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Biblical and Liturgical Formation in Teams of the Liturgical Altar Service

What shall I do at the next meeting? What shall I do with the acolytes? Such questions are frequently asked by priests, organisers and leaders of acolytes groups to themselves. Leading a meeting as well as encouraging intense participation in it is more and more difficult nowadays because acolytes, if they come, have higher expectations and they bring fewer and fewer suggestions on their own. In this context it is possible to formulate a hypothesis that there is no priest who would not have contact with liturgical service in his priesthood. It seems that reality most frequently resembles the words one of priests said: ‘Since the beginning of my priesthood, in each parish I have worked for, I have been tasked with leading groups of acolytes and lectors’¹. Whereas, in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* Constitution in No. 19 it can be read: ‘With zeal and patience pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation, both internal and external, taking into account their age, condition, way of life and standard of religious culture. By so doing pastors will be fulfilling one of the chief duties of a faithful dispenser of the mysteries of god, and in this matter they must lead their flock not only by word but also by example’ (SC No. 19). Such a special group of the faithful in each parish is a team of acolytes who, as the first ones, actively get engaged into liturgy. Therefore, the acolytes² exactly are the group the above mentioned council recommendations can concern. The liturgical service after the Second Vatican Council obtained a complex elaboration of formation program. It is an effect of works of the State Ministry of Liturgical Service with a particular role of Revd Franciszek Blachnicki. A certain model of liturgical service pastoral

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¹ G. W. Zagrodzki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów*, „Homo Dei” 2(2010), p. 128.

² Cf. G. Duszyński, P. Malak, *Radość ze służby. Zbiórki z ministrantami*, Poznań 2008, p. 5.

work was shaped and accepted as well as a certain style of work with acolytes and lectors which, generally, has been still realised in Polish dioceses. The program is original and can be distinguished from the universal Church due to the fact that it comprises all the school periods of children and teenagers (today: primary school, junior and senior high schools), and is the base of the liturgical service formation³. So, how should formation in the liturgical service look like? What should it be like? Should not it be biblical and liturgical character? In the article below, we try to answer this question. Let's then reach to the Tradition and instruction of the universal and particular Church and liturgical regulations in order to show a proper model of liturgical teams formation. The aim of the article is also presenting particular advice, hints, ideas and methods as tools for working in liturgical service formation. Finally, we will try to indicate correlation between formation in liturgical service teams and the issue of priestly vocations.

1. Formation – yes, but what?

What is then the character the formation of liturgical services should have in particular parishes? One more time the mentioned Constitution sheds light on the issue as it reads that the ones who exercise a genuine liturgical function, 'must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, each in his own measure, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner' (SC 29). When we add an excerpt of John Paul II's Epistles *Vicesimus quintus annus*: 'The most urgent task is that of the biblical and liturgical formation of the people of God, both pastors and faithful (...). This is a long-term programme, which must begin in the seminaries and houses of formation and continue throughout their priestly life. A formation suited to their state is indispensable also for lay people, especially since in many regions they are called upon to assume even more important responsibilities in the community' (VQA 15), we can receive an answer to the question on the character of the liturgical service. It should be a biblical and liturgical formation.

This type of formation can be mentioned in case of the formation program of the State Ministry of Liturgical Service (KDSL). An important feature of the program is also the fact that the training concerning the substance is connected with God's pedagogy (cf. DOK 38), namely, Christian education that is rooted in the Bible⁴. Since the beginnings of the existence of Catholic pedagogy, one of the areas applied as a method of Catholic education has been Liturgy⁵. The need for liturgical education was raised already before the Vatican Council II, especially by pioneers of the liturgical movement revival (R. Guardini,

³ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Od kandydata przez stopnie ministranta funkcję lektora i ceremoniarza do animatora*, Tarnów 2009, p. 5.

⁴ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów i lektorów w Kościele w Polsce*, Tarnów 2010, p. 265-266.

⁵ Cf. A. L. Szafranski, *Liturgia i jej znaczenie wychowawcze*, Lublin 1958, p. 6.

E. J. Lengeling). In the process of Christian education – formation, apart from natural factors, also the supernatural elements, tightly connected with the Church liturgy, are significant. That is why we speak about ‘liturgical’ education that is done in liturgy and through liturgy (liturgical celebration is the place and time of the education) or to liturgy (to conscious, active, fruitful, complete, common participation in it)⁶. The State Ministry of Liturgical Service focused on important forms of didactical and educational work of acolytes and lectors. However, the education goes further so besides practical skills of altar service, a proper conduct beyond liturgy is essential. Therefore, education of altar service members assumes a deeper Christian formation and acolytes and lectors should be distinguished by biblical and liturgical spirituality⁷.

