

The Altar Server's Guide

Save this guide for future reference

THE ALTAR SERVER COMMITMENT

Service at the altar is a serious responsibility. Altar Servers must demonstrate commitment at all times:

DEVOTION: A COMMITMENT TO WHAT WE BELIEVE

A love of God and the Catholic Faith

A strong desire to do God's work and serve his people

A willingness to conduct yourself in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord

Even if they are not serving, anytime an Altar Server is in the church their actions should be an example to the rest of the people at Mass. Altar Servers wearing vestments are an extension of the clergy and a reminder of heavenly worship.

Devoted Altar Servers know that their service is important to the whole faith community. Through their service at the Altar, others are able to grow in their love of the Lord.

DEDICATION: A COMMITMENT TO HOW WE ACT

The commitment to fully meet the requirements of the service for which you have been chosen

The commitment to fulfill your duties when you are scheduled

The commitment to help the entire altar server team to do well

Dedication to service comes from our love and Devotion to God

Dedicated Altar Servers know that others are counting on them. They help less-skilled servers when needed, and they never say, "That's not my job."

DISCIPLINE: A COMMITMENT TO HOW WE SERVE

The self-control that allows Altar Servers to carry out their duties with precision

The determination to do what needs to be done, the right way every time

The desire to be prepared, to arrive early to help prepare for Mass, and to ensure that the rest of the Altar Server Team is prepared

The initiative to pay attention and think about what they will do next

The ambition to improve each time they serve. Asking at the end of each Mass, "What could I have done better?"

The motivation to listen to coaching with an open mind and a willing heart

Dedication to proper service pushes us to be more disciplined.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your willingness to serve as an altar server! You are serving in an important way at the Mass. Serving at Mass will involve learning some new words and some very specific things to remember. It's important to realize that you are not only serving the priest, but also your family, the whole Church community, and you are serving God in helping with prayers and with the Eucharist. This server's guide covers the main details of serving at Mass. This guide should help you grow more comfortable and refined in your role on the altar. There are two types of servers: acolytes (from 3rd grade) and cross-bearers (from 8th grade). Please keep this handout and refer back to it when needed.

FUNDAMENTAL POINTS

Through prayer and reflection, we all can appreciate the significance of what is actually happening at Mass. It is important to be sure that you, as an altar server, be **attentive** and **sensitive to the presence of God** during the Mass, and afterwards. God calls us to respond to his great love and mercy with a sense of **reverence**, **wonderment** and **gratefulness**. We must all help each other remember to **show reverence to God** at all times, but most especially when you're serving. Some ways you can do this is to:

- 1) **Sit still**, be calm and settle your nerves
- 2) **Be aware** of what's going on; always **watch the priest**, especially if you are uncertain about something, he will direct you
- 3) Only **speak when necessary**
- 4) **Respond** with the congregation at the appropriate times
- 5) Do your best to **enter into the spirit** of the celebration—sing with God's family
- 6) **Keep your movements smooth and slow** (not sluggish though!)
- 7) When crossing from one side of the Sanctuary to the other, do not cross behind the altar. You should always cross in front of the altar, stop at center, bow and then continue to the other side of the Sanctuary.

POSTURE AND HAND MOVEMENTS

Believe it or not, what you do with your hands is very important! When you're standing or sitting and your hands are busy, or if you can't seem to sit or stand still, you will be a source for distraction for your friends and family in the pews, the other altar servers, and most surely, the priest. Always remember, that **when you move, you move for a purpose**; either to assist the priest or to perform an assigned function. Move at a pace that displays reverence yet is not too slow that you keep people waiting. Anytime you need to cross in front of the altar—do not genuflect during the Mass—a simple bow is okay in front of the Tabernacle, outside of Mass, a genuflection should be made to the Tabernacle unless for reasons of health or age.

