

**Altar Server Handbook
Holy Family Parish
Duxbury**

**Version 1
August 27, 2008**

HOLY FAMILY ALTAR SERVER HANDBOOK

Introduction:

Being an altar server is a great privilege. Servers help all the people attending Mass to pray and focus their attention on the altar where Christ is present in the Eucharist. The most important way you help everyone pray and be attentive is for you to pray and be attentive too. There are a few very simple rules to follow that will help you, and all the people in Church, to do this.

1. **Arrive at least 10 minutes before the Mass begins:** when you arrive early you will have time to get your alb (the white robe that all servers wear) on, talk to the other servers to decide which jobs you will be doing, and be able to get any last-minute instructions from the priests or deacons about the Mass. When servers arrive at the last minute, everyone is rushing around and it leaves no time for you to settle down and be ready for Mass.
2. **Dress nicely and wear nice shoes (no sneakers):** You will be serving at the altar, where the priest will consecrate the bread and wine so it becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. This is a very holy and sacred place and we should look our best. Also, if we have play clothes and sneakers it distracts people from praying because they notice how we look. When we dress nicely and wear good shoes, we blend into the background and remind people that the Mass is a very holy time and the altar is the place to be watching.
3. **Pay attention to the priest and deacon at Mass:** Because you will be doing jobs to help the priest read his prayers and prepare the altar, it is very important to always watch the priest and deacon so you are ready to help out. The priest and deacon will also give you signals to remind of you of what to do in case you forget or aren't sure. When you pay attention you also help all the people pray at Mass because everything goes smoothly.
4. **Be sure to serve at Mass when you are scheduled:** Everyone is counting on you to be at Church when you have been scheduled to serve. There are three servers assigned to each Mass, and each one has important jobs to perform. If you don't come to Mass then the other servers have to do more work. If you have a family trip or other conflict, it is your responsibility to find a substitute from the list of other servers. Of course sometimes you are not able to come at the last minute because you get sick or there is some kind of emergency, and we all understand that this can happen sometimes.

In the rest of these instructions we will go through all the parts of the Mass and describe the different jobs that each server does. It's important to learn all the different jobs so that you will feel comfortable in case one of the other servers can't make it to Mass (if they get sick for example). The instructions will start with a general summary of the role for each of the three servers at Mass.

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Summary of Server Roles.

There are three servers assigned for each Mass. We give them three different names: the Cross Bearer, the Book Bearer, and the Acolyte.

The Cross Bearer: The Cross Bearer will carry the processional cross into the Church at the beginning of Mass (and will lead the whole procession), carry the cross out of the Church at the end of Mass, carry the cross to escort the gift bearers to the sanctuary (the raised area of the Church where the altar and tabernacle are located) during the offertory/preparation of the altar, and also help with setting up the altar for the priest and cleaning the altar after communion. The Cross Bearer sits in the seat nearest the wall where the cross is placed in its stand in the sanctuary.

The Book Bearer: The Book Bearer is responsible for bringing the book of prayers (called the Sacramentary) to the priest at the beginning and end of Mass, and also bringing the book to the altar during the preparation set up and taking the book back from the altar after communion. The Book Bearer sits in the seat located nearest the ambo (the place where the scripture readings and gospel are read), next to the Sacramentary Book.

The Acolyte: The Acolyte is responsible for helping receive the gifts from the gift bearers during the offertory part of the Mass, setting up the altar (with the cross bearer) for the priest, and cleaning up the altar (with the cross bearer) after communion.

The different sections of the Mass will now be described along with the details of what each server needs to do. Remember to always pay attention to the priest and deacon at Mass and they will help you in case you aren't sure what to do.

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Getting ready before Mass

When you arrive at Church (remember: be at least 10 minutes early!) go to the Narthex (the gathering area located at the back of the Church near route 3A). This is where the priest and servers get their albs on before Mass. The server albs are located in the wooden closet in the corner (Figure 1).



Figure 1: closet with altar server albs located in the narthex area.

Each server should wear an alb (remember: the alb should be the right size, so it should come down to your ankles; not too long or too short), a cincture (a rope used like a belt – you tie it around your waist like a monk; it helps to keep the alb at the right length so you won't trip!), and a cross that you wear around your neck (this is a symbol of the holy work that you are doing at Mass) (Figure 2). Once you are all ready, decide who will be the cross bearer, and get ready for the entrance procession.



Figure 2: Altar server albs, cincture, and cross.

