St. Catharine RC Church
Guide for Altar Servers

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St. Catharine Roman Catholic Church
Guide for Altar Servers

Welcome!
You are now a member of a very special group of young people in our parish who have answered God’s call to ministry. As a St. Catharine Altar Server, you are one of the liturgical ministers of our parish and have special tasks to perform during the liturgies, especially during the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass. Serving at Mass will involve learning some new words and terms. You will also be asked to perform some very specific duties. It is important to realize that you are serving God in helping with prayers and with the Eucharist.

This guide covers the main details of serving at Mass. The guide should help you become more comfortable and refined in your role on the altar. We ask that you keep a print out of this guide so that you can review the instructions later when needed.

Requirements
To be an altar server, you must be in the 5th – 12th grade, have received your First Holy Communion, know how to genuflect properly and how to make the sign of the cross. You must attend Mass regularly, be a member of St. Catharine Catholic Parish or a student at Academy of Our Lady School, and have a desire to serve at the Altar of the Lord.

Expectations
As an altar server, you are involved in some of the holiest and most sacred events in our tradition of Catholic worship. Mass is a combination of Word and
Sacrament. We hear God’s Word spoken to us through the scriptures and in the homily. Then we respond to the Word with our prayers and in receiving the body and blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Through prayer and reflection, we all can appreciate the significance of what is actually happening in Mass. It is important that you, as an altar server, be attentive and sensitive to the presence of God during the Mass and afterwards. God calls us to respond to his great love and mercy with a sense of reverence and gratefulness. We must all help each other to remember to show reverence to God at all times, but most especially when you are serving. You are expected to show reverence during mass by:

1) **Sitting still**, be calm and settle your nerves  
2) Only **speak when necessary**, no talking  
3) **Respond** with the congregation at the appropriate times  
4) Do your best to **enter into the spirit** of the celebration – sing with God’s family  
5) **Keep your movements smooth and slow**  
   (not sluggish though!)

**General Reminders**

There are 2-3 altar servers assigned to serve for the weekly Masses on Saturday and Sunday, and one server for daily Mass. The most important thing to remember is that people look to you to help create an atmosphere of reverence and prayer. Your behavior will either help or hinder the celebration. We also ask that you come dressed to serve, even if you are not scheduled (in case you have to fill in).
**Arrive to serve at Mass**

Arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass starts. Check your name off on the calendar and greet everyone in the Vesting Sacristy. Get to know your fellow servers and vest in your alb. Leave all cell phones and other personal items in the Vesting Sacristy. Be sure your parents know that you need to get to church early! If you arrive less than 15 minutes before mass starts, another server may replace you on the schedule. Wait quietly for Mass to begin. Prepare yourself to serve God at Mass. ¹

**Schedule & Schedule Conflicts**

Schedules are sent out monthly. If you are unable to serve when you are scheduled, you should find another server to fill in for you as soon as possible. A list of servers is emailed to all families twice a year. Servers who miss assignments on a consistent basis may be asked to consider if this is the right ministry for them.

¹ If you are at a mass you are not scheduled to serve, feel free to check in and make sure there are enough servers present.
**Alb Sizes and Cinctures**

Upon arrival, each server will select an Alb from the closet. Remember to return the alb to the hanger so that others can use the alb for the next Mass. Albs are available from size 10 - 20. The Alb should come to the ankle.

Use the mirror to check the size of your alb.

All servers should hang up their vestments after Mass. NO albs should be found on the floor of the closet.

Please use the color cincture that matches the liturgical season. If the color is not posted on the Altar Server board, please check with the Presider. Cinctures should not look like a belt, but should hang down the RIGHT side of your body. Cinctures are NOT to be untied. Playing with your cincture is not acceptable at any time. Misuse of vestments at any time will not be tolerated.

**Appropriate Church Attire for Altar Serving**

Altar servers should always wear Sunday best including dress shoes. Come to Mass ready to serve.
• Male servers should dress in collared shirts, dress pants, or khakis.
• Female servers should wear dresses, skirts, or dress pants with blouse (no leggings or capri pants).
• Hair must be neatly combed.
• Please avoid bold stripes, text, or designs on your clothing that might show through the albs. Solid colors are fine, but light colors are best for shirts and tops.
• AoOL students may serve in the Official Dress uniform.