Folded Hands

Your hands are to be “folded” during most parts of the Mass. What this means is to put your hands together with your fingers together. They should be at least chest level. Just keep them together, comfortably. Placing your hands in this way is supposed to be a sign of prayer, not of tension. Remember, as altar servers, **you are leading others to pray!**



Bowing

When you bow to someone or something at mass, it should be a smooth forward inclining of your head and shoulders. Never walk and bow at the same time: stop before bowing. There are two types of bowing, the bow of the head and the bow of the body as described below:

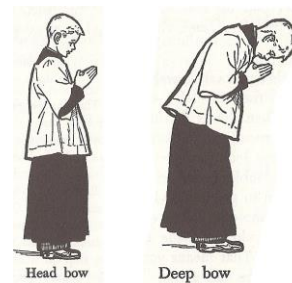
Head Bow – This bow is a slow nod of the head, made when:

- The name of Jesus is mentioned
- Leaving the priest after an action (i.e. water and wine, etc.)

Profound or Deep Bow – This bow is made from the waist with hands folded. It should be made slowly and reverently when:

- Crossing the altar if the Blessed Sacrament is not present
- At the moment of elevation during consecration; if standing, after the Priest genuflects. (**No genuflecting during Mass!**)

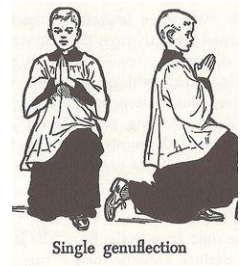
During the Creed at the words “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”



Genuflecting

When you genuflect, keep your hands in front of your chest while you go down on your right knee. Keep your body straight, bow your head briefly, and rise to the standing position. Be sure that your cassock/alb does not trip you on the way down or up.

As a rule, if the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the Tabernacle, a genuflection is made before and after Mass, and outside of Mass whenever passing in front of the Tabernacle. *Exception: The cross-bearer when carrying the processional cross, or any server who carries anything, does not genuflect.*



Kneeling

When you kneel, your body should be upright and your hands should be in front of your chest, well above your waist.

Standing

Always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor six to eight inches apart. This will give you balance and comfort at the same time. Do not lean against the furniture or against the walls.

Sitting – Sit down on your chair carefully and gracefully. Once you are seated, sit tall and do not slouch. Place both feet firmly on the floor. Place your hands on your lap or flat on your thighs in a relaxed manner.

Eyes – During Mass always look towards the place where the action is happening: the celebrant's chair, the ambo or the altar. When a reader is reading the scriptures, you should be looking at the reader. Keep your attention on the priest in case he is in need of your assistance. Always keep your eyes on things going on around you.

- **No running anytime in Church**, even when you're not serving.
- **No chewing gum in church**, even when you're not serving.
- **No sitting in a slumped position.** Always do your best to sit-up straight and to stand straight. When seated, refrain from swinging your legs.

ARRIVAL FOR SERVICE

When you are scheduled to serve, you should arrive **at least 15 minutes** before Mass. You'll need to get vested, light candles and be in the sacristy before beginning the procession. Be sure your parents know that you need to get to church early.

SCHEDULE PROBLEMS

If you are unable to serve when you are scheduled, please contact another server to fill-in for you as soon as possible (Don't wait until the night before!) Look at the other Saturdays and Sundays on the schedule and see whom else serves at Masses for the same time you're scheduled for. Try to work out a "swap." That is, be willing to switch your serving time for theirs. Switching is the fairest way to work out schedule problems. Remember, as soon as you receive your schedule; write your dates on your family's calendar or put them in your smartphone. Again, be sure your parents know your serving schedule. You will be provided a list of Altar Servers and their phone numbers so you can make coverage arrangements when needed. **Please contact Sr. Donna or Lisa Andursky (in the office: 724-628-6840) IF you cannot find a substitute!**

