

ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH, HIGHGATE



ALTAR SERVERS' HANDBOOK

WHAT IS AN ALTAR SERVER?

To be a good server, you need to know what to do and how to do it properly. But it is not just a matter of doing the right thing at the right time and in the right place: a robot can do that! A good server is one who also knows why things are done in that way and why it is necessary to have servers in the first place.

You may think that the name 'Altar Server' is simply a name and nothing more; most servers never give it a second thought. However, imagine what you would think if someone called you a servant. Most of you would not like it because you prefer not to think of yourselves as waiting on someone else. Yet the words "server" and "servant" really mean the same thing. The altar server serves others. It is not something to be ashamed of. On the contrary, it is something of which you can be very proud because you are following the example of Jesus himself.

Jesus showed his apostles (and therefore us as well) that he had come to be a servant when he washed their feet before the Last Supper. Jesus wants us all to follow His example and become servants of others. As an altar server, you will do this in a very special way. Serving is a privilege, a gift, or, as we sometimes say, a grace given to you by God. By his special invitation, you are called to do his work in this privileged way.



WHO DO YOU SERVE?

So, as an altar server, who do you serve?

1. *The Priest:*

The most obvious person you serve is the Priest, by preparing the Altar and Sanctuary, and by assisting in the celebration of Mass and other services in the Church. These are important tasks because they enable the Priest to carry out his duties and lead the people more easily in prayer and worship of God.

2. *The Community:*

It is not only the Priest you serve at Mass: you serve all the people in the Church, the entire community. You serve them by helping the Priest to lead them in prayer and by ensuring that the services are carried out well and in a dignified manner. Remember that the way you serve will help or hinder the people in their prayer and worship. A careless or sloppy server can distract and even irritate people. But a server who shows off and performs quite unnecessary movements, or who is too slow and fussy, can be just as bad. Dignity and prayerfulness are the golden guides of the good server. Remember that you are a server, not for your own sake, but for the sake of others.

3. *Jesus:*

The Mass and other services are collectively known as “The Liturgy.” The wonderful thing about the liturgy, especially the Mass, is that Jesus is present. When he came on this earth as a man, he spent much of his time praying to his Father and, because he was the Son of God, his prayer was sure to be heard. His greatest prayer was the sacrifice of the Cross. He wants us to pray like him, but that is impossible if we rely on our own powers. So, to make it possible, he gives us the power to pray along with him in the liturgy. The liturgy is his way of making his prayer present so that we can offer it to the Father. Jesus is there in the liturgy so that we may become united with Him and with each other and so offer perfect worship to the Father.

When you serve, you are helping Jesus do His job. You are working directly for him. So, once again, you can see how important it is to be a server and to be a good server at that.

WHAT IS SERVING?

1. Serving is Teamwork

Obviously, when serving with other servers, you must work together and be aware of what each server is doing - you must work as a team. But, important as you may be as servers, you are not the only people concerned in the liturgy who are at the service of others. So at Mass, there is a whole team of people serving the community. Besides you and the Priest, there are the readers, the extraordinary ministers of Communion, the choir and organist, those who take the collection, those who bring up the gifts at the Offertory and many others whose service is perhaps hidden but no less important.

Good liturgy means working alongside other people - it means teamwork. Like a successful football team, it means that we must work together as a cohesive unit. As a server, you have to learn how to be part of a team, to appreciate what others are doing, to help them if necessary, and to accept help from them when you need it.

2. Serving is Praying

As a server, you can learn all the correct things to do and when to do them. But, there’s one secret of good serving - it is to pray as you serve.

That may sound difficult. Don’t worry. It does not mean that you have to go around muttering words to God as you serve. If you do that, you may find yourself forgetting what to do. What it does mean, first of all, is that you should make all the responses, join in the singing and listen to the prayers and readings with all the other people in the Church. As a server, however, you get another chance to pray. All that you do, all the actions, the ceremonial, even the most ordinary jobs you do to help others, are one big prayer.

Prayer is not only words. You can pray in all sorts of ways, and one of these is by serving, by carrying out all the actions and ceremonies of the liturgy to the best of your ability and offering

it up to God. When you do that, you are praying not only with your lips but with your whole body. Serving is praying in action. Each movement and gesture you make is part of that prayer.

WHY SHOULD I SERVE?

We all go to Church to praise God and to try to get closer to him. You will sometimes hear young people say, "I don't like going to Mass because it's boring". Hopefully, as a server, you will never feel this way.

Through serving the Mass and other services, you should become more interested because you will be more closely involved in the actions of the liturgy. You will also learn about the Mass, which will provide a better understanding of what is happening. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are playing a vital part in the Church's liturgy and by serving the entire community. And you will use your service to pray not only with words but also with actions.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ALTAR SERVING

Serving is a prayer to God, so everything you do as a Server must be done with Reverence (respect), Understanding and Regularity (often).

- BEFORE LEAVING HOME, make sure you are neat and tidy. You must wear black shoes and dark-coloured socks. Additionally, try to avoid wearing polo neck sweaters or hoodies, as they can appear scruffy when hanging out of the top of your cassock.
- ARRIVE AT THE CHURCH in good time, at least 15 minutes before Mass is due to begin.
- ALL ACTIONS should be done deliberately, thoroughly and without hurry, not too slowly, but always with dignity.
- STANDING: Always take care to stand up straight and to stand still when in the Sanctuary.
- WALKING: All movements in the Sanctuary should be noiseless, graceful and reverent.