2. Liturgical formation

In theology the term ‘first rule’ is used for a fundamental truth from which it is possible to deduce and which can be the base of all statements of the given theology field or whole theology. Therefore, a question arises whether all the regulations concerning acolytes’ chaplaincy can be derived from one main rule and one source? Such a question can be answered positively and a thesis can be formulated that the first rule for the acolytes’ chaplaincy is liturgy. That is why everything which concerns existence, aims of the acolytes institution, its activity forms and fulfilled functions, education and trainings can and should be based on the essence of liturgy. Firstly, the existence of the acolytes institution should be derived from liturgy. The teams of altar liturgical service exist because the Church exists and its basic life function is conducting liturgy that requires and demands existence of the acolytes’ institution⁸. Revd Franciszek Blachnicki believes even that ‘it would be exaggeration to claim that acolytes’ service is a part of the liturgical acts essence and because of that the acolytes’ institution is established by God. Nevertheless, the Church formed a certain structure for its liturgy and one of the basic rights it is determined by is hierarchical division of roles and functions in the liturgical assembly, and among the roles, acolytes have maintained a very important position in a ceaseless tradition reaching the first centuries. Therefore, the institution of acolytes belongs to the significant acts of liturgy in actu secundo, namely, in its basic forms determined by the Church’⁹.

The statement that the institution of acolytes origins from liturgy is accompanied by another one that liturgy determines the aim of the institution and of the acolytes’ chaplaincy. It is essential to work it out as frequently it is be-

⁶ Cf. B. Margański, *Wychowanie liturgiczne we wspólnocie kościoła. Wychowanie w liturgii i przez liturgię*, „Seminare” 19(2003), p. 31.

⁷ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów...*, op. cit., p. 269.

⁸ Cf. F. Blachnicki, *Pedagogia ministrancka*, in: *Pisma katechetyczne ks. Franciszka Blachnickiego*, ed. M. Marczewski, Warszawa 2011, p. 66-67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

lieved that the fact that at a parish there can be and there must be acolytes is used as an opportunity to gain other pastoral objectives. There are voices that a substitute of a catholic organization for children is created, like catholic scouting or something like that and the liturgy is just a chance to do so. Not denying the value of such work, it is necessary to indicate that it is not an acolytes' chaplaincy in a direct meaning because it does not realize a tightly liturgical aim that results from the essence of the acolytes' institution. Accepting liturgy as the first rule of acolytes' chaplaincy leads to some consequences and subsequently means that liturgy must define the functions performed by acolytes within the God's service as a whole, both referring to the type of the functions and the method of their realisation¹⁰. Revd Franciszek Blachnicki claimed that 'in Poland it is still far way to approve the, one can think, clear rule that an acolyte does not conduct at the altar a service but the liturgical service, predicted, described and precisely defined by the liturgical regulations of the Church'¹¹. As understood by the founder of the Light-Life Movement, acceptance and consequent realisation of the rule would solve the problem of standardization of the acolytes' service style. Meanwhile, also today, despite 32 years since Revd Blachnicki passed away, his words are still topical: 'the way of service in Poland is highly differentiated, almost each parish – or at least each area – has its own acolytes liturgy. Such a liturgy has got nothing in common with the real liturgy. Many acolytes are brought to the altar, they stand or knee around, sometimes forming different geometrical shapes. They wear colourful capes, ribbons and other decorations, and in fact, they do not realise any liturgical function. Instead, they create a crowd at the altar and thus make the event more ceremonial or they just make a solemn mood in a church. It should be emphasised that this individual acolytes liturgy is often freely and carelessly shaped. Nobody really cares about liturgical regulations and it results in infantile and irresponsible impression. On the other hand, it is necessary to admit that nobody finds it offensive as the individual acolytes liturgy is the same as our typical Polish parish liturgy: native, folk, traditional, emotional, sentimental and infantile; generally speaking slightly liturgical'¹². And here occurs a fundamental problem: Will the acolytes liturgy and subsequently acolytes' chaplaincy be formed at grass roots level or top-down though liturgy in its pure form determined by the Church? A solution to the issue seems to be the liturgical formation of the altar liturgical service teams based on the rule education to liturgy and through liturgy. Liturgical formation cannot be understood as a kind of drill for acolytes that relies on teaching them proper formulas and movements and monitoring if they have clean hands, behave quietly in the sacristy, do not laugh and look around at the altar. Education of the acolytes for proper experiencing and participation in liturgy is a large and difficult task.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

A team of the altar liturgical service features favourable external conditions if taking into account education through liturgy. The fact cannot be understood as just preparation for skilful and pious execution of given functions by acolytes in a liturgical assembly. The most important is to make the acolytes and lectors who serve at the altar gradually learn to get to know the theology of the Eucharistic assembly to be able to recognize mystery of the Church and participate actively in the assembly, building the Church in themselves and in others¹³.

