

St. Louis Catholic Church Altar Server Guide

Dear Altar Servers, you are, in fact, already apostles of Jesus! When you take part in the Liturgy by carrying out your altar service, you offer a witness to all. Your absorption, the devotion that wells up from your heart and is expressed in gestures, in song, in the responses: if you do it correctly and not absent-mindedly, then in a certain way your witness is one that moves people.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the bond of friendship with Jesus. You are very close to Jesus in the Eucharist, and this is the most important sign of his friendship for each one of us. Do not forget it.

This is why I am asking you not to take this gift for granted so that it does not become a sort of habit, knowing how it works and doing it automatically; rather, discover every day anew that something important happens, that the living God is among us and that you can be close to him and help him so that his mystery is celebrated and reaches people.

If you do not give into habit, if you put your innermost self into carrying out your service, then you will truly be his apostles and bear fruits of goodness and service in every context of your life: in the family, at school, in your free time.

--excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Altar Servers, August 2, 2006.

Introduction

Welcome to the Altar Server ministry at St. Louis Catholic Church. Your service at the altar is of great importance to the sacred liturgy at our parish. As altar servers you will be able to assist the priests and deacons in the sanctuary during the holy sacrifice of the mass, which is when heaven and earth meet, and we join with the hosts of heaven to worship God and receive the graces and blessings imparted by the Eucharist.

Group training sessions will be offered 2-3 times a year. We will be happy to meet with any server individually (in the presence of their parents or another adult) who would like a "refresher" course, or if they have any particular questions about how to serve. We do understand that many servers are nervous about being in front of the congregation during mass, so we want to be sure that each server is as comfortable as possible so that they may be able to fully take part in this rewarding ministry.

Given this great privilege, it is important to keep in mind the reverence due to our Lord and sacredness of the sanctuary before, during, and after mass. Do not forget, as Pope Benedict mentioned above, that you are apostles of Jesus and that the good fruit that you bear should

also be continued outside of the mass with your family, friends, and with all whom you come in contact. It is our hope that, through this ministry, you will find joy in serving the Lord and will come to know and love Him even more every day, so that you may “keep the main thing, the main thing.”

Attitude and Reverence

- Attitude is everything. Determine that you are there to serve the Lord and that you will come mentally prepared, do everything to the best of your ability, and take responsibility to do things the right way.
- Please arrive no later than 15 minutes prior to mass so that you can get vested, prepare the Sanctuary for mass, and say the Altar Server Prayer (in the vesting room).
- During mass, it is important to keep a reverent and respectful attitude at all times. Keep appropriate reverent posture (prayer hands). When you are standing, stand up straight. Whenever you are carrying something, hold it steady and straight. When sitting, sit straight up with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground. When you kneel, keep your body upright; do not sit back on your heels.
- While moving around the sanctuary, try to move in a smooth and deliberate manner. You should never have to hurry, rush, or turn abruptly. Talking to each other during mass should be kept to an absolute minimum and really should be only reserved for the Master of Ceremony (MC) when guiding a junior altar server, when needed. Do not signal to each other across the sanctuary.
- It is important to pay attention at all times to the priest and deacon. You never know when something may come up and they may require your assistance. Be sure to participate fully during mass, saying the prayers, propers, and all responses. Do not slouch, fidget, rock back and forth, look aimlessly around, or do anything else that makes it appear that your attention is wandering.
- After the mass has been completed, it is important to remember that we are still within a holy place in the presence of our Lord and Savior, and that reverence should be maintained while placing all objects back into their places.

Dress and Attire

Your dress and appearance is an outward sign of your inward disposition. As we are entering into a holy place at a time when heaven comes down to Earth while in the physical presence of our Lord and Savior, it is important to present ourselves in a manner worthy of the sacredness of the moment.

- Boys should wear a collared shirt (polo or button down dress shirt), dress pants or khakis, socks, and dress shoes.
- Girls should wear a dress or dressy shirt with a skirt or dressy pants, along with dress shoes.
- Please do not wear any sports uniforms, t-shirts, shorts, jeans, or sandals/flip flops. If you have a sporting activity before or after mass, please bring a change of appropriate clothing.
- Please take time to ensure your face is washed and that your hair is neatly combed and out of your face. All servers should have their hair neatly styled and secured away from their face so that it does not distract them or require attention during Mass.

Altar Server Training Levels

Apprentice

- New server for 1-2 month period
- Only role is to process and observe, become more comfortable being around the altar
- Focus on practicing good posture and attentiveness

Junior Altar Server

- 4th and 5th grade (or first 2 years)
- Main role is as a torch bearer
- May also step in as credence server if not enough servers
- May hold incense boat, if needed, when incense used

Senior Altar Server

- 6th-12th grade
- Main role is as cross bearer or credence server, but can be torch bearer if not enough servers
- May also hold thurible or incense boat
- To be paired with a junior altar serve to aid in their training or if they have questions

Master of Ceremony

- Eligible 8th-12th grade, reserved for those with exceptional dedication to serving
- Main role is to work with other servers to make sure all is set up for mass
- Assist in hands on guidance of younger altar servers during mass
- Act as "go to" if there are any special needs by the priest or deacon.
- May also be paired with younger server to aid in training
- May hold thurible
- May act as cross bearer if needed.