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The Entrance Procession

The Mass begins with a procession starting from the Narthex. The altar servers lead the procession. The cross bearer is the first one in line, followed by the other two servers. The Eucharistic ministers and lectors are next in line, with the deacon and priest at the very end. To get ready for the procession, the cross bearer, carrying the cross (Figure 3), lines up in the center aisle just inside the door to the Church. The other two servers are right behind the cross bearer, with one to the left and one to the right, making a kind of triangle with the cross bearer leading the way. The priest will tell you when it's time to line up and get ready.

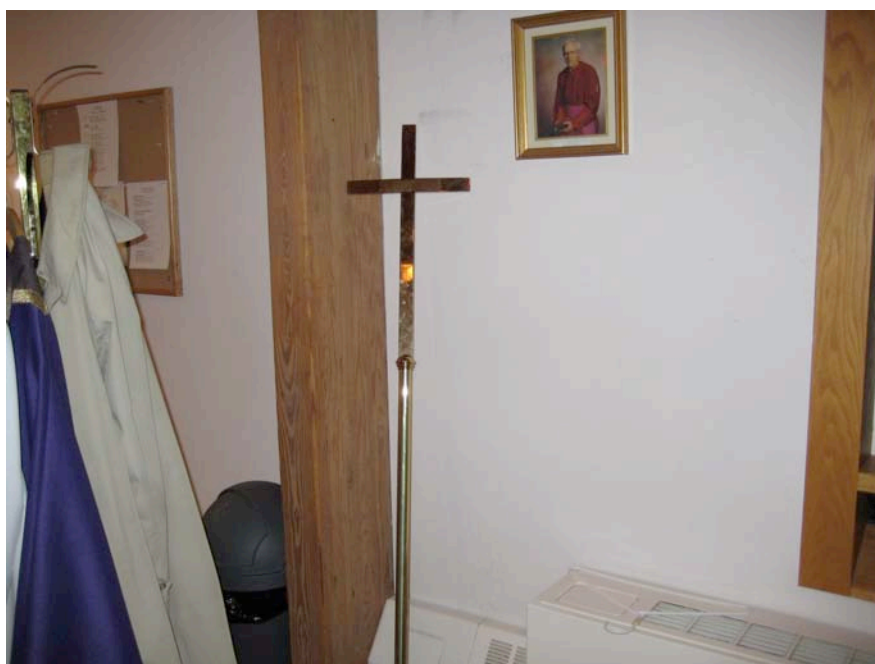


Figure 3: Processional cross that is carried by the cross bearer in the opening procession of the Mass.

As the Mass is about to begin, the music will start (except for the 7:00AM Mass). The cross bearer doesn't begin to walk down the aisle towards the altar until the singing starts. When the singing begins, the cross bearer leads the procession down the main aisle (at the 7:00AM Mass the priest will tell you when to begin down the aisle). Be sure to walk slowly and keep the cross with Jesus facing forward. When you reach the end of the aisle near the stairs, the cross bearer goes to the far left and stands at the foot of sanctuary steps right at the corner. The server that is on the cross bearer's left shoulder follows the cross bearer and stands right beside him/her near the steps. The other server (on the right shoulder of the cross bearer) goes to the far right side and stands next to the steps of the sanctuary at the right corner (Figure 4).

