

HANDBOOK FOR
LITURGICAL ASSISTANTS
AT THE EUCHARIST



PART 2 – SETTING THE CONTEXT

2.1 WHO'S WHO IN THE SANCTUARY

This will vary from place to place and from service to service. In a mid-week service, there may just be the President. For the main service on a Sunday, there may be several people involved: the President, deacon, other clergy, liturgical assistants and servers.

When there will be several assistants, it is best if a roster is published in advance so that everyone knows what their particular role for that service is and they can prepare appropriately for it. It is common courtesy that, if people are rostered, they are not then turned away in preference to someone else when they arrive.

The people who are most often in the Sanctuary for Sunday Eucharists include:

- (a) The President – Priest (or Bishop);
- (b) Deacon;
- (c) Other Clergy (honorary clergy and visiting clergy);
- (d) People with licences – Ordinands (if attached to or visiting); Liturgical Assistants;
- (e) Others, e.g. Servers.

In keeping with not wanting to distract the congregation from their focus on God and worship, it is usually best if the only people in the Sanctuary are those actually rostered for a task.

2.2 THE ROLE OF THE LITURGICAL ASSISTANT

The priest is the person licensed to the Cure of Souls and to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Any aspect of ministry within a parish, school or other authorised worshipping community is therefore undertaken under the Priest's care and supervision.

The role of a Liturgical Assistant involves much more than assisting at the Eucharist, filling in when priests are not available, or conducting non-sacramental services. It is an expression of true partnership in ministry and of a highly responsible role of leadership in the Body of Christ.

Given our Anglican tradition, built on mutual respect and courtesy, we recognize the authority of the Bishop of the Diocese and the Incumbent of the Parish (or School/Hospital Chaplain as appropriate). LAs join them in the Church's work to promote peace and unity – to work for Christ, for the good of His church, and the spiritual welfare of the people.

Liturgical Assistants should:

- (a) Help to ensure that services are always provided as scheduled (e.g. when priest is delayed, ill, absent, etc.).
- (b) Be willing to make constructive suggestions to the Priest, Parish Council, and local liturgical advisory group about liturgical matters.

- (c) Ensure that all is in readiness to enable the service to proceed on time and that the sanctuary is left in order following the service. Tidying the Sanctuary and cleaning up after a service can be carried out by others at that centre if the LA needs to leave quickly for another service elsewhere.
- (d) Be ready to step into roster vacancies by having rehearsed all readings and propers for the day.
- (e) Encourage and help the Priest at all times.
- (f) Encourage and help altar servers and sacristans at all times.

Please note the specific things that Liturgical Assistants are not permitted to do.

Liturgical Assistants:

- (a) Do Not pronounce Absolution;
- (b) Do Not pronounce the Blessing;
- (c) Do Not preside at the Eucharist;
- (d) Do Not consecrate the elements or use the "Great Thanksgiving".

LAs assist at the Eucharist under the direction of the President and in accordance with the rubrics. When using *APBA* Second Order Holy Communion, for example, where it is the accustomed practice in a parish, school or other authorised worshipping community, the LA may undertake duties that the relevant rubric specifies as being able to be performed by a "minister" (e.g. Confession: section 6, page 120, *APBA*) or "reader" (e.g. Gospel: section 16, page 122, *APBA*), or "other members of the congregation" (e.g. Prayers: section 19, page 124, *APBA*). Where a rubric specifies only a Deacon and a liturgical Deacon is not present, then the Priest performs that duty (e.g. Dismissal: section 34, page 144, *APBA*).

Assisting the priest with the conduct of orderly and joyful baptisms and liaising with other leaders of worship (people responsible for audio-visual and sound, music, dance, drama, children's ministry) may be other appropriate roles for an LA.

As can be seen, there is a lot that LAs do. Their ministry involves much more than reading lessons, assisting with the distribution of communion, or conducting non-sacramental services.

LAs are strongly encouraged, where circumstances permit, to undertake an ongoing program of theological study and prayerful reflection on the Word of God and doctrines of the Church in order to enhance their role as ministers to the Body of Christ.

