

Ave Maria Catholic Church

Altar Server Procedures



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Introduction

This booklet is not a religious study course or a substitute for the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is a booklet specifically for the training of altar servers at the Ave Maria Catholic Church.

This manual is limited in scope to the server's duties during the Mass and is intended as general guidelines. Your pastor or the Mass priest celebrant may require different procedures, if/as needed.

Altar servers are chosen individuals, from among the parish, who display a desire to participate in a more intimate way during the Mass. It is an extreme privilege to serve and kneel so close to the altar as our loving Savior, Jesus Christ, becomes truly present: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity upon the altar.

The primary role of the altar server is to assist the priest and/or deacon in the celebration of the liturgy during Mass. This is done through specific actions and by setting an example for the assembly to follow by active participation in the liturgy by their actions; saying prayers; singing hymns; looking alert and reverently sitting, kneeling or standing at the appropriate times.

Servers carry the incense and censer; the cross; the processional candle(s); hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar; prepare the altar in the absence of the deacon; assist the priest celebrant during the preparation of the gifts (when they receive the gifts from the people) and wash the hands of the priest.

Thank you for volunteering to serve in this ministry! May God bless you abundantly as you serve in His Sanctuary and at His altar.

Requirements

1. General Requirements

When serving at the altar, it is both wise and necessary for a server to perform all of his or her assigned duties with attention, dignity, and reverence. All actions of the server are based on signs and symbols whose meanings are rooted in the tradition of the Church; specified by events in the Old Testament; and/or are fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that all servers do their assigned tasks in the prescribed manner.

a. Three altar servers are needed for each Mass (a cross bearer and two candle bearers). The cross bearer serves as the lead server and should be the most experienced server of the group.

b. Servers are required to vest in a red cassock and a white surplice or as otherwise directed by the parish priest.

c. Clothes worn under the cassock are full length pants or jeans, no shorts, and a shirt or blouse.

d. Closed toed or dress shoes (no sandals, crocs, or flip-flops) and appropriate socks or stockings should be worn. The Sanctuary is not an appropriate place for soiled sneakers, running shoes, or any other sports footwear.

e. Servers carry the incense and censer; the cross; the processional candle(s); hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar; prepare the altar in the absence of the deacon; present the bread and wine to the priest/deacon during the prepara-

tion of the gifts or assist them when they receive the gifts from the people; wash the hands of the priest; and assist the priest celebrant and/or deacon, as necessary.

2. Specifics

Who may serve?

A server can be any male or female; who as a minimum is a 4th grade student; has received First Holy Communion; and is registered as a parishioner at the Ave Maria Catholic Church. Exceptions may be granted by the parish priest.

Why serve?

The coordinator of the server training should discern the reason(s) why a candidate wishes to serve and be reasonably certain that the candidate's desire and wishes, and not parental or peer pressures, are the primary motivation. A reluctant or disinterested server can be a distraction to the priest, parishioners, and fellow servers. A poor attitude can have a negative effect on the overall liturgical celebration.

Required Basic Knowledge of the Mass

A server candidate is required to know the principal prayers of the Mass: The Gloria; Our Father; Nicene Creed; Lamb of God; Lord, I am not Worthy to Receive You; and the Holy, Holy, Holy.

Duties of the Server

Servers are primarily present to assist the priest. Here is a short list of server duties:

1. The server's first duty is to prepare for the Mass. The server arrives at the Church no later than 15 minutes before Mass.
2. Servers should not handle any consecrated bread or wine unless specifically directed by the priest or deacon in an emergency or exceptional situation. If the server suspects any consecrated fragments or wine remain on the sacred vessels they must inform the priest, deacon, or sacristan immediately.
3. Servers must remain in or near the sanctuary during the entire Mass and are not to leave the sanctuary during Mass for any reason other than illness or the direction of the priest or deacon. Altar servers are on duty from the time they enter the sanctuary at the start of Mass until the priest exits at the end of the Mass. Thirst, itches, and the like are never an excuse for leaving the sanctuary before the final procession.
4. Servers have many specific duties. These duties include holding the Sacramentary for the priest; helping to set-up the altar; washing the priest's hands; and singing, praying standing, sitting and kneeling.
5. While in the standing position, hands should be held folded in the praying position.
6. While in the kneeling position, hands should be held folded as in the praying position also. You must kneel maintaining your upper body upright; not slouching or resting/sitting on your heels.