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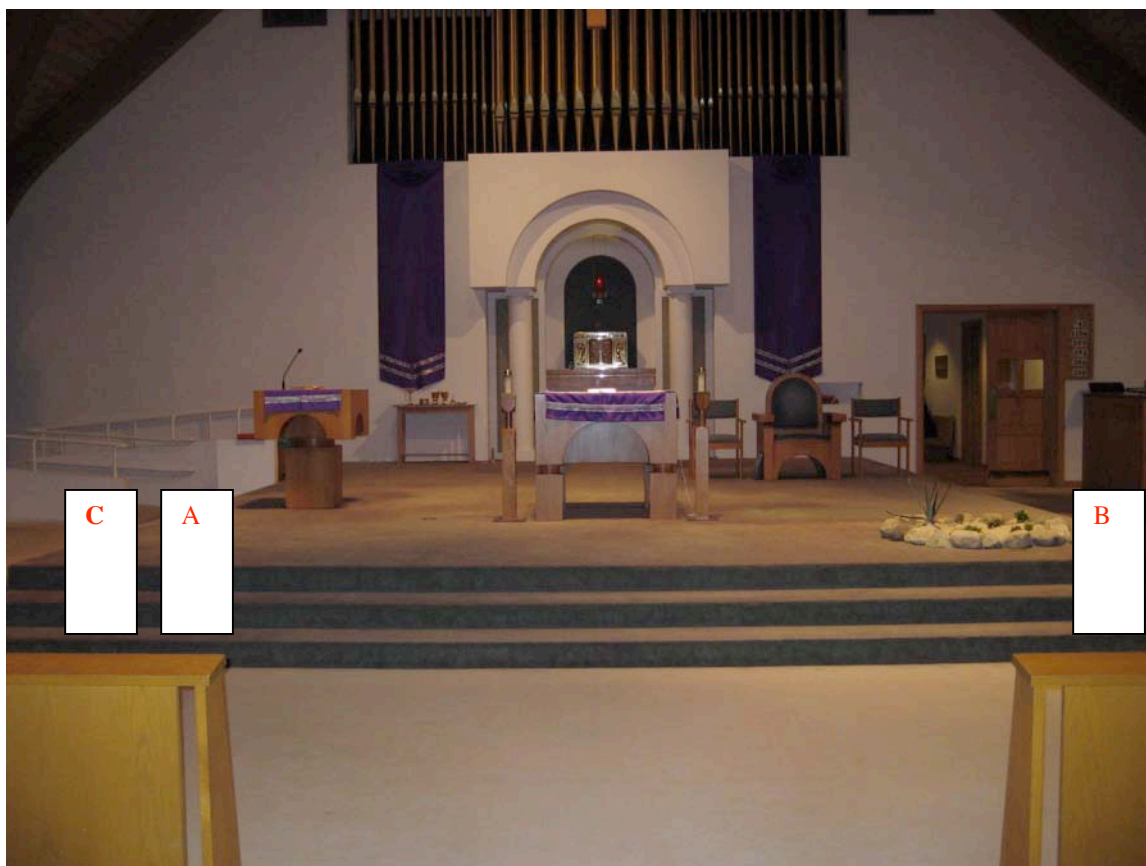


Figure 4: A view of the sanctuary area of the Church with the locations indicating where the servers stand at the end of the procession ('C' = cross bearer; 'A' = acolyte, and 'B' = book bearer). Servers stand on the floor just in front of the first step leading to the sanctuary.

Wait in those places until all the ministers plus the deacon and priest arrive at the foot of the steps. There will now be a long line of people, with servers at each end of the line and priest in the middle. When the priest genuflects, each server will genuflect too – EXCEPT the cross bearer (the cross is heavy and it would be too easy to fall over if you tried to genuflect!). After the priest genuflects, he will go up the steps into the sanctuary. The cross bearer will then walk along the base of the sanctuary steps around the corner towards the altar server chairs and go up the steps near the ambo and put the cross into the cross stand located near the tabernacle. The other two servers follow the cross bearer along the base of the steps and up to their seats (Figure 5). After placing the cross in its base, the cross bearer goes to his seat next to the other servers. Be sure to remain standing at this time. (NOTE: in general, the servers will have the same posture as the congregation; so when the people are standing you are standing, when they kneel you kneel, when they sit you sit.)

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Figure 5: Altar server seats in the sanctuary. The cross bearer sits to the far right, the acolyte sits in the middle, and book bearer sits on the far left beside the book.

The Greeting and Opening Section of Mass

After the opening hymn is completed, the priest will greet the people and lead them in the sign of the cross. After some initial prayers including the Penitentiary Rite (“Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy”) and Gloria (usually sung by the choir and people), the priest will need the Book (also called the Sacramentary) for a special prayer called the opening collect. It is very important that the book bearer pay close attention so that you are ready to bring the book when needed. To signal that he needs the book, the priest will say the words: “Let us pray”. This is the signal to bring the book to the priest. It is very important to also carry the book properly whenever you bring it to the priest or back to your seat. The book must be carried with your two hands holding it at the bottom and the top of the book leaning against your chest. Be sure that it’s right side up with the Kairos symbol (like a large P with an x printed on top – this is symbol for Christ) facing the priest. Walk over and stand in front of the priest and he will open the book to the correct page and place the book back in your hands. Hold the book with one hand on each side at the bottom of the book, with the top of the book leaning against your chest. Be sure to stand still so that the priest will be able to read the prayers. When the priest is finished with the prayer, he will either close the book for you or will just sit down (if he does this, you should close the book yourself; be careful when closing the book so that the pages will not get folded or bent). Take the book back to your chair carrying it the same way as before.

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The Liturgy of the Word (*the readings, gospel, homily, and prayers of the faithful*)

When the book bearer returns to the server seats everyone will be seated and you can now sit down too (all the servers). The next part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. In this part of the Mass all the people (and the servers) listen to the readings from the Bible. At Sunday Mass there are two scripture readings with a song (called the psalm) between the two. The servers, like all the people in the Church, should listen attentively while the readings are being read. God speaks to us in these readings and we can learn how God wants us to live and behave. During the psalm the people (and the servers) should listen to the words of the song and sing the refrain along with choir.

