



NewsLetter

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Pope Francis Opens Institution of Lectors and Acolytes to Women

Pope Francis issued the Apostolic Letter motu proprio Spiritus Domini on January 10, 2021, modifying the provisions of Canon 230 § 1 to allow women to be instituted in the ministries of lector and acolyte. An accompanying letter to Luis Cardinal Ladaria, SJ, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, provided a fuller explanation of the reasons for this change; that letter is available at www.Vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210110_lettera-donne-letturato-accollato.html. The text of the Pope's motu proprio is reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the perennial source of the Church's life and mission, distributes to the members of the People of God the gifts that enable each one, in a different way, to contribute to the edification of the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel. These charisms, called ministries because they are publicly recognized and instituted by the Church, are made available to the community and to her mission in a stable form.

In some cases this ministerial contribution has its origin in a specific sacrament, Holy Orders. Other tasks, throughout history, were instituted in the Church and entrusted through a non-sacramental liturgical rite to individual members of the faithful, by virtue of a particular form of exercise of the baptismal priesthood, and in aid of the specific ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

Following a venerable tradition, the reception of "lay ministries," which Saint Paul VI regulated in the Motu Proprio *Ministeria quaedam* (August 15, 1972), preceded in a preparatory manner the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, although such ministries were conferred on other suitable male faithful.

A number of Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops have highlighted the need to deepen the subject doctrinally, so that it may respond to the nature of the aforementioned charisms and the needs of the times, offering appropriate support to the role of evangelization that is incumbent upon the ecclesial community.

Accepting these recommendations, a doctrinal development has taken place in recent years which has highlighted how certain ministries instituted by the Church are based on the common condition of being baptized and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism; they are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders. A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has also confirmed, in fact, that these lay ministries, since they are based on the Sacrament of Baptism, may be entrusted to all suitable faithful, whether male or female, in accordance with what is already implicitly provided for by Canon 230 § 2.

Consequently, after having heard the opinion of the competent Dicastries, I have decided to modify Canon 230 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law. I therefore decree that Canon 230 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law shall in future have the following formulation:

“Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.”

I also order the amendment of the other provisions having the force of law which refer to this canon.

I order that the provisions of this Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and be promulgated by publication in *L’Osservatore Romano*, entering into force on the same day, and then published in the official commentary of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on the tenth day of January in the year 2021, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the eighth of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS

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Questions and Answers on the Instituted Ministries of Lector and Acolyte

What is an instituted lector or acolyte?

A lector proclaims the word of God (except the Gospel) at Mass and in other liturgies, and can also read the petitions of the Prayers of the Faithful. An acolyte assists the priest and deacon, especially at the altar. Before the Second Vatican Council, these liturgical functions were typically carried out by men in “minor orders” who were preparing for ordination to the priesthood. By the 1972 Motu Proprio *Ministeria quaedam*, Saint Paul VI abolished the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte, but the functions of lector and acolyte were retained and reclassified as “ministries,” now requiring “institution” by the bishop. Until the action taken by Pope Francis in January 2021, these instituted ministries were open solely to qualified lay men, whether or not they were preparing for Holy Orders. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* describes the current ministries of lector and acolyte and their role at Mass at nos. 98-99 and 187-198.

What are the current requirements in the United States for institution as a lector or acolyte?

The USCCB adopted a complementary norm to canon 230, § 1 in 2000 defining the requirements for the institution of men as lectors or acolytes, reflecting the limitation to men in the universal law at the time: a minimum age of 21, possession of the skills necessary to effectively proclaim the Word or serve at the altar, having been fully initiated into the Catholic Church, being free of any canonical penalty, and living a life befitting the ministry to be undertaken. (The full text is available at [USCCB.org/committees/canonical-affairs-church-governance/complementary-norms](https://www.usccb.org/committees/canonical-affairs-church-governance/complementary-norms).)

How are instituted ministers different from other readers at Mass and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion?

Canon 230, § 3 permits both men and women to fulfill the role of lector “by temporary designation.” Most of the readers at Mass in this country do so under this permission. From a liturgical standpoint there is little difference in the way instituted lectors and temporarily-deputed readers carry out their ministries. However, *Ministeria quaedam* suggests that the instituted lector could play a leadership role in the preparation of those who will be temporarily appointed to read Scripture in the Sacred Liturgy. Pope Francis also observed in his letter to Cardinal Ladaria that institution carries with it “stability, public recognition and a mandate on the part of the Bishop” which are meant to strengthen the Church’s work of evangelization.

There is a greater difference, however, between the liturgical roles of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and instituted acolytes. The former are limited to assisting in the distribution of the Eucharist at Mass and to the sick and homebound. Acolytes, on the other hand, have broader duties, especially in the absence of a deacon. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the acolyte can carry the cross in the entrance and recessional processions, hold the book for the priest at the chair, assist in the reception of the offertory gifts, and distribute Holy Communion. These functions are often carried out by other lay ministers who are deputed to do so. But acolytes are also uniquely authorized to assist the deacon and priest in the preparation of the altar and in the purification of the sacred vessels after Communion. *Ministeria quaedam* notes that in the absence of a priest or deacon an acolyte can expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration and later replace it in the tabernacle (but without giving the benediction) and also suggests that the acolyte could play a leadership role in the training of altar servers who assist at Mass.

