

Sample Formation Session

Altar Servers

Recommended Resource: [Serve God With Gladness: A Manual for Servers](#) by David Philippart

I. Welcome & Introductions

II. Prayer: **Prayer Before Serving** (*Handout A*)

III. Presentation I: **Briefly answer the following questions:**

Who is an Altar Server?

The Altar Server is a boy or girl, a woman or man who is trained to help at the Mass so that it can be celebrated with grace and reverence. An Altar Server is a member of the Church who participates in the celebration with the understanding that they are leaders of the assembly.

What does an Altar Server do?

An Altar Server assists the priest and deacon during the Mass and other religious ceremonies. There are special responsibilities for serving. The Server is also an example to the assembly by joining in the singing, praying and keeping silence during the Mass.

Why should an Altar Server step forward to assist at Mass?

A person steps forward to serve at Mass because God moves the heart, inspires the mind and calls the person to this ministry. God invites generous and helpful people to serve at Mass so that it can be a reverent and prayerful celebration for all who come to worship. Without a server, it would be difficult for the priest and deacon to do the many duties of leading prayers and rituals.

What must an Altar Server learn in order to serve at Mass?

1. Structure of the Mass and the meaning of Catholic prayer and ritual.
2. Identification and purpose of religious items used at Mass: Liturgical Books, Furniture, Vessels, Vestments and Articles.
3. Procedures and responsibilities for serving at Mass.

IV. Presentation II: The Structure of the Mass (*Handout B*)

V. Presentation II: Conduct a tour of the sacristy and church to identify the Books, furniture, supplies and vessels, vestments, and other articles used at Mass. (*Handouts C, D & E*)

VI. Presentation III: Practice postures and gestures. (*Handout F*)

VII. Presentation IV: Invite the servers into the sanctuary and teach the procedures for serving at Mass. First demonstrate the procedure, then allow each server to practice the procedure. (*Handouts G & H*)

VIII. Closing Prayer (*Prayer After Serving – Handout A*)

Handout A

Prayer Before Serving

Thank you, Lord Jesus,
for calling me to serve at your altar.

Please give me the grace
to serve you and your people well.

Open my mouth to praise you in word and song.

Open my ears to hear your Word.
Open my hands to do your work well.

I give you praise and glory in everything I do
now and forever. Amen.

Prayer After Serving

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for guiding me
as I served at your altar.

Hearing your Word gives me hope.
Receiving your Life gives me joy.

Help me find gladness in knowing and
doing your will in all things.

Praise and glory to you, Lord Jesus,
now and forever. Amen.

Handout B

The Structure of the Mass

Introductory Rite

Gathering – to assemble, to unite in song, and to gather as a people of God

Greeting – to welcome and to call to worship

Water Rite or Penitential Rite

Water Rite – to remember baptism, to bless the people gathered

Penitential Rite – to acknowledge God’s abundant mercy

Gloria – to praise and glorify God

Opening Prayer – to collect the prayers of the people and offer them to God

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading – to proclaim a message from the Old Testament

Responsorial Psalm – to reflect and respond in the poetic song of the Psalms

Second Reading – to proclaim God’s Word from the New Testament

Gospel Acclamation – to acclaim in song glory of the Gospel

Gospel – to proclaim the Good News of Salvation

Homily – to unfold God’s message and help us to live it out in daily life

Profession of Faith (Creed) – to declare in one voice the core of Catholic faith

General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful) – to present the needs of the people

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Altar – to prepare and set the banquet table

Preparation of the Gifts – to present in procession the gifts of bread and wine

Prayer over the Gifts – to ask God’s acceptance of the gifts

Eucharistic Prayer

Preface Dialogue – to praise God throughout history and in all creation

Acclamation – to proclaim the holiness and glory of God (Holy, Holy)

Epiclesis – to call down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine

Anamnesis – to remember the Lord’s passion, death and resurrection

Institution Narrative (Prayer of Consecration) – to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ

Memorial Acclamation – to proclaim in song the paschal mystery

Memorial Prayer – to pray for those who have gone before us

Doxology and Great Amen – to say “yes” in song to all we have heard and done

Communion Rite

The Lord’s Prayer – to unite in the prayer that Jesus taught us

Sign of Peace – to extend the peace of Christ throughout the assembly

Breaking of Bread and Pouring of Cup (Fraction Rite) – to place hosts in communion plates and to fill cups for communion.

