriptures at the Eucharist dates back at least as far as the time of Saint Justin. Writing about year 150 A.D. he described a typical gathering of Christians. Justin wrote: ‘The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. … [The rest of the ceremony follows] when the reader has finished.’ From this brief witness we recognize the customs of having regular readings and a lector to proclaim them. It did not take long before some ceremony with the lector began to evolve. In some places in the third or fourth century, a ritual action was taking place before the reading began. The bishop picked up the book and handed it to the lector. In this brief gesture the bishop indicated the worthiness of the book and his appointment of the reader to serve as a minister for the people.”

It is apparent that for nearly two millennia lectors have been regarded as true and valued ministers of the Word of God. Around 380 A.D. the Apostolic Constitutions were compiled from three early important Christian documents: the Didascalia, Didache, and the Apostolic Tradition.

“The Apostolic Constitutions above lists the following elements: readings, psalmody, preaching, kiss of peace, general intercessions

---

46 Ibid., 61.
47 Meagher and Turner, 9.
and their concluding prayer, bringing the gifts, Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion. There is no mention of an entrance ritual. The readings begin immediately. The ritual of the Apostolic Constitutions indicates the books to be read, without specifying the number of readings. These were chosen from the whole Bible, and offered in the following order: Old Testament, epistles, gospel.48

Two hundred years later the codified texts of Scripture readings were complied. Meagher and Turner note that:

“From texts such as these it is clear that a Lectionary was used for Christian worship very early on, but no copies of such books have survived. The earliest one comes from the sixth century, and it was not as comprehensive as ours are today. Lectionaries continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages, and the one-year cycle of readings established after the Council of Trent served the Church for 400 years.”49

The story of Christ was told by his witnesses, retold to disciples, and retold to prospective converts. The disciples believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah who had been foretold and promised in the Old Testament. They unpacked the prophecies of the Old Testament, and declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of those scriptures. “The Apostle Paul referred to oral tradition, now concerning his preaching (1Cor. 15:3; 2 Thes. 3:6), now concerning liturgical usages (1 Cor. 11:23). In the same way, for several centuries more, preachers and bishops attested to the importance oral tradition still had in their time, in particular in the liturgical domain, as shown by Basil the Great (d. 379 A.D.).”50

St. Cyprian claimed that the oral tradition was an important and necessary factor in the stability of the church.51

48 Metzger, 80.
49 Meagher and Turner, 9.
50 Ibid., 9-10.
51 Ibid., 10.
The legacy of the oral tradition has served us well for thousands of years. The role of the lector will never become obsolete. Lectors were considered elevated and prominent witnesses in the liturgies of the nascent church. Early in the history of the Church there were orders such as lectors, deacons, and priests. Seminaries would eventually arise in the 16th century to see to the adequate training of people for such offices. *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* states that: “Seminarians are given a liturgical foundation for their spiritual lives, an understanding of Church history and theology, and an opportunity to contemplate the sacred mysteries of the Church.”

It is interesting to note that during the Nineteenth Ecumenical Council in Trent (1545 A.D.) discussions to approve vernacular translations of the Bible were rejected, yet the bishops did “finalize decrees on the sacrifice of the Mass, the use of the Eucharist, the calling of provincial synods, and the establishment of seminaries for the training of priests.” The minor orders were considered stepping stones to the major orders. While in the seminaries men seeking to become priests first entered the minor orders (Porters, Lectors, Exorcists, and Acolytes). They were instituted into these minor orders. Later they would be ordained into the major orders, as sub-deacons, ‘transitional’ deacons, and finally priests. These seminarians had a solid liturgical foundation for their spiritual lives as lectors. A spiritual foundation for lay lectors grounded in spiritual lives is also needed.

*Impact of the distinction between clergy and laity*

---

53 Ibid., 263.
The ordained were the clergy, distinct, by virtue of their ordination to the Holy Orders, from the laity. In the early church, some would argue, that both men and women served as deacons and deaconesses, lectors and preachers, but not today. Currently only men can be ordained as deacons. “By the time of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (c. 220 A.D.) the word [clergy] was used to define a general ecclesiastical state to which bishops, presbyters, and deacons (Did the Eastern churches include deaconesses?) belonged.”\textsuperscript{54} Hippolytus acknowledged a clerical/laical distinction.

“Hippolytus’s Apostolic Tradition gives us groupings of ministers: there the first triad receive an important laying on of the hands; the others (readers, widows, etc.) do not receive one. In the third century there were still distinctions among ministries and their public commissioning: for example, different churches valued the roles of presbyter and deacon and deaconess differently, while nonordained ministries differed from region to region, expanding and diminishing according to regional conditions.”\textsuperscript{55}

In the third century deacons and deaconesses were common but varied from region to region.\textsuperscript{56} However, today both men and women can be ‘deputed’ to serve as a lector. According to liturgical law and the Code of Canon Law, in the absence of an installed male lector, a man or woman can fulfill the function of lector by temporary deputation. Although lectors perform an important and integral function in the Mass, they are still predominately lay persons; few are installed as lectors or ordained as deacons. In the Old Testament the proclamation of the Word was respected. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” (Is  61:1). Regardless of

\textsuperscript{54} Thomas O’Meara, \textit{Theology of Ministry} (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 173.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 28-29.
ordinations or installations all baptized Christians are members of a royal priesthood and common priesthood and called to profess their faith in Jesus Christ.

As O’Meara observes:

“The magisterium … is legitimately defending the distinction between ministries. That the ministry of pastor is central and more important than that of reader is obvious, but the ministry of reader is not nothing, not a tolerated usurpation of clerical activity. Ministries differ in importance, and distinctions among ministries (and ministers) remain, but they are, according to the New Testament, grounded upon a common faith and baptismal commissioning.”

The Vatican Council document *Dei Verbum* states: “But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant.”

Although laity and clergy are distinct ecclesial states, they should be in collaboration with each other and all Christians to fulfill the mission of the church. “Lay ecclesial ministry and the ministry of the ordained complement each other within the dynamic communion of the Church. They are not in competition … Each expression of ministry is needed in its full dignity and strength if the Church is to be fully alive in its communion and mission.”

St. Paul spoke of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how we are to use these gifts for the community and the Church. We are all members of the Body of Christ. We are all

---

57 Ibid.
organs in an organic whole. Each member has a unique function to participate in the health of the body, in the health of the Church. “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” (1 Cor. 12:14-15) One lector commented that he felt he was an appendix in the Body of Christ, unimportant, and easily excised! This is not so, all members of the body are important to the health of the Body of Christ. Whatever are our gifts, we are required to utilize them to the best of our abilities.

The clerical/laical division began as early as 321 A.D. when Sunday was recognized as a day of rest and a day of the celebration of the Mass. “Soon, in many cities, Mass was celebrated by ranks of clergy in the presence of the laity, whose level of participation was gradually diminishing. The adoption of Latin as the official language of worship, while peoples’ languages were rapidly evolving into new tongues, further separated the Eucharist from the living experience of the people.”60 The priest ‘performed’ the Mass, the laity sat in the assembly often not understanding the Latin language, or Greek responses such as the Kyrie Eleison.

As the centuries passed some parishioners eventually prayed the rosary, others prayed silently in their own words, or in standard recitation of prayers, such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The practice of repeating set prayers may have begun in the second century as a practice by the laity to imitate the monastic Divine Office, also referred to as the Breviary or the Liturgy of the Hours. The early monks daily prayed the 150 Psalms. The laity, many of whom could not read, substituted 50, or even 150 Hail

Mary’s for the Psalms. “The first clear historical reference to the rosary, however, is from the life of St. Dominic (+1221), the founder of the Order of Preachers or Dominicans. He preached a form of the rosary in France at the time that the Albigensian heresy was devastating the faith there. Tradition has it that the Blessed Mother herself asked for the practice as an antidote for heresy and sin.”61

Until the Second Vatican Council this clerical/laical divide was still the norm. The Second Vatican Council vowed to open the window and let in a breath of fresh air. One of the most dramatic changes that the Second Vatican Council adopted was the use of the vernacular language of the community, a concept originally discussed in 1545 A.D. at the Nineteenth Ecumenical Council in Trent. No longer was Latin the official language of Catholic worship in the Mass. The people in the pews could pray in their native languages, enabling them to be more fully, conscious and active participants in the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

However, still after the Second Vatican Council the clerical/laical divide was still evident. Although all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are called to the common priesthood, there is still a distinct difference between the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood. Thomas O’Meara comments: “There can be no spirituality of baptized ministers that is primarily and mainly ‘lay’ and only secondarily and condescendingly ministerial. One cannot imply that reading at the Eucharist is a secular

activity because the reader is married and works for a living; any exclusion of the
baptized from a sacral realm of rites and vessels is anti-Christian.”62

Thomas O’Meara defines ministry, not in terms of ordained or lay. “Christian
ministry is the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the
Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to
proclaim, serve, and realize the kingdom of God.”63 O’Meara further states that there are
six characteristics present in all forms of ministry. “Ministry is: (1) doing something; (2)
for the advent and presence of the kingdom of God; (3) in public; (4) on behalf of a
Christian community; (5) as a gift received in faith, baptism, and ordination; and (6) an
activity with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial
actions.”64 Thomas O’Meara does not confine ministry to the ordained, but to all
baptized Christians.

The book *Shaping Catholic Parishes: Pastoral Leaders in the 21st Century* is a
compendium of personal accounts from priests, religious, deacons, and lay people from
parishes nationwide. Twenty parishes are represented, ranging from large urban parishes
with over 10,000 families to small rural parishes of sixty families. Some have a vibrant
ordained and religious presence, some have primarily lay involvement; but all are
dedicated Catholic parishes. Some parishes have had issues between the laity and clergy
which are being resolved.

---

62 O’Meara, 237.
63 Ibid., 150.
64 Ibid., 141.
Sociologist Anthony J. Pogorelc, SS, PhD, in his commentary on this text writes: “In these stories, no one sets lay ministry in opposition to priestly ministry. All affirmed that both are essential. At this juncture in the history of the church, it is crucial that laity, clergy, and hierarchy take one another seriously. That means talking with and listening to one another. Competition or mistrust between laity and clergy must not be allowed to fester.”65

As a parishioner in a small rural parish with fewer than one hundred parishioners, I can attest that this parish is active and dedicated. (Most parishes reckon their number of parishioners by the number of families; our latest census puts St. John’s at eighty-eight people.) Although the priest comes only once a week to celebrate Mass, he is collaborative with the pastoral council and thankful of the lay ministers (all of whom are volunteers). I have served on the pastoral council for four years, am currently the secretary of the parish Altar Society (our only fund raising entity), a sacristan, an altar server, an extraordinary communion minister, a gift bearer, a collection counter, and maintenance/janitorial volunteer.

As the Vatican II Decree on Missionary Activity observed:

“The church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. For the gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of lay people. Therefore, from the foundation of a church very special care must be taken to form a mature Christian laity.”66

---

66 Ad Gentes Divinitus, No. 21, The Basic Sixteen Documents, 474.
St. John the Apostle in Reedsport, Oregon is truly blessed to have a dedicated cadre of volunteers and a collaborative pastor who work together to enhance this parish locally and the universal church.

Vatican II Contributions

The Second Vatican Council deemed that minor orders were to be suppressed; there would no longer be the institution of men to minor orders (Porters, Lectors, Exorcists, and Acolytes). However, two of these orders (Acolytes and Lectors) were somewhat retained. Porters and Exorcists were suppressed. We do still have ushers (who act as porters) but they are no longer part of the clergy. The church no longer has instituted exorcists.

The Sacrosanctum Concilium document produced by the Second Vatican Council states that those entrusted as lector “should carry out all and only those parts [of the Mass] which pertain to this office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy”.\textsuperscript{67} Although it sometimes happens, lectors should not also serve at the same Mass as ushers, communion ministers, or altar servers; their ministry is to be solely the proclamation of the scriptures.

There appears to be in practice a distinct dichotomy between clergy and laity, and further between men and women. After the Second Vatican Council females were allowed to be altar servers. In many parishes this opportunity has not been realized. In 1999 the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry declared that “the secular character of laity and

\textsuperscript{67} Sacrosanctum Concilium, 28.
their role in the world were named as cautionary notes in any affirmation of lay ecclesial ministers.”

The caution was that there be a blur between ordained and affirmed, between clergy and laity.

However, many lay men and lay women do serve as lectors without the benefit of affirmation, installation, institution, conferral, commission, or any other official ecclesial recognition of their ministry. Prior to Vatican II “The laity, therefore, were seen as passive subjects in the Church.”

It seems that in many parishes the laity are still regarded as passive participants in the role and the mission of the Church. However, in most parishes today the laity are far from passive. They are active and dedicated to the Church and her mission. In many small rural parishes (as well as some urban and large parishes) the laity enthusiastically respond to the call of the common priesthood. They serve as sacristans, lectors, extraordinary ministers of communion, visitors to the homebound and prisoners, ushers, as well as custodians, bookkeepers, agents of social justice, and parish councilors. They are consistent and reliable lay ministers.

All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are called to proclaim the Good News, to evangelize, to be good stewards of God’s creation, to be an example of Christ-like values, to be in right relationship with God, others, and themselves. The word ‘proclaim’ is derived from the Latin words “pro” (before) and “clamare” (to cry out). We can proclaim the Good News in many venues – in our workplaces, in our homes, in our incidental encounters with service personnel. The most evident and important venue is the proclamation of the Word in our liturgies, especially the Mass.

