



## Altar Server Guidelines at Our Lady of the Mountains September 2009

To be a servant of the altar of Christ's sacrifice is one of the greatest privileges a lay person can have. As one who participates in the Holy Mass in such an intimate way, and in such a visible way witnesses to the gathered community the appropriate manner of worship and the dignity which should be bestowed upon the Holy Eucharist, it is therefore important to lay down specific rubrics for serving, as well as guidelines of dress and conduct by which all who serve at Christ's altar should follow.

This document should help you to prayerfully consider your decision to become an altar server. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chris Owens, the Director of Catechesis.

## **Self-Examination: Am I prepared to learn to serve at the altar?**

These questions should help you to know whether you are ready to begin your server training. If you are unable to answer these questions affirmatively, then they should be a guide to help you prepare.

Have I received First Communion?

Do I go to Confession regularly?

Do I say my prayers daily?

Do I know the main parts of the Mass?

Do I know the responses during the Mass?

Do I know the Confiteor (I confess)?

The Gloria?

The Credo (Nicene Creed)?

The Sanctus (Holy, Holy)?

The Pater Noster (Lord's Prayer)?

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)?

Do I understand what it means to be a servant (See John 13:1-17)?

## Basic Expectations for Servers

When deciding whether to become an altar server, please discern prayerfully. To serve at the altar is an honor that carries with it some basic requirements and expectations. When you choose to be an altar server, you are representing both the parish and your fellow servers even when you aren't vested. Please keep this in mind in the way you dress, talk and behave both in and out of church.

The following are to be observed by all servers at Our Lady of the Mountains:

- Always show up 15 minutes before Mass starts if you are serving. Vest immediately upon arrival and prepare for prayers before Mass.
- If you are a server, even if you are not on the schedule, always dress as if you were going to serve when you attend Mass (so you can fill in if needed!).
- If you are not going to be able to serve on a particular Sunday, contact Mr. Chris as soon as you know. If you do not show up without prior notification twice, you'll be removed from the regular rotation of servers until you meet with Mr. Chris to discuss why.
- Follow the dress code for servers:

### Males

Pants – black, brown, grey, or khaki dress pants with a belt  
Socks dark colored dress socks  
Shoes - black dress shoes - no athletic shoes  
Shirts - solid color dress shirt with a collar  
Jewelry - no earring or any other piercing. No bracelets.  
Hair - nicely combed, no unnatural colors

### Females

Dresses / Skirts - at least knee length and not form fitting or tight  
Slacks - dress slacks, colors same as for males  
Stockings / tights - black, white or nude solid color hose or tights  
Tops - opaque fabric with a collar and sleeves  
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Jewelry- stud earrings- no dangling earrings, no other piercing. No bracelets.  
Hair - nicely combed, up in a pony tail if long enough, no unnatural colors  
Makeup - if used, lightly applied  
Perfume - please don't wear perfume

- If you need to go to confession, try to go on the Saturday before you serve so you will be able to receive Holy Communion at Mass.
- To be given more responsibilities at Mass, you have to pass the test (90%) for the next level of server training.

## **Altar Server Program at Our Lady of the Mountains**

The Altar Server Program at Our Lady of the Mountains is on a multi-stage system. In order to advance to the next stage, a server must pass a test and meet the other requirements. When a server feels they are ready, they may ask to take the test, keeping in mind that it is up to the Coordinator for Altar Servers to make the final determination.

Four Levels of Servers (explained in detail below):

Guardian Angel Servers: Process in to Mass and carry torches

St. John Berchmans Servers: Process with crucifix, handle altar missal

St. Tarsicius Servers: Assist at the altar with cruets, lavabo bowl, ring bells.

Senior Altar Servers:

Have been Confirmed

Act as head servers at Mass

Serve at weddings and funerals

Can be thurifers

Know how to serve for Benediction and Mass with a Bishop

### **Minimum requirements to be Guardian Angel Servers:**

- Received First Communion
- Go to Mass every Sunday
- Be able to sit still
- Be able to follow directions
- Pass a test on the following information:

What do altar servers do?

Altar servers assist Father and the deacon at Mass and set an example for the congregation by paying attention to the Mass and carrying out their duties with solemnity and reverence. Serving at the altar is also a time to discern your vocation.

Know proper posture

- Standing - If you aren't holding anything, put your palms together with your fingers pointed up and your thumbs touching your chest. If you are holding something, hold it in your right hand with your left hand open against your chest. Stand up straight.
- Kneeling - Keep your hands folded the same as if you are standing. Don't lean against the seat behind you.
- Sitting - Sit with your hands on your knees.
- Bowing - There are two kinds of bows. A bow of the head and a profound bow.

- Genuflecting - When you genuflect, touch your right knee to the floor while keeping your back straight. Keep your hands together as if you are standing.
- In general, pay attention to what is going on in the sanctuary, don't fiddle with your hair, vestments, or other things. Never hurry.

