

On the Ministry of Altar Server

GUIDELINES ON THE MINISTRY OF ALTAR SERVER

Diocese of Pueblo

General Norms

Essential Duties

2010

Office of Worship Guidelines for the Liturgical Ministry of Altar Server

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INTRODUCTION

Altar Servers have always been a part of the Church's liturgies – even at The Last Supper, someone had to set the table. They serve God and God's People by helping the Priest and Deacon so a liturgical celebration is conducted with grace and reverence and flows smoothly. They ensure that all items required for the celebration are available at the time they are needed. It is a special privilege to be close to the altar, to carry the cross and the light of Christ, to wear the robe of baptism, to hold the book of prayers – even to make holy smoke!

Altar Servers are first of all members of the Assembly. They fully and actively participate in every liturgical celebration. Besides handling all of the items required for a celebration, they sing, pray, listen and maintain silence along with the entire Assembly, and respond with words, postures and gestures with the entire Assembly.

Altar Servers are “front and center” at the Eucharistic Liturgy. They are to be conscious that their name reflects their ministry: they are servers. They do not draw attention to themselves – they serve God humbly by helping the other ministers and the Assembly so that the celebration of the Eucharist is possible.

ELIGIBILITY

The Church has a formal, instituted Office for someone assisting at the altar called an Acolyte. It is usually reserved to laymen who are studying to become a Priest or Deacon. But Bishops may permit Altar Servers to do all of their functions except distribute Holy Communion. The Bishop of Pueblo has granted this permission.

Any person who has been Baptized and has received First Holy Communion, who is at least 9 years of age and who is able to serve with reverence and dignity, may be an Altar Server in the Diocese of Pueblo.

Pastors should strive to have the ministry of Altar Server reflect the parish demographics, including gender. Pastors should also maintain an appropriate balance of male and female Servers, remembering that this ministry has been a source of Priestly and religious vocations in the past.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Besides the sacramental and age requirements, another prerequisite to becoming an Altar Server is to be trained and become knowledgeable about the following:

- The parts of the Mass and their meaning
- The objects used in the liturgy and their names (see sample Appendix) [books, vessels, vestments, locations, Seasons]

- The functions of the Altar Server during Mass
- Specific training for other liturgical celebrations (for example, baptisms, funerals, weddings, Confirmation, the Liturgy of the Hours, *Quinceañeras* and other worship events)

This training may be provided by the Pastor or whomever he delegates.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALTAR SERVERS

The Altar Server's role and responsibilities in each part of the mass are described below. The details of how they are carried out will vary from parish to parish because of the structure of the church building, the Priest's style, the traditions of the parish and other local circumstances.

For Sundays and other important occasions, two or more Altar Servers should be assigned to carry out the functions entrusted to these ministers. These can vary from parish to parish. In addition, an explanation of liturgical terminology is at the end of this document and described as *Appendix A*.

Altar Servers are not to draw attention to themselves by their behavior or what they wear. Altar Servers should be mindful that their movements (walking, genuflecting, bowing, standing, etc.) and gestures are to be prayerful. They sit quietly without fidgeting. Altar Servers don't do anything that shows a lack of reverence whenever they are in the altar area because they are in a sacred space where Christ is really present. They remember that people in the Assembly are watching them to see what it means to be really involved in the Mass.

Whenever Altar Servers are carrying or using sacred objects, they should do so with dignity. Usually this means carrying and holding items with two hands instead of one.

BEFORE MASS

- Personal grooming – Altar Servers want to look their best for this important service to God and his People during Mass. They look neat (hair combed and dry, hands and fingernails clean, wearing good shoes [not sneakers or other shoes that make noise on the floor]). They don't chew gum. They carry a handkerchief or Kleenex if they have a cold.
- Attire – Altar Servers wear albs, cassocks and surplices, or appropriate and dignified street clothing, depending on the custom of the parish
- Arrival – Altar Servers are encouraged to arrive at Church at least 15 minutes before the start of a liturgy.
- Sanctuary Preparation – If there isn't a sacristan, the Altar Servers may prepare the altar and sacred vessels before Mass. In that case, they will ensure that the sanctuary and church are prepared for Mass by the presence of the following items:
 - paten of communion bread (including a large host for the Priest) and wine cruet on the Gifts Table
 - chalices, plates, corporal, purificators, cruet with water, lavabo bowl and towel on the credence table
 - *Sacramentary* properly set and in place
 - *Lectionary* properly set and in place
 - hymnals and/or Worship Aids on each chair in the sanctuary that will be occupied

- tabernacle key in place
 - *aspergillum* (sprinkler) and water vessel are prepared if the Sprinkling Rite will be used
 - thurible (censer) is prepared (and additional coals prepared as needed) if incense is to be used
 - bells are in place (if used during the liturgy)
 - candles are lit
- *Sprinkling Rite* – *If there will be a Sprinkling Rite, the water container should be filled with plain water (not Holy Water) and the sprinkler put in it.*
 - *Incense* – *If incense will be used, light the charcoal 15 minutes before the liturgy starts; have the Presider (Priest) bless the incense and put it on the charcoal before the Entrance Procession starts.*
 - “Other duties as required” – Any other expectations and responsibilities of the Altar Server at the parish before the liturgy begins.

