

Church of Saint Mary

Altar Server Manual



One Family ~ One Spirit ~ One Church

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St. Mary Altar Server Manual

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Introduction

This manual is not a theological study course. It is a manual for the training of altar servers. There is some theological information which may be found fruitful in aiding servers with the reasons why they are expected to perform in special liturgical ways.

This manual is limited in scope to the servers' duties during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. This manual is intended as a general guide. The pastor may require different procedures.

The primary role of the altar server is to assist the priest in the celebration of the liturgy during Mass. This is done through specific actions and by setting an example to the congregation by active participation in the liturgy by their actions, singing of hymns, being reverent and sitting or standing at the appropriate times.

Servers carry the cross, hold candles, hold the book for the priest when he is not at the altar, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest or deacon during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, hold the Communion paten and assist the priest and deacon as necessary.

Requirements

General

When serving in the presence of Our Savior it is proper for a server to perform all assigned duties with attention, dignity and reverence. The Sanctuary is holy. Do not abuse the privilege you have been given to enter the sanctuary for service by being disrespectful or entering the holy place unnecessarily. Servers will be required to vest in alb and cincture, as directed by the parish priest.

A server can be any person who has received first confession and Holy Communion. There are no restrictions about age or sex, but we generally do not start until children get to Fifth Grade.

Basic Knowledge of the Mass

A server should know the principal prayers of the Mass: The Gloria, Our Father, Nicene Creed, Lamb of God, Lord, I am not worthy and Holy, Holy, Holy. If they cannot take the time to learn these basic prayers they may be demonstrating a lack of sufficient interest in being a good server. Not knowing these prayers usually results in a server who just stands there looking out of touch and in ignorance of our most sacred act of worship.

All servers should know the basic flow of the mass. A list of helpful definitions are found at the end of this manual.

1. All servers must demonstrate their ability to make use of the “*tools of the trade*” such as matches, candle lighters, books and candles, processional cross, preparation of credence table, etc.
2. All server candidates should be able to demonstrate their ability to genuflect, bow and make the sign of the cross.
3. They should understand genuflecting is reserved for and to the Real Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ whether exposed on the altar or reserved in the tabernacle.
4. Servers should be shown how to bow in respect to the altar.

Duties

Servers are not wall decorations, they are primarily there to assist the priest. Here is a short list of server duties.

1. The server’s first duty is to prepare for the Mass. The server should arrive at the Church early, usually 15 to 20 minutes before Mass, to perform the appropriate setup.
2. The Server must also stay after Mass to return the Church to its non service condition.
3. Servers should not handle any consecrated bread or wine unless specifically directed by the priest or deacon in an emergency situation. If the server suspects any consecrated fragments or wine remain on the sacred vessels they must inform the priest or deacon immediately.
4. Servers must remain in the sanctuary during the entire Mass and are not to leave the sanctuary during Mass for any reason other than illness or at the direction of the priest or deacon. Altar servers are on duty from the time they enter the sanctuary at the start of Mass until the priest exits at the end of Mass. Thirst, itches, and the like, are not bodily necessities and therefore are not an excuse for leaving the sanctuary before the final procession.
5. Servers have many specific duties. These duties include serving the wine and water to the priest or deacon, washing the priest’s hands, ringing bells, using the paten at communion time, standing, sitting and kneeling. They may also be required to prepare the credence table and clean up after Mass. In any of these positions they should maintain a straight formal posture. If you have never seen a formal posture look to the military for an example of how to sit, stand and kneel. If you have a free hand while holding an object you should place the other hand across your heart.
6. In the standing position, whenever you are not holding anything, you should have “hands joined” in the praying position as seen in most Christian artwork. “Hands joined” means palms together with fingers extended, pointing upwards, with right thumb over left thumb.
7. In the kneeling position hands should also be joined as in the standing position. You must kneel upright, not slouching or sitting on your heels.
8. When sitting the hands should be palms down, at or above the knee. Never slouch. Never play with your cinctures, pick your nose or otherwise cause a public reason to take notice of you. You are not on stage; you are serving at the altar of Our God. Note: Holding hands in the prayer position was a medieval sign of submission to a manor lord and it’s very appropriate to signify submission to our Divine Lord. Remember,

you are seen by all the parishioners and how you conduct yourself is important to their understanding of the eternal Lamb's Supper and His Sacrificial Act being represented for us in time.

