



**Guide for Altar
Servers
Our Lady of Mercy,
Redding**

Issue 1, November 2011

Welcome to our Altar Server Program at Our Lady of Mercy. You are volunteering as a server at church. You light candles, hold the books, handle the vessels, and arrange the cloths. You help the other ministers focus on their work by simplifying their motions and eliminating distractions. You help the entire community celebrate Eucharist by your humble service. Your actions may seem routine, but everyone depends on you to do them without flash. **When you serve well, no one notices you.** People only notice when things go awry. The greatest compliment they give you is to ignore that you are there.

This is why it is so important for you to attend our trainings at our Church and all of our servers serve mass in the same way, - no confusion among servers while on the altar. We only have training sessions a few times a year, just like learning to play basketball or to swim it takes practice and training to become competent at it. You can't expect to serve mass without learning how to do it.

We train our Servers by actual training workshops at OLM a few times a year and for the first year or so they will always be scheduled with experienced servers, and get "on the job" training from them. When you become an Altar Server at OLM we expect you to commit your time to attend these trainings.

The schedule for altar servers is done every two months. If there are dates you know you are unavailable contact me before the end of the current schedule and let her know when you are unavailable to serve. It's very easy to schedule someone the days they want to serve with adequate notice.

Generally all contact with the servers is done via email. Please ensure I have your current email address and contact information. If you do not have email please make sure I have a current phone number for you so you can be contacted. Copies of all current schedules and notifications are available in the Church outside the door of the room where the servers dress in church.

A current list of servers will be given to all servers. Please use this to contact an alternate server if you are unable to serve as scheduled. Please note adult servers only serve at the 5pm mass on Saturday and the 11am mass on Sunday. Adult servers may not serve with children unless they are of the same family. At any time if you have questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 530 245 0904 or dunboycastle@sbcglobal.net.

Sincerely, Zita Biehle

Arrival at Church to Serve - Preparing for Mass

- Arrive at Church to be ready dressed and ready to serve at least 15 minutes before the start of mass.
- Before you get dressed in your alb (white robe), make sure you have used the bathroom.
- Make sure you are wearing the correct color cincture (rope belt). Look at the calendar to the left of the window in the sacristy, (room where you dress), the color of the writing of the date of the day tells you what color to wear. When the number is black, you wear a white cincture (rope belt). The cincture is tied and hangs down on your right.
- When dressing, make sure your alb is ankle length. (If you try on more than one alb, always make sure you hang the other one up properly. There is a small footstool there for you to stand on if you have problems reaching the hangers comfortably). Especially for our younger servers, you are growing so the same size robe will not always fit you, so you may need to try a different size alb at times to make sure its ankle length. If you are not sure please ask!
- Check with the sacristan, (Diane), to see if help is needed.
- The candles at the altar should be lit 10 to 15 minutes before Mass begins. Do so slowly, reverently, and quietly, genuflecting before the tabernacle, bowing before the altar. Don't use a match - or worse yet, a cigarette lighter in the presence of the assembly. Use the brass candle lighter.
- You should be in place at the back of the Church ready for the Entrance Procession about 10 minutes before mass begins. Remember the cross and both candles need to be at the back of the Church for this.

During Regular Mass

For approximately the first year all servers serve with experienced servers.

Entrance Procession

In the Entrance Procession, servers carry the cross and the candles. Generally the most experienced server carries the cross, the newest server carries the candle on the left hand side behind the cross and the other server carries the second candle behind and to the right of the cross.

The candle-bearers and cross-bearer usually bow their heads in unison upon reaching the foot of the sanctuary, then continue to the place where the candles and cross are normally placed during the Mass. Servers bow their heads when the priest reverences the altar by either bowing or genuflecting in front of the altar. Servers move to place the cross and candles in their places only after the priest has bowed or genuflected.

After servers have carefully placed the cross and candles in the designated places, they go to their seats in the sanctuary.

What if there are only two servers?

In this case, the candles are left on the altar and not used in the Entrance Procession. The cross is carried and the second server walks directly behind the cross, hands joined together in front. When the Entrance Procession reaches the altar, the server with the cross goes to the left side of the altar and the other server to the right of the altar.

Reading of the Gospel

During the reading of the Gospel, (except during certain times when it is not done,- you always know before if this is the case) the candles are held by the servers.

When the priest or deacon moves to the altar to pick up the Book, in unison one server from either side of the sanctuary walks towards the candles, picks them up and walks to the ambo. They then stand one on either side of the ambo. Both servers remain in place at the ambo until the conclusion of the Gospel reading.

After the Gospel, the assembly is seated. The servers return the candle to the appropriate place and take their seats. During the Gospel, the third server stays in place on the altar. All listen attentively to the homily, in which the priest or deacon breaks open the word that was just proclaimed, and helps to connect it with our daily lives.

Holding the book

The Roman Missal (big red book) is held in front of the Priest at the Opening Prayer and again for Closing Prayer. At time the priest will request a special Rite book be held. This book is held by the server on the right hand side of the altar. Generally the priest is at the back of the altar and says “Let us pray”, when he says this the Server (on the right of the altar) needs to be ready to hold the book for the priest.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Preparation of the Altar and of the Gifts. The servers help to prepare the Lord’s altar for the holy meal.

The servers place the chalice, communion cups, purificators and Roman Missal on the altar. If there is no deacon, the servers spread out the corporal and place the chalice on it and the Book on its holder to the left of it.

The server who carried the cross goes to the back of the church to lead the procession of the gifts.

