

# St. Michael Catholic Church Altar Server Procedures



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## Table of Contents

Introduction  
Requirements

- General Requirements
- Specific
- Who may serve?
- Why serve?
- Basic Knowledge of the Mass
- Duties of the Server
- Proper Dress
- When to Genuflect and When to Bow
- How to Genuflect

Preparation for the Mass  
Entrance Procession  
Duties During the Mass  
Duties After the Mass  
Recessional Procession  
Additional Information  
Definitions  
Attachment #1: Entrance Procession Diagram

(2)



## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Requirements

### 1. General Requirements

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

a. Three altar servers are ideal for each Mass (a Cross bearer and two candle bearers). The Cross bearer serves as the lead server and should be the most experienced server amongst the Mass servers.

b. Servers are required to vest in a white robe and a cincture or as otherwise prescribed by the diocese bishop or parish priest.

c. Clothes worn under the alb should be full length pants or jeans (no shorts) and a shirt or blouse.

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

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

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

## 2. Specifics

### **Who may serve?**

A server can be any male or female; who as a minimum is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student; has already received First Holy Communion; and is registered as a parishioner at the St. Michael Catholic Church. Exceptions may be granted by the parish priest on an individual, case by case basis.

### **Why serve?**

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

### **Required Basic Knowledge of the Mass**

An altar server candidate is required to know the principal Catholic Prayers of the Mass: The Gloria; Our Father; Nicene and Apostle Creed; Lamb of God; and the Holy, Holy, Holy.

## **Duties of the Altar Server**

Altar servers are primarily present to assist the priest and/or deacon. Here is a brief list of altar server duties:

1. The server's first duty is to prepare for the Mass. The server arrives at the Church no later than 15 minutes before Mass.
2. Servers shall not handle any consecrated bread or wine, unless specifically directed by the priest or deacon in an emergency or exceptional situation. If the server suspects any consecrated fragments or consecrated wine remain on the sacred vessels, they must inform the priest, deacon, acolyte or sacristan immediately.
3. Servers must remain in or near the sanctuary during the entire Mass and not leave the sanctuary during Mass for any reason, other than illness or the direction of the priest or deacon. Altar servers are *on-duty* from the time they enter the sanctuary at the start of Mass, until the priest exits at the end of the Mass.
4. Servers have many specific duties. These duties include holding the Roman Missal for the priest; helping to set-up the altar; washing the priest's hands; and singing, praying standing, sitting and kneeling.
5. While in the standing position, the server's hands should be held folded in the praying position.
6. While in the kneeling position, hands should be held folded as in the praying position also. When you must kneel please maintain your upper body upright; so, there is no slouching or resting/sitting on your heels.

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

### **Proper Dress**

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

Closed toed or dress shoes should be worn. Soiled sneakers, no matter how expensive they are for casual dress and sporting events, are not appropriate in the House of God or His sanctuary area.

### **When to Genuflect and When to Bow**

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

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

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

Bowing of the head is done for: (1) A priest after presenting items to them and after washing his hands at the altar, and (2) The altar. We bow to the altar because it is the surface of Christ's Sacrifice. We bow to the priest because he offers the Sacrifice for the people—which will become the Body and Blood of Our Savior, acts in the Person of Jesus, and therefore should be shown respect.

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

Servers should remember that there is an exception to genuflecting: Whenever they are carrying something like the Cross, sacred vessels, books, candles or other object/s you shall not genuflect. A simple bow of the head is the appropriate sign of reverence to be used.

### **How to Genuflect**

There are two prescribed methods of genuflection:

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

### **Preparation for Mass**

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

At least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled Mass time a server should:

1. Ensure the processional candles and Cross are present and ready for the entrance procession.
2. Select an appropriately sized alb and cincture. The server's alb should fit loosely, but not be so long as to drag on the floor (creating a tripping hazard) or too short, so it is above the ankles. The servers' cincture is to be tied on the *right side* of the waist; the left side traditionally denotes those men who are instituted to the Ministry of Lector or Acolyte and for ordained clergy (bishops, priests or deacons).
3. Light all appropriate altar and processional candles.

Entrance Procession:

1. The processional Cross will lead the procession (unless the thurible is to be processed into the church). In that case, the thurifer will lead, followed by the Cross and candle bearers.
2. The procession ideally includes a minimum of 2 candle bearers. If there is an insufficient number of servers (e.g., 1 or 2) available, the procession will continue *without* any processional candles (e.g., 2 candles or no candles).
3. The normal Order of Procession will be the thurifer (incense bearer), Cross bearer, other servers (candle bearers), the Deacon (Instituted Lector or Reader) with the Book of Gospels, followed by the Presiding Priest.