Mass Procedures for Altar Servers

Before Mass

- Servers are expected to arrive no later than 15 minutes before Mass begins.
- The first thing a server is to do before performing any functions is to get vested.
- Before and after mass, and during the Liturgy of the Word during mass, reverence the *tabernacle* by genuflecting or bowing anytime you enter the sanctuary (either from the front or the sides).
- During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, reverence the *altar* by bowing anytime you enter the sanctuary (from the front or the sides) or cross over from one side or the other either in front or behind the altar.
- Servers should make sure all candles are lit and that the sacred vessels are on the credence table and in the back of the church (this also is to be completed by the MC).
- Thurifer (when used) will light charcoals 10 minutes before Mass.
- All servers are to be vested and at the back of the church 5 minutes before Mass is to begin.

Procession

Thurifer
(when there is one)

Crucifer

Torch Bearer Torch Bearer

Deacon (with Book of Gospels)

Credence Server (Acolyte) Credence Server (Acolyte)

Apprentice or Extra Server Apprentice or Extra Server

Master of Ceremonies (MC)

Lector Lector

Priest

- Line up on the angels under the altar
- Keep 2 silver lines (length of a full diamond) between you and the server in front of you
- Stay lined up with the server to your side
- Walk slowly and reverently
- If not holding anything, keep you hands in “prayer position”
- Thurifer goes off to the right and waits to genuflect

- Crucifer and torch bearers go straight their place. Do not genuflect or bow.
- Credence servers and MC go off to the right and wait to genuflect
- Apprentices/extra servers go off to the left and wait to genuflect, leaving room for the lectors
- All servers (except crucifer and torch bearers) genuflect with priest
- Everyone goes to their stations (except the thurifer, who goes to the top step and waits for priest to kiss altar, then approaches priest with thurible).
 - Priest will charge thurible then incense the altar.
 - Thurifer stands at bottom step waiting for priest to complete incensation.
 - Once priest is done with incensation, thurifer receives thurible from priest, bows to him, and puts away thurible.

Gospel Procession

- After Responsorial Psalm, the thurifer goes to the thurible, makes sure it is burning well, and waits for the end of the Second Reading. At the conclusion of the Second Reading, the thurifer approaches the priest with the thurible.
 - If deacon present: the deacon will take the boat from thurifer and give it to the priest.
 - Once the thurible is charged, the thurifer crosses the sanctuary (bowing in the middle) and stands behind the ambo.
- When the priest stands, the torch bearers pick up their torches at the same time (make eye contact with each other) and go to the front of the altar lined up on the angels.
- Deacon will get the Book of Gospels from the altar and process to the front of the altar in between the torch bearers (priest will normally go straight to the front of the altar)
 - At that time the torch bearers will turn and walk to the ambo, one in front and one behind the deacon or priest
 - The torch bearer in front will go around behind the ambo (St. Mary side); the one in back will stay on the Altar side
 - Both torch bearers with flank either side of the ambo, facing the ambo, and keeping the candles up straight with good posture while the Gospel is read.
- Deacon (or priest) introduces the Gospel and then turns to the thurifer to receive the thurible to incense the Book of Gospels.
- During the Gospel the thurifer swings the thurible back and forth in front of him to the left of the deacon.
- At the end of the Gospel the deacon (or priest) places the Book of Gospels on its stand.
- After the Book of Gospels has been placed on its stand:
 - The thurifer turns and exits the sanctuary through the left sacristy
 - The torch bearers accompany the deacon back to the front of the altar where they will meet the priest, line up on the angels as before (facing the altar), and will then wait for deacon and priest to bow, at which time the torch bearers return to their seats, replacing the torches on their stands.
 - If the deacon is preaching the homily, the torch bearers will process to the front of the altar, line up on the angels, briefly pause, and then return to their places.

