

Altar Server Handbook

The
Altar Server Ministry



Called To Serve

What is a Catholic Parish?

In the Roman **Catholic Church**, a **parish**, is a stable community of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ within a particular **church** whose pastoral care has been entrusted to a parish priest under the authority of the diocesan bishop. The people, who are present at the church, are called the congregation. A Catholic parish, like Shrule parish, is made up of a wide variety of people with many gifts and talents. Everyone within this parish community from all the different areas and townlands, are invited to serve God and each other. Above all, this happens and is modelled in the contribution different people and townlands make to the celebration of the Mass. These roles in the Mass are many and include Readers, Sacristans, EM's, cleaners, and others. Serving at the Altar as an Altar Server is one of these callings to serve in the House of the Lord in a Catholic Church in a Catholic Parish.



What is a Catholic Mass?

The Mass, known more fully as the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is the central liturgical ritual in the Catholic Church. The Church describes the Holy Mass as "**the source and summit of the Catholic faith.**" The Mass is a very important moment for people, especially if they are praying for a loved one, it is a celebration of a funeral or a wedding. An altar server helps and plays an important role in these celebrations. The Mass culminates in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The term 'mass' is derived from the ecclesiastical Latin formula for the dismissal of the congregation: *Ite, missa est* ("Go, it is the sending [dismissal]"). The people gather, pray, renew their faith, listening to Scripture and receiving the Eucharist, and are then 'sent' out into the world to be witnesses to the Gospel and a light of hope.

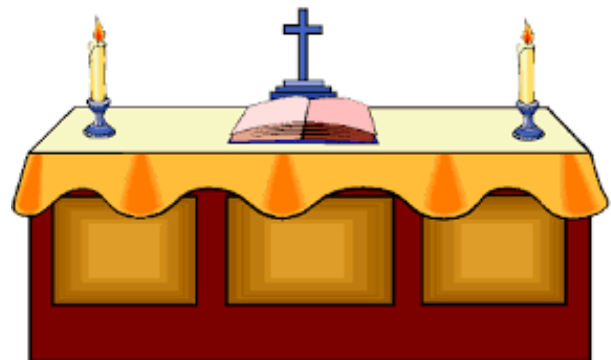
The Mass is a time people are called to set aside from their busy lives to give recognition and thanks to their creator, for the blessings, and in times of trouble, as a source of comfort. Literally one hour of the week that has a total of 168 hours. The Mass is one of Scripture and the Eucharist, full of prayer, rituals, movement and symbols that give expression to these, from standing at the Gospel to coming forward or 'to God' at the Eucharist, with the aim and objective of drawing us closer to God.

Altar servers have formed part of the Mass since earliest times – they helped prepare the altar for the Mass from setting up to lightening candles. They form part of the many

other people who contribute to the Mass from the priest to the reader to choir to the member of the altar society to the sacristan to the person who cuts the grass and cleans the church. The celebration of the Mass is to reflect community, and the community are reflected in how Mass is celebrated – people working together, helping each other, recognised the contribution they and others make in proclaiming the Gospel. In essence, teamwork. Altar serving plans a role in this.

Called to Serve.

God have been calling people to serve him for centuries, from Abraham to Moses to David and even Jesus himself was called by God to serve. Altar serving is one of the first ways in which children can begin to understand and recognised the importance, purpose and benefit of serving; of doing something for another, while learning and growing themselves in becoming more familiar with the Mass – a call each person is given at the time of their baptism.



Qualities of an Altar Server

In order to become an altar server, the person needs to have:

- Have received his/her First Confession and First Communion.
- Be in the third class or above.
- Be willing to learn and work with others.,
- Know how to make the Sign of the Cross and genuflect.
- Know how to receive Holy Communion in the approved manner
- Be willing to learn all the different roles required of any altar server.
- Awareness that you are helping people pray and making the Mass special for them. This is especially true at funerals and weddings.
- Be able to have fun and not stress over making mistakes!

(Don't worry if you don't know some of the above, since there will be training and time to learn them!)

Dress Code for Altar Servers

Wear something comfortable and not too bulky since you have to put on a server's alb. It is preferable not to wear sandals, since you can easily trip with them.



Altar Servers Prayer Before Serving

Father in heaven,

Your Son, Jesus Christ

Showed His love for you

By serving his needy brothers and sisters.

I now ask you to give me help

As I serve you and your people.

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.

Take from my heart all distracting thoughts.

Help me to know what I should do and to serve you and others well.

Help me to serve you reverently at your holy altar,

So, I may give your praise and glory,

Now and forever. Amen.

Actual Severing

Before Mass Begins

Altar servers along with their supervisor are to sign-in when they come to the sacristy, then they get ready by putting on the server's alb, cincture (rope belt) and cross.