---

68 Fox, 123.
69 Ibid.
The priest, deacon, cantor, and lector all share in this proclamation to the assembly. The lector proclaims the first reading from the Old Testament or parts of the New Testament on weekdays, and the first reading from the Old Testament as well as the second reading from the New Testament on Sundays. If the responsorial psalm is not sung, or performed by a cantor, the lector also reads the responsorial psalm. In the absence of a deacon the lector also reads the prayer intentions of the faithful. Typically the priest (or a deacon) proclaims the gospel and unfolds its message and current applicability in the homily. This sequence of scriptural readings is in the same order (Old Testament, Epistles, Gospel) cited in the 380 A.D. *Apostolic Constitutions*. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are privileged to have retained the basics of the Mass for over 1600 years!

At the Mass both the clergy and the laity share and participate in the sacred liturgy. Still, it seems in many parishes, the laity are regarded as supplemental presences as opposed to integral participants in the liturgy. There may be a perception that the laity are not as valued as much as the clergy. The 1978 “Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern” (which was endorsed by both clergy and laity) declared:

“It is our experience that a wholesome and significant movement within the church – the involvement of lay people in many Church ministries has led to a devaluation of the unique ministry of lay women and men.

The tendency has been to see lay ministry as involvement in some Church related activity, e.g. religious education, pastoral care for the sick and elderly, or reader in church on Sunday. Thus lay ministry is seen as participation in work traditionally assigned to priests or religious.”

---

Although lay ministers do participate in roles formerly performed by clergy, they seem to be devalued and all too frequently are not recognized for the roles they perform in the mission of the Church.

In the early church all Christians were exhorted to use their Spirit-given gifts for the evangelization of both believers and non-believers, of both Jews and gentiles, to actively engage in the mission of the Church. Lay ministry as we experience it today was virtually non-existent prior to the Second Vatican Council. In the United States during the 1900’s religious orders (especially the sisters and brothers) were involved in (or perhaps, more accurately, were in charge of) religious education (especially in Catholic private and parochial schools). They also were the primary ministers to hospitals, orphanages, and social justice venues.

However, prior to Vatican II there were many lay movements, such as the Catholic Worker (not an official organ of the Catholic Church) started by people such as Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. The Catholic Worker Movement, started by a handful of laity in New York in 1933, in the slums of New York City, has spread throughout the United States, and is still active today. The Catholic Worker Movement originally began its social teaching network with the Catholic Worker newspaper, seeking to present a pacifist position in the war-torn 1930’s. The movement spread throughout the United States and Canada. By 1941 there existed over thirty movement communities. Today there are over one hundred Catholic Worker social services communities – in the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, and Sweden.
After Vatican II the Church experienced a decline in the number of people in the United States who entered religious communities or the priesthood. With the revival of the permanent diaconate the number of deacons began to swell. With Latin no longer the official language of the Catholic Church in her liturgies more of the laity began to become more involved, not just those in the pews, but also those actively participating in a variety of ministries.

Regarding the history of lay ministry Thomas O’Meara notes that: “One searches the New Testament in vain for a theology of the laity. Neither laymen nor priests can be found in it, at least in the sense in which the Middle Ages understood those words. Being a Christian in faith and baptism grounds all ministry and exceeds all position.” Baptism and faith find us and bind us in the ministries of the common priesthood of all believers. We are all members of the Body of Christ, with a variety of gifts and charisms to be shared with the other members of the Body of Christ – to be an organic whole.

More than a decade before the Second Vatican Council Yves Congar began to develop a theology of the laity. A French theologian and Dominican priest, he was deeply affected by World War I in his teens. Congar was a champion of ecumenism and the role of all Christians (both clergy and laity) in the evangelization and the building up of the church. “Congar’s *Lay People in the Church*, published in France in 1953, is the first developed theology of the laity.” Congar questioned the undervalued nature and status of the laity. Why were they dismissed as second class Christians?

---

71 O’Meara, 173.
72 Fox, 125.
“He develops his answer by tracing the emergence of laity, clergy, and monks in the early history of the Church. He says this eventually becomes a division into men of religion and men of the world, defining laity to be a secular way of life.”\(^7^3\) Although Congar acknowledged the differences between clerical and secular functions, he emphasized the common baptismal priesthood of all Christians. “Congar’s theological starting point is that laity first and foremost are baptized Christians, members of the people of God. Therefore, of necessity, they exercise sacred activities.”\(^7^4\) Before Congar no one dared to suggest that the laity were involved in sacred activities.

“In France for the past century and a half” O’Meara observes: “the term lay has meant aggressively secular, even antichurch.”\(^7^5\) Congar was not anti-church. He was pro-church. He wrote that all baptized Christians are called, in varying capacities to be the church. He sought to replace the us/them notion of clergy and laity. He envisioned a model in which Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit were the grounding powers that animated a variety of ministries in community. Congar’s theology of the laity was greatly acclaimed by the laity.

Unfortunately, the clergy (in particular, his French superiors) did not embrace his views. A year after his publication of *Lay People in the Church* Congar was ostracized, prohibited from publishing, or public speaking and was virtually exiled to Rome, then to Jerusalem, Cambridge, and Strasbourg. Not all of his writings and public speeches were

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 126.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 129.

\(^{75}\) O’Meara, 156.

Decades after the Council in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, Congar remarks:

“...the most suitable concept is undoubtedly that of ‘communion’ and Paul VI loved it. I well remember the way in which he spoke to me about it, quoting from J. Hamer’s book, The Church is a communion (1962)! It is true, of course, that the Council did not go as far as it might have gone in working out this idea. As Antonio Acerbi has pointed out, it retained some elements of a juridical ecclesiology. According to *Lumen Gentium*, for example, the Church is ‘*ut societas constituta et ordinata*’ in this world (‘constituted and organized in the world as a society’) (sec. 8) and a ‘*societas hierachia ordinata*’ (‘A hierarchically structured society’) (sec 20, 14). This is still true.”

O’Meara comments: “Vatican II, through a never-ending panoply of liturgical changes, introduced diversity and personal meaning into the liturgy. Elements of creativity should enter the liturgical celebrations of baptism, marriage, and the Eucharist. No longer was liturgy a sacral routine, distant and monolithic.” With the Mass being prayed in the vernacular the Mass became more understandable and communal. With the increased use of extraordinary communion ministers, lectors, and the new admission of females as altar servers the Mass became more personal. Laity were no longer viewed as spectators, but as full participants in the Mass, to be active and conscience.

Congar in his contribution to the volume of *Vatican II Revisited By Those Who Were There* remarks that:

---

76 Glazier and Hellwig, 184.
78 O’Meara, 7-8.
“The widespread – perhaps too widespread – abandonment of Latin is a cultural datum and it is difficult to foresee its consequences. It may result in a diversification of the liturgy and greater creativity. Above all, it will mean a new and more widespread participation on the part of communities. What we share with many others – and in particular with our Orthodox friends – is the conviction that this new practice in the Church should be based on a very deep theology of the Tri-unity of God and on a Pneumatology. What a perspective of excellent work this opens up!”79

In the ensuing years after Vatican II lay ministers were becoming more active and vocal in their ministries, and some might argue, they felt more collaborative with the ordained clergy. “In 1980, the pastoral statement Called and Gifted first recognized and expressed gratitude for a new development since the Second Vatican Council. Lay men and women were responding as volunteers and part-time workers to serve on pastoral councils and other advisory boards and to undertake new roles as special ministers of communion, lectors, catechists, pastoral assistants, and missionaries.”80

Of all liturgies the celebration of the Mass is the epitome of the source and summit of the formation of the faithful. As noted before, the Code of Canon Law 230 states that lay persons (without reference to gender) can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministry of lector by temporary designation.

Therefore, both lay men and lay women may act as lector if deputed or designated on a temporary basis. A temporary basis implies that service is not a sacramental life change such as occurs in ordination. Temporary can be for days, weeks, months, years, even decades. Many lectors, myself included, have served as lectors for over a quarter of a century. In many cases, these lectors were not commissioned by the pastor, received no

79 Vatican II Revisited By Those Who Were There, 142.
formal recognition by the pastor or the parish assembly. In the words of Yves Congar the laity do participate in sacred activities, albeit often unofficially recognized. This dedication of the laity to serve as lectors demonstrates the call of the Holy Spirit and the willing response of the laity to serve.

The Power of the Word

Scripture is replete with reports of the power of the word. The entire Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament) speaks of the word. The Psalms of the Old Testament express the value of the word in many ways. “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.” (Ps. 119:50) “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Ps. 119:105) “How can a young man cleanse his way: By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” (Ps. 119:9-11) “I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I meditate on Your word.” (Ps. 119:147) “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.” (Ps. 119:14-16)

In the Old Testament books, one finds again many usages of the word. “But the word is very near unto you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that thou may do it.” (Dt. 30:14) “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you,
saying, The Lord your God has given you rest, and has given you this land.” (Jn. 1:13)

“And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua did not read before all the congregations of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.” (Jn. 8:34-35) “And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spoke this word unto Moses.” (Jn. 14:10) “And Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.” (1 Sm. 3:7) “And the word of the Lord came to Solomon.” (2 Sm. 6:11) “The Lord therefore has performed his word that he had spoken.” (2 Chr. 6:10)

In the New Testament there are also many references to the word. “We know, brethren, beloved of God, how you were chosen. For our gospel was not delivered to you in word only, but in power also, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much fullness, as indeed you know what manner of men we have been among you for your sakes.” (Thes. 1:4-5) “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (Jn 1:14) “Jesus answered and said to him ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you have heard is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.’” (Jn 14:23-24)

John further writes: “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” (Jn 15:3)
And Luke records:

“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. And those by the wayside are they who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved. Now those upon the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, but believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard, and as they go their way are choked by life, and their fruit does not ripen. But that upon good ground, these are they who, with a right and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bear fruit in patience.” (Lk 8:11-15)

Other New Testament verses also give testimony to the word. In the book of Revelation (the Apocalypse) John records: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone shall add to them, God will add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his portion from the tree of life, and from the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book.” (Rv. 22:18-19) “For you, therefore, who believe, is this honor; but to those who do not believe a stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner and a stumbling-stone, and a rock of scandal, to those who stumble at the word, and who do not believe.” (1 Pt. 2:7-8) “Therefore, casting aside all uncleanness and abundance of malice, with meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” (Jas 1:21) “For the word of God is living and efficient and keener than any two-edged sword, and extending even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints also and of marrow, and a discerner of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12)

Irwin writes:
“For the word of creation to be creative, for the transfiguring word to transform us, and for the parabolic message of the gospel to become a reality among us requires an openness to the Word proclaimed in the liturgical assembly and an appreciation that it can and should have its requisite impact on and among us. At its base such openness is an attitude of obedience. The thesis here that context is text asserts that the most appropriate theological setting for the appreciation and interpretation of the Scriptures is the act of liturgical proclamation.”

Lectors are imperative in the Spiritual proclamations; their ministry is not to be undervalued.

In the Acts of the Apostles Luke reports of St. Paul’s trip to Beroea:  “Now these were of a nobler character than those of Thessalonica and they received the word with great eagerness, studying the Scriptures every day to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11) St. Paul writes:  “We, at least, are not, as many others, adulterating the word of God; but with sincerity, as coming from God, we preach in Christ in God’s presence.” (2 Cor. 2:17) And further Paul writes:  “On the contrary, we renounce those practices which shame conceals, we avoid unscrupulous conduct, we do not corrupt the word of God; but making known the truth, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2)

Regarding the word Irwin affirms:

“The Word is treated before other constitutive elements of liturgy (symbol, euchology, and the arts to follow) because it has traditionally been and remains a foundational element experienced in all liturgy. This suggests that the Word has influenced the shape of forms of Christian liturgy (e.g., how the Passover influenced the shape of Christian Eucharist), that the events, symbols and images derived from salvation history continue to exert direct influence on the metaphors and imagery of

---

liturgical euchology and because in the reformed liturgy the proclamation
and preaching of the Scriptures is central to every act of liturgy.”82

The lector has a central position in the proclamation of the Scriptures; the priest or
deacon has the central position in the preaching or homiletics of the Scriptures.

All Christians are members of the Body of Christ, by their baptism all
Christians are called to the duties of the common priesthood. Each individual Christian
has distinct charisms and gifts, and each individual expresses his/her gifts in individual
and personal acts. We all participate in the ministry of Christ and the Church. The
epitome of our participation as Catholics is the fully, active, conscious participation in the
Eucharist. The celebration of the Mass is communal. Participation is not optional for
Catholics. The GIRM (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) states that it: “is the
assembly’s right and duty by virtue of their baptism.”83

The lectors, sacristans, altar servers, communion ministers, ushers, and the
assembled congregation have a duty to participate. Irwin writes that: “By hearing the
Word again and again in the liturgy salvation is experienced anew in ever new ways,
which experience requires a response of faith in community. … The purpose of the
scriptural Word at liturgy is to place in relationship, to encounter another (the Other and
others) and to reunite relationships forged and to deepen them.”84

At the Mass there are many participants – the faithful in the pews, the sacristan,
the altar servers, the music ministers, the celebrant (priest), the deacon, the communion
ministers, the ushers, and the lectors. Regarding lectors Sacrosanctum Concilium states:

82 Ibid., 85.
83 A Commentary on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 52
84 Irwin, 88.
“They must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the church consist in the full, active participation of all God’s holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.”85 All have a right and a duty to participate in the celebration of the Mass. The lector has the unique responsibility to proclaim the Word of God. God’s Word reaches the congregation through the proclamation of the lector for “when the Scriptures are read in Church, God himself is speaking to his people”.86

The transforming powers of the proclaimed Scriptures are immense. The Jews during the time of the early Christian movement realized the transforming power of the oral word. The Jewish people feared the lectors. The lectors (Scriptural proclaimers) were challenging Jewish history and tradition. In attempts to silence the lectors the Jews ostracized them, persecuted them, jailed, tortured and even killed them. But the lectors persevered in their witness and the proclamation of the Word.

