

A short course for those who are ...

## READING IN WORSHIP

The reading of the Scriptures in church services is a vital part of the worship of the Christian community. We read the Bible in church so that God's word may be heard. The sacred scriptures are heard through the reader. It's important that the hearer receive the message clearly, accurately, and with the meaning easily understood.

To better understand what is involved and be better readers, let's ask some questions.

### 1. Why do we read?

This may sound a strange question, but a little history might explain why.

When the first English Prayer Book was published in 1549 the preface, *Concerning the Service of the Church*, said of the reading of the Bible:

... the ancient Fathers so ordered the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year; intending thereby that the Clergy should (by often reading and meditating in God's Word) be stirred up to godliness themselves; and further, that the people (by daily hearing of Holy Scriptures read in the Church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion.

What does this tell us about our reading?

### 2. What do we read?

Again the first English Prayer book has an answer:-

... nothing is ordained to be read but the very pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, or that which is agreeable to the same; and that in such a language and order as is most easy and plain for the understanding both of the readers and hearers ...

St Philip the Deacon asks an important question for any reader of the Bible. (See Acts 8.26ff for the story) "*Do you understand what you are reading?*"

To read meaningfully you must **prepare**. Your **proclamation** of God's Word will be coloured by your **perception** of what is meant. Preparation is discussed in section 5 of these notes, below.

That story in Act 8 has some excellent advice in this regard. What is it?

### 3. To whom do we read?

A mixed bag of people ranging through the **discerning** and **dedicated** to the **distracted** or **doubting**, and of course the **deaf** or **hearing impaired**. For the first two you need to show that you know what you are reading; for the next two you must be interesting and alive. For the deaf or hearing impaired, look up, speak up (for those lip reading!) and make sure that the microphone is in the right place to catch your voice. (St Philip's has a hearing loop to help people with hearing aids.)

What advice does St Paul give? (See 1 Corinthians 14.8-9). See also Psalm 95 (the *Venite*) for an enthusiastic approach! Also see Isaiah 12. 2-6 and 40.9-11.

### 4. When and where do we read?

Check the roster to know when it's your time to read. The roster is emailed or handed out on paper. It's also on the parish website. The next week's readers are also noted in each Sunday pew sheet.

If you know ahead that you will be away please inform Leighton Mann who organises the rosters (ph: 6161 7133 or by email — before Thursday for the pew sheet). If you are unable to read when rostered, please arrange with another reader to take your place, and inform the liturgical assistant of the day.

Most of our reading is within the service of Holy Communion, in the part of the service called the Ministry of the Word.

- The *first reading*, normally from the Old Testament, follows the collect, the prayer of the day. At St Philip's there is often a children's talk between the collect and the first reading.
- Next, a psalm is read or sung.
- Then we hear the *second reading*, usually from a part of the New Testament other than the gospels.
- Then we share in a hymn, and a minister reads the Gospel of the day.

Moving from your seat to the lectern is NOT a liturgical movement. It should be prompt, quiet and without fuss. If possible, move to the pulpit just before when the reading is due. For example, the first reader could move to the lectern (along the side aisle!) while the children are departing.

Do you know what would happen if you were reading in a Cathedral?

### **5. How do we read?**

It's not only important *what* we read, but *how* we read. The word of God is never lifeless. The enemies are dullness; lack of meaning, distorted meaning; and inaudibility.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU PREPARE YOUR READING WELL BEFOREHAND

#### *Get to know the text*

At St Philip's we use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Texts in this version are available through the 'Readings' page of the parish website or by searching [bible.oremus.org](http://bible.oremus.org).

Read the text thoughtfully. Think about the meaning, as this will influence the way the text is read.

- Understand the meaning—at least in its most simple and straightforward sense. Think about the context, the meaning of words and expressions, and the flow of the story or argument.
- Make sure you can pronounce the words and decide how the emphasis occurs in each sentence or phrase.
- Decide where to pause (and breathe) and where the words should run on without pause.
- Characterisation: do any of the words need, for example, a severe, pleading, kindly or neutral tone?

#### *Practice*

Having prepared the passage, practice reading it aloud at home, while *standing* and imagining the congregation to be in front of you. Perhaps someone could listen to you read.

#### *Introduction*

A *short* sentence of context may be helpful; if you're uncertain, check with the preacher or a minister.

Introduce the reading simply, e.g. "A reading from the second letter to Timothy." Don't say "Paul's letter to . . ." unless you are sure. The authorship of some New Testament letters is debated! The chapter and verse numbers are not needed.

### *Read unhurriedly*

Take your time when reading; allow the hearers time to receive the words before the next sentence rushes onto them.

Allow the meaning and the phrasing to indicate faster and slower speed. To do this, you must have read it through beforehand!

### *Be heard*

If you have a small voice, get close to the microphone (but not so close puffs of breath are heard). Adjust the height of the microphone to about 2cm below your mouth. If you are experienced in public speaking and have a strong voice, stand back a little.

By all means arrange to practice in church with the microphone, but not in the 10 minutes immediately before a service. Note, too, that there may be musical practice before a service.

Project your voice. Speak as though to address someone in a balcony above the back row—but without shouting!

Good posture helps to project your voice well. Stand straight with your feet and arms still.

Look at each phrase in turn and then lift your head and speak it. Don't talk to the page. If the page is too low to see well, lift it up; don't bend down.

### *Be natural*

Read in your own relaxed natural voice, not in an assumed one. Don't let your pitch get too high or too low. This will be easy if you don't rush or go too slowly.

### *Be neither proud, embarrassed nor timid*

Vainglory can tempt the good reader! New readers, especially young and beginning readers, should work to overcome embarrassment and excessive timidity while reading in church. The hearers will always receive a sincere effort with kindness.

### *If you stumble or make a mistake*

Even the best readers stumble over a word or get words muddled. Just repeat the word correctly or take a short breath and start the sentence again.

### *Ending*

Pause, and then end the reading with the words that are in the liturgy for the day. Please memorise them; typically they are:

For the word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

*or*

May your word live in us, **and bear much fruit to your glory.**

### *Enjoy reading*

If you gently enjoy the ministry of reading, the worshipers will share your enjoyment.

To do all this well, we need practice

## **6. Practice**

[The group should break in pairs, and each pair be given a brief passage to prepare for reading to the group as a whole.

Each pair should move to a space where they can read aloud without disturbing others. Help may be sought from the leaders for any difficulty encountered.

After each reading, the reader may comment on how they felt it went and be subject to constructive criticism from the group present.

This may all sound very daunting but is really no different to what happens when you read at a service. The only difference is that you rarely get to hear the criticisms!]

## **7. The Spirit**

“Liturgy is more than words. Words provide a framework to encourage *WORSHIP*, but the important thing is the spirit in which the words are used.” (From the Preface in *A Prayer Book for Australia*)

Or as the Right Reverend Gordon Arthur once wrote: “*A form of words is only a means to an act of worship.*”

May God bless you in this important ministry.

David French and Brian McKinlay

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