



*St Catherine Laboure Catholic Church, Gynea Parish*  
*Altar Servers manual*



# The Ministry of Altar Server

## Introduction

This manual has been sourced from the Internet, re-written, edited and published for the instruction of the Altar Server by Grahame-Patrick Cashman, Liturgy Coordinator, St Catherine Labouré Catholic Church, Gymea Parish.

This manual is not a theological study course or a substitute for the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is a manual for the training of Altar Servers.

**This Manual has been customised for use at St Catherine Labouré Catholic Church Gymea as amendments to the sourced information has been altered.**

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Altar Servers perform most of the functions of the former minor order of ordained clerics known as Acolytes from the Greek word *akolouthos* (attendant).

Church writings from the second and third centuries discuss the role of Acolytes, giving the office great importance and honour in the history of the Church. Although institution into the ministry of Acolyte is reserved to lay men, the diocesan bishop may permit the liturgical functions of the Instituted Acolyte to be carried out by Altar Servers, men and women, boys and girls. Altar Servers are not ordained; they are 'commissioned' by their Parish Priest. The determination that women and girls may function as Altar Servers in the liturgy should be made by the bishop on the diocesan level so that there might be a uniform diocesan policy.

The primary role of the Altar Server is to assist the Priest in the celebration of the liturgy during Mass. This is done through specific actions and by setting an example to the congregation ~ the people they represent, by active participation in the liturgy by their actions, singing of hymns, responses, looking alert and sitting or standing at the appropriate times.

The Altar Server carries the Processional Cross, the processional candle(s), holds the book for the Priest celebrant when he is not at the Altar, carries the incense and censer, presents the water and wine cruets received from the Offertory (Presentation of the Gifts) to the Priest or Deacon (if one is

present) during the preparation of the gifts and will also assist him when he receives the gifts from the people - besides the Acolyte, assists the Priest celebrant and Deacon (if one is present)/Acolyte as necessary.

Altar Servers are chosen from among the faithful who display a desire to participate in an intimate way during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is an extreme privilege to kneel so close to the Altar as our loving Saviour, Jesus Christ, becomes truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity upon the Altar during the Consecration - which is why the Bells are rung at certain times during the Eucharistic (Sacred) Prayer.

The Altar Server is uniquely joined - by being present on the Sanctuary in the Heavenly Supper of the Lamb of God and serves in the company of myriads of angels eternally singing “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

## **(A). Requirements**

### **I General Requirements**

When Serving in the presence of Our Saviour and surrounded by His Heavenly Host it is both wise and necessary for an Altar Server to perform all assigned duties with attention, dignity and reverence. Just as Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant . . .” Altar Servers should set aside their own preferences and attend to every action of the Divine Liturgy as a team, all rehearsing the Divine Celebration in the same manner and style as directed by the Liturgy Coordinator under instruction by the Parish Priest and performed by their companion Altar Server(s).

The Altar Server, participating as instructed, will enter into a fuller participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass while assisting the Priests and Deacons (if one is present) as the mysteries of the Upper Room and Calvary are represented to God’s people. All actions of the Altar Server are woven from signs and symbols whose meaning is rooted in the works of creation and in human culture, specified by events in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is imperative that all Altar Servers do their assigned tasks in the prescribed form and manner.

The Sanctuary is holy, and access to it is restricted to very few people. Do not abuse the privilege you have been given to enter the sanctuary for service by being disrespectful or entering the holy place unnecessarily.

1. Altar Servers will be required to vest in suitable attire if no Altar Server Gown/Albs are available as directed by the Parish Priest & Liturgy Coordinator. NO SHIRTS WITH DESIGNS, DEPICTIONS OR PICTURES ARE TO BE WORN EITHER UNDERNEATH THE ALB/GOWN OR INTO THE SACRISTY.

2. Clothes worn under any such attire should be such that they do not have patterns, pictures, stripes, checks or any other design which will show through the alb.

3. Dress shoes and appropriate socks (or stockings for the girls if not socks) must be worn. *The Sanctuary is no place for sneakers, running shoes, or any other sports footwear.* Shoes that are not torn or have soles broken etc are not acceptable.

4. Altar Servers help the Acolyte prepare for the Mass by setting up the Altar, Credence Table and Offertory Gifts. They carry the Processional Cross, the processional candle(s) if enough Servers are available. They will hold the book for the Priest celebrant when he is not at the Altar, carry the incense and censer when used at certain Solemnities and celebrations, to lead the Gift bearers in the Offertory Procession by carrying the Altar Candles and then to assist the Priest celebrant and the Acolyte when receiving the gifts from the people after placing the Candles on the Altar, present the water and wine cruets to the Priest during the preparation of the gifts, holding the finger towel and bowl to enable the Priest to wash his fingers and to assist the Priest celebrant and Deacon (if one is present), Acolyte as necessary.

5. To ring the bells at the appropriate time and to always assist in leading the people in the responses of the Mass with the Acolyte.

## II Specifics

Who may serve?

An Altar Server can be any person who has received first confession and Holy Communion. *Or may be receiving both in the coming 6 months.*

Each bishop and each parish may have additional requirements but basically there are no other universal restrictions about age or sex.

Why serve?

The leader - Liturgy Coordinator of the Altar Server training should discern the reasons why a candidate wishes to serve and be reasonably certain that the candidates, and not parental pressures, are the main motivation.

A reluctant or disinterested Altar Server is a distraction to the Priest, parishioners and fellow Altar Servers.

A poor attitude can have a negative effect on the overall parish faithful. It is not uncommon for a parent to want a child to be an Altar Server but the child themselves have no desire - and this is a disaster.

