

IV.4.A: OFFICE OF LECTOR

What does it mean to be instituted as Lector? Here's the core definition: "The reader is appointed for a function proper to him, that of **reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly**. Accordingly,

- he is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, except for the Gospel in the Mass and other sacred celebrations [which is reserved to clergy];
- he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist;
- he is to present the intentions for the general intercessions in the absence of a deacon or cantor;
- he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful;
- he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments.
- He may also, insofar as may be necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations.

That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions, he is to meditate assiduously on sacred Scripture." (Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* #5, 15 Aug 1972)

An instituted lector is someone who has been called from among the people to read the Word of God (apart from those parts, such as the Gospel or the Prayers of the Faithful, which are reserved to priests or deacons). He must be someone who has the capacity to read well, both materially and spiritually. He is also a catechist, since all doctrine comes ultimately from Scripture.

Reading well materially means the ordinary qualities of rhetoric: pronunciation, enunciation, pace, volume, intonation and liveliness, etc. This is the minimal requirement.

Reading well spiritually means the invisible qualities of proclaiming the Scriptures as the True Word of God. This means praying with Scripture regularly, and ideally praying *lectio divina* daily on the Word to be read at the next liturgy or Mass.

The **obligations** of the Lector, then, are:

- to deepen your life of continuous prayer, especially your prayer with Scripture;
- to study Scripture so as to deepen your understanding of it (and here I mean especially the *spiritual senses* of it: what the Fathers meant by "exegesis");
- to come to know and love Jesus Christ more deeply in and through the Gospels;
- to teach the faith to others (in whatever capacity);
- and to live a life ever more inspired by the Holy Spirit and the Gospels.

Remember, also, that as an instituted Lector, you are preparing for the Diaconate. You still need to lead by example, and also practice the humility of being the least and last. That obviously means you don't usurp anyone else's role as ("extra-ordinary") lector, or take over the scheduling for lectors and cantors, or anything of the sort (unless, of course, you are asked properly to do so).

IV.4.B: OFFICE OF ACOLYTE

What does it mean to be instituted as Acolyte? Here's the core definition: "The acolyte is appointed in order **to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest**. It is his duty therefore:

- to attend to the service of the altar;
- to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass;

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- he is also to distribute communion as [an extra-ordinary] minister...;
- ...an acolyte may be entrusted with publicly exposing the blessed sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterward replacing it, but not with blessing the people;
- he may also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing [altar servers].

He will perform these functions more worthily if he **participates in the holy Eucharist with increasingly fervent devotion** [emphasis added], receives nourishment from it, and deepens his knowledge about it.

As one set aside in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning: in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his gravity and reverence in church, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the people of God, especially for the weak and the sick.” (Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* #6, 15 Aug 1972)

An instituted acolyte is someone who has been called from among the People of God, to serve the ordained ministers of the altar in the sacred mysteries. In order to do this well, the acolyte must deepen his devotion to the Eucharist, the “source and summit” of faith and life in Christ. He must pursue a still deeper interior conversion, so as to be more and more disposed to receiving Jesus Christ in His Body and Blood, and to the unity of soul with Him which should be the fruit of receiving.

Practically speaking, the Acolyte should also be ready to assist the deacon and the priest:

- With the preparation of the sanctuary and the sacristy before Mass;
- With the maintenance of the sacred vessels and vestments, etc., after their use in Mass (after the priest or deacon has purified them appropriately);
- With serving the altar regularly;
- With training others to be altar servers;
- With the Eucharistic ministry as an extra-ordinary minister, especially with carrying the Precious Body to those unable to be present at Mass;
- With Exposition and Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration by the faithful (though the Acolyte may not lead Benediction).

Remember, also, that as an instituted Acolyte, just as when you were instituted to the Lectorate, you are **preparing for the Diaconate**. You still need to lead by example, and also practice the humility of being the least and last. That obviously means you don’t usurp anyone else’s role as extra-ordinary minister of holy Eucharist, or as altar server or sacristan; or anything of the sort (unless, of course, you are asked properly to do so). It certainly means you don’t attempt to teach everyone else how to “do the Mass;” your study and deepening devotion to the Mass should be fruitful to others indirectly (e.g., as example, as support to deepen their devotion and reverence, as community experience).

The **most important thing** about being instituted as an Acolyte is that it help you **to love our Lord Jesus Christ in His sacraments, especially in the Eucharist**, more deeply. Therefore, whatever else you do as an Acolyte, it is most vital to spend time praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

IV.4.C: PASTORAL PRACTICUM

“During formation, engagement in a wide diversity’ of pastoral field education placements, ‘at least on a limited basis, will not only give the candidate greater awareness of the needs and mission of the [diocesan] Church, but will assist in the discernment and development of his own... talents and gifts.’ (USCCB, *Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on their*

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Formation and Ministry, 1984 revision, (1985) #84). These pastoral field education experiences ‘should provide an opportunity for theological reflection, as well as occasions to translate’ intellectual knowledge into pastoral service (ibid.).... [E]mphasis also should be given to the study of the role of culture in human, spiritual, and pastoral formation. Further, the pastoral dimension should provide a significant grounding in the social justice teaching of the Church” (National Directory #219).