[Notes: (1) Optional rites are italicized in the text that follows. (2) An Altar Server may also serve in the capacity of Thurifer, Incense Boat Bearer, Crossbearer and Candlebearer. (3) When a parish uses more than one Altar Server, it may assign the Altar Server duties that follow however it desires.]

INTRODUCTORY RITES

- Entrance Procession – The lineup for the entrance procession is in this order [when a position isn’t used, go to the next position]: Thurifer (Incenser) and Incense “Boat” Bearer; Crossbearer flanked by two Candlebearers; Altar Server(s); Lector or Deacon carrying the Book of Gospels; Deacon and Presider. Whoever leads the Entrance Procession sets the pace of the procession, to be maintained by those who follow.
- Reverencing the Altar – Ministers make a slight bow to the altar when they arrive at the entrance to the sanctuary; preferably they then go directly to their assigned seats (without waiting for the Presider behind them) and stand in place; the other option is to wait for the Presider to arrive at the altar and then all bow together. Thurifer and Incense Boat Bearer step to the side. Crossbearer puts Processional Cross in place next to the altar (or takes it elsewhere if a Crucifix is permanently mounted in the sanctuary) and goes to his or her seat. Candlebearers put candles by the altar. All remain standing.
- If the tabernacle is located in the sanctuary, the members of the Entrance Procession (except the person carrying the *Book of Gospels* and the Processional Cross) genuflect as they approach the altar.
- *If incense is used, the Thurifer hands the thurible to the Presider after he has revered the altar with a kiss. The Presider will incense the altar and the Cross and then hand the thurible back to the Thurifer. The thurifer puts the thurible where it won’t be knocked over and adds or replaces a charcoal and lights it to keep the censer burning for the Gospel procession. Then the Thurifer goes to his or her seat.*
- *Sprinkling Rite* – *If Mass begins with a Sprinkling Rite, mass begins differently than as described above. This Rite can begin either at the door of the church or at the altar. An Altar Server holds the book containing the blessing prayer for the Presider. An Altar Server holds the water container. The Presider will bless himself and then the Altar Server from the aspergillum (sprinkler). An Altar Server accompanies the Presider with the water container and*

stays within his reach as he walks to the front or the back of the church to sprinkle the people. After arriving at or returning to the sanctuary, the Presider reverences the altar with a kiss (if he started from the door of the church). Then the Presider and Altar Server (after putting the water container and aspergillum away where designated) go to their seats.

- An Altar Server holds the *Sacramentary* (the book with the prayers for the Mass) for the Presider until the end of the Opening Prayer. Then the Altar Server rests the *Sacramentary* at its designated place and sits down for the Reading(s) and Responsorial Psalm.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

- Altar Server(s) listen attentively to the proclamation of God's Word and join in the Responsorial Psalm.
- Gospel Acclamation – Altar Server(s) stand and remain standing until the end of the Gospel.
- *Gospel Acclamation (if incense is used) – The Thurifer brings the thurible to the Deacon or Presider. If there is a Deacon, he will receive a blessing from the Presider. The Deacon or Incense Boat Bearer opens the incense boat and the Presider puts incense in the thurible. Thurifer leads the Deacon or Presider (after he takes the Book of the Gospels from the altar, if it is used) to the Ambo, followed by 2 Candlebearers with lit candles. If the Book of Gospels was resting on a stand on the altar, an Altar Server removes the stand after the Deacon leaves the altar with it in procession to the Ambo. The Candlebearers will stand on either side of the Ambo, facing the Ambo until the end of the Gospel. The Thurifer will stand behind the Deacon or Presider until the end of the Gospel. The Deacon or Presider will take the thurible after introducing the Gospel, incense the Book of Gospels before reading the Gospel, and return the thurible to the Thurifer. After the Gospel, the Candlebearers return to their place*
- *After the Gospel the Thurifer takes the thurible where it won't be knocked over and adds or replaces a charcoal and lights it to keep the censer burning for the incensation of the altar, the ministers and the Assembly after the Procession of Gifts.*
- Gospel – After the Gospel reading, the Presider may hand the *Book of Gospels* or the *Lectioary* to the Altar Server to put on the credence table or to enthrone by the Ambo. Altar Server(s) sit for the homily.
- Creed – Altar Servers stand for the Creed.
- Prayers of the Faithful – An Altar Server holds the book containing the *Prayers of the Faithful* for the Presider (and Deacon) until its closing prayer is completed and then sits down.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts

- Preparing the Altar – As soon as the collection begins, the altar is set. If there is a Deacon, Altar Servers hand him the *Sacramentary*, the corporal, the chalice, a purificator and any communion cups (these may be brought on a tray) to place on the altar. If there is no Deacon, the Altar Servers place them directly on the altar. Communion cups are arranged so that the chalice is clearly visible to the Assembly. If there are extra purificators and patens on the credence table, these are not placed on the altar now – an Altar Server brings them

up at the Fraction Rite later in the Mass. Altar Server(s) sit down and remain seated until the collection has ended and the Procession of Gifts is about to begin.