Irwin notes:

“Truly communicative language requires that persons be in a relationship wherein the words they use reflect familiar patterns of meaning since speech that is address forges, presupposes or deepens of communication of values, principles, learning, and insight. In something of the same way the ritual action of hearing the Word presupposes the relationship of faith between speaker and hearers. The act of liturgical proclaiming and hearing the Scriptures invites the assembly into a relationship of ever deepening faith in God.”87

85 Sacrosanctum Concilium, 41.
86 Ibid., 9.
87 Irwin, 86.
Catholics throughout the world rely on sacred texts for the celebration of the Mass. We have the Breviary (also referred to as the Divine Office or the Liturgy of Hours), the Book of Gospels, the Sacramentary (Roman Missal), and the Lectionary. In every Roman Catholic Church throughout the globe the same scripture readings are proclaimed for each and every day. The priest celebrant uses the Roman Missal for the prayers of the Mass, and he (or a deacon) also reads a passage from the Book of Gospels. The lector proclaims Scriptures (Old Testament, Psalms, and New Testament) from the Lectionary. In the absence of a deacon or cantor the responsorial psalms and the prayers of the faithful or communal intentions are also read by the lector.

Regarding texts and contexts and scriptural readings Irwin comments that:

“For the word of creation to be creative, for the transfiguring word to transform us, and for the parabolic message of the gospel to become a reality among us requires an openness to the Word proclaimed in the liturgical assembly and an appreciation that it can and should have its requisite impact on and among us. At its base such openness is an attitude of obedience. The thesis argued here that context is text asserts that the most appropriate theological setting for the appreciation and interpretation of the Scriptures is the act of liturgical proclamation.”

Today many Christian congregations have adopted an ecumenical version of the Catholic Lectionary called the Common Lectionary. Schellman reports that:

“The present Lectionary for Mass must be viewed as one of the most remarkably effective achievements of the church in centuries…. This Worship experience has proved so winning that many of our Christian sisters and brothers in North America and other parts of the world now use an ecumenical version of this lectionary (called the Common Lectionary) for their Sunday worship. Among these

---

88 Ibid., 118.
communities are the Lutherans, United Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and the United Church.”

The power and importance of orally proclaiming the Word of God is worldwide. With these Christian congregations Catholics are sharing an ecumenical Proclamation of the Word.

Although as Christians we may share the common lectionary, we must also orally proclaim it. It is not sufficient to pass out programs or missalettes to the congregation and have the assembly follow along and read silently. We can read a Shakespearean play, or read a Gregorian chant. What is lost? The vocal (and dramatic) enactment of the play engages us, excites us, and entertains us. The vocal (and musical accompaniment) of the chant soothes us, touches us, and uplifts us. So too, it is with the oral proclamation of the Scriptures. The readings challenge us – to form, transform, and reform our moral and Christian behavior. Irwin writes: “Since the proclaimed Word constitutes and actualizes the Church, the liturgical proclamation of the Word has priority over any devotional reading or meditation. By its very nature the Word proclaimed in liturgy both invites and structures a faith response to that Word.”

Formation of Lay Lectors

The ministry of a lector is both a tremendous privilege and a great responsibility. O’Malley comments: “What, precisely, does a lector do? At a purely phenomenal level, the lector reads. Yet, if we remained only at this level, then we might assume that the liturgical ministry of lector is the ministerial role available to all who have mastered the
art of public speaking at most or with a modicum of literacy at least.”91 As lectors we are privileged to proclaim the Good News. We also have a great responsibility to proclaim reverently and with conviction.

“The spoken story can be approached as a text which has a deeper meaning than that which is immediately perceived by the speaker. … In the very telling the narrator [lector] learns something about him or herself that was not available before.”92 We have all heard poor lectors (mumbling Myrtle, bobble-headed Betty, whispering Willie, speed reading Sam, and so many others). We have also heard great lectors (eye contact Earl, devout Debbie, well paced Paul, dynamic David, and so many others). Though mumbling Myrtle may really want to be a lector, perhaps she is not well suited for this ministry. Perhaps speed reading Sam does not want to be a lector, but feels an obligation to serve (how could he say no to the priest, who asked Sam to volunteer to be a lector?).

“In the proclamation of the word, the people will realize how well the lector understands the reading. The lector’s preparation will be evident by the way the reading sounds. The preparation is more than technical, grammatical, and mental. It is, above all, spiritual.”93

What makes a good lector? O’Malley writes:

“The manner in which the lector uses the human voice to proclaim the divine Word affects how the covenant is brought to mind in the gathered assembly. In some sense, what makes a good lector is an awareness of how this covenant has functioned throughout time, as well as a continued commitment to contemplating and teaching this mystery of the divine Word in one’s life as a Christian.”94
It is my opinion that there are many characteristics of a good lector. A most important one is the desire, the sense of calling or vocation, a true commitment, to be a lector. Another is the element of the faith and the conviction of the lector. The lector must believe the proclamation he or she delivers reveals God’s relationship to the entire community. A lector should not render lip service as if reading the Sunday newspaper. Another characteristic is the lector’s understanding of the passages (focus, content, context of the preceding passages and those passages following, as well as the purpose of the passages). A toddler, who perhaps has the ability to read, is poorly equipped to deliver The Wall Street Journal’s editorials on the stock market indices.

I believe another characteristic of a good lector is a true appreciation of the power of the Word to transform people. A good lector must understand the power of the Word he or she proclaims. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn 1:1). It is God, the Word, and through his Word, who transforms those who truly hear the Word of God proclaimed by the lector. Regarding the ministry of a lector Pope Paul VI comments “In order to ‘more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions,’ Paul VI recommends this profoundly direct expectation of a lector: you are ‘to meditate assiduously on the sacred Scripture.’”

I also believe another essential quality (often overlooked) is communication skills. Clarity of enunciation, tone, volume, pitch, pace and quality are vitally important. The lector should not stutter or stumble over difficult words or passages. This takes

---

95 Meagher and Turner, 13.
preparation, practice, and perseverance. Once called (or driven) to be a lector, prayer, preparation and perseverance are needed.

*Prayer is both personal and communal.*

Personal prayer is, well, personal. Each individual has a personal prayer style. Some people prefer to rely on memorized or rote prayers as those familiar prayers can seem to be a soothing mantra. Others prefer a spontaneous monologue prayer, hoping to elicit a dialogue prayer with God, and a soul-felt reply through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Others prefer a combination, some people beginning with a reflection on the scriptures and spiritual writings of the Church fathers. Some people begin their prayer time with a centering prayer, such as “Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner;” “Come Holy Spirit, Come;” “Mary, Mother of God, intercede for me.” Whatever style of prayer one uses, it is personal prayer.

Communal prayer is a united prayer of the assembly. Although we pray for our brothers and sisters in the assembly at the liturgy of the Mass, should we not also pray for our brothers and sisters in other assemblies? Prayers for all liturgical ministers and volunteers of the parish could be offered at pastoral council meetings, altar society meetings, religious education meetings, and so forth. During Mass in the prayers of the faithful we pray for the church and her clergy. Could we not also occasionally add prayers for the parish liturgical ministers, volunteers and parish faithful assembled?

*Preparation is both personal and communal.*
Personal preparation begins with personal prayer. Just as personal prayer is personal, so also is personal preparation. Most lectors rely, in part, on the parish’s lector’s workbook for their lector preparation. In our parish, (St. John the Apostle, Reedsport, Oregon), we use the resource *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*. St. John’s has eight lectors, and each lector is assigned all appropriate readings for the day. The sole lector reads the first reading, the responsorial psalm, the second reading, the gospel acclamation, and the prayers of the faithful. As the parish has neither cantor nor choir the lector reads both the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamation.

The *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word* is a valuable asset. It supplies pronunciation guides, margin notes and short commentaries on each reading. The introduction gives good tips and techniques for a reverent delivery of the readings, as well as some resources for further study. However, I believe it is lacking in its omission of the responsorial psalms and gospel acclamations. The lector must take the initiative to find out what responsorial psalm and what gospel acclamations go with the readings cited in the workbook. I suspect that many lectors do not do so, and read the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamations for the first time just prior to Mass.

As a person in the pew I sense that the lack of preparation for the responsorial psalms shows in stark contrast to the preparation of the first and second readings. As a hearer of the Word it sometimes seems to me that the lector speeds or skims the psalm as if it were a television commercial break between the Old Testament reading and the New Testament reading.
I would suggest that when preparing the lector schedule, the parish would include not only the lector’s name and the date assigned for readings, but also the feast of the day, along with all readings for that day. A parish-supplied Biblical Commentary (perhaps through the parish library) should also be available for lector preparation.

Communal preparation begins with communal prayer. When the community prays as a community it prays with and for the entire community. The community participants should also prepare themselves to receive the word of God. There should be a communal preparation of the community of lectors. Lectors in their common role as proclaimers of the Word should be a liturgical ministerial community. They should be inclusive of one another and supportive of one another. Ideally they should meet on a regular basis for prayer, reflection, and mutual support. They should encourage one another, share tips and techniques of delivery of the proclamation of the Word, and share their spiritual resources.

*Perseverance is both personal and communal.*

Personal perseverance begins with a personal response to the Holy Spirit to serve in ministry as a lector. Accepting the calling to ministry as lector requires perseverance in prayer, reflection, and study of the scriptures. Stumbling over difficult texts – both in delivery and in personal interpretation requires perseverance. Ongoing commitment and practice in delivery techniques increases a lector’s confidence. Continuing to serve as a lector, and acknowledging one’s personal limitations, requires perseverance. Honest open prayer is a great aid to personal perseverance.
Communal perseverance requires the assembly to accept the lector. A new lector may be nervous, clumsy, and not a particularly good proclaimer. Community perseverance, inclusion, and encouragement will help the lector to succeed and the community to benefit. A veteran lector may have difficulty in hearing, visual problems in reading the text and insufficient vocal volume to reach the assembly. Communal perseverance recalls and appreciates the many years of service of the lector. Again, communal prayer for the ministry of lector, and each and every lector is paramount to their success. Feedback from other lectors and ‘people in the pews’ demonstrates a perpetual communal perseverance. Feedback can be formal or informal; one may wish to speak to the lector, or the pastor, or the pastoral council. Feedback and constructive criticism helps keep the lectors on track.

No lector should be unprepared to proclaim the Word. The lector should first read the passages, pray about them, and reflect on them before public proclamation. Non-verbal communication is also a valuable characteristic, such as eye contact, dress, demeanor, and poise. The lector is not an actor, but rather a conduit of the Word of God to the people of God. The lector should not grandstand and be overly dramatic. The lector should prayerfully and faithfully, proclaim the Word of God with true conviction.

O’Malley writes “Each time the lector reads the scriptures, the gift of re-creation is offered within the Church. In every scriptural proclamation, ‘the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it’. (Jn1:5)”  

96 O’Malley, 26.
In his gospel St. John begins with the powerful statement “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn 1:1). John’s statement that the Word was/is God was nothing new to his followers. The Jewish tradition repeatedly referred to God’s ‘word’. When the lector proclaims the Word of God, the lector proclaims God. We often say “I give you my word.” What is meant by this statement? The ‘word’ can be a contract, a promise, a covenant, a sacrament. When couples marry they say “I do” in response to the questions posed by the minister. When children ask their parents for a special request, such as a visit to the zoo, the parents respond that “yes, we’ll go to the zoo, I give you my word.” God gives us his Word. He has given us his Word in both the Old and the New Testaments. He continues to give us his Word in the scriptural passages in our liturgies, and especially the Mass.
CHAPTER II

Practical and Spiritual Formation Techniques
Project Methods

Delivery Techniques include the following topics which will be addressed separately.

Attitude - demeanor, dress, verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal considerations

Paraphrase – for youngsters (once upon a time)

Prepare a homily

Consult the parish’s lector workbook, and biblical commentaries

Practice with a friend, or in front of a mirror

Reflection – Lectio Divina (in a group if possible), mystagogical reflections (before, during, after the experience of proclamation)

There are many familiar techniques for proclamation and delivery. Some include consulting a biblical commentary, and referring to the parish’s lector workbook. Some lectors find it useful to investigate and research the scriptural language of the text, the liturgical dialogue, and the forms of the text. Many lectors find it helpful to read the passage aloud, in front of a friend or even a mirror. Novice lectors, as wells as lectors who have English as a second language find videotaped feedback of their deliveries helpful.

I have found many techniques to be helpful in entering into the text and enhancing my scriptural and spiritual understanding of the text.

Attitude - demeanor, dress, verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal considerations.

All too often the lectors do not show or display proper demeanor. They may arrive late, be disheveled, slurry in words, or distracted in delivery. We are entering the
house of the King, and should be appropriate in doing so. Lectors are quite visible and should be good role models for the congregation.

Paraphrase

One technique is to paraphrase the text as if one were describing it to a youngster. Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. Here is a possible rendition. Once upon a time in a faraway country there was a family – a Mom, a Dad, and two little boys. Dutiful Dan was the older brother who idolized his Dad and wanted to grow up to be just like him. Dan wanted to follow in Dad’s footsteps and take over the family farm when he grew up. His younger brother, Raucous Randy, just wanted to have fun. Maybe because he was ‘the baby’ he was spoiled. Like most siblings they played together and sometimes fought. They were very close as youngsters but as they got older they grew apart. Dan became more intent on running the farm. Randy became more intent on living the good life. While still a teenager Randy convinced his Dad to give him his share of his future inheritance. Randy wanted to see the world, and he did. Dad gave him his share and Randy traveled wide and far.

