

A Guidebook for Altar Servers

Called to Serve



ST. ROSE OF LIMA CHURCH
Simi Valley, CA

As each of you has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

1 Peter 4:10

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THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT

The Mass, an ancient prayer, has so many elements that have become part of the celebration. Servers must be familiar with all items connected with this celebration. You must know what these things are, why are they used, and where are they kept.

Service Books

Special books used during the liturgy

📖 *Sacramentary (Roman Missal)* – The large book that contains all the words the priest uses during Mass, except the readings.

📖 *Book of the Chair* – This book is kept by the chair where the priest sits and stands. It contains all the prayers from the Sacramentary that the priest needs when he is at this place.

📖 *Lectionary* – This book contains all the Scripture readings for Mass. The book is kept at the ambo; lectors go to ambo for readings.

📖 *Book of the Gospels* – 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 usually placed on the altar, and then carried to the ambo at the Gospel.

📖 *The Roman Ritual* – This book is used for the celebration of sacraments. Sometimes each rite has its own special book; for example, the Rite of Marriage or the Funeral Rite.

📖 *Ordo* – This book tells what feast day it is, what the readings are, and what is the proper color of the day. It is usually found on the vesting table.

📖 *Hymnal* – This book contains the hymns and psalms for Mass. You should keep this book near you so that you can sing whenever possible.

Note – Official books should be used during Mass. unless absolutely necessary, substitutes, such as monthly missalettes should not be used near the altar.

THE MINISTERS AT MASS

It takes quite a few people to celebrate Mass well. In larger parishes there can be as many as forty or fifty people ministering (if you count the choir). In smaller parishes, the number is usually far smaller. "To minister" means "to serve". So all of these people serve the community, helping them worship well.

▶ *Priest Celebrant* – This is the priest who presides over the celebration of the Mass. Sometimes, at what is called a concelebrated Mass, there can be more than one priest, but the one who presides is the one that you are mostly concerned about.

▶ *Deacon* – This person may or may not be part of your team. When present the deacon usually proclaims the Gospel, preaches, prepares the gifts for Eucharist, helps distribute Communion, and gives directions to the people.

▶ *Acolytes* – Altar servers.

▶ *Lector* – This is the person that reads the first and second readings. There can be two (2) lectors; one for the first reading and one for the second reading. In some parishes, this person also leads the responsorial psalm.

▶ *Cantor* – This is the leader of song. This person leads the hymns, acclamations and responsorial psalm.

▶ *Music Director* – This person is in charge of all the music of the parish. Frequently this is also the choir director or organist.

▶ *Musicians* – These people play the various instruments that accompany the music for the Mass. Choir members are also ministers.

▶ *Commentator* – This person makes announcements and helps the congregation follow the order of the Mass. The lector can fill this role.

▶ *Ushers* – These people greet the community as they arrive for Mass. They try to be sure that everyone is comfortably seated. They take up the collection at Mass.

▶ *Sacristan* – This person usually works before Mass, making sure that everything that is needed is where it belongs. You may be asked to help with his work.

▶ *Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist* – These ministers assist at Communion. In some parishes they are part of the procession.

THE SANCTUARY

The Sanctuary is that space at the front of the church within which most of the action of the Mass takes place. The word means "holy place". In most churches this space is somewhat elevated. There are things in the sanctuary with which you should be familiar.

† *Main Altar* – This is the large, high table usually located in the middle of the sanctuary. Most of the action of the liturgy of the Eucharist takes place near the main altar.

† *Altar Cloth* – This is the tablecloth for the main altar. It is usually white but also comes in liturgical colors.

† *Ambo* – This is the place where the readings are done. Gospel proclaimed and homily given (sometimes priest or deacon will go down to congregation for homily).

† *Lectern* – A Simple reading stand that is used to make announcements and used by cantor or commentator.

† *Credence Table* – A small table, usually on the Gospel side wall (left side when facing altar), on which is kept the Sacramentary and chalice (until transferred to the altar after prayer of the faithful). Also the cruet, water, finger dish and towel are kept there. Sometimes the vessels are purified there after Communion.

† *Candles* – They can be used in various ways within different parishes. Ordinarily candles are lit before Mass, two (2) at each side of the ambo. Candles can be brought in at entrance procession and placed at the ambo. Candles can be lit before Mass at each side of the tabernacle. Lastly, after the Prayer of the Faithful, a server lights candles on either side of the altar, while other servers prepare the Altar of Sacrifice with Sacramentary, corporal, and Mass vessels.