In the acolytes' liturgical formation their complete participation in the Holy Mass should be stressed. The situation in which acolytes' liturgical service as an obstacle to such participation in the Holy Mass must not occur. Instead, it should be experienced as the highest form. Therefore, systematic work should be undertaken to form internal conducts in boys that are important for active participation in the Eucharistic assembly. It is essential to maintain a conduct respecting the word of God as a valid norm of conduct in life, opening to listen to the word of God through faith, conducts of gratitude and thankfulness, uniting with neighbours, meeting their expectations and offering gifts for their material needs: ability to enter the conduct of Christ towards the Father and co-sacrifice himself in Him to the Father, conduct of making peace through forgiveness, etc¹⁴. The conducts should be shaped within liturgy itself by its proper preparation and supervising participation in it (comments, homilies) and in a direct preparation for participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The aims of the acolytes service should also include service to the priest at celebrating holy rites. The service in connection with outfits and proper ceremonies is to honour the God's service, to express its nobility and significance. Shall we then try to determine the aim of liturgical formation within the purely technical aspect of undertaking services with the words: properly, beautifully, inspirationally. In order to reach such a level, liturgical rehearsals should be organized frequently, especially with younger boys whose good habits should be exercised. That underlines importance of one of the formation meetings elements – liturgical exercises. It is worth involving maximal effort and inventiveness as the liturgical formation (liturgical education) greatly influences training mind and will in boys but mainly if connected with consciousness of the tutor. Proper execution of liturgical actions mostly means to know them¹⁵ and to be willing to perform them properly. Therefore, it is necessary to teach acolytes all the duties precisely, according to the regulations and mobilize them so highly that

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴ Cf. F. Blachnicki, *Odnova liturgii a duszpasterstwo ministrantów*, CT 37(1967), vol. 2, p. 178; cf. F. Blachnicki *Program formacji męskiej służby liturgicznej w Polsce*, CT 33(1974), vol. 4, p. 77-83; cf. F. Blachnicki, *Formacja służby liturgicznej jako jedna z form młodzieżowego deuteroka-techumenatu w parafii*, CT 46(1976), vol. 4, p. 87-93.

¹⁵ Therefore, the knowledge of regulations contained in OWMR and other documents of Church is essential.

their ambition and joy would be to serve the way they were taught. Aesthetic and correctness of conducts, gestures, and proper diction are obvious requirements at performing so noble actions. Beautifully conducted liturgical service during e.g. Holy Mass positively affects the faithful and the acolytes themselves and becomes a kind of proselytization means. However, such correctness and aesthetic (beauty) of liturgical activities should be practised in boys by systematic exercises during meetings, and also through conferences (on liturgical issues), gentle corrections if necessary, monitoring and praise¹⁶.

In order to make the acolyte service really build the faithful, it should, apart from beauty and correctness, keep inside the most important factor – internal excitement with significance and meaning of the realised action. Now, some internal experience is assumed, sense of God's greatness and high respect for His Majesty, belief that all our life must be God's service if we do not want to miss our goals. Each detail of the fulfilled services should be carefully elaborated, explained, combined with the whole so that each acolyte could see their aim and meaning. In younger boys we should pay attention at differences between exercises and real God's service. During preparations of younger acolytes, the candidates can ask older, excellent and experienced acolytes or lectors for help, providing a tutoring priest frequently supervises their teaching, exercises and controls the results (need for potential corrections)¹⁷.

Pastoral work seems to be facing huge amounts of work in the field of liturgical formation. Pastoral work itself will overlap and cannot be separated from general work on realisation of liturgical revival at the parish¹⁸.

3. Biblical formation of acolytes and lectors

The conception of biblical formation of acolytes and lectors is rooted in acolytes pedagogy, therefore hints concerning education and formation of acolytes should be, in a proper way, applied also to lectors. The term 'lector' that will be used hereafter means an Acolyte of the Word of God, not just a lector that is appointed for the service. Colloquially speaking, a lector is a faithful person who reads texts from the Holy Bible during liturgy, except of the Gospel (cf. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 99)¹⁹. Biblical formation of acolytes should be run parallel to liturgical formation. The demand concerns both acolytes and lectors, taking into account appropriate level of their formation. The reason is to let each member of the liturgical service get to know basic issues connected with the Bible to the best of their ability. This requirement is tightly connected with inspiration and spirit of the Vatican Council II where the Council Fathers expressed their wish to make the whole

¹⁶ J. Szczypa, *Króluj nam Chryste. Materiały pomocnicze w pracy z ministrantami*, part II, Sandomierz, n.d., p. 30-31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

¹⁸ Cf. F. Blachnicki, *Pedagogia...*, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁹ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów...*, op. cit., p. 285.

teaching of the Church and the Christian religion itself follow the Holy Bible (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation 21)²⁰. Our attention should be also drawn at an outline of a conception of acolytes' education which was presented already in 1968 by the State Ministry of Liturgical Service, especially points 5-7 which say²¹:

5. Formation of lectors contains four elements: ascetic (religious-moral), biblical, liturgical and diction formations;

6. The four-direction formation should be taken into consideration within weekly meeting of lectors. Deepening, strengthening and supplementing of the formation should be retreat meetings (holiday);

7. Formation of lectors takes place during weekly meeting in a form of 'evangelical revision of life' that is aimed at leading to a more perfect unity between the read and realised in life Word of God. The second element of the formation linked with the same weekly meeting is preparation of the ministry of the word through aspiring to understand what will be read (next Sunday) and proper diction preparation of the text'.