### **(B). Required Basic Knowledge of the Mass**

An Altar Server candidate is required to know the principal prayers of the Mass:

The Penitential Rites (The Confettia and the Kyrie), The Gloria, The (Nicene & Apostle's) Creed, The Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy), The Great Amen, The Lord's Prayer (Our Father), The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), the response to the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament before Holy Communion – "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you...".

Not knowing these prayers usually results in an Altar Server who just stands there looking out of touch and in ignorance of our most sacred act of worship.

All candidates should be able to know and recite the basic flow of the Mass.

They must learn this so as to later perform their tasks at the proper times.

They should & will be taught the use of all the liturgical items they will be handling and the purpose of each item. Whilst they may not remember the names of the various liturgical items, and whilst some are not in use at Gynea Parish, a fairly comprehensive list is included in this manual with the appropriate items used at all Masses highlighted.

1. All candidates must demonstrate their ability to make use of the “tools of the trade” such as matches, candle lighters, books and candles, processional cross, preparation of credence table, chalice, mass colours, etc. On the job training is very important. New Altar Servers should not be allowed to be alone without the guidance of an experienced Altar Server or the Liturgical Coordinator or Acolyte for several masses

2. All Altar Server candidates must be able to demonstrate their ability to genuflect, bow and make the sign of the cross. It is an eye-opener to see that many candidates never heard of the sign of the cross or genuflection

3. They must understand genuflecting is reserved for the Real Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ whether exposed on the Altar or reserved in the Tabernacle. Genuflecting is a form of worship of our God and should only be done to Him alone. It would be a grave mistake to genuflect to any Altar, cross, picture or crucifix. Catholics do not worship (latria) anyone but the ONE TRIUNE GOD, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

4. Altar Servers should be shown how to bow in respect to the Altar as it is where Jesus offers his Body to the Father for the propitiation of our sins

Sometimes Altar Servers are very young and must be shown the proper way to genuflect, bow, kneel, stand, and sit during Mass. They should be required to demonstrate sufficient form and dexterity in these motions before being commissioned as Altar Server.

Altar Servers are not a wall decorations, they are primarily there to assist the Priest by instruction of the Acolyte, *and to discern their vocation if they have one*. Here is a short list of Altar Server duties.

1. The Altar Server's first duty is to prepare for the Mass with the instruction from the Acolyte. The Altar Server should arrive at the Church early, usually 15 to 20 minutes before Mass, to perform the appropriate setup for their parish

2. The Altar Server must also stay after Mass to put things back and to assist the Acolyte in cleaning up

3. Altar Servers **MUST NOT** handle any Consecrated Bread or Wine (being the Body and Blood of Jesus) or Sacred Vessel or clothes – this is the Acolytes role. If the Altar Server suspects any consecrated fragments or wine remain on the sacred vessels they must inform the Acolyte or Priest or Deacon (if one is present) immediately

4. Altar Servers must remain on the sanctuary during the entire Mass and are not to leave the Sanctuary during Mass for any reason other than Illness or the direction of the Acolyte, Priest or Deacon (if one is present).

Altar Servers are on duty from the time they enter the Sanctuary at the start of Mass until they exist with the Priest & Ministers at the end of Mass

5. Altar Servers have many specific duties depending on the Parish Priest. These duties include presenting the water and wine to the Priest or Deacon (if one is present), holding the water bowl and towel for the Priest to wash his hands, ringing bells, leading the congregation in responses, leading the congregation with standing, sitting and kneeling at the appropriate and correct times

Depending on the parish they may also be required to prepare the ciboria, chalice, and credence table and clean up after Mass. In any of these positions they should maintain a straight formal posture. If you have never seen a formal posture look to the military for an example of how to sit, stand and kneel. If you have a free hand while holding some object you should place the hand with nothing in it across your waist with fingers in a flat manner with your palm against your chest

6. In the standing position, hands should ALWAYS be held in the praying position as demonstrated by the Liturgy Coordinator at training. Do not hold your hands behind your back, down at your sides or in a silly position

7. In the kneeling position hands should be held as in the standing position. You must kneel upright, not slouching or sitting on your heels

8. When sitting the hands should be held in the lap or at the sides or using the arms of the chairs as a rest

9. Never slouch. Never play with your cinctures (the cord around your waist if your alb has one), pick your nose or otherwise cause a public reason for people to take notice of you. You are not on stage; you are serving at the Altar of Our God.

**Note:** Holding hands in the prayer position was a medieval sign of submission to a manner lord and it's very appropriate to signify submission to our Divine Lord. Clasp hands and kneeling may be difficult due to arthritis or other physical limitations should be the only reason to excuse these activities.

**Remember, you are representing the people in the Church, your family, friends etc. and you are seen by all the parishioners, and so, how you conduct yourself is important so as to not cause distracting or confusion to their understanding of the ceremony of the Liturgy of the Mass.**

(D).

### Proper Dress

The Altar Server should dress in the proper clothes and footwear for Mass before arriving at the Church. If albs are provided ~ these are your liturgical gowns, remember what you wear underneath an alb will show through. For this reason, the Altar Server should be sure to avoid bold stripes and designs of any kind which may show through their alb. It is recommended that you wear solid colours, **but white would be the most appropriate choice of shirt.** Likewise pants, dresses and skirts should also be of some solid colour. DO NOT WEAR SHIRTS WITH LOGOS, PICTURES, DESIGNS OR INAPPROPRIATE DEPICTIONS.

Dress shoes should be worn. Sneakers, no matter how expensive, are for casual dress and sporting events and have no place at the Altar of Our God.

The wearing of old, unpolished or tattered footwear is unacceptable so please, don't wear them.

(E).

### Genuflection

When should an Altar Server genuflect?

Whenever entering or leaving a Catholic Church (usually when entering a pew) or crossing before the Tabernacle.

