

Lay Reader Training Course

**Sessions II and III:
Preaching**

The Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

**Sessions held on October 25 and November 15, 2008 at St. David's Anglican Church
Presented by Rev. Tim Chesterton and Rev. Madeline Urion**

Last Revised February 11, 2009

Instructions for Clergy/Supervisors

The Lay Reader training course has been compiled into modules to allow those who missed a session or two to complete it in their local parish, under the supervision and teaching of the rector, and the guidance of the course curriculum. It is the responsibility of the Lay Reader candidate to contact the rector and to arrange time to meet and work through the material. It is the responsibility of the rector to ensure that the course material is **fully** covered and understood, as well as to contact the program co-ordinator to report the completion of any modules.

This module's layout is designed to be printed double-sided. Sections are arranged individually so you can print out the specific pages you need.

Set aside a significant portion of time with your Lay Reader candidate to go through the material. The original sessions provided four hours of discussion and instruction, broken up by time for breaks. Depending on the candidate, you may need to schedule several shorter sessions to complete the material in question.

Spend time on demonstration. Make sure that the candidate is walked through the experience of organizing, planning, and leading services. Provide tips and practical hints as they occur to you.

Each session begins with a discussion related to the candidate's prior experiences or understanding of the topic covered. Do not skip this step to move directly into instruction. Spending time in general discussion at the beginning makes deeper learning and discussion possible later in the session.

Expect and encourage questions. Be prepared to discuss your answers.

The Diocesan expectation of Lay Readers is that they will be trained to plan and lead liturgies using both the *Book of Common Prayer* and *Book of Alternative Services*. At the same time, it is understood that Lay Readers function in the context of the practice of their local parish. Therefore, Lay Reader candidates will be expected to learn and gain competence in the full range of authorized liturgies, rubrics, and practices while **also** learning the rector's guidelines for the liturgical practice appropriate to the parish. Do not sacrifice one for the other.

Last, remember that you are equipping a minister. Take time to pray together.

**** If you have any questions, contact Rev. Cameron Burns, Program Co-ordinator ****

Session Learning Goals

At the end of these sessions, the candidates will:

1. Be equipped to read Scripture methodically and devotionally
 - a. By discussing the experience being nourished by Scripture
 - b. By being taught a basic method for reading Scripture
2. Be able to write a 10-15 minute homily
 - a. By being taught a basic method of determining a sermon point
 - b. By being introduced to basic biblical research tools
 - c. By being taught some techniques to craft a homily from a point
3. Write and preach a 12-15 minute homily, and receive feedback

Session Plan (Session II)

The following is the agenda from the last presentation of this session:

9:30 am	Doors Open, Coffee/Tea Available
10:00 am	Morning Prayer
10:30 am	Talking about Preaching
10:50 am	Starting with Scripture
11:30 am	Break (15 minutes)
11:45 am	Moving from the Text to a Point
12:45 pm	Lunch (45 minutes)
1:30 pm	Moving from the Point to a Sermon
2:30 pm	Break (15 minutes)
2:45 pm	Putting the Pieces Together
3:15 pm	Preaching a Sermon (and Homework Assignment)

Session Instruction – Session II

Session Preparation

Read over the lesson materials. Make sure that you have a Bible on hand (if you have more than one translation handy, so much the better). You'll need to mark two passages in your bible(s): Luke 1:26-38 and Matthew 2:1-12. Get some tea/coffee ready.

Greeting and Prayer

It is helpful to begin the session with a time of prayer. Consider using Morning Prayer, as it helps the candidate(s) to become familiar with the liturgy.

Talking About Preaching (~15 minutes)

Ask the candidate(s) to consider the best experience of listening to a sermon that they've ever had. Encourage them to think very specifically about what made that experience so powerful, so moving.

Next, ask the candidate(s) to consider the worst experience of listening to a sermon that they've ever had. Encourage them to think very specifically about what made that experience so lacking in power and/or meaning.