When two or more servers are together, they should move in unison.

- TURNING: When two servers are together, they should turn in towards one another.
- HANDS: should be held together on the breast, palm to palm, with the fingers extended and closed together, pointing upwards, but not upright, the thumbs being crossed right over left. When one hand is being used, the other should lie with the open palm on the chest, fingers and thumb lying together in a horizontal position. When sitting, place your hands, palms down, on your knees.

- **GENUFLECTION:** To make a genuflection, drop the right knee to the ground near the left heel, and keep the body and head upright; meanwhile, keep the hands joined in front of the chest. The server should genuflect upon entering the Sanctuary at the start of Mass and upon leaving at the end of Mass. This is to show a sign of respect to the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle.



- **BOWS:** A simple bow is made when you turn away from the Priest and is done by bowing the head only. A profound bow is made to the Tabernacle outside of Mass or the Altar during Mass, by bending the head and shoulders more deeply. Both types of bow should be made slowly and with respect.



- **SITTING:** When sitting, sit up straight. It is also important that you sit still and keep your hands in place on your lap, and your feet flat on the floor. Playing with your medal or swinging your legs will distract the congregation and the Priest.

- **EYES** should always be on the Priest, the reader when they are reading, and the senior server. Never stare at the people in the Church or gaze around. You have an important job to do, and therefore, you need to be alert and on the lookout for what you must do next.

- **KNEELING:** The server should always kneel so that they are upright. Do not sit on your heels. When changing from kneeling to sitting, or sitting to kneeling, always stand up first. Do not slide off the front of your seat. Do not use your hands to push yourself up or support yourself as you change position. Your elbows should also not need to be supported by the wall in front of the server's benches.



- **TALKING** distracts the congregation and draws attention to you. It is important, while serving, that you only speak when necessary and only in relation to serving. There is no place for general chatter in the Sanctuary.
- **MISTAKES** do happen. Perhaps you shouldn't have moved, or you have gone to the wrong place. Do not worry. Calmly return to your place as if nothing had gone wrong. Few people will notice if you don't rush.

WHAT IS THE MASS?

In the introduction to these notes, we stated that it is essential not only to know what to do but also to know why we do it. As an altar server, you should know what the Mass is all about and what it means; that is what these notes will help you to discover.

The Beginning

Jesus had been preaching, teaching, and healing for three years. But a lot of people opposed him, and he knew that he had very little time left before he was arrested and put to death. So he had one final meal with his friends, a kind of farewell meal.

It was no ordinary meal. It was the Passover Meal, which all Jewish families eat once a year, to remind themselves how God loved them and rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He rescued them, promised to be with them forever, and led them to the Promised Land, Israel. That was the meal Jesus ate with his apostles the night before he died, the meal we call the Last Supper.

The Last Supper

During the meal, Jesus gave his friends a wonderful gift - he gave himself, his own Body and Blood. Taking some bread, he said a prayer to his Father, broke it, and gave a piece to each of the apostles. He said, "This is my body". Later in the meal, he picked up his cup of wine, again prayed to his Father, and gave each of the apostles the cup to drink from. He said, "This is my blood"



What the Last Supper meant

The old Passover meal told of the rescuing of God's people from slavery in Egypt. The Last Supper, the new Passover meal, tells the story of God's people being rescued from slavery to sin.

The Body and Blood which Jesus gave to his apostles were the same Body and Blood he offered to his Father when he died on the Cross. By that sacrifice, our sins are forgiven, and we are given a share in the life of Jesus.

The Last Supper and the Mass

When Jesus gave the bread and wine - his Body and Blood - to the apostles, he gave them a command:

"Do this in memory of me".

We obey that command every time we celebrate Mass. At Mass, we offer to the Father the sacrifice of Jesus. He makes us part of that sacrifice, and we receive the same benefits as if we had been at the Last Supper or at the Cross with Jesus.

The Mass today

Of course, the Mass today looks very different from the Last Supper, which took place nearly two thousand years ago. The style is different, but the meaning is the same.

Over the next few weeks, we will examine the composition of the Mass as it is celebrated today. You must, however, always remember that it is the same sacrifice and celebration as the Last Supper, which took place all those years ago.

'Do this in memory of me'



THE MASS

There are several words which you will come across in these notes that you may not have heard before; you must understand what they mean:

Liturgy: the word used to describe the official prayer of the Church. When the members of God's Church gather together to pray, such as at Mass, this is called a Liturgy. Some parts of the Mass are described as Liturgies, e.g. 'Liturgy of the Word'.

Rite: the word 'Rite' really means the Mass or other services, but it is also used to describe particular parts of the Mass, e.g. 'Penitential Rite'

The Mass is the central act of prayer of the whole Church. It is God's people praying together and offering up to the Father Christ's final prayer – the sacrifice of his death on the Cross. It is the most important Liturgy of the Church.

We often refer to the Priest "saying the Mass", but this is not strictly correct. The Priest presides at Mass (this is why his chair is called the 'Presidential Chair'), which is said by everyone taking part: the Priest, servers, and people all together offering the prayer to God.

The Mass has many different parts and different moods. As a server, you should be familiar with these parts and their meanings.

The Mass has five main parts - here is an easy way to remember them, with their more official names alongside:

- COME - Opening Rite
- LISTEN - Liturgy of the Word
- GIVE THANKS - Liturgy of the Eucharist
- TAKE AND EAT - Communion Rite
- GO - Concluding Rite

Try to imagine that it is God - Father, Son and Spirit - who speaks these commands.