APPEARANCE AND DRESS

All servers are expected to wear "Sunday clothes" at the weekend Masses. Modesty should be preferred over fashion. Jeans, shorts, and t-shirts are not preferred. "Skorts" of appropriate length and style may be allowed. Albs are made from lightweight material. What you wear under an alb will show through. For this reason, the server should be sure to avoid stripes and flashy designs of any kind. These distract by showing through the alb. It is recommended that servers wear light, solid colors. Shoes must be clean dress-style shoes. Black, brown, or white (for girls) dress shoes should be worn whenever possible. Athletic shoes, open-toed shoes or flip-flops are not allowed. Shoes should have a conservative heel, and good traction. Our sanctuary floor has steps finished in polished marble. Servers may occasionally encounter water spills. Worn soles and high heels present a real hazard for tripping and slipping.

Dress code requirements that present undue hardship on a server or their family should be brought discreetly to the attention of the Altar Server Coordinator so that accommodations can be made.

Watch alarms and cell phones must be silenced. It is greatly preferred that cell phones not be carried while serving. Albs are sorted in the vestry by size. Select an alb that fits comfortably, and is long enough to cover to your ankles. Fasten the alb at the waist with a cincture. Tie the cincture in a "girth-hitch" knot snug enough to hold the alb in place (see diagram at end of manual). After Mass, return your alb to its original place (by size). Zip it on the hangar, facing the correct direction. Unknot your cincture and hang it on the proper hook. If you notice anything wrong with your robe, please bring it in to Sister Donna or Fr. Dan.

ENTRANCE PROCESSION

Acolytes should accompany the Cross Bearer walking **along side each other when possible**. The Acolytes should follow the pace set by the Cross Bearer and try to remain side by side the entire way up the aisle. The procession up the aisle is not a race, and should be done with reverence.

Acolytes should hold the candles steady and straight; this prevents wax from dripping down the side. When approaching the altar, at the foot of the sanctuary bow your heads. **Do Not** bow the Cross, candles or anything you may be carrying. Do not wait for the priest. Acolytes place the candles where they belong. Do not allow them to slam down onto their holders. Cross Bearer places the Cross on the stand in the sacristy. Be sure not to 'slam' them into the holder.

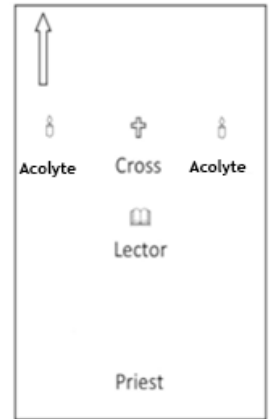
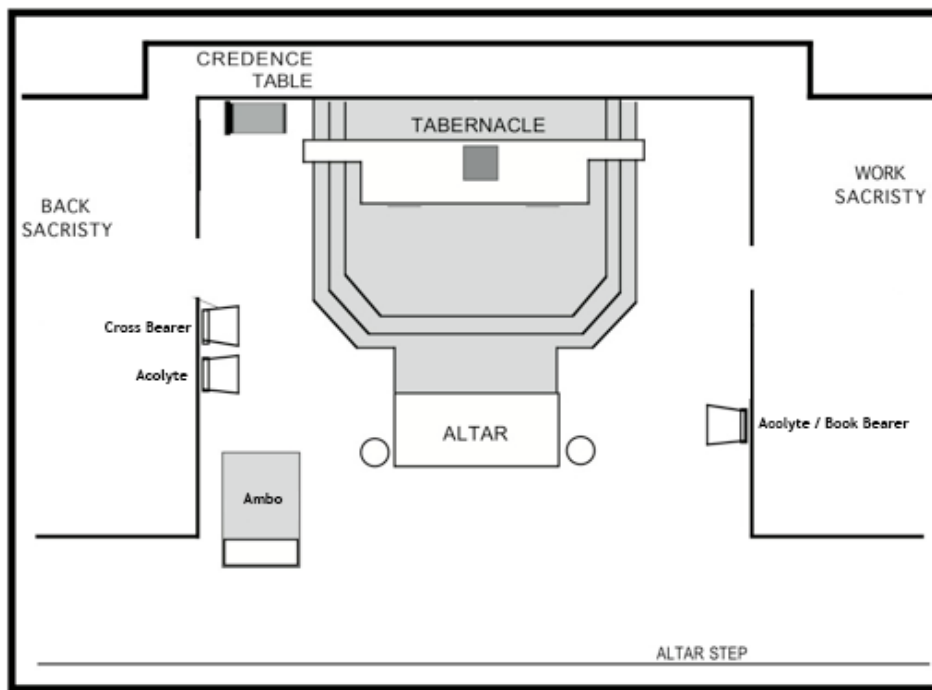


