

General Instructions for Altar Servers

Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church

(Revised September 2023)

“Your commitment to the altar is not only a duty, but a great honor, a genuine holy service.”
-Pope Saint John Paul II

Before Mass – arrive 15 minutes before Mass

- Prepare yourself both internally/externally - ensure your appearance is appropriate for serving.
- Wash your hands.
- Dress in your alb in the parish office area.
- Light the altar candles.
- Double check the credence table.
- Check in with the priest-celebrant and see if any additional assistance is needed.
- Check in with the other altar servers to review which roles you will each take. The roles may be divided in this way (but may be adjusted if three servers are *not* present:
 - Cross bearer/Roman Missal bearer/Receive gifts with the celebrant
 - Torch bearer #1/Altar Server #1 (main chalice w/corporal; water & bowl)
 - Torch bearer #2/Altar Server #2 (two bowls of hosts/hand towel)
- Retrieve the (Processional) Cross and torches (processional candles) and go to the vestibule to prepare for the Entrance Procession.
 - Songbooks should be used if a server is not carrying the Cross or a torch.
- Set a good example for all who see you serving:
 - Be reverent and attentive.
 - Direct your focus on the liturgical action that is happening in each moment.
 - Participate in *all* the songs/prayers/liturgical action taking place.

Introductory Rites

- Once the music has started and a few lines of the song have been sung, the procession begins to the sanctuary. If alone, walk single file in the center of the aisle. If there is more than one server present, then two should walk side-by-side. If present, *senior servers* should be in front of the procession, carrying the Cross.
- When you arrive at the Altar, you do *not* need to bow or genuflect if you are carrying the Cross or a torch. Simply pause momentarily at the bottom step and, then, walk up the stairs and place your item in its stand. Afterward (or if you weren't carrying anything in the procession), proceed directly to stand at your chair. *Remember, you do not need to wait to bow with the celebrant.*
- When the celebrant says “Let us pray,” the server who will hold the Roman Missal (red book) should stand about three feet in front of him, facing him with his/her back to the congregation. Once prayer is over and the congregation has responded “Amen.,” the server places the Roman Missal on the table next to his/her chair. Then, all will be seated.

The Liturgy of the Word

- After the First Reading, we will sing the Responsorial Psalm. When the Responsorial Psalm finishes, two servers should stand and go to retrieve their torches to prepare for the Gospel procession. Then, once the Second Reading is finished and the lector has exited the sanctuary, the servers bring the torches to the Altar. They should stand facing each other (one on either side of Altar at the back two corners). The celebrant will pick up the Gospel book to walk to the Ambo. Then, the servers (one in front and one behind) walk single file with the celebrant to the Ambo, and, again, stand facing each other. After the Gospel reading and the people respond “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”, the servers return their torches to the stands and go to their seats, moving behind the celebrant’s chair when doing so.
- Remain seated and be attentive during the Homily.
- After the homily, all will stand and recite the Creed (a copy will be at your place, if you need it).

The Liturgy of the Eucharist – If present, the senior server will coordinate the setup of Altar. Otherwise, the servers will bring things to the celebrant. One server should go to the bottom of the stairs with Fr. Pat when he goes down to receive the gifts.

- **Items used for the preparation of the Altar:**
 - Roman Missal (hand to the celebrant/senior server *or* place near the back, left hand corner of Altar)
 - Chalice with Pall/Corporal (hand to the celebrant/senior server *or* place on back, right hand corner of Altar)
 - Two (2) bowls of hosts (bread)
 - Wine pitcher (Server who received the gifts with the celebrant - on his right)
 - After the celebrant pours the wine into the main chalice, the server may return the wine pitcher to the credence table.
 - Water pitcher/bowl for washing hands (stand to the right of the celebrant)
 - The celebrant will use the water pitcher to prepare the main chalice, then the server will use it for the washing of his hands.
 - Hand towel (stand to the right of the celebrant)
 - Any servers not holding/handing over an item or who is finished doing so should be seated at their place.
 - Servers will stand and kneel at the appropriate times at their places
- **For the Communion Rite:**
 - The servers will stand at their places to sing/say the Lord’s Prayer and, then, will greet each other with a Sign of Peace (handshake) when invited to do so by the celebrant.
 - All will kneel after The Lamb of God is sung/said.
 - One of our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) will bring Holy Communion to you. Please stand and bow at your place to receive, kneeling there in prayer once you have received.