The Diocese of Sioux City requires that candidates for the Permanent Diaconate undertake **three** (at least) pastoral field placements, or practica, one during each year of candidacy. The purpose of these practica is three-fold:

1. **To assist in the discernment and development of the candidate’s diaconal charism, talents, and gifts.** During Candidacy, discernment shifts its focus from the question, “Am I called to serve the Church as a Permanent Deacon?” to “*How* am I called to serve the Church as a Permanent Deacon?” The pastoral practica help answer this question with practical experiences, and by the process of reflection and humiliation. The candidate must constantly ask himself, and allow himself to be asked by others in the formation community, such questions as these:
 - Does this sort of service give me joy, even in difficulty, sacrifice, or suffering?
 - Does this sort of service make use of the divine talents I know myself to have, or reveal new divine talents?
 - Does this sort of service advance or hinder my interior growth?
 - Does this sort of service advance or hinder the interior growth of others, especially those served?
 - Does this sort of service integrate easily with my other commitments to family, formation, Church, and livelihood?
 - Do I reveal the face of Christ serving through me?
 - Do I see the face of Christ in those I serve?

When the answer to these questions is positive, this is reasonable evidence that the candidate is being called to perform in some way this sort of service as a future Permanent Deacon.

2. **To deepen knowledge and experience of, and commitment to, the mission of the Church, in communion with the Bishop.** The candidate must begin the practice of obedience, even before his ordination. Pastoral practica offer a “real-world” opportunity for the candidate to place his ambitions, hopes, goals, and gifts at the service of the whole Church, in obedience to the Bishop, who is the chief Pastor of the local Church. By exposing the candidate to new situations and new challenges, in the context of integral formation, the practica invite a more spiritual response and commitment from the candidate.
3. **To train the pastoral practice of the future deacon.** In preparing for ordained ministry in the Church, the candidate requires both theoretical and practical opportunities to learn how to be *alter Christus*, and how to do *diakonia*. These practica are one of the most important avenues of formation in this sense, even if the future ministry of the deacon turns out to be something different from these experiences.

In order to achieve these three ends, the practica will need to be structured in certain ways:

1. **Each year’s practicum should be different from the other years, and should be an area of service in which the candidate has little or no practical experience.** This forces the candidate to learn new skills, to become familiar with new situations, and to learn more about the diverse realities faced by the People of God.
2. **Each practicum will be undertaken with a mentor/director.** This mentor or director should be a Roman Catholic priest or deacon as far as possible, and must be well experienced with this area of service, so as to coach and assist the growth of the candidate in this ministry. The mentor

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might be the parish pastor or the spiritual director of the candidate, if appropriate, but might be someone completely new to the candidate's formation. A mentoring "team" is possible in some circumstances: for example, the candidate's Spiritual Director and a non-clergy expert in the area of ministry targeted by the practicum. One person should be designated as the primary mentor in such a case.

3. **For each practicum, the candidate and the mentor will agree, in writing, on the terms of service and the goals of the experience.** The terms will vary somewhat according to the nature of the ministry or service, but should not in general be either too light or too onerous. Approximately 2 to 3 hours per week, on average, (or roughly 60 to 100 hours total in the year), is a reasonable "rule of thumb" for base time commitment. Other terms and goals will be articulated on an individual basis, according to circumstances and the nature of the practicum. The Director of Formation, the Pastor, and the Spiritual Director should receive copies of the terms and goals of the practicum.
4. **The candidate should keep a running log, journal, or reflection of some kind, in writing,** in order to support the process of theological reflection on the experience. This journal will not be graded, but should be shared with the candidate's Spiritual Director at least.
5. **The candidate should include in his annual self-evaluation a consideration of his performance in the practicum.** The Director of Formation will offer the appropriate prompts for this consideration. This self-evaluation might be aided by shared reflection with the candidate's Spiritual Director.
6. **The mentor or director will also be asked for a candid evaluation of the candidate's performance in the practicum.** The Director of Formation will solicit this information from the mentors as part of the annual review process.
7. The candidate must take care that this practicum does not demand excessive commitment, to the detriment of his family and parish life, his other formation commitments, or his livelihood. The Pastor and the Spiritual Director should be solicitous to ensure this general limitation is respected.