9. When assisting the priest with the Communion paten during Holy Communion the server must always hold the paten level from the time it is picked up from its storage place until it is returned to the priest or deacon after all have received. It must never be tilted or turned so as to spill any fragments of the Body of Jesus which may have been caught by it. It is the responsibility of the server holding the paten to protect the Body of Jesus from falling on the floor. A new server should practice using the paten with another server until proficiency is obtained.
10. Altar servers should attend the Mass they are scheduled for. When a server cannot be present, that server should arrange for a replacement.

Proper Dress

At home the server should dress in the proper clothes and footwear for Mass. Remember, what you wear underneath an alb will show through. For this reason, the server should be sure to avoid bold stripes and designs of any kind which may show thru their alb. It is recommended that you wear solid colors, but white would be the most appropriate choice of shirts and blouses. Likewise pants, dresses and skirts should also be of some solid color.

Genuflection

When should a server genuflect? Before Mass, whenever entering or leaving a Catholic Church (usually when entering a pew) or when crossing in front of the tabernacle. Normally during Mass you will genuflect three times:

1. Before entering the sanctuary during the entrance procession;
2. At the same time as the priest or deacon after he reposes the Blessed Sacrament after distribution;
3. At the same time the celebrant genuflects before turning to leave during the recessional procession.

Genuflecting to the tabernacle is required; bowing is not an option to genuflecting. Latin Rite Catholics genuflect to Our Lord alone. In all Catholic churches, once the consecration of the bread and wine takes place, the actual substance of the bread and wine (that which makes bread and wine what it is) is transposed with the actual substantial and real presence of Jesus, thus making it no longer bread and wine but just the appearance of bread and wine. While the appearance of the bread and wine remain, it is actually the real and true Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

All Catholics should be aware of whenever He is present on the altar after the Consecration, during Eucharistic Adoration or is reserved in the tabernacle everyone, servers included, should genuflect whenever crossing in front of the tabernacle, or entering and leaving the Church (usually as they enter a pew). Consult with your training leader for more information.

Bowing of the head is done for a priest after presenting the wine and water and after washing his hands, the altar, or in some circumstances a crucifix. We bow to the priest because he offers the Body and Blood of Our Savior to the Father in the Person of Jesus and therefore should be shown honor.

When bowing to the altar, it should be a profound bow which requires bending at the waist at a right angle, so that your upper body is parallel to the floor. One should bow to the altar when passing in front of it. We bow to the altar because it is the table of Christ's Saving Sacrifice as The Lamb of God.

If entering the sanctuary in procession and all genuflect be sure to realize you are genuflecting to the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle, not the altar you may be facing. When He is reserved in the tabernacle He is just as present as when He is present in Heaven, on the Altar or in the monstrance. Servers should try and visit Him in our Perpetual Adoration Chapel and spend some time with Him.

The church sanctuary candle placed by the tabernacle will indicate when Jesus is reserved in the tabernacle. When it is not lit, the tabernacle is empty as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Usually it is lit at all other times since Jesus is reserved there.

Servers should remember that there is an exception to genuflecting. Whenever they are carrying things like crosses, sacred vessels, books, candles or other objects you should not genuflect. There your job requires you to carry the object in a dignified manner and not endanger yourself or the object by losing your balance.

To properly genuflect:

- Stop and face the tabernacle.
- Genuflect on the right knee so the right knee touches the floor.
- Rise from the floor, still facing the tabernacle.
- Turn and continue in the direction you were heading.

Again, an exception to this requirement is when you are carrying anything.