*“O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!”  
and “At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend.”*

Genuflecting to the Tabernacle is required; bowing is not an option to genuflecting. There are some exceptions and conditions to the rule – one has already being explained earlier: age and arthritis or medical conditions, and I will explain the other in the following paragraphs.

**For Information Only: Latin Rite Catholics genuflect to Our Lord alone**

When setting up the Altar, the **First and Last** time you walk onto the Sanctuary you **GENUFLECT BEFORE THE TABERNACLE**, the middle times you will be in front of the Tabernacle and **BOW PROFOUNDLY**. If you are carrying anything large or are carrying lighted Candles - **'Cardinal's Rule'** applies and you **BOW** your head profoundly and with great respect and dignity.

**NOTE: 'Cardinal's Rule'** is the exception to Genuflecting and Bowing profoundly. For when you BOW ~ you BOW from the waist as demonstrated in training ~ so when you are carrying candles, the Processional Cross or any large or heavy item, **YOU DO NOT BOW OR GENUFLECT** ~ possibly a small nod of the head ~ not rushed but graceful is used. This is so that what you are carrying does not drop as you lean forward or drop to your knees ~ especially hot wax on the carpets and floors and water splashing everywhere or incense falling on the ground.

**FOR INFORMATION:** In all Catholic churches, once the Consecration of the bread and wine take place and the actual substance of the bread and wine (that which makes bread and wine what it is) is transposed with the actual substantial and real Presence of Jesus the God-Man Jesus, thus making it no longer bread and wine but just the appearance of bread and wine. While the appearance of the bread and wine remain it is actually the real and true Body and Blood of the Risen Lord, Jesus. This is called **SUBSTANTIATION**.

While His Presence is truly present within the Sacred Scriptures and whenever two or more are gathered in His Name, that Presence is subordinate to the actual and real Presence in the consecrated Eucharist and we owe our worship to Him which is why we genuflect.

Catholics never genuflect to the bible or to a group of people meeting in the Name of Jesus but we do genuflect to the Person of Jesus present in the Eucharist.

Consult with your training leader (Liturgy Coordinator) for more information.

The bowing of the head is done towards the Priest after presenting the water and wine and after the Priest washes his hands, YOU NEVER EVER need to bow to the Deacon (if one is present) or the Acolyte or other Ministers. When we bow to the Altar, it is because it is the table of Christ's Saving Sacrifice - you are not genuflecting to the Altar but the Tabernacle behind the Altar which is why when setting up before Mass and cleaning up afterwards when you walk between the Altar and the Tabernacle - it is to the Tabernacle ALWAYS that is revered.

We bow to the Priest because he represents Our Lord at the Altar of God and offers the Body and Blood of Our Saviour to the Father on our behalf and therefore honour should be shown to him as only the Priest can do this.

Also please take note, that if you are ever at a Church when the Tabernacle is not centrally aligned to the Altar, like ours at St Catherine's is, one should **BOW** to the Altar when passing in front of it. If entering the Sanctuary in a procession and everyone in that procession genuflects, know that you are really genuflecting to the Real Presence of Jesus held in the Tabernacle AND not to the Altar you may all be facing. Some Churches do this.

It has been noticed, that many people continue to genuflect to an Altar or crucifix when the Tabernacle is removed to a side Altar - this is not appropriate and should never be done - know to whom you are doing homage to - God not wood, metal or stone. Catholics as well as all our Christian brothers should only kneel and genuflect to God.

This REAL PRESENCE is represented in the Tabernacle when the Sanctuary Lamp is lit. Our Lamp is on the right hand side of our Tabernacle and is lit all the time - only at Easter may it be turned off until The Easter Vigil AFTER Holy Communion.

When He is reserved in the Tabernacle He is just as present as when He is present in Heaven, on the Altar or in the monstrance. Altar Servers should make frequent visits to Him in the Tabernacle and spend some time with Him. This is especially helpful when done before Mass and again afterwards.

**The Church Sanctuary Light**, standing next to the Tabernacle, will indicate when Jesus is reserved in the Tabernacle.

**The Church Sanctuary Light**, when it is not lit, the Tabernacle is empty; as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday night. Usually it is lighted at all other times since Jesus is reserved there.

## How to Genuflect

There are two prescribed methods of genuflection.

1. When the Tabernacle is closed - the Sanctuary Lantern is lit and Jesus is **not** present on the Altar, genuflect in this manner:
  - Stop, then turn and face the Tabernacle
  - Genuflect on the right knee so the right knee touches the floor
  - Pause with the right knee on the floor and bow your head to Jesus. Many make the sign of the cross which is acceptable
  - Rise from the floor, still facing the Tabernacle
  - Turn and continue in the direction you were heading
  
2. When the Body of Jesus is present on the Altar or Jesus is exposed in the monstrance during Eucharistic Adoration and an Altar Server (or anyone is entering or leaving the church) double genuflect in this manner:
  - Stop and face Jesus
  - Double genuflect by placing both knees on the floor, the right knee first
  - Pause with knees on the floor and bow your head to Jesus.
  - Rise from the floor, still facing the Tabernacle.
  - Turn and continue in the direction you were heading

An exception to this requirement is when you are carrying any liturgical object or book.

There your job requires you to carry that in a dignified manner and not endanger yourself or the object by losing your balance.

**BUT, when the Blessed Sacrament is out for EXPOSITION AND ADORATION you should NOT be moving about the Altar.**

Remember, every action you perform on the Altar is seen by the people in the congregation - they follow your lead.

#### **(F). Preparation for Mass**

The water and wine cruets to be used at the service are always rinsed after the previous Mass and should already be clean and standing upside down in the cupboard on the rack built to hold and store them.

