



# Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for the Parish Sacristan



June 1, 2008

Ave María Catholic Church  
9056 E. Parker Road  
Parker, CO 80138-7209

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Please accept my congratulations and sincere gratitude for your decision to assist the Ave María Catholic Church and parish community by volunteering your time, talent, and skills to the Sacristan Ministry.

As you will soon read in the attached parish-level handout, concerning our established Sacristan Ministry Program, it is a vibrant, worthwhile, and tremendous ministry that directly affects the quality of our daily community's liturgical celebrations.

Please know that I, our parochial vicar, and the parish liturgist are available to assist you and answer any questions you may have or receive your comments/suggestions.

May God bless you abundantly in this ministry at the service of Our Lord and His People.

Respectfully  
Yours in Christ,

Fr. Don Brownstein  
Pastor

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

General Information .....	4
Church History .....	4
Role of the Sacristan .....	4
Desired Qualities / Qualifications of a Parish Sacristan	4
Sacristan Guidelines .....	5-7
Closing Comments .....	7
References .....	7
Attachment #1	
Sacristan Duties Checklist .....	8-10
Attachment #2	
Norms/Guidelines Regarding Cleaning Liturgical Clothes/Garments .....	11-13

**General Information:** By definition (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), a “Sacristan” is defined as “a person in charge of the sacristy and church-related ceremonial equipment”. A sacristy is a room for keeping liturgical vestments (such as the priests’ cassocks, albs, stoles and chasubles; and the deacons’ albs, stoles, and dalmatics) and other church furnishings, sacred vessels, and ritual books. The sacristy is generally off-limits except for: the clergy; scheduled sacristan; and those assisting with set-up for the Liturgy. Using the sacristy as a location for parishioner’s to store personal property (e.g., coats, purses, etc) is strongly discouraged; as it detracts from its principal purpose. Such things are better left in our vehicles and therefore, does not mandate that the sacristy stay in or closely monitor the sacristy to safeguard these personal property items of others.

**Church History:** In ancient times, many of the sacristan’s duties were performed by the doorkeepers. The Decretals of Pope Gregory IX speak of the sacristan as having an honorable office and that their principal duties were to care for the sacred vessels, vestments, etc. Presently, the sacristan is an appointed official in the parish. The "Cæremoniale Episcoporum" prescribed that in cathedral and collegiate churches, the sacristan should be a priest, and describes his duties in regard to the sacristy, the Blessed Sacrament, the baptismal font, the holy oils, the sacred relics, the decoration of the church for the different seasons and feasts, the preparation of what is necessary for the various ceremonies, the ringing of the church bells, the preservation of liturgical and sacramental order in the church, and the distribution of Masses.

**The Role of the Sacristan:** Our appreciation and understanding of the role of the sacristan has developed hand-in-hand with our growing and understanding of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (SVC), that all members of the Church “should be led to take a full, conscious, active part in the liturgical celebrations which are demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, 14). ... the worship community needs ministers ... one such minister is the sacristan.

The ministry of the sacristan is a bit like the work of a weaver. In order for all the members of a community of faith to take their full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebrations, there needs to be someone who prepares and oversees the things of the liturgy. ... The sacristan is to know the meaning and purpose of the liturgy as well as the needs of the particular liturgical assembly, and to work carefully to see the liturgy’s ends realized by providing the members of the assembly with the tools they need [for a meaningful, prayerful, and active celebration].

Since the SVC, more-and-more of these previously priestly reserved sacristan responsibilities have been delegated to an appointed member of the laity. At the Ave Maria Catholic Church, we have an appointed lead sacristan and individual Mass sacristans who fulfill these liturgical functions and duties.

**Desired Qualities/Qualifications of a Parish Sacristan:**

- Must be a baptized Catholic in good standing and a registered member of the Ave Maria parish community.

- Has a basic knowledgeable and experience of liturgical rites (e.g., the Mass; Communion Service; Eucharistic Adoration; Baptism; Funerals; Reconciliation Service; etc.) and is aware of the demands of the liturgical position.
- Understands how to use the ecclesiastical region's published Ordo.
- Willing to work with a variety of religious traditions and cultures.
- Able to work, liaison, and communicate well with others involved in: (a) liturgical planning and (b) liturgical practice.
- Is a "team member" and a "team player".
- Is capable of being formally commissioned, ideally during a Sunday Mass, utilizing a blessing taken from the Book of Blessings (*Chapter 62, Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians, and Ushers*).
- Able and willing to learn about liturgical principles and to put those principles into practice.
- Self-motivated and possesses ability to follow-through.
- Able to request needed repairs/replacement through the parish's liturgist, pastor, or parochial vicar.
- Able to work on Sundays and is flexible (during the year, as needed) (e.g., Holy Week; Reconciliation Services; etc.)
- Is able to find spiritual nourishment and enrichment within the ministry.