Communion Procession – to walk in procession as one people to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation

Period of Silence – to reflect and integrate the mystery we have received

Prayer after Communion – to thank God for uniting us as Body of Christ

Concluding Rite

Announcements – to communicate briefly the important events of the parish

Sending Forth the Ministers of Communion to the Sick and Homebound

Blessing – to receive a final blessing before departing for mission to the world

Dismissal – to go forth in peace and love to serve the Lord

Liturgical Books, Furniture & Supplies

LITURGICAL BOOKS

Sacramentary

The priest's regular book of prayers used within the Eucharistic Celebration.

Lectionary

The Book which contains the readings from the Old and the New Testament is placed on the ambo before Mass. There is a Weekday set of Readings with Year I and Year II and a Sunday set with cycles A, B, C.

Book of the Gospels

The processional Book containing the Gospel readings and used for the proclaiming of the Gospel. It is carried in procession by the deacon or the minister of the Word.

Rituals

The books of prayers for the various rites (sacraments) of the Church.

LITURGICAL FURNITURE

The Font (Baptismal Water, Holy Water)

"Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Mt. 28:19

The baptismal font is a container of flowing water. The font should be stationary, well constructed, of splendid beauty and spotless cleanliness. It is most desirable to have running water. The **Paschal Candle is placed near the font during the season of Eastertide.**

The Chair (sedilia, seat for the clergy)

"You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church." Mt. 16:18

A noble chair of the priest placed in a clear, prominent and visible position.

The Ambo (lectern, podium, pulpit, reader's stand)

"Jesus went into the synagogue, according to his custom on the Sabbath Day, and he rose up to read." Luke 4:17

The ambo is a standing desk for proclamation of the Word and preaching. The ambo has a designated space in the sanctuary and is visible to all the assembly.

The Altar (table, place of sacrifice)

The altar, a holy table for the Lord's Supper and a table of sacrifice, is the primary symbol of Christ. The altar needs to be strong enough to hold the mystery of sacrifice and the celebration of

a common meal. Only the gifts of bread and wine, the vessels for Communion and the sacramentary are placed on the altar. (Candles may be placed on the Altar if no floor-standing ones are available.)

SUPPLIES

Altar Breads

Those breads to be used at the Mass and Communion services: unleavened, wheat.

Candles

Wax pillars of varying sized used at every liturgical service as a sign of reverence, prayer and festivity.

Charcoal

Small round pieces of coal used in a censer for igniting the incense.

Incense

Grains of a mixture of solidified resin and other sweet-smelling particles which are burned over charcoal and give off an aromatic smoke.

Wine

Special wine made from natural grapes used in the Eucharistic celebration.

Public Address Systems

Includes amplifier in sacristy and microphones in church proper.

Sacrarium

A basin draining directly into the earth used for the reverent disposal of liturgical elements and for the rinsing of the numerous cups found in sacristies after Mass.

Tabernacle

A large container that holds the ciborium with the consecrated bread, the Body of Christ.

Tabernacle Key

A special key to open and close the tabernacle. It must be kept in a locked cupboard or drawer.

Wedding Kneeler

A special kneeler for the bride and groom sometimes used at the wedding liturgy.

Sacred Vessels



Chalice

The vessel used at the Eucharistic celebration to hold the wine which becomes the blood of Christ.



Ciborium

A vessel with a cover in which breads are consecrated as the body of Christ and reserved in the tabernacle for distribution to the sick and for adoration.



Communion Plate or bowl

The vessel used for consecration and distribution of the hosts to the people during the Eucharistic liturgy.



Cups and plates for use in distributing under both species from several stations.



Flagon

Vessel for the wine at the presentation of the gifts.



Monstrance

A tall vessel used to expose the Blessed Sacrament. The top is usually circular with simulated sun rays coming from the center where the lunette is inserted. It is used for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and at Benediction.



Paten

A saucer- like plate which holds the bread for consecration as the Body of Christ.



Pyx

Small vessel in which the Blessed Sacrament is placed when taken to the sick.

Articles and Vestments Used at Mass



Aspergil

Used for sprinkling holy water on the people or articles to be blessed. In contemporary usage has come to mean either the bucket or the sprinkler or both. A pine or leafy branch and a beautiful bowl may be used for this purpose.