Fill the Wine Cruet with wine from the Altar wine supply. This is usually a bottle with a label stating it is Altar wine

**It is not for drinking.**

Fill the other cruet with water from the tap, unless from a previous Mass there is already water in it, just make sure there is enough water - it should be almost but not quite full if using the small glass cruets. You may have to put some more water from the tap in it.

Place the Water and Wine Cruets on the Offertory Table at the rear of the Church near the main doors for all Masses excepting week-day Masses - Monday to Saturday mornings unless a main Mass or a Special Mass is being said and you know there is an Offertory Procession, just ask the Acolyte/Minister or the Priest.

WHEN AN ACOLYTE IS NOT PRESENT you may prepare the chalice as follows:

- Place the chalice on the 'preparation' table with the cross on the base of the chalice facing you
- unfold the Purificator/Purifier and place it over the chalice so the ends hang down to the left and right and the cross on the Purificator/Purifier is aligned with the cross on the chalice
- Place the Paten on top of the Purificator/Purifier
- Place a large host in the centre of the paten with the impressed cross (if on the host) aligned with the cross on the base of the chalice
- Cover the patent and large host with the pall
- Place the corporal atop the pall on the chalice with the Tabernacle key on top to hold it all in place

Then with one hand holding the base of the Chalice and the other hand - palm down on-top of the Chalice you may pick it up and place it on the Credence Table on the Sanctuary.

Place the washing bowl, towels and any extra vessels required on the credence table.

Parishes that have an Offertory Procession (Presentation of the Gifts) have the water and wine cruets and ciborium or filled paten placed on the Offertory Table at the entrance of the Church for use in the Offertory Procession.

At five minutes to Mass time the Altar Server should light ANY appropriate candles.

- if there are candles positioned at either side of the Tabernacle, these should be lit
- From the Easter Vigil Mass until Mass at Ascension Thursday, the Paschal candle should be lit also

(F).

Preparation for Mass *continued*

- The Advent Wreath is usually lit before Mass with only the appropriate week's Candle being lit during the Mass at the Gospel. Be sure you know which candles in the wreath to light. Ask the Priest or Acolyte
- after lighting the candles, extinguish the taper/candle lighter by blowing out the taper with your hand held behind it so no wax falls on the ground and burns the flooring

If the small Sacramentary prayer book is used for the opening prayer, the Altar Server should prepare the book containing the opening and closing prayers and check with the Acolyte, Priest or Deacon (if one is present) to make sure that the place marker is in the pages for the days Mass.

Return the prayer book to its place.

If candles are used in an offertory procession, make sure they are placed on the Offertory Table with matches - these will become the Altar Candles.

(G).

Duties during Mass

**NO ONE BOWS OR GENUFLECTS UNTIL THE MINSTERS AND THE PRIEST HAVE ARRIVED AT THE STEPS OF THE ALTAR.**

**The Order of the Procession:**

The cross-bearer leads the procession into and from the Sanctuary. The Processional Cross bearer walks from the back of the Church through its main doors and down the central aisle when directed to "PROCESS IN" by the Acolyte or Priest. Otherwise starting from the Sacristy, lead the Procession when announced by the Audio-Visual or member from the Choir. Generally AT ALL MASSES on the week-end, someone will make the announcement welcoming everyone to St Catherine's for the Mass and who the Celebrating Priest will be and to stand and sing the Processional Entrance Hymn.....

Following the Processional Cross bearer, will be any servers - normally carrying Processional Candles, followed by the Readers, Ministers, Acolytes, Deacon if any and the Celebrating Priests.

Arriving at the steps to the Altar at the bottom of the sanctuary; the cross-bearer moves to the right towards the Choir area and waits for the other Ministers and the Priest to arrive at the steps of the Altar, where, when all assembled, will bow their head gracefully - not from the waist as you are holding the Processional Cross - you bow to the Tabernacle and only when the Priest is stepping up the stairs do you then proceed to move up the stairs and place the cross in its stand, with the Crucifix facing the people, so that the people can see.

**Never genuflect when carrying the Processional Cross.**

The candle-bearers, following the cross-bearer in procession, upon arriving at the steps to the Altar at the bottom of the sanctuary, split up and one moves to the left hand side and stops in front of the Lectern whilst the 2<sup>nd</sup> Candle bearer stands next to the Cross bearer - and bow their heads **ONLY** to the Tabernacle, move up the stairs after the Priest and Processional Cross bearer and Ministers have moved off and will place the processional candles on the Credence Table or the floor if they are the tall wooden or brass candlesticks - be directed by the Liturgy Coordinator.

**Never genuflect when carrying the Processional Candles.**

All Altar Servers will then proceed to their assigned locations standing in front of their seats with their hands held properly.

The Altar Server, who has been assigned to the Priest or **THE BOOK SIDE**, will with the assistance of the Acolyte pick up the small Sacramentary and as directed by the Acolyte will proceed directly in front of the Priest and open the book to the pre-marked position.

Hold the book open so the Priest can read the prayer. Keep the pages flat, your fingers out of the way of the text and do not move about while the Priest is reading. When the Priest is finished, close the Sacramentary and return it to its place. Sit down in your chair for the readings.

At the end of the second reading, during the Alleluia the candle bearers, if used during the gospel reading should get up and walk up and take the

Processional candles. As the Altar Servers are generally seated one on each side of the Sanctuary, they should stand on either side of the Altar as escort to the Priest who will proclaim the Word of God - The Gospel. The Priest will either move behind the Altar, or go in front of the Altar, the Servers should be prepared for either position so as to escort him from the Altar to the Lectern and then they will stand on the middle step on either side of the Lectern, facing inwards to each other but slightly towards the Priest.

