

**HANDBOOK**  
**For**  
**ALTAR SERVERS**



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### **ALTAR SERVER'S PRAYER**

Lord Jesus,  
I have come here to serve you.  
Open my lips to praise your name.  
Open my ears to hear your word.  
Open my eyes to see that you are here with me.  
Help me to grow more and more like you,  
loving and kind to all people.  
Amen.

## SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

### Crucifer:

- carry the processional cross for the processions at the beginning and end of Mass, and at the Presentation
- hold the Roman Missal for the priest
- ring the bells at the consecration
- hold the towel during the washing of hands

### Candle Bearer # 1 (closest to the ambo):

- carry the candle on the left
- flank the Gospel book with candle bearer # 2
- set the table with the corporal/chalice and the 5 communion cups on the right side of the altar
- bring the water for the priest to mix with the wine
- bring the water for the priest to wash his hands
- bring the water after communion for the priest or deacon to purify the chalice

### Candle Bearer # 2:

- carry the candle on the right
- flank the Gospel book with candle bearer # 1
- bring the ciboria with the hosts and set the 4 communion cups on the left side of the altar
- bring the bowl for the priest to wash his hands

#### Order of setting the altar (table):

- chalice (candle bearer # 1)
- ciboria (candle bearer # 2)
- 5 communion cups (# 1)
- 4 communion cups (# 2)
- water to mix with wine (# 1)
- water to wash hands (# 1), lavabo (# 2), towel (crucifer)

—Note: give the cruets to the priest or deacon with the handle **toward** them

## INTRODUCTION

### **Requirements:**

One must be at least nine years old or in 4th grade. At the end of five weeks of formation/training, the altar server will be installed at one of the Sunday Masses, after which they will serve as an intern for a period of four Sundays before being officially scheduled to serve at Mass.

The altar server serves in several different ways:

1. You are serving God through your worship and prayer.
2. You are serving your parish family by helping everyone to worship and celebrate in the best way possible.
3. You are serving the priest by helping him preside over the liturgy.

### **The Eucharist**

The most important liturgy of our church is the Eucharist, commonly known as the Mass. It is important to our parish family in much the same way as meals in your home are important to your family there. The meals your family share at home not only keep you alive and healthy, they also give you a chance to be together and strengthen your family ties.

It is helpful to think of our celebration of the Eucharist (the Mass) as having four main parts. They are:

**1. Introductory Rites:** consisting of the Entrance Antiphon (or song), Greeting, Penitential Act, Kyrie, Gloria, and Collect

**2. Liturgy of the Word:** consisting of the 1st reading (usually from the Old Testament), Responsorial Psalm, 2nd Reading (from the New Testament), Gospel Acclamation, Gospel, Homily, Profession of Faith, and Prayer of the Faithful

**3. Liturgy of the Eucharist:** consisting of the Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts, Eucharistic Prayer (within which we sing the Sanctus, Mystery of Faith, and Amen), Communion Rite; it is during this time of the Mass in which we give thanks to God for all He has done for us through Jesus by recalling Jesus' death and resurrection and sharing the bread and wine which have become the Body and Blood of Christ.

**4. Concluding Rite:** consisting of the Blessing and Dismissal

Different liturgical ministers serve at Mass. You might see any or all of the following:

1. Deacon
2. Lector (Reader)
3. Leader of Song (Cantor)
4. Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion
5. Usher (Greeter)
6. Sacristan
7. Liturgy Coordinator

8. After the ushers have begun taking up the collection, the candle bearers prepare the altar. The crucifer takes the cross and proceeds to the back of the church where they will lead the procession for the persons who will carry the gifts to the priest at the altar. **All servers should move together and at the same time.**

9. After the "Holy, Holy, Holy", the crucifer takes their place near the bells; candlebearers take their places on the opposite side of the sanctuary; all kneel in prayer position.

10. During the consecration, the crucifer rings the bells steadily each time; do not prolong the ringing of the bells (it is a signal to the assembly that something very important is happening).

11. After the "Amen", all altar servers proceed to their places behind the altar for the praying of the "Our Father," either joining hands or retaining the prayer position; the important thing to remember is to be hospitable toward one another.

12. Following the singing of the "Lamb of God," all kneel in place, in prayer position, and pray "Behold the Lamb of God..."; stand to receive communion, then be seated as the assembly receives, and sing the communion songs with the assembly.

13. After communion, candle bearer # 1 brings the cruet of water to the priest or deacon to purify the chalice.

14. Altar servers stand up with the priest and deacon as the Body and Blood of Christ is taken to the sacristy by the ministers.