Once they are properly dressed and ready, they set about getting the altar ready for Mass.

- Lit the candles.
- Fill if necessary and put the cruets (small glass jugs with water and wine) out on the credence table.
- Put out the chalice on the credence table after it is prepared.
 - Remove top & patten (patten is small circular dish).
 - Put a purifier cloth on top of chalice (purifier is cloth with cross in middle)
 - Put patten on top on purifier, then put a large host on patten.
 - Put top over the patten with key to tabernacle.
- Put finger bowl (small bowl with water) and finger towel on the credence table.
- Put pattens on credence table.
- Put out ciborium if needed (ciborium is container that hold small breads for Communion).



If there is a procession, meaning if the priest and servers are to enter from the back of the church, roles altar servers will have will depend on number of servers. If there are 3; 1 server carries the processional cross, and two are needed to carry the processional candles. If there are less than 3 servers, there may still be a procession, with 1 server carrying the processional cross and if 2 servers, they carry the processional candles and no processional cross.

How to Process at Start of the Mass

If there is no procession, and servers and priest enter the sanctuary from the sacristy, the servers and priest at the start of Mass:

In Shrute:

- Process to the space between the steps and altar in Shrute
- Servers stand either side of the green carpet.
- Leave space for priest in between.
- When he joins them, they all bow together.
- The priest turns to the altar and the servers go to their seats.

In Glencorrib:

- Process to the front of the altar.
- Leave space for priest in between.
- When he joins them, they all bow together.
- The priest goes to the altar and the servers go to their seats.

Shrute&Glencorrib Procession Entrance:

If there is a procession, and servers and priest enter the sanctuary from back of the church:

- Wait at back of church; server with processional cross in front and servers with candles behind him, side by side if possible.
- Process to the first step of the sanctuary, and line up there on either side.
- If two, carrying candles, stand apart leaving space for the priest.
- If three stand apart, with the candle bearers on the outside and the server carrying the cross on the inside leaving space for the priest in the middle.
- Wait for the priest to join then, and then all bow together.
- Server with the cross moves first, leaving the cross at designated place, then goes to their seat, remaining standing.
- Servers with candles move next, leaving the candles they are carrying on the altar, then go to their seats, remaining standing.
- Then priest goes to the altar to venerate the altar and then to the presider stand to start the Mass.

If procession includes servers with thurible and boat:

- Wait at back of church; servers with thurible and boat stand in front, next the server with processional cross and then the servers with candles behind him, side by side if possible.
- Process to the first step of the sanctuary, and line up there on either side.
- Wait for the priest to join them, and then all bow together.
- Servers with thurible and boat move first going directly and stand behind the altar.
- Servers with the cross move next, leaving the cross at designated place, then go to their seat, remaining standing.
- Servers with candles move next, leaving the candles they are carrying on the altar, then go to their seats, remaining standing.
- When the priest venerates the altar, he will then incense it, and once completed, the servers with the thurible and boat put them on the thurible holder, and go to their seats, remaining standing.

If only one or two for procession:

- Follow routine above, noting:
 - If only one server, they carry processional cross.
 - If only two servers, they only carry the candles.



Postures at Mass

When to Sit, Stand & Kneel During Mass:

While the altar servers have an important role in the Mass, they stand, sit and kneel at the same time as the congregation. So, if in doubt, look to see what the people are doing, and follow their lead. The only time this does not apply is if an altar server has something to do; for example, at the offertory, people sit, but the servers are standing while they assist the priest in preparing the altar for the Eucharist; bring the chalice, wine etc to him. When they have finished, they sit as the people are doing.

Walking

We do a lot of walking, but at Mass, remember to walk slowly and be careful of steps or anything that may be on the floor.

Bowing

Bowing is part of many cultures, especially Asian. It is used to greet someone, express thanks and used to acknowledge. In Mass, those involved in the liturgy from the priest to the reader and EM to the altar server, bow. At the beginning of the Mass, the priest and altar servers may bow towards the tabernacle if they do not genuflect, they bow any time they pass the tabernacle as way to acknowledge the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. Altar server bow when they have finished assisting the priest such as 'First Communion' and 'Second Communion'. The type of bow done is a shoulder bow, meaning a bending of the head and neck forward.

Genuflecting

This is seen as a profound way to begin and end Mass. When people genuflect; it indicates a greeting or goodbye towards someone important, such as royalty, even today. A genuflection is where a person goes down on their right knee, with their back straight and their head looking forward. This form of greeting and goodbye may be used at the start and end of Mass, again towards the tabernacle, indicating recognition of the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. People coming and leaving the church can often be seen to genuflect.

Standing

Throughout the Mass there are different times to stand such at the Gospel or at the Communion Rite starting with the Our Father. Altar servers are encouraged to stand

with hands in front and not to lean or slouch, or fidget so as not be a distraction to others.

