

## Guidelines for Altar Servers

Thank you for your willingness to serve! Our parish is deeply grateful for your commitment to service at the altar. Your service and dedication are important to our parish. Your role, through your actions and conduct, is to bring the assembly to a fuller understanding of the liturgy and a greater love for God. You have a place of honor at Mass because you assist the priest in many ways. As we are in the presence of Jesus our king, it is both wise and necessary for you to perform all assigned duties with attention, dignity, and reverence.

The following guidelines for Altar Servers covers the main details at St. Francis Xavier parish in Parkersburg, WV, for Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and Holy Days; the guidelines have been developed from the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) and the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's *Celebration of Sunday Eucharist*. It should help you become more comfortable in your role at the altar.

Your duties are so important that even Pope John Paul II talked about it. Here is what Blessed John Paul II said to a group of Altar Servers in 2001:

*"The altar server occupies a privileged place in the liturgical celebration. The altar server presents himself to a community and experiences firsthand that Jesus Christ is present and active in every liturgical act. Jesus is present when the community comes together to pray and render praise to God.*

*Jesus is present in the Word of sacred Scripture. Jesus is present above all in the Eucharist under the signs and bread and wine. He acts through the priest who, in the person of Christ, celebrates the holy Mass and administers the sacraments.*

*Therefore, in the liturgy, you are much more than simple 'helpers of the parish priest'. Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest. Thus, you, altar servers, are called in particular to be young friends of Jesus. Be determined to go deeper and to cultivate this friendship with Him. You will discover that in Jesus you have found a true friend for life."\*\**

*What is an Altar Server?*

- Through Baptism, we are all called to be a "holy people and royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), whose right and privilege it is to participate in Christ's own ministry. How we do so varies from person to person, but the most important way is "conscious, active, and fruitful participation in

the mystery of the Eucharist” (GIRM, Intro. 5). Since the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church” (GIRM, Intro. 5), all of us have an “individual right and duty to contribute” (GIRM, 58). Some are called to do so in a more particular way through liturgical ministries, such as Altar Server, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, or Lector.

- Since the Eucharist is the most important thing we do as Catholic Christians, the importance of this ministry cannot be over-emphasized. It is an honor and privilege to serve at the altar, assisting the priest in his responsibilities of leading the people in prayer.
- An Altar Server is a part of Christ’s own body, the church, and we work in harmony to glorify God through our service.
- Altar Servers may be called upon to serve in any number of situations. While these guidelines specifically envision the Sunday Mass, they also may serve at weekday Mass celebrations, funeral liturgies, Eucharistic Adoration, or any other public worship service in the church.
- Rather than replacing the priest or deacon, the Altar Server is an extension of the community’s need to participate actively in the celebration of the church’s public ministry.
- Some may be young members of the parish, others might be adults.

### ***Who May Serve?***

At St Francis Xavier, any young person who has received their first holy communion are eligible to serve. We encourage each young lady and gentleman to continue serving through high school, and even to come back during their college breaks. All candidates must attend a training session, and have the commitment and ability to perform this role with reverence.

Although the duties of the altar server are many and varied, the most important responsibility of the altar server during Mass is to pray! Before one may serve at the altar, he or she :

- Must have received first holy communion
- Have a strong desire to serve the Lord
- Must be committed to their fellow servers
- Attend practices and meetings that are scheduled
- Attend the parish school of religion or PCES or PCHS

For Catholics, nothing is more important than the Mass. It is the heart and soul of our worship of as a community. It is the celebration that gives us the strength we need to live our Christian life. The Mass is a sacred meal called the Eucharist (*from the Greek word meaning thanksgiving*). At Mass, we give thanks for all that God has done for us, and we all eat the same food -- “the bread of life and the cup of

the eternal salvation.”

### ***Responsibilities of the Altar Server***

The altar server must be able to follow rules to continue to serve at Mass

- You must be neat and clean. Clean face, hands, hair, shoes, etc
  - No wild hair, flashy earrings, flip flops or shorts
- Appropriate attire: dress as you would to go anywhere important.
  - Male servers should dress in collared shirts, dress pants, or khakis
  - Female servers should wear dresses, skirts (at or below the knee), or some other appropriate attire.
    - Blue jeans, beach attire, gym clothes, and tee shirt are never to be worn at Mass. Such clothing is not appropriate attire for serving at the altar.
  - Appropriate dress shoes should be worn by all (preferably black or brown shoes for mail servers.)
    - No Sneakers, work boots, or flip flops.
- Attend Mass on Sundays and holy days.
- Serve at every Mass when scheduled.
  - If for any reason the server cannot attend the assigned Mass, it is the server’s responsibility to find a replacement. If there is a problem finding a replacement, call the parish office no later than Friday before the assigned Mass.
  - Remember, as you are part of a team. When you miss your scheduled date, everyone suffers.
- Servers should know the responses and say them out loud. Even if you don’t have a response- and only Father is speaking, pay close attention to the prayers as they are being prayed. God is speaking to you too!