- When the Distribution of Holy Communion is finished, one server should retrieve the water pitcher from the credence table. Hand the pitcher to Fr. Pat (with the handle facing towards Fr. Pat).
- In this order, take everything back to the credence table during the purification:
 - Water pitcher and one communion bowl
 - Two communion bowls
 - Pick up and return the Roman Missal to its place when the Celebrant is drinking the ablution from the Chalice.
 - Finally, the Chalice/Pall/Corporal
- **Concluding Rites**
 - When the celebrant says “Let us pray,” the server who will hold the Roman Missal (red book) should stand about three feet in front of him, facing him with his/her back to the congregation. Once prayer is over and the congregation has responded “Amen.,” the server places the Roman Missal on the table next to his/her chair.
 - If there are any, the celebrant makes the announcements.
 - After the Final Blessing, the celebrant gives the Dismissal and the congregation responds “Thanks be to God,” the servers will go to the take up the Cross and torches to prepare for the Recessional.
 - The servers will walk immediately to the center aisle and will turn and face the altar.
 - After the celebrant genuflects/bows to the Altar, the servers turn and process together down the center aisle in the same order you processed into church.
- **After Mass**
 - Extinguish the candles.
 - Put all items (Cross, torches, song books, etc.) back in their places
 - Return your Alb to the vesting area, hanging it up carefully and neatly.
 - Ask either the Mass Coordinator or EMHC’s if there is anything else that is needed.

Credence Table Setup



Altar Setup



Liturgical Terms and Definitions

Alb – A full length white vestment worn over the clothes by priests, deacons, and altar servers.

Altar – In Catholic churches the table on which the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

Ambo – Elevated pulpit or lectern from which the 1st and 2nd Readings, as well as the Gospel are read.

Ambry – Cabinet that holds the holy oils used for baptism, confirmation, and anointing of the sick.

Aspergillum – A metal stick or the branch from a bush that is used to sprinkle holy water.

Baptismal Font – A stone, metal, or wooden receptacle for holding baptismal water used in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Boat – Container that holds the incense before it is burned.

Book of the Gospels – The book from which the Priest or Deacon reads the Gospel.

Chalice – The cup-shaped vessel or goblet used at Mass to contain the Precious Blood of Christ.

Ciborium – A covered container used to hold the consecrated hosts.

Corporal – Latin word that means “body.” A square white linen cloth on which the Host and Chalice are placed during Mass. It is also used under the monstrance at Benediction or under the Blessed Sacrament at any time.

Credence Table – Small table located near the altar that holds sacred vessels and books.

Crucifer – Person who carries the cross; can also be referred to as the cross bearer.

Cruet – A vessel that holds water or wine.

Holy Oils – Oils blessed by the bishop. They include the holy chrism, the oil of catechumens, and the oil of the sick. They are used for baptism, confirmation, and anointing of the sick.

Incense – Powder that when lit gives off a fragrant smoke. Incense is placed in a container called a boat. It is burned in a container called a thurible or censor.

Lectionary – The book of Scripture Readings usually from which the Old and New Testament readings are read.

Lector – Person appointed to read the Word of God in the liturgical assembly. (Person who read the 1st and 2nd Readings)

Narthex – The gathering area between the exterior doors of the church and the doors to the Nave (worship area).

Nave – The main body of the church reserved for worshippers, including the central and side aisles.

Paschal Candle – A large candle in which five grains of incense have been incased as a symbol of Christ's wounds. It is blessed on Holy Saturday in a special service and is symbolic of the Risen Savior, Light of the World. It is then used in the blessing of baptismal water and remains during the Paschal season in the sanctuary, where it is lit during liturgical services.

Paten - Container that holds the hosts that become the Body of Christ.

Purificator – A small piece of white linen, marked with a cross, used by the priest in the celebration of Mass. It is folded in three layers and used by the priest to purify his fingers and the chalice after Holy Communion.

Pyx – Small container used to carry Sacred Hosts; often used when visiting the sick.

Roman Missal – The book that sits on the Altar containing the prayers the priest uses for Mass.

Sacristy – One or more rooms attached to a church, usually near the Altar, where the clergy vest for Mass and where there is storage for sacred vessels, vestments, and other articles needed for liturgical use.

Sanctuary – Part of the church containing the Altar.

Stole – Long vestment worn around the neck by a priest or deacon.

Tabernacle – A cupboard or boxlike receptacle for the exclusive reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

Thurible – Metal container used to burn incense.

Thurifer – Person who carries the thurible.