Last, suggest to the candidate(s) that in being moved through hearing God's word proclaimed and preached, we have had an experience of being touched by God. Preaching is an important thing in our churches, because it is one of the ways in which God is revealed at work in the community; it is one of the ways in which we can come to know God more fully in our lives. Encourage the candidate(s) by suggesting that preaching is really just speaking from our hearts as believers who are moved by God's word—nothing more, and nothing less.

Ask the candidate(s) how they feel about preaching. What feelings are triggered?

Make sure to take notes (ask the candidate(s) for permission first) of important feelings, images, concepts, or thoughts. These will greatly help you to assess how best to work through the remaining material, as well as any additional conversation that you may wish to have. As you wrap up the discussion, it is important to normalize any concerns, doubts, or fears that the candidate(s) may express in relation to preaching (since it can seem extremely intimidating).

Starting With Scripture (~45 minutes)

Begin by discussing the following questions:

- Do you read the Bible regularly? How do you go about it?

- How do you go beyond just skimming, or superficial reading, to discover a message for yourself?
- Have there been times when you have been very aware of God speaking to you through the text? How did that happen?

Being someone who reads Scripture devotionally is a prerequisite for being a capable preacher, since preaching is speaking from the heart about the way in which God reveals Himself to us in His word. Therefore, it's important to start with the basics—developing a way of reading Scripture regularly, and devotionally.

First, point out to the candidate(s) that a given passage is usually part of a larger book in our bibles. So, before you go honing in on a few verses, it's important to consider the bigger picture first:

- If the book of the bible is unfamiliar, read all the way through it first, to get sweep, context etc. Often, it's helpful to do this in an easy-to-read translation like Good News, or New Living Translation.
- Ask yourself – what sort of literature is it? History? Poetry? Criminal code? Letter? Prayer? Read accordingly.
- Get some background on book as whole – the date written, author, situation etc. A good study Bible (New Oxford, NIV, New Interpreter's) will help you with that, since they have an introduction to each book of the bible.

Once you've gained a sense of the bigger picture, then it's time to start zeroing in on the passage in question. The kind of reading we'll be doing is called “devotional” because it's a slower way of reading more focussed on being guided by God:

- First, read prayerfully. Begin with prayer – be attentive to the Spirit's presence throughout this whole process– and ask for help in understanding the text.
- Read the passage slowly, at least twice.
- Try comparing a couple of different translations together to see if there are any interesting differences. Often, it helps to read out loud, since you notice things you might not otherwise.
- Check the context – what comes before the passage or after the passage. What difference does it make to your understanding of the passage?

Once you've read the passage slowly and prayerfully, it's time to ask some questions: What does this passage *say*? What does it *mean*? What does it mean *to me*?

- What does it say? Pay careful attention to what the text actually says. All biblical translations have strategies and/or philosophies that guide their work. Some are woodenly literal, while others more idiomatic (thought-for-thought rather than word-for-word). Comparing different translations to each other will give you a better sense of where the original text is clear, and where it isn't.
- What does it mean? Or, in other words “What is this passage *about*?”
 - Who are the main characters and what do you learn about them?
 - What does this passage teach you about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? What about human nature, about the good news, about God's plan for us etc. etc.?
 - Can you sum up the message of the passage in one or two sentences?

- What does it mean to me? If I took this passage to heart, what difference would it make in my life?
 - Apply the theme sentence you've created. If you really believed it/obeyed it, what would that look like?
 - Is there a promise to trust? A command to obey (and what would obedience look like for you)? Sin to avoid? Good example to follow? Bad example to avoid? An image to hold on to? A message to pass on? Etc., etc., etc.
 - Can you sum up in one or two sentences what you are going to do because of what you've read in this passage?

Write down the fruit of your prayerful reading in a devotional notebook of some sort. As you add to it, you will find that it is a precious companion in your journey with God. Not only will it help you in your bible reading and preaching, but also in your prayers. As well, sometimes ideas/images shoot through you mind and are gone in the next instant. Capture them and explore them more fully at a later time.