Randy spent all of his money abroad – on wine, women, and song. He soon became flat broke. He worked at odd and demeaning jobs. Meanwhile, back at the farm, Dan was dutifully doing his chores, working from dawn until dusk. Randy was broke, and felt badly and was jealous of his Dad’s farmhands. He decided to admit his bad ways, go home, and ask for forgiveness.
Mom and Dad must have been worried, every day they scanned the horizon for a sight of Randy. And one day, when Randy was just a tiny figure a long way off Dad recognized him. Dad was so happy to see him he planned a welcome home party. Dan was surprised to see his brother, but he was also mad at him. Dan had been such a good boy and his little brother was a spoiled brat. But Mom and Dad loved both their sons. Dad was so worried about Randy that he was very happy to have him home again. Mom and Dad loved both their boys, no matter what. Our Father, our Dad in heaven, loves all of his children, no matter what.

Prepare a homily

Another technique I find helpful is to prepare a homily on the text I’m going to proclaim. Consider Luke’s writing of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Again I offer an example. The parable of the Prodigal Son, also known as the Loving Father, Compassionate Father or Merciful Father, is a well known parable – not only among Christians. Following Luke’s theme of joy, this is his third joyful parable. Luke reports of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the drop-out son. In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus is ridiculed by both the Scribes and the Pharisees, for his hospitality to all, including their definition of sinners. Jesus tells them a familiar tale of a shepherd who has lost a sheep and upon finding it invites his neighbors and rejoices with them. “And when he has found it, he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing. And on coming home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them. ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost’.” (Lk 15:6) In today’s world do we often find ourselves
lost, and yearn to be found? How do the Lukan stories of the lost and found speak to me, do they comfort me, do they challenge me?

In Luke’s next joyful parable of the Lost Coin Jesus further tells of a woman who has misplaced some money. She searches frantically, and finally finds it. “And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me for I have found the drachma that I had lost.'” (Lk 15:9) Again in the parable of the Prodigal Son he who was lost has been found, and great rejoicing is called for. Religious leaders, like the Pharisees and Scribes in the parable of the Lost Sheep, and the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal Son show neither love nor pity for those who are lost. The true focus of this parable is not the sons, but the joyful father. Our God is not an either/or father, but a both/and father. He rejoices in one lost sheep, one lost coin, one lost soul. These parables give us hope in our ‘strayword’/wayword ways and lost directions.

**Consult the parish’s lector workbook, and biblical commentaries**

Lector workbooks and biblical commentaries help the lector become familiar with the context and text of the scriptural passages to be proclaimed. Most parishes have workbooks for the use of the lectors. Some parishes also have biblical commentaries available. Our parish uses the lector workbook *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*. For every reading there is a commentary with background on the scriptural passages, as well as margin notes that provide pronunciation aids, and practical advice on pacing, pausing, and emphases.

There are many excellent biblical commentaries. I find it helpful to consult at least one, preferably more. The *Harper Collins Bible Commentary* remarks on the
parable of the Prodigal Son: “The father had two sons, loved two sons, went out to two sons (15:20, 28). God is a both/and, not an either/or God; to embrace sinners is not to reject Pharisees.”97 The Jerome Biblical Commentary mentions the elder brother’s reference to his brother as ‘this one’ and does not address his father as ‘father’. “This parable not only vindicates Jesus’ kingly regard toward ‘sinners’ (v.2; not just immoral persons, but those too poor or too ignorant to know every legal refinement), but the refrain, ‘dead but come to life,’ makes us think of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. Jesus, by his union with human nature, becomes the wayward son!”98 The first commentary places the emphasis on the Father (God), the second places the emphasis on the Son (Jesus). I find it illuminating to read as many biblical reflections as possible.

*Practice with a friend, or in front of a mirror*

Many, especially novice lectors, find it helpful to practice in front of a mirror, or with a friend who can give honest and immediate feedback. Many lectors who have English as a second language have found it helpful to use audiotaped or videotaped proclamations.

I attend a small rural parish in Reedsport, Oregon - St. John the Apostle, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon. Our pastor serves two parishes and is not a resident priest at either parish. The parish of St. John the Apostle has about 100 parishioners. The average age of parishioners is 65 and they are not culturally diverse; all parishioners are Caucasian. There are many challenges in a small rural parish community. This community may not be well educated or financially well off, but they are devout and

---

dedicated to the parish. In *Shaping Catholic Parishes* Sister Eileen Hurley, SCL (a pastoral administrator) reports on her rural parishes in Montana. “How will the local faith communities retain their identity? We don’t want to go back to the circuit riders, but we might have to. It would have to be in a different form, because the old image of the circuit rider does not relate well to the contemporary community. … A major part of the answer, it seems to me, lies in the formation of lay ministers.”

The parish of St. John the Apostle has feared the distinct possibility of a circuit rider priest for more than a decade. Volunteer lay ministers keep the parish going. In the absence of a priest they have communion services, or a communal rosary, or the Stations of the Cross. The faithful of this parish will not go quietly or abandon their Catholic traditions. As Sr. Hurley comments there is an urgent need for the formation of lay ministers in small rural parish communities. I believe that spiritual formation of lay lectors is called for.

The parish of St. John the Apostle has no paid staff, only volunteers. St. John’s currently has eight lectors (two men and six women) who range in age from 61 to 84; only two have post high-school diplomas or General Education Degree (GED) educations. The majority of parishioners do not have a high school diploma or GED. In this coastal town on the Pacific Ocean there are two main industries – commercial ocean fishing, and forestry logging, neither of which require any education. When youngsters reach the age of acquiring a work permit (fourteen years of age) they drop out of school and go to work. The young men typically go to work on the fishing vessels or work in

---

the logging industry. The young women typically work in the seafood processing plants or the timber mills. Although not well educated this parish is faith filled with devout and consistently faithful Catholics.

At St. John the Apostle parish there is no practical training or spiritual development for the lectors. The parish merely sells them a lector workbook and gives them a schedule for when/what they will proclaim. I have checked with neighboring parishes that are much larger, and they also have no formal training or spiritual development forum. The Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon has no formal training programs that are diocesan sponsored. Each parish is on its own, and there seem to be no formalized training formats. Typically a veteran lector will meet with a novice lector to go over details, such as how to dress properly, how to process with the Book of Gospels or Book of Prayers intentions, when to approach the ambo, and how to adjust the microphone. There are programs that are available but at a high cost. Some programs involve a workshop, lecture, seminar, or are technology based (such as VCR’s, DVD’s, and Power Point Presentations), or combinations of the above.

This parish does not have a VCR, a DVD, audio tape player or a computer. With the parish demographics even if the parish did have high technology access, I doubt that it would be comfortable for our current or prospective lectors. Our new lectors are recruited by current lectors by personal invitation. We have tried to recruit new ministers (sacristans, altar servers, extraordinary ministers of communion, ushers, lectors, collection counters, and janitorial helpers) in the parish bulletin. We do not always have
a weekly bulletin, but usually have at least one a month. We have not always been successful in bulletin announcements. Personal invitations work best for this parish.

Those who have recruited new lectors have acted as mentors to the novice lectors. In my twenty-five years as a lector in this parish, we have not had an all lectors meeting, or any ministerial training, much less a welcoming and recognition as a lector minister. We have no ministerial meetings, we are merely given a quarterly schedule which includes all ministers (sacristans, altar servers, extraordinary ministers of communion, ushers, lectors, collection counters, landscape workers and janitorial helpers).

Some training methods for lay lectors I proposed for this parish include the history of lector ministry, delivery techniques, *Lectio Divina*, mystagogical reflection, self-assessments, and assessments of the program.

*Lectio Divina*

*Lectio Divina* is a Latin term translated as divine reading or spiritual reading and is an ancient and yet contemporary traditional Catholic practice of scriptural reading and prayer. This practice intends to promote communion with God and the Word of God. Practicing this method enables one to study, ponder, listen, pray and rejoice in God’s Word, transforming the participant spiritually. Thelma Hall, R.C. describes the beginnings of this practice. “Lectio’s origins were to be found in the beginnings of monasticism, and … it had a long and living history, reaching back before the sixth century, as attested to in the Rule of St. Benedict. Since the monasteries were in those
times the centers of learning and spirituality, lay persons as well as monastics were presented with this way of prayer.”

Kathleen Hope Brown reflects that although engaging in *lectio divina* is well suited to self-directed study it is also advantageous in a group setting. “The formal process of *lectio divina* is as follows: A member of the group reads aloud a passage from Scripture. As the passage is read, the group listens attentively and each member of the group takes note of any word or phrase that seems to stand out for them, that seems to be ‘given’ to them. After a moment of silent reflection, the members simply speak aloud these words or phrases.”

Typically there are three readings of the passage. During the first reading listeners are called to focus on a word, phrase or idea that gets their attention. During the second reading listeners should focus on the phrase they selected and what it means to them. During the third reading listeners should examine the selected phrase and what that phrase calls them to do for themselves individually and corporately as the Body of Christ. I believe an essential component of the process is the personal silent reflection. I also believe that group engagements in *lectio divina* are more successful if the individuals prepare themselves privately beforehand. Knowing what the scripture passage will be, and reflecting upon it prior to the group sharing enhances each one’s absorption of the Word of God.

Kevin Irwin comments on the values of *lectio divina*.

---


“Since the proclaimed Word constitutes and actualizes the Church, the liturgical proclamation of the Word has priority over any devotional reading or meditation. ... Exercises of personal devotion based on the Scriptures, lectio divina in particular, can help in the appropriation of what happens in the liturgical hearing of the Word. However, they cannot replace the centrality of the liturgical proclamation of the Word where texts are restored to their native context in proclamation and where proclaimed texts give life to the Church.”

The stages of the practice of lectio divina are: (1) selection of a scriptural passage, (2) preparation, (3) reading/listening, (4) meditation, (5) prayer, and (6) contemplation. First a passage should be selected – it could be at random or a portion of a continuing text or theme. Next, one should prepare oneself – select a quiet place and comfortable position. It could be a secluded room or a favorite recliner. One should then read and listen to the text. Whether alone or in a group one must both read the text and listen to the text. Next, one must meditate on the word(s) or phrases that speak to one. Some find it helpful to repeat the words or phrases; some find it helpful to jot down these words or phrases to keep them in sight and mind. Then one needs to pray. Speak to God, let Him know what words or phrases captured you, ask how this can transform you, ask how this can get you into a closer relationship with God. Finally, contemplate God’s presence within you. Be thankful for this communication with God.

Stage One – Scriptural Selection. Although the text can be selected at random and spontaneously I think it best to prepare beforehand. Just as a book club decides what book they will discuss in the following sessions, a lectio divina group should decide as a group what Scripture passage they will focus on in the following sessions. Individuals

---

Irwin, 90.
can then prepare beforehand, and reflect on the text prayerfully before engaging in a group setting.

Stage Two – Preparation. Thelma Hall writes: “[In] every prayer discipline, East and West, the one consistent principle common to all is that the spine must be erect, but not tense. Whether sitting on the floor or a cushion, with legs crossed or folded, or on a straight-backed chair, the basic idea is not to impede circulation or breathing, while remaining fully attentive and alert.”\textsuperscript{103} Attentive preparation is not something to be done on commercial breaks during favorite television programs, but takes dedicated time and posture. One must be calm and receptive to the text about to be proclaimed.

Stage Three – Reading and listening. Thelma Hall writes that “Listening is imperative to discover God’s will. The ‘dialogue’ of prayer implies a readiness to listen.”\textsuperscript{104} Once the scripture selection is made and one is prepared, one must read and listen to the Word of God. Whether one reads individually or someone else reads in a communal setting, each must listen with an open mind and open heart. In the Old Testament Isaiah writes: “You see many things without taking note; your ears are open, but without hearing.” (Is. 42:20) Years later in the New Testament St. Mark writes: “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mk 4:23)

And even today parents (or bosses) remark ‘you heard what I said but you’re just not listening.’ Further in the New Testament St. Mark describes the importance of hearing with an open heart when Jesus explained why he spoke in parables: “Seeing they

\textsuperscript{103} Hall, 36.
\textsuperscript{104} Glazier and Hellwig, 659.
may see, but not perceive; and hearing they may hear, but not understand.” (Mk 4:12) I have chosen for the project the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-31) to read and listen with an open heart and an open mind. The phrase that speaks to me is “[H]e was lost, and is found.” (Lk 15:24) A treasure of the lectio divina practices is that it invites a passage that strikes a chord within the reader to take seed and root.

Amazing Grace is a familiar Christian hymn, purportedly penned by John Newton (1725-1807), an English poet and clergyman, which was published in 1779. The first stanza also speaks to me of being lost and later found.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

Stage Four - Meditation. The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia defines meditation.

“Meditation is mental prayer in which the intellect and reasoning predominate. It is exercised by consciously placing oneself in the presence of God with an attitude of faith, adoration, and abandonment. The exercise of meditation is normally focused, guided by written material such as a Scripture passage, notes from spiritual reading, or inspirational thoughts. Meditation brings serenity and inner peace into daily commotion and aims to enrich one’s relationship with God.”

I have selected my scriptural passage, I have prepared myself comfortably, adjusted my breathing and posture, and have read and listened to the Parable of the

---

105 Glazier and Hellwig, 659.
Prodigal Son. I am now ready to meditate upon the text. Thousands of years ago in the Old Testament it was written “You see many things without taking note; your ears are open, but without hearing.” (Is. 42:20) I try to take note, I try to listen, I try to hear. I find it helpful to jot down the phrases that elicit a yearning for deeper understanding. I search for other passages with the same or similar phrases. In the instance of the Prodigal Son, I meditate on other parables with the same theme. I recall Luke’s joyful trilogy of the lost and found – the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son.

