



# **Altar Server Manual**

Dear Altar Servers,

The Mass is the central action of our parish. The primary reason our parish exists is to form saints and this is primarily done through the celebration of the Mass. Everything we do, whether that be our school, PSR program, youth ministry, sports, etc. flows from our celebration of the Mass and is designed to lead back to the weekly celebration of the Mass.

Your service as an altar server not only assists the priests and deacons in the practical matters of celebrating the Mass, but even more importantly serves the people of God by witnessing for them the reverence that is due to God at Mass, and most importantly serves Jesus Christ Himself, who comes to us at every Mass in the Holy Eucharist.

Serving at Mass is an honor and a privilege that must be taken very seriously and with great care and devotion. To effectively serve God, the priest, and indeed all of those who attend Mass, requires training and preparation. This manual is intended to assist you as you prepare to serve here at St. Theodore. If you still have questions please do not hesitate to ask another server, Deacon Dan, or myself.

I want to take a moment to thank you for embarking upon this great privilege of serving at the altar. It is my prayer that being an altar server will help the parish, as well as you, grow in your Catholic faith. May God bless you and our parish family for your charity.

Sincerely,

Fr. Peter Fonseca  
Parochial Administrator

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***Dear Altar Servers, you are, in fact, already apostles of Jesus! When you take part in the Liturgy by carrying out your altar service, you offer a witness to all. Your absorption, the devotion that wells up from your heart and is expressed in gestures, in song, in the responses: if you do it correctly and not absent-mindedly, then in a certain way your witness is one that moves people. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the bond of friendship with Jesus. You are very close to Jesus in the Eucharist, and this is the most important sign of his friendship for each one of us. Do not forget it.***

-excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Altar Servers, August 2, 2006

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## **REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME AN ALTAR SERVER**

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

- Must actively practice the Catholic faith and should regularly receive Holy Communion.
- Must be in the 4th grade.
- Should be currently participating in a program of faith formation, either through religion class at school, participation in the PSR program, or a suitable home school study program.

### **KNOWLEDGE**

A new server must be willing to become familiar with the Mass, understand why the Mass is important, and what happens during Mass.

Before serving for the first time, a server will be required to demonstrate that they know the Order of Mass, the prayers of the Mass, and the postures and responses during Mass. All of this will be taught during the new server training period.

Altar Servers must also demonstrate the ability to make use of the "tools of the trade" such as matches, candles, candle lighters, books and sacred vessels. All of this will be taught in training.

### **ALTAR SERVER TRAINING**

Training will be scheduled regularly for all new altar servers. After a server has been trained to serve, they will be added to the regular altar server schedule. All servers continue to participate in ongoing training through: training resources and regular practice.

Altar servers will be trained to handle all of the tasks assigned to each specific duty. Servers will be required to say the prayer responses of the Mass, know the names of the vestments and vessels of the altar, and to learn the Order of Mass.

### **PRACTICE**

Practices will be held for special celebrations such as Holy Week, Sacraments, etc. If invited to serve you will be attending these special practices. Practices give every server the occasion to improve their current skills as well as the opportunity to learn new ones.

## **CONDUCT**

### **GENERAL CONDUCT**

Servers must be in a state of grace to serve at Mass, meaning they should attend Mass each weekend and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis. Altar Servers should come to Mass prepared to meet the Lord in Holy Communion. They should consider whether they ought to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation ahead of time, and, if needed, make appropriate arrangements.

From the moment an altar server puts on their vestments, their conduct must always be professional and reverent.

Altar Servers must always show respect for the sanctity of the church and the sacred vessels. The care of the vessels and vestments is a primary responsibility of the Altar Server.

### **SCHEDULING**

Three Altar Servers are scheduled at each Sunday Mass. Parents will receive an email to schedule their children via Sign up Genius. The schedule is typically prepared two months in advance. Schedules are available in several locations:

- online on the Sign-up genius
- posted in the sacristy
- listed in the Sunday bulletin the week before your scheduled date

Servers should work with their parents to ensure that they are serving at the Masses for which they are scheduled. However, emergencies sometimes happen. Every server is required to make sure that their position is covered whenever they are scheduled. You must arrange your own substitutes. If, after a valid effort, a server is not able to find a substitute, their parent should email either Fr. Peter or Deacon Dan.