What NOT to wear

Blue Jeans, shorts, t-shirts are NOT to be worn when altar serving. No athletic, rubber soled shoes (sneakers, tennis shoes, etc. of any color), flip-flops or open-back sandals are to be worn. Boys should wear a brown or black dress shoe.
**Actions of Reverence**

**Prayer Hands**
Believe it or not, what you do with your hands is very important! When you are standing or sitting and your hands are busy, or if you can’t seem to sit or stand still, you will be a source of distraction for your friends and family in the pews and the other Altar Servers.

**Standing**
BE ALERT! Do not slouch, yawn, or play with your hair. Do not play with the cincture. Stand straight with prayer hands. Do not lean your hands on the pew rail. Your eyes should be focused on Mass so that you are aware of any needs by the Presider.

**Walking**
Walking should be done with your back straight and head held high. Pace should not be rushed but deliberate.

**Sitting**
Sit erect in the pew with your hands folded on your lap. Do not slouch. Both feet should be kept flat on the floor.
Silence

Except for making the proper responses, silence is maintained at all times. Nothing is more distracting to the priest or congregation than to see Altar Servers whispering together. The only exception is if a duty needs to be passed to another server or guidance is being given. This should be done as quietly as possible. No other talking should take place.

Kneeling

Your body should be upright with prayer hands above your waist. DO NOT drape your hands over the pew rail.

Correct Kneeling  Incorrect Kneeling

Actions that are NOT reverent.

Please avoid doing any of these:

- Chewing gum in church, especially when serving
- Running anytime in the Church
- Horseplay in the Vesting Sacristy – this is a time to prepare for Mass.
- Cells phones should be left in the Vesting Sacristy and never taken in to the church
**Altar Server Duties**

Please make sure the duties are spread out evenly.  

**Entrance Procession**
- Servers process in

**Opening Prayer**
- Server holds book for Presider

**Liturgy of the Word**
- Server holds book for Presider following the homily

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:**
- Preparation of the Altar
- Preparation of the Gifts
- Washing of hands

**Eucharistic Prayer**

**Communion Rite**
- Receive communion
- Clear Altar (not Ciborium tops)

**Closing Prayer**
- Server holds book for Presider

**Recessional**
- Servers recess out of church

The two Candles and Cross are kept in the Vesting Sacristy. Have a sacristan light the candles. **Altar Servers should NOT light the candles.**

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2 If there are only two servers at mass, one carries the cross and the other a candle (preset the second candle on its holder on the Altar). If there is only one server present, preset both candles and process in with the cross.
Introductory Rites

Entrance Processional and beginning of Mass

When the presider is ready, all line up in the back of the church.

Once the priest is ready to begin, the cross bearer will take their position ahead of the procession. The candle bearers will position themselves off the cross bearer’s outside shoulder and walk behind the cross bearer, followed by the lector, deacon (when one is present), and priest. Begin to move down the center aisle when the singing starts.

Remember you will all move and work together as a team!

If there are only two servers, the cross bearer lines up at the head of the procession. The single candle bearer will line up behind the cross, with the ministers and clergy behind them.

If there is only one server at a mass, they will carry the cross and line up ahead of the procession.

Cross Bearer

- The Cross is heavy!
- Walk steady and with pace of the music.
• Hold the cross up high while maintaining control.
• Do not angle the Cross forward or backward, keep it straight up.
• Make sure the Cross is pointing straight ahead.

_Candle Bearers_

• Keep your hair away from the candles.
• Do not angle forward, backward, or side-to-side; keep the candles up straight.
• Do not blow out the candle.
• Do not shift your hands around when holding the candles. If they are too heavy for you to carry then you should give this duty to another server.
• The cross bearer stops briefly in front of the altar after passing the final pew. They then walk stage left³ of the altar and place the cross in the holder. Then go to the pew.

After the cross breaks for the stand, the candle bearers come to the altar. Walk directly up the steps and place the candles in its holder. Take your time putting the candle down – rushing can cause the candle to “thunk” loudly in place. The stage right server walks down the ramp behind the Altar to the pew, the stage left server

³ “Stage right” and “stage left” directions are from the perspective of someone standing on the Altar facing the congregation. So the pew where the servers sit is “stage left”, the Ambo and Choir are “stage right”
goes down the steps to the pew.