Other Altar Servers not required for the Candles should stand at their normal positions and stand as the people stand. The candle bearers should stand at the gospel positions, facing the reader of the Gospel for it is the Word of God. All Altar Server should pay very close attention to the words of the gospel and homily. The arm that is holding the upper part of the candle should point toward the people. Maintain these positions during the gospel and then return the candles to positions you took them from, BOW to the Tabernacle, and return to your seats. Sit down and listen to the homily.

All Altar Servers sit with the people during the collections.

The Altar Server is always to attend the Presentation of the Gifts - or the Offertory for the Procession. If there are two Servers both will go down. The time for this is AFTER the Prayers of General Intercessions when the Priest and the people sit down. If there is only 1 Server, they will go with the Minister. 1 Server will place the Chalice on the Altar, whilst the 2<sup>nd</sup> Server will place the Altar Sacramentary on the Altar then move around the Altar, down the steps and stand facing the Altar together.

If there is only 1 Server and a Minister, the Server will place the Chalice on the Altar, walk to the bottom steps of the Altar - wait for the Minister, together you will genuflect and then walk down to the Offertory Table.

The Minister will light the Offertory Candles - only if there is no Minister - the older Server will light the Candles. By this time the people taking up the Gifts should arrive. The Gifts will be:

1 Water Cruet

1 Wine Cruet

1 Ciborium (maybe two or bowls are used which must be covered)

If there are only two people bringing the Gifts, one person may take both the Water & Wine Cruets and the other the Ciborium/bowl. Otherwise, if there are three people, 1 takes the Water Cruet, 1 takes the Wine Cruet and the other takes the Ciborium/bowl.

The order of the Offertory Procession is:



CANDLES



CANDLES



WATER & WINE



CIBORIUM

If there is more than 1 Ciborium they can be carried by the one person but more than 2, another person **MUST** help. (More than 1 Ciborium ~ the plural is CIBORIA)

The Offertory Candles **ALWAYS** lead. When the people are ready to move off, look for the Priest on the Altar, if he is standing up either at the front of the Altar or on the bottom steps of the Sanctuary you can start walking down the aisle at a slow pace. Make sure the Gift bearers are following you.

When you reach the steps, **DON'T BOW** or **GENUFLECT**, walk up the steps and place your Candle on the Candle bowl already set on the Altar, turn around **CAREFULLY** and if the Priest and Acolyte need help with the Gifts,

go down/go over and help. You should always be given the Water & Wine Cruets as the Server you will present them to the Deacon or Priest with the assistance of another Server or the Minister/Acolyte. When the Priest takes the Chalice, they normally use the Purifier to wipe it clean and will then turn to face you, the Wine Cruet is handed to the Priest first - I will show you how to correctly hold the Cruet. If the Cruet has a pouring lip, this must be facing YOU so as when the Priest takes it, it is ready to pour and he doesn't have to turn the Cruet around. Same with the Water Cruet which after the Priest hands back the Wine Cruet is handed to him. When the Priest hands back the Water Cruet, you both BOW to the Priest and move back to the Credence Table and get set up for the finger bowl and towel.

- with a single Altar Server and NO Minister - Unfold the wash towel and place it over your left arm. Pick up the washing bowl and hold it in both hands. Approach the Altar again and allow the priest to dip his fingers into the water. Let the Priest take the towel from your arm and when he has placed the towel back on your arm bow to him and return to the credence table. Neatly arrange the towel and bowl on the table

- with several Altar Servers, when the Priest comes to you, one Altar Server holding the bowl with the other Server holding the towel which they will unfold as the Priest washes his fingers and hold up for him to use. When the Altar Server has the towel back, both Altar Servers bow to the Priest and return to the credence table. Neatly arrange the towel and bowl on the table

- No one is to sit down at this time. All Altar Servers should then remain standing in front of their seats

**Bell Ringing** ~ The bell should be rung at the specific times during the Mass as is the local custom in your parish. Typical times for ringing the bell are:

- Once, when the Priest makes the sign of the Cross over the gifts and calls on the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts

- Once at the elevation of the Consecrated Host

- Once at the elevation of the Consecrated Wine

Because the elevation of the Body and Blood of Jesus are solemn times, (the bread and wine we offered just before has now become the real BODY and BLOOD of our God, Jesus Christ) we should ring the bells reverently. At these times it is proper to look at the elevated Jesus and say to yourself “My Lord and my God.” following the example of Thomas the Apostle when he met the Resurrected Jesus.

After Communion of the Faithful ~ After the Priest or Deacon (if one is present) returns to the Altar the appointed Altar Server should remove the covers from the water (and wine in some parishes) cruet(s) and carry them to the Altar for use in the purification of the Chalice, Ciboria, Ciborium, and paten. Pour the water over the Priest’s or Deacon (if one is present)’s fingers as directed and offer to pour the wine if used. If attending a Priest, bow to him when done and return to the credence table and cover the cruets.

Altar Servers should assist the Deacon (if one is present) or Priest in removing all objects from the Altar after the purification and prior to the Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayers ~ All sit until the Priest says: "Let us pray." If an Altar Server is assigned to hold the prayer book, the Altar Server will proceed directly in front of the Priest and open the prayer book to the proper page, hold the book for the Priest as with the opening prayer. When the Priest finishes, close the Sacramentary and return it to its stand.

Exit Procession ~When the Priest kisses the Altar, the candle bearers should proceeded to the front of the Altar, genuflect to the Tabernacle, pick up the candles, and return to their standard positions. Cross-bearer should pick up the processional cross.

When the Priest and Deacon (if one is present) genuflect, all Altar Server not carrying anything should genuflect also. Those carrying things should just bow. All Altar Server then turn and proceed quickly to their procession positions. All processions are always in order of rank. Cross bearer first, then candle bearers, other Altar Servers, lector, extraordinary ministers, Deacon (if one is present)s, Priests, bishops, cardinals, and the pope.