The Opening Rite (*Come*)

<i>ENTRY</i>	A Hymn or Antiphon. To join us all together and to help us prepare for what is to come.
<i>GREETING</i>	The Priest makes the Sign of the Cross and then greets everybody, to which we all reply together, showing that the Lord is with us and unites us. The Priest may also say something to introduce the theme of the Mass.
<i>PENITENTIAL RITE</i>	We tell God and each other that we are sorry for our sins – the things which divide us from God. There are several forms of the Penitential Rite – the most commonly used is the I Confess ('Confiteor') followed by the "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy" response.
<i>GLORIA</i>	On Sundays and major feast days, we praise God for all the wonderful things He has done for us, either in song or in the words beginning "Glory to God" – the Gloria is not said or sung during Lent or Advent.
<i>OPENING PRAYER</i>	The Priest joins all our prayers together in the Opening Prayer of the Mass. He begins by saying, "Let us pray," and at the end of the prayer, we respond, "Amen." This prayer is also known as the 'Collect' as it 'collects' the theme of the Mass.

The Liturgy of the Word (*Listen*)

The Mass is a kind of conversation between God and ourselves. He speaks to us, and we reply in our prayers and songs. This occurs throughout the entire Mass, but the most obvious time when God speaks to us is during what we call the "Liturgy of the Word".

READINGS

The First Reading typically comes from the Old Testament. The Second Reading is from the New Testament, usually from the Letters of the Apostles (Epistles) or from the “Acts of the Apostles”, but not from the Gospels. There is always some connection between the First Reading and the Gospel, but the Second Reading does not always fit into the same theme.

**RESPONSORIAL
PSALM**

This is an ancient song-prayer from the Bible. It is chosen to make us think about the First Reading. It is sung, or said, immediately after the First Reading, with the cantor or lector singing or saying the verses and the people making the response together.



**GOSPEL
ACCLAMATION**

Just before the reading of the Gospel, we sing, or say, a short verse, which is really a shout for joy to greet the Gospel. It usually begins and ends with the word “Alleluia”, which means “hooray”. The Alleluia is not said during Lent.

GOSPEL

The Priest reads an extract of one of the four Gospels telling us about the life of Christ.

HOMILY

The Priest, or a deacon, explains some part of the Readings, to help us to put God’s teaching into practice in our own lives.

CREED

From the Latin word “Credo,” which translates to “I believe,” we profess our Faith together using either the “Apostles Creed” or the “Nicene Creed.”

**BIDDING
PRAYERS**

These are also known as the “Prayers of the Faithful”. The Priest normally starts and finishes these, with a reader leading us in some intentions for which we are invited to pray. After each intention, we pray for a moment in silence, and then we respond with a phrase like “hear our prayer”.

The first two sections of the Mass, “COME” and “LISTEN”, take place mainly whilst the Priest is at his Chair and the reader is at the Lectern. At the end of the Bidding Prayers, the Priest moves to the Altar



The Liturgy of the Eucharist (*Give thanks*)

When we look around at the wonderful world God has made, when we think of all the good things God has done for us, and when we remember the teachings and work of Jesus, then we must thank God for His great goodness to us. Thanking God is the most crucial part of this section of the Mass, which all happens at or near the Altar.

THE OFFERTORY This is like getting the table ready for a meal. The Chalice, the Missal and other items are placed on the Altar. The bread and wine are brought up to the Altar and handed to the Priest, who offers them up to God on our behalf, as a sign of offering all we have to Him.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER This means 'thanksgiving prayer' and is the most important prayer of the entire Mass. At the beginning, the Priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," and during this prayer, we thank the Father for everything he has done for us. We thank him especially for sending Jesus to us. We remember the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to heaven. We pray for the whole Church, those who are alive and those who have died.

During the Eucharistic Prayer, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The prayer ends when the Priest says to the Father: "*Through him (that is, through Jesus), and with him, and in him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, for ever and ever.*" We answer: "*Amen.*"

"Through, with and in Jesus": this is the most complete prayer. It gets its power from him; he is present in it.

The Communion Rite (*Take and Eat*)

At the Last Supper, Jesus said the bread was now his Body, and the wine was now his Blood. He added, "*Take and eat*"/"*Take and drink*". So at Mass, we obey that command of Jesus. At Communion, we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

OUR FATHER This is the ideal prayer to begin this part of the Mass, as it is given to us by Jesus Himself and asks God to provide us with our daily needs and to forgive our sins.

SIGN OF PEACE This reminds us that before we receive Jesus in Communion, we must be at peace with everybody. We turn to those near to us and shake their hands as a sign of the peace and love that Jesus wants us to share with them.

COMMUNION A simple action of eating and drinking. But it means much more than an ordinary meal. Through Communion, we receive the life of Jesus Christ, and

we are united with all the other people who receive him. Communion makes us one.

Being one with Jesus in this way is so important that we spend a few minutes, after Communion, saying “Thank you” and praying quietly to him in our hearts.



The Concluding Rite (Go!)

CONCLUDING PRAYER

The Priest brings all our prayers together in the final Prayer of the Mass. He begins by saying, “Let us pray,” and at the end of the prayer, we respond, “Amen.”

THE DISMISSAL

The Priest finishes by giving a final blessing and sending us out to put into effect in our daily lives what we have celebrated, by “glorifying God by our lives”.

