

The Altar Corps Handbook

Introduction and Pre-Mass Considerations

Welcome to the St. Mary's Altar Server Corp. I thank you for offering your time and energy to help us make the Mass a beautiful and worshipful experience for everyone. I hope we will get to know each other better over the next year, and that we will help each other grow closer to the God we serve.

First, let's start with a couple of things that you should remember when you are preparing to serve at a particular Mass

- Always arrive at least 15 minutes before the Mass you are assigned to.
- Wear clothing that shows you respect what you are doing
 - This means wearing nice shoes (not sneakers or sandals!), appropriate pants (not jeans or shorts) or dress (for the girls), and an appropriate shirt. (this usually means without obvious logos and a neutral color that won't show too brightly through the white of the alb).
- Make sure to come to the Church with your alb [and cincture]. [When dressing, try to match the color of the cincture with the liturgical color of the day. This is the color of the chasuble worn by the priest at the Mass.]

Setting the Altar

Make sure the altar and Tabernacle candles are lit 10 minutes prior to Mass starting

Make sure the credence table has water, the bowl, and a towel

Glossary

Next, here's a list of important terms to learn. There is no need to memorize these all at once, but you will learn them as we go along.

- Alb = the white robe that is worn by servers. It represents the white robes we read about in Revelation, symbolizing purity through symbolizing the white baptismal garment that we were all covered with at our baptism.
- Cincture = the rope worn around the alb.
- Chalice = the cup.
- Paten = the circular dish that the host goes on.
- Host = the piece of bread that becomes the Body of Christ.
- Cruets = the glass/crystal vessels used for the water and wine.
- Credence table = the table on the side of the altar that has the cruets, chalice, bowl for hand washing, and other things.
- Pall = the square hard cloth that goes over the chalice.
- Chalice veil: The colored cloth that is draped over the chalice.
- Corporal = the large cloth that is laid over the altar before the chalice and paten are placed there.
 - “Perma-corporal” = The term I will use for the large corporal that is usually always on the altar. Only some of the priests use an additional corporal besides this one.
- Ambo = the stand from where the readings are read and the priest gives his homily.
- Sanctuary = the formal name for the area encompassing the altar, ambo, chairs, etc. For our purposes, this is the raised, carpeted portion of the church around the altar.
- Sacramentary: The proper name for “the Book.” It contains all the prayers for the Mass.

- Offertory: This is the time in the Mass when the “Offertory song” is sung, the ushers take up the collection, and the gifts are brought forward by people in the pews.
- “Purifying”: In the Mass, this is the time when the priests “washes” the chalice and paten after giving out Communion.
 - Gifts: These are the water and wine on the table in the middle of the church.

Take your positions...

Now that you are ready to serve, let’s talk about how exactly one serves well at the Altar. There are basically four positions used for Sunday Mass, they are:

- Cross bearer (Crucifer)
- Candle Bearer 1 (Candle 1)
- Candle Bearer 2 (Candle 2)
- Book Bearer (Book)

With these four present at every Sunday Mass¹, the services can be split up so that everyone knows exactly what they need to do. In general (though certainly not required), the tallest is Crucifer, the two with the closest height become Candle 1 & 2, and the Book is the one with the best grip. Servers should be lined up outside the cry room 5 minutes prior to Mass beginning, ready to go.

Masters of Ceremonies

MC, meaning Master of Ceremonies, is a special position in the Altar Corps. The MC’s job is to take care of more solemn Masses to make sure everything runs smoothly. Because solemn occasions, such as Christmas or Easter, have different things that happen within the context of the Mass, the MC helps prepare the servers for that Mass to understand the changes and adapt to them. It is especially important to listen to what the MC has to say, because he or she is

¹ In the event of one or more servers absent, the roles will be adjusted accordingly. See page # 3

responsible for helping the servers make the Mass beautiful on special occasions. Please cooperate with the MCs to this end!

The duties of each

In this time let us mark out exactly how each job is responsible for.

Crucifer: He/She carries the Cross in procession up, back when it is time for the gifts to be brought forth, rings the bells, and processes the Cross back after Mass. In a sense, the Crucifer sets the pace for the procession, and should be aware of this fact when they walk. If they go too fast, everyone behind him/her will have to speed up, giving a hurried look. He/She sits on the 'St. Joseph' side of the altar.