After the two readings and psalm, the gospel is proclaimed. For the gospel everyone stands (including the servers) and for most Masses during the year we sing an “alleluia” chorus to help us get ready to hear the gospel story that tells us about Jesus’ miracles and stories. When the priest or deacon reads the gospel be sure to listen attentively and think about what Jesus is teaching you in these words. After the gospel everyone sits down, and so the servers. The priest or deacon then gives a homily where he talks about the gospel and what it means in our everyday life.

After the homily everyone stands (and so do the servers) to say the creed (it starts with the words “I believe...” and contains all the beliefs of our Catholic faith). Servers join with the whole congregation to say this prayer. After the creed comes the Prayers of Faithful where all the people (including servers) pray for our Church, for peace, for all who are sick, and any of our own special intentions. At the end of each prayer, usually the deacon or lector will say “we pray to the Lord” and all the people (and servers) respond: “Lord hear our prayer.” After these prayers all the people sit down. This is the signal that it is time for the procession of gifts and preparation of the altar.

The Offertory and Preparation of the Altar

To begin preparing the altar so the priest can consecrate the hosts and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ, we first have to get the bread and wine onto the altar. The first step is to escort the gift bearers from the back of the Church to the sanctuary as they carry the ciboria and wine flagon. As soon as the Prayers of the Faithful are over, the cross bearer takes the cross out of its base and proceeds to the back of the Church where the gift table is located with the hosts and wine (Figure 6). The other two servers will go with the priest and deacon to the front of the altar (follow the priest and deacon). When the cross bearer gets to the back of the Church, there will be two or three people waiting there each carrying a ciborium or the wine flagon. When you reach the people, turn around and walk slowly down the main aisle as you carry the cross to lead the gifts down to the sanctuary where the priest and other servers will be waiting. The cross bearer can proceed around the side of the sanctuary and directly back to cross stand and put the cross back into its base. The priest will receive the gifts from the gift bearers and then hand them to the deacon or servers. The servers will take the ciboria or wine flagon and bring them directly to the altar.



Figure 6: The offertory table located in the back of the Church where the entrance procession started. The gifts for Mass (ciboria containing hosts and flagon containing wine) are carried to the sanctuary by parishioners led by the cross bearer.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Setting up the altar

After placing the gifts on the altar it is now time to bring the rest of the needed items to the altar so that the priest can prepare for the Liturgy of the Eucharist where the consecration takes place. In setting up the altar, the book bearer brings the book (holding it correctly) to the altar and places it on the left side (as you are facing out towards the people). The book bearer can then return to their seat. Meanwhile, the cross bearer and acolyte will bring the other items from the credence table to the altar (see Figure 7).

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Figure 7: Credence table containing the items needed by the priest at the altar for the Eucharistic liturgy. Top figure shows the table's location to the left of the tabernacle. The bottom figure shows the items on the table.

First, they should bring the “gold” items – that is, the chalice, any ciboria, any pyx that is on the credence table should be brought. After these items the remaining “gold” items should be brought over which includes the golden communion cups (usually 4 of them, except at the 7:00AM Mass). After all the “gold” items are on the altar, it is time to bring the water cruet along with the finger bowl and finger towel. One server should hold the water while the other holds the finger bowl in two hands (one on each end of the small bowl) with the towel over his/her arm like a waiter/waitress. Stand on the right side of the altar (nearest to the ambo) and wait for the deacon/priest to take the water (he will

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pour a small amount into the chalice while saying a quiet prayer (he says: “by the mystery of the water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity”). After he pours the water into the chalice he will give the water cruet back. Remain waiting beside the altar. The priest will hold up the chalice and paten with the host while saying prayers. When he finishes he will turn to the servers to wash his hands. When he holds his hands over the finger bowl the server with the water will begin to pour water on his fingers. Keep pouring until he signals you to stop (by moving his hands up to cruet). He will then dry his hands with the finger towel. When he has finished, bring the water, bowl, and towel back to the credence table. The server with the water cruet may also need to carry the empty wine flagon back to the credence table at this time too (note: sometimes the deacon will carry it back). After you bring these items back to the table, you can return to your seats. When the people stand, be sure to stand as well.

