

**Bibliography**  
(Helpful books and pamphlets)

**The Joy of Being an Altar Server**      Rev. Joseph M. Champlin  
Catholic Book Publishing Co (Resurrection Press) ISBN1-878718-66-5

**Serve God With Gladness**              David Philippart  
Liturgy Training Publications          ISBN 1-56854-151-1

**General Instruction of the Roman Missal**  
Liturgy Documentary Series 2  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Publication 5-543  
ISBN 1-57455-543-X

**Altar Servers/Servants of Jesus** (Tri-fold brochure full color)  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Publication 5-466  
ISBN 1-57455-466-2

**Redemptionis Sacramentum**  
Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Pauls Ave. Boston, MA 02130  
ISBN 0-8198-6482-X

**Ecclesia de Eucharistia** Encyclical Letter of John Paul II  
On the Eucharist in It's Relationship to the Church.  
Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Pauls Avenue, Boston, MA 92130  
ISBN 0-8198-2351-1

NOTE:            There are many books available for altar servers which are outdated. Check carefully to see if the instructions conform to our new General Instruction of the Roman Missal...especially regarding processions, and genuflection.



# Guidelines for Altar Servers

**Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend**  
**Revised January 2006**

Promulgated by  
**The Most Reverend John Michael D'Arcy**  
**Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend**

**January 2006**  
**Prepared by the Office of Worship**

*Dear young people,*

*I greet you affectionately, dear young people. Your commitment to the altar is not only a duty but a great honor, a true holy service. Regarding this service, I would like to suggest some points for your reflection.*

The *vestments* worn by altar servers are very special. They recall a garment that everyone puts on when he or she is welcomed, in Jesus Christ, into the community. I am referring to the baptismal garment whose deep meaning is explained by St. Paul: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal 3:27)

Even if you no longer fit into your baptismal garment, dear altar servers, you have put on that of an altar server. Yes, Baptism is the starting point of your “authentic liturgical service”. Which puts you beside your bishops, priests and deacons. The altar server has a privileged place in liturgical celebrations.....

.....in the liturgy you are far more than mere “helpers of the parish priest.” Above all, you are servants of Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest.

Thus you altar servers especially are called to be young friends of Jesus. Strive to deepen and foster this friendship with him. You will discover that in Jesus you have found a true friend for life.

I have spoken of friendship with Jesus. How happy I would be if something more sprang from this friendship! How beautiful it would be if some of you could discover a vocation to the priesthood! Jesus Christ urgently needs young people who generously make themselves available to him without reserve.

Furthermore, might not the Lord also be calling some of you girls to embrace the consecrated life in order to serve the Church and the people? Also for those who would like to be united in marriage, an altar server’s service teaches that an authentic union must always include readiness for reciprocal and gratuitous service.

Pope John Paul II  
August 1, 2001

## **Altar Servers give glory to God and enhance the dignity and prayerfulness of the celebration of the Eucharist.**

### **+Reverence**

Cultivate a reverent heart and respectful manner toward all things holy and sacred, especially toward the Blessed Sacrament, the altar of sacrifice, the Word, and all of God’s people.

### **+Holiness**

Celebrate the Mass as the action of Christ and the People of God.  
Grow continually in holiness by conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Eucharist and in the sacraments.

### **+Meaning of the Mass**

We open our ears to the Word of God  
and contemplate the presence of Christ  
in the Eucharistic Banquet.

We receive the Lord and are sent forth to transform the world.

### **+Mystery of Christ**

Enter into the spirit and prayer of Advent and Christmastime: **redemption;**  
of Lent, Triduum and Easter time: **passion/death/resurrection;**  
of ordinary Time: **the counted Sundays that celebrate the Mysteries of Faith.**

### **+Participation and Unity**

Be a holy people called by reason of Baptism to full participation.  
Embrace the mission of the Church wherein God sanctifies the world in Christ.

### **+Prayer**

Let us discover the wisdom and treasury of the prayers and rites of the Liturgy.

# Guidelines for Altar Servers

Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

## Position of the Altar Server in the Sanctuary

“The seat for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant. Seats for the other ministers are to be arranged so that they are clearly distinguishable from those for the clergy and so that the ministers are easily able to fulfill the function entrusted to them.”  
(GIRM #310)

In contrast to those who have been canonically installed in the ministry of acolyte (c.1035), servers may not distribute Holy Communion or act as Proclaimers of the Word during the same liturgical service at which they serve.