† *Paschal Candle* – The paschal candle, used from the Easter Vigil through Pentecost Sunday, is placed near the altar or ambo and is lit for all Masses to commemorate the Risen Christ among us.

† *Cruets* – The pitcher like vessels containing the water and wine are kept on the credence table.

† *Processional Cross* – This is the cross-mounted on a long pole that is carried at the head of the procession and in bringing up the gifts. It is kept in a stand at the side of the sanctuary.

† *Tabernacle* – This is the safe-like container in which the Eucharist is kept. It is located in various places in different churches. Your leader will teach you the proper reverence to it. Hosts are taken from here at Communion time.

† *Bells* – In parishes that use bells (some do not), they are rung at the consecration. Your leader will give you instructions on what is done in your parish. The bells are usually kept near the servers' places. If used, learn how to ring them properly.

VESTMENTS

In the earliest days of the Church, Mass was usually celebrated in people's homes. There were relatively few Church members then. The priest and other ministers wore what everybody else wore. As years passed, the Church community got much bigger, so Mass had to be celebrated in large buildings. Sometimes there were thousands of people there. People had to be able to tell easily who the various ministers were at Mass. The vestments we use today are thus very ancient in origin. They help us tell easily who is doing what at the Mass.

➤ *Amice* – A rectangular piece of cloth with two long ribbons attached to the top corners. The priest puts it over his shoulders, tucking it around his neck to hide his cassock and collar. It is worn whenever the alb does not completely cover the ordinary clothing at the neck (GI*297). It is tied around the waist. The priest puts this on himself. Some religious orders use it as a cowl or hood.

➤ *alb* – A long, white dress-like vestment that can be used by all liturgical ministers. It is helpful for the server to stand behind the minister, when he vests to see if the alb hangs properly in the back.

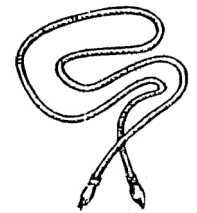
➤ *cincture* – A long white cord used for fastening some albs at the waist. It holds the loose fitting alb in place and is used to adjust it to the proper length. The cincture is usually white, although the liturgical color of the day may be used.



AMICE



ALB



CINCTURE

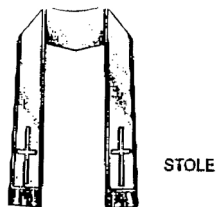
VESTMENTS CONTINUED

► *Stole* – Along cloth “scarf”, often ornately decorated and the same color and style as the chasuble. According to the manner that it is worn, it is a mark of the office of priest or deacon. A priest wears it around the neck, letting it hang down in front. A deacon wears it over his right shoulder and fastened at his left side like a sash. (There is another stole, white on one side and purple on the other, which priests use for the anointing of the sick and the sacrament of reconciliation.)

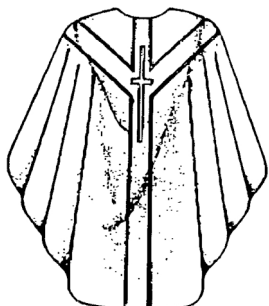
► *Chasuble* – This is a sleeveless outer vestment, slipped over the head, hanging down from the shoulders and covering the stole and alb. It is the proper Mass vestment of the priest and its color varies according to the feast. The server, standing behind, should see that it hangs properly during vesting.

► *Dalmatic* – This is a loose fitting robe with open sides and wide sleeves worn by the deacon. It takes its color from the liturgical feast.

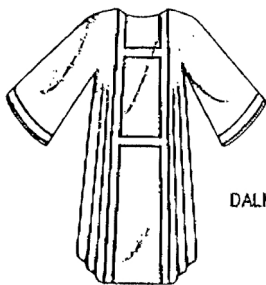
► *Cope* – A cape-like vestment that is put on over the shoulders and hangs to the ankles, it is open in the front and clasped at the neck. The priest frequently wears it in processions, at Benedictions and in other services. Copes can be found in any of the liturgical colors.



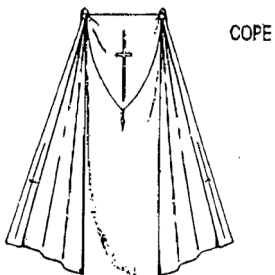
STOLE



CHASUBLE



DALMATIC



COPE

VESTMENTS CONTINUED

► *Benediction Veil* – Also known as the humeral veil, this is a long, narrow, shawl-like vestment used at Benediction and in processions where the Blessed Sacrament is carried.

► *Server's Alb* – This is the vestment used by servers in place of the cassock. It is similar to the priest's alb but sometimes has a cowl (hood). It is usually fastened around the waist with a cincture, often in the liturgical color.

