

Serving at the Altar

*SS. John
and Paul*

P A R I S H

(Revised, October 2010)

We are very happy that you have agreed to be altar servers. It is a very important role. Serving well helps everyone to celebrate Mass better.

- Most importantly, serving at the altar means always maintaining an attitude of honor and respect. We are there to pray and give God worship and help everyone else do the same. Everything we do is aimed at this important end.
- Show honor and respect for the Mass, the people, the priest, and the other liturgical ministers by being on time.
- Show honor and respect for the people assembled for prayer by not drawing attention to yourself by unnecessary talking, fidgeting, sloppy posture, etc... Look like you want to be there. Pray and sing.
- Show honor and respect for yourself by good grooming and appropriate attire. Find an alb that fits. Wear shoes/sandals that are in good condition. No flip-flops. They call attention to you every step you take.
- Show honor and respect for your fellow servers by hanging up your alb or putting away others that are out of place.
- Serving at the altar is an honor. Always conduct yourself in a way that commands respect.
- **Be in church at least 15 minutes before Mass.** After that, you are late and should apologize to the priest.
- **Always try to get a substitute when you cannot be there as scheduled.** If you need another altar server roster with names and phones, call the parish office. If you've tried 3-4 others and still no substitute, call the parish office to let us know you won't be there.

How to prepare for Mass

- Sign in the book on the podium in the room next to the sacristy. If you are a substitute, add “sub for” and list who you are a sub for.
- Dress in alb, cincture (rope belt, proper color), and cross.
- Light the candles.
- Carry the bread and wine to the gift table in the back of the church.
- Put the chalices, purificators, corporal, water, bowl and towel on the credence tables or make sure they are there. NB: on the server side table, you will need the corporal, the one main (taller) chalice and purificator, the water bowl and towel. The communion minister side table has the extra chalice(s) and purificator(s) and communion plates.
- When there are at least two servers, one is designated as the cross bearer and one as the book bearer. When there are at least two servers, the candles should be used for the gospel procession and procession of the gifts. When there are three servers, the candles should be used in the opening procession as well. Don't always do just one role. Get to know all of them so that you can serve by yourself if need be.
- Make sure the sacramentary book is by your chair before the start of the Mass.
- Double check everything. Always ask if you are unsure about anything. Never be afraid to ask a question.

The Entrance Procession

- We process from the back of the church.
- The cross bearer starts walking when we begin to sing, not when the organ starts to play. Wait until we begin to sing.
- Walk at a normal pace. Do not crawl. Do not hurry.

- Carry the cross reasonably high. It balances best if you place one hand slightly below the crosspiece and one hand further down.
- If there are candles in the opening procession, they come in after the cross. Leave at least 10 feet or so between them and the cross. Do not split around the baptismal font.
- Any additional servers process just in front of the presider. Leave at least three arms length distance between you and the person in front of you. You should not be able to reach out and touch them. Get no closer than that all the way up to the front.
- When the procession arrives at the altar, the cross bearer continues processing up the ramp, around the ambo and places the cross in its holder. Do not stop but keep the procession flowing. The candle bearers follow up the ramp and around the ambo to the altar and place their candles in their holders. NB: it does not matter if the candle is placed in the same holder from which it was taken. They are identical. Only those without a symbol of Christ in their hands (priest, extra servers, etc.) stop and bow the altar before proceeding to their chairs. When the server(s) get to their chairs, remain standing.

Responsibilities around the Altar

- When the priest says “Let us pray,” the book bearer brings the sacramentary, and stands in front of the presider’s chair. Return to your seat when the prayer is finished. Wait until the people respond “Amen” before moving back to your seat.
- Listen attentively to the scripture readings. Sit up straight. Stand with dignity. Even when you are not doing something, people are watching. You are still performing a public action and should act in a way that shows honor and respect to God and his people.
- If there are at least two servers, then candles are used in the gospel procession. When the priest or deacon moves toward

the altar, join him at the altar. Remember that the candle nearest the server seats leads the procession. When both candles are ready to go, that server leads the procession around the ambo and ends up on the far side. The other server takes a few steps to the near side. For the gospel, the candle bearers should be facing each other, holding candles on the same level, next to the candles that are always there. When the gospel is finished, the same candle bearer leads the procession back to the altar and servers put the candles back in place and return to their seats.