Candle 1: He/She takes a candle processing up, brings the chalice to the altar, [goes with Father to receive the gifts (the wine in particular)], helps set the altar by bringing up the wine, and then holds the finger towel for when the priest washes his hands, brings the chalice back to the credence table, and processes to the back with a candle. The primary duty of Candle 1 is to help set the altar. He/She sits on the Mary side of the altar

Candle 2: He/She takes the other candle processing up, and takes it processing back. [This is the easiest of the positions, and also doubles as the "liturgical flower pot."] Your presence gives a sense of symmetry, so you have to look the best while standing or kneeling. You sit alongside the Crucifer on St. Joseph's side.

Book: The Book holds the book for the priest at the opening prayer, brings the book up to the altar at its preparation, brings the water up for the preparation of the chalice, pours water over the fingers of the priest for the washing, rings the bells, brings water up for the purification afterwards, removes the book from the altar, holds the book for the closing prayer, and then processes down without the book. The Book's primary duty is holding the book for the priest and secondarily helping set the altar. Learning how to hold the book in respect to the priest, and when to bring the book up are the most important things to consider. He/She sits alongside Candle 1 on Mary's side.

Additional Note: When bringing the book up to the priest at the opening and closing prayers, try to have the book open to the right page and be standing in front of the priest before

he says “Let us pray.” To do this well, learn markers during the Mass that cue you to get the book ready (for example, using the second mention of Christ during the Creed as the cue to get the book and open it to the right page)

In the absence of a server

In the event that one or more of the servers is absent in the beginning of Mass, here are how the roles are to be divided:

Three servers available: The book is left on its stand on the credence table. The Crucifer’s job remains the same. Candle 1’s job remains the same. Candle 2 now sits next to Candle 1 and assumes the Book’s responsibilities.

Two servers available: Crucifer and Book process up. The change comes after the Crucifer leads the gift procession. Book receives the wine, and after Crucifer returns Cross to stand, goes to the front of the altar, bows, and then assumes Candle 1’s responsibility of setting the altar.

Crucifer will ring the bells (one set of bells is rung in this instance). After bringing back the chalice to the credence table, Crucifer will go to the front of the altar, bow, and return to his/her normal seat on St. Joseph’s side in time to get the Cross and process to the back

One server available: Server processes up not holding anything and assumes responsibilities of both Book and Candle 1. There is no gift procession in this instance

If you are a server not set for a particular day, and you feel generous, feel free to check in with the sacristy if we are in need of extra servers. God will never be outdone in generosity!

Working as a group

An important aspect of serving to remember is that everyone is working together; it is not one person’s performance that makes a reverent Mass, but everyone’s combined effort. What I mean by this is that we need to learn how to work and think as a group when serving. One of the most noticeable ways we can do so is learning to “walk together,” literally! When we process in, we want to walk up the aisle at a pace slow enough that it does not look like we are casually approaching God or hurrying, yet also not slow enough that we cause a traffic pileup or make ourselves the center of attention by distracting others.

This is the most important between the two candle bearers, who should always walk exactly side by side, candles as close together in height as possible. Candle bearers should talk about how high they can or want to carry their candles before Mass begins so that they know what each other can do well. When on the altar, moving together becomes the focus. When it is time to move as a group, there should be a designated moment or sign that signals all the servers to get up and move together. Doing things in union makes every action look better, and gives the impression to the people in the pews that you respect and know what you are doing. That feeling translates for them into a more reverent spirit of worship—this is why we do everything we do!

Priest Particularities

Every priest celebrates Mass a little differently, depending on what they like and what they are allowed to do differently. As servers, there are a couple of things that we have to remind ourselves to do differently depending on who is celebrating Mass:

Fr. Corey: Instead of purifying right after Communion, Fr. Corey purifies after Mass. Because of this, instead of bringing the water up after Mass, bring the chalice back to the credence table instead. Fr. Corey also does not replace the chalice veil at the purification.

Fr. Cyrus: He prefers to use the chalice veil. When you bring the chalice up to the altar, you leave the veil on. When he takes it off, the server takes it back to the credence table. After communion, when the chalice is being prepared, bring the veil back and hold it spread out using both hands. The front should be facing you (if it is noticeable) so that when the priest or deacon takes it the front is facing away from him.

