

Brief Guidelines to Being the Best Altar Server You Can Be

Introduction

Welcome fellow altar servers to the ministry of the Lord. Congratulations, for you will be participating in one of the most prestigious ministries. As an altar server you will be closest to God for you are to serve Him on holy ground. As you know Jesus is present in the Eucharist, which is kept in the Tabernacle. You will not only be serving the priest, but your whole Church community and, most importantly, God. So take pride in your noble, newfound position in the Church. Serving at Mass, however, is not an easy task, it will require you to learn new terminology and remember new behaviors. This guide covers the main details of serving at Mass. This guide, along with the help of your MCs and priest, should help you grow more comfortable and refined in your role on the altar.

Eligibility & Minimum Requirements

In order to be considered eligible to serve on the altar of the Lord, you must:

- > Have received the sacrament of Baptism and First Communion and be receiving Communion on a regular basis
- > Be at least in the second grade
- > Be able to commit to serving weekend Mass as scheduled
- > Be able to commit to serving Mass on Holy Days of Obligation on a rotational basis
- > Be able to attend scheduled Altar Server meetings and training classes
- > Be able to be present at least 15 minutes before Mass begins

NOTE: These requirements are non-negotiable and need to be considered before accepting the role as an Altar Server.

Responsibilities

As an Altar Server, when present on the altar, be it during or before/after Mass, there are responsibilities that you will be expected to uphold. These include but are not limited to the following:

- > Obtain a substitute when unable to fulfill a Mass assignment
- > Obey instructions delivered by the Masters of Ceremonies (MCs), priests (visiting and stationed), and adult sponsors
- > Be dressed and ready in front of the Church at least 10 minutes before Mass begins (you are expected to be able to dress yourself in the proper vestments)
- > The cincture should be properly tied around your waist and is used to blouse the lab if it needs to be raised. Twirling, swinging or fidgeting of the cincture is not allowed at anytime
- > Fix, comb, or brush hair BEFORE Mass
- > Boys no earrings

- > Boys no piercing
- > Boys if hair is long, must be away from face
- > Facial hair should be groomed (mustache, side burns and goat tee, etc.)
- > Boys no fingernail polish
- > Girls may only wear stud earring. No hoop or dangling earring
- > Girls no body piercing
- > Black close-toe (two inch heel maximum)
- > Fingernail polish should be natural or clear color
- > Hair accessories should be black or clear color
- > No heavy make up
- > Be sure that your hands are properly washed and sanitized
- > Gray polo shirt with the Altar Server Emblem
- > Black Slack or Black dress pants
- > Black belt
- > Black Shoes
- > Black crew shoes
- > Use the restroom if needed prior to Mass. DO NOT use the restroom during Mass, unless you are ill (thirst is not a reason for using the restroom during Mass)
- > Sit up straight and participate in the Mass (this includes: hymns, hand motions and prayers) Do not cross legs.
- > No horseplay or loud talking in the Sacristy nor during Mass
- > No sleeping in the Sacristy
- > No eating in the Sacristy
- > No gum chewing
- > If you are carrying a cell phone or any other electronic device , IT MUST BE SWITCHED OFF AND LEFT IN THE SACRISTY
- > No talking during Mass or while present on the altar
- > Sign in after Mass on the sheet provided in the Sacristy

Postures at Mass

A “posture” is how you are using the parts of your body at a particular time. A server has to carry out a number of different actions at Mass, and so there are a number of different postures.

- > **Walking:** We do a lot of walking everyday and sometimes we get sloppy as we do it. Don’t walk down the aisle or around the Sanctuary stiffly like a tin soldier, but don’t lumber around like a grizzly bear either. Walk with your back straight and your head held high.
- > **Bowing:** When you bow to someone or something at the Mass, it should be as smooth, forward, inclining of your head and shoulders. When you bow to the altar, bow deeply at the waist, and bring yourself slowly to your full height. When you bow to the priest, bow your head slowly and gracefully. Don’t walk and bow at the same time: stop before bowing.