- Procession of Gifts – At special celebrations, candles may accompany the Procession of Gifts; in those cases the Candlebearers would go to the back of church and lead the Procession of Gifts. One or more Altar Servers stand and accompany the Deacon or Presider to where the gifts of bread, wine, the collection and any other gifts will be received. The Deacon or Presider may hand the Altar Server the wine cruet and/or paten with bread to carry back to the altar.
- Preparation of the Gifts – An Altar Server hands the paten with bread to the Deacon or Presider if he handed it over at the Procession of Gifts. An Altar Server then gets the water cruet from the credence table and waits at the side of the altar for preparing the chalice with wine and water. The Altar Server(s) stand to the side of the altar, holding the wine and water containers for the Deacon or Presider to mix into the chalice (with the handles facing the Deacon or Presider so he can take them easily). Then the Altar Server(s) return the cruets to the credence table.
- *Incensing the Gifts (optional) – The Deacon or Presider takes the incense boat from the Thurifer or Incense Boat Bearer and opens it. The Thurifer lifts the top of the thurible and the Presider spoons incense on the charcoal. The Deacon (if any) returns the incense boat to the Incense Boat Bearer (if any) or else to the Thurifer. The Thurifer gives the Presider the thurible. The Presider then incenses the gifts, the altar and the Cross. The Presider hands the thurible to the Deacon (if any) or else to the Thurifer at the side of the altar. The Deacon or Thurifer then bows and incenses the Presider with 3 swings, bows again, then incenses any other clergy in the sanctuary with 3 swings. The Presider then washes his hands at the side of the altar while the Deacon or Thurifer moves on to incense the people. The Deacon or Thurifer goes to the front of the sanctuary, bows to the people, incenses them with 3 swings of the thurible, bows again to the people, returns the thurible to its place where it cannot be knocked over and takes a seat.*
- Washing Hands – The Presider says one more prayer over the gifts and then goes to the side of the altar to wash his hands. Altar Server(s) are ready with a pitcher of water to pour over the Presider's hands and with a bowl underneath to catch the poured water, and with a hand towel the Altar Server has opened up for him to dry his hands. After drying his hands, the Presider will hand the towel back to the Altar Server. Return the pitcher, bowl and hand towel to the credence table and then stand behind the Presider and Deacon and remain standing as the Mass continues.
- Holy, Holy – After the "Holy, Holy" is sung or said, Altar Server(s) kneel behind the Presider and Deacon. If incense is used at Mass, the Thurifer may take the thurible and kneel in front of the altar.

Eucharistic Prayer

- *Bells (optional) – If the parish uses altar bells, an Altar Server may ring them at the Epiclesis (when the Presider extends his hands over the bread and chalice), and again at the consecration when the Presider elevates the Body of Christ and when he elevates the Blood of Christ.*
- *Incensing the Body and Blood of Christ (optional) – If incense is used, the Thurifer kneeling in front of the altar swings the thurible three times as the Body of Christ is elevated, and three times again as the Blood of Christ is elevated.*

Communion Rite

- Our Father – After the *Great Amen*, Altar Server(s) stand and remain standing until after they have received communion and cleared the altar.
- Sign of Peace – Altar Server(s) remain in the sanctuary for the Sign of Peace and only exchange the Sign of Peace with others who are also in the sanctuary.
- Lamb of God – As the *Lamb of God* begins to be sung or recited, Altar Server(s) bring any extra purificators and patens to the altar. After the *Lamb of God* is completed, the Presider will break a piece of the Body of Christ and add it to the chalice. He will then say 2 more prayers in silence. After that, an Altar Server removes the *Sacramentary* from the altar and returns it to the Presider's table. The Altar Server then returns to his/her place for communion.
- Communion – After the Deacon (if any) and Communion Ministers receive communion, the Altar Servers receive communion in a reverent manner. As soon as the Presider leaves the altar to distribute communion to the Assembly, the Altar Server clears the altar of all items except for the corporal, moving them to the credence table, and then sits down. After everyone has received communion, the Presider or Deacon returns to the altar and either consumes any remaining consecrated hosts or wine or returns them to the tabernacle. If the Presider or Deacon opts to go to the credence table after communion to purify the vessels, an Altar Server goes to the credence table and hand him the water cruet so he can purify the vessels (unless it is the parish's custom to purify the vessels after Mass). The Altar Server then folds and removes the corporal and any other items remaining on the altar and then sits down.
- Prayer After Communion – The Presider returns to his Chair to pray. When he starts to get up to give the *Prayer After Communion*, the Altar Server stands and holds the *Sacramentary* for the Presider to read.

