

Guidelines for the Institution of Lectors, Acolytes and Catechists in the Archdiocese of Brisbane

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Archdiocesan Commission on the Liturgy

Background

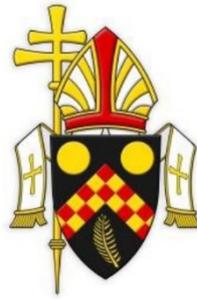
In 1972, Pope Paul VI (*Ministeria quaedam*) suppressed the minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte as well as the role of sub-deacon which had long been regarded as steps on the way to ordination. He put in their place two lay ministries of word and sacrament: Lector and Acolyte. New rites of institution were drawn up. In the Archdiocese of Brisbane, these instituted ministries have not been used because they were reserved to men and were still strongly linked with seminary preparation for the ordained ministry.

Half a century later, in mid-January 2021, Pope Francis (*Spiritus Domini*) adjusted Canon Law to allow women to be instituted as Lectors and Acolytes, making it clear that these lay ministries are based on the baptismal priesthood and are quite distinct from the ordained ministry. They are rooted in Baptism, not Orders.

In Brisbane parishes over the last five decades, lay men and women have universally exercised the ministries of reading the scriptures and assisting with the distribution of holy communion. From the beginning in 1972, Pope Paul went to some trouble to articulate the relationship between instituted Lector and lay reader, between instituted Acolyte and lay communion minister:

- ◆ *The instituted Lector not only reads the scriptures but has greater oversight of the Liturgy of the Word, trains lay readers and takes part in sacramental preparation. Thus he was expected to study and meditate on the word of God.*
- ◆ *The instituted Acolyte not only helps with the distribution of holy communion inside and outside the liturgy, but is involved in a broader ministry of the altar and in training lay ministers of communion. He was to devote himself to a deeper understanding and care for the Eucharist. In practice, this often seemed to embrace the duties of a senior server and sacristan.*

Now that the Church is revisiting the formal instituted ministry of Lector and Acolyte, it is important to review their place in the local Church so that they



will exist harmoniously with lay readers and lay ministers of communion. Indeed, rather than supplanting the existing lay ministries, the institution of lay ministries serves to articulate the common baptismal lay ministry of all by giving it stability, formal public and ritual recognition, and episcopal approbation.

Catechist

In May 2021, Pope Francis (*Antiquum Ministerium*) introduced a third instituted lay ministry, that of Catechist. It provides a contemporary guide to instituted ministry which will in turn help the Archdiocese to understand the role of Lector and Acolyte.

- ◆ The basic criteria for the use of the ministry of Catechist is pastoral need.
- ◆ The ministry is flexible and may have multiple forms (duration, content, modalities).
- ◆ Lay ministers are co-responsible in the local Church with ordained leaders.
- ◆ The instituted ministry emphasises the missionary commitment proper to every baptised person.

The accompanying letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments points out that not everyone who carries out a service of catechesis or who may be called 'catechists' has to be instituted. For example, among those who would not generally be instituted as Catechist are candidates for the diaconate and priesthood, religious women and men, religion teachers in schools, those involved in sacramental preparation...

Lay Pastoral Ministers

Finally these guidelines for the Archdiocese of Brisbane should be read in conjunction with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 2018 document *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace: Lay Pastoral Ministers in the Church in Australia*. It provides a comprehensive overview of the landscape of lay ministry and its theology in relation to the Church and its mission, and the diversity and complementarity of ministry within it. In some parts of the world, the lay leadership envisioned in *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace* has been designated as Catechist, that is, the role of Catechist is much broader than a ministry concerned with teaching and formation.

The instituted lay ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist overlap. It will be unhelpful to try to draw clear boundaries between them. Rather, these ministers work together with one another and collaborate harmoniously with ordained ministers. They can be an expression of 'synodal' or team leadership in the parish context.

Role Descriptions

Instituted Ministry vs Lay Ministry

- ◆ Instituted ministries are not to suppress but rather enhance other lay ministries; they are not to be seen as forming part of a hierarchical structure.
- ◆ In defining the role of an instituted minister, it is important to see how it is an extension of the lay ministry. What extra does the role of Lector include that is not part of the lay ministry of reader? What extra does the role of Acolyte include that is not part of the lay ministry of communion minister?
- ◆ In these Archdiocesan guidelines, the role of the lay ministry will be set out first in each case, to establish it as the norm within which the instituted ministry occurs.

The role of a lay READER includes the following:

(see [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 101*](#))

- ◆ Praying with the Scriptures;
- ◆ Preparing the Scripture texts: *Break Open the Word*;
- ◆ Learning the techniques of proclamation;
- ◆ Proclaiming the Scriptures in the liturgy.