**Opening Prayer – Servers Stand**

The Presider begins Mass by saying “In the Name of the Father...” or other words. The Presider (or Deacon) leads the congregation in the penitential rite, followed by the Gloria. (During Advent and Lent, the Gloria is not sung. The Presider will go right to the prayer).

After the processional, the server who will be holding the Roman Missal\(^4\) should immediately bring the Roman Missal and stand next to the Presider’s Chair. Stay at the chair until the opening prayer is completed or you are dismissed by the presider.

The deacon (or priest) will open the Roman Missal. Always stand directly in front of the priest with hands at the bottom of the Roman Missal. The server should present the Roman Missal to the Presider. PAY ATTENTION. Stand in front of the Presider and hold the Roman Missal at the proper level. When the priest finishes the prayer, he will close the Roman Missal. The server should carry the Roman Missal and place it on the left side of the credence table. Go back to the pew when done.

All are then seated for the Liturgy of the Word. Stand, sit, and sing with the congregation. Participate in the mass! You are helping to lead the mass, so be attentive and reverent.

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\(^4\) Many times, the Roman Missal is replaced by a binder for prayers said at the Presider’s chair
Liturgy of the Word

Readings - Servers Sit

1) First Reading - The lector will proclaim the 1st reading from the Old Testament.

2) Responsorial – The Cantor will sing the responsorial. Servers will sing response.

3) Second Reading – The lector will read the 2nd reading from the New Testament.

4) Gospel Acclimation & Gospel reading – The Presider (or Deacon) will proclaim the Gospel – All stand and then sit for the Homily.

Universal Prayer - Servers Stand

After the Homily, Mass continues with the Profession of Faith (Creed). One altar server brings the binder to the Presider. Respond to each petition during the General Intercessions (Petitions). Following the intercessions, the congregation is seated while the Ushers begin the collection.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparing the Altar – Servers Stand

After the offertory song begins, the servers will move to dress the altar.

1) Bring the Chalice to the Altar and place stage right.
   a. Take the long corporals (rectangular) and place the first one on the stage left (cup) side of the Altar.
   b. Then take the small (square) corporal and place in the middle (the Cross closest to
the edge) for the Presider.

2) Bring The Roman Missal & stand, and place them to the left of the square (small) corporal.

3) Bring the cups and purificators and place stage left on the long corporal.

4) Bring the water and place it to the right of the chalice.

When the servers are done dressing the Altar, wait behind the Altar (line up with the corners) for the Presider to move to the steps.

While two servers are setting the Altar, the third takes the cross and processes down the center aisle of the church to the back. Once the Presider comes down the
steps to the front of the altar, the Cross leads the
offertory procession to the Sanctuary. The Cross will
come up center aisle as in the opening: stop briefly at
last pew and then move stage left to place cross in stand
and sit in pew. If there are less than three servers, the
Cross should help dress the Altar first. Go to the back
only when most of the work on the Altar has been
completed.

**Preparation of the Gifts**

When the priest and deacon move to the front of the
Sanctuary, walk behind them (to the front of the Altar)
to receive the gifts. Stand one on each side of the
Presider. Once the Presider has taken the gifts, he will
turn and hand them to the servers. Take the bread and
place it center on the altar. Place the wine stage right
of the Chalice and remove top. Return to your seat via
the ramp. Place the top of the wine decanter on the
Credence Table.
**Washing of the Hands**

The servers who place the gifts on the altar will then go and collect the bowl and finger towel from the Credence Table.

Stand at the bottom step in position. The server with the towel will stand closest to the congregation, When the Presider says, “Blessed be God forever” following the blessing of the wine, move forward to wash his hands. **DO NOT MAKE THE PRESIDER WALK TO YOU!**

The Presider will hand the water cruet to the server with the bowl. Pour water until signaled to stop. The Presider will dry his hands with the towel and drape it back over the server’s arm. The Presider or Deacon will then hand the wine decanter to whichever server has a free hand. Return the items to the credence table and return to the pew.

**Eucharistic Prayer – Servers Kneel**

During the Eucharistic Prayer, servers should be kneeling erect, eyes focused on the altar and with prayer hands.
**Communion Rite**

Stand for the Lord’s Prayer. At the Sign of Peace, exchange a handshake of peace with each other and those seated behind you.

Servers will kneel until the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion begin to receive Communion. At that point servers:

1) Walk down stage the left side aisle to the back on the church.
2) Wait at the back of the Church for the congregation from the stage right side to reach the back, and then walk up the center aisle to receive Communion.
3) Return to pew.