FIGURE 1- ORDER OF PROCESSION



Note: at Immaculate Conception and St. Rita, the work ('server') sacristy and main ('priest') sacristy are swapped/ on the opposite side from the diagram.

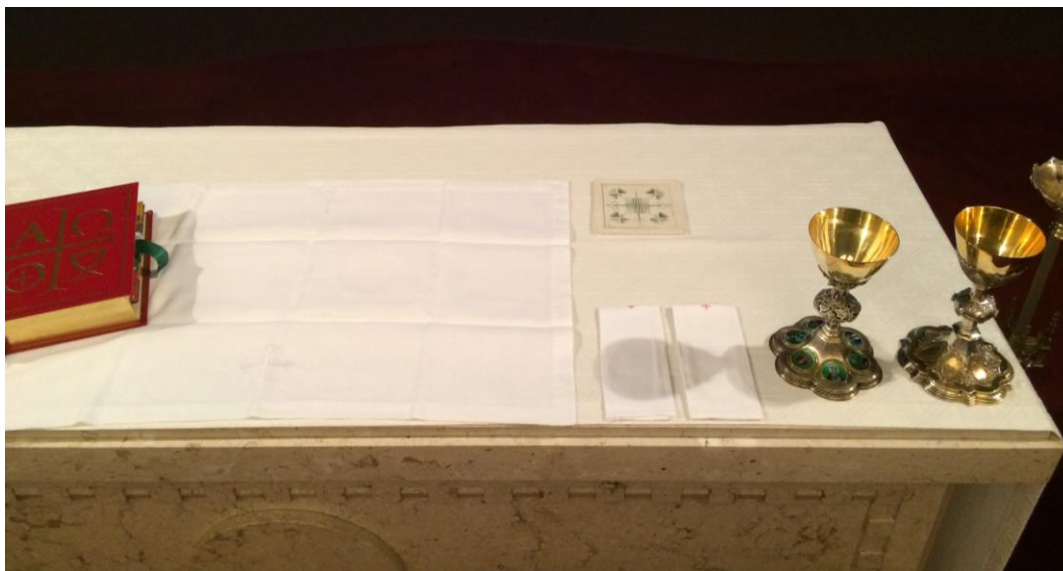
Once the Acolyte / Book Bearer gets to their seat they should prepare the **Roman Missal** for use by the priest. Listen for the priest to say "*Let us pray.*" Carry the Missal over to the priest, holding it chest high and at an angle that the priest can easily read. Be sure to keep your fingers off the pages so as to not block the priest's view. When the priest concludes the prayer, return to your seat and place the Missal off to the side.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Be attentive as the scriptures are proclaimed and be prepared to lead the congregation – in standing, sitting, singing, and listening. "Follow the action" by turning your body to the ambo during the Gospel.

PREPARATION OF THE ALTAR

The Cross Bearer is responsible for setting the Altar. When the Ushers come forward to take the Offertory collection, the Cross Bearer begins setting the Altar. From the credence table bring over the Chalice, Corporal, Purificator and Pall to the altar. Begin by placing the Corporal on the altar and carefully opening it and spreading it neatly. Do Not shake or flip the Corporal around. There may be small particles of Host on the Corporal and so great care needs to be taken while setting the Corporal. Place the pall at the upper right side of the Corporal. Place the Chalice near the bottom right corner of the altar. Return to the credence table and bring over the second Chalice and Purificator. Place the second Chalice next to the first Chalice and the two Purificators between the Corporal and the Chalices. Finally, take the Large Missal from the Credence table and place it to the left of the Corporal. When complete, bow to the Altar and then retrieve the Cross for the Offertory Procession. The Cross Bearer goes down the right aisle to the rear of the church.