After the priest completes his preparation prayers (be sure to respond to his prayers along with all the people at the proper places), the people will sing the “Holy, Holy, Holy” hymn (at the 7:00AM Mass this is spoken instead of sung). After this hymn all the people will kneel for the Eucharistic Prayer. At this point the servers will kneel too. But rather than kneel in front of your seats, which might be tricky when wearing albs, you will kneel on the steps of the sanctuary along the side near the ambo. When all the people kneel after the “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the book bearer leads the way (he/she will be closest to the steps) down the side steps, past the ambo toward the corner of the sanctuary. You should walk along the bottom step, and then kneel on the second step. Go far enough out along the steps so that the cross bearer can see the altar past the ambo. Remain kneeling until after the “great Amen” at the end of the Eucharistic prayer. When everyone stands up, you can stand and return your seats. Remain standing with the congregation. After some prayers by the priest, we pray the Our Father together. After the Our Father comes the Sign of Peace. Be sure to offer each other a sign of peace. The priest and deacon will come over and shake your hands with the sign of peace too.

Communion

Now we are ready to receive communion, but first we all sing (or say) a very special prayer known as the “Lamb of God” or “Agnus Dei” in Latin. Be sure to sing (or say) this prayer along with all the people. The words are: “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us peace.” During this prayer the Extraordinary Ministers of Communion (also known as Eucharistic Ministers, these are parishioners who help the priest and deacon distribute communion to all the people at Mass) will come up and form a line behind the priest to receive communion. Altar servers should stand in line with these people to receive communion too. The priest will give each of you the Eucharist first. If you would also like to receive from the Cup just remain in line, otherwise you can sit back down in your seats.

After receiving communion, the priest, deacon, and Eucharistic Ministers will all leave the sanctuary and begin to give communion to all the people at Mass. Usually there will

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be music played during this time. After they all leave the sanctuary, this is the signal for the Book Bearer to go the Altar and bring the Book back to his/her seat.

After Communion

After communion is finished, the priest and/or deacon will come back to the Altar to clean up. He will collect any remaining Eucharist into ciboria and return them to the Tabernacle. Then he will return to Altar to clean the Chalice. This is the signal for the Cross Bearer and Acolyte to come to the Altar. The Cross Bearer should also bring the water cruet to the Altar for washing the Chalice. The Acolyte will not bring anything with him/her. Both servers wait next to the Altar for the priest/deacon to take the water and pour some into the Chalice. He will hand the water cruet back to the Cross Bearer. After he finishes washing and drying the Chalice, he will place the purificator, paten, and pall on top of the Chalice and hand it to the Acolyte. Be sure to carry it with two hands - one on the stem of the Chalice and the other on top of the pall to make sure it doesn't fall off when you are carrying it. Both servers return to the credence table and place the Chalice and water on the table. Then return to your seats.

The Final Prayer

The Mass is now almost over. After the music is finished and a minute or two of silence, the priest will stand for the final prayer and blessing and say "Let us pray". This is the signal for the Book Bearer to bring the Book to the priest for the last time. The priest will read the final prayer and maybe give a few announcements. Then he will give the final blessing and end the Mass ("Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."). Sometimes the priest will keep the Book Bearer there until the very end (if there is a special blessing), but usually he will send the Book Bearer back after first prayer. Whenever the priest closes the book, you will know that you are done and can go back to seat and put the Book down in the usual spot next to the seat.

The Recessional (the end of Mass)

As soon as the final song begins and priest goes to the Altar to kiss it, the Cross Bearer gets the Processional Cross and leads the other two servers down the stairs and out into the Main Aisle. The Cross Bearer should go up to the third row of seats (from the front) and turn around to face the Altar. The other two servers should also turn to face the Altar and be in front of the Cross Bearer (this way, when he turns to walk up the aisle you will be behind him, one behind his left shoulder, the other behind the right). The Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors will all line up in front of the steps facing the Altar too. The Priest and Deacon will come down the steps and also face the Altar. As the final song is being sung the Priest will then genuflect, and the servers should also do the same (except for the Cross Bearer who will bow his/her head). As soon as the Priest stands back up he will turn towards the main aisle. This is the signal for the Cross Bearer to turn around and begin walking up the main aisle towards the back of the Church and into the Narthex area. The other two servers will also turn around and follow the Cross Bearer.

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As soon as you enter the Narthex area you can go right over to the closet where the albs are kept. Return the cross to its place against the wall, and remove and hang up your alb, cincture, and neck cross.

You have completed the Mass and helped our whole Parish celebrate the wonderful gift of Jesus in the Eucharist and scripture. Thank you for being such an important part of our Parish life and helping us all to pray and worship God together!