Moreover, the necessity of biblical and liturgical formation of a lector is clearly indicated in *Pastoral and theological introduction to the mass lectionary*, in which we read: 'it is essential for lectors realizing their service, even if they are not appointed with a special ceremony, to be properly and thoroughly prepared to arouse intense and warm love for the Holy Bible in the faithful who listen to the word of God. The preparation should be mainly spiritual, but some technical preparation is also needed. Spiritual preparation assumes formation in, at least, two fields: biblical and liturgical. Biblical formation tends to get lectors understand readings in their own context and be able to understand the essence of the revelation address in the light of faith. Liturgical formation should provide lectors with some knowledge on the structure sense of the liturgy of word and relations between it and the Eucharistic Liturgy. Technical preparation is to train lectors in public reading aloud with and without sound devices' (WLM 55). The indications can achieve their goal if the priest responsible for the formation as well as his assisting organizers make senior acolytes, candidates for lectors and lectors bring the Holy Bible for weekly meetings. It should add to improve the biblical formation which follows theological teaching and pastoral and liturgical requirements. It must be emphasised that the candidates for lectors should draw from the treasury of the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible texts are to permeate the whole formation process, and particularly the period of attending the lector course. It is important that the reading could pass on liturgical text to the faithful designated for a particular day because *the Word of God is to enlighten the mind*,

²⁰ Cf. E. Mitek, *Lektor. Przygotowanie ministrantów do czytania Słowa Bożego*, Wrocław 2009, p. 99.

²¹ Cf. F. Blachnicki, *Zarys koncepcji wychowania lektorów*, AGRŚ-Ż (Z. KDSL), No. 2000/6/1, p. 33-36; F. Blachnicki, *Formacja służby liturgicznej*, p. 197-201.

*strengthen the will and light the heart for God's love (KO 23)*²². Biblical formation of liturgical service teams takes place mainly within weekly meetings in groups. The lector who reads the Holy Bible to the people of God must be prepared for his role not only technically to sound correctly but mainly through proper biblical formation²³. It can be achieved by lector courses, organised in deaneries which contain the following topics from the range of biblical formation: to familiarize with the Holy Bible and the history of salvation (general knowledge on the Old and New Testaments), to present of methods for work with the Holy Bible, and the significance of the Holy Bible in the life of Church, to indicate importance of the ministry of reading the Word of God, to instil a passion for personal reading of the Holy Bible²⁴. Information introducing into the teaching of the Church, presenting what it is, how it was created, and how it should be interpreted, presenting the most important events and characters from the salvation history are essential elements of preparation for fruitful service of a lector in a community.

Describing the issue of biblical formation, we should focus our attention on the need for skilful listening to the Word of God that requires from the listeners (mainly the lector) applying the word in an unrepeatable and unique situation of their life to enlighten it and to give it a sense. Whereas, significance of the listening to the Word of God results from the fact that its fruit is faith without which man cannot be saved (cf. Rom 10, 17). Acceptance of the heard Word of God with ears but also heart and placing It in the centre of one's life, shapes the consciousness of the Christ's disciple, totally changes thinking, valuing and acting of a man – he accepts thinking categories from Christ. A lector as the one who belongs to the group of people God uses to pass on His Revelation, being a special tool of God speaking today to man, should remember that he is the first listener of the Word of God, proclaiming it during liturgy must relate it firstly to himself as a call requiring an exact answer. An important requirement that a lector should face today, is his proper relation to the Holy Bible and care for deeper knowledge and understanding of the real biblical treasury. A lector should be a person who lives the Word of God, reads It and ponders over It, draws topics from It for meditation and prayer²⁵. Performing his ministry an acolyte of the Word of God is to remember that the faithful want to know what God teaches during celebration of the Holy Mass in which they take part. It is also important for the reader himself to use the read texts and apply them for his biblical formation. Each participant wants to hear what God teaches. That is why reading should involve engagement and thorough preparation. It is not surprising that the lector course comprises proper biblical formation and takes into account the theological content of the Holy Bible. Our actions should aim towards making the Holy Bible

²² Cf. E. Mitek, *Lektor...*, op. cit., p. 99.

²³ Cf. T. Jelonek, *Formacja biblijna lektora*, Kraków 2007, p. 5.

²⁴ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów...*, op. cit., p. 289-290.