15. The crucifer and the candle bearers lead the procession out after Mass. As they pass the sacristy, they allow the communion minister to step between the crucifer and the candle bearers with the ciborium. Stop at the tabernacle, wait for them to place the ciborium in the tabernacle, then step back and wait for the song to conclude before proceeding to the sanctuary.

16. After the closing song, enter the sanctuary and put away the cross and candles. Snuff (do not blow) out the candles with the snuffer. Take all vessels, linens, and books back to the sacristy. Ask the sacristan if any other help is needed.

Other:

—There is never a need to walk between the altar and presider's chair during Mass.

## Procedure for Serving at the Liturgy

1. Three servers are assigned for all Masses...one crucifer and two candle bearers.
2. The altar candles will be lit by the liturgy coordinator at the back of the church; never light any candles with the clicker—use only the taper.
3. The crucifer and the candle bearers will lead the procession from the rear of the church up the center aisle to the sanctuary. The other servers will walk to the side and one step back from the crucifer.
4. The crucifer pauses in front of the altar, but without bowing, proceeds up into the sanctuary; the candle bearers will proceed to each side of the altar. When the priest reaches the steps, the crucifer places the cross in its stand facing the congregation, and the candle bearers place the candles in their stands, then do a head bow with hands in “prayer” position. The altar servers then proceed to their chairs and remain standing along with the other ministers.
5. The crucifer brings the Roman Missal to the priest after the priest gives the invitation “Let us pray”. (Follow the priest's instructions if he wishes you to bring the Roman Missal to him before this for any reason.) The Roman Missal should be held steady, without shaking or movement, at an angle and position comfortable for the priest to read the prayer, with the crucifer standing facing the priest.
6. After the opening prayer, the crucifer places the Roman Missal (on the altar after the opening prayer, on the credenza after the closing prayer), and returns to their seat.
7. When the Gospel acclamation begins, candlebearers proceed to their respective candles and pick them up. Remain facing the altar until the deacon or priest turns to walk toward the ambo. They then walk in procession with the deacon or priest to the ambo, flanking the ambo during the reading of the Gospel. Afterward, they return their candles in the same way as before. (see # 4)

## NAMES AND PLACES

Listed below are the names and descriptions of the areas and items that are used in the liturgy. You should know them so that you are able to use them properly and are able to understand what other ministers are talking about when these things are referred to. You should treat all the areas and items used for worship with special respect and care.

### Areas of the Church

The **Sanctuary** is the area in the center of the church where the **presider's chair**, the **ambo**, and the **altar** are located. The word means “holy place.” It is often set apart from the rest of the church by being slightly elevated.

The **Sacristy** is the room where the vestments are stored. It is in this area where the priest vests (gets dressed with special vestments) and prepares for Mass, and where all supplies for the liturgy are kept.

The **Adoration Chapel** is the area for prayer and meditation where the Monstrance is kept in which the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession or exposed for adoration.

The **Reconciliation Room**, located next to the altar servers' vesting area, is where the priest privately hears the confessions of the people.

The **Narthex** (Gathering Space) is the area just outside the church where people can assemble before Mass begins.

## Furniture

The **Presider's Chair** is the chair from which the priest leads at Mass during the Liturgy of the Word and the concluding prayers of the Mass.

The **Ambo** is the place at which the sacred readings and homily are given. Most of the action of the Liturgy of the Word takes place at the Ambo.

The **Altar** is the large, high table located in the middle of the sanctuary from which the priest presides over the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In ancient times, the altar was the place where a sacrifice was offered to God; therefore it is at the Altar where the sacrifice of the Mass takes place.

The **Credence Tables** are tables on either side of the sanctuary for the purpose of holding the cruets, bowl, Roman Missal, chalice, ciboria, communion cups and other items required for the celebration of Mass.

The **Lectern** is the stand on the right side of the sanctuary from which announcements and talks are made.

8. As an altar server, you are generously giving of your time and serving your parish through this ministry. You do not get paid for this service. However, at certain times, you may receive an honorarium (e.g. at a wedding). Please accept this as a token of appreciation, expressing your thanks to the person. Keep in mind, however, that this is always optional, and of course, not the reason you are there. All servers are expected to attend all meetings. If for some reason you are unable to attend the meeting, you are asked to contact one of the moderators to let them know so that a makeup time may be scheduled.

9. The serving schedule will be printed and distributed on a regular basis. It will be distributed by e-mail or mailed to you. **IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHECK YOUR ASSIGNMENTS, NOTE THEM ON YOUR CALENDAR, AND SAFEGUARD THE SCHEDULE.**

**IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO FULFILL YOUR ASSIGNMENT, YOU ARE TO FIND A REPLACEMENT. THIS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY!** (You have been given a roster with names and phone numbers for this very purpose.) If you are still unable to find a replacement, at the very least, call the other two servers to let them know they will be serving with only two.

