ALTAR SERVER INSTRUCTIONS

(effective 4/21/18)

**General Instructions**

* All ministries associated with the holy sacrifice of the Mass have the goal of helping people pray. As altar servers, everything you do while serving either helps people pray or distracts people from prayer. Your preparation actually begins before you get to church. For example, if you do not get enough rest and that causes you to be inattentive or yawn during the liturgy, you will impact the congregation’s experience in a way that we need to avoid.
* All those who serve at the altar must be very dedicated and intent on doing a good job.
* Parents and servers must understand that serving at Mass is a great privilege and that the server should display good behavior, manners, and especially reverence. Joking with one another should take place well before or well after Mass. This is a time of prayerful silence, diligence, and attentiveness.
* It is your responsibility to check the bulletin each week for the server assignments. If you cannot serve as scheduled, it is your responsibility to find a replacement. You can find your own replacement, request one online, or contact Margaret Pruitt at the office. Be sure the office has your current contact information.
* Arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of Mass, sign in, and confirm how many servers are available. The goal for each Mass is four servers.
* Do not bring cell phones into church, or be sure to give them to a family member.
* Arriving at this time gives you a chance to say the *Altar Server’s Prayer Before Serving Holy Mass* and think about what you are about to be a part of.

**Dress Code**

* Please wear appropriate “Sunday best” clothes. This includes dress shoes, nice boots, sandals with a heel strap, slacks or nice blue jeans, long dress or long skirt.
* DO NOT WEAR shorts, flip flops, tennis shoes, crocs, sneakers, short skirts or dresses, or yoga pants.
* Collared shirts should have the collar folded down so that it doesn’t show above the cassock or alb.
* How we dress says a lot about how we think about the Mass.

**PREPARING FOR MASS**

* Get vested. Your cassock or alb should just touch the top of your shoes, short enough to not trip on it but long enough to not show much more than your shoes.
* Light the altar candles, and get the carrying cross and candles no later than 10 minutes before Mass starts. Be ready to process in by the time the 5 minute bells ring.
* Take these last five minutes to look at the altar and Jesus on the cross, thinking about His sacrifice for you.