► *Cassock* – A long outer garment worn by clerics and servers. It is usually black, but for servers red or white cassocks may be worn for special feasts.

► *Surplice* – This is a wide-sleeved garment slipped over the head, covering the shoulders and doming down below the hips. It is worn over the cassock for services in which the alb is not necessary.



BENEDICTION VEIL



SERVER'S ALB



CASSOCK



SURPLICE

ALTAR VESSELS

Altar vessels are frequently called "sacred" because they have a distinctive role in our worship.

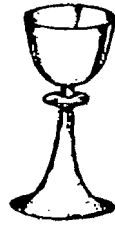
► *Chalice* – The large cup used at Mass to hold the wine that becomes the blood of Christ.

► *Paten* – This is a saucer-like dish that is usually matches the chalice with which it is used. It holds the bread that becomes the Body of Christ.

► *Ciborium* – This is a cup-like vessel (usually large) with a lid. It contains the hosts that will be used for Communion. It is also used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

► *Lunette* – A thin, Circular receptacle, having a glass face that hold the Consecrated Host used at Benediction. It slides into the monstrance on a track.

► *Pyx* – 1. A metal case, the lunette is kept there in the tabernacle.
2. A pocket watch-shaped case in which Communion used for sick calls is carried.



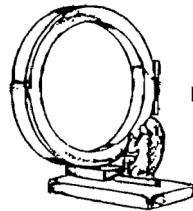
CHALICE



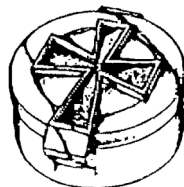
PATEN



CIBORIUM



LUNETTE



PYX

ALTAR VESSELS CONTINUED

► *Large Paten or Bread Plate* – Because of the sign value, it is becoming more common to use a large paten, or bread plate, in place of the ciborium. On this are placed the breads that will be consecrated for Communion. This paten is ordinarily brought up in procession at the presentation of the gifts. It may be the duty of a server to see that this paten with its breads is brought to the rear of the church before Mass. If this task falls to you, be careful not to spill any bread while going down the aisle.

► *Flagon or Decanter* – This is the bottle or carafe-like vessel used to hold the wine that will be consecrated at Mass for the Communion of the people. It is filled before Mass and brought to the rear of the church for the procession that will bring the gifts forward.

► *Communion Cups* – These are the chalice-like vessels, often made of pottery, used at Communion when the people when the people receive from the cup. They are usually kept on the credence table and brought to the altar at Communion time to be filled from the flagon.



LARGE PATEN or BREAD PLATE



FLAGON or DECANTER

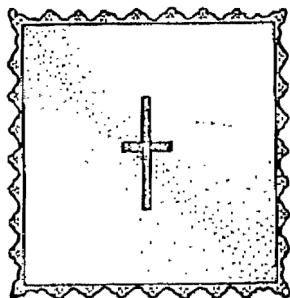


COMMUNION CUP

MISCELLANEOUS

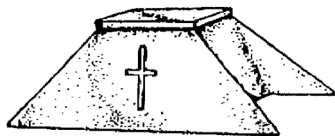
Other articles used at Mass include the following

► *Pall* – This is the stiff square white cover that is placed over the paten when it is on the chalice and over the chalice during Mass to protect its contents.



PALL

► *Chalice Veil* – This is the large square cloth, matching the vestments of the day, which covers the chalice before the presentation of the gifts.



CHALICE VEIL

► *Corporal* – A white linen napkin, usually starched, on which are placed the vessels containing the bread and wine during Mass. It is folded into a small square about the size of the pall. When folded, it is placed on top of the altar cloth. It is also used at the tabernacle at Benediction or when the Blessed Sacrament is taken out.



CORPORAL

► *Purificator* – This is a triple folded rectangular white cloth used to cleanse the chalice and to dry the celebrant's fingers after the last absolution (washing). In setting up the chalice, the purificator is placed over the mouth, beneath the paten.



PURIFICATOR

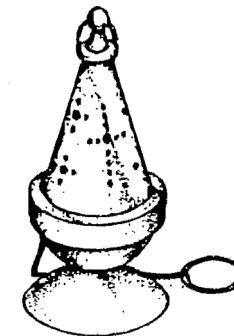
MISCELLANEOUS CONTINUED

► *Finger Towel* – A folded rectangular white cloth resembling a purificator but much narrower. It is used by the priest to dry his fingers after they have been washed during the preparation of the gifts. It is kept with the cruets and sometimes brought forward with them.