OFFERTORY PROCESSION

The two Acolytes will assist the Priest in receiving the Offertory gifts. When the Priest begins to move to the front of the Altar the Acolytes should move and meet him there. You will be facing the Altar and when the Priest bows, bow with him. You then all turn together to face the congregation. The Cross Bearer leads the procession up the aisle to the Priest. The Cross Bearer goes off towards the left side of the Sanctuary and places the Cross on its stand. The Cross Bearer then stands by the Credence table until the Acolyte returns from receiving the gifts with the Priest. The Acolyte / Book Bearer will receive the Offertory Basket from the Priest, and place it in front of the altar (opposite the flowers, if there are any). The Acolyte will take the wine flagon from the Priest and the Celebrant will accept the hosts when they are brought forward. Turn towards the altar and bow together once more with the Priest. The Acolyte goes over to the Credence Table. The Acolyte / Book Bearer will place the basket at the front right corner of the Altar and then proceed to their seat.

SERVING THE PRIEST DURING THE OFFERING OF THE GIFTS

The Acolyte and the Cross Bearer move together as a matched set. Remove the lids from the cruets. Turn the cruets so that the handles are facing the Priest so he can take them easily. Walk over together, right away. **Don't wait for the Deacon or Priest to give you a nod.** Be sure to get close enough so that the Priest or Deacon doesn't have to reach. The Cross Bearer will always handle the water and the Acolyte will always handle the wine. The Acolyte stands closest to the Altar and the Cross Bearer to their left. The Priest or Deacon will take the wine and water and pour it. He will then hand the cruets back. Both servers should **stay in position** until both cruets have been handed back. The two servers bow, turn (toward one another) and return the cruets to the credence table. Be aware that the Priest may decide to hand you the extra unconsecrated hosts to be placed on the Credence table. Simply place them on the glass dish on the credence table (and NOT in the spare ciborium).

Upon returning to the credence table, the Cross Bearer who has the water, picks up the finger washing bowl and the Acolyte sets down the wine cruet or decanter and takes the hand towel and **opens it**. Both go back to the altar and stand in the same positions as previous. **Go right away;** don't wait for the Priest to turn—it's more important that you are right there waiting for him. The Priest

will put out his hands over the bowl and the Cross Bearer pours water over the Priest's fingers, catching the dripping water in the finger bowl. The Priest will whisper the prayer, *Lord, wash away my iniquities; cleanse me from my sin*. The Acolyte hands the opened finger towel to the Priest. The Priest dries his hands and returns the towel to the Acolyte who grasps the towel with the thumbs of his/her folded hands. Both Servers **bow**, turn toward one another, and return the items to the credence table. At Immaculate Conception, the Cross Bearer then takes the empty wine flagon and the glass dish with unconsecrated hosts and places them on the counter in the sacristy. This is to make additional space on the credence table. The Cross Bearer and Acolyte then return to their places and **remain standing** with their hands folded.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER (when the Holy, Holy, Holy starts)

Move to the appropriate kneelers on each side – *DO NOT GENUFLECT* in front of the altar.

RINGING THE BELLS

Ring during the epiclesis – when the Priest changes the position of his hands and places them palm side down over the gifts – three strong, distinct rings.

When the host and chalice are elevated – three strong distinct rings each time.

SIGN OF PEACE

Come to the Priest, the Priest should not have to go to you. Servers will extend the sign of peace to each other, the Priest, Deacon and other Ministers who may be in the Sanctuary. Look the person you're greeting in the eyes and wish them "Peace be with You." After you've shared the Sign of Peace, return to where you were kneeling, (outside the Sanctuary). After exchanging the Sign of Peace with the Priest, the Acolyte goes to the credence table and brings the Ciborium over and places it on the altar. If the Priest hands you the Missal, return it to the credence table and then return to your place outside the Sanctuary.