**Sacristan Guidelines:** Overall, the role of the sacristan is to oversee and keep in good order the worship space (including the sanctuary, the nave, and the gathering area) and the sacristy. They must have a reverence for the sanctuary and for all articles and sacred vessels used in worship and liturgical activities. The sacristan is the person who is appointed to be available to prepare everything needed for the liturgy. The tasks could include (but are not limited) to:

- Make sure the furniture in the sanctuary is clean, appropriately positioned and not cluttered. This includes the altar, ambo, lectern, presider/deacon chair and other articles/furnishings in the sanctuary.
- Work with the priests, deacons, liturgist, and other liturgical ministers.
- (Lead sacristan) Serve as a member of the parish's Liturgy Committee.
- Be familiar with the Ordo, Sacramentary, Lectionary, and other ritual books needed in the liturgy and sets them up properly in preparation for the planned liturgies.
- Be responsible for the cleanliness of the sacristy.
- Be responsible for the ordering (through the parish liturgist) of all supplies and materials (e.g., unconsecrated/approved sacramental hosts and wine; candles; altar linens; liquid wax; purificators; incense; charcoal; etc) required for liturgies.  
Note: This responsibility may be shared/sub-delegated to other individuals/groups (e.g., the Ave Maria Parish's Altar/Rosary Society; etc.) with the pastor's knowledge and approval.
- Makes sure that processional candles are clean and functional, with wicks trimmed, as needed.

- Arrange the seating areas for the servers, deacon and celebrant; placing hymnals and/or binders (containing the Prayers of the Faithful and announcements) at their seats.
- If incense is to be used, fill the boat with incense, place charcoal in the thurible or bowl, and light the charcoal approximately 15 minutes prior to the start of the procession; place the stand or pedestal for the thurible and boat in the desired location.
- Order supplies needed for liturgies (e.g., approved sacramental wine, hosts, candles, vestments, altar linens, etc.). As noted above, this may be shared/sub-delegated with the pastor's knowledge and approval.
- Insure sufficient amount of clean purificators, corporals, hand towels, incense, and charcoals are available for the week's liturgies.
- Be responsible for promptly informing the pastor, parochial vicar, or the parish's liturgist of any liturgical device (chair, book, etc) which is in need of repair or replacement.
- Serve as a member of the parish's environment committee to plan the decorations needed for the different liturgical seasons and help with the decoration; to insure compliance with published church norms.
- Arrange the liturgical book(s) needed for the celebration, marking all of the divisions/sections.
- Lay out the vestments and anything else needed for the celebration (such as cruets, chalices, ciboria, linens, oils, processional crosses, candles, etc).
- Insure the church's bells are rung to announce the celebrations to the local community.
- (The lead sacristan (along with the parish's liturgist)) Be responsible for insuring that those who wash the altar linens do so according to the church's published liturgical norms. (See Attachment #2 for norms/guidelines regarding cleaning of liturgical clothes and garments.)
- (The lead sacristan (along with the parish's liturgist)) Be responsible for insuring that those who cleanse the sacred vessels after communion do so according to the church's published liturgical norms. (See Attachment #2 for norms/guidelines regarding cleaning of sacred vessels.)
- (The lead sacristan (along with the parish's liturgist)) Take care to burn or bury old linens and other objects (as appropriate) that are no longer suitable for liturgical use.
- Insure that the sanctuary vigil lamp is always burning; and is replaced if/as needed weekly.
- Insure that the holy water stoups are cleaned and replenished, as needed.
- Insure that the holy water font is cleaned and replenished, as needed. Note: If new (unblessed) water is added to the font, will contact a priest or deacon to bless the water, as soon as possible.
- If there is a sprinkling rite, insure the water bucket and sprinkler are prepared and placed on the credence table for use during the Mass.
- Insure any pyxes containing communion hosts (for distribution to the homebound, hospitalized, etc) (to be consecrated during the Mass) are placed on the credence table and brought to/placed on the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts.