Know what the basic parts of the Mass are:

- Liturgy of the Word - This is the part of the Mass where we listen to the Word of God and to Father (or the deacon) explain the readings.
- Liturgy of the Eucharist - This is the part of the Mass where the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ and we receive Him in the Eucharist.

Be able to give at least a one sentence description of the Eucharist:

- "The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament which contains the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine."

Know who one of the patron saints of servers is:

- St. Tarsicius was a Roman boy who was carrying the Eucharist to some people who couldn't attend Mass. Some non-Catholic boys killed him because he wouldn't give them the Eucharist he was carrying.
- St. John Berchmans lived 400 years ago. He wanted to be a priest from a very young age and entered the Jesuits when he was 17. He wanted to be a missionary to China but died when he was 22 of unknown causes. He was named a saint because of his Christ-like kindness, courtesy and devotion to serving at Mass.

Know what and where the credence table is.

- The credence table is where all items used during the Mass are staged.

Know when to bow at Mass

Profound Bow

- When passing in front of the altar during Mass - to the altar.
- During the Creed at the words "By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man."

Bow of the Head

- When giving something or receiving something from Father or the deacon
- When the names of the Trinity, Mary, "Jesus Christ," or the saint of the day is mentioned
- Before receiving Communion

Know when to genuflect at Mass

- When entering and leaving the sanctuary at the beginning and end of Mass.
- Anytime you pass in front of the tabernacle outside of Mass.

Servers who meet the minimum requirements for serving will be taught to:

- Walk in procession
- Carry processional torches (if able)

## **Minimum requirements in addition to above to be St. John Berchmans' Servers:**

Be able to carry processional candles and the crucifix

Know the names and purposes of the following articles used at Mass:

- Missal - The Missal contains all of the prayers for the Mass. At the beginning and end of Mass, one server will hold the Missal for Father at his chair so he can read the prayers. The Missal is also placed on the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- Lavabo bowl and towel - The lavabo bowl (lavabo is Latin for wash) is used by Father to wash his hands during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. He will dry his hands with the towel. One server will hold the bowl and towel and another will pour water from a cruet over his hands.
- Cruets - Cruets are small glass bottles that hold wine and water.
- Ciborium - the ciborium is a dish with a lid that contains hosts.
- Torches - Torches are carried by servers in the following processions: opening, Gospel and closing
- Processional crucifix- The processional crucifix is carried by a server during the opening and closing procession. The processional crucifix is put out of view during Mass.
- Chalice - The Chalice is where the wine mixed with water becomes the Body and Blood of Christ during the Consecration. The chalice is a gold cup that is brought to the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. On Sundays, several chalices are usually prepared so more people can receive the Precious Blood.
- Purificator - The purificator is a cloth used to clean the chalice.
- Patens - Patens are held by servers under the hands or chins of those receiving the host during Communion to help prevent the Body of Christ from falling on the floor. Father also uses a small paten during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This paten holds the large host that he breaks.

Know the names and something about both patron saints of servers (see above)

Know how to carry bowls for holy water blessings

Know how to light candles - In the sacristy, light a taper. Walk in to the sanctuary, then light the candles on the epistle side (right, when facing from congregation) of the altar first and then on the gospel side (left). In the case of a High Mass, where there are multiple candles, start with the ones closest to the altar, and work your way out.

To extinguish the candles, follow instructions in the opposite order.

Know the different colors for the liturgical seasons

- Green - used during ordinary time
- Violet / Purple - used during Advent and Lent and at Masses for the dead
- White - used during Easter and Christmas seasons, on feasts of Jesus, Mary and saints who weren't martyrs. Can also be used at Masses for the dead.
- Red - Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, Apostles, Evangelists and martyrs

- Rose - Gaudete and Laetare Sundays in Advent and Lent
- Black - All Souls Day and Masses for the dead.
- Gold and Silver can be worn on special feasts such as Easter and Christmas

Know the parts of the Mass:

- Entrance Procession or Processional - the rite (ceremony) at the beginning of Mass where Father, the Deacon, and the servers enter the Sanctuary
- Penitential Rite - the part of the Mass where we ask forgiveness to our sins
- Gloria – The “Song of the Angels.” The hymn following our asking forgiveness praising God for His glory.
- Collect (opening prayer) - the first prayer of the Mass that changes every week
- 1st and 2nd Reading - readings from the Old Testament and parts of the New Testament, except the Gospel.
- Responsorial Psalm - the hymn that comes between the 1st and 2nd reading
- Gospel - the reading from the Bible that tells about the life of Christ
- Homily - the part of the Mass where Father or the Deacon explain the readings
- Creed (Credo) - the part of the Mass where we all profess our faith in God, His Son, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.
- Prayers of the Faithful - the part of the Mass where we pray for those in need
- The Offertory - the part of the Mass where the gifts are brought to the altar
- Eucharistic Prayer and Consecration - the part of the Mass where the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ
- Communion - the part of the Mass where we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine.
- Closing Prayer - the final prayer of the Mass
- Recessional - the procession that occurs after the end of Mass when everyone leaves the Sanctuary.