10. When you are attending a Mass for which you are not scheduled to serve, always check to see if the servers have arrived. If one or both are missing, you should be prepared to step in and take their place. We should never have the occasion where there is no one serving and available servers are sitting in the assembly.

3. Even though you will be wearing an alb over your street clothes, appropriate clothing should still be worn. This means you may wear dresses, skirts, slacks, shirts. Shoes may be of any color, although brown or black are preferred. Wear nothing with writing or symbols that will show through the alb.

4. Be sure your hands and face are clean and your hair is neatly combed. Please do not wear cologne or perfume which is very heavy as these scents often remain in the fabric. Girls should be careful not to get any makeup on the albs. Girls should wear their hair pulled back off their faces.

5. Always arrive 15-20 minutes before the beginning of the liturgy. First, check in with the liturgy coordinator to let them know you are present. Second, be sure to sign in on the "sign-in" sheet which is posted on the bulletin board.

6. Upon arriving, give a general check to be sure that everything is in place for the liturgy. You may check with the sacristan to see if she/he needs any assistance in setting up for liturgy.

7. Put on your alb and cincture, then say the altar server's prayer (found on the inside door of the closet).

## **Books**

The **Lectionary** is the large book containing the readings from the Bible that are proclaimed at all Masses. It is used by the lectors and by the priest.

The **Roman Missal** is a book containing all of the prayers the priest says during Mass, along with special instructions for the priest.

The **Book of Gospels** contains the Gospel readings. It is usually carried in the entrance procession by the deacon.

A binder with the **Prayer of the Faithful** is also used at Masses.

The Book of Blessings contains blessings pertaining to people, buildings and forms of human activity, objects for use in liturgy and devotions, articles to foster devotion, and various needs and occasions.

## **Linens**

The **Corporal** is a white square piece of cloth that is spread upon the altar during Mass. The chalice is placed upon it. Its purpose is to ensure that any small particles or crumbs from the Sacred Host can be cleaned easily.

A **Purificator** is a white cloth (similar to a napkin) which is used to wipe the rim of the chalice or communion cup after drinking from it.

A **Pall** is a square pocket shaped piece of cloth with a cardboard/plastic insert to stiffen it. It is placed over the chalice to prevent dust or other matter falling into it.

A **Towel** is used by the priest to dry his hands after the hand washing.

## Vessels

The **Chalice** is Latin meaning “cup”. This is a consecrated cup made of gold or silver which holds the wine .

The **Paten** is Latin meaning “plate.” It is the vessel made of gold or silver upon which the large bread for consecration rests.

A **Ciborium, (plural=Ciboria)** is a special container that looks like a round bowl that is used to hold the bread (hosts) for Holy Communion. It has a lid or a cover. Ciboria that hold consecrated hosts are stored in the tabernacle.

The **Communion Cups** are similar to the priest’s chalice, and are used by the laity in receiving the precious Blood of Christ.

**Cruets** are pitcher-like vessels that contain the water and wine at Mass.

A **Lavabo** is a bowl over which the priest washes his hands during Mass (water drips into this bowl.)

A **Flagon** is a pitcher that contains the wine that will be consecrated during the Eucharist.

**Walking:** Take your time and move deliberately and with dignity. Walking in church is never a race and should never be hurried. When servers walk together, they should always remain together, walking at the same pace.

**Carrying the Processional Cross and Candles:** When you carry the processional cross, carry it straight and with the image of Christ facing forward. When you carry the candles, hold them straight up, not tilted.

## General Norms for Serving

1. You are performing your ministry so that our worship at liturgy can be more prayerful and meaningful. You should never be a distraction in any way to other people. During Mass and other liturgies, you must pay attention, participate in the prayers and singing, and be prayerful and reverent. There is absolutely never to be any fooling around, joking around, or any other behavior that would be distracting or disrespectful. If for some reason it is necessary to say something to your partner (for example, to ask a necessary question or to clarify what you should be doing), do so quietly and simply as possible. This should not be an extended conversation. Aside from these limited cases of necessity, there should never be any talking between the servers.
2. The liturgical clothing for servers to wear is the alb. Be sure that you are wearing an alb that fits you properly (it should touch the top of the foot before putting on the cincture). Take good care of the albs since other servers will have to wear them. Always hang them up properly. A cincture should also be worn, matching the color of the season (to be found on the liturgical calendar). When wearing a cincture, it is tied on your left side. Hang these up as well.



# PROCEDURES FOR SERVING

## Gestures and Postures

During the celebration, when you are not performing specific tasks, you will be sitting, kneeling, or standing. Everything you do as a server, no matter how ordinary it may seem, should be done carefully and reverently, because everything is a part of the worship you are giving to God.

