

ALTAR SERVER HANDBOOK



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

February 2023

Thank you for becoming an altar server at St. John the Baptist Parish!

This handbook contains information that you will learn as you advance as an altar server and will be a useful resource to you for years to come.

Altar servers are ranked based on the level of mastery of knowledge and skills. You will have the opportunity to advance in rank at your own pace depending on your willingness to work toward mastery of the skills and knowledge required at each level.

The altar server ranks are:

Altar Server:

- Novice
- Candle Bearer (Light Bearer)

Skilled Altar Server:

- Cross Bearer
- Book Bearer

Altar Minister:

- Thurifer

We pray that your experience as an altar server brings you into a deeper friendship with Christ and helps you to realize the great dignity of your service. St. John Paul II, addressing altar servers, once said:

“Therefore, in the liturgy, you are much more than simple “helpers of the parish priest.” Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest.”

The ministry of the Altar Server is an opportunity for boys & girls in the fourth grade and older who have received their 1st Communion to assist the priest and the entire assembly at Mass on Sundays and other special occasions. Altar Servers, vested in a white alb with a cincture and cross, carry the processional cross and candles, hold the Missal for the Priest, prepare the altar, and washes the hands of the Priest. Servers also respond to the prayers and sing the hymns with the rest of the assembly. Altar Servers fully, actively, and consciously participate in the liturgy.

Prayer of an Altar Server

O God, You have graciously called me to serve You upon Your altar. Grant me the graces that I need to serve You faithfully and wholeheartedly. Grant too that while serving You, I may follow the example of St. Tarcisius, who died protecting the Eucharist, and walk the same path that led him to Heaven. St. Tarcisius, pray for me and for all servers. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE MASS TO KNOW

CONFITEOR

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have
failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

PENITENTIAL OPTION B

Priest: Have mercy on us, O Lord.

Response: For we have sinned against you.

Priest: Show us, O Lord, your mercy.

Response: And grant us your salvation.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.
We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of
the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

NICENE CREED

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial
with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of
the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the
giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic
Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of
the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE MASS TO KNOW

PRAYER OF ACCEPTANCE

May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands
For the praise and glory of his name,
For our good, and the good of all his holy
Church.

PREFACE DIALOGUE

Priest: The Lord be with you.

Response: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

Response: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Response: It is right and just.

SANCTUS (HOLY, HOLY, HOLY)

Holy, Holy, Holy

Lord God of hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes

In the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

MEMORIAL ACCLAMATIONS

We proclaim your death, O Lord,
and profess your resurrection
until you come again.

OR

When we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim your death, O Lord,
until you come again.

OR

Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your cross and resurrection
You have set us free.

PATER NOSTER (OUR FATHER)

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.

AGNUS DEI (LAMB OF GOD)

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the
world: have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the
world: have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the
world: grant us peace.

PRAYER TO ST. MICHAEL

St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle,

be our protection against the wickedness and
snares of the devil.

May God rebuke him we humbly pray; and do
thou,

O Prince of the Heavenly host,

by the power of God,

thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits

who prowl about the world

seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.

PROSIT/OMNIBUS ET SINGULIS

Priest: Prosit.

Response: Pro omnibus et singulis.

The Order of Mass

Introductory Rites — Preparing our hearts

Entrance Chant: We gather as God's family and praise God in song.

Greeting: We pray the Sign of the Cross. The priest welcomes us.

Penitential Act: We bring to mind our sins and ask God for mercy.

Gloria: We praise God in song.

Collect: We ask God to hear our prayers of this Mass.

Liturgy of the Word — God speaks to his children

First Reading: We listen to God's Word, usually from the Old Testament.

Responsorial Psalm: We respond to God's Word in song.

Second Reading: We listen to God's Word from the New Testament.

Gospel Acclamation: We sing "Alleluia!" to praise God for the Good News. During Lent, we use a different acclamation.

Gospel Reading: We stand to listen attentively to the Gospel of the Lord.

Homily: The priest or the deacon explains God's Word.

Profession of Faith: We proclaim our faith through the Creed.

Universal Prayer: We pray for the needs of people throughout the world and in our own community.

Liturgy of the Eucharist — Bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood

Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts: We bring gifts of bread and wine to the altar.

Prayer over the Offerings: The priest prays that God will accept our sacrifice.

Eucharistic Prayer: Eucharist comes from the Greek word for "thanksgiving."

Preface: "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks..."

Holy, Holy, Holy: We praise God in song.

Epiclesis: The priest calls down the Holy Spirit.

Anamnesis: The priest says the words of Jesus at the Last Supper.