Possible Practica:

The practica must focus on some area of service; that is, the experience must be clearly diaconal. This will most commonly be an area of ecclesial service, but it need not be in every case. Some kinds of service are always ecclesial: for example, sacramental preparation, or catechesis. Other kinds of service are ecclesial or not, depending on context: for example, visiting prisoners to bring them Eucharist, versus visiting prisoners to teach a GED class. A proposed practicum must meet the following criteria for *diakonia*:

- It must be of clear human (moral, physical, intellectual, or spiritual) benefit to the one(s) served.
- It must have the possibility, even if only implicitly, of bringing the one(s) served closer to Jesus Christ.
- It must not involve anyone in sin of any kind.

The final determination of what will be acceptable rests with the Director of Formation.

Examples (keeping in mind that the experience should be one in which the candidate has little or no prior experience):

- RCIA, Religious Education, Confirmation preparation
- Marriage preparation, marriage sponsor couple
- Baptism preparation
- Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist (must include bringing the Eucharist to people outside of Mass)
- Lector (first year of Candidacy only; after receiving the Lectorate, candidates should serve in this capacity routinely)

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- Sacristan, cantor, liturgy planning (except in the last year of Candidacy, when such roles fall under the liturgical practicum of the Acolyte.)
- Prison, hospital, or nursing home visits; visiting the elderly and home-bound of the parish; “sick calls”
- Teaching/tutoring the underprivileged
- Soup kitchen, food pantry, St. Vincent de Paul’s Society
- Evangelization, outreach to lapsed Catholics

Many other possibilities exist beyond this list.

IV.4.D: LITURGICAL PRACTICUM

“[D]iakonia at the altar, since [it is] founded on the Sacrament of Orders, differs in essence from any liturgical ministry entrusted to the lay faithful. The liturgical ministry of the deacon is also distinct from that of the ordained priestly ministry....

“Since ‘the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and the font from which all her power flows’ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10), this prerogative of diaconal ordination is also the font of sacramental grace which nourishes the entire ministry. Careful and profound theological and liturgical preparation must precede reception of that grace, to enable the deacon to participate worthily in the celebration of sacraments and sacramentals” (*Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* #28).

In the course of Candidacy, the candidate studies the theology of the Church’s liturgies, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours, the sacramental rites of Baptism and Marriage, and the Funeral rites. This deepening of knowledge of, reverence for, and devotion to the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ in His own Body, through the ministry of His ordained servants, prepares the candidate to take on the Ministry of the Altar as a permanent deacon. It is always useful, however, to add practical experience to the theological knowledge. This is the purpose of a relatively lengthy period of serving as an Acolyte, before ordination itself.

Once the candidate has received the call to the Ministry of Acolyte, he should begin planning, in conjunction with his pastor and with the Director of Formation and the Diocesan Director of Worship, a “liturgical practicum” in his own parish, or in another parish if the Bishop deems this useful. The Directors, the pastor(s), and the candidate will determine together exactly which roles the candidate will practice in the daily and Sunday worship of the parish. The purpose for the candidate in assuming some of the duties of a sacristan, extra-ordinary minister of Holy Eucharist, and altar server is two-fold: to provide the concrete experience that will solidify the study of liturgy and enable the candidate to move confidently into properly diaconal roles after ordination; and to accustom the parish community to the more extensive service of a future deacon. At least some of the roles of the liturgical practicum, therefore, should include Sunday service at the altar, wearing the alb.

The details of the agreed-upon practicum should be in writing. The pastor, the Directors of Formation and of Worship, and others (as appropriate) should evaluate the success of the practicum and give appropriate and constructive advice to the candidate throughout the practicum period.

In conjunction with the various duties assumed in the practicum, the candidate will also begin formal study of Homiletics. The support of the pastor is important here. Practical opportunities to give “live” homilies before ordination are limited, but the pastor might licitly arrange three such opportunities:

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1. First, in the candidate's role as extra-ordinary minister, bringing Holy Eucharist to a group (e.g., at a hospital, nursing home, prison, or school), in the course of which the candidate, as Acolyte, might preside at the Liturgy of the Word and/or offer a brief reflection.
2. Second, if the parish were to celebrate publicly Morning or Evening Prayer, the candidate might offer a very short homily after the reading.
3. Third, the pastor might invite the candidate to offer a brief reflection on the Gospel at Sunday or daily Mass, in the place of the announcements, following the conclusion of the Eucharistic Rite.

The pastor and the instructors of the Homiletics class should take great care to preview such a "homily," and to provide constructive responses afterwards.

In addition to this formal Liturgical Practicum in the parish, other opportunities exist for practical experience in the course of the formation program. These especially include practice presiding at and preaching for the Divine Office with the formation community; and special Masses or events with the Bishop, at which those in formation may be asked to serve in various capacities. These opportunities should be taken advantage of, and included in the spiritual direction and theological reflection of the candidate.