SERVING AT MASS

ROLES OF THE ALTAR SERVERS

Each altar server plays a crucial role in helping the Mass run smoothly and reverently.

1. **Thurifer:** Carries the thurible (the metal vessel with burning charcoal) and leads the incense rituals. Works closely with the Boat-Bearer. The Thurifer walks carefully so that the smoke rises gently and prayerfully.



2. Boat-Bearer: Carries the boat, a small container with incense grains. Holds it open for the priest when he adds incense to the thurible. Always stands beside the Thurifer when incense is used.



3. Cross-Bearer (Crucifer): Leads the procession at the beginning and end of Mass, carrying the processional cross. Sets the cross carefully in its stand near the altar and assists during the Preparation of the Gifts.



4. Candle-Bearers (Acolytes): Carry the candles in and out of Mass and during the Gospel Procession. During the Offertory, they help prepare the altar, bring the cruets, and assist with the Lavabo (washing of the priest's hands).



5. Book-Bearer: Holds the Roman Missal (the priest's book of prayers) during the Collect Prayer and Prayer After Communion. Holds it firmly, with the top resting on their chest so the priest can read easily.



6. Bell Ringer: Rings the bells during the Consecration and Elevation of the Body and Blood of Christ to draw the congregation's attention to the holiest moments.



7. Senior Server / Captain: The most experienced server. Helps assign roles, gives quiet instructions during Mass, ensures everyone is in the right place, and leads the final prayer after Mass in the Sacristy.



BEFORE MASS

- Arrival:** Arrive 10–15 minutes before Mass.
Sign in on the altar servers' sheet.
Choose an alb that reaches your ankles.
Gather in the Sacristy for prayer and role assignments.
- Preparation:** Check that the candles, cross, thurible, cruets, bowl, and towels are ready.
Keep your hands folded neatly when standing or kneeling and not carrying anything.
Move slowly and respectfully at all times.
- Prayer Before Serving:** Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me to serve at Your altar.
Help me to carry out my duties with reverence, attention, and love. Amen.

DURING MASS

The following order is used for the Procession to the Altar at the start of Mass:

Thurifer (and Boat)
Cross
Acolyte 1 Acolyte 2
Other servers (in pairs in height order)
Priest



- The Procession:** The Thurifer (or Cross Bearer if there is no Thurifer) leads the Procession up the side aisle and down the nave. The Thurifer, followed by the Cross and Acolytes, then go up the steps to the Altar and give a bow before going to their places. The other servers walk to the bottom of the steps, genuflect in pairs, and then split up to take their seats on the benches.
- Incense:** Where this is used, the Thurifer with the Boat-Bearer should go to the Priest and raise the lid of the Thurible by means of the ring at the top of the centre chain. He should then grasp the chains just above the lid and raise the Thurible to the level of the Priest's hands. After the Priest has put the incense on the charcoal, the Thurifer should lower the Thurible, close the lid and pass the Thurible to the Priest with his right hand. The Priest then incenses the Altar and returns the Thurible to the Thurifer, who should go to his place.

Book-Bearer: When the Priest says “Let us Pray”, the Book-Bearer should bring the book to the Priest, holding the book at the bottom, being careful not to cover the words with their hands, and resting the top of the book on their chest (or their forehead if the book is too low for the Priest). When the congregation reply “Amen,” the Book-Bearer should return to their place.

Gospel Procession: All servers stand and turn to the lectern. The Acolytes pick up their candles and stand by the arch on the far side. The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer go to the Priest, and he puts new incense in the Thurible. As this is happening, someone from the near side goes to collect the book from the reader. The Priest then picks up the Gospel Book and stands behind the Acolytes. The Acolytes lead the Priest Lectern and rest their candles on each wall, and face one another. The Priest blesses the Gospel Book with incense and then begins to read the Gospel. At the end of the Gospel, after the congregation reply “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”, the servers should return to their places.

Offertory Procession: Two servers should set the Altar. As the Priest goes down to collect the Offertory, two Servers should stand by him (one on either side) to take the cruets to the Credence Table.

Preparation Of the Gifts: Two Servers should take the cruets to the Priest, ensuring that the lids are not on, the server holding the wine is on the right (from the priest’s perspective), and that the handles of the cruets are facing the Priest. Once this has been done, the Servers should give a simple bow to the Priest in union and turn back to the Credence Table to get ready to wash the Priest’s hands. The Thurifer should then step forward with the Boat-Bearer, and the Priest will then fill the Thurible with incense. The Thurifer should then hand the Thurible to the Priest, and he will bless the Altar with the incense. When the Priest has returned the Thurible, the Thurifer should incense him (two swings, three times) and then the congregation (one swing, three times), then step to the side. Whilst this is happening, the two servers should approach the Priest with the Lavabo Bowl and Lavabo Cloth for him to wash his hands. Once finished, the Servers should give a simple bow and return the bowl and cloth to the Credence table and then go back to their places.

