



OUR LADY *of*
GOOD COUNSEL
CATHOLIC CHURCH

ALTAR SERVER TRAINING BOOKLET



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ALTAR SERVER PRAYER

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.**

DIRECTION OF INTENTION

My God, we give you our ministry. Please give us the grace to conduct ourselves during it in a manner most pleasing to you.

St. Francis DeSales & St. Jane de Chantal **Pray for Us**

Our Lady of Good Counsel **Pray for Us**

DEFINITION OF ALTAR SERVER

An altar server is generally a child or young adult, who serves at the altar during liturgical services, particularly Mass. They assist the priest and deacon by performing various tasks to support the celebration of the liturgy, contributing to the smooth and reverent conduct of the service. Duties include carrying the cross and candles during processions, holding the liturgical book(s) for the priest, dressing/undressing the altar with Communion vessels, and assisting with the washing of the priest's hands. Serving as an altar server is a wonderful privilege and can be a means for young people to develop a deeper understanding of the Mass and grow in their faith.

DRESS CODE FOR ALTAR SERVERS

- **SHOES** – dress shoes (preferably black or brown shoes for boys; black, brown or white for girls).
- **HAIR** – should be neat and trimmed, appropriate for boys and girls. Girls should have their hair styled in such a manner that it is not in their faces.
- **VESTMENTS** – servers wear white albs with an appropriate color cincture for the liturgical season or holy day.

ALTAR SERVER ROLES

- **CROSS BEARER** – This person carries in the crucifix at the beginning of Mass, takes the crucifix to go get the gifts and carries the crucifix out at the end of Mass.
- **CANDLES (usually 2) / CRESCENCE** – These people each carry a candle in the opening procession and exiting recession at the end of Mass. They also help to dress /undress the altar for Communion by taking items to and from the credence table to the altar. And, utilizing the lavabo bowl, pitcher & towel, they will assist by pouring water over Father's hands prior to Communion.
- **BOOK** – This person holds the book for Father to read the opening and closing prayer. This role is performed by the server sitting directly behind the Presider's chair.
- **INCENSOR (THURIBLE)** – Used on special occasions. This person carries the incensor in at the beginning of Mass and brings it to Father when needed during Mass.
- **INCENSE BOAT** –Used, along with the thurible, on special occasions. This person stays with the altar server who is carrying the incensor and has the container (boat) that contains the incense.

THE FOUR PARTS OF THE MASS

1. **Introductory Rites** – gathers and prepares the congregation for worship
 - Entrance procession, Greeting, Penitential Act, Gloria, Opening Prayer
2. **Liturgy of the Word** – God speaks through Scripture
 - 1st Reading, Responsorial Psalm, 2nd Reading, Gospel, Homily, Creed, Prayer of the Faithful
3. **Liturgy of the Eucharist** – the heart of the Mass
 - Offertory, Preparation of the Gifts, Consecration of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Communion
4. **Concluding Rites** – sends the congregation forth to live the faith
 - Concluding prayers, Final blessing, Dismissal

ALTAR SERVERS STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Before Mass

1. **Arrive and Vest:** Arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass. Put on an alb that fits properly, with the hem falling 2–3 inches above your shoes.
2. **Choose the Cincture:** Select the color that matches the liturgical season or holy day. Confirm the color by checking:
 - The calendar in the Minister's Room (most reliable)
 - The placard in the Minister's Room
 - The banner above the Altar (note: banners may not change for single holy days; always confirm with the calendar)
3. **Assign Roles:** With the lead server or other servers, decide who will take each responsibility.
4. **Gather for Prayer:** Meet in the Narthex 5–10 minutes before Mass to pray with other altar servers and liturgical ministers (*Gathering Prayer: Direction of Intention*).
5. **Line Up for the Procession:** Stay close to the Priest, Lectors, and others in the entrance procession.
6. **Listen for Instructions:** Watch for any special directions from the Sacristan or Priest.

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INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Procession

1. Line up after the pre-Mass prayer in the following order:

Order of Procession

[Thurifer / Incense – used only on special options]

Cross

Candle Candle

Server Server

MC / Other servers

Lector #2 w/ Book of the Gospel

(Deacon w/ Book of the Gospel)

Presider

If there are fewer servers, see the blue box instructions.