FINGER TOWEL

► *Thurible* – The metal container extended from a chain (or chains) in which charcoal and incense are burned for liturgical ceremonies. It has a lid that can be raised. It is sometimes called a censer.



THURIBLE

► *Boat* – This is a small metal container that holds the incense to be put into the thurible. It has a cover and comes with a small spoon. Frequently shaped like a boat, it is a symbol of the Church, the bark of Peter.



BOAT

► *Monstrance* – This is the large, ornate vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction and Eucharistic processions.



MONSTRANCE

MISCELLANEOUS CONTINUED

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

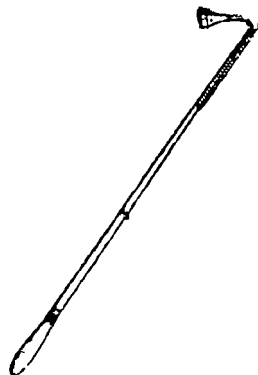
► *Extinguisher* – While this tool takes its name from putting out candles, it is also used to light them. It is a pole-like instrument with a tube at one side on the top with a retractable wick for lighting candles. The server using it should have enough wick exposed so that the flame will not go out until all candles are lit. Then the tab should be used to retract the wick and put the flame out. The other side of the top is a cup for extinguishing the candles. Often the server cannot see over the top of the candle, so practice is needed.



CHALICE



ASPERGILLUM



EXTINGUISHER

PERFECT ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

To achieve perfect attendance the server must meet the following criteria.

1. To be at all scheduled masses for the period of June 1 to May 31 of that attendance year.
2. To serve no less than one (1) mass per month
3. To call a substitute when you are scheduled for a mass and you are unable to serve. The scheduled server must notify the altar serving coordinator of substitution.
4. To call the altar serving coordinator in the event of sudden illness on your scheduled mass day.
5. To serve two (2) daily masses at 5:30 p.m. for that attendance year. The 8:30 a.m. mass will not count for perfect attendance. (NOTE: In the future, it may be mandatory to serve daily mass once a week.)
6. To serve one (1) holy day for that attendance year
7. To serve one (1) funeral/wedding for that attendance year.
8. You must attend 3 mandatory training sessions per attendance year. One session every fall, winter and spring.
9. To sign in for every mass served. If you do not sign in you do not get attendance. If you have served and forgot to sign in it is your responsibility to notify the altar serving coordinator.
10. There will be only one (1) attendance notification in November. The servers are responsible for tracking their own attendance.

SIGN IN PROCEDURE

1. If you are a scheduled server, print your name legibly on the line in the second column on the same line across from your printed name.
2. If you are a substitute or switching, write your name on the line in second column on the same line across from the printed name of server you are subbing/switching for. Check the appropriate box of "Sub" or "Switch".
3. If you are neither scheduled or subbing/switching but a walk on, print your name in the first column on blank line and check the "walk on" box

There may be up to five (5) servers for a regular mass. Scheduled servers have priority up until 10 minutes before the beginning of mass.

Explanation of terms for sign in procedure:

SUB = Replacing a server without switching dates.

SWITCH = Switching dates scheduled with another server.

WALK ON = You are not scheduled and you walk on to serve for a missing server.

EXPECTATIONS FOR ALTAR SERVERS

Responsibility: When you are scheduled to serve, mark it on your calendar, tell your parents, and prepare to get to church at least 15 minutes before Mass time. If you cannot serve when you are scheduled, make sure someone will take your place.

Reverence: Show respect for God and others by having a good attitude when you come to serve, walking with dignity, listening attentively and carrying out your duties with care.

Personal Appearance: Get a good night's sleep before you serve at a morning Mass. Before you leave home, make sure your hands and face are clean, your hair is combed, and that you are wearing clean clothes and dress shoes. Even though you will be wearing a cassock and surplice, wear your "church" clothes and shoes.

Participation: Even though you have a special role as a server, you are first a member of the worshipping community. You are expected to verbally respond, pray and sing, the same as everyone else at Mass. Always pay attention to what is happening at Mass.

Teamwork: You will be serving as part of a team of servers, with specific tasks to do. As individuals and as a team, the service you give at Mass is very important to the prayer of everyone present.

VOCABULARY

Altar – this is the focus of attention during the Mass. It is also called the Altar of Sacrifice.

Ambo/Pulpit – this is the “Altar of the Word”. From here, only Scripture and the homily are proclaimed.

Aspereges – ceremony of sprinkling all the church with holy water.

Aspergillum – usually metal, holy water sprinkler and bucket.

Baptismal Font – large font or pool for baptisms.