²⁵ E. Stencel, *Lektor i jego liturgiczna posługa*, Pelplin 2010, p. 38-39.

a frequent and constant source of internal life for members of the altar liturgical service²⁶.

4. A few remarks, conclusions and ideas...

Discussing biblical and liturgical formation without presenting exact methods and means to realise it would be really unfair. Therefore, I would like to share a few remarks, conclusions and ideas.

1. Formation meetings – are a very important element of formation because during them apart from teaching issues connected with liturgy, Church issues they mainly educate, and it is much more important, educate a young man to personal and Christian maturity²⁷. The meetings should take place every week with a division into formation groups. The division suggested by the State Ministry of Liturgical Service seems to be worth recommending. It includes the following ranks: Candidate, Choralist, Acolyte of Light, Acolyte of Altar, Acolyte of the Book, Acolyte of the Word of God (Lector), Celebrant, Organiser. Basing the work with liturgical service on the system of ranks is a sensible, wise and efficient method of introducing into functions and ministries in the Church. It is of a great importance in the didactical and educational work²⁸. The meetings must be well prepared and led in an interesting way. It is crucial to have an own, friendly furnished room and setting and following constant timetable weekly (days cannot be changed as it confuses acolytes and their parents). The priest is not able to run all formation meetings with each group so the best solution is to obtain support from well-trained organisers.

2. Formation materials – currently there many positions in the market that can be used as formation materials. The recommendable are the ones published by the Ministry of Liturgical Service in Cracow. Only their coursebooks contain a perspective of a multi-year formation work. They eliminate the problems of this type: What to do with the acolytes next time? A considerable part of formation aids published recently consists of one-year, rarely 2 or 3-year positions. After realising the curriculum, new coursebooks do not present the further way of the formation path. Whereas, coursebooks *Kandydat na Ministranta*, *Choralista*, etc perfectly supplement the issue of biblical and liturgical formation.

3. Journals supporting formations:

a. Króluj nam Chryste – is the only national magazine devoted exclusively to liturgical service. It would be a wonderful habit to order at least 2 issues of the magazine at each parish and thus let acolytes use them. There is a great example of priest who sponsors annual subscription of the magazine for 10 best

²⁶ Cf. E. Mitek, *Lektor...*, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁷ Cf. J. Tendej, *Uwagi pedagoga w określaniu celów, stopni i innych elementów formacji służby liturgicznej dzieci, młodzieży i dorosłych*, „Anamnesis” No 58, p. 125-126.

²⁸ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów...*, op. cit., p. 289-290.

acolytes. Other priests order the paper and use best formation articles to create a newsletter in the sacristy cutting them out. One issue is enough to have a new, interesting and valuable newsletter every week.

b. *Żywe Słowo* – to be able to read the Word of God, lectors should understand what they read about. *Żywe Słowo* can effectively help understand contents of excerpt read from the Holy Bible during the Liturgy. It is advisable to make, at least, one issue of the magazine available for lectors.

c. Oremus – to let the lector read the reading before he does it publicly.

4. Liturgical rehearsals – should not be the main element of weekly liturgical meetings, on the other hand they cannot be just an occasional training of ministries caused by a visit of a bishop, confirmation or a parish fair. The rehearsal should be led by a person who knows liturgical regulations and follows them (e.g. Celebrant, Liturgical Organizer). It is recommended to introduce a habit of celebrating the Sunday High Mass always with full liturgical entourage. In this context it is worth to consider the issue of, so called, weekly briefing of the service that would rely on tasking the older, more educated lectors, celebrants and organizers with more responsibility connected with preparation the Liturgy from the liturgical service side.

5. Courses: organizers, celebrants, lectors – in the Cracow Archdiocese such courses are organized yearly. They educate new groups of young people who obtain knowledge, learn current liturgical regulations but they have an opportunity to use what they learn during holiday retreat, winter retreat or just every day at their parishes. Due to the fact that parishes send subsequent candidates to undertake the functions every year, there are real chances that one day it will be possible to achieve uniformity in the ways the ministries are performed in dioceses.

6. Ceremonial promotions (badges, books, ranks) – obtaining the ranks makes the formation of liturgical services orderly, efficient and leads to authentic religious life, helps mastering skills, shaping personality, teaches discipline, sacrifice for God and Church, allows annual promotion in acolytes service, and is a strong educational stimulus. There are no problems with attendance of acolytes at the meetings in places where the program is based on the ranks system. Everybody who wants to perform ministry at the altar must prepare himself for it by systematic work and gradual reaching more complete participation in the service of God. Following the path of ranks already from the rank of candidate is connected with introducing requirements and maintaining a certain level which consequently at the beginning eliminates boys who would not be able to meet the requirements of the service of God. Moreover, the ones who become acolytes are usually good lectors, celebrants and organizers. The community of the Altar Liturgical Service then becomes a well organised community.