Altar Service Guidance when all servers are not present:

One Altar Server:

- Will carry in cross at procession
- Will **not** meet gift bearers with cross so they can dress the Altar.
- With no cross procession, Usher will assist by meeting gift bearers at gifts table and send them forth when Priest and Altar Server have descended the steps to receive gifts.

Two Altar Servers:

- No candles
- One carries the cross
- One processes
- Cross bearer will meet gift bearers to process with the cross, returning the cross to the holder and then returning to the Altar to assist other server with dressing the Altar.

2. Begin processing when the sacristan or priest gives the signal.
 3. Walk at a normal, steady pace—do not rush.
 4. Upon reaching the altar:
 - The **cross bearer** bows their head briefly, then places the crucifix on its stand and takes seat on bench behind presider’s chair closest to cross.
 - The **candle bearers** go up the steps, place their candles on the credence table behind the presider’s chair, bow to the altar, then move to their seats (behind the ambo) and remain standing.
 - Other servers without items either go directly to their seats or, if the priest pauses at the bottom of the steps, bow together with him before taking their seats.
 5. The **lector with the Book of the Gospels** places it in the altar’s acrylic stand, then either:
 - Returns to the bottom of the steps to bow with the priest, or
 - Goes directly to their pew if the priest continues to the presider’s chair.
-

Greeting

1. The priest begins Mass with the Sign of the Cross.
2. He welcomes the congregation, sometimes mentioning the day’s feast or readings.
3. The **Penitential Act** follows: the priest invites all to recall their sins. The assembly responds, “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy” (recited or sung).
4. The **Gloria** comes next (recited or sung).
 - *When the words “For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord…” are spoken/sung, the **book server approaches to hold the book for the priest.***
5. After the Gloria, the priest says, “Let us pray,” and reads the **Collect (Opening Prayer)**.
 - The book server stands slightly to the side so the priest can face the congregation.

6. When the prayer is finished, close the book and place it on the side table. **Return to your seat.**
7. All sit for the first reading, responsorial psalm, and second reading.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

1. **First Reading** – The first lector (already at the ambo from the announcements) proclaims the first reading.
 - *No action is required by the altar servers.*
2. After the first reading, the lector returns to the center foot of the steps and is met by the cantor. They bow together.
 - The lector takes their seat.
 - The cantor goes to the ambo to sing the Responsorial Psalm.
 - *No action is required by the altar servers.*
3. **Second Reading** – When the psalm is finished, the second lector comes forward, meets the cantor at the center, and they bow together.
 - The cantor returns to the choir.
 - The second lector proclaims the second reading from the ambo.
 - *No action is required by the altar servers.*
4. **Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia)** – When the choir begins the Alleluia, all stand. The priest or deacon goes to the ambo to proclaim the Gospel.
 - *No action is required by the altar servers.*
5. After the Gospel, all sit for the **Homily** given by the priest or deacon.
6. After the homily, the priest/deacon returns to the chair. The priest then stands and invites everyone to profess the faith.
 - All stand and recite the **Nicene Creed** or **Apostles' Creed**.
7. Near the end of the Creed, the second lector (or deacon) goes to the ambo for the **Prayer of the Faithful**.

8. The priest introduces the Prayer of the Faithful. The lector/deacon reads each intercession, with the assembly responding, “*Lord, hear our prayer.*”
 - After the intercessions, the priest concludes the prayer, and all respond “*Amen.*”
 - All sit.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Offertory Collection and Preparation of the Altar

1. After everyone is seated, the ushers collect the offertory. The cantor introduces the preparation of the gifts.
 - The **cross bearer** takes the crucifix to the back of church to meet the gift bearers and lead the procession.
 - Other servers **dress the altar**, bringing:
 - Cruet of water
 - Priest’s chalice, pall, purificator
 - Trays of ciboria and communion cups (see altar setup below)
 - *Note: The corporal is usually placed on the altar by the sacristan. If not, place it yourself.*



- If the **Book of the Gospels stand** is still on the altar, remove it and place it on the bottom shelf near of the small table that sits behind the altar and holds the ablution bowl.



- If the **Roman Missal** has not been placed by the priest, move it from the presider's table to the altar.
 - Servers who dressed the altar join the priest at the foot of the steps to receive the gifts.
2. When the **Cross Bearer** returns with the gift bearers:
- Place the crucifix back on its stand.
 - The gift bearers hand the gifts to the priest.
 - The priest hands the wine cruet to one server and the paten to another.
3. Returning to the altar with the priest:
- Place the paten on the altar or hand to the priest.
 - Hold cruets by the base with the handle facing the priest.
 - Remove the lid, and rest your free hand flat against your chest while the priest pours.
 - The priest pours wine into the chalice, then adds a drop of water.
 - Replace the lids and return the cruets to the credence table.