The Role of the Server

Until fairly recently, it was Servers who assisted at the Eucharist (and other services) rather than LAs. Typically Servers set up the Altar and Credence Table before the service and helped with the preparation of the Altar and with the Offertory. They carried out the lavabo and the ablutions and cleared away after the service. At other services they assist with the liturgy in various ways. Servers undertaking particular tasks may be known as Acolytes or Taperers (carry candles in processions), Crucifers (carry crosses in processions), Masters of Ceremonies (supervisory tasks), and Thurifers (assist with incense).

In some places today, Servers still carry out these tasks whilst in others it is now the LA who carries them out. However, it is important that LAs understand the role of the Server *as practiced in their worshipping community* to enable them to carry out the duties if called upon.

Like LAs, there is no age limitation on a person being a Server.

2.3 SANCTUARY AND SACRAMENTAL SENSE

It appears that the first “Lay Readers” licence was issued by the Bishop of Bristol, England, around 1866, although there is evidence of the likelihood of lay, or non-ordained people acting as “Ministers” of the Eucharist in the early centuries of the church’s existence.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 14, verse 40, St Paul writes “Let all things be done decently and in order”, and this expresses very clearly the approach of Liturgical Assistants to their ministry. When LAs prepare carefully for their ministry, and exercise it with humble reverence and respectful care, the result is that the proper reverence in the liturgy is enhanced.

Every service of worship should be a smooth-flowing, cohesive, joyful expression of praise to the Lord.

One way to achieve this is through prayerful preparation for the service. The vestry prayer simply is not adequate in itself. A time of quiet reflection is essential for those preparing to minister in the sanctuary. This includes reading all the scripture passages for the service; not only to prepare for the focus of the worship, but also to be confident in reading if the allocated reader isn’t there.

Practical preparation is also essential:

- (a) Check the Altar and Credence Table to make sure everything is correctly set up.
- (b) Make sure the correct readings for the particular day are marked and that the rostered readers are in attendance.
- (c) Check the hymns. Ensure that whoever is to announce them has the correct details especially where some verses are to be omitted.
- (d) Check the candles are lit. (The Paschal Candle, representing the risen Christ among his people, is traditionally lit first, and all others lit from it.)
- (e) Check that the stewards/sides people are present.
- (f) Check that the person leading the intercessions is in attendance and be ready to lead the intercessions if s/he does not arrive.

It is good to have these preparations completed at least 15 minutes before worship so that the congregation can gather for prayer before the service, with focus on an ‘uncluttered’ and not busy sanctuary.

Once the service commences LAs - like all other members of the sanctuary party - need to realise that their attitude and conduct will help or hinder the worship of each person present in church.

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3.4 THE ADMINISTRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

The administration of Holy Communion is one of the most solemn parts of the liturgy and should be carried out with great care and reverence. Communicants are individuals. LAs need to be aware and be sensitive to each individual reception of the chalice and not expect all situations to be the same. It is not a mechanical process along an assembly line.

The Distribution of the Bread

The Archbishop's directions state:

- (a) At all times make the words of administration audible to each communicant.
- (b) Allow time for the communicant to say "Amen".
- (c) Place the bread firmly in the hand or on the tongue.
- (d) If the communicant is hesitant or appears unsure of what to do with the host, guide the hand gently but firmly towards the mouth.

The Administration of the Chalice

The Archbishop's *Ad Clerum* about Wine and the Common Cup at the Holy Communion is included in Part 4 of this Handbook (section 4.4). LAs should note in particular the advice regarding intinction. However, at the Altar rail, LAs are not in a position of judgement or comment.