7. When sitting, the hands should be held folded and resting on the lap. Please do not slouch, play with your cassocks, whisper comments amongst the other altar server(s), or otherwise cause the assembly to take special notice of you (e.g., you should not do anything which draws attention to you).
8. Altar servers should make every attempt to attend every Mass they are scheduled for. When a server cannot be present (due to sickness, etc), that server must arrange for a replacement in advance of the scheduled Mass. If you are unable to do so, please contact the Altar Server scheduler, as soon as possible, before the scheduled Mass and inform them.

Proper Dress

The server will dress in appropriate clothes and footwear for the Mass. Since albs or cassocks are the normal liturgical attire, remember what you wear underneath may show through the garment's fabric. For this reason, the server should be sure to avoid bold stripes and designs of any kind which may show through their alb or cassock. It is recommended that solid colors be worn (e.g., white or another light color would be the most appropriate choice for shirts and blouses). Likewise pants, dresses, and skirts should also be of some solid color. Shorts of any kind are discouraged.

Closed toed or dress shoes should be worn. Soiled sneakers, no matter how expensive are for casual dress and sporting events, and really are not appropriate in the sanctuary or at the altar of Our Lord.

When to Genuflect and When to Bow

When should a server genuflect? Whenever entering or leaving a Catholic Church (usually when entering a pew) or crossing in front of the tabernacle.

Genuflecting to the tabernacle is required; bowing is not an option to genuflecting, unless you are carrying or holding an object in your hand or there is a physical ailment or handicap which prevents genuflecting.

All Catholics should be aware of whenever Jesus is present on the altar after the Consecration, during Eucharistic Adoration or is reserved in the tabernacle. Everyone (servers included) should show the appropriate sign of reverence whenever crossing in front of the tabernacle or entering and leaving the Church.

Bowing of the head is done for: (1) A priest after presenting the wine and water and after washing his hands at the altar, (2) The altar (unless Jesus is present on it). We bow to the altar because it is the table of the Christ's Sacrifice. We bow to the priest because he offers the Body and Blood of Our Savior, acts in the Person of Jesus, and therefore should be shown respect.

When Jesus is present (reserved) in the tabernacle, He is just as present there, as when He is present on the altar or in the monstrance. Servers are encouraged to make frequent visits to Him in adoration while in the tabernacle and spend some time with Him in private prayer. This is especially helpful before Mass. The red, church sanctuary candle when lit alongside the tabernacle, indicates when Jesus is present (reserved) in the tabernacle. When it is not lit, the tabernacle is empty (e.g., as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday).

Servers should remember that there is an exception to genuflecting: Whenever they are carrying thing like the cross, sacred vessels, books, candles or other object you should not genuflect. A simple bow of the head is the appropriate reverence to be displayed.

How to Genuflect

There are two prescribed methods of genuflection:

- When the tabernacle doors are closed and Jesus is not present on the altar after the consecration or exposed for Eucharistic Adoration, genuflect in this manner: Stop, then turn and face the tabernacle, or
- If Jesus is present on the altar (e.g., during the Mass after consecration or during Eucharistic Adoration): Stop, turn, and face the altar.
- Genuflect on the right knee, so the right knee touches the floor.
- Pause for a few moments with the right knee on the floor and bow your head to Jesus.
- Rise from the floor, still facing the tabernacle or altar.
- Turn and continue in the direction you were going.

Preparation for Mass

Check-in with the Sacristan, coordinator, and/or priest know that you are present for the Mass as a server. Please arrive 15 minutes ahead of the scheduled Mass time.

At least 15 minutes prior to the scheduled Mass time a server should:

1. Insure the candles and cross are already in the altar server's vesting room in preparation of the entrance procession.
2. Select an appropriate sized red cassock and white surplice. The server's cassock should fit loosely, but not be so long as to drag on the floor or too short so it is above the lower shin. The servers' cincture is to be tied on the right side of the waist; the left side denotes those who are ordained clergy.
3. Light all appropriate candles (e.g., the altar candles).