Candle Lighter

A long thin instrument used to light candles and extinguish them.



Censer (Thurible) and boat

The censer is a vessel in which incense is burned on charcoal at liturgical celebrations. It has a perforated or open cover for releasing aromatic smoke.



Boat

The boat is a small vessel which holds the incense to be used in the censer.



Corporal

An additional small altar cloth spread under the Eucharistic vessels. One understanding of the corporal was the containment of Eucharistic crumbs. The corporal also protects the more permanent altar cover from stains.



Cruets

Vessels for the water and wine to be used at Mass. Carafes, decanters or flagons are more commonly used for the presentation of wine with a large assembly.



Hand towels

Small towels used in liturgical celebrations for symbolic washings.

Lavabo dish and pitcher

Vessels for water used in cleansing of the presider's hands during the preparation of the gifts.



Funeral Pall

A large white cloth which is spread over the casket at a funeral liturgy. It represents the white garment given at the time of baptism.

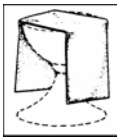


Processional Candles

Candles, varied in size, usually mounted on a long candlestick with a floor stand for use in processions.

Processional Cross

A cross mounted on a tall pole and set in a floor stand. It is used in processions and placed near the altar during liturgical celebrations.



Purificator

A cloth used to wipe the rim of the chalice or cup after each communicant partakes of the wine; it is used again for drying wine vessels after they have been purified.

OILS

Chrism – SC

A mixture of olive oil and balm used in anointing at Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders and in the consecration of a bishop.

Oil of Catechumens – OC

Olive oil used to anoint those preparing for entry into the Catholic Church

Oil of the Sick – OI

Olive oil used in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

The Sacred Oils are reserved in a cupboard called an **ambry**.

BAPTISM

Baptismal Candles

A special candle given to the family of a newly baptized person

Baptismal Gown

A special gown worn by a person after being baptized.

VESTMENTS



Alb

The sacred vestment common to all ministers of every rank. It is full length and of white or off-white color representing the rank of the baptized.



Chasuble

The outer garment worn by the priest at Mass and services directly connected with Mass. Its color is in accordance with the liturgical season or the feast of the day. It is sleeveless.

Ministerial Robes

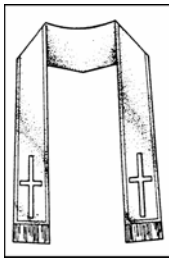
Special long vestments used by Eucharistic ministers, lectors, acolytes, choir members, etc.



Alb – the long white robe used in liturgical ceremonies. It signifies the white robe of Baptism.

Cassock – The long, outer, traditional gown, which may be black, white, or red.

Surplice – A white linen, cotton or synthetic- fiber traditional garment with wide sleeves that reaches slightly below the hips and is worn over the cassock.



Stole

The stole, a symbol of the liturgical leadership of the bishop, priests and deacons, is a long band, worn about the neck by bishops and priests and over the left shoulder by deacons. Its color is in accordance with the liturgical season or feast.

Postures and Gestures at Prayer

STANDING is an active, engaged posture that manifests respect and shows great attention to what is taking place. It also denotes readiness for praise and service.

KNEELING signified penance in the early Church. In the Middle Ages kneeling came to signify homage. More recently the posture signifies adoration.

SITTING is a posture of repose, of listening and of meditation.

BOWING signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them. There are two kinds of bows.

A **simple bow of the head** is used when saying the name of Jesus. It is the chosen sign of reverence before receiving the Body and Blood.

A **profound bow of the body**, bending from the waist, is made to the altar during the opening and closing processions and during the Creed. Outside of Mass, it is appropriate to make a profound bow to the altar which represents Christ.

WALKING

Walk with your back straight and your head held high. Walk at a slower pace than ordinary and with a reverent and prayerful manner.

PROCESSIONS have been a part of liturgy since the early centuries of the Church. This movement demands involvement of one's total being, particularly as the assembly approaches the altar to receive Communion.

GENUFLECTING signifies adoration and is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as for the Holy Cross on Good Friday. If there is a tabernacle in the sanctuary, the priest and others in the procession genuflect when they approach the altar and when they leave the sanctuary. The priest genuflects three times during Mass: after elevating the host, after elevating the chalice and before Communion.

HANDS

Unless you are sitting down or carrying something (like a candle), your hands should be kept joined in front of your chest: either locked together, or palm to palm, fingers pointing upward. If you are carrying something in one hand, hold the other hand flat on your chest.