Servers who meet these requirements will be taught to:

- Carry the processional crucifix (if able)
- Hold the Missal (if able)
- Light candles

**Minimum requirements in addition to above to be St. Tarsisius' Servers:**

Know what the different vestments are called and used for:

- Amice - a white cloth that goes around the neck to cover "street clothes"
- Alb - (alba means white) The alb is the white garment normally worn by all serving at the altar.
- Cincture - a rope tied around the waist over the alb
- Stole - a long rectangle of cloth in the liturgical color of the day worn under the chasuble or dalmatic. A priest wears it over both shoulders and a deacon wears it over one.
- Chasuble - the large vestment that goes over Father's head. This vestment matches the color of the day.

- Dalmatic - the vestment for a deacon which is similar to a chasuble but has sleeves. A deacon doesn't have to wear the dalmatic but it is highly recommended.
- Cope - a special cape-like vestment that a priest wears when doing Benediction.
- Humeral Veil- a special rectangular shaped vestment with tassels on the end that clergy wear when processing with the Blessed Sacrament, or when giving blessings with the Blessed Sacrament.
- Cassock - a black cloak-like vestment sometimes worn by altar servers and master's of ceremony. Some priests wear cassocks as clericals.
- Surplice - a white "shirt" that goes over a cassock during Mass. A priest who is attending Mass, but not con-celebrating, will wear his stole over a cassock and surplice. This is called attending Mass "in choir".

Know the names and functions of the different parts of the chalice "dressing":

- Paten - a small gold plate that goes on top the purificator on the chalice. This plate holds the large host used by Father at Mass.
- Pall- A stiff square of white cloth that goes over the paten. It is used to cover the chalice once wine has been poured in it to keep anything from falling in.
- Burse - A square pocket in the liturgical color of the day that holds the corporal. It goes on top of the chalice veil.
- Corporal - A large square of white cloth that goes under the chalices and ciboria on the altar. It is used to catch any bits of the host that fall during Mass.
- Chalice Veil - A square of fabric in the liturgical color of the day that goes over the chalice when it is not being used.
- Purificator - A white rectangle of fabric used for cleaning the chalice. It is placed in between the paten and the chalice.
- Chalice - The large cup used to consecrate the wine at Mass. Other chalices may be placed on the altar if Communion under both kinds is being distributed to the congregation.

Know the Fruits of Holy Communion

- Brings us closer to Christ
- Gives us grace to avoid sin
- Washes away venial sin
- Brings us into unity with the whole Church
- Commits us to helping the poor
- Commits us to the unification of all Christians

Know the Holy Days of Obligation and their dates

- Christmas (December 25)
- Ascension (40 days after Easter or the Sunday following)
- Mother of God (January 1)
- Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- The Assumption (August 15)
- All Saints (November 1)

Know how to use bells

- Don't be timid - ring them like you mean it.
- When you finish ringing the bells, make sure they are put back on the pillow to avoid extra noise.
- Bells are rung three times during a regular Mass:
  - When Father holds his hands over the offerings during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is called the Epiclesis and the bells are rung once.
  - During the Consecration, the bells are rung three times when he lifts the host and again when he lifts the chalice.
  - At the moment of First Communion. This is when Father places the consecrated host in to his mouth. The bell is rung once.

Serve at two weekday Masses a month during the summer

Go to Confession at least every other month

Servers who meet these requirements will be taught to:

- Ring bells at Mass
- Assist with cruets and lavabo bowl

**Minimum requirements in addition to above to be a Senior Altar Server:**

Receive Confirmation

Know how to use a thurible

Know what to do when serving at weddings and funerals and other special liturgies

Serve at one Mass a week during the summer

Know the ordinary chants of the Mass in Latin

Know how to assist at a Mass with the bishop

Know how to assist at Benediction

Servers who meet these requirements will be taught to:

- Serve for weddings and funerals
- Serve at Masses with the bishop
- Serve as MCs at Mass
- Train level 1 & 2 servers
- Serve at Benediction

**Altar Server's Prayer**  
(Before serving Holy Mass)

Open my mouth, O Lord, to bless Thy Holy Name. Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts. Enlighten my understanding and inflame my will that I may serve more worthily at Thy holy altar. O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest, obtain for me the most important grace of knowing my vocation in life. Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience so that I may ever behold the priest as a representative of God and willingly follow him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ. Amen.

**Altar Server's Prayer of Thanksgiving**  
(After serving Holy Mass)

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

# Basic Expectations for Servers

(sign and return this copy)

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Shoes - black dress shoes - no athletic shoes  
Shirts - solid color dress shirt with a collar  
Jewelry - no earring or any other piercing. No bracelets.  
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## Females

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- To be given more responsibilities at Mass, you have to pass the test (90%) for the next level of server training.

I understand the rules for serving at Mass and promise to follow them.

Server \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_  
(if server is not yet confirmed)

Date \_\_\_\_\_