

I first started altar serving my freshman year in college. I was home for Holy Week and assisted at the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper. Quite the first Mass! The second time I served was at daily Mass at college. And the third time I served was at a conference before World Youth Day in Toronto. I had received a scholarship from the group hosting the conference, and it culminated with Mass with a local bishop. There were two of us servers – a polish seminarian and me. I figured he would take the hard parts. He asked if I would carry the pastoral. The only thing I could think of carrying was the Cross. So I agreed. Turns out that's not what he meant - I was the miter and crozier bearer, the bishop's staff and hat.

Thankfully the bishop spoke English, so I told him I had no idea what I was doing. He told me to just come every time he nodded with whatever I was holding and he would take what he needed and give me what he didn't. It was one of the most nerve-wracking Masses ever, and I almost fell down the steps into the choir while trying to stand up and holding onto both, not knowing I could put them down. As soon as I got home, I looked up the protocols for serving Mass with a bishop.

It's always been a favorite ministry; one I still get to carry out a few times a year as a Master of Ceremonies for archdiocesan liturgies. I like things to go well, and if I can help make that happen with my love of details, I am happy to do so.

The life of the Church relies on each of her members sharing their gifts. Over the next several weeks, I invite you to reflect on your gifts, and how you might be able to use them in service of Christ and the Church. Part of the impetus for Partners in the Gospel is the need for more volunteers in parishes. Each of our Masses needs readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, altar servers, a sacristan, and musicians. All of our parishes could use more liturgical ministers. There are a number of other ministries and apostolates as well, to share in the life of the parish – helping others grow in faith, fostering community, serving those in need, deepening the life of prayer, etc. These things don't happen on their own – but because we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, in service of Christ and the Church.

“How can I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?”

Psalm 116:2