**Hands:** Be sure you have a firm grip on whatever you are carrying. If one or both hands are free, they should be kept in front of you, clasped together at chest level, in “prayer” position. If you are carrying something in one hand, the other hand should be held flat against your body, at waist level.

**Eyes:** Always look where the action is, for example, at the altar, ambo, presider’s chair, or the direction in which you are walking. You should not be gazing aimlessly around the church, looking at different things and people during Mass.

**Standing:** Always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor; do not slouch. Do not lean on one leg or on anything else.

**Kneeling:** Kneel straight without leaning on the backs of your legs; retain prayer position.

**Sitting:** Sit up straight and keep your knees together. Do not cross your legs or tap your feet. Feet should never be swinging. Hands should rest flat on your lap if you are not holding on to something while you are sitting.

**Bowing:** Make a respectful and deep bow at the waist; if carrying a candle or cross, it should be a bow of the head. It should be a smooth motion, and not a jerky or quick bobbing.

## Clothing

The **Alb** is a long white robe worn by the priest, deacon, and altar servers. The alb is a reminder of our baptism. It signifies purity of conscience.

The **Cincture** is a rope or cord worn around the waist (like a belt) over the alb. It further symbolizes modesty and also readiness for hard work in God’s service.

The **Stole** is a long, narrow band of cloth that looks like a scarf. The priest wears the stole draped over his shoulders and hanging down in front; the deacon wears a stole draped over one shoulder and diagonally across his chest. Stoles may be white, green, red, purple or gold. Worn as it is over the shoulders, it reminds us of the cross Our Lord carried.

The **Chasuble** is the outer and chief vestment of the priest at Mass. Its name means, “little house” and it represents the overshadowing power of Christ. It usually matches the color of the stole.

The **Dalmatic** is the outer garment worn by the deacon. It, too, usually matches the color of the stole.

The **Cope** is a cloak, opened in the front and fastened at the breast with a band or clasp; it is used for benediction, processions, and other occasions outside of Mass. It represents the Royalty of Christ and is reserved for the most special occasions.

The **Humeral veil** is a long, wide rectangular cloth worn around the shoulders by the priest when carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession or giving benediction.

## Other Items

The **Thurible** is a metal vessel in the shape of a vase on a chain. It is used for burning incense. The **Incense Boat** is a small metal container that holds the incense to be placed into the thurible. The boat has a cover and a spoon. Both the thurible and the incense boat are placed on a stand.

The **Holy Water Bucket** is the container used to hold holy water. The **Aspergillum (Sprinkler)** is used to spray holy water over the people during a blessing or a sprinkling rite.

The **Paschal Candle (Easter Candle)** is the large candle placed at the left forefront of the Sanctuary. This candle is to be lit before Mass during the Easter Season to commemorate the Risen Christ among us. After Pentecost, it remains near the baptismal font. It is also used during baptisms and funerals throughout the year.

The **Processional Cross** is the large cross that is carried in by an altar server (the crucifer) in the three processions of the Mass: opening, procession of the gifts, and closing.

The **Tabernacle** is the large, decorated box in which the consecrated Eucharistic Bread is kept. It is located in the arch to the right of the sanctuary.

The **Sanctuary Lamp** is a candle in a red holder that is lit when the Blessed Sacrament is present within the Tabernacle.

The **Baptismal Font** is the large pool located in the arch to the left of the sanctuary where baptisms take place.

The **Ambry** is the place where the Holy Oils are kept. The ambry is on the wall behind the baptismal font. There are three Holy Oils stored there: OC: the Oil of Catechumens, SC: the Sacred Chrism, and OI: the Oil of the Sick (or infirm).

The **Bells** are rung at the consecration during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Our bells are kept near the kneeling cushion of the crucifer whose duty it is to handle the bells.

The **Funeral Pall** is a large decorated cloth that covers the casket during a Funeral Mass.

## Liturgical Seasons and Colors

**Advent** is the period of four weeks of preparation prior to Christmas. **Violet or purple** is the color of this season.

The **Christmas Season** begins on Christmas Eve and continues through the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. **White or gold** is the color for this season.

**Lent** is the forty-day period before Easter. **A darker (than that used in Advent) violet or purple** is the color for this season.

**Easter** is the great fifty days beginning with the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night and continuing until the feast of Pentecost. **White or gold** is the color for Easter; **red** is the color for **Pentecost**.

**Ordinary Time** literally means ordered or counted time. **Green** is the color for ordinary time.

**Red** is also used on **Good Friday**, at **Confirmation**, and on the **feasts and memorials of martyrs**.

Altar Servers wear cinctures in colors to match the Liturgi-