### **Beginning of Mass/Entrance Procession/Opening Prayers**

1. The Cross bearer and servers meet the priest and deacon at the entrance doors of the Worship Space. The Cross bearer holds the Cross high with the Corpus (Christ's Body) facing the assembly. The cross bearer begins the procession, when the priest motions to start (normally when the choir begins to sing the processional hymn). All servers proceed up the center aisle, walking slowly and reverently.
2. Upon arriving at the foot of the sanctuary, all servers immediately proceed to their right, and await the Priest. After the priest genuflects, proceed into the sanctuary, and place the Cross and candles in their respective holders. Servers then proceed to their chairs and remain standing, while the Priest and the Deacon take their places at their chairs.
3. All servers remain standing during the Greeting, the Penitential Rite and the Gloria. At the signal from the priest or his words "*Let us Pray*", the Cross bearer takes the Roman Missal and proceeds to stand in front of the priest's chair with the Roman Missal. The Cross bearer is asked to hold the Roman Missal open at the priest's chest or eye level (the priest may adjust the Roman Missal to the correct level).

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

### **Liturgy of the Word**

5. All servers remain seated during the first reading, the responsorial psalm and the second reading. As the priest stands and choir begins to sing the Gospel Acclamation, all servers (along with the assembly) stand and the candle bearers get their processional candles at the front edges of the altar. The servers then wait for either the priest or the deacon to come and retrieve the Book of the Gospels.
6. The priest or the deacon will pick up the Book of the Gospels from the altar and will begin to walk escorted by the candle bearers. As the priest or deacon moves, the servers lead the procession to the ambo. The first server will proceed to the far side of the ambo, while the other server will stay on the other side of the ambo. Both servers hold their lighted candles, so that the top of the flames are approximately even with each other. Both servers turn to face each other (on both sides of the ambo)—so they are facing the Book of the Gospel.

7. At the conclusion of the Gospel proclamation, the servers will then turn and return the candles to their holders on both sides of the altar. The servers then proceed back to their assigned chairs. The Cross bearer remains standing until the other servers have returned to their seats. All servers sit down at the same time and remain seated for the homily.

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

### **Profession of Faith/Intercessory Prayers/Petitions**

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

### **Preparation of the Altar**

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

Servers will bring the following items from the credence table and hand them to the priest or deacon. The following items from the credence table will be handed to the priest, deacon or acolyte, in the order specified below:

- Always first, the priest's chalice; upon which are stacked a purificator, paten, pall and the corporal. Together, everything is taken from the credence table and are then presented to the priest or deacon at the side of the altar.
- All the communion cups.
- All the purificators (the white, folded cloths).
- All the Communion bowls (ciboria) containing hosts to be consecrated.
- The Roman Missal (and the wooden book holder, if used).

**(These are the only items that are given to the priest or deacon to be placed on the altar. The glass bowl, water cruet, pitcher of water and the finger towel remain on the credence table until they are needed.)**

\*\* Important note: Everything is handed to the priest, deacon or acolyte. *An altar server should never place anything on the altar by themselves.*

10. After the altar has been prepared, the servers return to their chairs and remain standing. As the priest and/or the deacon move towards the center aisle to receive the offertory gifts, all servers follow them down to the center aisle in front of the altar.

### **Presentation of the Gifts/Offertory**

11. When the servers receive the gifts of bread and wine from the priest or deacon, they proceed to the far-right rear (choir) side of the altar.
12. After the server with the paten of bread has given it to the priest or deacon, they will bow to the priest and return immediately to the credence table and pick up the glass bowl and the finger towel in preparation for the washing of the priest's hands. (This server will wait at the credence table until the other server (holding the wine pitcher) returns to the credence table.)

The server with the wine flagon (pitcher) will give it to the priest or deacon.

A server then brings the small cruet of water from the credence table to the priest or deacon.

After the priest or deacon pours the water into the chalice filled with wine, he will give the water cruet back to the server. This server then takes the water cruet and returns it to the credence table, and gets the larger, water pitcher on the credence table to assist with the washing of the priest's hands.

13. The two servers at the credence table with the water pitcher, the glass bowl, and the finger towel will then proceed to the side of the altar and await the priest to turn and wash his hands. Both servers bow to the priest, the server with the water pitcher and the tray pours water over the priest's hands (not just a few drops over his fingers). The other server presents the finger towel to the priest. After the priest has dried his fingers, he will give the towel back to the server. Both servers again bow to the priest and then return the glass pitcher, glass bowl, and towel to the credence table.

### **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

14. All servers remain standing at their chairs singing or with hands folded in prayer, until the assembly kneels. All servers then exit the sanctuary and kneel on the carpeted stairs to the sanctuary, with hands folded, as the Eucharistic consecratory prayer begins.