In order to best serve, you should know the order of the Mass, and what is going to happen as we pray together. Before we get into the details of how to serve, let’s look at the order of the Mass.

## THE ORDER OF MASS

### **INTRODUCTORY RITES**

#### **Entrance Procession**

#### **Greeting**

**Penitential Rite** (*sometimes, we may have Sprinkling with Holy Water at this time*)

**Gloria** (*this ancient hymn of praise is used on all Sundays and Solemnities outside of Advent and Lent*)

**Opening Prayer** (*also called the "Collect."*)

## **LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**First Reading**

**Responsorial Psalm**

**Second Reading** (*omitted on most weekdays*)

**Alleluia / Gospel Acclamation**

**Homily** (*a teaching or lesson given by the Bishop, priest, or deacon that helps us understand the readings, feast day, or special occasion*)

**Profession of Faith**

**General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful)**

## **LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

**Presentation of the Gifts / Preparation of the Altar**

**Prayer over the Gifts**

**Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)**

**Eucharistic Prayer:** (*there are a total of 10 Eucharistic Prayers that the priest may choose from. Each prayer has a similar structure.*)

**Memorial acclamation**

**Great Amen**

## **COMMUNION RITE**

**The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)**

**Sign of peace**

**Communion**

**Prayer after Communion**

## **CONCLUDING RITE**

**Announcements**

**Blessing & Dismissal**

**Recessional and Closing Song**

### ***Arriving at Mass***

- Arrive 15 minutes before Mass begins
- Dress in provided Server Clothing in Sacristy. Your cassock should be ankle length. (As you grow, you will need to be aware of larger sizes.) Treat the vestments with care, and make sure that the one you choose fits properly.
- Ask the priest if there are any special changes for this celebration.
- Spend a few minutes in prayer yourself before Mass begins so that you are prepared to serve well.

Some of the following preparation items may have been done before you arrive. Always double check to make sure that these things have been done:

- Fill the water cruet and place it on the credence table
- Make sure that the hand towel and hand washing bowl are on the credence table
- Put out the bells in their place
- When the priest is ready, place the Roman Missal on the table beside the Presider's chair.
- When the five minute bell rings, light the candles on the altar.
  - Always use the candle lighter to light the candles. Properly extinguish the flame by

pulling the wick into the lighter immediately after lighting the last candle. When you get back to the sacristy, push the wick back out at least one inch. (this allows the tip to cool so that the wick does not stick) Please do not walk back toward the sacristy with a lighter still alight, and do not blow the wick out.

- Cross bearer brings the cross into the sacristy

### ***Serving at Mass***

- Altar Servers are part of the formal procession at the beginning of Mass. The order of procession will be:
  - Thurifer (if incense is used)
  - Crucifer (Processional Cross)
  - Servers (may carry candles in more formal celebrations)
  - Readers
  - Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist
  - Deacon
  - Priest

- When told, the Cross Bearer stands at the door to signal the musician to begin. We start to walk when the people begin to sing.

- Servers walk reverently in procession with their hands folded, at a moderate pace, and with eyes forward.

- Coming down the main aisle, leave a space between yourself and the person in front of you.

- When the procession reaches the foot of the altar, the Thurifer and Crucifer proceed to their places on the left as you face the altar. All others wait for and genuflect with the priest.

Upon entering the sanctuary, servers proceed to their seats. The book bearer will go the right. If any chairs beside the priest are available, they should be occupied first. Otherwise, servers take their place on the pews at the side of the sanctuary.

- The one server designated as “Book Bearer” will be in place with the Roman Missal (Book) before the priest says “Let us pray.”

- Stay in a position and attitude of personal prayer during Mass
  - Fold your hands and sit up straight
  - Keep your eyes focused on what is happening at the altar

- Servers should know the responses and say them out loud.