### **ARRIVAL**

Altar Servers must arrive early to prepare for Mass. It is important to arrive before your designated serving time, a minimum of 10 minutes prior to Mass beginning. There are several duties that a server must perform before Mass. Often, there is some additional instructions regarding that day's liturgy that the priest and deacon may need to give to the servers. A replacement will be assigned for servers prepared to serve 5 minutes prior to the beginning of mass.

Attendance times:

- 10 minutes before Mass: All scheduled Altar Servers have arrived vested in the sacristy and have initialed by their name on the schedule
- 5 minutes before Mass: Any server standing by can fill-in for any absent server. Servers arriving after this time are "absent", even if they show up later.
- 5 minutes before Mass: the servers assign roles amongst themselves with preference given to those who arrive first: no further changes are made. All servers are responsible for signing in when they serve. This should be your first duty before Mass.

### **APPEARANCE AND DRESS**

All servers are expected to wear "Sunday clothes" at the weekend Masses. Modesty should be preferred over fashion. Jeans, shorts, and t-shirts are not preferred.

Shoes must be clean dress-style shoes. Black, brown, (or white for girls, shoes should have a conservative heel, and good traction) dress shoes should be worn whenever possible. Athletic shoes and open-toed shoes are not allowed.

Servers should refrain from excessive or flashy jewelry or accessories. Headbands and hair accessories should be dark solid colors. Other than a cross or sacred medal worn under the alb, and modest earrings for girls, all other jewelry should be removed and left with a friend or parent. Watches may be worn if they are not a distraction to the server or others. Watch alarms must be silenced.

Cell phones are not allowed while serving.

### **Vestments**

Per parish custom, male servers will wear the cassock and surplice and the female servers will wear the alb with blue covering. Both the cassocks and the albs should be long enough to cover your ankles.



### **POSTURES**

The posture of the Altar Server should be one of near invisibility. If people are paying attention at Mass, they should not even notice you. If someone looks at you, they should see a server who is reverent and paying attention. It should remind them that they, too, should be paying attention to the Mass, and not to you.

In general, your posture should be confident, but calm. You should look reverent and prayerful, but comfortable. Move smoothly, but deliberately, not slowly.

Always look "**where the action is**". When someone is speaking or reading part of the Mass, you are listening to them. When the Eucharist is being consecrated, you are looking at it. When the choir is singing, you are singing with them.

Make no distracting motions or noises. Do not wave, smile, or wink at people. Coughs and sneezes should be covered with a handkerchief or facial tissue. Make a habit of bringing them with you in case they are needed. If you have to yawn, cover your mouth as you would a cough or sneeze.

Do not leave your place during Mass. Bodily needs should be attended to before or after Mass. Emergencies are of course understandable.

### **STANDING**

When standing, stand up straight. Balance your weight evenly on both feet, but do not lock your knees.

Anytime you are not holding anything, place your hands with palms together, in the "prayer position". Point your fingertips upward, with the right thumb over the left. Hands should be held comfortably at about the middle of your chest.

If you are holding something, hold the item firmly with one or both hands, as needed. The free hand, if you have one, should cover your heart. Grasp items firmly and deliberately. When handing something to someone else, make sure they have a firm grip so as not to drop it.

## HANDS

Place your hands with palms together, in the "prayer position". Point your fingertips upward, with the right thumb over the left. Hands should be held comfortably at about the middle of your chest.



## PROCESSING

The procession is a sacred act. It is more than just a way for the priest to get to the altar. It is a very formal way of welcoming and glorifying Christ himself into our presence. When you process, walk at a deliberate, but respectful pace. It should be just slower than you normally walk. If you are not the lead in the procession, keep pace with the lead.

When carrying something while processing, hold it reverently with both hands and slightly in front of you, not resting on your chest.