Fr. Ed: When Fr. Ed purifies, he takes the water himself and pours it, then hands it back to the server. Likewise, when he is done preparing the chalice after communion, he will hand the chalice to the server, rather than leave it on the altar to be picked up.

Msgr. Scull: Msgr. Scull does not use the bookstand, so when Book brings up the book, bring it up without it.

Detailed Ordo

- Introductory Rite

- Procession
 - The Procession line up goes: **Cross, Candles, Book**, Eucharistic ministers, Lector, Deacon and Priest. **Cross** walks up the main isle at a steady pace, without rushing, and when he or she reaches the front of the altar, goes to the right, replaces the Cross in the stand (making sure it is securely in), and then goes to his/her seat (the second one from the priest's chair). **The candles** walk up and then both go to the left, replacing the candles in the altar server room, and then **Candle 1** sits in the chair closest to the credence table while **Candle 2** crosses in front of the altar and sits besides the **Crucifer. Book** processes up and goes immediately to his/her seat nearest the deacon's chair.

- Sign of the Cross
 - The priest begins the liturgy, as all good things, "in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

- Greeting
 - The priest may have some introductory remarks, welcoming us to the celebration of the Eucharist.

- The Penitential Act
 - There are two options for the priest to use. Either, "We confess, to Almighty God..." or the Deacon will recite "Lord, have mercy"

- Gloria
 - This is a hymn to God of praise and thanksgiving. About midway through, **Book** should prepare the page that the priest will read from momentarily. At the last line, "...in the glory of God the Father. Amen" **Book** should go over to the priest. You want to have the book open and ready for the priest to read from before he says "Let us pray."

- Opening Prayer
 - The opening prayer is read, and when the priest lowers his arms from the “orans” (praying) position, **Book** closes the book and returns it to the stand under the credence table.
- Liturgy of the Word
 - The First Reading
 - The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament (or the Acts of the Apostles during Easter)
 - Responsorial Psalm
 - This is a psalm recited by the cantor or choir to which we respond.
 - The Second Reading
 - The second reading is taken from the New Testament letters.
 - The Gospel
 - When the Alleluia is sung, we stand with the priest and prepare our hearts to receive God’s message to us. When the priest or deacon gets to the ambo, we turn to face him. At the *Glory to you O Lord*, we form crosses over our foreheads, mouths, and hearts, saying that we want Christ to reign in our minds, our words, and our hearts.
 - The Homily
 - The priest or deacon gives an explanation of the readings we heard and applies it to living the Christian life so we can follow Christ more closely.
 - Profession of Faith
 - We recite what we believe about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Although we have gotten into the habit of

saying this from memory, try paying attention to what you are professing to believe, and think about those words.

- The Prayer of the Faithful (Intercessions)
 - The deacon will lead us in praying for things that the world or ourselves need.
- The Liturgy of the Eucharist
 - Preparation of the Altar
 - This is the most involved part for servers. When the offertory song is started, **Cross** gets the Cross ready and processes down the aisle to the table where the gifts are and stand ready. When the priest comes down from the altar to receive the gifts, process back up leading the gift-bearers and return the Cross, and then return to your seat.
 - Meanwhile, **Candle 1** brings the chalice to the altar (placing it besides the perma-corporal, not on it) on the right side and **Book** brings up the book and stand and places them on the left side, then they return to their seats.
 - Preparation of the Gifts
 - When the priest and deacon go to receive the gifts, **Candle 1** goes with them, going to the left side of the priest. The priest will receive the wine and hand it to **Candle 1**, and hand the ciborium to the deacon. **Candle 1** brings the wine back to the credence table, removes the stopper, and then goes with **Book**, who has gotten the water, to the altar. The deacon takes the wine first, then the water. After this, both bow and return to the credence table. (If possible, **Candle 1** should try and take the ciborium lid back with him/her to the credence table) **Candle 1** replaces the stopper in the wine, puts it down, and takes the towel as **Book** takes the bowl. They return to the altar after the priest blesses the wine and washes his hands. After this, they return to their seats