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Appendix 1 – vocabulary

- alb – Long white gown worn by servers, priests, and deacons. It is a reminder of our baptismal gown.
- altar – The table where the priest offers the sacrifice of the Mass. It is located in the center of the sanctuary area.
- ambo – The wooden stand where scripture is read.
- chalice – The special cup used by the priest that contains the wine that will become the precious blood of Christ in the Mass.
- ciborium (ciboria) – Golden bowls that contain the hosts that become the Body of Christ in the Mass.
- cincture – The rope that we tie around our waists over the alb like a belt.
- credence table – The table near the servers seats where items needed for the Mass are kept.
- congregation – All the people of the parish who gather in the pews for Mass.
- cruet – A small glass container with water (sometimes, especially for the 7am Mass, there will also be a cruet containing wine instead of a flagon).
- finger bowl – A small glass dish used to wash the priest's hands before he celebrates the Eucharist
- finger towel – A small wash cloth used to dry the priest's hands after he washes them.
- flagon – A large glass container containing wine.
- genuflect – To touch the right knee to the floor when we walk in front of the Tabernacle. It is a sign of reverence for the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist
- homily – The words that the priest or deacon speaks after reading the gospel. This is where the priest or deacon explains what the gospel means in our daily lives.
- host – A round, flat piece of bread that will become the Body of Christ at the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- incense boat – A small metal covered bowl that contains incense.

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- Mass – The holiest prayer of the people where we listen to the Word of God in scripture and the priest consecrates the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Jesus as we celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- neck cross – A small wooden cross that servers wear around the neck as a sign of their special role in the Mass.
- narthex - The open hallway gathering area located in the back of the Church (closest to Tremont Street); this is the area where servers get ready for Mass and the procession begins.
- paten – A gold circular plate that contains the large host the priest uses.
- purificator – A small white cloth with a red or white cross on it used to wipe the chalice or communion cups.
- pyx – A small round golden vessel with a cover. It is used to bring communion to a person that is sick.
- sacramentary – The big red Book containing the prayers that the priest uses during Mass. This is the Book that the Book Bearer brings to the priest.
- sanctuary – The elevated area at the front of the Church containing the altar, ambo, and tabernacle.
- sprinkling vessel – A golden stick with a spherical enclosed end that contains Holy Water. The enclosure has small holes in it so that Holy Water can be sprinkled onto the people.
- tabernacle – The golden ornate box behind the altar that contains the Eucharist from Mass that is available for people who are sick. These consecrated hosts are the Body of Christ, so Jesus is present in the tabernacle.
- thurible – An enclosed metal container on a long chain that is used to burn incense on hot charcoals. Sometimes referred to as a censer.

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Appendix 2 – special Masses

Every Mass is a special celebration of the sacrifice that Jesus made to save us and give us the gift of eternal life. There are, however, some particular moments during the year when our Masses are focused on an important part of the life of Jesus. During this important times of the year there are sometimes different roles for the altar server. If you are serving at any of these Masses, the priest or deacon will give you special instructions. Here is a brief summary of those Masses and some of the differences:

Advent

In the four weeks before Christmas the Church is in a period of waiting for the coming of Jesus and we have an advent wreath near the altar with candles that are lighted each week to remind us of this waiting. The priest will often ask one of the servers to light the appropriate candles either before the Mass or during the Mass. He will give you instructions about this if needed.

Christmas

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus and are amazed that God would become a human being like us to show us how we should live our lives and show us how deeply God loves and cares for us by dying on the cross to save us. At Christmas time we have many more Masses because so many people come to celebrate this gift, including visiting family members and friends. For Altar Servers, these Masses are the same as your usual Mass. Because they are so crowded, be sure to arrive a little earlier than usual. Also, some of the Masses will take place downstairs in the Parish Center. If you sever at one of these Masses, you will need to arrive early enough to get your alb on upstairs and then go downstairs and check where everything is arranged for Mass so you will know how to set up the altar. The priest can also give you any new instructions that might be needed.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday signals the start of Lent. It is a day when we all take time to recognize that we hurt God and one another by our selfishness and mistakes. During Ash Wednesday, those who are old enough also offer a fast (that is, we don't eat any food between meals and we only eat one regular meal during the day), and we abstain from eating meat. These are ways of remembering that everything in our lives is a gift from God who loves us, and therefore we should work hard to love God with all our hearts and minds by saying we're sorry for our sins and trying to live holy lives. The Mass on Ash Wednesday is a little different because the priest blesses some ashes (note: these ashes come from burning the left over palms from last year's Palm Sunday Mass) and everyone at Mass receives a small amount of ashes on their foreheads during a special part of the Mass. Altar Servers will also receive these ashes (as a sign of our repentance and our complete reliance on God. The priest will place these on your forehead as you stand at your seats. The rest of the Mass is the same as any normal Mass.