The Mystery of Faith: We proclaim the mystery of our faith.

Amen: We give our assent to the words and actions of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Communion Rite — Receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ

Lord's Prayer—We pray the Our Father.

Sign of Peace—We offer Christ's peace to one another.

Lamb of God—We ask God for his mercy and peace.

Communion—We receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Prayer After Communion—We pray that the Eucharist will strengthen us to live like Jesus.

Concluding Rites — We are sent forth

Final Blessing: We receive God's blessing.

Dismissal: We go forth to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

Glossary of Terms

Listed below are the names and descriptions of the areas and items that are used in the liturgy.

Areas Within the Church

Nave: The main portion of the Church where the pews and sanctuary are located.

Reconciliation Room: The room in the far right corner of the church where the Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated.

Sacristy: The portion of the Church where the priests, deacons, servers, and lectors meet to vest and prepare themselves for Mass.

Sanctuary: The area of the Church that contains the altar and the ambo.

Vestibule: The area inside the front door before entering the nave.

Special Books

Sacramentary (Roman Missal): The large red book from which the priest prays during Mass.

Lectionary: The book from which the lectors (readers) proclaim the Word of God.

Book of the Gospels: The book used to proclaim the Gospel.

Special Furniture

Altar: The large table from which the priest presides over the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Ambo: Where the lector stands to read the Scripture readings and the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.

Credence Table: The table that has the chalices, Communion bowls or patens, finger bowl, water cruet and finger towel.

Presider's Chair: The chair on which the priest sits when he leads the assembly in prayer.

Tabernacle: The ornamental, locked box where the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated Eucharist is kept.

Sacred Vessels

Chalice: The large cup that holds the wine that becomes the Blood of Christ.

Ciborium: A round, gold container that is used to hold the hosts. Ciboria that hold consecrated hosts are stored in the Tabernacle.

Cruet: The little pitcher that holds either water or wine for use during the Mass.

Paten: A small dish or bowl that holds the bread for Holy Communion.

Special Linen

Corporal: A small cloth that sits on top of the altar where the priest places the chalice, paten, and flagon. Its purpose is to catch any small crumbs of the Blessed Sacrament that may fall onto the altar.

Purificator: A white cloth that is used to wipe the rim of the chalice after drinking from it.

Towel: Used by the priest to dry his hands after the hand washing.

Special Clothing

Alb: The long, white garment used to cover street clothes and worn by the priest, deacon, and altar servers.

Cincture: A rope or cord worn around the waist (like a belt) over the alb.

Chasuble: The outer garment worn by the priest at Mass.

Humeral Veil: A white veil used by the celebrant to cover his hands when handling the monstrance during elevation and benediction or during solemn Eucharistic processions as on Holy Thursday.

Stole: A long, narrow band of cloth that looks like a scarf. A priest wears the stole draped over his shoulders and hanging down in front.

Other Items

Aspergillum: The liturgical instrument used to sprinkle people and objects with holy water.

Extinguisher: Used to light and put out candles.

Lavabo Bowl: The small basin over which the priest washes his hands.

Monstrance: The large vessel used for showing the body of Christ for prayers outside of Mass. Inside the monstrance is a smaller glass container called a lunette.

Thurible: The pot that holds the charcoal on which incense is burned.

Boat: A small liturgical vessel containing the incense that will be used with the thurible

Thurifer: A minister who carries the incense pot.

Before Mass:

All servers should be dressed appropriately. When you cross the nave (central aisle), ***you should always bow your head to the tabernacle*** (that is the gold box located on the facing right side of the the altar where the Eucharist is reserved).

Servers enter the sacristy (the room located to the right of the sanctuary). You should arrive 15 minutes before the beginning of Mass to prepare. If there is a priest or other adults in the sacristy, remember to greet them. After greeting everyone, you should hang your coat or jacket on the coat rack. After you sign in, go to the closet and select your alb. All albs are hanging in size order. Cinctures (the rope cord) are also located in that closet. Next select a crucifix and place around your neck. If you need help with vesting ask for help.

MASS w/2 SERVERS

After you've fully vested in your alb, cross and cincture, please make sure you know your assignment. Assignments: server 1 and server 2.

Server 1

Rank: Skilled Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer & Book Bearer

Server 2

Rank: Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer & Sanctus Bells Ringer

After jobs have been assigned, final preparations must be made for Mass. When all is prepared, the servers with the priest go to the rear of the church. Remember, when you come out of the sacristy, turn towards the tabernacle, and bow before walking to the back of the church.

If you did not arrive in time, or are coming up late to substitute, put on a servers alb and join the priest in the sanctuary going to your seat during the opening hymn.