### ***Preparation of Gifts***

- When the priest or deacon is ready, assist with setting the altar.
  - Server 2 (Book Bearer) brings the Book to the altar
  - Server 1 and 3 (Cross and Bell Server) bring chalices to the priest or deacon
  - When waiting for a next “action,” servers stand near the credence table
- When the priest goes to the front of the altar to accept the gifts, Servers 2 & 3 (Book and Bells) stand on either side of the priest and deacon with hands folded while waiting.
  - One will be handed the plate with bread, the other will be handed the flagon with wine.
  - Return to the altar
    - Give the paten with bread to the priest.
    - If a deacon is present, give the wine to him. Otherwise, place it on the altar.
    - The cross bearer immediately brings the cruet with water to the priest or deacon for mixing with the wine.
    - The server who carried the wine, then joins the cross bearer with the towel and bowl for washing the priest’s hands.
    - These actions should occur gracefully, yet swiftly in order to help the liturgy flow smoothly.
- AT TIMES. THERE MAY BE INCENSE USED AT THIS PART OF THE MASS. IF USED, THE HAND WASHING FOLLOWS THE USE OF INCENSE.
- Servers go to the foot of the altar on either side where their bells have been placed, and stand and kneel at the proper times.
  - Bells will be rung at the elevation of the host and again at the chalice.
    - After the priest says **“This is my body which will be given up for you.”**
    - After the priest says **“Do this in memory of me.”**
- At The Lord’s Prayer (Our Father), stand in place and help the priest lead the prayer.
- At the sign of peace, first exchange the sign of peace with the priest, then the deacon, and each other.
  - After the sign of peace, stand in a line behind the ambo to be prepared to receive communion.
  - After you have received communion, kneel on the steps in front of the tabernacle.
  - If there is no deacon at this Mass, the priest hands the sacred vessels from the altar to the cross bearer and the server returns them to the credence table.

- Return to your seat only after the tabernacle is closed.
- After a brief period of reflection, the priest will stand for the Prayer after Communion. Watch for his signal for the Book Bearer to come forward so you are in place with the Book before he says “Let us pray.”
  - After the prayer, remain in place until the priest closes the book.
  - Be attentive during the prayer and any announcements that may follow.
- At the dismissal, the priest or deacon will give the final instruction. When the people respond “Thanks Be to God,” all servers move to their places for the recessional.
  - All are in a line at the foot of the altar and genuflect when the priest / presider genuflects. (*if carrying cross, incense or candles, you do not genuflect*)
- The order of the recessional is:
  - Thurifer (if incense is used)
  - Crucifer (Processional Cross)
  - Servers (may carry candles in more formal celebrations)
  - Deacon
  - Priest
- Regardless as to where the priest goes, all servers return immediately to the sacristy.

### ***After the Mass***

- Remain vested until all chores are finished.
- Bring books, and bells back to sacristy
- Properly extinguish the candles using the candle snuffer.
- Ask if there is anything else they should do.
- Properly hang cassock and surplice on the hangers provided.

### ***Tips for Altar Servers***

- The people are looking at you for guidance and will follow what you do.
- You set the tone for the Mass
- Remember, both older and younger people are looking at you so they can follow your example.
- Make sure that you know the order of the Mass and all of the responses!
- Occasionally you might forget something or make a mistake. Remain calm and continue to serve in a dignified manner.
- If you forget something, ask the priest or deacon for help



- When incense is used at Mass, care must be taken that it is not kept burning near the smoke detectors.

***DO's and DON'T's***

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Always be reverent and respectful	Make silly faces or "goof around"
Walk reverently	Jump, skip, or run
Pay attention to what is happening	Day Dream
Have good posture	Slump or slouch
Listen attentively	Giggle, chit chat, or yawn

***Definitions***

- **ABLUTION CUP** - a covered dish of water on the side of the tabernacle used by the priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist to wash their fingers after distributing communion.
- **ALB** - the full length white garment worn by the priest, deacon, and in some cases altar servers. The alb is symbolic of baptism. The rope tied around the waist is called a **CINCTURE**.
- **ASPERGILLIUM** - the holy water sprinkler.
- **CASSOCK** - a long, tunic like garment which reaches from the neck to the heels which is worn by some servers and clergy. May be either black or red.
- **CHALICE** - a cup made of precious metal that holds the wine which becomes the Blood of Christ after the consecration. All chalices should be put away after Mass. If the chalices were left unpurified by the priest or deacon after Mass, they should be left out on the presentation table in the Sacristy for purification later by the priest or deacon. Never put an un-purified chalice away.
- **CIBORIUM** - a large cup or container made of precious metal with a cover of the same material which will hold The Body of Christ in the Tabernacle. This same vessel may be used to distribute communion.
- **CORPORAL** - a white linen cloths, usually with a cross for other design of woven in, used to protect any particles of the Body and Blood of Jesus from falling to the altar cloths. It is always a

folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from being lost. The corporal is like the body winding sheet used to hold the crucified body of our Lord in the tomb.