Entrance Procession:

1. The processional cross will lead the procession (unless the censer is to be processed into the church). In that case, the censer will lead, followed by the cross and candle bearers.
2. The procession normally includes a minimum of 2 candle bearers. If there are an insufficient number of servers (e.g., 3 or 4) available, the procession will continue *without* any candles.
3. The normal order of procession will be the thurifer, cross bearer, other servers (candle bearers), the Deacon (or Lector) with the Book of Gospels, followed by the Presiding Priest.

Beginning of Mass/Entrance Procession/Opening Prayers

1. The cross bearer and servers meet the priest and deacon at the center doors of the Church. The cross bearer holds the cross high with the Corpus (Christ's Body) facing the assembly. Cross bearer begins the procession when the priest says to start (normally when the choir begins to sing the opening hymn). All servers proceed up the center aisle, walking slowly and reverently.
2. Upon arriving at the foot of the sanctuary, all servers immediately proceed to their right, up the stairs, past the altar to the rear of the altar, and place the cross and candles in their respective holders. Servers then proceed to their chairs. The cross bearer takes the chair closest to the credence table. Remain standing while the Priest and the Deacon take their places at their chairs.
3. All servers remain standing during the greeting, the Penitential Rite and the Gloria (if it's said). At the signal from the priest or his words "Let us Pray", the cross bearer takes the Sacramentary off the credence table and proceeds to stand in front of the priest's chair with the Sacramentary. The cross bearer holds the Sacramentary open at the priest's eye level (the priest will adjust the Sacramentary to the correct level).

4. After the priest has finished the Opening Prayer, the cross bearer returns to and places the Sacramentary on the credence table. The other servers remain standing until the cross bearer has returned to his/her chair. All sit down at the same time.

Liturgy of the Word

5. All servers remain seated during the first reading, the responsorial psalm and the second reading. As the choir begins to sing the Alleluia, all servers (along with the assembly) stand and the candle bearers get their candles and proceed between the altar and the priest's chair to the south (ambo) side of the altar. The servers stand together at the side of the altar and wait for either the priest or the deacon to come behind the servers with the Book of the Gospels. As the priest or deacon approaches, the servers move toward the ambo.
6. The priest or the deacon will pick up the Book of the Gospels from the altar and will begin to walk towards the servers. As the priest or deacon approach, the servers lead the procession to the ambo. The server on the right side will proceed to the far side of the ambo, while the server on the left will stay on the near side of the ambo. Both servers hold their lighted candles so that the top of the flame is about even with the priest's or the deacon's chin.

7. At the conclusion of the Gospel, the servers will turn towards the altar, walk behind the altar, and return the candles to the holders at the rear of the altar. The servers then proceed to their chairs. The cross bearer remains standing until the other servers have returned to their seats. All servers sit down at the same time and remain seated for the homily.

(If there is a baptism, renewal of marriage vows or other special ceremony after the homily, the servers remain seated unless the priest asks the entire assembly to stand; at which time the servers will stand until the priest directs the assembly to be seated.)

Profession of Faith/Intercessory Prayers/Petitions

8. As the priest stands to begin the Profession of the Faith/Creed (or after a baptism, in which case the Profession of Faith has already been said), all servers stand at their chairs.

Preparation of the Altar

9. After the priest has concluded the Intercessory Prayers and the ushers have begun the collection, all servers now begin to prepare the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

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Servers will bring the following items from the credence table and hand them to the priest or deacon. If the priest or deacon wish the servers to set the altar, the following items from the credence table will be placed on the altar:

- The priest's chalice; placed in the center of altar towards the bottom of the corporal (white cloth on altar); if there is no main chalice on the credence table, one of the regular Communion cups may be used instead.
- All of the communion cups; placed near the far right rear corner of the altar – the priest or the deacon will place the communion cups where they want them for the consecration.
- All of the purificators (the white folded cloths); placed near the right side of the corporal, but not on the corporal.
- All of the communion bowls (ciboria) containing hosts to be consecrated; placed in the center of the altar on the back side of the corporal around the main chalice.
- The sacramentary (and the wooden book holder, if used); placed to the left of the chalice.
- The cruet of water (placed near the communion cups on the far right, rear corner of the altar)

(These are the only items that are placed on the altar. The glass tray and the finger towel remain on the credence table.)