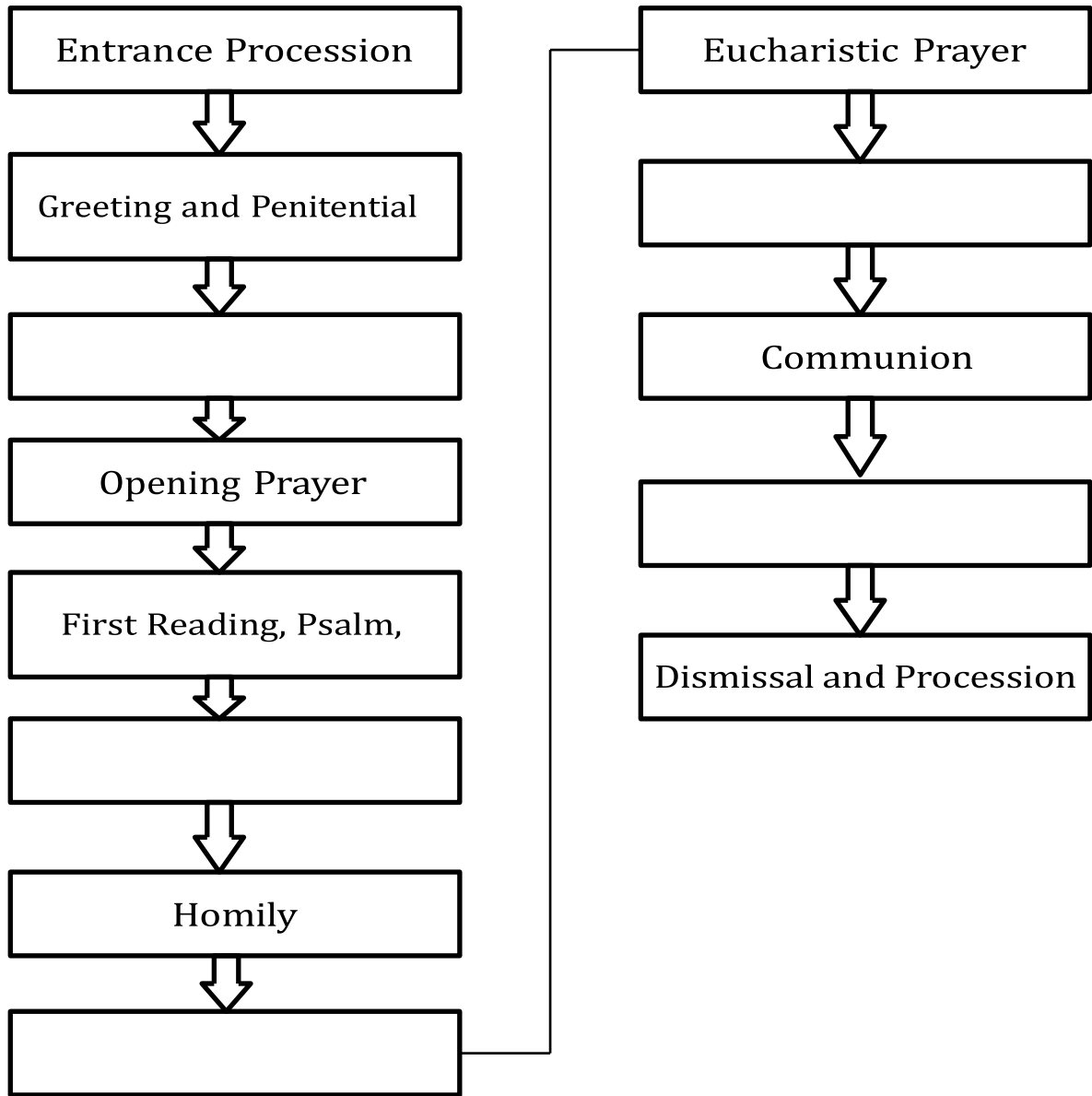
Consecration: The Consecration is the central moment when the bread and wine, by the words of Christ spoken by the priest and the invocation of the Holy Spirit,

become the Body and Blood of Christ. The Thurifer should wait until the end of the "Holy, holy, holy..." before kneeling on the first step in front of the Altar. When the priest calls the Holy Spirit down upon the gifts, saying "Make holy, therefore, these gifts..." and places both hands outstretched over top of the chalice and the paten, the altar server should do one, short, ring of the bells. At the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament and the elevation of the Blood, when the priest holds first the consecrated host, and then the chalice, up over his head for the people to see, the bell should be rung three times and the Thurifer should incense (3 swings, 3 times). At the "Amen" (usually sung) at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Thurifer should stand, give a simple bow, and return to the Sacristy to put the Thurible away.



- Communion:** Servers join the Sign of Peace with priest and other servers before forming to receive communion. As the Priest gives the chalices to the Eucharistic Minister, the Senior Server will instruct the other Servers to walk into the middle of the Sanctuary and form two straight lines facing the Altar.
- After Communion:** The Servers should kneel when the Priest returns to the Sanctuary. They should remain kneeling until the Eucharistic Minister has genuflected to the Tabernacle. Two Servers should then clear the Altar.
- Book-Bearer:** When the Priest stands and says, "Let us Pray", the Book-Bearer should bring and hold the book for him. When the congregation reply "Amen", the server should return to their place.
- Procession:** At the end of Mass, the Cross and Acolytes should walk down the centre of the nave, followed by the other servers. They should all turn to face the Sanctuary. When the Priest genuflects at the bottom of the steps, the Servers should also genuflect and then turn inwards and follow the Cross up the nave and then down the side aisle to the Sacristy. In the Sacristy, the Servers, led by the Senior Server, should bow to the Cross and then say the prayer for after serving.
- End of Mass:** The Servers should all help to tidy the Sanctuary whilst still in their vestments, and then change and leave quietly.