Lavabo (Washing of Hands)

1. Two servers bring forward the lavabo set (bowl, pitcher, and towel).
2. The server with the bowl drapes the towel over their arm.
3. The other server pours water from the pitcher.
4. After washing, return the items to the credence table.
5. All servers return to their seats (bowing if crossing the altar) and remain standing.
6. The priest invites the congregation to stand for the Eucharistic Prayer.

Eucharistic Prayer

1. The priest prays the preface and leads into the *Holy, Holy, Holy* (sung or recited).
 2. As the *Holy, Holy, Holy* is sung, servers go to the bottom of the steps and stand centered.
 3. All servers kneel after the *Holy, Holy, Holy*.
 4. The priest consecrates the host: “...*this is my body, which will be given up for you.*” He elevates the host.
 - *In some churches, bells are rung three times here.*
 5. The priest consecrates the chalice: “...*this is the cup of my blood...do this in memory of me.*” He elevates the chalice.
 - *In some churches, bells are rung three times here.*
 6. The priest proclaims the *Mystery of Faith* (sung or recited).
 7. The Eucharistic Prayer continues, concluding with: “*Through Him, with Him, and in Him...*”
 8. All respond with the *Great Amen* (sung or recited).
 9. After the *Great Amen*, all rise for the *Our Father*. Afterward, the *Sign of Peace* is shared.
-

Communion

1. The *Lamb of God* is sung or recited.
2. During the *Lamb of God*:
 - The sacristan (or deacon) retrieves Jesus from the Tabernacle.
 - Eucharistic Ministers line up:
 - Hosts on the left (ambo side).
 - Cups on the right (presider's chair side).
3. At the conclusion of the *Lamb of God*, the congregation and servers kneel.
 - *Eucharistic Ministers remain standing as they begin their ministry.*
4. After the priest receives Communion under both kinds, the sacristan and Eucharistic Ministers receive.
5. Servers receive Communion in the first two lines at stations A and B.
 - *If Fr. Metzger is presiding, servers go up the steps to receive first from him, then return to their seats.*
6. While Communion is being distributed, one server brings the cruet of water to the altar for purification, then returns to their seat.
7. After Communion, the priest/deacon or sacristan consolidates the remaining hosts into one large ciborium.
8. Servers stand when Jesus is returned to the Tabernacle.
9. Once all vessels are returned to the credence table, a server **undresses the altar**.

CONCLUDING RITES

Final Blessing and Dismissal

1. The priest invites everyone to stand for the closing prayer. When he says, "*Let us pray,*" the **book server** brings the book to the priest.
 - *Stand slightly to the side so the priest can face the congregation.*
2. After the closing prayer, the priest gives the announcements.

3. The priest concludes Mass with the **Sign of the Cross** and the **Dismissal** (“**Go forth in peace...**”).
4. As the cantor begins the closing hymn:
 - The **cross bearer** retrieves the cross and stands at the third pew.
 - The **candle bearers** retrieve their candles and stand at the second pew.
 - Any **additional servers** line up at the first pew.
 - The **priest** stands at the foot of the steps.
5. When the priest bows and turns, all servers bow and turn at the same time [*watch the direction the priest turns and try to turn the same way*], then process out together.

After Mass

- Return the crucifix to its stand.
- Return candles to the Minister’s Room.
- Hang up cincture and alb in the closet, placing them in proper size order.
- *Leave everything in the same condition—or better—than you found it.*

IMPORTANT SACRAMENTALS & DEFINITIONS



Alb & Cincture – an **alb** is what an altar server wears. It comes to 2-3 inches above the top of your shoes. Make sure to fix the collar. The **cincture** is the colored rope/belt that is worn around the waist. The color of the cincture corresponds to the liturgical season or holiday.



Altar – the table in the sanctuary where the sacrifice of the Mass occurs, in which the bread and wine are prepared and transformed into the body and blood of Christ.



Altar Server Candles – carried in at the processional and out at the end of Mass. The lit candle reminds us of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.