COMMUNION

After receiving Communion return to your seats in the Sanctuary. After saying a prayer of Thanksgiving, the Cross Bearer will go to the altar and carefully fold the Corporal, remove the book and pall and take them back to the credence table. Bow to the altar when you are finished. Be finished before the Priest and Ministers are finished giving Communion.

RECESSIONAL

When the final hymn starts, the Cross Bearer should immediately go over and get the Cross and the Acolytes go and get the lit candles. The Cross Bearer stands facing the altar in the center of the aisle at the beginning of the pews. The Acolytes stand with the lit candles beside him on both sides. The Priest will come down and stand in the aisle. When the Priest genuflects the three servers bow their heads. The Cross Bearer turns, (following the same turning direction as the Priest) and the Acolytes turn inwards towards the Cross Bearer. Together, move at a normal pace down the aisle toward the doors of the church. Remember the Cross Bearer sets the pace for the Recessional and the Acolytes should take their pace from him. The Recessional goes all the way outside the church. One of the acolytes may take the priests' hymnal back to the sacristy with him/her. In warm, nice weather, the servers to return to the sacristy by going outside. In colder or bad weather the servers are to wait in the back of the church for the congregation to exit. After the congregation has exited and the side aisle is clear that is when the servers can proceed back into the sacristy. All servers are responsible to assist in the clean-up following Mass.

AFTER MASS

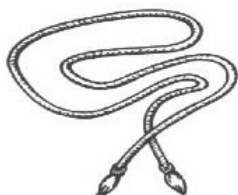
After Mass is finished, please be available to help the sacristans return all the liturgical items from the credence table to the sacristy, extinguish the candles *with the snuffer* before changing out of your alb.

APPENDIX: A GUIDE TO THE ITEMS USED IN THE MASS

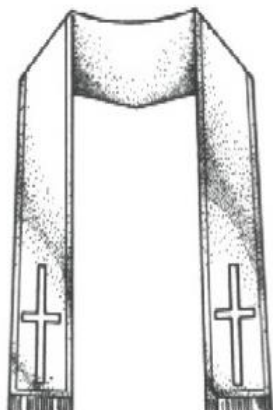
VESTMENTS



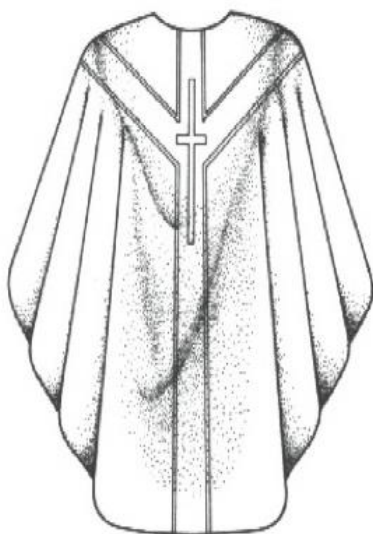
- *Alb*: This long, white, dress-like vestment can be worn by all liturgical ministers. An altar server can assist the priest or deacon/seminarian by making sure that it hangs properly in the back.



- *Cincture*: This long cord is used for fastening some albs at the waist. It holds loose fitting albs in place and is used to adjust the proper length. The cincture is usually white.



- *Stole*: A stole is a long cloth “scarf,” often ornately decorated, of the same color and style of the chasuble. A priest wears it around the neck, letting it hang down in the front. A deacon wears it over his left shoulder and fastened at his right side, like a sash. Neither do seminarians nor other lay-ministers wear stoles.



- *Chasuble*: The chasuble is the sleeveless outer vestment, slipped over the head, hanging down from the shoulders and covering the stole (sometimes) and alb. It is the proper Mass vestment of the priest and its color varies according to the feast or liturgical season.

