



St. Francis de Sales Parish

Holland, Michigan

Altar Server Guidelines

What (is the ministry?)

Altar servers assist the priest during Mass and other liturgical celebrations.



Why (is it important?)

It is a great privilege to serve at the altar of our God. Altar servers are chosen from those who display a desire for a more intimate union with our Lord Jesus Christ. Our loving Savior becomes present on the altar, just as He was at the Last Supper and Calvary. Accordingly, altar servers have a solemn responsibility to do their assigned duties with dignity and reverence.

Who (can serve and is served?)

Our parish invites boys, girls, adult men, and adult women to be altar servers. Those selected should be committed to growing in their faith and remaining committed to the ministry for the period of their assignment. All people of good faith are welcome. Those who think they may desire to serve are encouraged to do so. All that is required is a desire to serve at the altar of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Servers should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. They should have already received Holy Communion for the first time and normally receive the Eucharist whenever they participate in the liturgy. They must also be in at least 4th grade. Servers should receive proper training before they begin to function.



Updated: July, 29, 2025

When (is the ministry to be carried out?)

There are five opportunities to minister as an altar server:

1. Weekend Masses, including the Saturday Vigil Mass and all Sunday Masses
2. Funerals
3. Weddings
4. Quinceañeras
5. Masses held for certain feast days and holy days of obligation

Attire

Dark shoes should be worn by servers. Casual footwear (sneakers or sandals) is not acceptable.

How (is the ministry performed?)

Before Mass:

1. Check with the Sacristan to ensure that the credence table has been set up with the following: a. Communion bowls b. Communion cups c. Purificators (cloths) d. Corporals (2) e. Pitcher of water f. Bowl for hand washing g. Towel for hand drying h. Extra corporal and purificator at the table; the priest or deacon will need this for purification of the vessels after Communion i. Aspergil (sprinkling branch, or metal wand) and bowl with holy water (during the Easter season, Christmas, and the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord) j. Extra charcoal and incense stand (for Masses where incense is used)
2. Check with the Sacristan to ensure that the Missal (the large red book of Mass prayers) is on the altar
3. Put on an Alb over your clothes. Albs are found in the vestment closet in the sacristy. Use one of the ropes (Cincture) as a belt. **Note: we are in the process of changing from the use of the Alb and Cincture to the use of a Black Cassock and White Surplus for altar server use (see pictures in the Glossary).**
4. Ask the Mass coordinator or deacon if there are any special rites to be used during the Mass.
5. Prepare your heart for the ministry you are about to engage in by praying:

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. Jesus, I love you with all my heart. Amen.

Loving Father, creator of the universe, you call your people to worship, to be with you and 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 forever and ever. Amen.

Note: A parent or related adult should accompany any minor altar servers in the sacristy preparing for Mass. Any other adult should not be alone in the sacristy with a minor altar server.

Procession:

Order of the procession: Cross, Altar Servers, Book of the Gospels, Celebrant



1. Follow the cross bearer. The deacon or lector with the book of the Gospels will follow directly after you. If you have a partner, walk together side by side.
2. Join the congregation in singing the opening hymn. Take a hymnal from a pew in the back of church.
3. Pause to bow deeply and reverently together with your partner as you pass by the front of the altar. However, if you have anything in your hands, such as incense, do not pause and bow before the altar.
4. Proceed around the front of the altar, up the platform, and to your seat.

During the Mass:



1. Stand when the congregation stands, sit when they sit, and kneel when they kneel.
2. Pay close attention to the priest at all times in the event he needs you to do something out of the ordinary (fetch a fresh battery, bring a cup of water, retrieve something from the sacristy, etc.).
3. Participate fully in the Mass, including the prayers, hymns, and Eucharist.
4. Maintain a reverent, prayerful posture (hands folded prayerfully, sitting and kneeling up straight, etc.).

Roman Missal

Hold the Roman Missal for the priest to read from at the following times during the Mass:

- Collect (Opening Prayer) - The Altar Server closest to the Roman Missal will hold the Roman Missal. At the end of the Collect, the Celebrant will close the Roman Missal. Once the Celebrant sits down he Altar Server returns to his/her place and sits.

- Before Offertory when preparing the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, carry the Roman Missal from the credence table to the Altar and place it on the left-hand side of the Altar (as you face the congregation).
- Once the Celebrant/Deacon and the EMHCs have moved to distribute the Eucharist to the congregation, one Altar Server removes the Roman Missal from the Altar. They return it to the credence table.
- Prayer after Communion – When the Celebrant and Deacon stand for the Prayer after Communion, the Altar Server closest to the Roman Missal brings the Roman Missal to the Celebrant. Once the Celebrant closes the Roman Missal, return to your seat and place the Roman Missal on the credence table.
- Final Blessing This may be simple or solemn. If simple, the Celebrant may elect NOT to use the Roman Missal. If solemn, the altar server will be asked to continue holding the Roman Missal. Respond to the blessings with “Amen”.