Holy Week

Holy Week is the most important part of the year for us. This is the week right before Easter and we celebrate the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The week begins

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with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter Sunday. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of that week we celebrate the ‘Triduum’, that is the three days that include Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday (the Easter Vigil). Each Mass during this week has special meaning and Altar Servers will have very important and different roles to play.

Palm Sunday

On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus entering Jerusalem as a hero just a few days before he is put to death. In this Mass the priest blesses the palms that everyone takes when they enter the Church. The Mass is different because we will sometimes (but not always) begin outside the Church with some special prayers, readings, and blessings. The entrance procession will then involve walking outside and then into the front doors and finally down the main aisle we always do. The priest or deacon will give you instructions about where to go and how to process into the Church.

Triduum

The Triduum (pronounced “Trid – oo – um”) includes three very important services for our parish: Holy Thursday (Feast of the Lord’s Supper), Good Friday (Veneration of the Cross), and the Easter Vigil (the Resurrection celebration). Each of these services has different roles for the Altar Servers.

Holy Thursday

On Holy Thursday we celebrate the Last Supper when Jesus gave us the gift of the Eucharist and the priesthood. At this Mass our entrance procession will be different (perhaps including carrying in candles), the recessional at the end of Mass is different (we have a procession with candles and incense as we bring the Eucharist into the chapel for a time of special prayer, and there is also a very different moment after the priest’s homily when the priest will wash the feet of 12 people from the parish (representing the 12 apostles at the Last Supper). At the foot washing ceremony, Servers will help the priest by carrying towels and perhaps other items. Finally, before the gifts are brought up to the altar, there will be special procession of the holy oils brought to the sanctuary. The remainder of the Mass will be similar to other Masses. The priest or deacon will give you special instructions for all these different roles, so it is important to arrive at the Church 30 minutes before the start of the Mass to go over these details.

Good Friday

Good Friday is a very solemn service where we remember the death of Jesus on the cross. This service is very different from a regular Mass, so it’s important for you to arrive 30 minutes early if you are assigned to this service. The procession and conclusion of the service are different than normal, there is a special part of the service where everyone venerates (that is, shows a sign of respect and honor) the cross by touching or kissing a cross that is held by the servers and deacons, and there is a very different communion service as well.

In addition to the Good Friday service, you might also be assigned to help out with Stations of Cross held at Noontime or in the afternoon. In this service you will assist the deacon or priest by carrying the cross and candles around the Church as we read through

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special prayers that remind us of the Passion and death of Jesus. Again, because there are special instructions for servers, please arrive at least 15 minutes early.

Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil is a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus and is one of the most beautiful moments in our Church. This Mass begins after sunset on Saturday night before Easter. This is a long Mass (usually 2 hours) because of the many wonderful and important parts of the service. These include: lighting of the Easter Fire outside the Church, procession into the dark Church with the Easter candle, singing of the Easter Exsultat, a number of readings that remind us of God's plan to redeem the world through Jesus, and the welcoming into the Church of new members through baptism and confirmation. Servers will have a number of new instructions for all of these parts of the service, so please arrive 30 minutes before the start of the Mass to receive instructions from the priest or deacon.

Easter Sunday and Easter Season

On Easter Sunday, and for a number of weeks after Easter, we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus in special ways. In many of the Masses during this period, the priests will include a sprinkling rite to remind us of our baptisms when we were welcomed into the Church as sons and daughters of God. In this sprinkling rite, servers will often help out the priest by carrying the holy water around the Church as the priest sprinkles the people. The priest or deacon will give you special instructions when you arrive at Mass.

Weddings

There will be opportunities for servers to help at weddings during the course of the year. Usually there is only one server at a wedding and the priest will give you very specific instructions before the wedding begins (so be sure to get there early!). Servers with more experience are normally invited to help at these celebrations.

Funerals

Altar servers are usually not involved with funeral Masses, however if you do serve at such an event (this would generally be by special invitation only) the priest or deacon will explain any special instructions to you.

Appendix 3: Special Activities

Incensing

Incense is sometimes used during special Masses. Incense is made of a mixture of tree resin and natural spices and oils, including frankincense (which we remember from the gifts of the Three Wise Men who brought gifts to the Infant Jesus in Bethlehem). The incense is burned to make a sweet smelling smoke that rises up in the Church to remind us that our prayers rise up to God in heaven. Incense is used at Funeral Masses, and also at special Masses during the year such as the Triduum and the Easter Season. Sometimes the priest will incense the altar during Mass as a symbol of the holiness of the altar. At other times the book of the gospels will be incensed as a sign of the sacred word that will be read. At some Masses we might also incense the priest and the people, as a sign of the holiness of the people as members of the Body of Christ.

