

A Guide to Readers and Subdeacons

There are many ways of serving in the Church, some of which include some type of blessing or ordination. Minor orders, taper-bearers, readers and subdeacons, are conferred through the form of blessing known as *cheirothesia*. This type always takes place both outside of the Divine Liturgy and outside of the Holy Place. Ordination to major orders, that is deacon, priest (or presbyter) and bishop, takes place specifically during the Divine Liturgy, within the Holy Place and specifically at the altar table. This type of ordination is known as *cheirotomia*. Both *cheirotomia* and *cheirothesia* mean “the laying on (or imposition) of hands,” but have very different implications.

Readers and subdeacons are blessed for specific parishes. When a reader or subdeacon is outside of his parish (such as on vacation or at a diocesan conference or gathering) he must receive permission of the bishop or proestamemos prior to serving. In case of a reader or subdeacon moving from one city and/or church to another, again, he must receive permission of the proestamemos prior to serving. There is no canonical transfer of readers or subdeacons as with deacons and priests.

Titles:

Whereas bishops, priests and deacons are addressed by specific titles (Your Grace or Sayyidna; Father or Abouna; Father Deacon/Deacon or Abouna Shammass/Shammass), subdeacons and readers go by their “regular” name within the parish and diocese. They are given communion as “the Subdeacon N.” or “the Reader N.,” but do not use that at other times.

Cassocks:

A cassock is worn by a subdeacon or reader when he is serving in the church temple. If for some reason a subdeacon is not serving in the altar, he does not wear a cassock or his vestments unless specifically blessed by the bishop to do so. If for some reason a reader is not serving at the chanter’s stand (or in the altar), he does not wear his cassock unless specifically blessed by the bishop to do so. A reader or subdeacon does not wear the cassock to coffee hour or at other church functions unless specifically blessed by the bishop to do so. Only the clergy, that is those in major orders (bishop, priest, deacon), may wear a cassock outside of the Church temple without a special blessing from the bishop.

At diocesan conferences, a subdeacon or reader only wears a cassock when serving in their specific role. Neither would wear a cassock while sitting with the congregation for a liturgical service. If serving at a conference, the cassock would be brought folded to the chapel and blessed by a priest or the bishop prior to donning (see below). The cassock is removed immediately after the service and not worn through the hallways of the hotel.

The cassock (and sticharion and orarion for a subdeacon) is to be blessed by the priest (or bishop) prior to putting it on. This is the blessing to serve either as subdeacon or reader.

Ministry of Reader:

A reader is one who serves as a psalti (chanter) and/or one who reads the Epistle and other scripture readings at the services. Thus, a reader must be familiar with the liturgical texts, able to read aloud well and to enunciate the words clearly for the congregation to hear and understand. A reader does not read in a dramatic or interpretive style. Readings in the Church are typically done in a simple and unadorned fashion. Psalms and Old Testament readings are read and not intoned in Antiochian/Greek practice.

Ministry of Subdeacon:

The Subdeacon is a server in the altar. When the bishop is at the parish, he is typically assigned to carry the Dikeri and Trikeri, the pitcher and bowl, and/or the bishop's staff. When a bishop is not present, he may serve as an altar server.

Subdeacons and Ektenias:

A practice unique to the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America has been for subdeacons to recite the Great and two Small Ektenias at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy only. This is not normative Orthodox practice and a blessing must be given by the hierarch for permission for these to be done. There is no general blessing for subdeacons to recite these litanies. Within the Diocese of Wichita it is not blessed for subdeacons to recite ektenias.