Stage Five – Prayer. *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* defines prayer. “Prayer is the expression of personal relationship to God. It is lifting of mind, heart, and soul to God. … All prayer requires personal presence: mind presence and heart presence. It involves use of intellect, management of time, and focus of attention. With deepest confidence and love, spiritual communion with God is sought.”106 I have listened to God’s Word, I hope I have heard his Word. Now it is time for me to speak to God, to have a dialogue with God. “As Abraham Heschel said: ‘There is something far greater than my desire to pray – that is, God’s desire that I pray.’”107 Once a young child remarked, “Sometimes I pray, but mostly I just say my prayers.”

“Prayer is one clear way people can come to see themselves as divided selves in need of healing.”108 I may recite my prayers, e.g. the Rosary, but in this case I must pray. My prayers may be petitional, gratitudinal, adorational, reparational, centered prayer or a combination of the above. I may be petitional – please, Lord help me though this dark

106 Ibid., 657.
107 Hall, 34.
108 Studzinski, 95.
night of the soul, I am lost. I may be grateful – thank you, Lord for helping me through this dark night of the soul, I am found. I may be adorational – thank you Lord, I feel a kenosis, I am emptied, and feel both exhausted and invigorated. I may be reparational – Lord, I have sinned through my own fault and plead your forgiveness.

I may engage in a centered prayer. Centering prayer may be traced to contemplative prayers of the Desert Fathers of early Christian monasticism, as well as lectio divina. Basically, one reflects on a word or phrase, such as “Jesus”; for me the phrase would be “lost but found’.

Often my prayer is a silent listening, and speaking, for God knows what is in my heart and what I need to experience in my spiritual life. In any particular lectio divina process my focus will/should change as I change. “Ideals – those patterns for what people know they should become – can also surface in the context of prayer.”

Stage Six – Contemplation. The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia defines contemplation. “Contemplation is heart, soul, and being affectionately gazing upon God. It is characterized by its simplicity of affection.” Simplicity is difficult in this modern age of technology; there is no application on the Blackberry for a simplicity of affection.

“To pay attention to what is present in one’s heart is to begin to contemplate. It is the road which leads to the discovery of one’s true identity. Contemplation is a way of seeing reality in depth and it is related to discernment inasmuch as it focuses attention on

---

109 Ibid.
110 Glazier and Hellwig, 659.
what is really there either to be affirmed or rejected. Contemplation clears the path for further conversion because it allows people to experience their true condition.”

One must simply make it through the storm, through the dark night of the soul. “The ‘dark night’ of John of the Cross has become a catch phrase to describe a period of depression in which there is loneliness and a crisis about the goals and the meaning of life. Night is an apt expression for this period not only because it captures the negative aspects of being enveloped in darkness, but also because it hints at some of the positive features of the experience as well.” One must be open, quiet, and listen to God, to love him unconditionally as he loves us.

Thelma Hall advises that: “Perhaps nothing more simple and basic may be said about contemplative prayer than that it is the acceptance of God’s invitation not only to trust him in all this, but to entrust ourselves to him, so that he may take us beyond ourselves, i.e., beyond our superficial ego-consciousness, which cannot enter upon this mysterious journey into his love.” I believe that most people have experienced a dark night of the soul, or even a dark fortnight in which we are called to transform our lives. “Transformation involves reworking the framework of meaning. The Dark Night experience described by John of the Cross calls for just such a change in framework. The darkness and desolation are ‘reframed’ and seen anew as experiences of God.”

---

111 Studzinski, 83-84.
112 ibid., 15.
113 Hall, 50.
114 Studzinski, 70.
These stages of *lectio divina* are not necessarily sequential; they may be fluid; they may skip a stage or two, or fluctuate back and forth. The process of *lectio divina* takes time and commitment, and a desire to hear and respond to the Word of God.

*Mystagogy*

Mystagogy is a difficult word or concept to translate. Kathleen Hughes gives a succinct definition. “Mystagogy is a word borrowed from Greek; it means, literally, the ‘interpretation of mystery’ or the ‘teaching of mystery.’”\(^{115}\) Mystagogy is not a detective mystery novel, though some might argue we are all detectives searching for the mystery, the truth in the story, and the truth shall set us free. Hughes remarks that the practice dates to the nascent church, mystagogy was a post-baptismal mystery interpretation to the newly baptized. These neophytes could only discuss their baptismal experience after the fact.

“There is some evidence of mystagogical reflection in the New Testament. Paul speaks, for example, about baptism and eucharist in ways that suggest he is addressing those already baptized, drawing on their sacramental memory and imagination to break open deeper levels of their experience… (Rom 6:1-4).”\(^{116}\) The term mystagogy became more widespread after the publication of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in 1972. The RCIA demands four periods of discernment connected to baptism: inquiry, catechesis, enlightenment, and mystagogy.\(^{117}\)

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{117}\) Ibid., 9.
The RCIA expounds on these discernment periods in its outline for Christian Initiation of Adults, listing in order: inquiry, election, sacraments, and finally mystagogical catechesis. The discernment is a period of evangelization and precatechumenate (inquiry); this is the first step – an acceptance into the order of catechumens (a liturgical rite). This rite is followed by the period of the catechumenate (catechesis). The second step in the discernment process (also a liturgical rite) is the election of the prospective candidates or the enrollment of names. This rite is usually celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent, and followed by a period of purification and enlightenment.

The third step and final liturgical rite is the celebration of the sacraments of initiation which is typically integrated into the Easter Vigil. Much like the early church catechumens are initiated through baptism, confirmation and eucharist at the same liturgy. This is still the case in the Eastern Catholic Church, even for infants. In the Roman Catholic Church the final stage of RCIA is the period of post-baptismal catechesis (also referred to as mystagogy). This stage of discernment is not a liturgical rite and may last for a year or more.  

Mystagogical catechesis is a cumulative and cyclical reflection and contemplation of the mystery inherent in all our liturgies. It is both personal and communal. Mystagogy is not new, it has been a part of the Christian faith development and discernment for nearly two millennia. The mystagogical reflection requires both

---

experience and imagination; it is both personal and communal; it can be self-directed, it can be leader-directed.

Hughes traces the practice of mystagogy from St. Paul to the early church fathers. “The fourth century witnessed the golden age of mystagogical preaching. The most famous of the mystagogues (those who interpreted the mysteries) were the teachers Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopseustia and John Chrysostom. Augustine, too, has left us some mystagogical reflections among his voluminous writings.”

When the sacraments were received, when the Scriptures were proclaimed, what images or texts touched those in attendance, personally and communally? What did the liturgical ministers experience? These questions were asked of the lector participants, who were reflective and slow to answer.

Mystagogy declined in the early medieval period, practiced only by monastics and recent adult converts; infant baptism had become the norm, and mystatogical reflection was obviously not appropriate for infants. It was revived in 1972 with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Kathleen Hughes comments that “In practice, mystagogy has been limited to baptism, confirmation and eucharist as experienced at the Easter Vigil; in addition, those who have come into full communion in the Catholic church at the Vigil also reflect on their new corporate identity. But why do we or should we limit ourselves to these three sacraments?” Why indeed? Are not all of our liturgies subject to mystagogical reflection?

---

119 Ibid., 10.
120 Ibid., 14.
The Mass, the most celebrated liturgy of our faith, has two equally important parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They are both demanded for our full, active and conscious participation. I submit that mystagogical reflection should be a part of all our worship experiences, and that reflection on the Scriptures is paramount to effective proclamations of our lectors.

Unlike *lectio divina* whose stages may or may not be sequential, mystagogical reflection is sequential. While engaging in *lectio divina* (be it personally or communally) one might flow from prayer to meditation to contemplation and back to prayer or a re-reading of the Scriptural passage. Mystagogical reflection requires experience, memory, and imagination; it is subjective, not objective. Kathleen Hughes lists several aspects of mystagogy: it is for all baptized, it is lifelong, its primary focus is the community’s sacramental life, its language is more like poetry than prose, and its most critical element is well-celebrated rites. Further she writes: “Liturgical attention is of two kinds: attending to the liturgy as it unfolds and attending to the movements of our hearts before, during and after the celebration.”

Liturgical attention is a trilogy of sorts – reflecting upon the anticipation of the Messiah, Christ’s worldly ministry and Christ’s resurrection; these are the three movements. Mystagogy has also been alluded to as the life of a butterfly – the lowly caterpillar (the mundane), the cocoon (the dormant or dead) and the butterfly (the resurrected).

---

121 ibid., 17.
Mystagogical reflection for a lector includes preparation (pre-reading the text, the before experience), attention to the text while proclaiming it (the during experience), and reflection upon the text after the proclamation (the after experience). What/how did the lector feel while in preparation? How did the lector experience the actual proclamation? What did the lector experience spiritually and emotionally after the proclamation? Did the lector feel that he/she was transformed, did he/she feel the congregation was transformed by the proclamation? What type of Scriptural text is involved – Proverbs, Psalms, Old Testament, New Testament, Gospels, and what personal and spiritual emotions did it evoke?

Lectors proclaim Biblical texts. As the title of Bible implies it contains a phlethora of stories – histories, genealogies, Proverbs (words of wisdom), Psalms (words of rejoicing and consolation), Epistles, anecdotes, Gospels, and many other stories.

*The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Gospel parables speak to people of all ages, from the young children to the adolescents, to the adults and to the elderly. At each stage of life different messages will be received, different interpretations will be given, different responses will be elicited.

“As a person matures, some images are discarded because they no longer speak to the heart about the reality of God. Repeated exposure to the Word of God (the Scriptures) helps transform the imagination and presents more adequate images of God. Parables suggest that God is beyond the images fashioned by one’s wishes about what God should be. They call into question narcissistic distortion and reveal a God who exceeds human comprehension.”

---

122 ibid., 108.
Nouwen comments that “More than any other story in the Gospel the parable of
the prodigal son expresses the boundlessness of God’ compassionate love.” Further
Nouwen when reflecting upon Rembrandt’s painting of The Return of the Prodigal Son
writes that “Instead of its being called The Return of the Prodigal Son, it could easily
have been called ‘The Welcome by the Compassionate Father.’ The emphasis is less on
the son than on the father. The parable is in truth a ‘Parable of the Father’s Love.'”
Further, when reflecting on Rembrandt’s painting Nouwen suggests another title for the
parable.

“The parable that Rembrandt painted might well be called ‘The
Parable of the Lost Sons.’ Not only did the younger son, who left home to
look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one
who stayed home also became a lost man. Exteriorly he did all the things
a good son is supposed to do, but, interiorly, he wandered away from his
father. He did his duty, worked hard every day, and fulfilled all his
obligations but became increasingly unhappy and unfree.”

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is familiar to both Christians and non-Christians.
It has been explored, examined and preached upon for hundreds of years. Nouwen wrote
his reflections upon the parable in 1992. Henry Ward Beecher, a liberal American
Congregationalist preacher, preached upon this parable in 1875. There are many
similarities in the reflections of both Nouwen and Beecher. Both Beecher and Nouwen
reflect upon the characters of the older son, the younger son, and the father.

Dr. Studzinski comments “People and human situations are multifaceted. They
can be looked at in one way and then in another. The viewpoints are really

124 Ibid., 92-93.
125 Nouwen, 69.
complementary, and by putting some of these viewpoints together a person can achieve a fuller understanding of the reality being looked at.” 126 This insight is particularly appropriate to the understanding of the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

I have read and heard this parable for years, even decades. Each encounter with the Parable of the Prodigal Son resonates differently - perhaps due to my state of life at the time. I am the middle child of three children. Even as a middle child I can relate to both the older son and the younger son; I was the younger sibling and for many years the ‘baby’. In retrospect I thought that as the younger (the ‘baby’) I should have had special privileges – not so. Later I became the older sibling when the youngest was born. In retrospect I thought I should have had authority and preference over my younger brother – not so. I eventually accepted my lot as the middle child, non-preferential, but equally accepted. On many occasions as a child, in today’s parlance, ‘I want it all and I want it now!’ The prodigal son wanted it all and wanted it immediately.

I have not been able to relate to the overly compassionate father. I have never been a parent so perhaps I do not understand the unconditional love and forgiveness of a parent. I do not understand, but I do believe in unconditional parental love. I have faith in that love of God, our Father.

The parable speaks of the unwavering love of the father. Although I do not understand the unconditional parental love of a father or a mother (especially with wayward and problem children), I do believe in the love of God (Lord, help my

126 Studzinski, 50.
unbelief!). I have faith, which gives me the comfort and belief of a wayward child of God.

Both Nouwen and Beecher reflect upon the sons and the father. Additionally Beecher reflects upon the mother (whom I have always thought was neglected in the drama). Regarding the younger son Nouwen writes: “The younger son became fully aware of how lost he was when no one in his surroundings showed the slightest interest in him. They noticed him only as long as he could be used for their purposes. But when he has no money left to spend and no gifts left to give, he stopped existing for them.”

That was the truism then as it is today. Purported friends can be fickle. More than a century prior Henry Ward Beecher commented: “There is many and many a young man who is walking on the same track in the world. To-day he has friends enough. Just as long as his pocket holds outs his company will be sought, but when his pocket gives out he will be abandoned.”

One does not need to be an older son, a younger son, an older daughter or younger daughter to have experienced what the younger son in the parable experienced. Many, if not most, adolescents have sought to impress their peers, to be popular, to be adulated and admired. The admiration sought might be from wealth, from fame, from scholastic or athletic accomplishments or any number of things, yet the admiration is still sought, often at a heavy price. When one fails, perceived friends flee.