Whenever incense is used the altar servers are there to help. The priest/deacon will give you special instructions before Mass, but it is important to have a little background so that you will be ready when you are asked to help. There are two items that are used in incensing: the “thurible (also called a censer)” and the “incense boat” (see Figure 8). The thurible is made up of a long golden chain with a small enclosure at the end containing the burning charcoal. Before Mass the priest or deacon will usually put the charcoal into the thurible and light it so that it will be ready during the Mass. The boat is a small covered golden bowl that contains the incense. There is also a small metal spoon that is with the boat. The thurible and boat are placed on a metal stand when not being used. During the Mass, when the priest is ready to use the incense, the server will bring the thurible and boat from the stand, holding the thurible by the end of the chain in one hand, and the boat in the other hand. Usually you will hand the boat to the priest or deacon, and they will use the spoon to scoop a small amount of incense to put into the thurible on the hot charcoal. After you hand the boat to the priest/deacon, you need to open the thurible up so that the priest can put the incense onto the coals. The way to do this by holding the chain up a bit higher with one hand (at about shoulder height), and then lifting the cover of the thurible enclosure up with the other hand – use two fingers to lift the cover by the black insulated knob. Please be very careful because the censer can be quite hot! Once you open the thurible the priest will put the incense onto the charcoal and it will begin to smoke. When he is finished you can put the cover back down and hand the chain to the priest or deacon. Remain standing in the same position so that they can return the thurible and boat to you when they are finished. They will tell you when you can return the thurible and boat to the stand.

When incense is used with the gospel book (such as at the Easter Vigil Mass, for example), you will lead a procession with the deacon or priest and other servers to the Ambo and remain standing just behind the deacon or priest when he reaches the Ambo. He will take the thurible from you to incense the Book of Gospels and then hand it back to you. You will stay in that same position until the gospel is finished. Then you can return the boat and thurible to the stand.

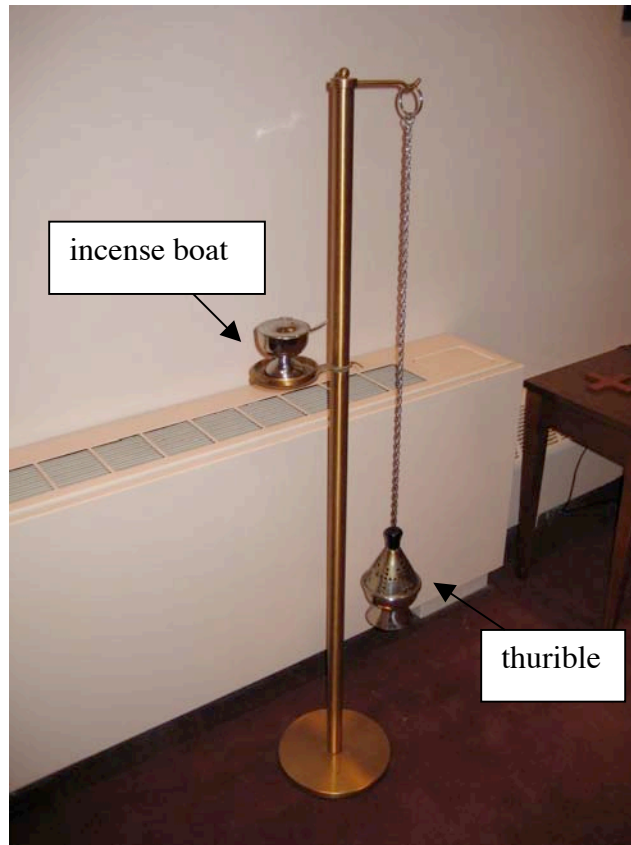


Figure 8: Thurible (or censer) and incense boat on their stand.

Sprinkling Rite

Starting at the Easter Vigil and continuing through the Easter Season we often will sprinkle the people with Holy Water during the Mass. This is done to remind us that we have all been baptized and so our lives are holy and we will share in Christ's resurrection. When there is a sprinkling rite the priest will walk up and down the aisles of the Church to sprinkle the Holy Water using a brush or sprinkling vessel. To do this he will need a server to carry the bowl of Holy Water beside him. When it's time to start the rite, the priest will signal the server to bring the water bowl to him. After the priest sprinkles the servers, he will walk off of the sanctuary and through the Church. You will follow close behind him carrying the water bowl so that he can get more water when needed. Continue to follow the priest wherever he goes. When he is done, he'll return to his chair in the sanctuary and you can return the bowl to its place and go to your seat.