As the General Instruction clearly states “...All, therefore, whether they are ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, in fulfilling their office or their duty, should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them.” (GIRM #91)

## Fostering of Vocations

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM directed the Church to be nourished more fully from “...that primary and indispensable source” of the true Christian spirit. Active participation in the liturgy has been and will remain a primary source, not only of grace for the Church in general, but specifically of vocations to other ministries in the Church.

Therefore, care should be taken to give younger servers, both men and women, the necessary spiritual formation regarding their ministry which will lead them to consider a more formal dedication to the Church in the priesthood and/or religious life.



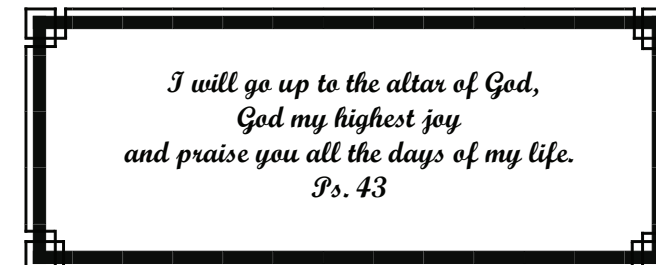
From the second century onward, the ordained minister of the Eucharist has been assisted by others who helped to prepare the altar, sanctuary, various liturgical books, and sacred vessels for the celebration of the Mass. These persons have been of various ages and of both genders. It was their task to assist the ordained minister at the altar during the celebration, and carefully replace things in their proper order and place afterwards.

The ministry of server was spoken of by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in the following way:

“Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought to discharge their office therefore with the sincere devotion and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God’s people.

Consequently, they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, in the measure proper to each one, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.” (#29)

**The universal Church, in interpreting Canon 230.2  
and with the approval of Pope John Paul II (Prot. 2482.93),  
has embarked on renewing this ministry  
and has opened its implementation to both men and women of all ages.  
(John Paul II promulgation July 11, 1992)**



*In the absence of an instituted acolyte,  
lay ministers may be deputed to serve at the altar  
and assist the priest and the deacon;  
they may carry the cross, the candles,  
the thurible, the bread, the wine, and the water..*

*GIRM #100*

## **What are the duties of the altar server?**

### **Before Mass:**

Prepare the sacred vessels and the altar before Mass. (GIRM#117 and #118) Depending on the practice of the individual parish, the altar server may place the cups on the credence table, and the altar breads and wine on the gift table for the Presentation of the Gifts.

Light the candles.

### **During Mass:**

1. Altar servers carry candles, cross, incense in procession. (See processions on page 5)
2. The altar server may hold the *Sacramentary* for the celebrant for the Greeting, Penitential Rite, Opening Prayer, Post-Communion Prayer, Solemn Blessing.
3. At the Preparation of Gifts, altar servers may bring the chalices to the altar (if appropriate), prepare the corporal, purificators and *Sacramentary* before the procession and presentation of gifts by the faithful.
4. The altar server assists the celebrant in the reception of the gifts, assists with the water and the wine, and the washing of hands.
5. Especially when a deacon is not present, the altar server assists the celebrant with incense, if incense is used.
6. Assists Ministers of Communion in clearing the altar.

### **After Mass:**

The altar server extinguishes the candles.

The altar server may return the sacred vessels to their proper secure place after the celebration of the Mass.

## **Vesture**

The **General Instruction of the Roman Missal** states the following:

“In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same office. This variety of offices in the celebration of the Eucharist is shown outwardly by the diversity of sacred vestments, which should therefore be a sign of the office proper to each minister. At the same time, however, the sacred vestments should also contribute to the beauty of the sacred action itself. It is appropriate that the vestments to be worn by priests and deacons, as well as those garments to be worn by lay ministers, be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual before they are put into liturgical use.” (#335)

“In the dioceses of the United States of America, acolytes, altar servers, lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing.” (#339)

Parishes may wish to consider some form of off-white robe for the use of servers or they may wear a cassock and surplice.

A business style of dress may be considered appropriate for adult servers, but all should consider it necessary to dress with the dignity which is befitting the Eucharistic celebration. At all celebrations, servers should be neat, clean, and simply dressed in such a way as not to draw attention to themselves.