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10. After the altar has been prepared, the servers return to their chairs and remain standing. As the priest and the deacon stand and move towards the center aisle to receive the offertory gifts, all servers stand and follow the priest and the deacon to the center aisle. The cross bearer and one server pick up the children's collection baskets and proceed to the second step (and stand to the right of the priest or deacon). The server gives his/her basket to the cross bearer; the other server stands on the second step to the left of the priest.

Presentation of the Gifts/Offertory

11. When the servers receive the gifts of bread and wine from the priest or deacon, they proceed to the far right rear (ambo) side of the altar. When the priest holds out the collection basket, the cross bearer will place both of the children's collection baskets on top of the large collection basket; the cross bearer then returns immediately to his/her chair and remains standing.
12. After the server with the paten has given it to the priest or deacon, they will return immediately to the credence table and pick up the glass tray and the finger towel in preparation for the washing of the priest's hands. This server will wait at the credence table until the other server (holding the wine pitcher) returns to the credence table.

The server with the wine pitcher will give it to the priest or deacon. After the priest or deacon pours the water into the wine pitcher, he will give the water pitcher to the server. The server then takes the water pitcher and returns to the credence table.

13. The two servers at the credence table with the water pitcher, the glass tray, and the finger towel will then proceed to the left side behind the altar and await the priest to turn to wash his hands. Both servers bow to the priest, the server with the water pitcher and the tray pours water over the priest's hands. The other server gives the finger towel to the priest. After the priest has dried his fingers, he will give the towel back to the server. Both servers bow to the priest and then return the pitcher, glass tray, and towel to the credence table.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

14. All servers remain standing at their chairs singing or with hands folded in prayer until the assembly kneels. All servers then kneel, with hands folded, as the assembly kneels.

15. As the priest raises the Consecrated Host (the Body of Christ), the cross bearer will ring the Sanctus Bells loud enough to be heard, but not overly loud. As the priest raises the chalice holding the Precious Blood, the cross bearer will again ring the Sanctus Bells. All servers remain kneeling until the assembly stands after the Great Amen.
16. At the sign of peace, the servers will move forward a couple steps to receive the sign of peace from the priest and deacon and remain there for Communion.

Holy Communion

17. The servers will bow their heads before the priest gives them Holy Communion and before the deacon gives them the chalice with the Precious Blood. The Servers remain standing with their hands folded in prayer while the priest and the deacon give Holy Communion to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The servers remain standing in their places until the priest, the deacon, and all of the EMHCs have left the altar to distribute Holy Communion to the gathered assembly.

During Holy Communion

18. During the distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly, all servers clear the altar of all items (except the large ciborium of Consecrated Hosts) If it is on the altar, it remains there. If the priest's empty chalice is on the altar it is taken to the rear of the altar, while any other items (along with the Sacramentary) are taken to the credence table.
19. After clearing the altar, all servers return to their chairs and remain seated with hands reverently on their knees during the distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly.
20. After Holy Communion, as the priest, the deacon and the EMHCs return to the altar, all servers stand at their chairs and remain standing as the priest or the deacon places the large ciborium (if used) in the tabernacle. All servers remain standing until the priest has been seated, at which time all servers sit down.

Concluding Rite/Final Blessing

21. After a period of silence, the priest will stand at his chair for the Closing Prayer. At a signal from the priest or the words "Let us pray", the servers rise and the cross bearer will pick up the Sacramentary and proceed to in front of the priest's chair.

The cross bearer holds the Sacramentary as the priest recites the Closing Prayer. When the priest is finished with the Sacramentary, the cross bearer returns it to the credence table and goes to their seat.

22. If there are announcements, all servers remain standing at their chairs.

Recessional/Dismissal

23. After the announcements, the priest will give the Final Blessing and the deacon will announce “Go in peace...”
24. As the closing hymn begins, the cross bearer and the candle bearers will go to the rear of the altar and take the cross and the candles from their holders. The cross bearer then leads the candle bearers from the rear of the altar. The Corpus on the cross is facing the assembly. All servers walk together past the side of the altar, down the steps, and proceed to the second pew in the center aisle. Candle bearers turn inward toward each other and turn-around to face the altar. The cross bearer is located directly behind the candle bearers and likewise turns-around to face the altar. After the priest and deacon genuflect/bow, the cross bearer and the candle bearers then turn-around to face the rear of the church (the candle bearers turn inwards toward each other). The Cross Bearer raises the cross high and begins the recessional procession walking slowly to the rear of the church.