During the Liturgy of the Word:

- a. During special liturgical seasons, be prepared to help with a sprinkling rite, incense, or some special prayer or procession. Check with the Mass coordinator before Mass to see which, if any, of these rites might be used during the Mass you are serving.
- b. The second lector will hand you the lectionary after the second reading. Place the book on the shelf under the credence table. If the lector forgets to hand you the book, simply stand up, walk to the ambo, and retrieve the book yourself.
- c. The priest or deacon may also hand you the book of the gospels after the gospel reading or before the petitions. Be ready.

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

Offertory:

Once the offertory hymn begins, the priest or deacon prepares the altar. Bring him first the chalice with paten and corporal, followed by the other corporal, communion cups, communion bowls (prefilled with unconsecrated hosts), purifiers, and pitcher of water.

When no deacon is serving, altar servers bring to the priest in the following order: two corporals, then the chalice and communion cups, communion bowls, and purificators.

Then, in order:

1. Proceed to the credence table to get the pitcher of water. Hand it to the priest when he asks for it. He will pour a small quantity of water into one of the chalices and hand the pitcher back to you.
2. If there are two servers, one remains near the altar with the pitcher of water while the other waits for the priest to fill the chalices with wine and then accepts the empty wine pitcher from the priest and returns it to the credence table. If you are the only server, take the water pitcher to the credence table, then return to the altar to accept the emptied wine pitcher from the priest.

Hand Washing:

3. The server who returns the wine pitcher to the credence table retrieves the bowl and towel for hand washing and stands next to the server holding the pitcher of water. The towel should be draped over the arm of the server holding the bowl.
4. The priest will turn toward the servers after completing his prayers over the bread and wine, at which time one server pours water over the priest's hands while the other server holds the bowl under the priest's hands to collect the excess water. The priest will dry his hands on the towel and return it to the arm of the server.
5. The altar servers return the bowl, towel, water and wine pitchers to the credence table.

Consecration:

6. Ring the bells at the appropriate times during the Consecration. These include:
First ring: the Epiclesis, Prayer near the beginning of the Eucharistic Words of the priest: the priest calls the Holy Spirit down upon the gifts. Hand gesture of the priest: both hands outstretched over top of the chalice and the paten
Type of ring: one, short, ring of the bells.

Second Ring: the first elevation Words of the priest: the priest is silent (of the host) Gesture of the priest: the priest holds the consecrated host up over his head for the people to see. Type of Ring: 3 rings of the bells.

Third Ring: the second elevation Words of the priest: the priest is silent (of the chalice) Gesture of the priest: the priest holds up the chalice with the Precious Blood over his head for the people to see. Type of Ring: 3 rings of the bells.

Communion:

7. The priest will distribute communion to each of the extraordinary eucharistic ministers, who will then move to their stations.
8. Get in line for communion. Return to your kneeler once you've received communion.

After Communion:

9. When all the people have received communion, be prepared to help carry ciborium and corporals from the altar to the credence table. The priest or deacon will transfer any remaining consecrated hosts to the large ciborium which is returned to the tabernacle and purify (clean) the Communion bowls and cups, as well as chalice at the credence table and place them on the wooden tray. [We could ask you to do this, but not at this time: One server

should take the wooden tray with the Communion bowls and cups to the sacristy, and then return to his or her seat. If you are serving alone, leave these items on the credence table until the Mass has concluded, then return them to the sacristy.

10. When the congregation begins to sing the recessional hymn, sing with the congregation while observing the movements of the priest.

Recessional Procession:

11. When the priest leaves the chair to reverence the altar, process with your partner side by side: 1. Walking past the priest, continuing to sing the recessional hymn. 2. Following the cross-bearer down the ramp. 3. Bowing reverently and deeply in front of the altar. 4. Processing slowly down the main aisle to the baptismal font. 5. If the recessional hymn has not concluded, stand near the baptismal font and finish singing the hymn.

Once the Mass is finished:

- a. Help the sacristan to return trays, etc. to the sacristy.
- b. Thank your partner for his/her service and assistance.
- c. Return your Cassock and Surplus to the coat rack hangers outside the Usher Room.
- d. Thank our Lord for the privilege of serving his church during the Mass which just concluded (see a sample prayer below)

At Special Masses:

Procession:

Order of the procession: Incense, Cross, Altar Servers, Book of the Gospels, Celebrant

Incense the Altar:

Altar servers bring the Thurible and Boat of incense to the priest so he can incense the altar. After he incenses the altar return to your seat with the Thurible and Boat.