---

127 Nouwen, 47.
Beecher comments: “No selfishness is so hideous which prevails among the passionate who, having enjoyed all the wild delirium of pleasure with each other, heartlessly abandon one another in the hour of extremity.”129 Adolescents can be quite fickle in their friendships – today a buddy, tomorrow a nobody. Nouwen writes: “The younger son sinned in a way we can easily identify. His lostness is quite obvious. He misused his money, his time, his friends, his own body. What he did was wrong; not only his family and friends knew it, but he himself as well.”130 The younger son lived a life of wine, women, and song. However, this carefree life did not last long.

Beecher comments: “He went into the saloon to begin with, and he went into the pig-pen to end with. It was not a long reach from the glory, the dazzle, the pride, the vanity, the lust and the license of his youth, to the humiliation and the shame, the degradation and the want of a swine-herd.”131 Even contemporary Jews avoid pork; how much more serious was this transgression in the time of Jesus. I cannot imagine a lower state for a devout Jew. He was the lowest of the lowly. Nouwen writes: “When the younger son was no longer considered a human being by the people around him, he felt the profundity of his isolation, the deepest loneliness one can experience. He was truly lost, and it is this complete lostness that brought him to his senses.”132 One must be lost before one can be found.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.”

One must acknowledge his lostness, his blindness before one can be healed. Referring to the younger prodigal son Beecher says insights fully: “Having sinned, he had courage to look upon his sin and call it sin, and know that it was sin, and take it in all its magnitude. He attempted no acquittal, no palliation, no excuse, no piteous fear, addressed to the compassion of his old father.” The younger son was humbled, and was contrite, and willing to expose his sins of commission and omission to his father. His father’s joy at his son’s return and repentance is immediate and immense. “The joy at the dramatic return of the younger son in no way means that the elder son was less loved, less appreciated, less favored. The father does not compare the two sons. He loves them both with a complete love and expresses that love according to their individual journeys. He knows them both intimately. He understands their highly unique gifts and shortcomings.”

There is no favoritism on the part of the father; both sons are loved equally, and unconditionally. The father opens his arms and heart to both sons. Is there a chance that both sons will be reconciled to the father? Will the elder son continue to resent his younger brother? “But the story of the elder son puts all of these agonizing questions in a new light, making it very plain that God does not love the younger son more than the

---

133 Beecher, 426.
134 Nouwen, 80.
elder. In the story the father goes out to the elder son just as he did to the younger, urges him to come in, and say, ‘My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours.’”\textsuperscript{135}

Both sons were lost, but in different arenas.

“The lostness of the elder son, however, is much harder to identify. After all, he did all the right things. He was obedient, dutiful, law-abiding, and hardworking. People respected him, admired him, praised him, and likely considered him a model son. Outwardly, the elder son was faultless. But when confronted by his father’s joy at the return of his younger brother, a dark power erupts in him and boils to the surface. Suddenly, there becomes glaringly visible a resentful, proud, unkind, selfish person, one that had remained deeply hidden, even though it had been growing stronger and more powerful over the years.”\textsuperscript{136}

Both Nouwen and Beecher reflect upon the sinful differences of the two sons. Writing more than a century apart both have similar insights into these two sons. Nouwen ponders: “Looking deeply into myself and then around me at the lives of other people, I wonder which does more damage, lust or resentment: There is so much resentment among the ‘just’ and the ‘righteous.’ There is so much judgment, condemnation, and prejudice among the ‘saints.’ There is so much frozen anger among the people who are so concerned about avoiding ‘sin.’”\textsuperscript{137}

Commenting on the contrite younger son and then the self-righteous elder son Beecher writes: “Well, this is a beautiful picture; but still, we must finish the whole scene. There was one other son. We have now, next, one of these perfect folks who censured Christ for eating with sinners; one of these pharisaic precisionists, one of these

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 79-80
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
men who thanked God that they never stumbled; one of these men that know what was right, and always did it.”

Examining my own behavior I find that I vacillate between the two sons. Sometimes I am the devil-may-care child; sometimes I am the finger pointing, purportedly pious child. In fact, I am both – at different times in different circumstances. “If there be any meaning in this parable, it is that if a man stands where he probably thinks he is proper and right and virtuous, and has no compassion for his fellowmen who are in distress or want, even though it is by reason of their own folly, then he is the elder brother. Such a man is more despicable than he who has sinned more grossly and yet seeks to repent.” I would not venture to cast one son as more despicable and sinful than the other. Both have erred, both have sinned, yet both are forgiven by their all-loving father. I humbly pray that as I vacillate between the older and younger sons I too may be forgiven by God, my father.

Regarding this parable Dr. Filas remarks: “Two rather common misunderstandings exist concerning this parable. The first is the impression that ‘prodigal’ means ‘repentant’, instead of ‘wasteful.’ The second is the impression that the parable teaches mainly the mercy of the father (God) toward the erring son (the sinner). The fact of the matter appears to be otherwise: The main lesson is for the self-righteous

---

138 Beecher, 428.
139 Ibid., 431.
not to condemn nor to be jealous of their brethren who have returned to God.”¹⁴⁰ I humbly pray that I do not judge nor condemn my brethren.

Nouwen relates the drama of the two sons to the behavior of Jesus Christ. “I am touching here the mystery that Jesus himself became the prodigal son for our sake. He left the house of his heavenly Father, came to a foreign country, gave away all that he had, and returned through his cross to his Father’s home. All of this he did, not as a rebellious son, but as the obedient son, sent out to bring home all the lost children of God.”¹⁴¹ Nouwen’s reflections are much akin to The Jerome Biblical Commentary’s description of Jesus, as the wayward son. This commentary touts the role of the son and not the father. Jesus was the penitent one who returned to his Father in faith.

Both Nouwen and Beecher comment on the behavior and convictions of the father in the story. Nouwen remarks:

“What gives Rembrandt’s portrayal of the father such an irresistible power is that the most divine is captured in the most human. I see a half-blind old man with a mustache and a parted beard, dressed in a gold-embroidered garment and a deep red cloak, laying his large stiffened hands on the shoulder of his returning son. This is very specific, concrete, and describable.

I also see, however, infinite compassion, unconditional love, everlasting forgiveness – divine realities – emanating from a Father who is the creator of the universe. Here, both the human and the divine, the fragile and the powerful, the old and the eternally young are fully expressed. This is Rembrandt’s genius. The spiritual truth is completely enfleshed.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Nouwen, 55.
¹⁴² Ibid., 93.
Beecher finds the unconditional love and patience of the father in the parable. “Men see a great way with telescopes; eagles and vultures see a vast distance: but I take it that there is no eye so unerring and that sees so far and so sure as a parent’s eye looking for a lost child. ‘When he was yet a great way off his father saw him.’ And he saw all that was good in him; for fatherhood in its purest form is the truest expression, as it is the sign and symbol of the Godhead.”¹⁴³ I have often wondered where the mother is in this drama. Rembrandt’s painting has a vague female figure in the upper left corner, whom I assume to be the mother. Also, when I look at the painting I am struck by the hands of the father. His right hand seems supple and feminine, his left hand seems gnarled and masculine. The portrait of this father evokes both the masculine and the feminine, both the divine and the human.

Beecher speaks of a mother’s love and concern in a episode similar to the homecoming of the prodigal son (Nouwen makes no mention of the mother). When preaching a sermon on the parable of the Prodigal Son Beecher said:

“The beauteous child, flattered and deceived, in an evil moment flees and wanders, and goes from bad to worse; and the mother’s heart is sore through years, hearing from her and yet not being able to recover her; but at twilight, on some evening, as the mother sits and sees things darkling, there comes a form, ill-clad, with feeble step and sunken cheek, through the open gate. The mother knows her, and with open arms rushes to embrace the child that has come back. No word is spoken. Both hearts are pouring out a sacred tide. She bears her child to the house. ‘Mother, I have come home to die.’ ‘My child, live.’ Ought not the mother to say, ‘The public sentiment of this neighborhood requires that I should call out from you some token that you have repented?’ Ought she not be a violation of public sentiment to take her back without words? Nay; is

¹⁴³ Beecher, 426.
there anything that cleanses away the sin of a child so fast as the loving heart of a parent?"144

The loving heart of a parent, is a poignant phrase that evokes the loving and forgiving heart of our Father, our eternal parent.

Nouwen reflects that the parable and Rembrandt’s portrayal of the parable leave him with much spiritual work to do. I too, have much soul-searching to do, an honest examination of conscience, and a firm resolution to better serve the Lord and my fellow brothers and sisters.

“The open-endedness of the story itself and Rembrandt’s depiction of it leave me with much spiritual work to do. As I look at the lighted face of the elder son, and then at his darkened hands, I sense not only his captivity, but also the possibility of his liberation. This is not a story that separates the two brothers into the good one and evil one. The father only is good. He loves both sons. He runs out to meet both. He wants both to sit at his table and participate in his joy. The younger brother allows himself to be held in a forgiving embrace. The elder brother stands back, looks at the father’s merciful gesture, and cannot yet step over his anger and let his father heal him as well.”145

Amongst our families and friends we most likely know the prodigal children in our midst. Lest we think this parable is an olden times story, as Catholics we must acknowledge our own prodigal sons and daughters, as some in the third century sinners who become saints. St. Augustine of Hippo was an early church father and doctor of the Church. As related in the Parable of the Prodigal son he too was a wayward teen. In his late teens Augustine had a mistress and an illegitimate child. As a wayward son, he returned not to his father, but to his mother St. Monica. A prodigal child returns to an all

144 Ibid., 427.
145 Nouwen, 78.
loving and all forgiving parents. Augustine was one of the original mystagogues. He practiced mystagogy and taught the mystery and interpretation of mystery. One oft quoted statement of his “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” might be paraphrased for lectors as “I am speechless, O Lord, until you speak through me”.

146 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. 14.
CHAPTER III

Project Completions
The project was offered to a maximum of ten lectors, either current or prospective lectors. Invitations for these sessions were noted in the parish bulletin. Also there were flyers on the bulletin boards in the church vestibule and in the church parish hall. Copies of the proposed sessions were also available in those locations. There were four sessions scheduled for two hours each, two weeks apart (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to complete a pre-workshop survey to assess their knowledge of the history and theology of a lector, any prior spiritual formation or theological training, as well as their comfort in the delivery of their readings (see Appendix B).

Participants

There were six participants, five current lectors and one prospective lector. It was a good mix, there were four women, and two men. Three participants were cradle Catholics, three were converted Catholics. The one prospective lector, a widowed woman who converted to Catholicism after her marriage to a Catholic, was shy at first but showed much interest in becoming a lector after the sessions. One converted couple has been lectors for about ten years. The three veteran lectors (cradle Catholics) have been lectors for over twenty-five years each.

Prior to the first session participants were given a schedule of sessions (see Appendix A), asked to complete a pre-workshop questionnaire (see Appendix B) and given a copy of Luke’s Parable of the Prodigal Son, as well as Guide for Lectors: The Liturgical Ministry Series. They were also given a copy of Henri Nouwen’s The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming as well as a copy of the print of
Rembrandt’s painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, often referred to as The Prodigal Son for personal reflection. *Guide for Lectors: The Liturgical Ministry Series* was offered as a technical training resource. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* and the print *The Return of the Prodigal Son* were intended for use as spiritual resources.

The Parable of the Lost Son

“Then he said, ‘A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many hired men in my father’s hired workers have bread more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father, and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’ So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and is found.’ Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might be mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry,
and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me a even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’

He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’”

(Lk 15:11-32)

I told the participants that we may have heard this or a familiar reading year after year, one that we know so well that we have it labeled in our minds (for example “The Three Magi,” or the “Prodigal Son”). For this workshop we are using a parable from the Gospel of Luke, since in general lectors do not proclaim a gospel; although they may be familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son, lectors do not proclaim it.

If lectors read it aloud, in another context, they should not recite a parable on ‘auto-pilot’ but examine it and absorb it before each proclamation to be truly engaged in the witness of the Holy Spirit. This challenge was presented at each session.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

Lectors have a valid and unique ministry, which should not be a small portion of the other ministerial duties at a liturgy. Proclamations of the Scriptures is an integral part of the Mass, and should be recognized and respected as such. “By tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector, and the Gospel by a deacon or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant.” (GIRM 59)
The Code of Canon Law prescribes the qualifications and duties of the laity in liturgical activities. Although only men may be installed as lectors and acolytes, women may also be temporarily designated as lectors (but not acolytes). Neither lectors nor acolytes are paid for their services. These ministries are joyfully volunteered. “Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church. Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation. All lay persons can also perform the functions of commentator or cantor, or other functions, according to the norm of the law.” Code of Canon Law 230:1-2.

All sessions were opened and closed with a prayer. Additionally, when resuming after the mid-session break participants were invited to add personal prayers in their own words, similar to the prayers (or intentions) of the faithful said during Mass. My goal was to explain to them that all stories have the capacity to engage us, to educate us, to entertain us, yet parables are more personal and affect us unlike a travelogue itinerary can. Dr. Studzinski comments that: “Parables can overturn a person’s way of looking at life. … Parables are stories which can shatter the very foundations of an accepted world. They challenge the conventional life stories people fashion for themselves, and they
suggest new and different outcomes to ordinary life events.”  

Parables engage the listener in home-spun tales like no other Scriptural texts do. We can relate to the people in the parables, perhaps we know these folks as our neighbors, or our oppressors, or our heroes, or even ourselves. Hearing a parable repeatedly we may focus on different people in the story, we may perceive its meaning differently at each hearing.

