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 *cheirotonia*. Both *cheirotonia* 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 metropolis conference or gathering) he must receive permission of the bishop or *proistamenos* 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 *proistamenos* 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 Eminence for the Metropolitan; Father for the Priest; Father Deacon or just Deacon), 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. If for some reason a reader is not serving at the chanter’s stand (or in the altar), he does not wear his cassock. A reader or subdeacon does not wear the cassock to coffee hour or at other church functions except when the Metropolitan (or other hierarch) is visiting. 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 Metropolitan.

At Metropolis meetings or events, 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 the Metropolitan or a priest prior to donning (see below). The cassock is removed immediately after the service and not worn outside of the service (through the hallways of the hotel, in the meeting rooms, in the community center, etc.).
The cassock (and sticharion and orarion for a subdeacon) is to be blessed by the priest (or hierarch, if present) 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 Greek practice.

**Ministry of Subdeacon:** The Subdeacon is a server in the altar. When the Metropolitan is at the parish, the subdeacon is typically assigned to carry the Dikeri and Trikeri, the pitcher and bowl, and/or the hierarch’s staff. When a hierarch is not present, he may serve as an altar server. If the proistamenos wishes, the subdeacon may also assist with the upkeep of the sanctuary (cleaning liturgical items, changing altar covers, etc.) – but only with the explicit blessing of the proistamenos and following his direction. The subdeacon is not to minister in any way to the Holy Gifts (he does not move the artoforion of the Altar Table, nor does he consume the gifts).

**Subdeacons and Ektenias:** Some jurisdictions in North America have allowed subdeacons to recite the Great and two Small Ektenias at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy only. **This is not normative Orthodox practice.** There is no general blessing for subdeacons to recite these litanies. **Within the Metropolis of Pittsburgh it is not blessed for subdeacons to recite ektenias, even if they are visiting subdeacons and have the blessing to recite those ektenias in their home parish.**