Parishes should tend to organize ceremonial acolytes promotions to higher ranks. It is a very important event to acolytes, but not only emotionally. Together with the promotion they should receive badges and cards: of an acolyte

after ceremonial entering the liturgical service at a parish and of a lector after being blessed for ministry as an acolyte of the Word of God.

7. Initiation – it is not possible to accept a situation when somebody skips formation ranks or when an acolyte who moves to a higher level school and who was in the liturgical service automatically receives an alb regardless of the fact whether he has started a lector course or not. It would be unfair and unjust for lectors who have conducted their service in a parish for many years and have diligently completed the lector course.

8. Too fast approval for the service – acolytes without a certain preparatory period – being a candidate for a few months, optimal 9 – should not be approved. This will prevent a situation described in a rhyme: ‘A boy applied on Friday to be an acolyte, was approved on Saturday, served to everything on Sunday and resigned on Monday because got bored’.

9. Biblical contests, from the Gospel, reading the Holy Bible together, liturgical circles – to make the content of the Holy Bible and especially the Gospel familiar to the liturgical service.

10. Separate lectionary in the sacristy for lectors – lectors should use it to prepare for reading during the Liturgy assembly. It would be used only for training activities.

5. Formation of liturgical service and priestly vocations

The State Ministry of Liturgical Service while elaborating *Wytyczne dla duszpasterstwa ministrantów w Polsce* (Guidelines for acolytes ministry) (14 Sep 1965) formulated aims of the acolytes ministry following the spirit of Vaticanum II. The first aim is the glory of God achieved through serious, beautiful and integral education of the liturgical service. The second aim is ‘work on the group of acolytes so that through liturgy they become Catholics that consciously and more deeply live the life of the Church, of apostolic attitude, and also, hopefully, in relation to some of them, future priests’²⁹.

Since the time when the International Association of Acolytes began organizing pilgrimages to Rome, almost each Pope’s speech directed to the visiting acolytes contained the ‘vocation’ element. During the audience on 30th March 1967 Paul VI while addressing acolytes, indicated that from among a group of young boys serving at the altar, there is a growing number of those who are called by Christ to follow Him, to join Him more tightly and permanently³⁰. On the 15th April 1980 John Paul II said to acolytes in Rome: ‘Have you ever thought that Christ might demand from you to follow Him to the depths as His servant, priest? How enormous grace it would be for you, your family, your

²⁹ Cf. *Wytyczne dla duszpasterstwa ministrantów w Polsce*, in: *Teczka pomocy dla duszpasterstwa ministrantów*, No 1 (14 September 1965 r.), No. 2000/1/1, p. 2-9, p. 3.

³⁰ Cf. Paweł VI, *Słowo Ojca Świętego do ministrantów*, in: *Teczka nr 6 Dekanalnego Referenta Duszpasterstwa Młodzieży* [1968], AGRŚ-Ż (Z. KDSL), No. 500/20, p. 9.

parish, Christian communities which need priests? Vocation is not a duty, Christ Himself says «if you want». (...) I am certain that many of you are able to leave everything for Christ, follow Him and fulfil His mission»³¹. On the 30th Aug 1990 John Paul II said to the acolytes who came to Rome: 'If the Holy Spirit was to inspire you to devote to Christ and fulfilling His mission, do not be afraid to follow this path. Vocation means particular love of Christ and is a source of particular joy'³². In the *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday of 28th March 2004*, the Pope indicated to take care of acolytes groups in parishes. He wrote that priests that cherish the Eucharist should pass on to children and the youth 'eucharistic amazement' to encourage them to enter priesthood³³. At the same time he insistently asked priests to pay particular attention at tutoring acolytes who are 'a kind of cradle of priestly vocations'. Also Benedict XVI during his pilgrimage that took place in 2006 addressed acolytes with similar message: 'Maybe Jesus tells some of you: «I want you to serve in a particular way, as a priest, becoming then my witness, being my friend and bringing others to the friendship». Listen to the voice of Jesus with trust'³⁴. In the instruction of *Redemptionis Sacramentum* of 25th March 2004 the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments wrote: 'The still maintained habit of the presence of boys and young men usually called acolytes who serve at the altar and receive a proper religious instruction on the performed ministry is particularly worth praising. We should not forget that through centuries from among the boys there have been a lot of ordained priests' (RS 47). The Polish Bishops' Conference in the document: *Młodość z Chrystusem* (Youth with Christ) published in 2008 stressed the need for work with acolytes, liturgical service, schola and liturgical teams and for chaplaincy of vocations³⁵. The fact that the chaplaincy of the altar liturgical service plays a crucial role in arousing vocations is confirmed by studies conducted at the Higher Theological Seminary in Cracow on a group of 207 seminarists (clerical students + deacons). The results of the studies are as follows:

³¹ Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do ministrantów (Aula Pawła VI 15 kwietnia 1980 r.)*, in: D. Metzinger, *Servir la messe*, Paris 1993, p. 194-195.

