

THE ROLE OF THE ALTAR SERVER

The Holy Spirit plants many gifts within the members of the Church. In the liturgy, we rely on the different gifts we have in order to praise the Father better and to honor Him in every way we can by being everything He has created us to be.

Any “ministry” is a service. The special ministry of the Altar Server is to aid the other ministers, especially the Priest. This may not seem too important at first. But keep this in mind: the liturgy is not just talking and singing; it is built on things you can see and touch; gestures and movements. The Priest can’t be running here and there picking up the many things that are necessary to the liturgy (candles, books, incense, etc.). He has to be free to pray and lead the people in prayer.

Unlike the ushers, choir, and organist, whose service is in the midst of the people, Altar Servers serve in the sanctuary. They are very much part of the central scene wherein the sacred mysteries are celebrated.

After the Deacon, it is the Altar Servers who are responsible for the sanctuary and its furnishings. The Altar Servers arrange the things that the liturgy requires and present them when they are needed so that others are free to become involved in the liturgy without a lot of distraction. This service is their way of being involved in the liturgy, too. They are not just workers or “hired help”; they are members of the family who are helping the family.

An Altar Server has real responsibility. He or she has to “know the Altar Server territory” and understand the way the liturgy works. The Altar Server has to know what is going on now and what is coming next, and be alert enough to pick up signals from the Priest, Deacon, or other ministers. Altar Servers have their own special things to do in the service, but they also should be able to see unexpected things that need to be done and get them done well, with confidence and simple elegance.

Qualifications

Altar Servers must be baptized Catholics who have received first Holy Communion, and who respect the liturgy and want to enrich it. It is not enough just to know *what* to do; the ministers must also understand the *why* of the liturgy. A good Altar Server has a sure sense of the importance of what he or she does; he or she will always act with the necessary reverence.

Another qualification for Altar Servers is the ability to blend into the action of the liturgy--to walk and move with grace; to sit in alert quiet; to be unhurried and natural while still being reverent; to be disciplined without being stiff and mechanical. It may seem

strange to talk about such things, but the demeanor of the Altar Servers has a very real impact on how the liturgy is celebrated.

Not Just the Mass

To be chosen for ministry is both an honor and a responsibility, both within the liturgy and in other phases of the Church's life. If one assumes the Altar Server responsibility, he or she is asked to live in a way that reflects the Altar Server's role within the community. The Church is concerned with being transformed into a holy people; its ministers must be leaders in this transformation.

MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE ALTAR SERVER

Entrance rite

Walk in the procession, slowly, carrying the candles, cross, etc. if used, or with hands folded.

Once in the sanctuary, reverence the altar, place the cross and lanterns in their holders, then go to your seat and participate along with the people. Be alert! The Priest may want the book (Roman Missal) right away.

If there is an asperges (a sprinkling with Holy Water), one server holds the book while another holds the water (reverently), so that the people can see it and the Priest can bless it. The water bearer goes with the Priest throughout the congregation for the blessing. (If the Deacon is present, he may accompany the Priest and carry the water instead.)

Near the end of the Gloria (at the words "...with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father"), or at the end of the Penitential Act if the Gloria is not sung, listen for the Priest to say "Let us pray", then, holding the book firmly in both hands, reverently carry it to the Priest. Stand in front of the Priest, slightly to the side. You will hold the book as he reads the Collect (opening prayer). When he is finished, close the book and carry it back to your seat in the same reverent fashion. Place the book on the arm rest then sit down.

The Liturgy of the Word

Be quietly alert as you sit and listen to the readings. Please join in the responses. The Priest should be able to hear you responding.

At the Gospel acclamation, when the Priest stands all are to stand and respond to the Alleluia. (On occasion altar servers will assist in the gospel procession with candles

and incense.) Once the Deacon or Priest is at the ambo (pulpit), the Altar Servers turn to face him and listen attentively to the Gospel.

After the Gospel, sit and listen to the homily. Remember, that you are in the sanctuary; sit reverently, do not cross your legs, be alert and quiet.

Stand for the Profession of Faith (Creed) and recite it along with the people. Join in the response to the intercessions.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

At the proper time, you are to prepare the altar to receive the peoples' gifts. This usually occurs when the offertory song starts and the ushers begin the collection. If there is no collection, prepare the altar when the Priest sits down.

One Altar Server will carry the corporal, the purificator, and the Roman Missal to the altar. Open the corporal by unfolding it. **DO NOT WAVE THE CORPORAL WHEN YOU OPEN IT** because it may contain particles of the Consecrated Host, which is the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The other Altar Server brings the Chalice, with the pall on top of it, to the altar. Please hold your hand on top of the pall so that it does not fall off. **DO NOT** place these items on the corporal. The Chalice is placed toward the right side of the altar. One Altar Server returns to the credence table to get the tray of cups and places it on the altar to the right of the chalice, then returns to the seat. The other server returns to the credence table to get the water cruet and then takes a seat.

When the gifts are presented it is your job to accompany the Priest (and Deacon). You are to stand near him as soon as he moves to receive the gifts. The empty-handed Altar Server is to be next to the Priest (Deacon). This Altar Server will be handed the flagon of wine. The other Altar Server holds the water cruet, and the Priest (or Deacon) carries the ciboria with the hosts.