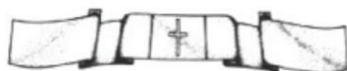
GUIDE TO THE ITEMS USED IN THE MASS (continued)



- *Dalmatic*: The dalmatic is a loose-fitting robe with open sides and wide sleeves worn by the deacon. The color varies according to the liturgical feast or season of the liturgical year.



- *Cope*: A cape-like vestment that is put on over the shoulders and hangs to the ankles, it is open at the front and clasped at the neck. The priest wears this at Benediction and in certain processions. Copes can be of any liturgical color.



- *Humeral Veil*: This is a long, narrow, shawl-like vestment used at Benediction and in processions when the blessed sacrament is carried.



- *Server's Alb*: This is a vestment used by servers in place of a cassock. It is similar to the priest's alb, but sometimes has a cowl (hood). A cincture is often tied around the waist.



- *Surplice*: This is a wide sleeved garment, worn over the cassock.

GUIDE TO THE ITEMS USED IN THE MASS (continued)

ALTAR VESSELS



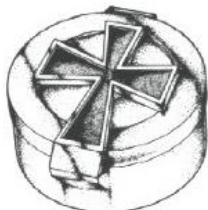
- *Chalice*: The large cup used at Mass to hold the wine that becomes the blood of Christ. Some can be very ornate.



- *Ciborium*: This is a cup- or bowl-like vessel with a lid. It contains hosts that will be used for communion. It is also used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.



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



- *Pyx*: A case, about the size of a pocket watch, in which Communion is carried to those who are sick or unable to come to church.



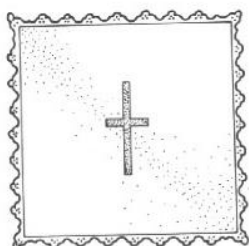
- *Large Paten or Bread Plate*: Used in some churches, this is used in place of a ciborium during the presentation of the gifts. The bread to be consecrated is placed on this large paten.

GUIDE TO THE ITEMS USED IN THE MASS (continued)

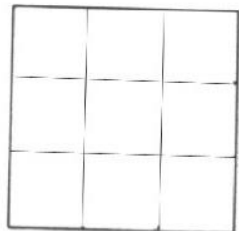


- *Flagon or Decanter*: This is a bottle or carafe-like vessel used to hold the wine that will be consecrated at Mass for the communion of the people. It is filled before Mass, taken to the rear of the church and is brought forward at the procession of the gifts. At daily Mass, smaller bottles, called *Cruets*, are used.

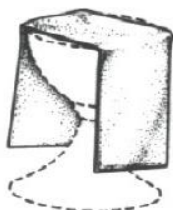
MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS



- *Pall*: This is a stiff square white cover that is placed over the paten when it is on the chalice and over the chalice during Mass to protect its contents.



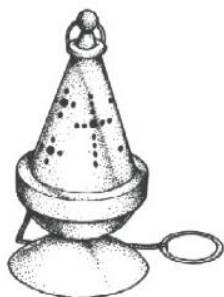
- *Corporal*: A white linen cloth usually starched, on which are placed the vessels containing the bread and wine during Mass. It is also used at Adoration and Benediction.



- *Purificator*: This is a triple folded white cloth used to cleanse the chalice and the celebrant's fingers after the last ablution (washing). In setting up the chalice, the purificator is placed over the top of the chalice (see diagram) beneath the paten.

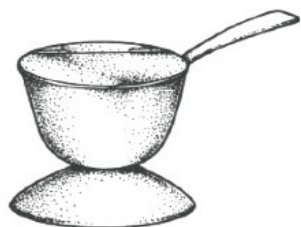


- *Towel*: A folded rectangular cloth resembling a purificator, but much narrower, it is used by the priest to dry his fingers after they have been washed during the preparation of the gifts. It is kept with the water cruet and finger bowl.