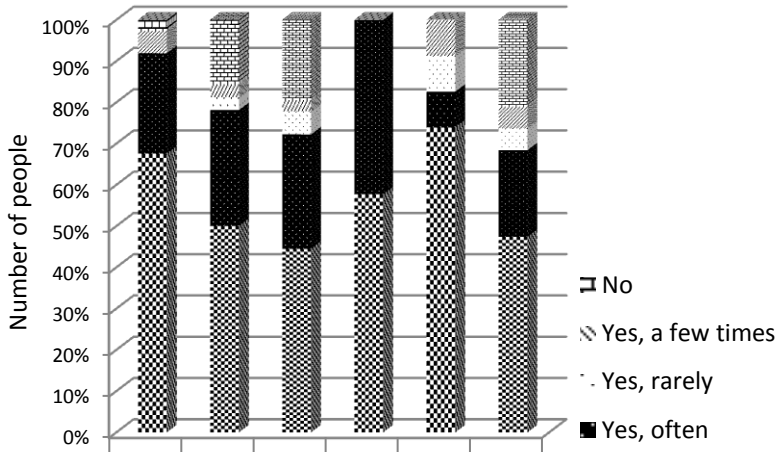
³² Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do ministrantów (Plac św. Piotra 30 sierpnia 1990 r.)*, in: D. Metzinger, *Servir la messe*, op. cit., p. 206.

³³ Jan Paweł II, *List do kapłanów na Wielki Czwartek 2004 roku*, Tarnów 2004, No 5.

³⁴ Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie do ministrantów: «Bądźcie przyjaciółmi i apostołami Jezusa»*, „Anamnesis” 47(2006), No 4, p. 9.

³⁵ Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, *Młodość z Chrystusem (Dokument KEP przygotowany przez Radę ds. Duszpasterstwa Młodzieży)*, Tarnów 2008, p. 71, 78-80.

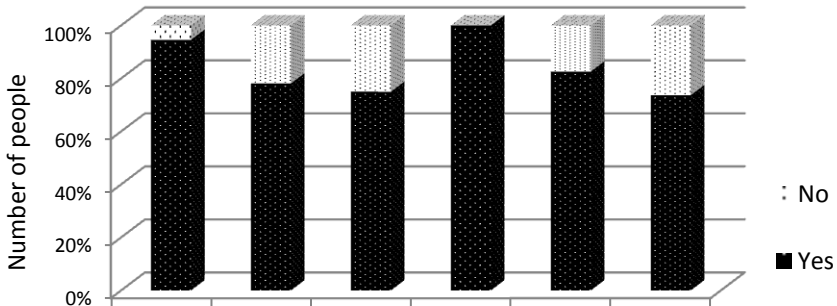
Did you serve at the altar before joining the seminary?



	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
No	1	5	7	0	0	4
Yes, a few times	2	1	1	0	2	1
Yes, rarely	0	1	2	0	2	1
Yes, often	9	9	10	11	2	4
Yes, very often	25	16	16	15	17	9

Class

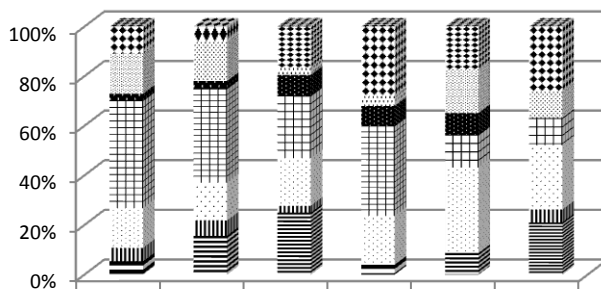
Were you a member of liturgical service at you parish before joining the seminary?



	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
No	2	7	9	0	4	5
Yes	35	25	27	26	19	14

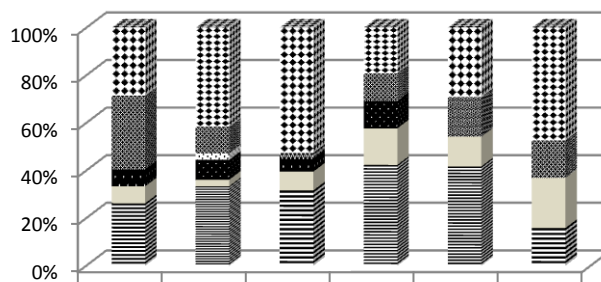
Class

Before joining the seminary I was:



	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
▣ Acolyte, lector and organizer	4	2	6	7	4	5
⊠ Organizer	6	5	1	1	4	2
■ Lector and organizer	1	1	3	2	2	0
▢ Lector	16	12	9	9	3	2
⊠ Acolyte and lector	6	5	7	5	8	5
▣ Acolyte	2	2	1	0	0	1
▬ I was not connected with liturgical service	2	5	9	1	2	4