**The Celebration of the Mass**

* At the direction of the priest or deacon, process down the aisle at a steady, deliberate, and respectful pace. Do not rush the procession!
* The cross bearer always leads, followed by the candle bearers walking side by side, with the last server just behind the candle bearers. If there are less than the full number of servers, the priority is on the cross and then the candles. If there are not enough to carry both candles, no candles are carried. At the foot of the altar, split and go to your respective sides without hesitating. Do not go up to the altar level before reaching the banisters. Place the cross and candles in their holders, and go stand at your pew.
* Whenever you are not holding anything in your hands, hold them together in a prayerful manner, folded in front of you at chest level.
* Your first and greatest responsibility when serving for the holy sacrifice of the Mass is to reverently pray. That means audibly saying or singing every prayer, response, or song. Every one. Every time.
* Toward the end of the Gloria, one server to the left of the priest, will bring up the Missal into the sanctuary and wait to the left of the priest, near the candle on that side, until the Gloria ends. Hold the Missal in front of you, right side up, ready to be opened. When the priest says “Let us pray”, move in front of him, face him, and hold the Missal high enough for him to comfortably open it. When he finishes that prayer, close the Missal quietly and return to your pew with it.
* At the start of the “Alleluia” (Gospel reading), one server from each side goes to the sanctuary and picks up one of the candles. Try to move at the same speed as best you can. Move to the front of the altar, turn so that your back is to the people, lined up in front of the last altar candle on each end of the altar.
* Bow gently with the priest or deacon when he does, always trying to hold the candle as straight as you can. Move toward the ambo, with the first server passing between it and the altar. Turn to face the people, one on each side of the priest or deacon and slightly behind him, lined up with the corners of the ambo. Hold the candles as straight and as level as you can.
* At the conclusion of the Gospel reading, when the priest or deacon kisses the Book, take the candles back to their holders and return to your pew, again trying to move at the same speed.
* A general rule for the entire group of servers is to try to sit down in unison, as a group, whenever you are seating yourself.
* At the conclusion of the Universal Prayers, the Prayers of the Faithful, it is time to set the altar and help with the children’s collection. One server from the left of the priest will take the Missal to the altar, setting it on the missal stand, set up ready just to open, and then return to their pew. At the same time, the other server to the left of the priest will go forward to hand out the children’s bulletins and then return to their seat when that is done. At this same time, one of the servers from the right of the priest will carry the children’s collection basket to the front, and then return it to the foot of the credence table once the collection is completed. The other server on the right, during this same time, carries the sacred vessels to the altar. The first one to take is the chalice, placing it on the altar with the cross on the chalice cloth facing the people. Next, take up any ciboria with hosts that will be consecrated. Last, take up the empty chalices. The priest or deacon will be setting the vessels in their places as this is happening. Don’t rush, be reverent, and respectful. A very special table is being set and it deserves our best efforts.
* When the priest stands to move forward to receive the gifts, stand and meet him at the foot of the altar, facing the people with hands held in a prayerful manner.
* Take the wine flagon and smaller collection basket to the credence table, placing the basket on the ground. All four servers go to the credence table.
* The priest or deacon will take the full ciborium that came as part of the gifts to the altar.
* Two servers will come immediately with the water cruet and wine flagon up to the corner of the altar to hand them to the priest or deacon. Hold them in a way that makes it easy for them to grab the handles. Remove the lid on the flagon so that a small amount of water can be added to the wine. While that is taking place, the other two servers will be ready with the larger water cruet, the lavabo bowl, and finger towel. They wait at the foot of the steps.
* As soon as the servers return from the altar with the water and wine, the other two proceed immediately to the same spot at the corner of the altar. Do not make the priest or deacon wait on you.
* Once these four servers have finished, and everything is back on the credence table in some order, all four take up their places on the second step.
* Next comes the Eucharistic prayer and the ringing of the bells. The first time this happens is when the priest brings his hands together over the gifts at the Epiclesis, the calling down of the Holy Spirit. One short ring takes place, meant to call attention to what is happening but not to become a distraction to the priest or the people.
* When the priest elevates the host as it becomes the Body of Jesus, ring the bell three times, with a short pause between each ring, while the priest is elevating the Precious Body.
* The same thing takes place when the priest elevates the chalice, while the wine is transformed into the Blood of Christ, three rings while elevation takes place.
* After the Sign of Peace, bring up any remaining empty ciboria and extra purificators to the altar. Return to the second step and face the tabernacle as the full ciboria are taken from there, slowly turning back toward the altar as the ciboria pass by you. They hold the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus, and He deserves to be recognized appropriately.
* After receiving Communion, two servers return to the pew on the right and remain kneeling while the people receive.
* The other two servers move to the pew and kneeler on the other side of the altar, pausing to bow to the altar as they pass by. One of them takes the Missal off the missal stand and takes it to the pew with them. They also remain kneeling while the people receive.
* After Communion, one server on the right moves immediately to pick up the small water cruet. Pause and be respectful at this time as you wait for the full ciboria to be returned to the tabernacle. Once that is done, take the cruet to the corner of the altar. Pour the water for the priest or deacon at their direction, or give it to them depending on their preference. Remember to face the handles toward them in a way that makes it easy for them to grab it.
* As the vessels are purified, the servers on the right takes turns returning them and the purificators to the credence table. Don’t rush, move with respect, resetting the credence table in the same order as when it started. There is no need to leave it in a mess.
* All the servers will kneel or sit as the people do so.
* After the Communion meditation song ends, one of the servers from the left will bring the Missal up to the left of the priest, same place as before, holding the Missal the same way as before.
* When the priest says “Let us pray”, move like before in front of him and hold the book while he prays the Closing Prayer. When he finishes that prayer, return the Missal to the pew and prepare for the recessional. If there is a solemn blessing to follow, the priest or deacon will direct you to bring the book back after the announcements are completed.
* When the people say “Thanks be to God”, the two candle bearers and the cross bearer with pick those up, and all four of the servers will move back to the foot of the altar.
* They will stand facing the altar, lined up to leave as they were to come in, giving enough space for the priest and deacon to stand at the foot of the altar. When they turn to face the people, all the servers turn and begin to leave, again at a reverent pace.
* All four servers will go to the right, walking together toward the side of the church and go down the aisle on the far side, stopping near the front pew until the closing song ends. Show respect to the music ministry by allowing them to finish.
* Return the cross and candles to their holders and blow out all the candles.
* Return to you sacristy, remove your cassocks and albs and hang them back up before you leave. Say the *Altar Server’s Prayer of Thanksgiving After Serving Holy Mass* thanking God for the special honor you just received by serving at the altar.