## Spiritual Formation

It is exceedingly important that servers be concerned with more than just the “how to” of their ministry. They must also be led, in a way appropriate to their age and abilities, to a deeper understanding of the prayerful intention and spiritual disposition which must inform anyone engaging in liturgical ministry. The same movements of walking, sitting, standing, etc. which we use throughout our everyday actions, are vested with a deeper and more spiritual significance when done before, during, and after the Sacred Liturgy. Whether they are swinging the censor, carrying a book, serving as cantor, lector, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, all who engage in liturgical ministry are serving the Church assembled before God in prayer. The beauty and prayerfulness of the appropriate gestures for each respective ministry should edify the praying Church. It is of great importance to work with servers of all ages on the development of a prayerfulness and spirituality to support their ministry.

*Thank you, God,  
for calling me to serve at your altar this day.  
Help me to be calm and joyful,  
to remember everything  
and do my tasks well.  
I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### The following words of Pope Paul VI are appropriate for reflection:

“You might at times think that the liturgy is made up of a lot of minor details; posture, genuflections, bows, handling the censor, missal, cruets, etc. It is then that you must remember the words of Christ in the Gospel: ‘The one that is faithful in the smallest things is faithful also in the great.’ (Mk 10:21). Moreover, in the liturgy nothing is little, when we realize the greatness of the one to whom it is directed.”

(Pope Paul VI, Address to a pilgrimage of altar servers from various parts of Europe, 30 March 1967).

NOTE ON GENUFLECTING: #274 GIRM: “If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself.

Otherwise all who pass before the most Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are moving in procession.

Ministers carrying the processional cross or candles bow their heads instead of genuflecting.”

### Processions: #120 GIRM Mass without a Deacon.

“Once the people have gathered, the priest and ministers, clad in the sacred vestments, go in procession to the altar in this order:

- A. the thurifer carrying a thurible with burning incense if incense is used.
- B. the ministers who carry lighted candles, and between them an acolyte or other minister with the cross.
- C. the acolytes and other ministers.
- D. a lector, who may carry the Book of Gospels (though not the Lectionary) which should be slightly elevated.
- E. the priest who is to celebrate the Mass.

**Procession: Mass with a deacon..** Same as above, with the following exceptions:

#172. Carrying the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated, the deacon precedes the priest as he approaches the altar, or else walks at the priest’s side.

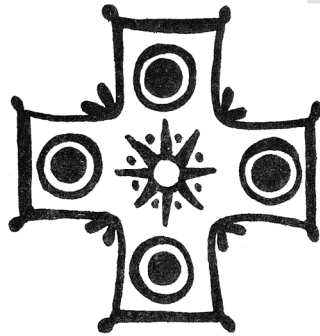
#173. When he reaches the altar, if he is carrying the Book of the Gospels, he omits the sign of reverence and goes up to the altar. It is particularly appropriate that he should place the Book of the Gospels on the altar, after which, together with the priest, he venerates the altar with a kiss.

If, however, he is not carrying the Book of the Gospels, he makes a profound bow to the altar with the priest in the customary way and with him venerates the altar with a kiss.

## Varying local circumstances....

..within the parish will determine the specific tasks of servers.

The solemnity of a particular liturgical celebration will also affect the number and nature of tasks for servers on any given day.



## Participation in the Mass

The altar server should make every effort to join in the hymns, prayers, acclamations, and to listen attentively to the Word of God proclaimed and to the homily.

## Training

In order that each server "...be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy..." (S.C. #29) adequate preparation must precede the exercise of this privileged ministry. This formation for service at the Sacred Liturgy will need to be adapted to the educational level of the person participating, but should include the following:

1. Imitating Jesus the Prayerful Servant: Personal Prayer for the Server.
2. Serving the Assembly at Prayer: competent but not intrusive; fully participating in the prayers and song.
3. Server roles may be further described as cross bearer, thurifer (incense bearer), candle bearer, or book bearer, etc. It is important that each pastor develop a ministry description for those who function in these various roles as servers, so that each individual will be conscious of their particular responsibilities on a given occasion.
4. The Eucharist: the altar server should know the structure of the Mass.
5. The altar server should know the names, locations, and function of each of the liturgical books, vessels, and vestments; the particular character of each of the liturgical seasons; the vocabulary of the liturgy.
6. Specific procedures for serving at Mass according to the rubrics of the Roman Rite. (See pages 4 and 5 in these guidelines, and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Chapter IV) should be taught.
7. Procedures for liturgies other than the Eucharist, such as Morning and Evening Prayer, Funerals, Weddings, Baptism, etc. as well as other forms of public worship such as Benediction, Way of the Cross, etc. should also be taught.