After taking a moment to say a prayer, servers:

1) Refold the corporals and place them on the chalice with the Pall and Purificator.
2) Place the chalice, Roman Missal & stand, and anything remaining on the Altar except for the tops to the Ciboria back on the Credence Table.

**Concluding Rite**

**Closing Prayer**

When the distribution of communion is over, the Presider or Deacon will place the remaining hosts in the Tabernacle. The priest will then return to his chair and will be seated for a few moments. The server holding the Roman Missal for the closing prayer will go and stand next to the Presider’s Chair.

When the Presider stands and says “Let Us Pray”, the
server stands directly in front of the priest and holds the Roman Missal upright for him to read. When finished, the priest will close the book and the server will return to his/her chair. All servers are now standing for the final blessing.

**Recessional**
When the closing hymn begins, the servers will move.

The cross bearer collects the cross from the stand and takes their place in the aisle of the church. Leave room for the candle holders, lectors and clergy.

The candle bearers will collect the candles and walk down to the cross and turn to face the altar, taking a position between the Cross and the Altar.\(^5\)

The Presider will also come down to the front of the Altar. When he bows and turns, all servers turn and exit the church. Don’t rush. Walk deliberately in time with the music.

**After Mass**
Return the cross and candles to their respective stands in the Vesting Sacristy (you may blow out the candle). All servers are expected to hang up their alb and cincture, ensuring they are on the correct hanger and location.

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\(^5\) If two candle holders – stand on either side of the cross. If only one, stand directly behind the cross.
The Sanctuary is the space at the front of the church within which the Mass takes place. The word means “holy place.” It is often set apart from the rest of the church by being slightly elevated. There are many things in the sanctuary with which you should be familiar.

Main Altar – This is the large, high table located in the middle of our sanctuary where most of the Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place. 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 liturgical colors are often draped across the altar.
**Ambo (Pulpit/Lectern)**
This is the place from which the sacred readings and homily are given. Most of the Liturgy of the Word takes place at the Ambo. It is the special place set aside for Sacred Scripture.

**Tabernacle** – This is the ornate place where the Eucharist is reserved. Hosts are taken out and returned to the Tabernacle at communion time. Proper reverence by genuflection is to be given to the Tabernacle at all times when the Sanctuary light is lit.

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

**Paschal Candle** – The Paschal Candle, used during the mass from the Easter Vigil through Pentecost, is placed in the Sanctuary next to the Ambo. The candle is to be lit before Mass to commemorate the Risen Christ among us. After Pentecost, it remains at the Baptismal Font and is not lit during Mass.
Credence Table – This area stage left of the altar and is used for the purpose of holding the cruets, bowl, Roman Missal, chalice, ciboria and other items required for the celebration of the Mass.

Cruet, Bowl and Finger Towel – The cruet (pitcher-like vessel containing water), the bowl, and finger towel are to be used during the Preparation of the Gifts.

Presider’s Chair – The chair from which the priest leads the prayers and rites of the church. The adjacent chairs are for deacons or concelebrants.

Candles and Cross – There are four candles in the Sanctuary. Two are at the far corner of the Altar, the other two by the steps. The two candles and the Cross used for the processional are housed in the Vesting Sacristy.
**Baptismal font** – The baptismal font is located in the middle of the church. This is where the priest will conduct the sacrament of baptism.

**Holy Oils** – A consecrated mixture of olive oil and balsam, blessed by the bishop and used by the priest or bishop for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Anointing of the Sick.

**Holy water** – Water that has been blessed by a priest or bishop for the purposes of spiritual cleansing. Our church has vessels (“dips”) containing holy water at the entrances to the Church.
**Altar Vessels and Other Sacred Vessels:**

**Chalice** – The large cup used at Mass to hold the wine that becomes the blood of Christ.

**Ciborium** – This is a vessel (with a lid not shown) used to hold the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

**Paten Bowl** – This is a bowl that matches the chalice. It holds the bread that becomes the body of Christ.

**Purificator** – This is a triple folded rectangular white cloth used to cleanse the Chalice.

**Corporal** – A white linen cloth on which are placed the vessels containing the bread and wine during Mass that become the Body and Blood of Christ. We use a long (rectangular) corporal for the bread and wine, and a short (square) corporal for the Chalice. When unfolded, it is placed on top of the altar cloth. With the cross facing up closest to the edge of the Altar.