Preparation for Mass

The sacristan normally will rinse with clean water the water and wine cruets to be used at the service. The sacrarium is not to be used to dispose of the rinse water. Use a normal sink for washing out the cruets. They will fill one cruet with wine from the altar wine supply. This is usually a bottle in the small refrigerator in the sacristy. It is not for drinking by altar servers. The other cruet will be filled with cold fresh water from the tap or a water supply designated for this purpose.

Place the prepared chalice, ciborium (if required), filled cruets, lavabo bowl, towels and any extra chalices required on the credence table. If there is to be an offertory procession, place

only the wine cruet and one ciborium on the pull-up shelf at the side of a pew about half-way up the main aisle of the church for use in the Offertory procession.

At five minutes before Mass time, at the direction of the sacristan, a server may light all appropriate candles. During the Easter Season or a funeral Mass, the Paschal candle should also be lit. **Please note:** after lighting the candles, extinguish the taper candle lighter by pulling the taper into the lighter until it is extinguished and then pushing it out again so that the taper will not stick in the lighter.

Duties During Mass

The cross/book-bearer will lead the procession into and from the sanctuary, unless incense is being used. When reaching the sanctuary, give a slight bow of the head and continue moving to the sacristy to put the cross away. Do not stop or genuflect when carrying the procession cross. Immediately come back to the sanctuary, pick up the open missal at the page it is set, carry it over to the celebrant and hold the book open so the priest can read. Keep the pages flat, your fingers out of the text and do not move about while the priest is reading. When the priest is finished, close the missal and return it to the stand on their credence table. Remember, the missal is heavy, so if necessary, rest the top edge on your chest while holding the bottom edge with your fingers, being careful not to disrupt the pages.

The acolytes will genuflect before entering the sanctuary and immediately proceed to their assigned locations to their left. Remember that when the deacon or lector is processing with the Book of the Gospels, they will not stop but move directly into the sanctuary and place the Book of the Gospels face down in the center of the altar. Therefore you must avoid getting in their way.

After the opening prayers, sit down in your chair for the readings. All servers should pay very close attention to the words of the readings, Gospel and homily.

After the homily, the book-bearer should pick up the liturgical binder, keeping it open at the page it is set, and keep on their lap until the celebrant stands for the Profession of Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful. Immediately bring the open binder over in front of the celebrant. This binder is not heavy and should be held away from your body so the celebrant can read it. The acolytes will stand with hands joined in front of their chairs.

Afterwards, the book-bearer will return the liturgical binder to the credence table and pick up the missal together with the stand and place it on the left side of the altar, unless an instituted acolyte is serving and he will bring the missal and stand over to the altar. The acolytes will bring over and place the chalices, ciboria, and purificators on the right side of the altar.

The acolytes will then move to the front of the sanctuary when the celebrant rises and goes to the front of the sanctuary and will wait on each side of the priest. One server will be handed the wine cruet and the other the ciborium from the priest. They will turn together, bow their head toward the altar and move to the left while the celebrant returns to his chair. Please be

careful not to collide with the celebrant. The acolyte with the ciborium will hand it to the deacon or instituted acolyte at the altar, or place it on the side of the altar, and go to the credence table to get the water cruet.

Both acolytes will remove the tops from the wine and water cruets at the credence table and carry them with the handle facing out away from them to the “invisible line” which runs out along the short edge of the altar (in other words, do not walk behind the altar unless otherwise instructed). The cruet should be held at the bottom in the palm of one hand, with your fingers clasping the cruet and your free hand over your heart/chest. The deacon or priest will first take the wine cruet by the handle, fill the chalices and return it to the acolyte. He will then take the water cruet, pour a few drops into each chalice and return it to the acolyte. The acolyte’s hands should be joined while the deacon or priest has the cruet. Together the acolytes will make a slight bow of the head (only to the priest) and return the cruets to the credence table and place the stopper on top of the wine cruet.