Servers 1 & 2 will pick up the processional candles. Please light before processing to the altar.

MASS w/3 SERVERS

After you've fully vested in your alb, cross and cincture, please make sure you know your assignment. Assignments: server 1, server 2 and server 3.

Server 1

Rank: Skilled Altar Server

Position: Cross Bearer & Book Bearer

Server 2

Rank: Skilled Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer & Sanctus Bells Ringer

Server 3

Rank: Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer

After jobs have been assigned, final preparations must be made for Mass. When all is prepared, the servers with the priest go to the rear of the church. Remember, when you come out of the sacristy, turn towards the tabernacle, and bow before walking to the back of the church.

When the priest is ready, pick up the cross {1} walk out into the sanctuary and bow together to the tabernacle and go down the side aisle to the rear of the church.

If you did not arrive in time, or are coming up late to substitute, put on a servers alb and join the priest in the sanctuary going to your seat during the opening hymn.

Servers 2 & 3 will pick up the processional candles. Please light before processing to the altar.

MASS w/4 SERVERS

After you've fully vested in your alb, cross and cincture, please make sure you know your assignment. Assignments: server 1, server 2, server 3 and server 4.

Server 1

Rank: Skilled Altar Server

Position: Cross Bearer

Server 2

Rank: Skilled Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer & Sanctus Bells Ringer

Server 3

Rank: Skilled Server or Altar Server

Position: Candle Bearer

Server 4

Rank: Altar Server

Position: Book Bearer

After jobs have been assigned, final preparations must be made for Mass. When all is prepared, the servers with the priest go to the rear of the church. Remember, when you come out of the sacristy, turn towards the tabernacle, and bow before walking to the back of the church.

When the priest is ready, pick up the cross {1} walk out into the sanctuary and bow together to the tabernacle and go down the side aisle to the rear of the church.

If you did not arrive in time, or are coming up late to substitute, put on a servers alb and join the priest in the sanctuary going to your seat during the opening hymn.

Servers 2 & 3 will pick up the processional candles. Please light before processing to the altar.

Entrance Procession:

Altar servers should line up in a specific order. First comes the cross bearer followed by the two candle bearers. If it is a special Mass with incense being used, the thurifer will lead the procession with the cross bearer directly behind. The candle bearers will be next to each other as you process down the aisle. You should keep two full pew spaces between you and the person in front of you.

The procession should begin once everyone is lined up and the singing begins. The procession should be not too fast but not too slow. Once the procession comes to the edge of the sanctuary, the {1} cross bearer goes to the far right, one candle bearer goes to the far far left {2}, the {3} other candle bearer goes to the left and the other server {4} goes to the right.

When the priest reverences the altar, all will bow (from the waist). If you are carrying anything, **do not bow**. The cross bearer goes directly into the sanctuary and places the cross in the stand. Both servers go to their seats, remain standing and pick up a hymnal/worship aid and sing.

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After the Penitential Rite (Lord have mercy) and Gloria (if used), the priest will say “Let us pray.” The book bearer will bring the Sacramentary to him and hold it carefully/steady as he prays the prayer. When finished, place the Sacramentary on the left corner of the altar.

Liturgy of the Word (Readings):

Following the Collect (opening prayer), all sit for the first reading, responsorial psalm, and second reading. At the beginning of the "Alleluia" for the Proclamation of the Gospel, the servers should stand when the priest stands.

At the conclusion of the Gospel, servers should sit for the homily and listen. After the priest returns to his seat and sits briefly, he will then stand and begin to recite the Creed. Servers stand with the priest and recite the Creed.

Preparation of the Altar:

Following the Creed, the collection will occur. During the collection, server(s) 1 (and 4) should prepare the altar by assisting the priest or deacon. The vessels need moved from the credence table to the altar. All of the needed items should be on the credence table. The items include Chalice w/Paten, 1 purificator, water cruet and Sacramentary. (4 communion cups & 5 purificators when congregation is offered the Precious Blood)

When the ushers are at the second last pillar, the servers should take the processional candles, walk down the main aisle to the back of the church and stand where the entrance procession began waiting to accompany the gifts.

Reception of the Gifts:

When the altar is set up, the priest or deacon will walk to the edge of the sanctuary. Server 1 (and 4) will walk down with the priest or deacon to receive the gifts. Once servers 2 & 3 process up, server 3 will hand his/her candle to server 2 to place back in the stands and server 3 will stand next to the priest to receive the gifts. If there are 4

servers, servers 2 & 3 will place their own candles back in the stands & stand next to the altar.