ONLY THE PRIEST OR DEACON sets things on the altar at this point. The gifts of the people have been accepted and will now be prepared and offered to God. The Altar Servers assist the Priest and Deacon with this preparation.

The wine bearer stands near the altar. Hold the flagon in one hand, remove the top and hold it in the other hand. **DO NOT** set it on the altar. After the Priest or Deacon has poured the wine, take the flagon from him and replace the lid.

The water cruet should be handed to the Priest or Deacon with the handle facing him. When he hands the water cruet back, both servers bow and return to the credence table.

[Sometimes, after the bread and wine have been placed on the altar, there will be an incensation of the gifts. If so, the thurible and boat are presented right away, then the Altar Servers step back to allow the Priest to move around freely. After the incensation, the Altar Server(s) receive the censer and boat and return them to their place.]

The pitcher and bowl (lavabo) are brought to the Priest by one Altar Server while the second holds the towel. After the Priest washes his hands, the servers bow. Take the vessels back to the credence table but DO NOT pour the water from the bowl back into the pitcher.

The Altar Servers return to their places for the Eucharistic Prayer. Stand or kneel when appropriate. Maintain a posture of quiet reverence with hands folded, and participate in the responses.

Stand after the great "Amen." Pray the Lord's Prayer and offer each other the sign of peace. Be natural, but do not distract everybody with a lot of movement.

As you see the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approaching the altar, bring up any extra ciboria from the credence table for use at the distribution of Communion. If someone is taking Communion to the sick, there will also be a tray with one or more pyxes on the credence table. Take this to the altar as well. The Altar Servers then line up next to the ministers at the sides of the altar.

When the ministers take their place behind the Priest, you take your place on the second step. Remember to make a bow of the head before receiving the Body of Christ and, if you desire, the Blood of Christ. If you do not receive from the cup, return to your place after receiving the Host.

Once the Priest reaches his place for distributing Communion, you will remove ONLY the book and the tray used for the cups from the altar and place them on the credence table. DO NOT TOUCH THE CHALICE and DO NOT REMOVE ANYTHING ELSE FROM THE ALTAR. KNEEL out of respect for the Holy Eucharist.

After distribution of Communion, the Priest will return to the altar to purify the Chalice. When you see him returning, one Altar Server should retrieve the water cruet from the credence table and bring it to him, standing on the second step. If there is a pyx on the altar, wait for the Priest to present the pyx to the minister going to the sick, then bring him the water cruet.

The Altar Servers sit when the Priest sits.

When the Priest stands, the Altar Servers stand as well. Listen for the Priest to say, "Let us pray." At this time, the Altar Server takes the book and holds it for the Priest

as he prays the final prayers before the blessing. At the Amen at the close of the prayer, close the book and return to your place.

After the final blessing, the Altar Servers retrieve the cross and candles and all servers take their positions at the front corners of the map. After the Priest reverences the altar with a bow, you turn and begin to process out.

Upon returning to the sacristy, line up and face the crucifix on the wall. The Altar Server carrying the processional cross says, "May Jesus Christ be praised!" The other Altar Servers respond, "Now and forever!"

Return the processional cross and lanterns to their places. Be prepared to help by extinguishing candles, bringing the books and vessels from the credence table to the sacristy, etc. These duties will vary depending on circumstances, for example, whether or not there is another Mass following soon after.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Be well groomed; wear suitable clothing. Never wear flip-flops or gym shoes when you are assigned to serve.
2. Come early enough to get things ready. (No less than 15 minutes before Mass.)
3. Greet the Priest in the sacristy before quietly vesting.
4. Choose an alb that is long enough. It should reach the top of your shoes.
5. Make sure the alb and cincture fit and look neat. They are a sign of your role in the Church.
6. Mark a line through your name on the Altar Server schedule. If you are a substitute for another server, scratch that person's name off and write your name and put a line through it. This sheet will be reviewed by the staff. If you should miss your assignment more than 3 times without finding a reliable substitute, you may want to reconsider your willingness to serve. When you do not show up for your assignment, or if you arrive at the last minute, it inconveniences all the ministers of the altar and the congregation.
7. If you cannot serve a certain liturgy for which you have been scheduled, you must find someone to take your place. If you are in Church and discover there is a need for another Altar Server, please offer your help. We ask that everyone collaborate. If someone asks you to substitute for them, be kind and accept if possible. There will surely

come a time when you must ask someone to take your assignment. Would you not appreciate the assistance?

Fasting from food and drink before Mass

Please remember that we are to fast at least one hour before communion to instill and prompt in us a desire for God in the Eucharist. This means no food, candy, gum, or drink other than water or necessary medicines.

ROLE OF THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

Parents/guardians are asked to support their children in this ministry. Please review the schedule with them to ensure they fulfill their responsibilities. Mark your calendars and appointment books to help you to remember your child's service assignments.

If your child has taken on an assignment and you discover that your family already has another commitment, please help to resolve the situation by finding a replacement. Let your children know that they have responsibilities to fulfill, and that you are there for them when they need help.

Parents, please be an example to your children by the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Go together! Go often!

As with all ministries of the Church, the Altar Server must embrace his or her responsibilities with self-sacrificing love and fidelity.

**MAY JESUS CHRIST BE PRAISED!
NOW AND FOREVER!**