- The Eucharistic Prayer
 - This is the great prayer of the Mass. Eucharist means “Thanksgiving,” and as you pay attention to the words of the prayer, you will find the priest thanks God constantly for the good things He has given us. Try to make this “attitude of gratitude” part of how you pray at Mass.
- Sanctus
 - After the Holy, Holy, Holy, the servers kneel on the steps of the Sanctuary. **Candle 1** and **Cross** are kneeling nearest the bells, and prepared to ring them at the Consecration.
- Consecration
 - This is the recounting of the words of Christ when he transformed bread and wine into His Body and Blood. The Priest, in imitation of Christ, does the same. When the priest raises the Host, now Christ, those at the bells ring them to signify that something amazing has happened here. Ring them again at the elevation of the Chalice, filled with the Blood of Christ. Wait until the priest lowers the vessel before stopping to ring, and do not place the bells down until the priest kneels. This allows the ringing to continue to show the majesty of what just happened.
- The Great Amen
 - After the Great Amen, “with Him, in Him, Through Him...” everyone stands and returns to their seats. Try to coordinate your standing with the person next to you.
- Sign of Peace
 - We exchange a sign of peace with each other to show that Christ, the Prince of Peace, reigns in our hearts and that we are united in Him. After exchanging this sign, line up behind the priest and prepare yourself to receive Christ.

- The Breaking of the Bread (Fraction Rite)
 - The priest holds up Jesus in the form of bread and wine again for us to look upon the miracle that has taken place. It is appropriate after the “Lamb of God” to say a quiet prayer asking the Lord to receive you as you receive him, to forgive your sins, and to make us more like himself. After all, we “are what we eat!”
- Communion
 - Because we are receiving Christ, a gesture of respect is due. The Church asks that those receiving give a slight bow before the priest presents the Host to you. He says, “The Body of Christ” and then you either receive in your cupped hands or on your tongue (whichever is your preference). When all the servers have received, return to your seats.
- Purification and clearing of the Altar
 - When the priests go down to distribute communion, **Book** can take the book down from the altar and replace it under the credence table, or else hold onto it. When the priest returns to the altar, follow the guidelines for purification. Usually this means **Candle 1** brings up water for the purification, brings the water back, brings up the chalice veil if used, and then brings the chalice back to the credence table.
- Prayer after Communion
 - The priest will sit down for a short time after Communion. **Book** should be watching, and as soon as he stands up, go to him with the book open to the right page. Just like the opening prayer, when the priest lowers his arms, return the book to the stand under the credence table.
- The Concluding Rite
 - The Blessing

- Now that we have all received Jesus, the priest gives us a final blessing to send us out into the world.
- The Dismissal
 - The Deacon, after the final blessing, will say, “The Mass is ended, go in peace...”
 - Afterwards, the dismissal song will begin. All servers go to their equipment and go down the aisle about halfway, turning back and facing the altar. **Cross should wait for the Candles to be out of the servers’ room BEFORE heading towards the center. Book** follows directly after **the candles** after they start moving. The order is again **Cross, Candles, and Book**, though **Book** does not bring the book down with him/her. When the priest bows and straightens again, servers turn around and lead the procession back out of the church. Again, a slow, reverent pace is best.
 - “Prosit”; “Omnibus et Singulis”
 - Some priests like to give this final prayer in front of the Cross. If it is requested, **Cross** should go in front of the font and turn back, with **Candles** on either side. The priest will bow to the Cross and say, “Prosit,” which means “May it profit us.” The servers then respond, “Omnibus et singulis,” which means “All and one.”
- Clean up
 - The last duty you have now is to help clean up. Return your equipment to its place, put out the candles, and check in with the priest quickly before you leave. **IF YOU ARE LEAVING ALBS OR CINCTURES IN THE ALTAR SERVERS’ ROOM, RETURN THINGS NEATLY. THERE IS NO EXCUSE TO JUST THROW THEM AROUND.** As always, the rule is being reverent and considerate.

Closing Remarks

I would like to thank you again for offering your time and energy to make our celebration of the Mass a beautiful one. Although you have this packet, I'm sure your experience will be a better teacher. Do not worry about missing some things at first, as you will become better as you continue to serve. Feel free to ask questions whenever you think of one, and don't forget we are all together to pray better before anything else. May God bless you in your service of St. Mary's "Altar Corps."

Servers' Prayers

Open my mouth O Lord, to bless your 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 Your 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 representative of God and willingly follow him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ.

Amen.

*Loving Father, creator of the universe,
you call your people to worship,
to be with you and one another at Mass.
I thank you for having called me
to assist others in their prayer to you.
May I be worthy of the trust placed in me
and through my example and service
bring others closer to you.
I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
who is Lord forever and ever. **Amen.***