

THE SACREDNESS FOUND IN SERVING: LAY EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS/LAY READERS/LECTORS

By: Jackie McFadden

For *all* in-person weekday *and* Sunday worship services at St. Stephen's, there is a network of volunteers that are front and center. These are our Lay Eucharistic Ministers, Lay Readers, and Lectors. Although each of these 27 individuals have had their distinct paths leading them to join the ministry, they share one thing in common—they found the sacredness in serving.

The Lay Eucharistic Ministers/Lay Readers/Lectors is arguably the most layered ministry, meaning that choices abound. One can choose to be a Lay Eucharistic Minister (LEM), which means one would be licensed by the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas (DWTX) to serve the chalice of wine at Holy Eucharist. One could choose to be a Lay Reader, also referred to as a Worship Leader, which means one would be licensed by DWTX to lead a weekday or weeknight public worship. And, if one prefers to read only, not serving the chalice of wine, one would choose to be a Lector, who is licensed by the rector at St. Stephen's to read the *Lessons* and *Prayers of the People*. And, of course, there are combination choices—like going through the training and licensing to become both a Lector and a Lay Reader. If you have already served as a LEM/Lay Reader/Lector at another church, one would only need a refresher training.

Overseeing this ministry and who has accrued many hours wearing her vestments, is Charlotte Carter, Dean of Lay Ministers. After serving at St. Stephen's for 17 years and counting, she is as awed as ever, "I am eternally grateful that I have had the opportunity to serve in this Ministry. It has been a joy and a blessing to look on the faces of my brothers and sisters in Christ as they receive Eucharist."

To someone first considering joining this ministry with its front and center responsibilities, it might at first produce some hesitancy. Charlotte and the three teams of LEMs/Lay Readers/Lectors assure us that despite the initial hesitations that they may have had when they first pondered the next step of serving, they all wholeheartedly agree that the support, mentorship, training, and personal rewards of growth are there.

"Although I still was hesitant serving Chalice, I quickly gained the confidence because I was assigned a Mentor that worked beside me as I started serving Chalice on Sundays and leading weekday services with and without Eucharist" fondly recalls Charlotte of her beginning experiences.

For former trial lawyer Frank Walker, although he readily admits that his hesitations have never really been completely allayed, he also finds through his ministry experience that "there is always more to learn. I led Morning Prayer for many years and tried to be perfect, with no mistakes. I never succeeded, which helped keep it fresh."

“The only hesitation I had when considering this ministry was that I would make a mistake or mispronounce a word or do the wrong reading!” Veronica Erwin admits. “As soon as I start reading, though, I find that my fears are alleviated. It feels very natural.” She offers this advice for those that might have the same hesitancy. “We are all human, and it is OK to make mistakes.”

Carla Daws who serves as LEM/Lay Reader/Lector offers some practical advice, “I thought it might be difficult to remember all the movements. Then I realized whatever you do, do it with authority! Oh, and watch out for those big sleeves. If they catch on the altar, you can spill the wine (which I almost did once).”

For those also concerned about mishaps, consider the humor within the experience. Even having been a cradle Episcopalian and well versed in scripture and ritual, Carroll Dolezal, who is a LEM, Lay Reader, Lector, and a LEV, which is someone authorized to take communion to nursing home residents and people confined at home, has had her share of qualms too. “What if I spilled the wine, or broke a vessel, or read the wrong scripture??? Well, I have done ALL of that over these many years; but God is forgiving of those trivial mistakes.”

Even for those that had no hesitancies, they are quick to declare, “I have no regrets,” Phil Muth. “Come join us! You will never know what you are missing until you do!”

Serving in this ministry has provided each member many times with unexpected surprises and/or spiritual growth.

“Leading the Healing Service, increased my compassion, and my ability to connect with others, especially in difficult times,” shares the Ministry Division Leader, Frank Walker.

Connie Maverick has been serving as a LEM and Lector for as long as she has lived in Wimberley, more than 20 years, and has gained insight through her experience. “Serving as a LEM has been truly meaningful. As I serve the wine to people, I have had an awareness of each person and that we are all equal in God’s sight.”

Although she was initially responding to the immediate need of the congregation for volunteers at the time, Judy Holmes, has found her 20+ years of participation continues to deepen her worship. “The ministry always gave me much more than I gave of myself.”

For Peggy Schiflett, she has been attached all her life to the symbolism and personal spiritual enrichment of the Eucharist, “and these ministries seemed perfect for my participation...I love reading scripture aloud to help other folks and myself to understand and be inspired by its messages.”

For couple Bob and Linda Reed, they discover the gift found within and feel “humbled by the great privilege of serving the Eucharist to people at one of their most private and special moments of worship.”

Being in this type of ministry started when Lexi Jones was a young teenager in Brownsville, Texas. “My dad has been a Lay Reader for as long as I can remember. When I was a young teenager, he enlisted me to be his reading partner in a bilingual Mass. He read in English so you can guess what that meant for MY job—yep, you guessed it, to read in Spanish.” It was this early experience in a church with 100s of attendees that Lexi credits for her ease of public speaking. In turn, she has had the pleasure of watching and hearing her own son read the *Prayers of the People* at St. Stephen’s during a Family Celebration Sunday Service. “He did great!”

Our senior warden, Nancy Cooke-Jenkins, offers this parting thought, “In reading and serving, you go from observation to participation.”

The next training for LEMs/Lay Readers/Lectors will be held soon after we have our new rector. In the meantime, if you would like to serve as a guest Lector for the Holy Eucharist Sunday services which are currently being streamed through YouTube and Facebook, make that leap and contact Charlotte Carter, charlotteanncarter@gmail.com, who can answer many of your immediate questions and allay any concerns.