ACTIVITY: ORDER OF THE MASS



Offertory

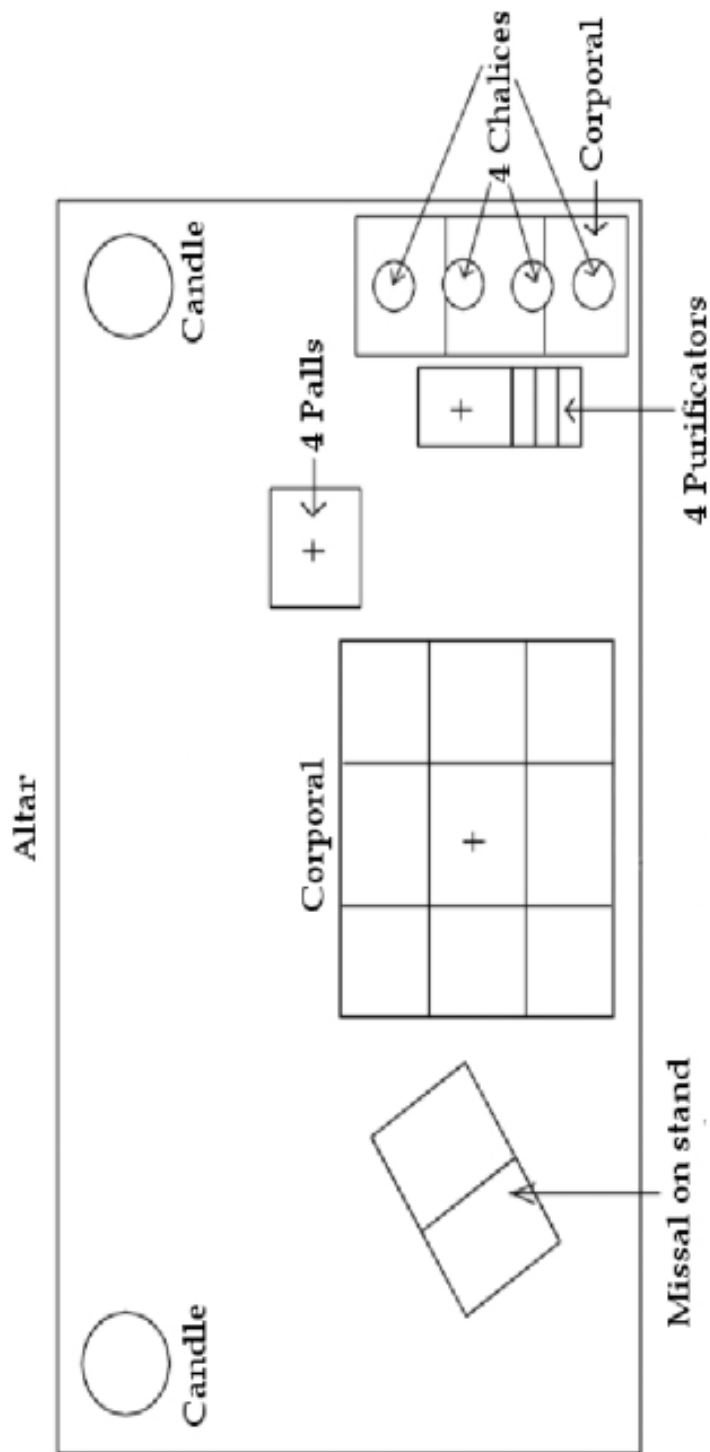
Gloria

Sign of Peace

Prayer after Communion

Alleluia and Gospel

LAYING OUT THE ALTAR AT MASS



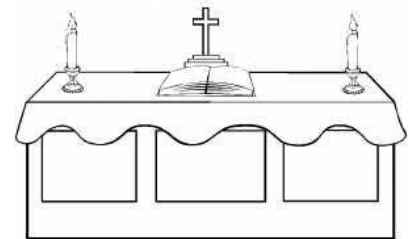
THE SANCTUARY

The Sanctuary is the most sacred part of the Church and is where the liturgy is presided from. Its name comes from the Latin word 'Sanctus', which means holy. This is why we must always be reverent when we are serving in the Sanctuary.

The three most important places in the Sanctuary during Mass are:

- The Altar
- The Priest's Chair
- The Reader's Lectern

THE ALTAR: The Altar is the centre-piece of the Sanctuary. It is the table on which the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered and from which we receive Holy Communion (the food of eternal life). It is, therefore, the focal point of the celebration.



The main Altar in a church is usually made of stone, although wooden altars are sometimes used. Our Altar, consecrated by our Bishop, features relics (typically small pieces of bone) of one or more martyrs set into the back. The use of these "relics" originates from the time of early Christians, who, during periods of persecution, would celebrate Mass in

the catacombs on the tombs of martyrs.

The Altar is covered by a cloth, usually white, which often reaches to the floor at each end. Some altars are decorated by an Altar Frontal, which hangs the full length of the front of the Altar. This frontal typically matches the colour of the vestments being worn by the celebrant. The only decorations that should be on the Altar itself are the candles.

THE PRIEST'S CHAIR: The Priest (more appropriately called the celebrant) leads the opening and the closing prayers of the Mass from his chair, which is called the "Presidential Chair" because the celebrant presides at the celebration of the Mass by the whole community. This is why it is one of the most critical places in the Sanctuary. The position of the Presidential Chair will vary from Church to Church, the most important factor in its positioning being that the congregation should be able to see the celebrant when he is sitting on it.