Next, the acolyte with the water cruet will grab the handle of the water cruet with their right hand (unless they are left-handed, then use the opposite hands) and pick up the lavabo bowl with their other hand. The acolyte who had the wine cruet will pick up and open the finger towel and hold it between the thumb and forefinger of each hand at the top corners of the long edge. Immediately they will walk together to the “invisible line” and wait for the celebrant to wash his hands.

The acolyte with the water will pour it over the celebrant’s fingers, being sure to hold the lavabo bowl underneath to catch the water. Then the celebrant will take the finger towel from the other acolyte to dry his hands. This acolyte is to keep their hands joined. The celebrant will place the towel over their joined hands after using. They all bow together to the priest and return the items to the credence table. Neatly arrange the cruets, towel, and bowl on the table. (If you are serving alone, unfold the finger towel and place it over your left arm before picking up the lavabo bowl and cruet. Let the priest take the towel and when he has placed the towel back on your arm, bow to him and return to the credence table. Neatly arrange the cruets, towel, and bowl on the table as above.)

Immediately proceed together to the center in front of the altar just outside of the sanctuary, bow together and each go to the pad on either side of the altar. Do not kneel until after the *Holy, Holy, Holy*.

Bell Ringing - The bell should be rung at the following seven times during the Mass:

- The first time is when the priest extends his hands and makes the sign of the cross over the gifts and calls on the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts, it should be rung with one longer ring.
- At the elevation of the Consecrated Host it should be rung with three shorter, but distinct, rings.
- At the elevation of the Chalice with the Consecrated Wine it should also be rung with three shorter, but distinct, rings.

After the celebrant has drunk from the Chalice, both servers should stand, move to the center and bow together, and proceed to the front of their credence table. If they are receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, they should pick up their communion paten and hold it under their chin while receiving, otherwise, wait until after they have consumed the Host before picking up their paten. One acolyte should follow the Minister of Holy Communion over to the aisle closest to their doorway and stand just in front and to the side of that Minister. The other should move to the center side closest to them, again, just in front and to the side of the Minister, usually a priest or deacon. See #9 above under duties for the proper use of the paten.

After Communion of Faithful and the priest or deacon places any leftover Hosts in the tabernacle, all genuflect together and return to their seats. The cross/book-bearer should remove the Missal and stand from the altar, return it to their credence table, pick up the missal and hold it on their lap. The priest or deacon may turn the missal to the appropriate page while you are holding it on your lap.

Normally the chalice is purified after Mass, but for those times when the priest or deacon may want to purify during Mass, the acolyte closest to the water cruet will stand, remove the top from the water cruet and pour the water over the priest's or deacon's fingers as directed. When done, replace the top on the water cruet and place it back on the credence table.

Closing Prayers - All sit until the priest says: "Let us pray." The cross/book-bearer will proceed directly in front of the priest with the Missal open to the proper page and hold it for the priest as with the opening prayer. When the priest finishes, he may close the Missal and you can return it to the stand. After the deacon or the priest has dismissed the congregation, wait for the priest and deacon to proceed to the altar and immediately retrieve the procession cross from the sacristy and come out to the center aisle. The acolytes should begin moving to the step near their pads.

Exit Procession – After the priest and deacon have kissed the altar, they will move in front of the altar. When they genuflect, all servers not carrying anything should genuflect also. All servers then turn and proceed up the center aisle, led by the cross accompanied by the two acolytes. All processions are always in order of rank. Cross bearer first, then acolytes, other servers, instituted acolytes and lectors, deacons, priests, bishops, cardinals, the pope (if you're so lucky!). Usually the deacon of the Mass walks alongside the celebrant. The cross bearer and acolytes turn to the left when they reach the baptismal font and proceed down the far aisle back to the sacristy, where the processional cross is returned to its spot. The priests and deacons normally go out the front door to greet the congregation as they exit.