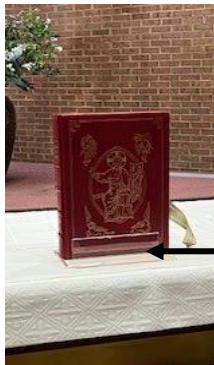
Aspergillum & Holy Water Bucket – a metal perforated ball, brush or other device used to sprinkle holy water at religious ceremonies. Aspergillum comes from the latin word “aspergere” meaning “to sprinkle.” The **holy water bucket** is known as the **aspersorium, or situla**.



Bells – rung three (3) times each when the body and blood are elevated by the priest. They generally sit on a foam board to eliminate excess sound. At OLG, these are used at special occasions.



Book – also known as the **Roman Missal**. It is a book containing the order of the Mass and the prayers that the priest.



Book of the Gospels Stand – Book of the Gospels is placed in this stand when it is carried in at the beginning of Mass. Altar server will remove it when the altar is dressed for Communion.



Storing Book of the Gospels Stand – Move the stand to the bottom shelf of the small table behind the altar.



CHALICE SET -- contains the chalice, purificator, paten, pall and corporal.

Chalice: the sacred, metal cup (made of brass or silver) used to hold the wine that becomes the Precious Blood of Christ during Mass.

Corporal: a folded, square linen white cloth placed under the chalice and paten during Mass to catch any fragments of the Eucharist. It is folded on top of the pall.

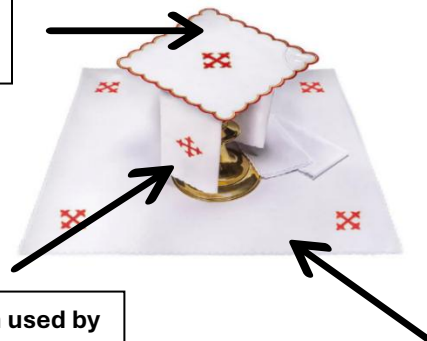
Paten: the small, flat metal plate, usually matching the chalice, used to hold the host which will become the Body of Jesus.

Pall: a stiff, square covered in cloth placed over the chalice to protect its contents.

Purificator: a long, rectangular, narrow linen cloth used to wipe the rim of the chalice and/or communion cup after a person takes a drink. The purificator is also used to clean up spills.

ANOTHER VIEW

Pall – stiff square of linen that is placed over the chalice to keep dust or insects from the Blood of Christ.



Purificator – white linen cloth used by the priest or EM during Communion.

Corporal – linen altar cloth used for the celebration of the Eucharist. It goes under the priest chalice to capture any pieces of the body of Christ.



Ciborium – a metal container with a lid used to distribute the body of Christ at Holy Communion or used to store the consecrated hosts in the Tabernacle.



Communion Cup – holds the wine during Holy Communion. Wine is transformed into the Precious Blood during the consecration.



Cruets – hold water and wine for Communion.



Lavabo Bowl & Pitcher – used to wash the priest's hands during Holy Communion. Don't forget the hand towel which towel goes on the arm of the hand that is holding the bowl.



Monstrance – an ornate vessel used to display the consecrated Host during Eucharistic adoration. The Host is held in a glass center called a **luna** so it can be seen and adored.



Paschal Candle – the tall candle that is blessed at the Easter Vigil and used during the Easter season, baptisms and funerals.



Processional Cross / Crucifix – the crucifix carried in and out of Mass.



Tabernacle – sacred container that contains the consecrated Eucharist (body & blood of Christ) are outside of Mass.



Thurible – a metal incense burner suspended from chains, in which incense is burned during special worship services.



Ablution Bowl – a small, covered dish of water used to wash the fingers of a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. It is accompanied by a small linen towel to dry fingers when finished.

CREDESCENCE TABLE SET UP



Credence Table Setup – working from right to left, this is the order that items come to the altar during Communion set up.

1. Priest's Communion Set & cruet of water;
2. Cup tray placed on the far side of the altar (presider chair side)
3. Ciboria tray placed on the ambo side of the altar
4. LAST TO COME OFF THE TABLE is the lavabo bowl, pitcher & towel to wash the priest's hands.



Storing Book of the Gospels Stand – When setting the altar for Communion, move the stand to the bottom shelf of the small table behind the altar...see side picture.

ALTAR SETUP AND FOLDING OF CORPORAL



Altar set up should look like this.



Altar set up with trays.