Before joining the seminary I was connected with:



	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
▲ I was not connected with any groups	12	15	20	5	7	9
⊠ Other groups	13	4	1	3	4	3
⊠ Catholic Action	0	1	0	0	0	0
■ Catholic Youth Association	3	3	2	3	0	0
■ Apostolic Groups	3	1	3	4	3	4
▬ Light-Life Movement	11	12	12	11	10	3

Recapitulating, it should be stated that vocations chaplaincy is directed firstly towards boys engaged in the altar liturgical service³⁶. Sometimes, the chaplaincy of the altar liturgical service is called ‘a school for arousing priestly and monastic vocations’³⁷. The service of acolytes and lectors offers to young people a regular contact with priests and makes their intimacy with holy issues more conscious and personal. It results in better understanding of priesthood and makes it easier to reply to the arising vocation. Being an acolyte is also a ‘small vocation’.

6. Conclusions

1. Biblical and liturgical formation is the basic condition of a formation at all and education of acolytes because is it possible to imagine leading such meetings without any referring to the Holy Bible and events described there? Or is it possible to teach the candidates a proper service or preparing an entourage at a good level without explaining the functions and training ministries?

2. According to documents the acolytes formation is the parish priest’s responsibility but usually he tasks a curate with it. Therefore, it is unacceptable to organize formation of teams of liturgical service without supervision and tutoring of a priest. There must be a responsible priest in such a formation to lead, show direction or reprimand if there is a need. It is not possible at a complete realisation of the formation program to have all the groups led by one priest.

3. Formation is compulsory for each acolyte and lector. They cannot stop at a certain phase and claim: ‘I am not going any further, I do not feel like doing it’ while continuing their liturgical service at a parish. A standstill at a certain level in the beginning of a regress.

4. It is recommended to apply formation aids, especially journals designated for liturgical service.

5. Formation of acolytes and lectors is directly correlated with the number of vocations as liturgical service, as it results from conducted studies, is the main reservoir of vocations in Cracow Archdiocese. Without good formation, conducted at a certain level, groups of acolytes in a parish will begin to decrease (lack of acolytes at the altar is frequently noticed even today). Consequently, the number of clerical student who were in the liturgical service before seminary may drop. Therefore, it on one of the causes of a decreasing number of clerical students, known by many people as, so called, ‘crisis in vocations’. Establishing chaplaincy of vocations is a good solution, but only when the offer will be directed not only to college or university students, but mainly to acolytes.

³⁶ Cf. W. Przygoda, *Powolaniowe duszpasterstwo*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, ed. R. Kamiński, W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski, Lublin 2006, p. 675.

³⁷ W. Wilk, *Budzenie powołań kapłańskich wśród ministrantów*, „Homo Dei” 155(1976), No 1, p. 41; Z. Mońka, *Kapłan a problem budzenia i pielęgnowania powołań*, „Homo Dei” 182(1981), No 4, p. 274.

lytes and lectors who have not chosen their way of life. So if there is no thorough formation work with acolytes at each parish, the consequences will be seen soon.

7. Ending

Liturgical and biblical education was a demand raised by the liturgical movement already before the Vatican Council II. In this context one cannot speak about liturgical revival without liturgical education of clergy and the faithful, so the demand was realised in the Church in Poland within the program of acolytes and lectors education elaborated by the State Ministry of Liturgical Service. Even, if it was not undertaken and realised at a proper shape in each diocese, now we can speak about one general biblical and liturgical paradigm of work with acolytes and lectors³⁸. It should be emphasized at the end that ‘the efficiency and fruitfulness of all pastoral and educational actions are not decided by programs, documents, technical aids and external organizational structure. All these are needed, but the final decision relies on a person, their level of engagement, their attitude and devotion to an issue³⁹’.

Summary

The liturgical and biblical education was a postulate set by the liturgical movement before the Second Vatican Council. In this context, one cannot speak of liturgical renewal without upbringing the liturgical clergy and the faithful, which is why this postulate was realized in the Church in Poland, in the curriculum of the altar boys and teachers, developed by the National Ministry of the Liturgical Service. Even, if it was not taken up and carried out in a proper shape in each diocese, it is possible to talk about one general biblical and liturgical paradigm of working with altar servers and lectors. It is worth emphasizing that “the effectiveness and fruitfulness of all pastoral and educational activities are not determined by programs, papers, technical aids and an external organizational apparatus. All these are necessary and useful, but ultimately, the person decides and the degree of their engagement, commitment and devotion to the given matter”.

Key words: altar liturgical service, acolytes, lectors, formation.

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³⁸ Cf. G. Rzeźwicki, *Duszpasterstwo ministrantów...*, op. cit., p. 369-371.

³⁹ F. Blachnicki, *Drogi realizacji «Wytucznych dla duszpasterstwa ministrantów w Polsce»*, No. 2000/1/1, p. 17.

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