- *Thurible or Censer*: The metal container extended from a chain in which charcoal and incense are burned for liturgical ceremonies. It has a lid that can be raised. It is used at solemn Masses and a Benediction.

GUIDE TO THE ITEMS USED IN THE MASS (continued)



- *Boat*: This is a small metal container that holds the incense to be put into the thurible. It has a cover and comes with a small spoon. Frequently shaped like a boat, it is a symbol of the church.



- *Sprinkler*: It is a perforated metal ball or tube on a handle that holds the holy water used by the priest to sprinkle the faithful or articles to be blessed. It is often kept in a small metal bucket (with a handle) that holds the holy water.



- *Candlelighter or Extinguisher*: Used for lighting and extinguishing candles. It is a pole-like instrument with a tube at one side on the top with a retractable wick for lighting candles. The server using it should have enough wick exposed so that the flame will not go out until all candles are lit. Then the tab should be used to retract the wick to put the flame out (once the flame is out be sure to leave a little of the wick sticking out—the wick is made of wax and it will stick to the inside of the tube when it cools, if you don't leave it sticking out a little.) Often the server cannot see the top of the candle (especially the Easter candle), so patience and practice may be needed, or you may need to ask for someone to help you.



HOW TO TIE A ROPE CINCTURE



Fold cincture in half



Wrap around waist
with knots on your
right side



Grab end of loop made
by the fold and overlap
as shown



Using right hand, slip
loop over left hand,
keeping hold of cincture



Grab knotted end with
your right hand



Slip knotted ends through
loop (where left hand is
making sure that single loop
is on top of double cincture.)
Feed knotted ends through
loop from top to bottom



Drop loop and then
tighten around waist



Knot is on left hip

ALTAR SERVER PRAYERS

PRAYER 1: (DEVOTION TO JESUS)

Oh Jesus, my King and Lord,
by the grace of the heavenly Father
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
guide me in all righteousness
as I serve You today at the Altar
so I may be always worthy of Your presence.
If I happen to make an error,
may it be a lesson
so my service will be perfect tomorrow.
Sweet Jesus, I love you with all my heart. Amen.

PRAYER 2: (REMEMBRANCE OF TARCISIUS, MARTYR)

O God, You have graciously called me to serve You upon Your altar.
Grant me the graces that I need to serve You faithfully and wholeheartedly.
Grant too that while serving You, may I follow the example of St. Tarcisus, who died protecting the Eucharist,
and walk the same path that led him to Heaven.

St. Tarcisus, pray for us and for all servers. Amen

PRAYER 3: (ALTAR SERVER PRAYER OF THANKS)

Loving Father, creator of the universe,
you call your people to worship,
to be with you and with one another at Mass.
I thank you for having called me
to assist others in their prayer to you.
May I be worthy of the trust placed in me
and through my example and service bring others closer to you.
I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
who is Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER 4: (TRADITIONAL ALTAR SERVER PRAYER)

Open my mouth, O Lord, to bless your Holy Name.
Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts.
Enlighten my understanding and inflame my will
that I may serve more worthily at your holy altar.

O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest,
obtain for me the most important grace of knowing my vocation in life.

Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience
so that I may ever behold the priest as a representative of God
and willingly follow him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ. Amen.

Altar Server Information

Name: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

This email is **YOURS/ YOUR PARENTS** (If yours, please include also your parents' email.)

To which parish do you belong (circle): **ST. RITA / ST. JOHN / IC / ST. ALOYSIUS**

Do we have permission to share your phone number on the substitute list? **YES / NO**

Mass Preferences:

Please mark your top two (2) choices for the Mass you most prefer to serve. Rank them in order as: #1 and #2 Servers are often especially needed at 8AM & 4 PM and 6PM Masses. Your flexibility is greatly appreciated!

Connellsville

4:00pm _____

6:00pm _____

8:00am _____

9:30am _____

11:30am _____

Dunbar

5:00 pm _____

9:00 am _____