- **CREDENCE TABLE** - the table in the sanctuary where the CRUETS, CHALICES, and CIBORIUM are kept before and after the consecration.
- **CRUETS** - the vessels containing the water and wine used at Mass.
- **FLAGAN** - another name used for the large pitcher holding the wine to be used at Mass.
- **LECTIONARY** - the book of readings used for the Liturgy of the Word. It usually contains all of the Biblical readings used for the three year Sunday cycle of readings. There are other Lectionary books that hold the weekday Mass readings.
- **LUNA** or **LUNETTE** - a thin, circular receptacle, having a glass face that holds the consecrated host used for adoration and benediction. It slides into the MONSTRANCE on a little track.
- **MONSTRANCE** - this is a large, ornate vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration, Benediction, and solemn Eucharistic processions.
- **PALL** - a square piece of cardboard or plastic, covered by linen, used to cover the chalice.
- **PASCHAL CANDLE** - also called the Christ Candle - is a special candle that is blessed at the Easter vigil and that during the Easter season and baptisms, funerals, and other special events.
- **PATEN** - a small saucer shaped plate made of precious metal that holds the Host. Servers should be very careful when they have to handle it in their official duties.
- **PROCESSIONAL CROSS** - the crucifix mounted on a long pole that is carried at the front of the entrance procession.
- **PURIFICATOR** - a linen cloth used by the priest or deacon to wipe the chalice after washing and purifying a host. Used PURIFICATORS must always be placed in the proper container for sacred cloths.
- **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.
- **ROMAN MISSAL** or **SACRAMENTARY** - the book containing the prayers used by the priest during 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's wash and rinse water, used holy water, used baptismal water, consecrated wine, and blessed ashes. No other use is allowed.

- **SANCTUARY** - space at the front of the church which is slightly elevated and is the place where most of the “action” takes place. The word means “holy place.” It contains:
  - **MAIN ALTAR** - the large table in the middle of the sanctuary on which the sacrifice of the Mass takes place.
  - **AMBO** - the special space set aside for Sacred Scripture reading and preaching.
  - **PRESIDER’S CHAIR** - the chair from which the priest leads the prayers and the rites of the church.
- **STOCK** - the metal containers used to hold the Oil of Catechumens, the Sacred Chrism, and the Oil for the Anointing of the Sick.
- **SURPLICE** - a wide-sleeved garment worn over a cassock by clergy and altar servers in some parishes.
- **TABERNACLE** - a small cupboard where the consecrated Body of Christ is kept for distribution to the sick. It is usually crafted of fine material such as precious metal and lined with fine linens to denote the dignity of the place. The root word means the “Dwelling Place (of God).”
- **THURIBLE** - the special vessel which holds burning charcoal and into which incense is placed. The device holding the incense is called the “**BOAT**.” The one who carries them is called the **THURIFER**.

***An Altar Server’s 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

***Considerations for Adult Servers***

- Albs for adult servers can be found in the priest’s sacristy.
- Remember that the above guidelines envision the Sunday Mass when there are three servers.

- Consult the priest for any special conditions in the Mass you are serving.
- Adult servers may adjust accordingly.

## **PRAYERS TO KNOW**

Are already familiar with most of the prayers at Mass from going to Mass for so long. The important thing to remember is that they are said in a clear tone. Here are some of the longer prayers that you should know to say or sing during Mass:

### **CONFITEOR**

I Confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

### **GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth these to people of goodwill. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great Glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

### **PROFESSION OF FAITH (Nicene Creed)**

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in Glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe and one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

### **HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SANCTUS)**

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your Glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER (OUR FATHER)**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

### **SPECIAL NOTES FOR FUNERALS**

*Funerals are a time of grieving for families, so it is especially important that you show respect for God by being attentive not only to the needs of the priest, but also to be sensitive to the needs of the family that may be struggling through their loss of a loved one.*

*If you are requested to serve any Funeral Mass, please try to arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass begins. In general, a funeral Mass is very similar to a normal Sunday Mass. Here are some things that may differ from a regular Sunday Mass.*

- In the entrance procession, One server carries the vessel with holy water. Another carries the Cross.
- After the priest blesses the casket, we turn and process in.
- Depending on the priest the presiding, incense may be used at the preparation of the gifts. If incense is used, it will be before the priest washes his hands.
- After communion, there will be a closing prayer. This is followed by “**The Final Commendation.**” again, the priest will use incense to bless the casket at the foot of the altar.
- The very end of the Mass, the priest or deacon will say “In peace let us take our brother/sister the place of rest.” We then lead the funeral procession to the cars.

### **TO LEARN MORE**

The priest or deacon is always available to help with any questions you may have. As you learn more,

you will better understand the depth of the Mass and be able to pray it more deeply, even while serving.

- *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*. (GIRM) 2010. (<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-Mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/>)
- *Lumen Gentium*. Second Vatican Council. 1964. ([http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html))
- *Liturgical Guidelines* Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. 2012. ([http://dwc.org/liturgical-information/cat\\_view/139-worship-a-sacraments/231-diocesan-liturgical-guidelines.html](http://dwc.org/liturgical-information/cat_view/139-worship-a-sacraments/231-diocesan-liturgical-guidelines.html))
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Guidelines for Altar Servers. 1994. (<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-Mass/frequently-asked-questions/guidelines-for-altar-servers.cfm>)
- \*\* Pope John Paul II, August 12, 2001 address to altar servers.