## Duties after Mass

Extinguish the candles by using the proper tool - the snuffer on the end of the wick lighter. Do not smash the wicks. Do not blow out the candles - you will get soot on Altar and floor. If you use your fingers like some older people do not complain about getting burnt.

Remove Chalice and Ciboria from the credence table and place them on the preparation table or where directed.

Place used Purificator in the appropriate linen bag.

Return chalice veil to its storage place.

Place corporal and purse to their storage place.

Place chalice and gold paten in their place.

Place linen covered paten in its place.

Remove cruets from credence table. Pour any remaining wine back into the wine bottle and pour any unused water in the washing sink

Rinse the cruets with clean water and place them on the drying rack if available.

Remove bowl, towel, and dish from credence table. Dry bowl with towel. Place towel in used linen bag. Place bowl and dish in storage place.

Remove your liturgical clothing and hang it neatly in its proper place.

Clean up any messes you made on the credence and preparation tables.

Pick up the lectionary (book of readings) from the Sanctuary and place it closed on the pulpit.

Remove all notes and papers from the sanctuary and pulpit and place them where directed.

## Definitions

**Ablution cup** - covered dish of water on the side of the Tabernacle used by the Priest, Deacon (if one is present) or extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist to wash their fingers after distributing Communion. **This is also known as the FINGER BOWL.**

**Alb** - The white 'gown' worn by Acolytes and some Ministers. It is also the undergarment worn by the Priest beneath his Chasuble.

**Altar** - The table at the centre of the Sanctuary where the Priest makes the Sacrifice of the Mass. Our Altar has been CONSECATED and Blessed by the Cardinal when the Church was dedicated. The Oils of Dedication are on the 4 corners and in the middle where the Corporal is placed to hold the Chalice and breads for the Consecration when the Priest changes the bread and water and wine into Christ Jesus' Body and Blood.

**Ambo** - The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the reading and homily are given. We refer to this place as the LECTEN OR PULPIT.

**Amice** - The piece of rectangular cloth worn OVER the Alb but beneath the Chasuble and around the Priest's neck - like a 'kerchief.

**Aspergillum** - The Holy Water ball (dispenser).

**Burse** - A square container for holding the corporal. It is selected for the liturgical colour of the day. Used Corporals should always be placed in the proper container for sacred cloths after mass. **NO LONGER USED.**

**Cassock** - A long tunic like garment which reaches from the neck to the heels which is worn by some clergy.

**Chalice** - A cup of precious metal that holds the wine which becomes the Blood of Jesus after the consecration. All chalices should be placed in their places after Mass. If the Chalices were left unpurified by the Priest or Deacon (if one is present) for some reason they should be left out on the presentation table for purification by the Priest or Deacon (if one is present). Never put an unpurified chalice away.

**Chalice veil** - A cloth covering used to hide the chalice and paten up to the offertory and after Communion. It is selected by the liturgical colour for the service. **NO LONGER USED.**

**Chasuble** - The coloured outer garment worn only by the Priest. There are different colours depending on the Church Season.

**Ciborium** - A large cup or container of precious metal with a cover of the same material which will hold the Body of Jesus after the consecration for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful.

**Ciboria** - As above but when there is more than 1 Ciborium.

**Cincture** - The coloured cord worn by Acolytes, Ministers, Deacon (if one is present)s and Priests around their waists.

**Communion Paten** - A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal with a handle, usually wooden, used by the Altar Server to protect the Body of Jesus from falling to the ground if a minister or communicant accidentally drop a fragment of the Host. **NO LONGER USED.**

**Corporal** - A white linen cloth, usually with a cross in the centre, used to protect any particles of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus from falling to the Altar cloth. It is always folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from being lost. The corporal is like the body winding sheet used to hold the crucified body of Our Lord in the tomb. This is only touched by the Acolyte, Deacon (if one is present) or Priest.

**Credence Table** - The table on the sanctuary where the cruets, chalices and ciborium are kept before and after the Consecration.

**Cruets** - The two glass/pottery jugs – with or without lids, used to hold the Water and the Wine.

**Finger Towel** - The hand towel used by the Ministers and Priests to wipe their fingers after ‘washing’ them in preparation for distributing Holy Communion.

**Holy Water Fount or Stoups** - The holy water fountains or bowls at the entrances of the church.

**ΙΗΣ** - the first three letters of Jesus' Name in Greek and often used to decorate the Altar and other church facades.

**Lunette** - A thin, circular receptacle, having a glass face that holds the Consecrated Host used for Adoration and Benediction. It slides into the monstrance on a little track.

**Lectionary** - The book of reading used for the liturgy of the word. It usually contains all the biblical reading used for the three year Sunday cycle of reading and the two year daily Mass readings.

**Monstrance** - This is a large, ornate vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration, Benediction and solemn Eucharistic processions.

**Offertory Table** - This is the table located at the back of the Church, near the main doors, where the cruets, ciborium (ciboria) and Altar Candles are kept until the Presentation of the Gifts or Offertory Procession.

**Pall** - A square piece of cardboard or plastic which is covered by linen and used to cover the chalice.

**Paten** - A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal that holds the Host. No lay-person should ever touch the paten and Altar Server should be very careful when they have to handle it their official duties. (See Communion Paten.)

**Peplum** - A cloth covering used to hide the chalice and paten up to the offertory and after Communion. It is selected by the liturgical colour for the service. **NO LONGER IN USE IN AUSTRALIA.**

**Piscina** - A sink with a drain going directly into the ground usually fitted with a cover and lock which is used for the disposal of the following: The sacred linen wash and rinse water, used holy water, used baptismal water and blessed ashes. No other use is allowed. **WE DON'T HAVE ONE SO EXTRA CARE IS TAKEN BY THE MINISTERS.**

**Purificator/Purifier** - A linen cloth used by the Priest or Deacon (if one is present) to dry the chalice after washing and purifying it. Used Purificators/Purifiers must always be placed in the proper container for sacred cloths as directed by the Ministers.