- (a) Hold the chalice firmly.
- (b) Allow the communicant time to consume the bread.
- (c) Make the words of administration audible to each communicant. Follow the format of words used by the President. If administering the Chalice with a second person, ensure you both say the same words. Approved words are in the prayer book (e.g. in *APBA*, on page 113 (First Order), page 143 (Second Order), page 178 (Third Order)).
- (d) When offering the chalice, be prepared to have the communicants either take the chalice into their own hands, not touch the chalice at all, or just take it very lightly. It is recommended that the LA does not hand the chalice over but rather loosen their grip a little to allow the communicant to have control.
- (e) Use the purificator carefully to wipe the inner and outer lip of the chalice with a clean portion of the purificator. In addition to wiping, turn the chalice about 45° so the next person receives a different part of the chalice.
- (f) If not sure whether or not a person (e.g. child) is communicating, ASK.
- (g) Be prepared to advise the priest when the level of wine in the chalice is low.
- (h) Be alert to special circumstances. For example, a person may wish to have a connection with the Chalice – just to hold it – but not drink from it for reasons of illness. Do not force the Chalice on anyone. A short LA administering to a very tall person who is standing may in fact need to let go of the Chalice.



At all times, remember that you are assisting in a privileged action.

Dealing with Consecrated Wine that is spilled

Whilst every care should be taken not to spill consecrated wine, it may happen on rare occasions. The spilled consecrated wine needs to be dealt with reverently. How it is removed will depend on whether the spill happens on carpet or a hard surface (wood/concrete/stone).

Handling Chalices

It will be helpful for the priest and LAs in a parish/school/other authorised worshipping community to agree on good practices to observe when handling chalices in order to limit opportunities for spillage to occur. Spillage of consecrated wine is most likely to occur when wine is poured from one chalice to another and when a chalice is being given by one person to another. If wine is not poured from one chalice to another and if a chalice containing consecrated wine is collected only from the Altar or Credence Table, opportunities for spillage will be limited.

3.6 RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY AS A LITURGICAL ASSISTANT

The office of LA is prescribed by the terms of the licence issued, and ranges from permission to assist at Holy Communion to authority to conduct services and to preach.

The basic requirement is personal commitment to Jesus Christ and a continuing personal relationship with God in Christ. No other resource can replace or supersede this commitment and ongoing relationship. The development of this “faith journey” includes daily bible reading, prayer and regular participation in the Eucharist.

The Bible: Seek advice on obtaining a clear and accurate translation of the Holy Scriptures for your personal use and develop a regular pattern of reading. There are many structures available, including using the Lectionary.

Bible Reading Notes: Scripture Union Notes, Bible Reading Fellowship notes or a good commentary. Refer to your Priest, or the Roscoe Library at St Francis’ College for resource advice.

Break Open the Word: Years A, B, C.

APBA: Possess your own copy of the *red APBA*; this is the complete version. Make a study of it and be familiar with alternatives suggested in services. Note carefully the rubrics.

When We Meet for Worship: This commentary on *AAPB* by Brother Gilbert Sinden has practical information of value to LAs as well as others involved in liturgy. (Note: this is now very old and out of print. It may be possible to locate secondhand copies from time to time. It is held by the Roscoe Library at St Francis College)

A Prayer Book for Australia: A Practical Commentary: Edited by Gillian Varcoe was published with the 1996 Prayer Book. (Note: this is now out of print. It is held by the Roscoe Library at St Francis College)

The Diocesan Cycle of Prayer (Pray Daily): This includes the Anglican cycle of prayer and is available on the diocesan web site.

An Australian Lectionary: for *APBA* or for *AAPB*.

A comprehensive list of useful resources is at section 4.6 in Part 4 of this Handbook.

SUMMARY

- P** Prepare. (It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark!).
- R** Remember to pray for your clergy. Remember to pray for yourself.
- A** Alertness is vital; watch the President at all times.
- Y** Your ministry is to honour God.
- I** Inquire beforehand for prayer needs.
- N** Never ramble - be brief.
- G** Give God thanks for the privilege of leading worship in the sanctuary.
To God be the glory.

And remember, you cannot make 'mistakes' in worship if you are prayerfully honouring God in your preparation and in the intention of your heart. There may be mistakes in stagecraft, which can be addressed later so they do not recur; but there are no mistakes in worship itself because God graciously overlooks our bumble footedness.

Sanctuary etiquette is like manners – you don't necessarily notice good manners, but you certainly notice bad manners!

Notes