How and when will the change to Canon Law be implemented in the United States?

This remains to be seen and will require some important steps to be taken. For one, the complementary norm to canon 230, § 1, approved by the USCCB in 2000, will need to be revised to reflect the change to the universal law. The Holy Father informed Cardinal Ladaria that it will fall to Conferences “to establish appropriate criteria for the discernment and preparation of men and women candidates for the ministries of Lector or Acolyte,” and this will need to be addressed as part of this revision. USCCB committees will study the matter and bring a proposal to the full body of bishops for their vote at the appropriate time.

Pope Francis also stated that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments will need to amend the liturgical rites for the institution of lectors and acolytes. Once the revised Latin edition is promulgated the USCCB will need to collaborate with the International Commission on English in the Liturgy to prepare and eventually approve an English edition of the rites.

Until these tasks are completed, the current situation with regard to the ministries of lector and acolyte in the dioceses of the United States remains unchanged. Future issues of the *Newsletter* will provide updates on these matters as they develop.



CDWDS Issues Note on the Ash Wednesday Distribution of Ashes

In light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its continuing impact on the liturgy, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a Note on January 12, 2021 regarding the blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday this year (Prot. n. 17/21). A modified procedure has been approved.

The priest blesses and sprinkles the ashes with holy water as usual. Then, he says only once to all present one of the formulas found in the *Roman Missal*. After washing his hands and putting on a mask, he distributes the ashes, either with the faithful coming to him as usual or with him going to each person standing at their place. Without saying anything, he sprinkles a little of the ashes on the top of the person’s head. (This method of distributing ashes is common in Europe and other places in the world but would preclude the use this year of the custom done in the United States, whereby the ashes are rubbed on the forehead in the shape of a cross.)

The Congregation’s Note in multiple languages may be found at: [CultoDivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/note/nota-mercoledi-delle-cenere.html](https://cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/note/nota-mercoledi-delle-cenere.html).

January 2021 Meeting of the Committee on Divine Worship

The Committee on Divine Worship met on January 11, 2021 via an online meeting platform. Following the presentation of reports by the Committee and Subcommittee Chairmen, the Secretariat of Divine Worship, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, and the *Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia*, the members and consultants held open discussions on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the liturgy (especially post-pandemic evangelization) and on the promotion of a better *ars celebrandi* among the clergy and the lay faithful. They also discussed the current progress of the *Liturgy of the Hours, Second Edition* and other pending liturgical texts.

Following the recent approval of the Administrative Committee to move the morning of prayer at each November plenary meeting from the final day to the first day, the Committee proposed a schedule for that morning of prayer to recommend to the General Secretary. Members supported the effort of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth to request a transfer of the annual national celebration of World Youth Day from the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time to the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, in alignment with the Holy See's recent transfer of the observance from Palm Sunday. The publication rights to three future liturgical books – *Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons*, the *Order of Penance*, and the *Bendicional* – were approved. The Committee considered requests to name a secondary patron saint for the United States and the inscription of Saint Teresa of Calcutta in the U.S. proper calendar; the latter proposal was recommended to the Administrative Committee for inclusion on the agenda of a future plenary meeting. Finally, preferring to emphasize the sacredness of the liturgy and the need to reduce “screen time” rather than add to it, the Committee rejected a publisher's proposal to sell liturgical texts in a format designed for projection in churches.

In May 2020, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments instructed English-speaking Conferences of Bishops to correct the translation of the conclusion of Collect prayers in the *Roman Missal*, which is a Christological rather than Trinitarian formula (i.e., “God” refers to Christ, whereas “one God” in the current translation is a reference to the Holy Trinity). After reviewing the decisions of other Conferences, the Committee approved a U.S. adaptation to no. 54 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* regarding Collect prayers and recommended it to the Executive Committee for canonical vote of the Latin Church Bishops of the USCCB as soon as possible. If approved by the bishops and confirmed by the Holy See, a new translation will be publicized and implemented in the United States.

The next meeting of the Committee is tentatively scheduled for June 15, 2021 in Denver, Colorado.

Rev. Dustin P. Dought Appointed as Secretariat Associate Director

Msgr. Jeffrey D. Burrill, USCCB General Secretary, has announced the appointment of Rev. Dustin P. Dought, a priest of the Diocese of Lafayette in Louisiana, as Associate Director of the Secretariat of Divine Worship, effective February 8, 2021. Fr. Dought succeeds Rev. Randy L. Stice, who served as Associate Director from July 2017 to June 2020, and will serve alongside Rev. Andrew Menke, Executive Director; Carmen Aguinaco, Multicultural Specialist; Matthew Godbey, Administrative Assistant; and David Ringwald, Staff Assistant.

Ordained to the priesthood in 2013, Fr. Dought's most recent assignment was as pastor of St. Leo the Great Church and chaplain of Teurlings Catholic High School, both in Lafayette, LA, as well as director of the diocesan office of worship and liturgy. He holds a licentiate in sacred theology and liturgical studies from The Catholic University of America.

The Secretariat welcomes Fr. Dought to the Conference and looks forward to working with him in continuing to build up the liturgical life of the Church in the United States.