

# Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church

## Greenwich, Connecticut

*A word fitly spoken  
Is like apples of gold  
In pictures of silver*

*Proverbs 25:11*

### **EFFECTIVE LAY READING TECHNIQUES**

#### **Before the Service**

If you have never lay read before, get out a Bible and practice reading in front of a mirror. This is also a good way to practice some of the techniques listed below.

To get an idea of how your voice sounds to others, stand facing a corner, put both hands in front of your ears with your little fingers touching your sideburns and your hands held 90 degrees from the side of your head. Speak into the corner. Your voice will sound different from what you are used to hearing because part of the sound you normally hear is vibration that comes through your jawbone.

Arrive at church early enough so you can review the readings.

If you make a mistake or mispronounce a name, don't get rattled. If it changes the meaning of the text, correct it. If it doesn't, gloss over it and keep going. Probably no one will notice it anyway.

#### **Your Personal Ritual**

Establish your own personal ritual to use before you start to read. Walk confidently to the place where you will do the readings. Pause, take a deep breath, and slowly exhale, knowing you are in control. Look around at the congregation.

The purpose of this is to help you get centered. If you are uncomfortable making direct eye contact with the congregation, a useful technique is to look around, but gaze directly above their heads.

#### **Posture**

Stand with your body slightly away from the lectern so your voice isn't directed downward, but rather toward the Congregation. There is a microphone mounted on the lectern that will pick up your voice if it is not covered. This is automatically activated when you step up to the lectern and turns itself off 10 seconds after you leave.

#### **Preparation**

When approaching how you will read the text aloud, try to establish the habit of reading meanings rather than words. There is no magic formula, but using these techniques will help you improve your skills.

1. **Become familiar with the reading.** Get the feel of the content and style of the selection.
2. **Think about its meaning.** What is being said on the surface? Are there any underlying messages? What are the feelings about his message? What feelings should be communicated to his congregation? What parts should the congregation remember?
3. **Study the words.** Check the dictionary or a concordance for the exact meaning and pronunciation of any unfamiliar names and words.
4. **Mark your copy** of the text as an aid to expression where pauses and stress might be used.
  - a. Underline each word or phrase to be stressed.
  - b. Underline twice parts that have greater stress.
  - c. Pauses can be indicated by a slash (/).

## Reading the Text Aloud

There are six tools you can use to make your reading more interesting and varied: volume, speed, tone, emphasis, eye contact and enthusiasm. When you read, try to read as if you are normally talking to someone and telling a story. Use a "talking" voice rather than a "reading" voice. Relax and let the words flow like a verbal ballet.

Make some parts a narrative, some parts intense, and accent some parts with a dramatic silence.

### 1. Volume

Your voice should be loud enough to carry to the back of the room. A good technique is to pick out a person in the back of the room and pretend you are reading to them. You can start loud, but later tone your volume down. As you are reading, put a little more emphasis on verbs and words that show action.

### 2. Speed

A common mistake is to read too fast because of nervousness. Read at a moderate speed, fast enough to move along, but slow enough so the congregation can understand you. A good technique is to sometimes slow down just a bit to emphasize a particular part of a sentence, especially an ending. Paul Harvey uses this technique well in his radio broadcasts. You can also slow down if you want to enunciate a word so the audience will understand what you are saying.

If you are reading a narrative with a quotation, or another person starts to speak, pause for a moment, change the pitch of your voice and your tone before reading the quotation. Pause at the end of the quotation to let the congregation know the quotation is finished. Then return to your normal narrative pitch and tone.

### 3. Tone

Tone gives your voice melody, and can be like the spice in a good dinner. Tone is a combination of pitch, quality, and strength. You want just enough to make the taste interesting, but not overly strong. Vary your pitch enough so that you don't read in a monotone. You can also change pitch and volume slightly when two people are talking during the narrative so the audience can distinguish between the two.

### 4. Emphasis

For more effective reading emphasize verbs and nouns. De-emphasize articles, especially "a" and "the". You can use emphasis by inflection, by force, by change in voice quality, by means of pitch, and by means of pause.

## **5. Eye Contact**

Use your finger to mark your place in the text as you read. Periodically, as you are approaching the end of a statement, read far enough ahead so that while you are finishing orating the sentence, you can look up and make eye contact with the congregation. Once you have perfected this technique, while reading, you can occasionally direct your gaze to the left, right and center congregation, and make direct eye contact with them or look just above their heads. You can also read ahead if you are coming to the bottom of a page and the reading continues on the other side.

## **6. Enthusiasm**

Have enthusiasm for what you are reading! Get excited about the message you are reading or the story you are telling. Enjoy the process of reading it. This enthusiasm and enjoyment will reflect in your voice and pass on to the congregation.

Practicing these techniques and incorporating them into your reading will help you become a more effective reader. To summarize, follow the rules of good public speaking:

- Adequate volume
- Vocal flexibility
- Some eye contact
- Enthusiasm

Greatest fear held by most people, is to get up and speak in front of a group of people. Winston Churchill stuttered and had a speech impediment. He overcame this and became one of the greatest orators of his time.

You have the same opportunity to overcome any discomfort you might have and share your gifts with others. We hope this gives you some anchors that will help you in this process. Welcome to Lay Reading and may God be with you as you grow in His grace in this ministry.

*Compiled from various Internet sources (10/1/2009)*