## WALKING

Walk. Never, run. You are the model of reverence, calm and grace. Walk deliberately to your station. Watch for others in your way and plan ahead to step around them. Never get in the way of the presiders, or of any minister holding the Blessed Sacrament. Hands are folded prayerfully or firmly grasping whatever you may be carrying.

## SITTING

While sitting, sit up straight, not slouching. Feet should be directly in front of you. Legs should never be crossed. Keep your legs and feet still. Hands are placed on top of thighs. Respond to prayers and sing songs deliberately, and fully participate in the Mass.

## KNEELING

While kneeling, keep your torso up straight, not slouching or resting on feet. If kneeling behind a chair or pew, do not lean over it. Feet should be directly behind you. Keep your legs and feet still. Hands are folded prayerfully.

## BOWING

*Never bow at the waist when carrying the cross or candle.*

There are two types of bows:

The bow of the head: Lower your chin to your chest and hold it there briefly. There are several times in the Mass when this is done. Also, anytime a priest bows to you, return the bow with a brief head bow.

The profound bow (full bow): Bend at the waste and bow forward. This is used during the Profession of Faith and a few other times.

## GENUFLECTING

**Never genuflect when carrying anything.**

With your back straight and your hands folded prayerfully, lower yourself onto your right knee, and hold that position briefly. Genuflecting to the tabernacle, whenever Jesus is reserved in the tabernacle, is required. Our Lord's presence in the tabernacle is usually signified by the red sanctuary light. When it is not lit, the tabernacle is empty, as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday.



# ORDER OF MASS

## **Before Mass**

- a) Arrive at least 10 minutes early to be sure you have time to dress and properly prepare for the Mass.
- b) Remember to be quiet when in the sacristy – your voices carry all the way to the back of church.
- c) All servers should sign in at the Altar Server Bulletin Board.
- d) Find correct size cassock or alb.
- f) Recite Preparation Prayer on bulletin board as a group.
- g) Decide amongst yourselves what each server will be responsible for: **Note:** Tallest is usually cross bearer
- g) Use the Pre-Mass Checklist to ensure everything is set up properly. (Study Pictures)
- h) Check the credence table to be sure everything is set out: Ciborium, chalice, purificators, large corporal, additional chalices, water cruet, water pitcher, lavabo and towel.
- i) Make sure that there is a Roman Missal on the servers' bench.
- j) Check that the Offertory gifts (Ciborium with Hosts & Wine Cruet) are on the table at the back of church
- k) 5 minutes before mass make sure candles at the altar are lit.

## **Introductory Rites – Part I**

### Entrance Procession

Candle Bearers get their candles (will light them in back of church). Cross Bearer gets the cross. All wait quietly in the back with the priest and the ministers.

- Procession begins once lyrics to song begin.
- Cross and Candle Bearers should hold candles reverently.

Cross Bearers set the pace by walking very slowly and reverently. Always wait 3 steps between each other when processing

When you get to the front of the altar, wait for each person to line up.

- Carrying something = pause, bow your head slightly
- Not carrying anything = you would pause, genuflect to the tabernacle
- Move forward: Cross bearer put cross in stand; candle bearers put candles in stands
- Walk to your seats and remain standing.
- Always sit and stand in unison, when possible

## **Collect**

As soon as the Book Holder hears the priest say the words “Let us pray” retrieve the book and bring it to him.

- There are usually two times during the Mass when this happens – at the beginning before the readings and again at the end after communion.

**Note:** There are exceptions during special Masses which include sacraments, baptisms, funerals etc. but you will be told about the changes beforehand. Be alert and ready to hold the book whenever the priest motions to you that he needs the book, even if he has not yet said “Let us pray”.

Hold the book exactly where the priest places it.

- Hold the book with your hands on the edge of bottom corners and rest book against your chest
- Watch the priests’ eyes until he finishes. When finished, bow your head to the priest, and return to your seat.

