

Introduction to the Altar Server Ministry

Welcome!

You are now a member of a very special group of young people in our parish who have answered God's call to ministry. As an altar server at St. Ethelbert's parish, you are one of the liturgical ministers of our parish and have special tasks to perform during the liturgies, especially during the celebration of the Eucharist at mass. Serving at mass will involve learning some new words and terms. You will also be asked to perform some very specific duties. It is important to realize that you are serving God in helping with prayers and with the Eucharist.

This guide covers the main details of serving at mass. This guide should help you become more comfortable and refined in your role serving the altar.

Expectations

As an altar server, you are involved in the holiest and most sacred events of Catholic worship. As you assist the priest, so you make worship more reverent, efficient, and beautiful. Your service is very important!

At the altar, your service is directed firstly to God, secondly to help the clergy, and thirdly as assistance to the people who are gathered by God for worship. Your actions are visible and public, but you are never a performer. A good server is not only skilled in craft or duty at the altar, but also a humble and sincere person. The good server is a member of a team working together in harmony with others, serving for the glory of God. The good server is careful and reverent.

Altar serving developed out of the temple servers of the Old Testament and as the church evolved, developed from the order of the acolyte. When there were not enough deacons to assist the bishop or priest in the Mass, their role was deputed to acolytes. Altar serving is part of a noble tradition that has developed in the Church and is a serious responsibility.

This manual is to help you become "imbued with the spirit of the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). Altar servers "must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). The three ideals of a server are discipline, decorum, and piety.

Discipline

You must be trained to serve. Training involves discipline. Discipline requires teamwork. You are always part of a team when serving. Precise teamwork makes a great act of worship more beautiful, peaceful, and prayerful. It draws people deeper into worship.

Discipline involves obedience. Obedience to the clergy, obedience to the master of ceremonies, obedience to the sacristans, obedience to the team lead, obedience to the coordinators, obedience to the law of the Church, obedience to correct procedures.

Decorum

Decorum means "what is proper." It is important that you, as an altar server, be attentive and sensitive to the presence of God during the Mass and afterwards. God calls us to respond to his great love and mercy with a sense of reverence and gratefulness. We must all help each other to remember to show reverence to God at all times, but most especially when you are serving. You are expected to show reverence during mass by:

1. Sitting still, be calm and settle your nerves
2. Only speak, when necessary
3. Responding with the congregation at the appropriate times
4. Doing your best to enter into the spirit of the celebration – sing with God's family
5. Keeping your movements smooth and slow (not sluggish though!)
6. Using Prayer hands and demonstrate reverence at all times
7. Wearing the proper clothing
8. Being neat and orderly in appearance and movement.

Decorum also means displaying a sense of dignity and reverence. It shows how to respect the presence of the Lord.

Piety

Piety is the soul or spirit of all our worship of God. It's an attitude that directs your whole life toward God. It conveys "I'm doing this for you, my God." Sincere piety recognizes that God caused me, that I came from God, and that I am going back to God. This keeps one humble. Piety is an attitude of adoration, sorrow for sins, thanksgiving for our lives, and interceding for others.