Extra roles for an instituted LECTOR may include some of the following:

(see [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 99, 194-198*](#))

- ◆ Discerning and encouraging those who have a gift for the ministry of the word;
- ◆ Training and formation of lay readers;
- ◆ Providing formation on the word, including scripture groups and Lenten groups;
- ◆ Leading *lectio divina* in the parish;
- ◆ Leading the Liturgy of the Word and the Prayer of the Church;
- ◆ Preaching;
- ◆ Preparing the Prayer of the Faithful;
- ◆ Co-ordinating or leading Children's Liturgy of the Word on Sunday;
- ◆ Contributing to the RCIA by helping catechumens in the study of the Sunday Readings and guiding them when they are dismissed from the Mass;
- ◆ Being involved in the sacramental preparation of children;
- ◆ Being a member of the baptismal preparation team which prepares parents for the baptism of their children;
- ◆ Renewing the ministry of the word within the parish community.

The role of a lay COMMUNION MINISTER includes the following:

(see [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 100*](#))

- ◆ Distributing holy communion at Mass;

- ◆ Taking communion to the sick in their homes;
- ◆ Bringing holy communion to those in hospitals or nursing homes.

Extra roles for an instituted ACOLYTE may include some of the following:

(see [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 98, 187-193*](#))

- ◆ Training and formation of lay communion ministers;
- ◆ Organising ministers for bringing communion to the sick in their homes;
- ◆ Organising ministers for bringing communion to those in hospitals and nursing homes;
- ◆ Training and co-ordinating altar servers;
- ◆ Leading Liturgy of the Word and the Communion or Sunday Celebrations in the absence of a priest;
- ◆ Forming the community in eucharistic living (e.g. Eucharist and Social Justice);
- ◆ Fostering eucharistic devotion in the parish;
- ◆ Taking the role of MC at major parish liturgies (e.g. Easter Vigil);
- ◆ Taking the role of sacristan / preparing the altar and the sacred vessels for liturgy;
- ◆ Preparing thurible when incense is to be used;
- ◆ Preparing children for First Communion;
- ◆ Being a member of the baptismal preparation team which prepares parents for the baptism of their children.

The role of a lay CATECHIST includes some of the following:

- ◆ Teaching religion in State Schools;
- ◆ Contributing to the RCIA in the intellectual formation of catechumens;
- ◆ Teaching children as part of their sacramental preparation;
- ◆ Leading a Lenten discussion group.

Extra roles for an instituted CATECHIST may include some of the following:

Catechesis and Formation

- ◆ Training and guiding other catechists;
- ◆ Ongoing formation and education of the parish;
- ◆ Preparing parents for the baptism of their children;
- ◆ Writing reflections for the parish newsletter.

Pastoral Leadership

- ◆ Co-ordinating pastoral initiatives as part of a parish leadership team;
- ◆ Being witnesses to the faith, mystagogues, encouraging the faithful to live the baptism they have received;
- ◆ Assisting the sick;
- ◆ Leading funeral celebrations;
- ◆ Guiding community prayer;

- ◆ Helping the poor and marginalised;
- ◆ Promoting social justice initiatives.

Organisational Leadership

- ◆ Organising and running sacramental programmes;
- ◆ Overseeing Christian initiation of children, young people and adults;
- ◆ Overseeing children's and family ministries;
- ◆ Collaborating across all parish ministries.

Qualities of candidates for instituted ministries

◆ 'Men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of communion as brothers and sisters... It is essential that they be faithful co-workers with priests and deacons, be prepared to exercise their ministry wherever it may prove necessary, and be motivated by true apostolic enthusiasm.' ([Antiquum Ministerium](#) 8)

◆ 'Aware of the office they are undertaking, Lectors are to make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make them more perfect disciples of the Lord.' ([Ministeria quaedam](#) 5. See [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) 24)

◆ 'Set aside in a special way for the service of the altar, Acolytes should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning. In that way they will be able each day to offer themselves entirely to God, and be an example to all by their gravity and reverence in the church, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the people of God, especially for the weak and the sick.' ([Ministeria quaedam](#) 6)

◆ They should be a recognised, trusted, and respected member of the local community with potential for leadership and talents specific to the ministry in question (discernment of gifts). They should be inspiring examples of service in the associated lay ministries.

The following qualities and competencies are also noted from [Guidelines for Lay Leaders of Liturgy – Archdiocese of Brisbane \(2001\)](#).

Qualities needed for instituted ministries:

- ◆ An understanding of leadership as service;
- ◆ A sense of prayer, both private and communal;
- ◆ A commitment to inclusiveness and collaboration in the Church;



- ◆ The ability to consider a situation, make a decision, and act confidently on it;
- ◆ The ability to communicate with clergy and parishioners alike;
- ◆ A pastoral sensitivity to the needs of others.

Competencies needed for instituted ministries:

- ◆ The knowledge of the liturgy, its rites, structures and symbols;
- ◆ Skills in proclaiming the Word of God, in presiding at public worship, including public speaking;

- ◆ A sound theological, scriptural and ecclesial background;
- ◆ Skills in pastoral care especially of the sick and bereaved.