EYES

During Mass, always look towards the place where the action is happening; the priest's chair, the lectern, or the altar. When the reader is reading the Scriptures, you should be looking at the reader. When you talk to someone, you want that person to look at you, right? The same is true at Mass. Look at the priest and the other ministers as they speak and act in the sanctuary, and even look at the people in the pews. This tells the other people in church that you know they are there.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Know what you are to do while serving Mass and when you are to do it. Think ahead to your next task. Don't be afraid to smile as you serve Mass. Be relaxed and comfortable. Be yourself. Remember to listen, sing, and pray with the other people who have gathered to worship God. Remember what an important service you are giving to God and God's people, and do your best.

Procedures and Responsibilities for Serving at Mass

Before Liturgy:

1. Dress according to customs of parish: alb with or without cincture or regular, respectful dress or wearing of a pendant.
2. Place on the credence table a chalice, corporal, purificator, lavabo dish, water cruet with water and a cloth for washing hands and asperges (if used).
3. Place wine flagon and bread vessel on gift table.
4. Place Sacramentary near the priest's chair.
5. Light all candles (including Paschal candle during the Easter Season and for Funerals and Baptisms). Note proper use of the extinguisher.
6. If used for Mass, prepare the censer (charcoal and incense).
7. Move in opening procession carrying any object assigned for the celebration

Order of Procession

- Incense (if used)
- Cross
- 2 candle bearers
- Lay Ministers
- Lector
- Deacon(s)
- Concelebrant(s) (if present)
- Priest

During Liturgy:

1. Stand attentively during the Greeting and Penitential Rite (if Sprinkling Rite is used, hold the water vessel if the Priest desires such).
2. Hold Sacramentary (when desired) for Opening Prayer. Note the procedure.
3. After the General Intercessions, prepare the altar with a corporal, chalice, and Sacramentary.
4. Assist in the reception of the gifts. At the altar, hand the gifts to the priest.
5. Bring the water from the credence table for preparation of the chalice.
6. Bring the : water cruet, lavabo bowl and towel for the washing of the hands.
7. When used, bring the censer and boat to the priest. (to incense gifts/altar/people).
8. After Communion present water for cleansing vessels and/or assist in removing all vessels from the altar.
9. Hold the Sacramentary for the final prayer and Solemn Blessing.
10. Follow the order of the recessional (closing procession). No incense, no candles and no Book in the recessional.

After the Liturgy:

1. Assist in the clean-up detail: assist as directed with the cruets, chalice, Sacramentary and censer.
2. Extinguish all candles. This includes the Easter Candle when used.
3. Return your server vestment or pendant to the proper place.
4. Help the Priest and deacon as requested.

Directives for the Server at Mass

MASS PART

Directives for the Server

Introductory Rite

1. Go in procession to the altar where the priest and ministers make a profound bow (genuflect towards tabernacle if it is in the sanctuary). If holding the cross or candles, do not bow. Place them in their location for Mass.
2. Before or when priest says, let us pray, bring the Sacramentary for opening prayer. After the prayer place it on the altar or the credence table as customary.

Liturgy of the Word

3. If it is parish custom, in the procession with the Book of Gospels, accompany the priest holding candles. Stand in attention during the reading of the Gospel. Return the candles and be seated for the homily.
4. During the singing of the Alleluia or other chant, if incense is used, assist the priest.

Preparation of the Altar and Presentation of the Gifts

5. After General Intercessions, prepare the altar with corporal, chalice, and Sacramentary.
6. Assist in the reception of the gifts. Take items given to you by the priest.
7. Assist with the water and wine as the priest prepares the chalice and cups.
8. Assist with the washing of hands: water cruet, lavabo bowl and towel.
9. If incense is used, present the censer and boat to incense gifts/altar/people. A server, while standing at the side of the altar, may be asked to incense the priest and then the people.

Liturgy of the Eucharist with Communion Rite

10. If the vessels are purified at the altar, assist in bringing water for cleansing the vessels and then carry them to the credence table. Clear the altar of all vessels and books.

Closing Rite

11. Before or when the priest says, let us pray, bring the Sacramentary for the closing prayer and Solemn Blessing.
12. After the concluding rite, bow to the altar with the priest and follow the order of the final procession.