## **Liturgy of the Word – Part II**

### **First Reading, Responsorial Psalm, Second Reading**

Sit and respond (eyes on action and hands on top of thighs)

### **Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia) and Gospel**

Stand and respond (prayer hands and eyes on action)

### **Homily**

Sit and listen (eyes on action)

### **Profession of Faith**

Stand and respond (prayer hands and eyes on action)

Make a profound bow at the words “and by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

### **Universal Prayer**

Stand and listen (prayer hands and eyes on action)

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist – Part III**

### **Offertory Presentation of the Gifts and Preparation of the Altar**

a) As soon as Father is seated the servers begin to prepare the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

b) The Book Holder brings the book to the altar and places it at the far left of the altar, leaving room in the middle for the Corporal to be placed.



c) The other two servers:

- Go to the credence table and bring the celebrant's chalice, and extra chalices to the altar.

e) Place the celebrant's chalice and additional chalices on the side of the altar.

f) Place the purificators beside the chalices as shown in the photo.

g) Line up in front of the credence table when finished.

### **Receiving the Gifts**

a) Follow behind the priest to the front of the altar.

b) Depending on which gift you are handed by the priest you do one of the following:

- the server that is handed the ciborium with hosts will place it on the right side of the corporal on the altar.
- Server who is handed the wine cruet, proceeds directly to the credence table and also picks up the water cruet and waits until the Deacon or Priest has set the host on the Altar.

### **Prayer over the Offerings Preparing for the Consecration**

a) When the priest has finished pouring out the wine and water, he will return them. Bow reverently to the priest, and return the cruet to the credence table.

b) The other two servers should bring the bowl and pitcher and towel to allow the priest to wash his hands.

- Move towards priest and stop. Don't make the priest come to you.
- Towel = Left side - Drape the towel over one arm
- Lavabo (Bowl) = Center
- Water = Right - pour just a small amount of water over the priest's fingers and pause while he wipes his hands.
- Then bow in unison to the priest and return the lavabo, pitcher and towel to the credence table.
- Leave altar and stand below the step in the center of the sanctuary.

### **Preface**

a) Stand with hands folded through the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy...)

### **Ring of the Bells**

a) Upon reciting the Holy, Holy, Holy prayer, all servers kneel (with prayer hands) along with the congregation.

b) At the Epiclesis (*calling upon the Holy Spirit*) watch his hands, when the priest extends his hands over the gifts and starts the prayer = 1 twist of the wrist for a short ring

c) When the priest holds up the host and is completely elevated and stops = 3 twists of the wrist

d) When the priest holds up the cup and is completely elevated and stops = 3 twists of the wrist

### **Eucharistic Prayer**

a) When Sanctus ends, kneel with hands folded through the remainder of the Eucharistic Prayer. Sing and Respond as appropriate.

### **Communion Rite**

a) After the Doxology and the Great Amen, all stand, with prayer hands pray The Lord's Prayer

a) Stand with prayer hands The Sign of Peace

a) When the priest calls for an exchange of Sign of Peace, walk to side of altar and greet priest first then each other, immediately proceed to the credence table.

### **Lamb of God**

a) Stand with prayer hands

### **Communion**

a) After the priest consumes the body and the blood of Jesus, the servers will receive the Eucharist then return to kneel at your place.

b) When the priest returns to the altar from distribution Holy Communion stand in unison and go to the credence table. Get the cruet with the water and stand next to the altar.

- when handed a sacred vessel place it on the Credence Table in its original place.

### **Concluding Rites – Part IV**

Greeting and Blessing (Closing Prayer)

a) After a few moments of meditation, the priest will say "let us pray" at which point the book bearer brings him the book.

b) Upon the concluding prayer, return the book to its place and go back to your seat.

### **Dismissal and Recession**

a) Following the blessing all servers get their procession items (cross or candle) and leave the sanctuary lining up at the altar steps with the cross bearer in the middle and candles on each side facing the altar.

b) The St. Michael Prayers is recited as the priest and deacon reverence the altar and then come and stand in front of you at the altar steps facing the altar.

d) When the Priest and deacon genuflects, any Altar Server with something in their hands should bow their head only.

e) When the singing begins, All turn and process slowly to the back of church.

### **After Mass**

a) Extinguish the candles and return them and the cross to their stands in the sanctuary.