Fairy tales and olden Aesop’s Fables might well be considered to be classic parables. They present the good behavior, the bad behavior, and the consequences of both. “[Paul] Ricoeur also notes the roles which parables can play in the conversion process. ‘To listen to the Parables of Jesus, it seems to me, is to let one’s imagination be opened to the new possibilities disclosed by the extravagance of these short dramas. If we look at the Parables as at a word addressed first to our imagination rather than to our will, we shall not be tempted to reduce them to mere didactic devices, to moralizing allegories.’”

Without someone else’s cinemascopic rendition, our imaginations have free rein to interpret the parables in situ. What we experienced yesterday is not what we will experience today or tomorrow. The situation changes, the locus/focus of our attention is ever changing with the ebb and flow of our own personal spiritual tides. “’When the parables and sayings of Jesus function as imaginative shock,’ [John] Shea observes. ‘they

---

147 Studzinski, 57.  
148 Ibid., 88.
result in the hearer’s perceptual shift. … They do not change the content of thought but the framework with which one thinks.”

Parables speak to people of all ages, from the young children to the adolescents, to the adults and to the elderly. At each stage of life different messages will be received, different interpretations will be given, different responses will be elicited. “As a person matures, some images are discarded because they no longer speak to the heart about the reality of God. Repeated exposure to the Word of God (the Scriptures) helps transform the imagination and presents more adequate images of God. Parables suggest that God is beyond the images fashioned by one’s wishes about what God should be. They call into question narcissistic distortion and reveal a God who exceeds human comprehension.”

As noted in Appendix A this lay lector formation program focused on parables.

During all sessions, instead of an end of session question and answer period we engaged in a free flowing discussion – questions, comments, concerns, and rebuttals. Questions included “What do you mean by that?” Comments included “I read an article about this recently that I would like to share.” Concerns included “Where did you get that information, do you have any resources or references?” Rebuttals included “I don’t remember any of this as a child; is this after Vatican II?”

Session One: History and Theology of Lectors; reflection on Parable of the Prodigal Son; helpful delivery techniques.

---

149 Ibid., 114.
150 Ibid., 108.
The first session covered the history and theology of a lector. As an ice-breaker they shared their initial self-assessments (see Appendix B). Regarding the length of service as a lector, three cradle Catholics have been lectors for over twenty-five years, two (a converted Catholic couple of about twelve years) have been lectors for over ten years, and one participant (a widowed convert) is a prospective lector. Regarding the impetus of lector involvement, the prospective lector wants to volunteer, as she feels it is an important ministry and is impressed by the current lectors. She nor her deceased husband were involved in parish ministry. All other lectors were recruited by other parishioners initially. Those new to this parish contacted the pastoral council to volunteer. All lectors rated themselves as adequate, but also felt there is always room for improvement. One eighty-four year old woman admitted she is quite stooped over, and too soft-spoken. It should be noted that the parish does not have an adequate microphone or sound system.

Regarding spiritual training, all participants had attended at least one retreat, one had attended a Cursillo, and one an outreach mission; four have been involved in Bible study groups and small faith sharing groups. Two participants have been engaged in weekly Bible study groups for over five years. These same two lectors in the Bible study group attend at least a yearly retreat at a minimum and have done so for over five years. No participants had formal training in public speaking, lector guidance or received any spiritual direction.

Participants were reluctant to describe their person prayer lives, yet all agreed they said personal morning and evenings prayers, as well as setting aside time for silent
reflection. All participants described special devotions. The most common devotions were the daily rosary, daily readings, and being on the parish ‘pray-er line’ (which is somewhat like a chain letter – parishioners call the ‘next one on the list’ to appeal for daily prayers for specific parishioners). One lady (who is our oldest lector at eighty-four years of age) arrives early before Mass to engage herself in the Stations of the Cross and then leads the rosary before Mass. She also reads the morning and evening prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours daily. She also leads the weekly Bible study group at her home, and has done so for the past five years. She is the only single (never been married) lector. All other participants were parents and grandparents.

Two participants were familiar with Lectio Divina – both are in their eighties. Only the newly converted couple were familiar with Mystagogy. The other converted widowed Catholic married a Catholic man fifty-six years ago and converted then, at which time the Rite of Christian of Initiation was not in use. At that time she was newly baptized and was committed to raising their children in the Catholic faith. Perhaps the differences in the familiarity with these two reflective techniques of lectio divina and mystagogical reflection are signs of the times – pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II.

Many participants were quiet and dismissed their roles as lectors as being merely readers, and not legitimate ministers. I reminded them of the Code of Canon Law 230.2 validating their ministry. For the upcoming sessions participants were asked to focus on parables. I commented that The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia defines the term parable.
“A parable is a short discourse that makes a comparison. The Greek word used in the New Testament and from which we get our English word ‘parable’ – parabole - referred to a much broader range of verbal expression than we denote with our word. … Western writers have usually used the ‘parable’ to mean some kind of elaborated comparison, especially the brief stories Jesus told.”

Parables can be similitudes alluding to a typical daily event; they can be about a fictitious event, or they can be example stories intended to imitate or avoid specific behavior. They are typically once upon a time stories.

As an older Catholic population some questions arose about the nomenclature and the usage of B.C./A.D., and B.C.E./C.E. I explained that after Vatican II, in an effort to be more ecumenical, and respect our Jewish forefathers, terminology evolved. Both B.C./A.D and B.C.E./C.E. are used. It is the same calendar, but now different nomenclatures.

I noted that in the time of Christ liturgists were public servants - police, doctors, teachers, sanitation works, and so on. Guilds (comparable to today’s unions) began for policeman, and other civil servants. Teachers and rabbis were not included in the guilds; and eventually the term liturgists referred to only religious leaders.

Participants voiced concerns about the term ‘theology’, and felt it only applied to ordained ministers or highly educated scholastics. As people with limited education, they were intimidated by the term, and unsure of its meaning, and how it applied to them as lay lectors.

151 Glazier and Hellwig, 609.
In response I gave them the dictionary definition of theology: rational interpretation of religious faith, practice, and experience; a branch of systematic theology dealing with God and his relation to the world: a theological theory or system; a distinctive body of theological opinion; a four year course of specialized religious training in a Roman Catholic major seminary.

I also noted St. Anselm’s definition of theology: faith seeking understanding. All participants were in accord with this definition. The term of faith seeking understanding resonated with all the participants. This definition was new to most but was a welcome one. In *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* theology is described as a living faith. “A living faith is a searching faith – it ‘seeks understanding’. Adults need to question, probe, and critically reflect on the meaning of God’s revelation in their unique lives in order to grow closer to God. A searching faith leads to deepening conversion.”152

Participants also were concerned about the term ‘liturgists’, and felt it only applied to ordained ministers, highly trained seminarians, or paid ecclesial staff. As people with limited education, they were intimidated by the term, and did not feel they could be considered or accepted as liturgical ministers.

Once again I presented a dictionary definition of liturgy: (from the Greek public/people service) a rite or body of rites prescribed; Eucharistic rite.

And I also offered a Catholic definition: Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* emphasized that liturgy is not limited to mere rubrics, but includes the ritual actions of the celebrants.

---

152 *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, 17.
and the gathered assembly. “Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963), promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, does not define ‘liturgy’ either. Instead it describes the action of liturgy and its place of prominence in the life of the Church: ‘The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church’ (SC 2).”153.

The Sacrosanctum Concilium document produced by the Second Vatican Council states that those entrusted as lector “should carry out all and only those parts [of the Mass] which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy”. (SC 28). Although it sometimes happens, lectors should not also serve at the same Mass as ushers, communion ministers, or altar servers; their ministry is to be solely the proclamation of the scriptures.

Having being reminded of their ministerial duties and responsibilities as lectors, participants were presented with techniques to enhance their proclamations. The following suggestions were given as an assignment for the next session, which would be shared at that session. They were also asked to give personal techniques they found helpful.

The following delivery techniques were explored:

- Attitude - demeanor, dress, verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal considerations
- Paraphrase – for youngsters (once upon a time story)
- Prepare a homily on this text, relating it to historical and contemporary values
- Consult a lector workbook, and biblical commentaries

153 The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia, 495.
Practice with a friend, or in front of a mirror, or utilize audio or video tapes

Reflection – *Lectio Divina* (in a group if possible prior to the scriptural readings)

Mystagogical reflections (before, during, and after the experience of the Scriptural readings); these reflections can be done individually or in a group setting

With regard to delivery techniques – Attitude - demeanor, dress, verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal considerations. I performed the techniques of verbal and non-verbal considerations at the first session to introduce the participants to various techniques.

We talked about delivery techniques. O’Malley comments: “The best lectors have learned how God communicates to human beings. The timbre and tone of their voice becomes an icon of divine promises fulfilled in Christ.”

As an example at this session for this demonstration I posed as three different lectors. As lector one I was a mumbling Myrtle. My head was bowed down and I slowly mumbled and nearly inaudibly read the text, never lifting my head to make eye contact. As lector two I was a speed reading Sam. My eyes were like those of a deer in the headlights. I read quickly and did not move my gaze. It was as if I had memorized the passage and merely wanted my delivery to be over. As lector three I read slowly with good inflections and paused appropriately. I repeatedly made eye contact with the participants. Not surprisingly, there were different reactions to the three different lector proclamations.

---

154 O’Malley, 27.
I explained that for these workshop sessions we would be using a parable from the Gospel of Luke, since in general lectors do not proclaim a gospel; although they may be familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son, lectors do not proclaim it.

_Inspirational verses_

Popular verses were given to the participants, and other verses were solicited from the participants.

“The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.” (Is 50:4-5)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” (Is 61:1)

Participants shared some other verses of inspiration and reflection that were helpful to them, as well as personal and communal prayers.

_Session Two:_ Review of first session, with an opportunity for questions and clarifications; then the following topics - Spiritual Formation, _lectio divina_, and mystagogical reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

During this second session each participant was reminded to reflect on Henri Nouwen’s _The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming_ as well as a copy of the print of Rembrandt painting _The Return of the Prodigal Son_, often referred to The
Prodigal Son. I chose this gospel parable for reflection for several reasons – most people are familiar with this parable (having heard or read it, understanding it as parents, children, or siblings); in general lectors do not proclaim the gospel (so they are not personally familiar with its proclamation); and the Nouwen book as well as the Rembrandt painting offer excellent materials for reflection. Participants were asked to both consult and reflect upon Nouwen’s book and Rembrandt’s painting in view of their current stage of life and their stage of faith prior to the next session.

A few people expressed concerns about the upcoming revised Roman Missal (Sacramentary for Mass), and the current lectionary. The Common Lectionary (an ecumenical version of the Catholic Lectionary) is used by Lutherans, United Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, the United Church and some other Protestant denominations. In the fall of 2011 Catholics will revise their Sacramentary – probably the first Sunday of Advent. The above mentioned denominations are also revising theirs. The biggest changes will be to the Eucharistic prayers. There seem to be little differences in the drafts I have reviewed among Christian congregations. There was some concern about the changes and what it will mean for lectors. I emphasized that there might be changes to the responses, such as the refrain “The Lord be with you” response “And also with you.” This will become “The Lord be with you” and the response “And with your spirit.”

There will be no changes to the Lectionary, and therefore no changes to the readings proclaimed by lectors. Though the Sacramentary (to be called the new Roman Missal) will change, the Lectionary will remain as is. There was sighed relief that as lectors, there would be no changes to the current readings.
At this second session, as a group, we participated in *lectio divina* following the suggestions of Kathleen Hope Brown. The stages of the practice of *lectio divina* are: (1) selection of a scriptural passage, (2) preparation, (3) reading/listening, (4) meditation, (5) prayer, and (6) contemplation. At stage one the group had previously selected the passage – the Parable of the Prodigal Son. At stage two the participants prepared for this reading prior to this session. At this session (stage three) we read and listened to the passage. After sharing their reactions, silent time was allowed for meditation (stage four). Participants then shared impromptu prayers (stage five), and silent time was allowed for contemplation (stage six).

As there were six participants, each participant read the Parable of the Prodigal Son aloud in turn, while all participants reflected upon the parable silently for a few minutes, and then shared the words or phrases that stood out for each of them. Five of the six participants were parents and grandparents; they shared their anecdotes of raising their children and experiences of their children raising their children.

In the meditation moments, for one woman the word ‘squandered’ stood out for her. Although, she remarked, not to the extent of the younger son, she felt she had squandered much. She was a stay at home wife and mother. She felt she had squandered some money on frivolous things, she felt she had squandered her God-given gifts; she felt she had not shared willingly with her family, friends, community, or parish. She related to the self-centered younger son. She also remarked she did not often ask for forgiveness for her squandering – not from her family, friends, or even from God.
For one gentleman the phrase “But he was angered and would not go in” struck a chord. He was in middle management in the timber industry, but as he aged the more lucrative jobs went to the younger men. He had worked faithfully for the company for over forty years, yet earned little more than when he first started. He felt he was not appreciated for his loyalty, he felt that he was over the hill and feared for forced early retirement (for which there would be no pension). And he felt justified in his anger. As Beecher might comment, he was acting like a Pharisee. He related to the self-righteous elder son. Viewing himself in the light of the elder son, he felt ashamed and humbled.

In prayer moments most participants related to (or tried to relate to) the father. Both women and men who were parents felt that in their hearts they loved all their children equally, for better or worse. Yet they also agreed that they did play favorites at times, for the scholar, the athlete, the sickly one, or for a variety of reasons. But all, laughingly, hoped and prayed that God our Father did not play favorites with his children. We all prayed for each other and the children.