- > ***Genuflecting:*** When you genuflect, keep your hands in front of your chest when you go down on your right knee. Keep your body upright. Don't wobble back and forth, or you may look like a newborn lamb trying to walk. Be sure that your cassock or alb isn't going to trip you on the way down or up.
- > ***Kneeling:*** When you kneel, your body should be upright and your hands should be in front of your chest well above your waist.
- > ***Standing:*** Always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor. About 6 to 8 inches apart. This will give you balance and comfort at the same time. Don't lean against the furniture or against the walls.
- > ***Sitting:*** Sit down on your pew or chair carefully and gracefully. And once you are seated, sit tall and don't slouch. Place your hands in your lap or flat on your thighs in a relaxed manner. Watch how the priest holds his hands, and do as he does.
- > ***Hands:*** Unless you are sitting down or carrying something (like a candle), your hands should be kept joined in front of your chest: either locked together, or palm to palm, fingers pointing upward. Hold your hands the way the priest does. Keep your hands high up on your chest. If you're carrying something in one hand, hold the other hand flat on your chest.
- > ***Eyes:*** During Mass, always look toward the place where the action is happening: the celebrants chair, the lector, or the altar. When the reader is reading the Scriptures, you should be looking at the reader. When you talk to someone, you want that person to look at you, right? The same is true at Mass. Look at the priest and the other ministers as they speak and act in the sanctuary and even look at the people in the pews. This tells the other people in church that you know they are there.
- > ***General Appearance:*** Know what you are to do while serving Mass, and when you are to do it. And look as though you CAN do it. Don't look as if serving Mass is the worst punishment or the most unpleasant thing you can think of. Don't be afraid to smile as you serve Mass. An ancient prayer in the Bible says, "I will go to the altar of God, to God who gives joy to my youth."
Don't fidget nervously or slither around the sanctuary. Be relaxed and comfortable. Be yourself. Remember to listen, and pray with other people who have gathered to worship God. Remember what an important service you are giving to God and his people, and do your best.

General Instructions for Serving at Mass

Entrance Procession: The Priest (and Deacon) will gather with the servers and lectors at the double door entrance to the main isle. When signaled to go, the cross-bearer will lead the procession up to the main isle, followed by the acolytes, and remaining servers, the lectors, and the Priest (and Deacon). (EXCEPTION: When incense is being used it goes ahead of the cross.)

1. **The Cross:** The cross is carried in at all the Masses.
2. **The Candles:** When there are three or more servers the processional candles ALWAYS accompany the cross. Candles are NEVER carried without the cross. (There is no significance of the processional candles by themselves.)

3. Cross-Bearer: ALWAYS carry the cross in front of you with respect and reverence, holding it with both hands. DO NOT carry the cross sideways with one hand next to your leg, or carry it over your shoulder. Hold the cross up high, NOT at your eye level. All the people, including those who are near the choir loft stairs or the Eucharistic Chapel, should be able to see the cross.
4. General: If you are carrying something, when you reach the altar, pause, gently bow your head, proceed to the cross side of the altar, place whatever you are carrying in its proper location, and proceed to your place at the front pew. If you are not carrying anything during the procession, genuflect to the altar and proceed to the cross side of the altar.

Opening Prayers: Following the procession, and upon reaching his/her place, the server who will take the Sacramentary to the Priest holds the book, places it with his/her finger, and LISTENS for the cue to move toward the Priest.

1. When you are carrying the Sacramentary to the Priest, proceed on the floor level to the center of the altar and briefly PAUSE; FACE THE ALTAR, AND GENTLY BOW.
2. Then move to the Priest. Upon reaching the Priest, ascend to the top step of the altar and stand only a foot in from the top step. (NOTE: The Sacramentary is printed in large type and can be read easily by the Priest from the distance.)