- At the conclusion of the general intercessions, as the ushers begin the collection, the server(s) bring the sacramentary book, chalice and purificator, and corporal to the altar. The corporal is unfolded and placed at the center of the altar. The cross mark on the corporal should be closest to the server.
- If there are at least two servers, after the altar is prepared, servers take the two altar candles and go to the back of church to lead the procession with gifts. Don't split around the baptismal font. Come up the center aisle, directly to the altar and replace the candles. One server then needs to get the water and bring it to the altar. **DON'T WAIT FOR THE OTHER SERVER TO GET THE BOWL AND TOWEL. BRING THE WATER IMMEDIATELY.** If there is a third server, that server helps to receive the gifts and place them on the corporal, which is on the center of the altar.
- When you pour the water, pour just a little water over the priest's fingers. The other server holds the towel out to the priest. When putting everything back on the serving table, set the towel under the bowl, not into the water dish.
- At communion time, servers come up to the altar and stand in the center. The presider will usually hand one of the servers the empty wine cruet, once the chalices are filled, and sometimes the Sacramentary. Put the Sacramentary on the priest's side table and put the empty cruet on the serving table and come back up to the altar. **NB:** Don't make the priest walk toward you. You walk up to the priest and take the cruet.
- After you receive communion (the consecrated bread), if you want to receive from the cup, wait until the communion minister is in place and then go into the cup line. After receiving, go

back to your seat and sing the communion hymn along with everyone else. No talking! When you see that communion is almost finished (not before), the servers then clear the altar, by removing anything on the altar. The corporal is folded and put on the serving table. The book (if still on the altar) is put on the stand next to the presider's chair. Any cups or cruets are put on the serving table. The altar should be completely cleared by the time communion is finished.

- When the priest uses a chair at the altar, one server, after receiving communion, takes and places the chair on the floor level against the steps, so the priest can sit in it to distribute communion. After Communion is done, that chair is taken and placed in the row of chairs the servers are sitting in, closest to the wall.
- If the priest stands and says "Let us pray," the book bearer goes up in front of the presider to hold the sacramentary. Otherwise, the presider will not need a server to hold the book.
- After the final hymn begins, and when the priest moves to the altar to kiss the altar, the cross bearer gets the cross (and candle bearers get the candles). All the servers then join the priest, facing the altar, as the priest comes down to the floor. Servers can either come directly down the steps or use the ramp to come down.
- When the presider bows, the procession out begins. Remember, only bow if your hands are empty.
- Remember what was said about the entrance procession. Walk normally. Don't crawl. Don't hurry. Keep three arms length between you and the person in front of you.
- When you reach the back of the church, go to the LEFT of the baptismal font and around the chairs at the back, directly into the sacristy. Place the cross on the wall and begin clean-up procedures.
- If another Mass is to follow, you may leave the candles burning. If it is the last Mass of the day, *SNUFF* the candles with the candle lighter. *DO NOT* blow them out because the wax will get all over.

- Return any empty wine or water cruets on the serving table to the sacristy. Usually the towel and the corporal are usable for the next Mass. If not, they can be put into the laundry basket in the servers' closet.
- Carefully hang up your alb, cincture and cross. Be courteous and pick up any other ones that are not hung properly.
- If your alb is dirty, torn, or stained, *DO NOT* just put it back. Place what needs cleaning or repair in the laundry basket. We need your help to keep what you wear looking good.
- Ask if anything else needs to be done.

Some words we all should know

Altar	The central table around which we all gather to celebrate the Eucharist. It is a symbol of Christ and so is always treated with dignity.
Alb	The white garment priests wear under the chasuble and servers wear with a cincture (rope).
Ambo	The stand from which The Word of God is proclaimed.
Blessed Sacrament	The consecrated bread and wine, which can be reserved in the tabernacle.
Book of the Gospels	A book with all the gospel readings, carried in procession and placed on the altar. The priest or deacon then reads from this book at the time of the gospel.
Chalice	The cup used at Mass for the wine.
Ciborium	The bowl or dish for the bread used at Mass. The plural is ciboria.
Cincture	The rope belt that is used with an alb. Different colors for different seasons and feasts.
Corporal	The larger square white cloth used on the altar. The bread and wine are placed on the corporal. The corporal is not to be shaken but folded and

unfolded carefully to contain any fragments of the Eucharist.

**Credence
or Serving
Table**

The small tables way up front on which we place the bowl for washing hands, additional chalices and purificators, and other needed items.

Cruet

A glass or ceramic container for water or wine.

Lectionary

The book from which the lector proclaims The Word of God.

Pall

A word that means “covering”, used for two items: The cardboard cover sometimes placed on the chalice; and the cloth covering for the casket at a funeral.

Presider

The name given to the priest, deacon, or other person who is leading the community’s prayer.

Purificator

The cloth napkin used with the chalice. Every chalice needs its own purificator.

Sacramentary

The book which contains the prayers the presider prays during the Mass.

Sacrarium

The special sink in the sacristy which drains into the earth rather than the sewer system; for blessed water and consecrated wine to be disposed of properly.

Sacristy

The room where we prepare for Mass and where Mass supplies are kept.

Sanctuary

The raised platform area where the altar, ambo, presider’s chair, and tabernacle are located.

Sanctuary Lamp

The candle on the wall near the tabernacle.

Tabernacle

The golden box-like container, where consecrated hosts are kept after Mass.

**Remember: Always get your own sub. For
schedules or questions, contact:
Fr. David Buersmeyer, 586-781-9010.**