**Pall** – The stiff square white cover that is place over the Chalice.
**Monstrance** – This is a large ornate vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction and Eucharistic processions.

**Lunette** – A thin, circular receptacle, having a glass face that holds the Consecrated Host used at Benediction. It slides into the Monstrance on a track.

**Pyx** – A pocket watch–shaped case in which Communion is kept to distribute during sick calls.

**Apergillum** – Also called the holy water sprinkler, it is a perforated metal ball or tube on a handle that holds holy water used by the priest to sprinkle the faithful or articles to be blessed. It is often kept in a small bucket (with a handle) that holds holy water.

**Thurible** – The metal container extended from a chain in which charcoal is burned for liturgical ceremonies. It has a lid that can be raised. The **Boat** is a small metal container that holds the incense used in the Thurible. It has a cover and comes with a small spoon.
Vestments Worn by the Priest and Deacon

**Alb** – This long, white, dress-like vestment can be used by all liturgical ministers including the priest, deacon and altar server.

**Cincture** – This is the long cord used for fastening some albs at the waist. It holds the loose-fitting type of alb in place and is used to adjust it to the proper length. The cincture worn by the priest is usually white, although the liturgical color of the day may be used. Altar servers will wear the liturgical color of the day.

**Stole** – A stole is a long cloth, often ornately decorated of the same color as the chasuble. According to the manner in which it is worn, it is the mark of a priest or deacon. The priest wears it around the neck, letting it hand down the front. A deacon wears it over his left shoulder and fastened at this right side like a sash. For the Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Reconciliation the priest will wear a smaller stole, white on one side and purple on the other.
Chasuble – The Chasuble is the sleeveless outer vestment, slipped over the head, hanging down from the shoulders and covering the stole and alb. It is the proper Mass vestment of the priest and its color varies according to the feast.

Dalmatic – The dalmatic is a loose-fitting robe with open sides and wide sleeves worn by the deacon. It takes its color from the liturgical feast. The deacon wears the stole over the dalmatic across his left shoulder.

Other Vestments used in Liturgical ceremonies

Humeral veil – This is a long narrow, shawl-like vestment used at Benediction and in processions where the Blessed Sacrament is carried.

Cope – A cape-like vestment that is worn over the alb and put on over the shoulders and hangs to the ankles. It is open in the front and clasped at the neck. The priest wears it in processions, at Benediction, and in other services. Copes can be found in any of the liturgical colors.
Books Used During The Liturgy

Throughout the Mass, the priest, deacon or lector will use many different books as part of the celebration. It is important that you are familiar with the name and location of each special book.

**Roman Missal** – This is a large and heavy book that contains all the words the priest uses during the Mass, except the readings.

**Lectionary** – This book contains all the Scripture readings for Mass and is placed on the ambo from which the readings are done.

**Book of the Gospel** – This book contains the Gospel readings (taken from the Lectionary). It is usually carried in the entrance procession by the deacon when there is one present. It is placed on the altar and carried to the ambo at the Gospel reading.
Ministers at Mass

It takes quite a few people to celebrate Mass. “To Minister” means “to serve.” All of these people serve the parish and help the congregation at Mass to worship.

**Priest, Celebrant** – The priest presides over the celebration of Mass. Sometimes, at what is called a concelebrated Mass, there may be more than one priest. The priest who presides at mass is the one you should be most concerned about as your job is to help him.

**Deacon** – When present, the deacon usually proclaims the Gospel, preaches, prepares the gifts for Eucharist, helps to distribute Communion, and gives direction to the people.

**Acolytes / Altar Servers** – This is you and how you serve the Priest and the Church Community are listed in this manual.

**Lector** – The person(s) who read(s) the first two readings during the Liturgy of the Word.

**Cantor** – The person who leads the hymns, acclamations, and the responsorial psalms.

**Music Director** – This person is in charge of the music for the Mass.

**Choir** – The choir leads the church community in song.

**Sacristan** – This person helps prepare the Mass for the priest, lights the candles and provides assistance to the altar servers.

**Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** – These ministers assist with the distribution of Communion.

**Greeters** – These people greet the community as they arrive for Mass.

**Ushers** – These people help with seating and also take up the collection during mass.