

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALTAR SERVERS

A great honour

To serve at the altar is a great privilege and honour. Those who serve will receive special blessings and reward from the Lord. Accordingly, a server has a solemn responsibility to do the assigned duties with attention, dignity and reverence.

General information

Altar servers have three primary positions during the mass when they are not performing a specific duty. These are standing, sitting and kneeling. In any of these positions they should maintain a straight formal posture. In the standing and kneeling positions their hands should be held in the praying position. When sitting the hands should be held on the lap or at the sides. It is never proper to slouch or hold hands in any other position which would be more appropriate at a bus stop. Remember, you are seen by all the parishioners and how you conduct yourself is important to their understanding of the Lamb's Supper.

Every altar server must attend every Mass they are scheduled for. When a server cannot be present, that server must arrange for a replacement.

Requirements

A person applying to be an altar server must have received first confession and Holy Communion; must have a desire to serve well and with dignity.

Dress

Altar servers wear albs, cinctures and altar server's cross. It is important that you wear appropriate shoes. The rule of thumb is to wear something you would wear if you went to visit an important person. Normal school shoes are suitable, however thongs and sport shoes are not.

Genuflection

We genuflect to Jesus. When Jesus is present in the Tabernacle, the Sanctuary lamp is lit.

Genuflect in this manner: stop, then turn and face the tabernacle. Genuflect on the right knee so the right knee touches the floor. Pause with the knee on the floor and bow your head to Jesus. Rise from the floor, still facing the tabernacle. Turn and continue in the direction you were heading.

When should a server genuflect? At the beginning of the Mass and at the end of the Mass. Whenever you are carrying things like crosses, sacred vessels, books or candles do not genuflect.

Bowing

There are two kinds of bowing. A profound bow and a light bow. A profound bow is from the waist. A light bow is a slight bow of the body and head.

Deep bow is used at the beginning and end of the mass and whenever we cross the tabernacle. Light bow is used when receiving or giving something to priest or to others.

Duties before Mass

Arrive on time, put on the alb and cincture. If not sure what is the liturgical colour, check with the priest. Five minutes before the Mass, light the candles on the altar and at St. Joseph's and Our Lady's statue. In the sacristy speak softly so as not to disturb people praying in the church.

Duties during Mass

Cross-bearer: In a procession, the cross-bearer will lead the procession, holding cross facing forward. Arriving at the sanctuary, he/she steps to the side leaving the centre for the priest. Cross bearer doesn't genuflect but can bow slightly or bow his/her head. After priest's genuflection and bow, the cross-bearer replaces cross into its stand, facing the congregation and goes to his/her seat.

Servers who do not carry anything follow the cross-bearer in pairs, holding their hands in liturgical position. At the sanctuary they fan out to the left and to the right leaving the centre for the priest. Together with the priest they first genuflect and bow and then they go to their seats.

Book bearer: The server who is assigned to hold the missal comes to the priest after he says "Let us pray". The priest will place the missal into your hands. Try holding it at the same height and angle. Please do not stand straight in front of the priest, but rather stand to the side so that people may see him. At the end of the prayer, the priest will close the book and you can return to your seat.

Candle bearers: At the end of the second reading on Sunday or Responsorial psalm during weekday mass, during the Gospel acclamation the candle bearers take their lit candles with both hands and come in front of the altar leaving space in the middle for the priest. After he bows and ask God for a blessing, the candle bearers start processing to the pulpit in front of the priest. At the pulpit one will stand on the right the other on the left facing people. At the end of the gospel reading the candle bearers return candles to their places, extinguish the flame and go to their seat. During this ceremony the candle bearers walk as much as the space allows together as a pair.

Book bearer: After the homily and the creed, the book bearer comes to the priest and holds for him the prayers of the faithful in a manner described above.

Money baskets: Receive the money baskets from the collectors and place them at the front of the altar in the middle. If the baskets are decorated with grapes or some other decoration, place them in such a way that the decoration is visible by the people. There are two collections on Sunday only, first after the prayers of the faithful and the second after the communion.

Cruets bearers: After the prayers of the faithful, bring the chalice and any ciboria to the altar. Leave them on the side of the altar. Two servers then go down to the middle of the church to meet the people bringing the offertory gifts. They walk in front of the people leading them to the priest waiting at the step of the sanctuary. Arriving to the priest they fan out one on the left the other on the right to the priest facing in the same direction. The priest will give them one of the cruets each. Together with the priest they bow to the people who brought the offertory gifts, turn around and approach the altar. Remove the stoppers from the cruets and wait until the priest is ready to receive first the wine and then the water from you. After he returns the cruet to both of you replace the stopper, turn around and walk together to the credence table. Place the cruets on the credence table, take the water bowl and the towel and immediately return to the priest. The server holding

the towel should unfold the towel and hand the unfolded towel to the priest. If there is only one Cruet bearer, do not remove the stopper, just hand the cruet to the priest with the stopper. He will remove the stopper himself. Please do not place the stoppers on the altar and do not lean on the altar. When handing the cruets, water bowl or towel to the priest, please stand in the open space so that the priest doesn't have to lean over the altar to reach you.

Bell-ringer: The bell is rung once when priest places the palms of his hands in horizontal position over the chalice and ciborium. The bell is rung three times at the elevation of both the consecrated host (body of Christ) and the chalice with consecrated wine (the blood of Christ). The bell is rung once when the priest drinks from the chalice. If gong is used, please strike the gong at the bottom part, not too loud and not too soft. Please do not silence the gong by touching it. Let the gong ring out by itself.

Receiving communion: Remember that Christians are to show a sign of reverence before receiving communion. In Australia the bishops have decided that the appropriate sign of reverence is a profound bow. Since all people can now see you, please remember to bow reverently before receiving the holy communion. After communion, return to your seat and wait in silence.

After communion: Priest will purify the vessels. During purification two servers should stand at the side of the altar waiting for the vessels to be purified. If there is a loose cloth on top of the vessel, such as chalice or ciborium, take only one vessel at a time holding it with both hands one from the bottom or side the other from the top. If there are still other vessels on the altar, return to the altar to remove them. Please remove the book with its stand only after the priest has left the altar.

Book bearer: Come to the priest after he says "Let us pray." After the concluding prayer, the priest may invite the people to sit to make some announcements. You also return to your seat. When the priest invites people to stand for the final blessing, come again to the priest to hold the book. Please do not close the book if priest stops reading from it. Let the priest close the book himself when he is finished.

Cross bearer: After the final blessing the cross bearer takes the cross and together with all the servers aligns in front of the sanctuary step. The priest will kiss the altar and join the servers in front of the sanctuary. He may stay there for a while joining people in singing, then he will bow and genuflect. All the servers not carrying anything should also bow and genuflect at the same time. Then they turn around and process out of the church led by the cross bearer.

Duties after Mass

Replace the alb, cincture and the cross neatly in their place. Refrain from talking loudly as there may still be some people saying their prayers in the church.