Blessed Sacrament – Jesus present in the consecrated species of bread and/or wine.

Blood of Christ – consecrated wine.

Boat – container of incense.

Body of Christ – consecrated unleavened bread

Cassock – long garment worn by priest or altar servers.

Chalice – ceremonial cup used by the priest during Mass.

Ciborium (plural – Ciboria) – often made of metal or ceramic plate or container for hosts. Often has a lid.

Cincture – usually a rope-like “belt” used to secure the alb/cassock around the waist.

Consecration – the moment in Mass when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ (also “transubstantiation”)

Corporal – smaller square cloth on the altar. The bread and wine that is on this cloth only is consecrated.

Credence Table – small side table in the sanctuary on which the chalice is set, along with other vessels.

Cruet(s) – glass or ceramic containers for the water and the wine used at Mass

Eucharist – word means Thanksgiving: also describes the event of the Mass

Finger Towel – used in the Washing of the Hands at Mass.

Funeral Pall - large white (sometimes decorated) clothe placed over a casket.

Genuflect – the action of going down on one knee to reverence and honor the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle. A genuflection.

Host(s) – Large or small pieces of unleavened bread.

Incense – spices, gums, and perfumes burned to produce a fragrance.

Lavabo – the act of Washing of the Hands at Mass. Also used to describe the pitcher and basin.

Lectern – from where the scriptures are read. More properly Ambo.

Lectionary – the book containing the Scripture readings for Mass.

Offertory Table - on which the bread and wine are placed and brought up by the people.

VOCABULARY (CONTINUED)

Pall – white square of linen that is placed on top of the chalice.

Paschal Candle – large Easter Candle

Paten – a metal “plate” or dish used along with the chalice.

Precious Blood – term used to describe the consecrated blood which has become the Blood of Christ.

Purificator – white clothe that accompanies the chalice. Folded differently than the finger towel.

Sacramentary – large book of prayers used by priest during Mass.

Sacristy – storage and preparation room for Mass.

Sanctuary – the front part of church around the altar that is used for the ceremonial parts of the Mass.

Sanctuary Light/Lamp – candle that is always lit signifying that Jesus is present in the Tabernacle in the Blessed Sacrament. Only on Good Friday is the Tabernacle empty and this lamp is extinguished.

Spoon – placed into the “Boat” to ladle out the incense.

Tabernacle – locked container for reserving the Blessed Sacrament.

Taper – the candle lighter

Thurible – the “incense burner” used at ceremonies.

Thurifer – the server who has charge of the incense, the boat, spoon, and thurible.

Vestibule – the separate entry way in the front of church. It is often a large space for gathering and welcome. Also called the Narthex.

Vestments – any ceremonial garments worn by servers, ministers or priests.

Vesting Table – the large countertop where the priests’ vestments are laid out.

Parts of the Mass (with brief altar serving duties)

Introductory Rites:

1. Entrance Procession
2. Opening Prayer, Cue for book bearer, "Let us Pray".
3. Penitential Rite, "I confess to almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters" or "Lord have Mercy.." and then Gloria

Liturgy of the Word:

4. First reading, prepare for gospel procession, second reading
5. Gospel Acclamation, Alleluia – gospel procession with candle bearers (may use incense).
6. Gospel reading, Homily, Procession of Faith, General Intercessions.

Liturgy of the Eucharist:

7. Gift procession with candle bearers (may use incense).
8. Cross bearer puts corporal on altar (if not there). Book bearer puts sacramentary on altar. Cross bearer gets chalice and place on altar.
9. Offertory – cross bearer and book bearer go with priest to receive gifts.
10. Cross bearer gets cruet with holy water and stands at bottom step and waits for the priest to motion.
11. Book bearer goes back to credence table and waits for Cross bearer. Both prepare for washing of hands.
12. Cue – "May the Lord accept this sacrifice at your hands...".
Candle bearers go to stand at the altar with the others. Candle bearer gets close to bells to ring at appropriate time.
13. Candle bearers prepare for ringing of the bells.
14. "Holy, Holy, Holy", Mystery of Christ, Amen, Our Father, Sign of Peace.
15. Lamb of God –server will receive empty flagyl.
16. Communion – remove sacramentary, chalice (do not remove chalice if has blessed wine). Leave the corporal on altar until hosts have been put in tabernacle. Servers back to stations and stand until finished.
Cue – "Let us Pray", Book picks up sacramentary and brings to priest.
17. Exit Hymn – servers get cross, candles (and incense if used) and return to altar in correct positions.

Conclusion Rites:

18. Exit Procession