You can use this method to read Scripture regularly, not just when preparing sermons. But it is especially important to use it in sermon preparation. Some people read a passage, and then go straight to some commentaries or preaching aids, without listening to what the Holy Spirit might be saying to *them*. It's crucial that your preaching come out of your own prayerful and considered reading.

Moving From The Text To A Point (60 minutes)

In this section, use the text of Luke 1:26-38 as the example in question. Start by reading the text of Luke 1:26-38 a couple of times slowly and prayerfully.

Suggest to the candidate(s) that the first step in crafting a sermon or homily is to decide on a sermon point.

To do that, you first need a text. Depending on the parish, this might be already assigned by the parish leadership. If not, then choose which passage you're going to preach on from the lectionary choices for that given day:

- It is better to pick one reading to preach on, than to try to cover all of them.
 - Often the different readings are totally independent of each other, so a sermon based on all four will have no unity.
 - Even when there is connection (i.e. at Christmas, Easter etc.), a sermon based on all the readings can't help being based on a *theme*, not the *text*. In other words, on a human system, rather than passage of scripture.
- In order to choose one passage, ask yourself the following helpful questions.
 - Which passage grabs your attention the most?
 - Which will be most difficult for people to hear without a sermon to explain it? (eg. Mark 10:2-12)?
 - Which seems most relevant to the people in your congregation – to their situation as individuals, or as church community?
 - What is God saying?

Next, read and study the passage devotionally. Make sure to pray, and ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and illumination. The process here is very similar to what we've already covered, but a little more complicated, once we get to asking questions of the text:

- What does it say?
 - Use as many translations as you can to read your passage through and note any differences. If it seems significant, make a note of it, so you can look for answers later. It's really important to get as close to the actual text as you can. If you can use an interlinear Greek/English NT, get one.
- What does it mean? (Or, 'what is this passage *about*?')
- Who are the main characters and what do you learn about them?
- What does it teach you about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit? About human nature, about the good news, about God's plan for us etc. etc.?
- Questions in the Serendipity Study Bible are very useful at this stage in the process. Other study bibles may also have notes and/or helpful observations to consider.
- Ask yourself, "What don't I understand? Where do I need help with this passage?" Make a note of these trouble spots, for our next step.
- What have other people said about this passage? There are a number of helpful resources out there that can shed some light on any differences in translation, background material, or bits that don't make sense.
 - First, get yourself a good study Bible (New Oxford, NIV, New Interpreter's, Life Application etc.). These bibles have notes written into their margins, introductions to each book, and sometimes additional materials (e.g., reflection questions).
 - While full commentaries might be a bit daunting, there are several one-volume bible commentaries out there— NBC, Harper's, Peake's etc. Also, consider a smaller series (N.T. Wright's volumes are extremely accessible and very helpful). Your rector may well have resources like this to lend you.
 - Read relevant sections and take notes. You'll soon discover that commentators don't always agree! Ask yourself – does this commentator answer questions I have about the passage? What fresh light do they shed that I didn't think of before?
 - Commentaries are especially useful in providing "background" information that you might otherwise not be aware of.
 - Consider using a Bible dictionary to help you get a sense of what a particular word might mean.
- What does it mean to *us*? How does the passage apply to our congregation, or individuals in it? What difference would it make if we lived it out etc. etc.?

At end of this process – you want to be able to write two short statements, each one no more than two sentences long:

1. **What is the passage saying?** What's its essential message?

2. **What is the passage trying to accomplish?** Is it moving people to repentance, relieving their fears, opening their minds to a new truth – or what? When we can answer that question, we'll know what the point of our sermon should be as well.

Finish this section by taking some time together and using Luke 1:26-38 to come up with a sermon message and point.

From Point To Sermon (~60 minutes)

In this section, continue using Luke 1:26-38 as the working example.

Begin by telling the candidate(s) that the second step in crafting our homily is to hone and narrow down our sermon point as much as we can.