Readings, Responsorial, Gospel & Homily:

1. Following opening prayers sit up straight in the pew, feet together and flat on the floor, and reverently listen to the readings that are proclaimed.
2. Listen to the Responsorial recited or sung and respond with the congregation.
3. Stand when the Priest stands for the Alleluia or other Gospel acclamation. Stand-up straight with feet together and hands folded in a praying position at chest level.
4. Listen to the gospel. After the Gospel is proclaimed sit as the congregation sits.
5. Listen attentively to the homily, sitting up straight in the pew, with your feet together and flat on the floor.
6. The server responsible for the Sacramentary must place the book on the altar when the collection begins (after the prayers of the faithful) and remove the stand for the Book of Gospels from the altar, placing it on the pew next to the credence table. The same server is also responsible for removing the book from the altar after receiving communion and placing it next to him/her in the pew.

Presentation of Gifts & Washing of Hands:

1. The Priest will wait for the collection to be completed. When the Priest (and Deacon) move(s) to the front of the altar to receive the gifts, two servers will join him/them, one at each side.
2. Then take either the bread or wine from the Priest. The wine and bread are NOT to be placed on the altar; rather, the gifts are HANDED to the Priest or Deacon.

3. After handing the bread to the Priest or Deacon, the server bows, immediately moves to the credence table, picks up the water cruet, and takes it to the Priest or Deacon. (NOTE: DO NOT wait for a signal or a nod to take the water cruet to the Priest or Deacon.)
4. After handing over the wine to the Priest or Deacon, the server immediately move to the credence table, picks up the bowl and towel, and faces the altar.
5. When the server with the water cruet returns to the credence table the other server hands him/her the pitcher. Both servers immediately walk TOGETHER to the Priest and wait for the washing of hands.
6. The Priest will turn to the Altar Servers and the server carrying the water pitcher has the responsibility of pouring the water over the hands of the Priest into the bowl. (NOTE: DO NOT let the cruet hit the bowl and pour the water easily and smoothly so that the water will not splash.)
7. After the Priest's hands are washed, both servers BOW TOGETHER, return the items to the credence table, and join the other servers at the pew.

Offertory & Eucharistic Prayers: At the conclusion of the offertory prayers all servers move to the altar step in front of the altar and kneel on the step. All servers remain kneeling throughout the Eucharistic Prayers.

Our Father & the Sign of Peace:

1. Pray the *Our Father* with the Priest and congregation. Remain holding hands during the acclamation until the Priest or Deacon asks the congregation to offer each other a sign of peace.
2. During the sign of peace, proceed to the Priest (and Deacon), share a sign of peace with him (them), return to your places, and offer each other a sign of peace.
3. Once the sign of peace is shared, the MC will move to the credence table and take the patens and distribute them. (NOTE: The acolytes usually do paten if circumstances permit).

Communion:

1. Bow immediately before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ (when the person to your right is receiving). Once all of the Altar Servers have received the Body and Blood of Christ, proceed to the altar step that is immediately located in front of your pew and kneel in reverence throughout communion.
2. While the congregation is receiving communion, the server responsible for the Sacramentary removes it from the altar, and places it back on its proper pulpit.
3. Once the congregation has received communion, the other servers begin to assist the Priest or Deacon in clearing the altar by removing the items that have already been purified and placing them back on the credence table. (NOTE: The patens are taken to the sacristy).

Closing Prayer, Announcements & Exit Procession:

1. After the altar has been cleared, and the Priest/Deacon has returned to his chair, the server with the Sacramentary goes to the Priest/Deacon with the Sacramentary.
2. If there is a solemn blessing after the closing prayer, the Priest will ask you to remain in place.
3. After the closing prayer or solemn blessing, close the book, place the book back on the pulpit, and remain seated to listen to the announcements.
4. After the “Mass is ended, let us go...” all the other servers proceed to the front of the altar and take their place next to the Priest to the right.
5. When the Priest (and Deacon) genuflect to the altar that is you cue to genuflect and turn around and exit. The cross bearer bows gently and then exits.

Duties Following the Mass:

1. Upon return to the sacristy, cross bearer returns the cross to its proper place.
2. ALL servers assist the Eucharistic Ministers in retrieving and storing any items remaining on the altar and credence table.
3. Once the altar and credence table has been cleared and all of the items have been restored to their proper places, hang your lab on a hanger and place it back in the closet.
4. Hang your cincture on the proper hook.