THE READER'S LECTERN: A Lectern is a stand for a book or a stand from which the readings are read. The Reader's Lectern is one of the most important places in the Sanctuary because it is the place from which the "Word of God" is proclaimed. This is sometimes referred to as an "Ambo".

There are some other items, in or around the Sanctuary, that you need to remember. These are:

THE CRUCIFIX: A Crucifix is a representation of Christ on the Cross. As the Mass is a memorial of Christ's death, there must always be a Crucifix in the Sanctuary when Mass is being celebrated. In many churches, the Crucifix is on the rear wall or hanging above the Altar. For Sunday Masses and other solemn Masses, the Processional Cross is placed in a holder alongside that Cross.

THE TABERNACLE: The Tabernacle is the place in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept. The name originates from a Latin word meaning "tent." For safety purposes, the Tabernacle is a small safe. The Tabernacle may be covered with a veil which, like the Altar frontal, matches the colour of the vestments. This is not the case at St. Joseph's. A light, known as the Sanctuary Lamp, is kept burning hanging from the roof of the Altar to indicate to the people that



the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there. Once Mass has started, we should focus our attention on the Altar. The Tabernacle doesn't need to be located in the Sanctuary; in many large churches, the Blessed Sacrament is reserved on a separate altar, often in a side chapel.

CREDESCENCE TABLE: The Credence Tables are the tables on which the sacred vessels and other objects for the ceremonies are placed during the service. The main Credence Table is always on the right-hand side of the Altar from the position in which the Priest stands whilst at the Altar.

BOOKS USED DURING MASS

There are two books used during the Mass:

THE MISSAL: This book (full title "The Roman Missal") contains all the prayers of the Mass. It contains all the parts of the Mass that do not change, and also the prayers for the particular day, or the Mass that is being said. It also includes the instructions for the Priest on how to say the Mass. The Missal is the book the Priest uses both at the Chair and at the Altar.

THE LECTIONARY: This book contains all the Scripture readings and psalms used during the Mass. It is in three volumes and includes the readings for each day and for all other celebrations. The Lectionary is the book used by the Priest and the readers' Lectern.

THE SACRISTY

Adjacent to the Sanctuary, this is the area in which the Priests and the servers vest and in which are kept the sacred vessels, the altar furnishings and the vestments.

In the Sacristy, the Priests and ministers vest for services. In this room are also kept all the vestments, the sacred vessels and the altar breads and wine. Servers should only be in this part of the Sacristy when they are actually preparing for Mass or clearing up afterwards. Here your

cassocks and cotta are kept. This is the area in which servers should congregate and remain, except when actually carrying out duties elsewhere.

Whilst we do not insist on absolute silence in the Sacristy, you must remember that it is part of the Church. We do, therefore, expect you to maintain a sensible standard of behaviour there. Whilst in the Sacristy, you should be trying to prepare yourself for the ceremonies at which you are about to serve. Once we have said our 'prayers before serving', strict silence should be maintained. Remember: *"Talk to God before Mass, and to each other after Mass."*

THE VESTMENTS

The term "vestments" is used to describe the special clothes that the Priest and servers wear while participating in the Church's liturgy. The design of many vestments is inspired by the clothing worn by people during the time of Christ. Many of these vestments have names derived from Latin, a language commonly used by the Church. You must know the names of the vestments so that you can help the Priest prepare for Mass.

As a server, you are also privileged to wear the same vestments as the Priest wears when administering the Sacraments outside of Mass.

These are:

CASSOCK: The long black garment, which should reach down to the top of your shoes.

COTTA: The shorter white garment, worn over the top of your cassock. This should reach down to your thighs, almost to your knees.

ALB: An altar server's alb is a long, white robe worn as a symbol of baptism, purity, and Christian dignity during liturgical services.



You must keep your cassock clean, neat, and labelled with your name. Your cotta, especially, will need to be washed and ironed regularly. It is also essential to wear suitable black shoes. Trainers are not permitted.

The Priest wears many vestments for Mass, and we will examine these in the order in which he puts them on.

AMICE: This is a white linen cloth, with tapes attached to the two top corners. It is worn over the Priest's shoulders, with the tapes around his waist. With some modern Albs, it is not necessary to wear an Amice.



ALB: This is a long white garment which goes from the neck down to the shoes. It is similar to the long undergarment worn by people at the time of Christ. The name "Alb" comes from the Latin word for white, and the garment is worn as a sign of purity.

CINCTURE: A long cord, with tassels at each end, used by the Priest to secure the Alb around his waist. This is usually white, although some churches have them to match the colour of the vestments.

The next vestment the Priest puts on is the most important of all. It is called the:



STOLE: This is like a long, thin scarf and is the first vestment that the Priest uses that must be of the colour of the day. It is very important as it is a sign of the Priesthood. The Stole is worn only by the Priest and the deacon, who are the ordained ministers of the Church. A Priest wears the Stole around his neck, with the ends hanging down in front of him. A deacon wears the stole over his left shoulder with the two ends meeting on the right hip. The Priest and deacon wear the Stole whenever they are administering the Sacraments, as well as during Mass. Once again, it is of very ancient origin as it is named after the 'Stola' - a scarf worn by Greek Philosophers who were allowed to preach their teachings in the streets of ancient Greece.

CHASUBLE: This originates from the cloaks worn at the time of Christ. These were usually a complete circle of cloth with a hole cut in the centre for the head. The design has been adapted for convenience. The Priest uses a Chasuble of the colour of the day, and these are normally decorated both back and front.