Before the Gospel:

Present the Thurible and Boat of incense to the priest or deacon at the Ambo for him to incense the Book of the Gospels. Once he has done so and returns the Thurible to you, stand behind him at the Ambo until after the Gospel is read then return to your seat.

Offertory:

Place a new charcoal in the Thurible and bring the Thurible and Boat of incense to the priest and when he returns it to you return to your seat.

Recessional Procession:

Leave the Thurible and Boat behind and do not bring it for the processional.

O Lord, Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest, I thank you for the privilege of having served at the holy altar of your sacrifice. Now, as I put aside the garments of that service, I ask that I may at all times think of you, and always act accordingly, as a privileged altar server. May I ever seek you and find you; may I always follow you; may your priestly spirit be my guide, and your service of love be my example. May your holy name always be on my lips, and to your praise and glory may every work of mine be done. Ever ready in your service, may I always know and do your holy will in all things. May I remain pure and blameless and be found worthy to be your servant, and by your grace may I persevere to the end. Amen.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the opportunity to serve you during the holy Mass. In your sacred presence, my heart is filled with joy and peace. May your spirit always guide me so I may grow in your love by the grace of the Heavenly Father. Amen

Glossary

<p>Alb & Cincture - Cassock & Surplus</p> 	<p>Alb: A long white robe worn by the Celebrant, Deacon, and Altar Servers. Cincture: A long cord used for fastening the Alb at the waist and to adjust it to proper length. Usually white, may be liturgical color of the day.</p> <p>Cassock: A long black robe worn by Altar Servers covered by a White Surplus top.</p>
<p>Ambo</p> 	<p>Place where the reading of the Holy Scriptures takes place during Mass. It can also be used for the homily.</p>

<p>Altar</p> 	<p>Place of sacrifice; central site where the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy takes place.</p>
<p>Ciborium</p> 	<p>A sacred vessel in which hosts, after being consecrated, become the Body of Christ. Used for distribution of Holy Communion and for storing consecrated or unconsecrated hosts.</p>
<p>Chalice</p> 	<p>A sacred vessel in which wine, after being consecrated, becomes the Precious Blood.</p>
<p>Corporal</p> 	<p>Square cloth spread over the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The chalice and paten are placed in the corporal. This one is folded in a way that captures any Fragment of the host that may have fallen.</p>
<p>Credence</p> 	<p>Table near the altar where the different vessels are located (the jar of water for washing and the towel, the water, the glasses of wine, etc.) which are used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.</p>

<p>Cruets:</p> 	<p>Glass Vessels Containing Water and Wine for Mass</p>
<p>Purificator</p> 	<p>Small cloth folded into three parts used for purification the chalice when communion is received. Before being washed, it should be soaked, and the water should be drained into the sacrarium.</p>
<p>Bowl, water, and towel</p> 	<p>Used to wash the priest's hands during Mass.</p>
<p>Roman Missal</p> 	<p>Ritual book containing the prayers recited by the priests during Mass.</p>
<p>Evangelary</p> 	<p>A book containing the Gospel readings for Mass. Commonly known as the Book of the Gospel.</p>

<p>Lectionary</p> 	<p>Book located in the ambo containing the readings of the Scripture for the Mass.</p>
<p>Sanctuary</p> 	<p>Separate church area for the celebration of Sacred rites. The altar and ambo are located inside the sanctuary.</p>
<p>Tabernacle</p> 	<p>A locked place and a safe place where the Blessed Sacrament resides.</p>
<p>Paten</p> 	<p>Small metal plate in which the hosts are consecrated during Mass.</p>
<p>Monstrance</p> 	<p>Sacred element containing the Luna with the consecrated host for worship and blessing.</p>

<p>Luna</p> 	<p>Round glass case in which a large consecrated host is kept in order to be placed in the Monstrance for worship and blessing.</p>
<p>Pyx</p> 	<p>Small metal case used to store and transport consecrated hosts for distribution to the sick, homebound, nursing home residents, or those in the hospital. It is carried in a bag with a Cord around the neck.</p>
<p>Sacristy</p> 	<p>A place where the sacred vessels are kept and where the Priests and deacons dress when there is no place intended for this function.</p>
<p>Sacrarium</p> 	<p>An element similar to a sink, located in the sacristy, whose drainage system leads directly to the ground instead of lead to public sewerage; It is used to dispose of water who has been able to come into contact with sacred elements.</p>