**Pyx** - A case, about the size of a pocket watch, in which Communion is carried to those who are sick or unable to come to church by Ministers and Priests.

**Sacramentary** - (**The Altar Sacramentary**) - The Altar book containing the prayers said by the Priest during the Mass placed on the Altar.

**Sacramentary** - (**The small Sacramentary**) - The hand held smaller book containing the prayers said by the Priest during the Mass.

**Sacrarium** - A sink with its drain going directly into the ground usually fitted with a cover and lock which is used for the disposal of the following: The sacred linen wash and rinse water, used holy water, used baptismal water and blessed ashes. No other use is allowed - *The Altar Society ladies take care of the washing of the linens so no Sacrarium is at the Church.*

**Sepulcrum** - The cavity on the Altar in which the relics of the patron saints of that church or chapel are encased. This is found beneath our Altar and holds the sealed Relic of the Cross.

**Stock** - The metal containers used to hold the oil of the catechumen, the oil of chrism and the oil for anointing the sick. **These are GLASS VIALS.**

**Stoup or Founts** - The holy water fountains or bowls at the entrances of the church.

**Surplice** - A wide sleeved, linen worn over a cassock by clergy and Altar Altar Servers in some parishes.

**Tabo stand** - The ornate stand used to support the Monstrance during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Gynea doesn't have one.

**Thurible** - The metal swinging container on chains used for Incense dispersion.

## **Altar Server Instruction & Training Manual**

### **Post:**

It is a great privilege to serve at the Altar of our God and therefore Altar Server are chosen from those who display a desire for a more intimate union with Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ. Our loving Saviour becomes present on the Altar, just as He was at the Last Supper and Calvary. Accordingly, Altar Servers have a solemn responsibility to do their assigned duties with dignity and reverence.

The primary duty of an Altar Server is to assist the Priest, as a representative of the people of the parish, in a visible manner, as the mystery of Calvary unfolds on the Altar. All actions of the Altar Server are woven from signs and symbols whose meaning is rooted in the works of creation and in human culture, specified by events in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that all Altar Server do their assigned tasks in the prescribed form and manner.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

This *Altar Server Guide* is intended as a general guide. Your pastor may require different procedures.

Although institution into the ministry of acolyte is reserved to lay men, the diocesan bishop may permit the liturgical functions of the instituted acolyte to be carried out by altar servers, men and women, boys and girls. The determination that women and girls may function as servers in the liturgy should be made by the bishop on the diocesan level so that there might be a uniform diocesan policy.

No distinction should be made between the functions carried out in the sanctuary by men and boys and those carried out by women and girls. The term "altar boys" should be replaced by "servers". The term "server" should be used for those who carry out the functions of the instituted acolyte.

Altar servers perform most of the functions of the former "minor order" of ordained clerics known as acolytes from the Greek word *akolouthos* or '*attendant*'. Church writings from the second and third centuries discuss the role of acolytes, giving the office great importance and honour in the history of the Church. Altar servers today are not ordained, but are 'commissioned' by their parish priest.

The primary role of the altar server is to assist the priest in the celebration of the liturgy during Mass. This is done through specific actions and by setting an example to the congregation by active participation in the liturgy (hymns, responses, etc.), by looking alert and sitting or standing at the appropriate times.

Servers carry the cross, the processional candle(s), hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary.

Servers should be seated in a place from which they can easily assist the priest celebrant and deacon. The place next to the priest is normally reserved for the deacon.

Servers may not distribute holy communion unless they have been mandated for this function by the bishop.

Altar servers must attend every Mass that they have been scheduled. When a server cannot be present they must arrange for a replacement.

Altar servers are on duty from the time they enter the sanctuary at the start of Mass until they finish cleanup after the end of Mass. During the Mass their duty station is the sanctuary and a server may not leave the sanctuary except as directed by a priest, deacon or bodily necessity.

Altar servers must have received first confession and Holy Communion.

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## POSTURE

The three primary positions during the mass are standing, sitting and kneeling. In any of these positions they should maintain a straight formal posture. In the standing and kneeling positions their hands should be held in the praying position. When sitting the hands should be held on the lap or at the sides.

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## DRESS

Whatever you wear underneath an alb will show through. Servers should wear white or solid colours.

Dress shoes should be worn whenever possible.

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## GENUFLECTION & BOWING

The Catholic Catechism allows for bowing in consideration for the Eastern Rites which perform a profound bow instead of genuflection.

Servers should genuflect whenever entering a church pew, the sanctuary or crosses in front of the tabernacle, they should face the tabernacle and genuflect/bow. The exception is when carrying things like crosses, sacred vessels, books or candles they do not genuflect.

When the tabernacle is closed and Jesus is not present on the Altar after the consecration or exposed for Eucharistic Adoration genuflect on the right knee. *The right knee touches the floor pause and bow your head to Jesus.*

When the Body of Jesus is present on the Altar or Jesus is exposed in the monstrance during Eucharistic Adoration and a server or anyone is entering or leaving the church double genuflect.

*Both knees touching the floor, the right knee first. Pause with knees on the floor and bow your head to Jesus.*

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### DUTIES BEFORE MASS

Upon arrival the server should dress in the alb and cincture or cassock and surplice.

The cruets to be used at the service must be rinsed with clean water before filling.

Fill one cruet with wine from the altar wine supply. Fill the other cruet with cold fresh water from the tap.