At this session, as a group, we also participated in mystagogical reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The converted Catholics who were familiar with mystagogical reflection from their experiences with RCIA led the discussions. They spoke of their experiences of inquisitiveness (before their entry into the Catholic church), their trepidation of the actual sacraments, and their relief and sense of acceptance after the liturgy. They were surprised and delighted with the feast after the celebration, being welcomed by people they had only seen in passing. They felt they had come home to a new but in the background family.
The threefold reflective engagement of mystagogical reflection attends to the before, during, and after of the event. The participants were by now familiar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son. For most, the before reflection was minimal. They agreed that in reading/hearing it again there was a different reaction than what was expected. All were surprised in the aftermath of the reading/hearing of the parable.

The husband of the newly converted couple described his mystagogical reflections as similar to taking an exam. The reflection before the readings reminded him of studying for an exam, preparing himself and going over and over the text and his impressions of the text. The reflection during the proclamation reminded him of taking an exam; okay I can do this, there’s a lot of people out there on the edge of their pews hanging on my every word. The reflection after the proclamation reminded him of the after-exam jitters – how did I do? Did I project my voice, did they hear me, did I pause at the right places? Mostly, did I challenge the assembly and myself to a deeper sense of holiness?

Session Three: Lector proclamations of the parable of The Prodigal Son, critiques, preparation for personal parable selections.

Each participant read the Parable of the Prodigal Son in turn, and each was evaluated by the others after their proclamations. At the end of the parable readings critiques were made of individuals in comparison to each other and the group as a whole (see Appendix C). The evaluations were honest and helpful. In the category of overall considerations comments included “You read too fast”, and “I wish you had read it like a
fairy tale, slow and more personal”, “Your voice was too subdued, unlike on ordinary Sundays”. All lectors admitted to feeling somewhat nervous in their proclamations. On Sundays they are not being critiqued by a select group of their peers. There is little or no feedback on Sunday proclamations. Although these sessions were intended to be practically and spiritually nourishing, some felt it was akin to a job performance appraisal. Yet, after initial nervousness and hesitation, they all did well. Perhaps the first lector was the most nervous.

Session Four: Lector proclamations on personal parable selections; critiques, post sessions survey.

Each participant read a favorite parable; none were the same. As in the previous session, at the end of the parable readings critiques were made of individual lectors, individually, and in comparison to each other and the group as a whole (see Appendix C).

Evaluations

For both the proclamations of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the lector self-selected parables, all current lectors were rated as a 4 or 5 in most categories (see Appendix C). Evaluating verbal considerations, in rating vocal projection and vocal volume two were rated as a 2 (one being subdued, and one soft-spoken). The prospective lector was rated as 2 or 3 in all categories in the proclamation of the Prodigal Son. However, in her self-selected parable reading she was rated as 3 to 5. I think this
demonstrated her continued comfort in proclamations, as well as being able to select her own favorite parable to read. In non-verbal consideration four were rated as 4-5, two were rated as a 2 in the use of the microphone.

The end of sessions lector self-critiques (see Appendix D) revealed that all felt there was improvement in their delivery skills as well as a new camaraderie amongst the lectors. The prospective lector felt more confident and said she may volunteer as a lector – if she is able to engage someone in mentoring and coaching. The older woman (who described herself as stooped and soft spoken) realized she needed to “improve her volume” and learn how to better adjust the microphone. One lector commented that she was “too old” to learn new techniques such as lectio divina and mystagogical reflection, yet she did find them interesting. Another lector was intrigued by these techniques and would like to “learn more of this stuff”. Four of the six lectors found that paraphrasing a scriptural text was a valuable tool that they planned to practice on their grandchildren.

All participants agreed that they would recommend this training for other lectors, most agreeing with the prospective lector that it would be most helpful for novice lectors. However, all current lectors felt it would be a good ‘refresher’ for veteran lectors to keep their skills and self perspectives on their deliveries up to date. Regarding the question “What were the most important or striking things you learned?” four lectors said they felt relieved that they weren’t in the boat alone. One lector said she felt the most important thing she learned was to “let the Holy Spirit come through and guide her”.

Regarding unanswered questions, most lectors wanted to know if there were any other lector training programs or support groups for when they felt a need to speak to someone about a difficult passage in the Scriptural texts or a difficult passage in their ministry. I did not know of any, but suggested that if they were interested we could form a lector support group in our parish. It was decided to bring this option up before the pastoral council and the pastor. Meanwhile, one woman suggested, we could exchange phone numbers and call one another for help and advice.

Regarding improvement of this formation program, several admitted to being easily distracted, and not focusing, so they did not get a full benefit. One gentleman suggested that the program contain a monthly reading assignment, and an in-person monthly discussion on resources, prior to the actual formation program.

The post-sessions critique was requested for three months after the session. This critique (see Appendix E) posed nearly the same questions as the critique at the close of the final session (see Appendix D). All participants responded. Four participants spoke with me after Mass to give additional insights. It was interesting to note that all felt they had improved in their ministry as lectors. Four commented that the changes were both personal and communal, and that they had formed friendships with other lectors; two did not comment on improvement or changes. In answer to the question “Do you feel your fellow lectors have improved as a result of these sessions?” all lectors responded. (The prospective lector did not volunteer at this point, so was not rated). All rated each other better in Scriptural deliveries, with the exception of the older ‘stooped and soft-spoken’ woman. However, they did comment that she showed more confidence in approaching
the ambo, and seemed less embarrassed about the reliance on her cane, and was visibly attempting to master the microphone (which is less than adequate for the best speakers).

Three lectors felt that adherence to the techniques of *lectio divina* and mystagogical reflection were enormously helpful, and ‘soothing to the soul’ (as one gentleman expressed it). This gentleman also commented he had great fun in paraphrasing Scriptural texts for his grandchildren, and had begun to compile some of these on his computer. Two lectors enjoyed preparing homilies for their families. All agreed that if this program were offered again they would attend, and recommend it to not only lectors, but to anyone wanting to get more out of the Scriptures.

As a result of this training one gentleman remarked that he was engaging in *lectio divina* with his next door neighbor who is also a parishioner but not a lector. They meet on Saturdays for *lectio divina* and discussion on the upcoming Sunday readings. This gentleman and his friend were particularly interested in reviewing the responsorial psalms which are all too often ignored.

The converted couple had engaged in *lectio divina* since the formation sessions on a daily basis, previewing the following day’s readings. Also they have encouraged the members of the weekly rosary group to practice *lectio divina*. The older ‘stooped and soft spoken’ woman has incorporated the technique of *lectio divina* into her weekly Bible study meetings. She has encouraged the participants of the Bible study group to practice *lectio divina* individually and prepare for the upcoming Bible study readings.
All of these participants who responded remarked that they practiced the *lectio divina* exercise whether or not they would be upcoming lectors. They also felt that the practice of *lectio divina* was spiritually helpful. One woman recommended the book by Henri Nouwen: *Home Tonight: Further Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Regarding mystagogical reflection three participants added comments to the final evaluation. The converted couple and the older woman said they reflected on mystagogical reflection only when they were upcoming lectors. This same older woman who leads the Bible study group mentioned mystagogical reflection to those participants in the weekly Bible study group. I am unsure if this was well received or practiced. It appears that comparing the techniques of *lectio divina* and mystagogical reflection, *lectio divina* was of greater help in their spiritual development.

**Summary**

The Code of Canon Law prescribes that laity can be admitted to the ministry of lector, and Canon 230.2 states “Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation”. In reality many lay men and women are temporarily designated to be lectors.

This project intended to design, implement and evaluate a comprehensive technical and spiritual training formation. This program was guided by the principles of spiritual formation and incorporated the foundations of lector theology and history, as well as practical techniques of good delivery of the readings. The major emphasis was on spiritual formation utilizing the techniques of *Lectio Divina* and mystagogical reflection
for this population of rural lay lectors with little or no prior technical or spiritual training. Adult learning theories stress the importance of selecting materials and media appropriate to the specific adult learners. With limited educational backgrounds and most without computer and internet experience these lay lectors were comfortable with a familiar parable that spoke to them as adults.

All participants reported that the visual print of Rembrandt’s *The Prodigal Son* was helpful for reflection. They all reported that it was a good conjunct to Henri Nouwen’s *The Return of The Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. Five of the six participants were not previously familiar with Biblical commentaries, yet all agreed these resources were especially helpful.

As reflected in the evaluations the sessions were well received, and were recommended for future repetition. This series of sessions can be replicated without any technical support; all one needs is a willing audience who can read, pray, and meditate. There are virtually no costs involved. This project could also be tailored to small faith sharing groups, or in-home Bible study groups. I, along with the group, felt it was a successful formation process for all. If I were to present this spiritual formation project again I would additionally give handouts on *lectio divina* and mystagogical reflection, as well as Thelma Hall’s *Too Deep for Words*, prior to the sessions.

Several months after sessions a newly converted Catholic wished to volunteer in whatever capacity was needed, but wanted to be a lector. She had spoken to the two converted Catholic women who had attended the sessions. She approached me and asked
if there would be another such training opportunity, and if not she would like to meet with me or another lector who had participated in the sessions. She was particularly interested in the *lectio divina* studies.
Appendix A

St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, Reedsport, Oregon

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Four Saturday workshop sessions

Prior to first session lectors will submit self-assessments on their lector confidence.

April 30, 2011  9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

May 14, 2011   9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

May 28, 2011   9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

June 11, 2011  9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Written follow-up critique requested by September 10, 2011.

Session One: History and Theology of Lectors; reflection on Parable of the Prodigal Son; helpful delivery techniques.

Session Two: Spiritual Formation, Lectio Divina, mystagogical reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Session Three: Lector proclamations on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, critiques, preparation for personal parable selections.
Session Four: Lector proclamations on personal parable selections; critiques, post sessions survey.

This program is limited to ten participants, please contact Ardella prior to April 24th to sign up, as I need time to prepare study materials. Thank You.
Appendix B

St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, Reedsport, Oregon

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Initial Self Assessment

How long have you been a lector? Here? Other parishes? Total?

Why are you a lector?

How did you get involved: parishioner or pastor suggestion, you wanted to volunteer, or other?

Describe in your own words how you rate yourself as a lector, include the positives and negatives.

Have you had any spiritual training: retreats, missions, bible study groups, small faith sharing groups, formal education, or other?
Describe in your own words your prayer life.

Do you have any special devotions or patterns: Rosary, Stations of the Cross, daily readings, prayers and meditations, visual aids (such as holy cards, statue, icon, crucifix, candles), Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), something personal to you, other.

Are you familiar with *Lectio Divina*?

Any comments or suggestions.
Appendix C

St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, Reedsport, Oregon

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Lector Critique

Lector: Reading: Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Critic: Date:

Verbal Considerations

A: Communication of Content:

5 4 3 2 1

Understands the meaning and conveys it well      Unsure of the meaning

B: Quality of Sharing:

5 4 3 2 1

Aware of the assembly, eager to share      Unaware of the assembly
C: Vocal Projection:

5 4 3 2 1

Voice is clear and distinct       Voice is subdued and indistinct

D: Vocal Tone, Range:

5 4 3 2 1

Tone and range are appropriate to text       Voice is monotone, lacks variety

E: Vocal Rate:

5 4 3 2 1

Rate is varied and appropriate to text       Rate is too fast or slow, dull

F: Vocal volume:

5 4 3 2 1

Easy to hear       Volume is loud or soft
G: Vocal articulation:

5  4  3  2  1

Easy to understand, distinct                Indistinct, imprecise or overdone

H: Vocal emphases, pauses:

5  4  3  2  1

Well placed, enhance meaning                Ill-placed, awkward, inconsistent with meaning
Non-Verbal Considerations

A: Posture:

5  4  3  2  1
Alert, confident yet relaxed  Stiff, rigid, too casual, unnecessary movements

B: Attitude:

5  4  3  2  1
Genuine, sincere, warm  Stiff, severe or nonchalant

C: Dress:

5  4  3  2  1
Modest, appropriate  Too casual, flashy or inappropriate

D: Demeanor in approaching the ambo and while at the ambo:

5  4  3  2  1
Poised, comfortable, natural  Too rigid or casual, awkward
E: Use of microphone:

5 4 3 2 1

Comfortable, able to adjust for height  Does not adjust microphone for best delivery

113
Overall Considerations

General Impressions:

Suggestions for improvement:

Things well done:
Appendix D

St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, Reedsport, Oregon

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Lector Self-Critique

After completion of the Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Lector: Date:

Do you feel you have improved as a result of these sessions?

If so, in what categories did they change, and how? Were changes personal, communal, or both?

Did the principles of Lectio Divina and mystagogical reflection help?
Did other techniques help? Some examples include paraphrasing the parable for a youngster; preparing a homily on the reading; personal techniques or newly discovered techniques.

Would you recommend this training for other lectors or prospective lectors?

What were the most important or striking things you learned?

What remain unanswered questions?

How would you improve this formation program?
Appendix E

St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, Reedsport, Oregon

Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

After completion of the Spiritual Formation for Lay Lectors

Written follow-up critique requested by September 10, 2011.

Lector: Date:

Do you feel you have improved as a result of these sessions?

If so, in what categories did they change, and how? Were changes personal, communal, or both?

Do you feel your fellow lectors have improved as a result of these sessions?

If so, in what categories did they change, and how? Were changes personal, communal, or both?
Did the principles of Lectio Divina and mystagogical reflection help?

Did other techniques help? Some examples include paraphrasing the parable for a youngster; preparing a homily on the reading; personal techniques or newly discovered techniques.

Would you recommend this training for other lectors or prospective lectors?

What were the most important or striking things you learned?

What remain unanswered questions?

How would you improve this formation program?