After preparing the altar, servers assist the celebrant in receiving the gifts brought forward by the assembly. The gifts are handed directly to the priest or deacon who then hands them to the servers to be placed at the altar - in the case of the Prayer for the Sick book, it is placed at the base of the altar on the floor on the left hand side.

The cross bearer then puts the cross back in its place.

The server on the right side of the altar then returns to their place on the altar.

The servers on the left side of the altar work together. They bring forward a basin, pitcher, and towel for the celebrant to wash his hands. (All of these are found on the table on the left side of the sanctuary).

Eucharistic Prayer

Servers kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer. The server on the left of the sanctuary rings the bells at the Elevation of the Host and Chalice. Remember to keep ringing the bells as long as the host or chalice is elevated.

Communion Rite

Servers generally receive Holy Communion shortly after the priest and deacon. Be focused and reverent as you receive the Body and Blood of Christ. People in the assembly will be watching what you do as a model of how to receive communion reverently.

After you receive Holy Communion, return to your kneeler in the sanctuary. Stay kneeling while the assembly comes forward to receive. You may be asked to

assist with cleaning the altar during the Communion Rite or directly afterwards. It is the servers on the left side of the altar that do this. Generally you take what ever necessary from the altar and place it on the side table. Servers may sit when the assembly sits for announcements etc.

Concluding Rite

There is a procession out of the sanctuary to the back of the church at the end of mass. The cross bearer carries the cross down the steps directly beside where the cross rests during mass around the left side of the altar. S/he then walks to the first pew and stands there facing the altar until the priest is ready to move down the center aisle. After a prompt from the priest, the cross bearer turns around and slowly starts to process down the aisle, followed by the candle bearers.

Remember to keep three pews between the cross and the candle bearers.

Do not blow out the candles until you have reached the back of the Church and turned right.

The ministers process out of the church in the same order they processed in.

After Mass

- After the end of mass procession to the back of the Church, servers walk up the side aisle back to the altar. Remember you are in public view, this is not a time for playing with the candles or the cross!
- Walk up the left side of the Church and pause at the end of the side wall until the final hymn has finished.
- Only then walk quietly and reverently back to the altar and put the candles and cross back in their places.
- Return to the sacristy and ask the sacristan how you can help.
- If asked, reverently extinguish all candles. Be sure to use the snuffer. **Do not use your fingers to extinguish the candles and do not push down on the candle wick.** This makes it very difficult to light the candles the next time they are needed.
- When you have finished all of your tasks, hang your alb neatly, fastening any snaps so that the alb won't wrinkle. (If you do find some albs have fallen off their hangers please take a moment to hang them up properly, thank you.)
- Hang the cincture (rope belt) back where you found it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Your Clothes - What should you wear when you serve?

- Shoes - You should be conscious of what kind of shoes you are wearing so your walking from one location to another is not a distraction. Avoid wearing squeaky shoes, those that have smooth bottoms (so not to slip!), or shoes with harder bottoms (they would be loud when walking from one place to another). It is best not to wear high heels, sandals, flip-flops, or clunky sneakers. You might consider wearing soft flats or loafers in black or brown.
- Be careful not to wear clothing in which logos or images will show through the alb.
- Jewelry - If you are wearing it, please keep it discreet.

When on the Altar, how should I sit?

It is good to remember that although you may not be doing something, you are still in a public forum for prayer and are a model for the rest of the assembly. Be attentive to what is going on. Respond. Sing. Be silent. Sit down carefully. Sit tall with both feet on the floor. Never slouch or seem uninterested. Keep your hands folded or laid flat on your lap. Pray!

Is there a certain way I should walk when preparing things during Mass?

Keep your back straight, but relaxed in a way so as not to appear stiff. Walk slowly, smoothly, and gracefully. The pace is deliberate, but not rushed. When walking with other servers, walk together in a unified motion. Keep your hands folded when you are not carrying vessels or other items.

How should I stand during Mass?

Servers should always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor. Your feet should be about six to eight inches apart. This will give you balance and comfort. Never stand with your knees locked. Standing too long in this manner could actually cause fainting. Keep your hands folded when you are not carrying vessels or other items.

How should I walk down steps?

A server should never back down steps in the sanctuary. This is important for safety reasons. You can also lift your alb slightly when walking down the steps so you do not trip.

What should I do if something unexpected happens?

No matter how well you have prepared to serve, sometimes things go wrong. Candles could blow out; books could fall; coals may burn out; you might stumble; etc. When something goes wrong, stay calm. When a problem arises, think about it for a moment and then do what is required to correct the problem in a way that is not distracting to other ministers or to the assembly.

Where should I focus my attention during the liturgy?

A server should always look toward the focal point - the place where the action is taking place. This could be any of the following: presidential chair, ambo, altar or the baptismal font. When moving from place to place, it is best for you to look straight ahead - toward where you are going. Staring or looking around at other persons or things can unnecessarily distract the assembly. Respond, sing, pray, and observe silence and proper gestures.

Procedure when you have to cross in front of the tabernacle during mass

At the beginning of mass, all servers reverence the altar. Once you are on the altar and going about your duties during mass you may have to cross back and forth in front of the tabernacle. If you are carrying something in your hand you may simply pass in front of the tabernacle, without any additional reverencing. If you are not carrying something in your hand simply pause, face the tabernacle and simply bow your head. (Just bend your neck, do not bow at the waist, do not genuflect, do not genuflect and bless yourself).

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