Place the prepared chalice, ciborium if required, filled cruets, washing bowl, towels and any extra chalices required on the credence table.

Some parishes that have a procession may wish the wine and ciborium or filled paten to be placed on a table at the entrance of the church for use in the offertory procession.

Five minutes to mass time a server should light all appropriate candles.

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### DUTIES DURING MASS

In a procession the cross-bearers will lead the procession into and from the sanctuary. After entering the sanctuary the cross-bearer will bow to the tabernacle (*altar if tabernacle is at a side altar*) and then proceed to place the cross in its stand, normally facing the priest as the people can all see the central crucifix behind the altar. Never genuflect when carrying anything, including the procession cross.

The candle-bearers follow the cross-bearer in procession and bow to the tabernacle (*altar if tabernacle is at a side altar*).

All servers will then proceed to their assigned locations genuflect/bow facing the tabernacle from their assigned positions with the priest and the deacon. If the tabernacle is on a side altar face the tabernacle when genuflecting/bowing.

During the *Glory to God in the Highest (Lord have mercy . . . during lent)*, the appointed server will pick up the small Sacramentary and wait for the

priest to say, *Let us pray*. When the priest says, *Let us pray*, server will proceed directly in front of the priest and open the book to the pre-marked position. Hold the book open so the priest can read the prayer. Keep the pages flat, your fingers out of the text and do not move about while the priest is reading. When the priest is finished, close the Sacramentary and return it to its place. Sit down in your assigned position for the readings.

All servers sit with the people during the collection. When the ushers are 3/4 of the way down the middle aisle during the last collection the candle-bearers stand up, genuflect to the tabernacle and walk to procession candles. Genuflect to the tabernacle, pick up your candles and turn toward the people. Walk to the back of the church and wait for the rest of the gift procession. When the ushers have the procession ready turn toward the altar and lead the gift procession to the priest.

The candle-bearers should walk slowly together starting on their left foot toward the sanctuary. When walking hold the candle underneath with your inside hand and grasp the candle stick with your outside hand, holding your elbow out toward the people. Never carry anything but your candle! When you reach the sanctuary pass around the priest and deacon and proceed to the front of the altar. Set down your candles and genuflect to the tabernacle if it is behind the altar, bow to the altar if the tabernacle is on a side altar. Proceed to your positions at the credence table or assist the priest in accepting the gifts if no other server is available.

The cross-bearer and remaining servers should stand when the priest and deacon stand and follow them to the assigned positions. Servers should be positioned at the left side and behind the priest. If a deacon is not present one server should take the water and wine cruets from the priest and place them on the credence table. Another server should take anything else brought up in the procession and place it on the credence table.

Remove the tops from the wine and water cruets and hand the deacon or priest the wine or water as he directs. Stand until the deacon or priest is finished. If it is the priest who you hand to or pour the water and wine, bow to the priest (*do not bow to the deacon*) and then return to the credence table and recap the wine cruet and place it on the credence table. The reason we bow to the priest is because he acts in the person of Christ during the consecration of the Mass.

### After the offering:

If a single server - Unfold the wash towel and place it over your least used arm. With your good arm hold the water cruet. Pick up the washing bowl and hold it with your towel arm. Approach the Altar and pour the water over the priest's hands collecting the water in the bowl. Let the priest take the towel and when he has placed the towel back on your arm bow to him and return to the credence table. Neatly arrange the cruets, towel, and bowl on the table.

### BELL RINGING - (optional):

Three times is done in some parishes in honour of the Trinity; bells rung three distinct times for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . .

Because the elevation of the Body and Blood of Jesus are solemn times, (*the bread and wine we offered has now become the real BODY and BLOOD of our God, Jesus Christ*) it is proper to look at the elevated Jesus and say to yourself "*My Lord and my God.*" following the example of Thomas the Apostle.

### Closing Prayers:

*All sit until the priest says: "Let us pray." If a server is assigned to hold the prayer book, the server will proceed directly in front of the priest and open the prayer book to the proper page, hold the book for the priest as with the opening prayer. When the priest is finished, close the Sacramentary and return it to its stand.*

*All servers should then be standing in their assigned positions and follow along with the people.*

### Exit Procession:

*Cross-bearer should pick up the processional cross. All servers then turn and proceed quickly to their procession positions. All processions are always in order of rank. Cross bearer first, then candle bearers, other servers, lector, extra-ordinary ministers, deacons, priests, bishops, cardinals, the pope.*

## **DUTIES AFTER MASS**

*Extinguish the candles by using the proper tool. Do not smash the wicks. Do not blow out the candles.*

*Remove your liturgical clothing and hang it neatly in its proper place.*

*Clean up any messes you made on the credence and preparation tables.*

*Remove all notes and papers from the sanctuary and pulpit and place them where directed.*

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## ALTAR SERVER APPLICATION

(Please Print Clearly)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

All Altar Server must make themselves available for the Mass times they choose to Altar Server at.

The Altar Server forms a very important part of the church and every parish is enriched through their dedication and service. It is a very important responsibility, and requires a sincere commitment. Only if you are serious about committing to the following expectations should you apply to be an Altar Server. Your signature indicates your agreement to these expectations.

1. All Altar Servers are expected to be at the Church 15 minutes before Mass begins.
2. All Altar Servers are to check in with the Acolyte and see what needs to be done to prepare for Mass.
3. All Altar Servers are expected to fulfil their assigned times to serve.
4. All Altar Servers are expected to wear "Sunday clothes" at the weekend Masses.
5. All Altar Servers are expected to hang up their vestments after Mass. (if any worn)
6. All Altar Servers are expected to pay attention to the Priest and Acolyte/Minister during Mass.
7. All Altar Servers are expected to know and say the appropriate responses throughout the Mass.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