We need to narrow down our sermon point so that our homily will be as focussed as we can get it. A sermon point that is too broad will result in a sermon that wanders vaguely without really saying anything. It is better to say less, but say it specifically and clearly than to say a lot, but indistinctly.

Print out the “Subject and Complement” sheet from the Appendix. Suggest to the candidate(s) that an easy way to think about narrowing down our sermon point is to break the point up into its two most basic elements: a subject and its component.

- The subject is the thing that you are going to talk about (e.g., “the love of God”).
- The complement is what you are going to say about the subject (e.g., “helps us forgive our enemies”).
- Another way of thinking of it is to phrase the complement as a question, with the subject as its answer (e.g., “What helps us forgive our enemies? The love of God.”)

Being able to phrase our sermon point using a subject-complement structure allows us to be very efficient in our sermon writing and organizing, because we can simply delete anything that doesn't illustrate or prove our subject-complement. It's a very handy way to keep yourself on track, and to avoid chasing rabbit trails in your preaching!

- Using the printed subject-complement sheet, practice narrowing down sermon ideas into the shortest and most direct subject-complement pairs you can.

Next, suggest to the candidate(s) that once you've found your subject-complement pair, it's time to “frame” your homily by putting up the structural components.

There are two of these components to consider:

- Sermon point
 - It's important to get your point across, and also to do so in more than one way. Beyond directly stating your point, you want to be able to

illustrate your point, with an image, or a story, or a metaphor, or a simile.

- The point here is that you want to continuously have your point engaging the congregation at the level of their imagination. Therefore, your illustrations, etc., need to be ones which your congregation can relate to.
- You don't need a dozen illustrations. Pick the best one (or two, maximum) and go with it.
- Application
 - Beyond making a point, a homily needs to help answer the "So What?" question. You need to answer the following questions in your homily: "How does hearing this truth change me? What does it have to do with my life?"
 - But it's more than just telling people; the homily needs to *show* people what living out in the truth of God's promises looks like, in daily life.

Once you've found your major illustration and major application, you're ready to begin putting things together.

The last step in crafting a sermon is building the completed sermon. Mostly, this involves tying things together so that the homily flows:

- The first step is to "place" your illustration and application material. Where do you want them in relation to each other? Next, you'll want to make sure you're repeating your main point, so you need to add images, or metaphors, or other different ways of repeating the point.
- At that point, your homily should have a logical flow to it. How are you moving from idea to idea? Are you building up a set of arguments to prove something? Have you stated an idea at the beginning and are just providing a series of illustrations to drive the point home? Considering the logical flow of your homily, you'll want to think about how you make the transitions from one point to another, and start writing those transitions in.
- Then, put in an introduction and conclusion. Make sure that your introduction catches people's attention right off of the bat.
- Finally, you'll need to read over your homily, and ask yourself the following questions:
 - Is my sermon point clear and repeated?
 - Does every part of my homily support or illustrate my sermon point?
 - Is my language clear and understandable, or am I speaking in jargon?
 - Am I clear as to the application of this point? Am I answering the "So What?" question?
 - Am I using a variety of imaginative means to engage the congregation with this truth that I'm sharing?

Take some time with Luke 1:26-38, and together, work at honing the sermon point into a subject-complement pair, and come up with one illustration and one application for the sermon point.

Questions, Wrapping Up, and Homework Assignment (30 Minutes)

At this point, wrap up the session by going over any questions that the candidate(s) may have regarding the material for the session.

This is also time to introduce the homework for the next session. Print out the “Homework Assignment” sheet from the Appendix, and go over the homework with the candidate(s). Be sure that the candidate(s) understand the requirements of the homework project.

Last, close in prayer. You may wish to share Evening Prayer. If this is the case, consider using a different prayer book than the one used for Morning Prayer; it will help to broaden your candidate(s)’ familiarity with both books.