There should be an adequate annual parish budget allocated for the Sacristan Ministry. This budget is usually under liturgy expenses and is the responsibility of the parish's appointed liturgist.

Sacristies usually contain a special wash basin, called a Sacarium, in which the drain flows directly into the ground to prevent sacred material (such as used baptismal water) from being washed into the common sewers or septic tanks. At the Ave Maria Catholic Church, the sacarium is NOT located in the sacristy. It is positioned behind the altar. Sacristans must be alert NOT to utilize the sacristy sink to dispose of liquids or materials which need to be poured down the designated sacarium. The sacarium is used to wash linens used during the celebration of the Mass and purificators used during Holy Communion.

At the Ave Maria Catholic Church, the cruets, chalices, ciborium, and patens are stored in cabinets located behind the altar. Clean and soiled altar linens are generally stored in the sacristy. The Sacristy is generally off-limits to the general public.

**Closing Comments:** In the event there is conflicting information or instruction, between that provided by the parish's liturgist and those clergy associated with a planned liturgy, the instructions or requests of the clergy will take precedence over the liturgist's decisions in all such instances. In other words, the presider (priest or deacon) has the last word in such liturgical matters.

### **References**

Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sacristan Duties Checklist, undated, Parker, CO.

Neff, Christina, Guide for Sacristans, @2001, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL.

USCCB, General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM), @2002, Washington, DC.

Zenit, A Sacristan's Duties, Vatican News Article, 8/21/07, Rome, Italy.

**Attachment #1**  
***(Sacristan Duties Checklist)***

1. Arrive one hour before the 5:00 p.m. Mass on Saturday and the 7:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday. Arrive ½ hour before the 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 1:30 p.m. (Spanish) Mass.
2. Turn on lights in the gathering area and hallways.
3. Unlock the Sacristy and Altar Server/Ministry rooms.
4. Turn on church lights #1 through #10 – omitting #7 (unless it is overly dark).
5. Turn on the sound system; be sure the microphones for the ambo, lectern, presider, and deacon are working by physically testing them.
6. Unlock the storage cabinets in the sacristy and behind the altar.
7. Set-up the credence table for the Mass (e.g., Sacramentary; required number (4 or 6) of chalices, patens, and purificators; the cruet of water, crystal tray, and hand towel; etc).
8. Insure the tabernacle key is positioned in the locking device of the tabernacle.
9. Check to see how many hosts are in the tabernacle. Depending on the number of hosts already reserved in the tabernacle, place the appropriate number of unconsecrated hosts in the patens on the credence table.
10. Insure the altar servers have lit all of the required candles at least 10-15 minutes before the Mass.
11. Prepare the wine carafe and presider's paten for the Presentation of the Gifts portion of the Mass. Insure a large presider's host is placed in the paten and enough wine has been placed in the carafe for the priest, deacon, EMHCs, and the assembly.
12. Get the Book of the Gospels out and place it on the sacristy countertop. Looking at the Ordo, determine and mark (using a colored ribbon) the appropriate page denoting the appropriate Gospel of the day.
13. Get the appropriate Lectionary out and place it on the sacristy countertop. Looking at the Ordo, determine and mark (using a colored ribbon) the appropriate page denoting the scripture readings for the day. Once marked, place the Lectionary (opened to the appropriate page) on the ambo; in preparation for the proclaimers' arrival. Note: The colored ribbon should be placed across the page opposite the first reading.

