

Diocese of San Diego

GUIDELINES FOR LAY PRESIDERS

In the absence of a priest or deacon, laypersons, carefully selected and properly trained, may serve as presiders in the following situations:

- Liturgy of the Hours
- Weekday Communion Services preceded by a Word Service or Liturgy of the Hours  
(cf. *Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside of Mass*)
- Funeral Vigils, Committal Services & Office for the Dead  
(cf. *Order of Christian Funerals*)
- Liturgy of the Word with Children during Sunday Mass
- Eucharistic Exposition  
(cf. *Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction*)
- Minor Exorcisms & Blessings  
(contained in *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*)
- Blessings  
(given in the *Book of Blessings*)

Only with the permission of the bishop may laypersons or deacons preside for Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest.

#### Presiders

It is the responsibility of the pastor in consultation with parish leadership to determine who has the charism of presiding. Those chosen for this ministry should be fully initiated, practicing Catholics and recognized leaders in the community. They should be “persons who exhibit a living appreciation for Scripture; a deep reverence for the eucharist; an active prayer life; an exemplary moral life; a spirit of cooperation with the laity and clergy of the particular community; an acceptance by the members of the community; an active involvement in the pastoral life of the community; and both a strong desire and ability to foster participation by lay people as members of the worshipping assembly and in other liturgical roles. The cultural makeup and linguistic needs of the assembly should also be considered in the selection of candidates.” (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, n. 32, NCCB Committee on the Liturgy)

#### Catechesis

It is essential that catechesis be provided to the faith community so that there is no confusion between a prayer service that includes parts of the Mass and the

celebration of Mass. “It is especially important that the community be assisted in deepening its understanding of the importance of the sacramental worship of the Church and its ordained ministry.” (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, n. 56.)

## Training

Those called to lead liturgical prayer should understand the ecclesiology and theology of the assembly as found in the liturgical documents and rites of the Church. “The Church is first and foremost a gathering of those whom the Lord has called into a covenant of peace with himself. In this gathering, as in every other, offices and ministries are necessary, but secondary. The primary reality is Christ in the assembly, the People of God.” (*Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, n.5, NCCB Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry)

## Specific Norms

1. Lay presiders may wear lay clothing in accord with the dignity of their role, or be vested in well designed albs. The use of a stole is reserved to the ordained along with a chasuble for a priest and dalmatic for a deacon.
2. Laypersons are to avoid all things proper to a priest or deacon. They do not use the greeting before the Gospel (“The Lord be with you”) or any of the other greetings designated for a priest or deacon. Nor do they use the priestly or diaconal forms of blessing.
3. The chair used by a layperson must be different from the presidential chair used by a priest or a deacon and normally it should be placed in close proximity to the assembly.
4. The ambo is reserved for the Liturgy of the Word. The readings assigned in the Lectionary for a particular day are to be used. The homily is, by its very definition, reserved to a priest or a deacon. Only the bishop may authorize others to preach the Word of God with due regard for canon 767.1 which deals with the issue of the liturgical homily. Otherwise the pastor may provide a text for the leader to read.
5. The altar is used only when the rite of communion is included in the celebration. The eucharist is placed on the altar before the distribution of holy communion. Candles are lighted at the altar before the sacrament is brought to it from the place of reservation.
6. The lay presider does not assume the roles and functions of other assisting ministers. Each person who has an office to perform should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to that office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.

7. In every situation lay presiders should follow the norms in the appropriate liturgical books and, in particular, the formularies for when the minister is a lay person. The lay presider uses the specific formularies in the ritual text designated for a minister who is a layperson. (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, n. 46, 55)

#### Term of Service and Blessing

The appointment of lay presiders is made for a definite time and should be made known to the community in a liturgical celebration, preferably on Sunday. *The Order for the Blessing of Those Who Exercise Pastoral Service, Book of Blessings*, Part VI, Chapter 60 may be used for this purpose.