DALMATIC: The deacon wears the same vestments as a Priest except that in place of the Chasuble he wears a Dalmatic. This is a square-shaped garment with sleeves, rather than a tunic. It matches the colour of the vestment worn by the Priest.



On very solemn occasions outside of the Mass, the Priest sometimes wears a:

COPE: This is like a very long cloak that reaches down to the ground, with a clasp on the front to keep it in place. As they are used for solemn occasions, they are often very heavily decorated.

HUMERAL VEIL: When carrying the Blessed Sacrament, the Priest sometimes uses a Humeral Veil. This is a large, decorated shawl that is placed over the Priest's shoulders and fastened in front with a clasp.

COLOURS OF VESTMENTS

The Church uses signs and symbols in many ways to help us understand the liturgy, and one of the most obvious of these signs is the colour of the vestments. The colours of the vestments are used to reflect the mood of the celebration or to emphasise some aspect of the liturgy. There are four primary colours used for the vestments:

WHITE: Used during the seasons of Christmas and Easter; On all Feasts of Our Lord, except those concerning his Passion; On all Feasts of Our Lady; On Feasts of Angels; On Feasts of Saints who are not martyrs; On special occasions or celebrations, such as weddings.

RED: Used on Passion (Palm) Sunday and Good Friday; On all Feasts relating to the Passion of Our Lord; On Pentecost and all Masses in honour of the Holy Spirit, such as Confirmation. On the Feasts of the Apostles (apart from St John); On the Feasts of Martyrs.¹⁹

PURPLE: Used during the seasons of Advent and Lent (times of preparation for Christmas and Easter). On the Feast of All Souls, at funerals and Masses for the Dead.

GREEN: Used on Sundays in Ordinary Time - all those outside the special seasons of the liturgy; On all days when there is no special feast.

So you will see that:

WHITE is the colour of celebration and joy.

RED represents the fire of the Holy Spirit, the Blood of Christ, and of the martyrs.

PURPLE expresses a mood of penance and preparation, or of mourning.

GREEN is the colour of nature and new life and expresses hope - an essential part of the life of the Church.

There are other colours which you may occasionally see:

ROSE: May be used on the third Sunday of Advent ('Gaudete' Sunday) and on the fourth Sunday of Lent ('Laetare' Sunday).

GOLD: May be used at any time except when purple vestments would have been used. It symbolises an elevation of the Feast.

BLACK: Is still occasionally used for funerals

ACTIVITY: VESTMENTS AND VESSELS



Chasuble

Cassock + Cotta

Stole

Alb + Cincture

Amice

THE SACRED VESSELS



CHALICE: the sacred cup used at Mass to contain the Blood of Christ, as Jesus used at the Last Supper.

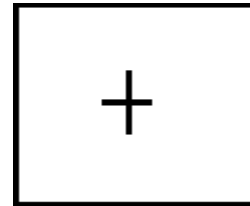
CIBORIUM/ CIBORIA BOWL: A vessel which contains the small hosts for Communion.



PALL: A linen-covered piece of stiff material which may be used to cover the chalice during Mass.

CORPORAL: A square of linen cloth on which the bread and wine are consecrated during Mass. From the Latin word 'Corpus' meaning 'Body'.

PURIFICATOR: A folded piece of linen used to purify and cleanse the chalice. From the word 'purify', which means 'to clean'.



CRUETS: Used to hold the water and wine and brought up at the offertory procession.

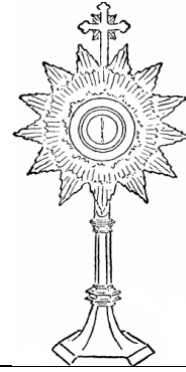
WATER BOWL: Holds water for the Priest to wash his hands.

LAVABO TOWEL: A small rectangular cloth used to dry the Priest's hands when he washes them. From the word 'lave', which means 'to wash'.



PYX: A circular gold vessel in which the body of Christ is taken to the sick and housebound of our community.

MONSTRANCE: The vessel which holds the Blessed Sacrament when it is displayed for adoration and benediction, and carried in processions.



THURIBLE: The container used to incense the gifts, the Priest and the people as a sign of reverence. The smoke that rises from the Thurible also reminds us of our prayers rising to heaven.

PATRON SAINTS FOR ALTAR SERVERS



St. John Berchmans

Memorial: November 26

St. John Berchmans loved being an altar server. He took great care to serve Mass with reverence and attention, seeing every action as a prayer to God. What made him special was not big miracles or great achievements, but his kindness, courtesy, and faithfulness in little things.

He shows us that holiness can be found in the ordinary — by being reliable, respectful, and joyful in service. St. John reminds every altar server that serving well at Mass is already a path to becoming a saint.

Prayer:

St. John Berchmans, help me to serve at the altar with love, reverence, and joy, so that even in the smallest things, I may grow closer to Jesus. Amen.

St. Stephen

Feast Day: December 26

St. Stephen was one of the first deacons of the Church. He was chosen to assist the apostles in serving the community, particularly the poor. Stephen preached about Jesus with courage and was the first Christian martyr (the first to give his life for Christ).

What makes him a model for altar servers is his faith, courage, and love. Just as he served the Church in its early days, altar servers serve the Church today at the altar of God. Stephen reminds us that serving is not just helping at Mass, but a way of living for Jesus with all our heart.

Prayer:

St. Stephen, help me to serve with courage and love, and to be faithful to Jesus in all that I do. Amen.

