



# **Altar Server Guidelines**

St. Mary on the Hill Catholic Church

Updated 11/1/17

## **Preparations before Mass**

- Teams of 3-4 servers per mass, but if more show up and want to serve that is fine.
- Quiet prayerful atmosphere in the sacristy behind the altar before mass (keep the talk limited to mass preparations).
- Be sure and wear required and appropriate clothing.
  - **No shorts, flip-flops, tennis shoes, or high heels worn while serving.**
- Arrive **at least 20 minutes before** the mass begins. Mark off name in sacristy.
- **At 10 minutes till, if a server is not there, look for a replacement. This is the cutoff. If someone fills in for you because you are not there on time, let that sub serve for you.**
- **It is your responsibility to get a sub if you cannot serve that Mass.**
- Ensure candles are lit on altar (Easter candle if during the Easter season).
- Place bells under farthest/last seat. Put kneeling cushions under seats being used.
- Go to back of church at least 5 minutes before mass begins, and light processional candles.

## **Entrance Procession**

- Candle bearers hold candles straight up and down with the flame of the candle around or a little below eye level as you walk.
- Incense always leads the procession *if it is used*.
- Cross leads if there is *no incense*. Leave enough space between servers when processing. The cross is usually the tallest server, but this *may* be changed.
- **If you are not carrying something in the procession, your hands should be folded in prayer as you walk. Your hands should be folded at all times during the Liturgy when you are not holding something.**
- **If you are holding something with one hand and the other is free, place your free hand over your heart.**
- At the foot of the altar, the cross bearer stops and bows his/her head (a nod).
- At the foot of the altar, the candle bearers stop and slightly bow their heads (a nod).
- If you are not carrying the cross or a candle, bow at the foot of the altar. **Bows should not be quick or jerky, but reverent and prayerful.**
- The cross bearer and candle bearers **immediately** go to the sacristy. Blow out the candles and put the cross in its stand. Return to your seats.
- **When seated, place hands on your lap. Sit up straight. Do not cross your legs. Do not pick at or play with your fingers. Do not sleep. Little to no talking. No yawning. Do not look around or become distracted during the Liturgy. Remain reverent and attentive.**

## **Book bearer**

- Keep an eye on the celebrant **during the Gloria** for a nod or gesture. Do not wait for the end of the song to go. Be in front of the celebrant as the Gloria is ending.
- Have the book closed as you walk up but have a finger on the correct page. Have book opened when arriving at the celebrant's chair.
- When holding the book, **do not hold the pages tightly with fingers**. Let the book *rest* in your fingers/hands (holding tightly prevents the celebrant from turning the pages if needed, and it can also tear the pages and/or warp them).
- When the priest is praying from the book, keep your eyes fixed on a point on his chest (don't look at the words of the book and don't stare into the eyes of the priest while he is reading from the book).

## **Homily**

- Be respectful and attentive during the homily. Pay attention to the homily. Hands on lap.

## **Offertory**

- Book bearer places book (which is closed) on altar (left side as viewed from the back side of altar).
- After placing the book on the altar, the book bearer folds hands in prayer and bows to the altar before returning to his/her seat. Remember, no quick bows.
- A server brings the chalice from the credence table to the altar and places it on the right side of the altar, bows to the altar, and then returns to his/her seat with hands folded in prayer.
- All other servers bring the remaining chalices and ciboriums up to the altar. Allow the priest or deacon to place them on the altar.
- A server joins celebrant at the foot of the altar to receive the gifts: a cruet of wine and hosts. Another server *may* be needed to receive the hosts.
- If a server receives the container of hosts, he/she will take the container to the back of the altar and give the container to the celebrant, and then return to his/her seat.
- The server receiving the cruet of wine will go to the credence table and retrieve a cruet of water. The server **will remove both caps from the cruets** and then go immediately to the right side of the priest/altar.
- **The server with the cruets of wine and water:** the wine in the right hand and the water in the left, **with the handles facing the priest**. This is so the priest can easily grab the cruet of water by its handle. (The handle on the cruet is for the priest, not the server). The server can hold the cruet from the bottom of the container. **Once you have given the**

**priest the wine, put the cruet of water in your right hand for the priest.**

- Another server gets the water bowl, the other cruet of water (**remove the cap**), and the hand towel, and proceeds to the altar as soon as the celebrant places the gifts on the altar, following the other server. This server also stands to the right side of the priest/altar, next to the server holding the water and wine.
  - This server can hold the water cruet by the handle if they wish. The priest will not have to take the cruet from the server.
  - The server washes the hands of the priest.
- Both servers should bow to the priest (slight nod) when each is finished, and then return vessels to the credence table and return to their seats.

### **Eucharistic prayers**

- **Keep hands folded in prayer when standing for the prayers and when kneeling.**
- Remember to kneel close to seats so you can lean against seat if needed.
- The server who rings the bells should drag them out from under the chair during the singing of the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and slide them back under the chair during the singing of the “Mystery of Faith” (to prevent making a lot of noise while moving the bells).
- The server gives a single ring of the bells at the *Epiclesis*, the calling down of the Holy Spirit (this is when the priest puts his hands over the gifts/offerings).
- The server rings the bells at *both* consecrations beginning when the priest elevates the host or chalice until the priest begins to lower them. **Do not stop ringing until the priest begins to bring them down to the altar (one long ring).**
- After ringing the bells for each consecration, the server should keep holding the bells until the bells have completely stopped ringing (if the bells are put down before ringing has stopped it usually makes a bad noise).
- We keep our hands folded in prayer during the Our Father and remain at our seats.

### **Sign of Peace**

- Exchange the sign of peace reverently with those around you.

### **Communion**

- Altar servers receive communion **and then are seated.**
- The book bearer receives communion and then goes immediately to the altar, bows to the altar, (closes the book if necessary), picks it up, and returns with it to his/her seat.
- Servers kneel after others in communion line in front of them are done receiving.
- Before kneeling, one of the candle bearers lights the processional candles in the sacristy

and then returns to his/her seat.

- **Keep hands folded in prayer while kneeling after communion.**
- When the priest and or deacon goes to the altar to purify the ciboriums and chalices all servers need to line up on the right side so the priest/deacon can hand you the ciboriums and chalices to be placed back on the credence table.

### **Closing prayer**

- Book bearer keeps an eye on the celebrant after the tabernacle has been closed.
- He/she brings the book when priest is ready.
- After the closing prayer, the book bearer returns to his/her seat. The priest/deacon will say, “The mass is ended, go in peace.” The people respond, “Thanks be to God.”  
**Immediately** after this response, the cross bearer and candle bearers go to the holders and retrieve the cross and candles, and make their way to the main aisle, led by the incense if used, then the cross, then candles.

### **Recession**

- All servers line up accordingly and turn back to the altar, at about the 6<sup>th</sup> pew. Wait for the celebrant to genuflect or bow, and then turn and process out.
- When turning to go out, if you have a partner next to you, each of you turns in toward the middle when turning around. If you do not have a server partner next to you (like the cross bearer), turn toward your right when turning around.
- Servers go into the back sacristy and place the cross and candles there before going to the sacristy behind the altar.
- (*If this is a funeral mass, process out into the narthex, to the right side door nearest McDowell Street, and stand in a line facing the casket & family as they exit the Church.*)

### **After mass reminders**

- A server should extinguish all the candles on the altar.
- Return cassocks and surplices to their hangers, and pick up any that are on the floor.
- Ask the deacons, priests, and older/more experienced servers for positive feedback.

**Remember: If you are not carrying anything in your hands, keep your hands folded in prayer (this may be the hardest thing to remember).**



# ALTAR SERVERS