

SCRIPTURE, THE PUBLIC READING OF

After writing this for our congregation, it occurred to me that some of you might like to see it.

South Congregational ChurchINSTRUCTIONS FOR

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

565 MAIN STREET

CENTERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02632-2915

LECTORS

*THE IDEAL: So to read
that the people will feel
they're hearing it for the first time.*

1 The most famous early Congregationalist preacher, pastor of the Mayflower congregation, said to his congregation just before the Mayflower sailed, "God has yet more light and truth to break forth out of his holy Word." In public worship, you the Lector (Latin for "Reader") have the first responsibility (ahead of the Preacher) to help God's people hear his Word. These Instructions are to help you do your best in exercising this joyful and awesome responsibility. Your reading will be telling God's Story to God's people on God's behalf.

2 "Reading well" doesn't mean doing better than somebody else. It means doing better than you would do if you did not do your best. Doing your best is what God and the church expects of you, and what you should be ashamed of yourself for not doing.

3 People of the Book, Jews and Christians, have always gathered to hear the Word of God. In synagogue, Jesus listened to the Torah. (That's why, in our worship, the Old Testament reading is usually first.) In the early churches (and ever since), Christians gathered to hear readings from the Old Testament and from the letters of Christians leaders and from gospels (Jesus' stories and teachings). (That's why, in our worship, New Testament readings follow Old Testament readings, and the Gospel reading is usually last.)

4 "Liturgy" means working for the people: you the Lector are working for the people, as well as for the Lord, when you read. This Greek word came to mean also the work of the people: being of the people, you the Lector represent the people reading to one another. And this work, worship, is the most important action in this world and in the world to come. It is for each of us every day: It is called "liturgy" that once each week when we do it together to thank God for the old week and let the Holy Spirit lift us into the new week. (We call it also "the service," service to God in preparation for serving our Lord Jesus Christ in the world for which he died and lives.)

5 Your preparation for serving as Lector is in two parts:

(1) On your own, pick up the readings at the church. They are in the church office by the Wednesday of the week of the service, if not before. (You may be able to have them the previous Sunday. Phone the church--775.8332--to find out when you can have them.)....Assume you will do all the readings you are given, though some particular one may be read by the pastor....Take each reading separately, reading (aloud, if convenient) several times, prayerfully asking "What is God trying to say? What is God saying to me?"....Pay special attention if a word, phrase, sentence, verse jumps out at you. Let the readings become a part of you. See if you can discern a common theme in them....If the Bible you are using does not have pronunciation helps, you can find them in a Bible dictionary in the church library.

(2) With the coach, practice at the church (allowing at least a half hour). The present Lector-coach is Willis Elliott, who has had special training for this. To make an appointment with him for some time during the day before you read, see him at church or phone him--775.8008.

6 Lectors' worst mistake is to read too fast. When you are in public, you are not reading for your own understanding (as when you read to yourself): you've already done that. Now you are reading to project meaning to those most of whom are not looking at the words as you read: for meaning, they are entirely dependent on your mouth and body-language.

7 The second worst mistake? Lazy (slurred) consonants. In public reading (or speaking), exaggerate the consonants by volume & by time. For example, try now to say "p-b-p-b" louder than you would in conversation, and take longer to say each sound. If you exaggerate in practice, you'll be normal (instead of subnormal) in performance: you won't sound artificial (as you will in practice).

8 The third worst mistake? Shallow breathing. Practice diaphragm-breathing (throat-breathing always sounds pinched and weak).

9 The fourth worst mistake? Low volume. (You choke yourself on high-volume throat-breathing. As in singing, high volume demands diaphragm-breathing.)

10 The fifth worst mistake? Choppiness. As in singing, good reading requires sustaining the sound, with only such breaks as sense demands.

11 Mike too far or (less apt to be true) too near? Proper distance, depending on your voice-size, is about a foot.

12 You made a mistake? Don't mention it! Minimize it by repeating only so much as is necessary (usually only one word).

13 Don't drop your voice toward sentence-endings.

14 Occasionally, for emphasis, look at the people--but never lose your place! Before you look up, put your finger on the last word you've read.

15 Don't rush! Take your time walking up the aisle and onto the dais. (The deacon leads, you next, then the pastor.) Proceed immediately to the ambo (pulpit) for the call to worship. When you sing, step back a few feet from the mike. No leaning on the ambo: both feet on the floor. Say nothing till the people quiet down. Keep your body straight.

16 Read from the pulpit Bible* (the places are well-marked in it, as you will observe before the processional). If you wish to use another Bible, talk with the coach about it.

17 No excess words, please. Do not say "Good morning!" To identify your references (sources), say (for example) "Nahum" (not "the book of Nahum" or "the prophet Nahum"). EXCEPTION: Say (for example) "the Gospel of Mark," not just "Mark." Follow this format (unless you convince the coach to permit you to deviate from it): *Let us listen for the Word of God. [Pause] The first reading is from (for example) Nahum (do not mention chapter and verse, or even chapter).... The second reading is from (for example) James.... The Gospel reading is from (for example) Mark....* Having completed the lections (readings), look at the people and say with conviction *The Word of the Lord*. Some may respond "Thanks be to God."

18 Arrive early enough so you have some time for quieting yourself down in silent prayer. Also, the pastor would love to have prayer with you before the service if you come to her office 15 minutes before the service. Keep steadily in mind that God himself is with you and is delighted that you are willing to serve him this morning as Lector.