Offertory

- Master of Ceremony (or Credence server, if no MC present) is to bring the chalice to the altar and give it to the deacon or, if no deacon is present, the MC/credence server will set up the chalice on the altar.
- Credence servers (making sure to bow to the altar when they cross the center of the altar), or extra servers when present, bring up the missal stand to the altar and place it on the left side of the altar.
- Credence Servers (making sure to bow to the altar when they cross the center of the altar), or extra servers when present, take sacred vessels and purificators to the altar and set up on the right side of the altar.
- At the notification by the hospitality minister, the crucifer (with crucifix) and torch bearers (with torches) will reverently process to the back of the church and then accompany the faithful and the gifts back to the front, where they will then go straight back to their seats.
- For the Presentation of the Gifts, the two credence servers, MC, and any apprentices or extra servers go to the front of the nave with the priest (and/or deacon), with two on the left and one on the right of the priest
 - Credence servers who receive the patens go to the altar and give them to the deacon (or priest).
 - Credence server who receives the wine goes to the credence table and waits for the other credence server to get the water cruet so that both can approach the altar together.
- Credence servers will then walk side by side to the altar with wine and water cruets (wine on left and water on right)
 - Remove top from cruet before leaving the credence table
 - Hold cruets with handle facing the priest/deacon
 - Priest/deacon will then take the cruets one at a time and give back to server
 - Server then replaces top to cruet and waits
 - When priest/deacon returns water cruet to server, both servers bow to the priest at the same time and then turn around (inward toward each other) to return to the credence table
- After placing cruets on the credence table, the MC will give the water pitcher to the server who had the water, while the basin will be given to the server who had the wine. The towel will be draped over the left arm of the basin server.
 - Servers will then walk back down to the altar together to the priest (this is done after incensing of altar if incense is being used).
 - The priest will wash his hands over the basin while the server pours water from the pitcher.
 - The priest will then take the towel from the left arm of the server with the basin.
 - After drying his hands, the priest will fold the towel and then drape the towel left arm of the server with the basin,
 - Both servers will then bow to the priest at the same time and then turn around (inward toward each other), and then return items to the credence table.
- All servers then take their place standing on either side of the altar next to the red rugs.

Eucharistic Prayer and Communion

- When the priest places his hands over the offerings to bless them right before the Consecration, the bell ringer (whichever credence server is kneeling next to the bells) will ring the bells one time reverently.
- During the elevation of the host, the bell ringer will ring the bell three times, slowly and reverently.
- During the elevation of the chalice, the bell ringer will ring the bell three times, slowly and reverently.
- When the priest begins to give communion to the extraordinary ministers of holy communion, all servers rise at the same time and process down to the line up next to either set of pews.
- After receiving Communion, each server will then return to the sanctuary to kneel in silent prayer.
 - Before returning to kneel, the credence servers will remove the Missal and stand from the altar and place them back on the credence table, making sure to bow to the altar when crossing over center. They will then return to their places, kneeling in silent prayer.
- When the priest and deacons return, the two credence servers will assist the priest and deacon with the cleaning of sacred vessels.
 - One credence server will approach the altar with the water cruet and remove the top with handle facing the priest/deacon (may be asked to pour water over priest/deacon's fingers).
 - After receiving the water cruet back, server replaces the top, bows to the deacon/priest, and returns cruet to the credence table.
 - Credence servers will approach the altar for as many times as necessary to receive various things from the priest (ciboria, patens, tabernacle key, etc.) on credence table.
 - The MC (or credence server, if no MC present) will remove the chalice from the altar and place it in the Sacristy.

Recession

- After the priest or deacon has announced the end of the Mass, all stand still until the priest begins to move to the altar.
- At this time the crucifer will go the aisle and line up on the 2nd pew while the torch bearers will line up with the first pew, facing the altar.
- The Credence servers, extra servers, apprentices, and MC will return to where they genuflected in front of the altar during the procession (credence servers in front of pew on right, facing the altar, and apprentices/extra servers in front of pew on left facing the altar)
- When the priest and deacon come down to genuflect, all not holding an object will genuflect.
- At this time all turn around (torch bearers inward toward each other) and process out in the same order as the procession, being sure to keep two silver lines behind the server in front of you and even with the server next to you.

After Mass

- All wait in the back until the final song has ended. Once over, all walk down the side of the church or go through the garden back to the sanctuary to replace the crucifix, torches, and assist sacristan with clean up.

- If this is the final mass of the day, all candles are to be extinguished.
- Once complete, all servers go back to the vesting room to remove robes.
 - At this time the MC or adult supervisor may then debrief, going over what went well and where more work or attention may be needed.

Attendance and Point System

- The priests and deacons are depending on your help to assist during mass. Please be sure to check the schedule each month when it comes out and let your parents know so that you will be able to make plans to serve on that day. If you cannot serve at your scheduled time, then please do your best to find a substitute either through the scheduling system or by speaking with another server.
- Please sign in to the attendance log book which will be kept in the vesting room. If you are subbing for another server, or if you have been asked by the priest or deacon to help when walking into mass, don't forget to print your name in the appropriate space.
- Points will be awarded to each server based on attendance (see below). These points will be used toward determining the altar server of the month, as well as an invitation to an annual altar trip or party (sporting event such as the Redbirds, cookout, pool party, etc.). Points will also be used in identifying servers who may no longer be interested in continuing in this ministry.

Point System

- 1 point will be given for serving at a weekend mass or if you are a sub/fill in.
- 1 point will be given for serving at a weekday mass.
- 2 points will be given for volunteer serving at mass on a Holy Day of Obligation
- 2 points will be given for volunteer serving at a funeral or wedding
- 3 points will be given for attending training
- 2 points will **TAKEN AWAY** if you miss a mass your are scheduled for **AND** you did not request a sub in the online system by 8am the day before (no points taken away if sub request was made in time)