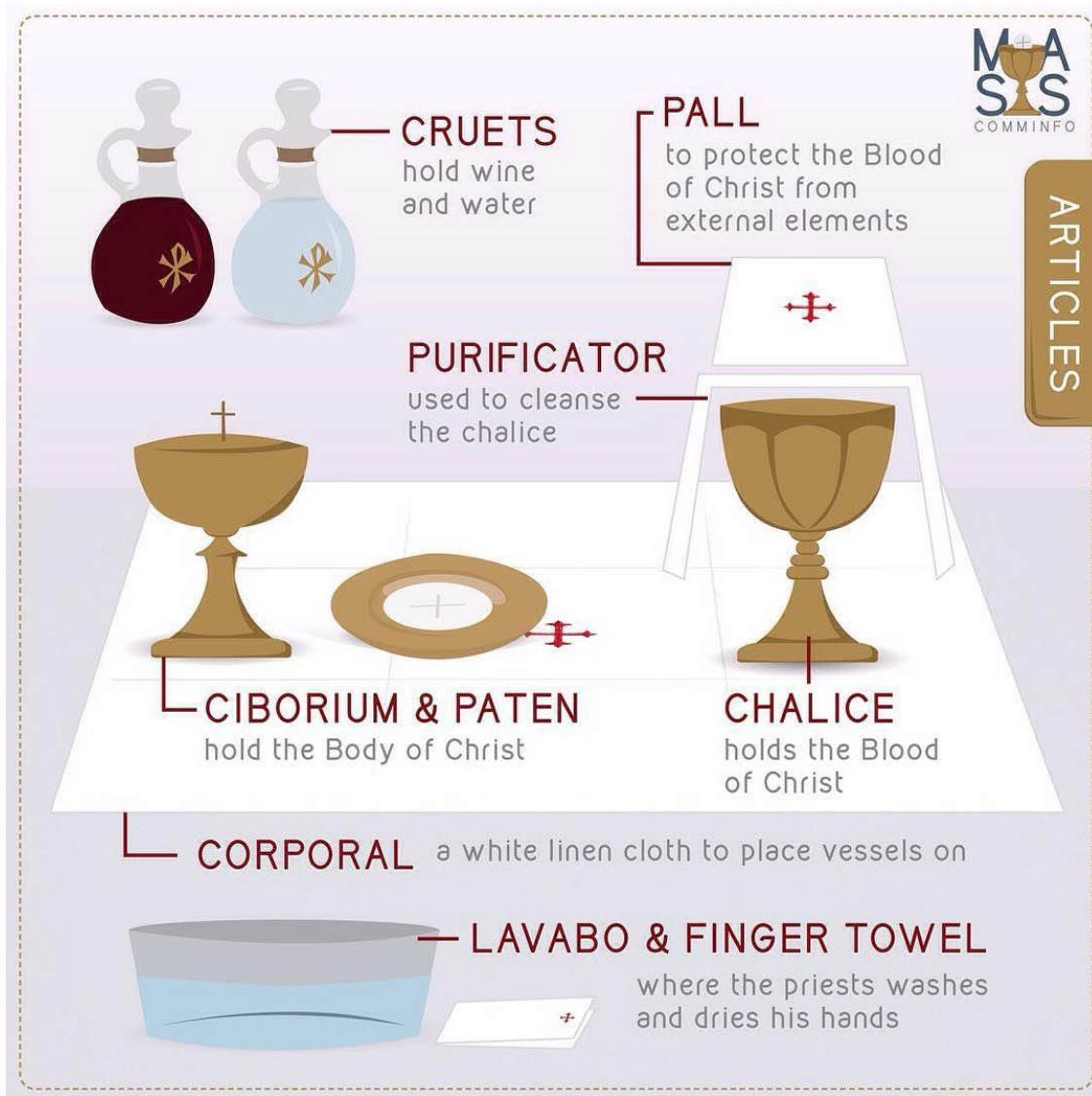
b) Bring all of the vessels to the sacristy

c) Recite Thanksgiving Prayer together

d) Replace vestments in correct spots No Servers leave until everything is done.

## References

### Sacramentals



Roman Missal