After Mass Duties

- ✓ After ALL Masses, extinguish the candles on the altar.
- ✓ After the 5:00 p.m. Saturday and the 11:30 a.m. Sunday Masses, assist in clearing the altar; return the three (3) red books – the Book of the Gospels, the Lectionary and the Sacramentary, along with the priest’s and deacons three-ring binders to the Sacristy. Clear the credence table and take the water pitcher, the glass tray, and the finger towel to the Sacristy.
- ✓ Hang up your cassock and surplice *neatly and respectfully*.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

From the beginning of the Mass to the end, please always keep your eyes (as much as possible) on the priest; you may be called on to go and get something or assist the priest or deacon in some way.

Definitions

Ablution cup: Covered dish of water on the side of the tabernacle used by the priest, deacon or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to wash their fingers after distributing Communion.

Ambo: The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the readings, gospel, and homily are given.

Boat: A metal container (with a small spoon) which is used to store unused incense.

Cassock: A black or red, linen gown worn by altar servers, acolytes, deacons, and priests when performing official functions at the altar during Mass, funeral services, etc.

Chalice: A cup made of precious metal that holds the wine, which becomes the Blood of Christ during the consecration.

Ciborium: A large cup or container made of precious metal which will hold the Body of Christ after the consecration for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful. This is commonly stored in the tabernacle to enable the priest and/or other ministers to later visit and distribute communion to the sick, hospitalized, homebound, etc.

Corporal: A white, linen cloth, usually with a cross in the center, used to protect any particles of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ from falling to the altar cloth. It is always folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from falling onto the floor or carpeting.

Credence Table: The table in the sanctuary (directly behind the altar) where the water pitcher, chalice(s), corporal, purificators, and ciborium are kept before and after the Consecration in the Mass.

Crucifix: A cross containing a figure of Jesus Christ nailed to it.

Cruet: A small, glass container normally used to store water and/or wine.

Luna: A thin, circular receptacle, having a glass face that holds a Consecrated Host used for Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction. It slides into the monstrance on a little track or slide.

Lectionary: The book of biblical readings used for the Liturgy of the Word during the Mass, Communion Services, etc. It usually contains all the biblical readings used for the three year Sunday cycle of reading and the two year daily Mass readings.

Monstrance: This is a large, ornate vessel used to hold and display the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction and solemn Eucharistic processions.

Paten: A small saucer-shaped plate of precious metal that holds the Host. Used by the priest and/or Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to distribute the Body of Christ during Communion.

Purificator: A white, linen cloth used by the priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion during communion and to dry the chalice after purifying or cleansing it. Used purificators must always be placed in the proper container or drawer specifically designed for the cleaning of sacred cloths.

Pyx: A case, usually the size of a pocket watch, in which consecrated hosts are carried to those who are sick, homebound, hospitalized or are otherwise physically unable to come to church for Communion during a scheduled Mass.

Sacramentary: The book containing the prayers said by the priest during the Mass.

Sacrarium: A sink with its drain going directly into the ground; usually fitted with a cover and lock which is used for the disposal of the following: The sacred linen wash and rinse water; used holy water; used baptismal water; blessed ashes, etc.

Sanctuary: The most sacred part of the church in which the altar is located. At the Ave Maria Catholic Church, the sanctuary is elevated and is situated in front of the pews.

Stoup: The small holy water fountains or bowels at the entrances of the church.

Surplice: A wide-sleeved, white, linen worn over a cassock by clergy and altar servers.

Thuribial (also known as censer): Is a circular-shaped, metal device used for incensing. A burning charcoal is placed inside it, upon which the priest or deacon places incense to make it burn and smoke before blessing the altar, gifts, a casket, etc.

ATTACHMENT #1

**ENTRANCE AND RECESSIONAL
ORDER OF PROCESSION**