CLOSING RITES

- Blessing and Dismissal – If the Presider will be giving a Prayer Over the People or a Solemn Blessing, the Altar Server puts down the *Sacramentary* while the announcements are read; after that, the Altar Server holds it up again for the Presider to read the Prayer Over the People or Solemn Blessing. After the Presider gives the actual Blessing, the Altar Server closes the *Sacramentary* and puts it down.
- Exit Procession – As the Presider (and Deacon, if there is one) leaves his chair to kiss the altar, the other ministers in the sanctuary walk to the entrance to the sanctuary and wait for him to arrive. All bow together with the Presider (unless the tabernacle is in the sanctuary – in that case, the ministers genuflect) and then exit in this order: Crossbearer flanked by Candlebearers; Thurifer and Incense “Boat” Bearer; (without thurible and incense “boat”), Altar Servers; Deacon (but not carrying the *Book of Gospels*) and Presider. The first minister will set the pace of the Exit Procession. All leave in a dignified manner.

LOCAL RULES

These Guidelines provide general observations and principles on this important ministry. For a smooth functioning of this ministry, the needs of the local faith community must be accounted. Examples of some local practices that need to be determined include:

Number of Altar Servers
 Scheduling
 Finding substitutes
 Grounds for removal
 Arrival times
 Sign-in sheets
 Responsibilities before Mass
 Vesture (albs or other dress code)
 Division of responsibilities (for two or more Altar Servers)
 Seating
 Where and how the Sprinkling Rite is conducted
 How to hold the *Sacramentary* for the Presider
 Where the Processional Cross is placed
 How children are dismissed for Children's Liturgy of the Word
 How the Gospel Procession is routed
 How catechumens are dismissed
 Where Procession of Gifts is received
 Responsibilities after Mass

RESOURCES USED

A Commentary on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Edward Foley, Nathan D. Mitchell and Joanne M. Pierce, ed. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2007.

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"The Ministry of Altar Servers – Questions and Answers." Milwaukee: Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Office for Prayer, Worship & Evangelization.

The Ministry of Servers. Rev. Michael Kwatera, O.S.B. Collegeville: Liturgical Press. 2002.

Appendix: Liturgical Terminology

Alb: a long white vestment with close fitting sleeves, reaching nearly to the ground

Ambo: a lectern or pulpit from which the scriptures are read and the homily is delivered

Baptismal font: the water tank used for the Rite of Baptism

Chalice: the cup that holds the wine that is consecrated at mass to become the blood of Christ.

Chasuble: a loose sleeveless outer garment worn by a Priest when celebrating Mass

Cope: a cape worn by the Priest at liturgical functions

Corporal: a white cloth on which the bread and wine that will be consecrated are placed

Credence table: a table in the sanctuary that holds the cruets, lavabo bowl, purificators, corporal, chalice and other liturgical objects used at the liturgy

Cruet: small containers that hold the water and wine used in the Eucharist

Humeral veil: a cloth which the Server puts over the Priest's shoulders and arms before he carries the monstrance and blesses the people

Incense boat: the vessel (so-called for its shape) that contains the incense for immediate use

Lavabo bowl: a basin used for the Priest's ritual washing of the hands at Mass

Lectionary: a book containing the scripture readings for liturgies during the course of a 3-year cycle

Monstrance: a large container made of precious metal that is used to show the consecrated host to the Assembly

Pall: a white cloth covering for a casket

Paschal candle: a wax candle of exceptional size held in a great candlestick that is blessed at the Easter Vigil and is lit by the altar during the Easter Season or at funerals.

Purificator: a cloth to wipe the chalice or communion cups during communion

Pyx: a container in which consecrated hosts are placed so they can be taken to those who cannot leave home

Sacramentary: the book used by the Priest that contains the prayers of the mass and its rubrics (directions for what to do at mass)

Sacristy: the room in church in which sacred vessels, vestments and other liturgical objects are kept

Sanctuary lamp: the candle near the tabernacle

Stole: a liturgical vestment worn by ordained clergy under the chasuble or dalmatic that is composed of a strip of material from two to four inches wide that hangs around the cleric's neck and reaches the length of the chasuble or dalmatic.

Tabernacle: the box or case in the sanctuary in which consecrated hosts are kept

Thurible: a censer or container that holds lighted charcoal and is used for burning incense