14. Get the Sacramentary out and place it on the sacristy countertop. Looking at the Ordo, determine and mark (using the colored ribbons) the appropriate pages denoting the appropriate prayers for the day. Leave the Sacramentary on the counter top for the presiding priest to confirm, before placing it on the credence table.
15. Get the white binders containing the Prayers of the Faithful out and place them on the sacristy countertop. Confirm that the required prepared prayers are in the binders. If so, place the presider's binder on the table next to the presider's chair and the proclaimer's binder (opened) on the lectern. If they are not present, notify the parish liturgist and/or clergy, as soon as possible, before the liturgy.
16. Take up and place on the first sanctuary step, the children's offertory baskets.
17. Insure any pyxes containing communion hosts (for distribution to the homebound, hospitalized, etc) (to be consecrated during the Mass) are placed on the credence table and brought to/placed on the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts.
18. If there is a sprinkling rite, insure the water bucket and sprinkler are prepared and placed on the credence table for use during the Mass.
19. If there is a baptism scheduled to occur during or after the Mass:
  - a. Remove the baptismal font metal cover and place it behind the wall, behind the altar (out of sight).
  - b. Insure sufficient clean water is added to the font for the baptism.
  - c. Insure the appropriate number of white baptismal stoles and candles are placed on the wall mounted table (between the credence table and the ambry (wooden, wall mounted container of the sacred oils)).
  - d. \* Insure the white binder containing the Rite of Baptism is placed on the countertop in the Sacristy for the priest or deacon who will be presiding (if the baptism is to occur within the Mass).
  - e. \* Insure the white binder containing the Rite of Baptism is placed on the same wall mounted table with the baptismal stoles and candles (if the baptism is to occur after/outside the Mass).
  - f. Insure the Oil of Catechumens (OC) and Sacred Chrism Oil (SC) are removed from the ambry and placed on the same table with the baptismal stoles and candles.
  - g. If during the Mass, insure that the Easter candle has also been lit.
  - h. Insure a sufficient number of front row seats (on the baptismal font side of the nave) are reserved (e.g., placement of reserve signs on the pews).
20. Always make sure you have sufficient altar servers, EMHCs, proclaimers, and ushers for each Mass (BEFORE the Mass starts). This includes finding last-minute substitutes for absent ministers, if/as needed.

21. After the last Mass on Saturday and Sunday, please put everything (chalices, patens, etc) away and lock the cabinets and church entry doors. Place soiled/used purificators in the laundry bin for later cleaning.
  22. Lock the tabernacle and place its key in the sacristy cabinet.
  23. Insure all candles are appropriate extinguished and all interior exit doors are closed, before shutting off the interior church electrical lighting (switch(es) in the sacristy) and the PA system (switch on the wall, the left of the main entry doors).
- \*\* If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Lead Sacristan, the presiding priest or deacon, or the parish's liturgist.

**Attachment #2**  
***(Norms/guidelines regarding cleaning of liturgical clothes/garments)***

**The Care and Cleansing of Altar Linens,  
Purification and Cleansing of Communion  
Vessels and Use of the Sacrarium**

The following guidance is from the U.S.C.C.B.'s Committee on the Liturgy regarding the care of altar linens:

Whatever is set-aside for use in the liturgy takes on a certain sacred character both by the blessing it receives and the sacred functions it fulfills. Thus, the cloths used at the altar in the course of the Eucharistic celebration should be treated with the care and respect due to those things used in the preparation and celebration of the sacred mysteries. This brief statement reflects on the importance of reverently caring for altar linens which, because of their use in the liturgy, are deserving of special respect. These linens should be "beautiful and finely made, though mere lavishness and ostentation must be avoided." Altar cloths, corporals, purificators, lavabo towels, and palls should be made of absorbent cloth and never of paper.

Altar linens are appropriately blessed according to the Order for the Blessing of Articles for Liturgical Use. The blessing of a number of such articles for liturgical use may take place "within Mass or in a separate celebration in which the faithful should take part."

**Altar Cloths:** Just as the altar is a sign for us of Christ, the living stone, altar cloths are used "out of reverence for the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and the banquet that gives us his body" and by their beauty and form they add to the dignity of the altar in much the same way that vestments solemnly ornament the priests and sacred ministers. Such cloths also serve a practical purpose, however, in absorbing whatever may be spilled of the Precious Blood or other sacramental elements. Thus the material of altar cloths should be absorbent and easily laundered. While there may be several altar cloths in the form of drapings or even frontals, their shape, size, and decoration should be in keeping with the design of the altar.

Unless the altar cloths have been stained with the Precious Blood, it is not necessary that they be cleaned in the sacrarium. Care should be taken, however, that proper cleaning methods are used to preserve the beauty and life of the altar cloth. *(A "sacrarium" behind the altar at the Ave Maria Catholic Church. A "sacrarium" is a special sink or basin (used in the Roman Liturgy) used solely for the disposal of ablutions from the Mass. Unlike conventional sinks or basins, the drainage pipe(s) for the sacrarium go directly into the earth, not into the public sewage systems. During or after the Mass, the Blood of the Lord is **never** to be poured into a drain—even the sacrarium; it **must** be consumed. After it is consumed, the communion vessels are placed on the counter behind the altar to be purified by a priest, deacon or acolyte, during or immediately after the Mass. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) are asked to help cleanse the vessels after their purification, with soap and water.*

*All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread or wine. Should there be any mishap--as when, for example, the consecrated wine is spilled from the chalice--then the affected "area . . . should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy. [GIRM, 280]." (Norms, 29).*

**Corporals:** Sacred vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord are always placed on top of a corporal. A corporal is generally spread by the deacon or another minister in the course of the preparation of the gifts and the altar.