Corporal—to dress—placed folded on the altar, with raw edge on right and folded edge on left...open first/top flap (1) right to left; (2) open next flap left to right; (3) open next flap up and (2) last flap down. (Sacristan is placing corporal at start of Mass).

Corporal—to undress—fold (1) bottom up; (2) top down; (3) right in; (4) left in and you will have the raw edge on the right and the folded edge on the left (just like it started)

WHAT ARE THE LITURGICAL SEASONS?

There are many liturgical seasons that different denominations celebrate. During each season, or time of year, specific colors are worn, churches are decorated, and portions of the scripture are read to celebrate. The 8 most common seasons in western Christianity are: **Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Time of the Church or Ordinary Time, Advent, and Christmas.**

Liturgical colors, meanings, and seasons

LITURGICAL SEASON	TIME OF YEAR	COLOR	MEANING
EPIPHANY (sometimes referred to as Time of the Church, or Ordinary Time)	January	GREEN	Life, hope, anticipation
LENT	February-March	PURPLE* <i>*Priest wears Rose on the 4th Sunday of Lent</i>	Penance, sacrifice, preparation
HOLY WEEK: Palm Sunday, Good Friday	The week immediately preceding Easter	RED	God's love, blood, fire, celebrations of Martyrs
HOLY WEEK: Holy Thursday		WHITE AND/OR GOLD	Purity, light, glory, joy
EASTER	March or April	WHITE AND/OR GOLD	Purity, light, glory, joy
PENTECOST	Late May/Early June	RED	God's love, blood, fire, celebrations of Martyrs
ORDINARY TIME	After Pentecost—ends when Advent begins	GREEN	Life, hope, anticipation
ADVENT	End of November- Early December	PURPLE* <i>*Priest wears Rose on the 3rd Sunday of Advent</i>	Penance, sacrifice, preparation
CHRISTMAS	December	WHITE AND/OR GOLD	Purity, light, glory, joy

OTHER OCCASIONS: ALTAR SERVER CINCTURE COLORS –

- FUNERALS: **WHITE--preferred (signifying celebration of new life in Christ)**
(Purple is an option -- Fr. Kumar prefers purple. Check if uncertain.)
- WEDDINGS: WHITE
- CONFIRMATION: RED

THE MINISTERS AT MASS & DEFINITIONS

Priest – Specially ordained men who consecrate and offer the Body and Blood of Jesus at Mass. They forgive sins, perform baptisms, marriages, funeral, run the parish and the people closer to God. Their ordination to the priesthood can be traced to the Apostles who were the first priests after Jesus.

Deacon – A Deacon is like a priest in training. He can assist in preaching, perform baptisms, marriages and help run the parish. He does not offer Mass or hear confessions.

Altar Servers – A young boy or girl, or an adult who is specially trained to assist the priest at Mass.

Eucharistic Ministers – A person who is specially conferred by the Bishop to assist the priest in giving communion. They also can bring communion to people who are sick at home or in the hospital.

Lector – The person who reads the Epistles (first and second readings) and the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass.

Sacristan – The person who prepares and sets up everything for Mass. Their ministry is the care of the sacristy, sanctuary, vestments and sacred vessels, etc.

Bishop – A Bishop is higher in rank than a priest. He's like their boss. He has the authority to ordain priests. This authority is given to him by the Pope.

Cardinal – A Cardinal is a high church official ranking next in line to the Pope. He assists and advises the Pope, consecrates Bishops and, along with other Cardinals, elects the Pope.

Pope – The Pope is the supreme authority of the Catholic Church. He is sometimes called "Pontiff" and/or "Holy See," and will be the leader of the Catholic church until he dies.

SACRED SPACES AND TERMS FOR SERVERS

- Sanctuary:** Sacred space surrounding the altar. Usually elevated from the nave.
- Altar:** The table in the sanctuary where the sacrifice of the Mass occurs, in which the bread and wine are prepared and transformed into the body and blood of Christ.
- Nave:** The area where the congregation sits.
- Ambo:** An elevated platform or stand from which the readings of Scripture, the Gospel, and the homily are proclaimed during Mass.
- Credence Table:** A side table in the sanctuary used to hold items needed for the celebration of the Eucharist, such as the bread and wine before consecration, the chalice, paten, cruets, and lavabo bowl and towel. The table is typically placed near the wall on the side of the sanctuary where the readings are proclaimed.

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