15. As the priest places his hands over the bread and wine, the Cross bearer **briefly** and loudly rings the Sanctus bells. As the priest later raises the Consecrated Host (the Body of Christ), the Cross bearer will ring the Sanctus bells loud enough to be heard (3 times, with a brief pause between each ring). As the priest raises the chalice (the Precious Blood), the Cross bearer will again ring the Sanctus Bells (3 times, with a brief pause between each ring). All servers remain kneeling until the assembly stands after the Great Amen.
16. At the Sign of Peace, the servers will move forward back into the sanctuary to exchange the Sign of Peace from the priest and deacon, and return to their server chairs; remain there for Communion and the remainder of the Liturgy of the Mass.

### **Holy Communion**

17. The servers will bow their heads before the priest, deacon or acolyte gives them the Body of Christ and before receiving the chalice of the Precious Blood. The servers kneel, with their hands folded in prayer, while the priest, deacon or acolyte distributes Holy Communion to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The servers remain kneeling in their places until the distribution of communion to the entire assembly is completed.

### **During Holy Communion**

18. During the distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly, servers *may not* remove any items from the altar. **Only the priest, deacon or an acolyte may add or remove items from the surface of the sacred altar.** Altar servers are asked to leave all items on the altar, until or unless they are given to them by the priest, deacon or acolyte.
19. After Holy Communion, as the priest, the deacon, acolyte and the EMHCs return to the altar, all servers stand at their chairs and remain standing as the priest, deacon or acolyte places the large ciborium into the tabernacle.
20. Altar servers then move forward to the side of the altar to receive items from the priest, deacon or acolyte. After all items are returned to the credence table, all servers remain standing until the priest has been seated; at which time all servers are seated at the same time also.

### **Concluding Rite/Final Blessing**

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

The Cross bearer holds the Roman Missal as the priest recites the Closing Prayer. When the priest has finished with the Roman Missal, the Cross bearer returns it to the credence table (if needed) and returns to their seat.

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

### **Recessional/Dismissal**

23. After the announcements, the priest will give the Final blessing and the deacon (if present) will announce the dismissal.
24. As the closing hymn begins, the Cross bearer and the candle bearers will go to retrieve the Cross and the candles from their holders. The Cross bearer and candle bearers will proceed to the center aisle in front of the altar, face the altar and await the priest, deacon and/or acolyte.
25. (All servers stand between the first row of assembly seats in the center aisle.) Once the priest, deacon and/or acolyte exit the sanctuary and genuflect, the altar servers will turn around to lead the recessional procession walking slowly to the entrance doors of the Worship Space and then, out into the Gathering Area.

### **After Mass Duties**

- ✓ Please extinguish the candles in the sanctuary.
- ✓ Assist in cleaning the sanctuary (if needed).
- ✓ Hang up your alb and cincture *neatly* and *respectfully* in the assigned storage closet.
- ✓ If Precious Blood spilt on your alb during the Mass, please bring it to the priest, deacon or acolyte to be specially purified and cleaned.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

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

*Thank you for all you do  
at the service of God and His Church!*

## Definitions

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

**Alb:** A white cloth gown worn by altar servers, acolytes, deacons and priests when performing official liturgical functions at the altar.

**Ambo:** The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the Mass scriptural first and second readings, gospel, and homily are given.

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

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

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

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

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

**Credence Table:** The table in the sanctuary (directly behind or near the altar) where the water cruets, chalice(s), corporal, purificators, and towels are kept before the Mass Preparation of the Gifts.

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

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

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

**Lectionary:** The book of biblical readings used for the Liturgy of the Word during the Mass, Communion Services, etc. It usually contains all the biblical readings used for the 3-year Sunday cycle of reading and the two-year daily Mass readings.

**Monstrance:** This is a large, ornate vessel used to reverently hold and display the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic Adoration and solemn Eucharistic processions, such as the Feast of Corpus Christi.

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

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

**Pyx:** A circular device, usually the size of a pocket watch, in which consecrated hosts are carried to those who are outside the parish church (i.e., the sick, homebound, hospitalized, etc.) and are otherwise physically unable to come to the church for Communion during a scheduled Mass.

**Roman Missal:** The book containing the prayers said by the priest during the Liturgy of the Mass.

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

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

**Stoup:** The small holy water fountain or bowl at the entrances of the church.

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

**Thuribal** (also known as a Censer): Is a circular-shaped, metal device used for burning incense. A hot, burning charcoal is placed inside it, upon which the priest or deacon places incense to make it burn and smoke to enable a blessing of the altar, gifts, a casket, people, etc.

**ATTACHMENT #1**

**ENTRANCE AND RECESSIONAL  
ORDER OF PROCESSION**