Process of Appointment

◆ *Preparation.* The parish needs to be prepared for these instituted lay ministries. Bulletin inserts could be prepared to inform parish

communities about what these instituted roles involve. The process of nominating a person for such a role would be outlined.

◆ *Nomination.* Nomination for an instituted ministry may originate with the parish priest or another member of the parish. Someone who thinks they themselves would be a suitable candidate should seek a nominator from the parish. In all cases, the signature and endorsement of the parish priest is required to move to the next step.

◆ *Application.* Nominated applicants then need to put in writing why they think they would be suitable for the ministry, what gifts they would bring, and what scope of ministry they consider may be possible. This may take the form of written responses to a number of questions drawn up in advance in accordance with local pastoral need. The dossier should include two references, one from the parish priest. Any supporting documentation should also be included (qualifications, memberships, etc). The parish would need to decide which applications they wish to advance.

◆ *Discernment.* Applications are to be received by the Archdiocese at Liturgy Brisbane. A small team reviews applications and contacts applicants to have a pastoral conversation of discernment with them. The team would also determine what formation would be required to support the applicant in the ministry.

◆ *Institution.* With formation at least well underway (if not yet complete), the Rite of Institution is celebrated by a bishop in the candidate's own parish.

The bishop may delegate the parish priest to celebrate the rite. The parish Sunday Mass would be a good occasion.

Training and Formation

◆ Instituted lay ministers must be well-trained and formed. Many serving in the lay ministry will already have had many years' experience. Others may require more extensive training. Fundamental is an understanding of ministry as a work of service, and one situated within the existing lay ministries of reader, communion and catechesis.

◆ The Archbishop has ultimate responsibility for training and formation. Training will be recommended from existing opportunities provided at a diocesan and national levels.

◆ *Training* refers to the learning that occurs prior to institution to ensure that roles required by pastoral need can be carried out with confidence and understanding. *Formation* refers to a broader preparation designed to deepen knowledge and understanding of the role. It may include retreat days and spiritual direction.

◆ Instituted ministers will require some theological and scriptural training pertaining to the ministry, as well as a knowledge of the pastoral principles of liturgy as provided by the Church's documents.

◆ Catechists may need a higher level of biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation.

◆ Parishes are expected to support their candidates in fulfilling the formation requirements suggested by the Archdiocese including monitoring and encouraging progress. Financial support may be required for courses to be completed.

◆ The training and formation need not all be completed prior to institution but will merge into ongoing education as the minister undertakes their service.

◆ It is envisaged that there would be one day a year where instituted ministers would gather together from across the Archdiocese for a face-to-face formation opportunity.

◆ All instituted ministers require a Police Check and a Working with Children Check (Blue Card).

Practical Issues

Terms of Office:

◆ The institution in the ministry of Lector, Acolyte or Catechist is permanent and a minister is not required to be re-instituted at any stage.

◆ Permission to exercise the ministry is at the discretion of the Archbishop and is granted for a period of 5 years following which the instituted minister may apply for a further period of service.

◆ Those who do not wish to continue in the active

ministry before the conclusion of 5 years should simply notify their parish priest and the Liturgy Office.

Geographical Scope:

◆ Ministers are instituted for service in the Archdiocese of Brisbane and exercise their ministry at the invitation of the parish priest.

◆ Instituted ministers from another diocese who take up permanent residence in the Archdiocese of Brisbane would be asked to provide the parish with:

◆ Evidence of their Institution in another diocese;

◆ A letter signed by the bishop of their previous diocese confirming that they are an instituted minister;

◆ A current police check and a valid Working with Children Blue Card.

◆ The parish would then forward this information to Liturgy Brisbane and the person's details would be entered into the diocesan database.

Age

◆ Instituted ministries are open to men and women who are fully initiated into the Catholic Church and are at least 21 years of age.

Rite of Institution

◆ The rite of institution would normally be celebrated by the diocesan bishop in the parish church in the presence of the community.

Exercise of Instituted Ministry:

◆ Acolytes and Lectors do not exercise their instituted ministry at every Mass. They are a part of the roster along with lay communion ministers and lay readers.

◆ Lectors and Catechists would not vest.

◆ It is not necessary for Acolytes to vest for each Mass, although it may be appropriate for occasions of particular solemnity.

◆ The customs of the local parish should be observed. If a parish has the practice of altar servers vesting, it may be appropriate for a simple white alb (the baptismal garment) to be worn by an Acolyte fulfilling a liturgical ministry at that Mass. The danger of adopting a quasi-clerical image must be avoided at all costs; the Acolyte does not sit or stand beside the priest but rather take a place among others who serve at Mass.

Number of Instituted Ministers:

◆ The pastoral needs of the community are primary, and thus Lectors, Acolytes and Catechists should only be instituted to the extent a community has need of them, rather than providing a way of recognising years of service or responding to a personal vocation. In most parishes this would probably not exceed one or two of each.