Because one of the purposes of the corporal is to contain whatever small particles of the consecrated host may be left at the conclusion of Mass, care should be taken that the transferal of consecrated hosts between sacred vessels should always be done over a corporal. The corporal should be white in color and of sufficient dimensions, so that at least the main chalice and paten may be placed upon it completely. The material of corporals should be absorbent and easily laundered.

Any apparent particles of the consecrated bread, which remain on the corporal after the distribution of Holy Communion, should be consumed in the course of the purification of the sacred vessels.

When corporals are cleansed they should first be rinsed in a sacrarium and only afterwards washed with laundry soaps in the customary manner. Corporals should be ironed in such a way that their distinctive manner of folding helps to contain whatever small particles of the consecrated host may remain at the conclusion of the Eucharistic celebration.

**Purificators:** Purificators are customarily brought to the altar with chalices and are used to wipe the Precious Blood from the rim of the chalice and to purify sacred vessels. They should be white in color. Whenever the Precious Blood is distributed from the chalice, poured into ancillary vessels or even accidentally spilled, purificators are to be used to absorb the spill. The material of purificators should be absorbent and easily laundered. The purificator should never be made of paper or any other disposable material.

Because of their function, purificators regularly become stained with the Precious Blood. It is, therefore, essential that they should first be cleansed in a sacrarium and only afterwards washed with laundry soaps in the customary manner. Purificators should be ironed in such a way that they may be easily used for the wiping of the lip of the chalice.

**Lavabo Towels:** The Order of Mass calls for the washing of the hands (lavabo) of the priest celebrant in the course of the preparation of the gifts and the altar. Since it is his hands and not only his fingers, which are washed at the lavabo, the lavabo towel should be of adequate size and sufficiently absorbent for drying his hands. Neither the color nor

the material of the lavabo towel is prescribed, though efforts should be made to avoid the appearance of a "dish towel," "bath towel", or other cloth with a purely secular use.

**Other Cloths:** Other cloths may also be used at Mass. A pall (a piece of square cardboard covered with white cloth) may be used to cover the presider's chalice at Mass in order to protect the Precious Blood from insects or other foreign objects—especially during the summer months. In order that palls may be kept immaculately clean they should be made with removable covers of a worthy material, which may be easily washed in the sacarium and then laundered. Chalice veils either of the color of the day or white, may be fittingly used to cover the chalice before it is prepared and after it has been purified.

**Disposal of Worn Altar Linens:** Consistent with the disposal of all things blessed for use in the liturgy, it is appropriate that altar linens, which show signs of wear and can no longer be used, should normally be disposed of either by burial or burning.

**Purification of Sacred Vessels (e.g., Communion patens and chalices):** *After everyone has received communion and the precious blood is consumed, EMHCs are asked to return the vessels to the countertop behind the altar for purification by the priest, deacon, or acolyte. Purification of the vessels entails the adding of water into the vessels and moving the water around inside it to cleanse all of the remaining particles or droplets from the surfaces. If/as necessary, a purificator may be used on the edge of the instrument to prevent any inadvertent/accidental spillage. Once the vessel has been purified, the water (with the particles and/or diluted precious blood) is to be consumed by the priest, deacon, or acolyte. After the water is consumed, use the purificator to dry the interior and exterior surfaces of the sacred vessel before it is cleansed by the EMHC or sacristan. Soiled purificators, corporals, or other linens must be cleaned as noted above, using the Sacarium.*

**Cleansing of Sacred Vessels:** *After the Mass has concluded, the sacristan or EMHCs are asked to cleanse the sacred vessels used during the Mass. The cleaning of these instruments includes simply washing the vessels using warm water and mild dishwashing detergent. Since the vessels have already been purified, the excess water is permitted to drain into the common sewage systems.*

**Conclusion:** The manner in which we treat sacred things (even those of lesser significance than the chalice, paten, liturgical furnishings, etc.) fosters and expresses our openness to the graces God gives to his Church in every celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, by the diligent care of altar linens, vestments, etc., the Church expresses her joy at the inestimable gifts she receives from Christ's altar.

(Source: <http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/DocumentContents/Index/2/SubIndex/11/DocumentIndex/529>)