Duties After Mass

At the direction of the sacristan, extinguish the candles by using the proper tool - the snuffer on the end of the wick lighter. Do not smash the wicks. Do not blow out the candles to avoid getting wax on the altar and floor. Clear the credence table, bringing everything except the patens back to the sacristy. Remove your liturgical clothing and hang it neatly in its proper place.

Definitions

Alb - The white gown worn by you and the ordained ministers while serving.

Ambo - The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the reading and homily are given.

Chalice - A cup of precious metal that holds the wine which becomes the Blood of Jesus after the consecration. All chalices should be returned to their places after Mass. If the chalices were left unpurified by the priest or deacon for some reason, they should be left out on the credence table for purification by the priest or deacon. Never put an unpurified chalice away.

Chasuble - Outermost liturgical vestment worn by the priest.

Ciborium or Communion Bowl - A large cup or container of precious metal with a cover of the same material which will hold the Body of Jesus after the consecration for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful.

Cincture - A white (or other liturgical colored) cord worn as a belt around the alb.

Communion Paten - A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal with a handle, usually wooden, used by the altar server to protect the Body of Jesus from falling to the ground if a minister or communicant accidentally drop a fragment of the Host.

Corporal - A white linen cloth, usually with a cross in the center, used to protect any particles of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus from falling to the altar cloth. It is always folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from being lost. The corporal is like the body winding sheet used to hold the crucified body of Our Lord in the tomb.

Credence Table - The tables on either side in the sanctuary where either the chalice, ciboria and cruets or the Missal and liturgical binder are kept.

Cruet - A container with a handle that holds either water or wine for use during the Mass.

Dalmatic - Outermost liturgical vestment with sleeves, worn by the deacon.

Finger Towel - Small tri-fold towel used by the priest to dry his hands after the offertory.

Holy Water Bucket - Glass bucket with a sprinkler wand used during funerals and other occasions to bless things like palms, coffins, and the congregation.

Humeral Veil - Long silk vestment worn by the priest or deacon over the shoulders and hands for holding the monstrance for the blessing during benediction.

Incense Boat - Metal container carrying the incense and spoon for the thurible.

“Invisible Line” - runs along the short sides of the altar to the back wall of the sanctuary, which serves as a boundary for where the altar servers should stay outside of, unless directed by the priest or deacon.

Lavabo Bowl - Crystal dish into which the poured water on the celebrant’s hands drops into.

Lavabo Towel - Small quad-fold towel used by the priest to dry his hands after the offertory.

Lectionary - The book of readings used for the Liturgy of the Word. It usually contains all the biblical reading used for the three year Sunday cycle of reading and the two year daily Mass readings.

Missal - The book containing the prayers said by the priest during the Mass.

Monstrance - This is a large, ornate vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration, Benediction and solemn Eucharistic processions.

Pall - A square piece of cardboard or plastic which is covered by linen and used to cover the chalice.

Paschal Candle - The large single candle in the sanctuary used during the Easter season and for funerals and baptisms.

Paten - A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal that holds the Host. No layperson should ever touch the paten and servers should be very careful when they have to handle it as a part of their official duties. (See Communion Paten.)

Purificator - A linen cloth with a cross embroidered on it used by the priest or deacon to dry the chalice after washing and purifying it. Used purificators must always be placed in the proper container for sacred cloths.

Pyx - A case, about the size of a pocket watch, in which Communion is carried to those who are sick or unable to come to church.

Sacrarium - A sink with its drain going directly into the ground usually fitted with a cover and lock which is used for the disposal of the following: The sacred linen wash and rinse water, used holy water, used baptismal water and blessed ashes. No other use is allowed.

Sacristy - The area of the Church building where the priests, deacons, servers, and lectors meet to vest and prepare themselves for Mass.

Sanctuary - The area of the Church that contains the altar and the ambo.

Stole - A narrow piece of linen usually decorated or of color worn by the priest or deacon when assisting at Mass or other rites.

Thurible - Metal censer suspended by chains in which incense is burned during services.