

## **Do you want to know more about ... Reading the Bible and Leading the Prayers in Church?**

Here are some notes from a recent training session to help you think about it. For more information, speak to the rector or Churchwardens or Miranda O’Gara.

### **1. The Lectionary**

In the Church of England, we have always read the Bible on Sundays through a system called a Lectionary. This is a planned visit to all the major parts of the Bible over a period of time. Since 2000, at Holy Cross, we have used the Revised Common Lectionary, or RCL for short, which means that we are hearing the same biblical readings as all the other mainstream Christian churches in the country and sometimes internationally. The RCL provides readings over a 3-year period, called Years A, B and C. The RCL employs the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) in an anglicised edition which avoids the linguistic americanisms of the original translation.

On most Sundays the Lectionary provides for three readings. A reading from the Old Testament, a reading from one of the New Testament books or letters and also a reading from the Gospels. The Gospel is read ceremonially by either a priest or appointed Lay Minister. The other readings are read by members of the congregation from the lectern.

Sometimes the RCL provides alternatives readings. It is the responsibility of the clergy to ensure that the reader knows in advance which alternative is to be read. On some occasions we dispense with the RCL provision and use special readings which will be notified well in advance.



Information about the readings for the forthcoming Sunday can be found in Stop Press each week as in this example from 17th July, 2005:-

**Next Sunday:** Year A Trinity Nine (Proper 12-track 2) RCL page 318-322

1 Kings 3: 5-12- Jean Waudby, Romans 8: 26-39 -Lorna Churn, Intercessions - Florence Adegunwa  
The Gospel contains several parables of the Kingdom- it is like mustard seed, a pearl or great value, a fishing net.  
**Read Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52**

More advance information about when it is your turn to read may be found by looking at the Notice Board in the New Church where the rota is published in advance.

### **2. Finding the words in advance**

1. The RCL is published in small and large format with identical pagination. What we recommend is that each reader takes the small format book home and rehearses at home before coming to church and reading from the large format RCL on the lectern.
2. They are published on the parish website in advance so if you have access to the web, please find the readings here too. [www.greenfordmagna.info](http://www.greenfordmagna.info)
3. You may also email Neil and ask him to send the text to you.
4. In an emergency you may ask Neil or the Wardens who may make a photocopy for you to take home and study.

### 3. Advance personal preparation

What we do not carry within ourselves can never be communicated to others:

- Do I, as the reader understand this passage?
- What else is being read and do the other passages relate to each other? Read them.
- Are there any verses where the meaning is vague to me?
- Is there a book which will help me understand?
- Do I need to discuss any aspect with Neil or someone else in advance?

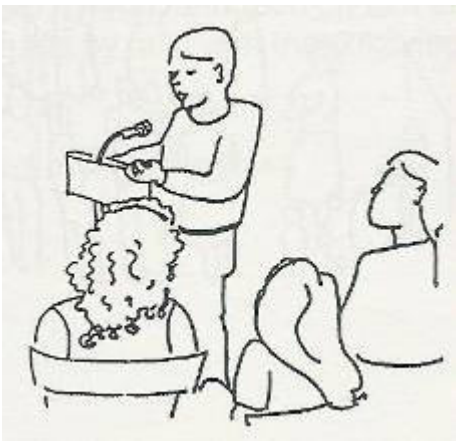
It is not important that the reader believes every single word intellectually, and certainly not that the reader feels every emotion expressed. BUT the readers should believe that the Word is important for the comfort or disturbance of those who hear it.

### 4. Familiarisation with the text

It is important that the reader feels physically familiar with the text on the page:

- Read the passage out loud several times, until the words and intonation feel right in your mouth.
- Decide where there should be pauses,
- Notice when you might run out of breath,
- Identify any words that should be emphasised or that have difficulties in pronouncing.

### 5. Practicalities in situ



Make sure you know what it feel like to stand at the lectern.

**OT reading-** be at the lectern as the Gloria ends and wait for the Collect and then the announcement about children's work. Then, as the children move away, start your reading.

**NT reading-** be there before the end of the gradual psalm or hymn.

If you start before people are ready, they will miss the beginning. If you wait for them to settle down, they may never do so!

Note the introductory words and the ending words in each case. The RCL provides words to introduce the passage and these should normally be used. There is a choice of ending words and

these are printed in the Order of Service.

You will need to feel right about the position of the microphone.

Please note whether or not you will need to turn the page and what implications there are for your voice and the microphone position.

It helps you plan where to sit and what is your route to the reading place.

### 6. Voice tips

Generally speaking, read at half your normal speed. If you read at normal speech speed, you do not have the presence of mind or the breath to project your voice to the back of the church.

Take time to look up and out at the congregation as you read. You never give an important message to someone with your eyes averted from their face. Ask someone to reflect with you on how you read, whether it was audible and intelligible.

Discover whether you have any distracting habits of which you are unaware which need attended to... e.g. mumbling the first line, dropping your voice at the end of each sentence, hurrying through closing words at the end of the reading, clearing your throat excessively, scratching your head, etc.

## Intercessions at Public Worship

Saint Paul once described prayers as our inner groanings. That means that sometimes it is ok for the prayers to be somewhat inarticulate because our human strivings are often that way too. If you feel inarticulate, don't worry. Ask for the Holy Spirit to work in you and see what happens. Our prayers are a public opportunity to present to God our needs, concerns and aspirations for the world in every aspect, including very personal or local matters as well as international issues. In this sense, the prayers are a very public front to our church and a form of identity.

We are what we pray.

The person who accepts responsibility for leading the intercessions is leading them on behalf of the whole congregation.

This has consequences;

- 1) responsibility to ensure that everyone will be able to "own" the prayers as from him or her self. Sometimes it is wise to drop the more controversial ideas in favour of a consensual form of words.
- 2) responsibility to ensure that such prayers reflect the current needs and aspirations of the community, taking account of local and international concerns
- 3) responsibility for ensuring the prayers are heard and understood
- 4) responsibility for ensuring the prayers are in tune with the theme of the day or season and the readings of the day.



The intercessions are free intercessions – everyone is allowed to use their own ideas and thoughts about how to deliver them, although there are some occasions when a prepared text or response is best suited to the particular congregation, especially when the church may have large numbers of non-church-going people such as baptisms and in special seasons.

We have several orders of service reflecting the church seasons. You should always check to see if there is an expectation of reading a special text or not.

Preparing the prayers should occupy some time before the week-end has started. I suggest you start on the Monday before your Sunday and chart what is happening around us in the world as a way of making a review to inspire your prayers.

Most intercessions include sections as follows:

- 1) prayers for the Church (local, national, international, unity, special issues...)
- 2) prayers for the world (its needy people, the conflicts and wars, the leaders of the nations, our own country, the Queen, Government and Parliament, local government, local activities like education, commerce and community life in Greenford)
- 3) major issues facing the world or the congregation at this time
- 4) the sick, often named, and matters of human wholeness and healing
- 5) the communion of saints, including prayers for those who have died.

There are aids for those preparing intercessions... so please ask Neil or the wardens.

Neil Richardson