Session Instruction – Session III

Session Preparation

Read over the lesson materials. Make sure that you have one “Homily Feedback” form from the Appendix printed off per candidate, plus one for yourself. You’ll need to mark one passage in your bible(s): Matthew 2:1-12. Get some tea/coffee ready.

Greeting and Prayer

It is helpful to begin the session with a time of prayer. Consider using Morning Prayer, as it helps the candidate(s) to become familiar with the liturgy.

Preaching a Sermon (~25 Minutes per Candidate)

Invite the candidate(s) to preach their homilies from the pulpit in your parish church. Fill out the feedback according to the form, and share the feedback with the candidate(s). If you have time, you might offer the candidate(s) a second chance to preach the homily.

Questions, Wrapping Up, and Homework Assignment (30 Minutes)

At this point, wrap up the session by going over any questions that the candidate(s) may have regarding the material for the session, especially regarding their experiences of writing a homily.

Last, close in prayer. You may wish to share Evening Prayer. If this is the case, consider using a different prayer book than the one used for Morning Prayer; it will help to broaden your candidate(s)’ familiarity with both books.

Appendix – Worksheets And Forms

This section contains materials referred to in the Session Instruction section.

The contents are as follows:

1. Subject-Complement Worksheet
2. Sermon Homework Assignment Form
3. Sermon Feedback Form

From Point to Sermon: Subject and Complement

(questions 1-3 are taken from Haddon W. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*)

1. Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". (Matthew 7:21)

Subject:

Complement:

2. "Do not speak harshly to a man older than yourself, but advise him as you would your own father; treat the younger men as brothers and older women as you would your mother. Always treat younger women with propriety, as if they were your sisters." (1 Timothy 5:1-3).

Subject:

Complement:

3. Forgiveness "cannot mean that we cover up a fault with a 'mantle of charity'. Divine things are never an illusion and deception. On the contrary, before the sin is forgiven the mantle with which it is covered must be removed. The sin must be.....exposed to the light of God's countenance" (Helmut Thielicke).

Subject:

Complement:

4. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid". (Matthew 5:14)

Subject:

Complement:

5. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". (Matthew 5:44)

Subject:

Complement:

6. "For nothing will be impossible with God". (Luke 1:37)

Subject:

Complement:

Homework Assignment – Preaching Your Own Sermon

The point of this assignment is to give you the opportunity to put all of this teaching into practice, as well as getting some experience in writing and preaching sermons.

Here's the assignment:

Using Matthew 2:1-12 as your text, you will prepare and write a short sermon, which you will preach at our next session (November 15th). Your sermon should be ten-twelve (10-12) minutes in length, presenting a focused point and application, with some supporting imagery.

Here's some pointers:

- 10-12 minutes will go by *very quickly*. Make sure that your sermon point is clear, narrow, and focused *before* you start thinking about the rest of your sermon.
- Be careful in how you use imagery. If you paint too big of a picture, you will run out of time; but if you don't paint a picture at all, your listeners will have trouble getting "into" the story (and your point).
- Rather than listing a whole pile of applications of your point, try focusing on one (or maybe two), and really showing how the text can apply to one's life in that particular way.
- Just because your sermon isn't long doesn't mean you don't need to catch people's attention at the beginning, and "land" the sermon at the end. Keep it simple....there's no need to grandstand.
- Do make sure that you spend time rehearsing your sermon out loud. Time yourself carefully, and know how long your sermon takes. (As an example, I know that I preach one page, double-spaced at size 12 font, in 3 minutes. That means that I'd plan on writing 3 to 4 pages double-spaced, **maximum**).
- The more you rehearse your sermon, the more it will flow naturally when you preach it.

Feedback On Sermon Assignment

Consider the following questions:

1. What impressed you the most about this sermon?
2. In one sentence, what was the point of this sermon?
3. What did this sermon teach you about God? About yourself? About the world?
4. Name one way in which this sermon suggested you might live life differently.
5. What did the delivery of the sermon (tone of voice, stance of preacher, etc.) tell you about the preacher and/or the sermon?
6. How could this sermon be improved?