Please place the ciborium of hosts on the altar (remove lids & place on the right side of the altar). As the priest or deacon prepares the gifts on the altar, Server {2 & 3} present him with the cruet of wine and the cruet of water. The priest or deacon will pour a small amount of water from the cruet into the wine flagon. Server {2} will return empty flagon to the credence table and then bring the towel and finger bowl.

For the washing of the priest's hands, one server {2} holds the finger dish with the towel over their arm, while the other server {3} holds the water cruet and pours a small amount of water (gently) over the priest's hands. He will dry his hands with the towel. Place these items on the credence table and go back to your seats.

Whenever standing in the sanctuary during Mass, hands should be in prayer pose.

Eucharistic Prayer:

For the ringing of the bells, at the elevation of the Body, the server closest to the bells {2} should ring the bells gently while the Body of Christ is elevated. The same should be done for the elevation of the Blood of Christ. Please keep ringing until the Body/Blood of Christ is completely lowered.

Servers should stand at the invitation to recite the Our Father. After the sign of peace is shared between the servers and the priest, servers will stand in the middle of the sanctuary to receive Holy Communion. If you do not wish to receive the Precious Blood from the Cup, return to your seat.

Communion:

When the distribution of Communion is finished, one server {3} should have the water cruet ready in hand so that when the celebrant returns to the altar he can purify his chalice immediately. When the priest or deacon is finished cleaning/purifying the vessels, take these items, along with the Sacramentary, from the altar and place them at the Credence Table. (The Sacramentary can be taken to the small table next to the presider's chair)

Concluding Rite & Recessional:

When the priest stands and says "Let us pray", the book bearer should bring the Sacramentary to him. When finished, the Sacramentary should be placed on the back on the presider's table. After prayer, the server returns to his/her seat.

During the recessional hymn, once the priest gets up from the presider's chair to walk to the altar, the cross bearer will pick up the cross & candle bearers will pick up the processional candles and meet the priest at the edge of the sanctuary facing the altar.

The {1} cross bearer goes to the right, server {4} goes to the far far right. The candle bearer {2} goes to the far far left and server {3} will go to the left.

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The procession down the main aisle is as follows:

Cross Bearer {1}, Candle Bearers {2} & {3}, Altar Server {4}, Deacon, Priest

When the priest(s) [and deacon] reverence the altar, they will then proceed to line up at the edge of the sanctuary. They will genuflect or bow, which should be imitated by all servers at the same time, **except those carrying objects**. The exit procession should be as gradual as the entrance procession. It shouldn't be too fast or too slow.

After Mass:

At the conclusion of Mass, servers should walk up the right aisle to the sacristy. Be mindful of other people. When back in the sacristy, one server needs to take the candle snuffer to extinguish the candles. Bring the various items on the credence table into the sacristy. After this is complete, everyone should un-vest, placing their crosses and cinctures back. Albs should be zipped up and placed back in the closet according to size. If albs are on the floor of the closet please pick them up.

A few things to keep In mind-

*As a server, you are serving in several different ways:

- You are serving God through your worship and prayer
- You are serving the priest by helping him preside over the Mass
- You are serving your parish family by helping everyone to worship and celebrate in the best way possible

*When becoming an altar server, you are making a commitment to your parish. You need to be faithful to this commitment by being present for each Mass for which you are scheduled. Please take this responsibility seriously.

*Remember to arrive in the Sacristy 15 minutes before Mass begins. If you are unable to serve when you are scheduled, it is your responsibility to find a replacement.

*Since altar servers have a very visible role in the sanctuary, the way you look and conduct yourself during Mass makes a big difference. Please **dress appropriately and respectfully** when you serve at Mass. Please wear neat, clean clothes and nice shoes. Maintain an attitude and posture of reverence and prayerfulness.

We hope that serving at Mass will help you grow closer to the Lord and that you will find this ministry interesting, meaningful, and enjoyable.

Everything you do as a server, no matter how ordinary it may seem, should be done carefully and reverently, because everything is part of the worship you are giving to God.

YOU HAVE A HOLY RESPONSIBILITY

On August 12, 2001, St. John Paul II addressed a gathering of young altar servers in Rome and in part said,

“Therefore, in the liturgy, you are much more than simple ‘helpers of the parish priest’. Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest. Thus, you, altar servers, are called in particular to be young friends of Jesus. Be determined to go deeper and to cultivate this friendship with Him. You will discover that in Jesus you have found a true friend for life.”

St. John Berchmans...pray for us.

St. Tarcisus...pray for us.



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PRAYER POSTURE

Standing/Kneeling



Sitting