Sitting

Throughout the Mass there are times when to sit such at the readings from Scripture and after Holy Communion. Like standing, altar servers are asked to not slouch or fidget or chat with other altar servers. These are all very natural things to do, especially if something is happening that an altar sever may find boring or tiresome, or simple wants to catch up with a friend. However, altar serving is a part of liturgy where people are praying and trying to pray;so altar servers are encouraged to their best so as not become a distraction to others.

Hands

An age-old question of what to do with your hands; unless holding something, an altar sever hands should be front of them on their lap if they are sitting or in prayer position when they are walking or moving around the sanctuary during Mass.



First & Second Communion

First Communion:

The assigned servers help priest preparing the altar for the Eucharist with 'First Communion' at the offertory, just after the prayers of the faithful, by bringing ciborium, chalice, wine & water etc to him as required. Once they have this done, they return to their seats. Servers who are not helping at First Communion, sit.

What is 'First Communion'?

'First Communion' is just after the prayers of the faithful where the servers help the priest prepare the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They do this by bringing to the altar the items he needs. These steps generally are:

1. Ciborium, if any (holds the small communion breads).
2. Chalice.
3. Cruets of water and wine.
4. Finger bowl of water and finger cloth.



Once this is done, the server(s) return to their seats.

At Communion:

Servers approach the priest for Holy Communion, and then the servers assigned to doing First Communion, also help in the distribution of Holy Communion. They take the patten and go with the priest or EM. Other servers return to their seats. Altar servers hold the patten under the hands of the people receiving Holy Communion.

Second Communion:

The server assigned to Second Communion rings the bell at the start of Mass and during the Liturgy of the Eucharist when incantation to the Holy Spirit occurs and at the elevation of the Host and Chalice. The server for Second Communion assists the priest after the distribution of Holy Communion, while the other servers remain seated or return to their seats if they were doing the patten during the distribution of Holy Communion.

What is 'Second Communion'?

'Second Communion' takes place after the distribution of Holy Communion, and when the priest returns to the altar. The cleaning of the sacred vessels then takes place. The altar server(s) help the priest in the following ways:

1. Bring the cruet (small jug) of water to the priest. Once he is finished, put the cruet back.
2. Return to the priest; he may hand you several to put back on the credence table such as pattens and ciborium. Each time go back to the priest.
3. The last item the priest will hand you is the chalice. Bring the chalice back to the credence table
4. Only then the server(s) return to their seat.

The server doing Second Communion is also responsible for ringing of the bell at the start of Mass and during Mass.



End of Mass

In Shrute (Without Procession):

- Process to the space between the steps and altar in Shrute
- Servers stand either side of the green carpet.
- Leave space for priest in between.
- When he joins them, they all bow together.
- The servers then turn and walk back into the sacristy.

In Glencorrib (Without Procession):

- Process to the front of the altar.
- Leave space for priest in between.
- When he joins them, they all bow together.
- The servers then turn and walk back into the sacristy.

In Shrute (With Procession):

- Servers carrying cross and candles go to get them and then process to foot of sanctuary step, taking up positions of cross bearer on inside, with candle bearers each side leaving space for priest.
- When priest arrives, all bow and turn to walk slowly down aisle.
- When servers reach end of church, they go outside and return to sacristy. If raining, go return to sacristy via side aisle.

In Glencorrib (With Procession):

- Servers carrying cross and candles go to get them and then process to foot of sanctuary step, taking up positions of cross bearer on inside, with candle bearers each side leaving space for priest.
- When priest arrives, all bow and turn to walk slowly down aisle.
- When servers reach end of church, they go outside and return to sacristy.

Prayer After Serving

Lord Jesus Christ,

You are the Eternal High Priest.

You lead all your saints in Heaven,

And your people here on Earth,

In praising God, our Father.

Thank you, Lord Jesus

For letting me come before your altar,

So that, with your help,

I can praise God the Father in heaven as his server.

Help me find joy in serving at your altar.

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

Glory be to the Father,

And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

Now and forever. Amen.

Different Roles & Responsibilities of the Server

What an altar server does depends on how many servers are present. If only one, then the server does everything; if there are two or three or more then each server is assigned different roles. It is important these roles are rotated so each server gets an opportunity to do different things, and they also learn what servers do overall.

If one server:

The server does everything.

If two servers:

The roles and responsibilities are divided into two:

If procession, both servers carry processional candles and leave on altar.

Server One:

- Rings bell at start of Mass & during Mass
- Helps server two with 'First Communion'
- Does Communion with EM and holds patten.

Server Two:

- Helps server one with 'First Communion'.
- Does Communion with priest holding patten.
- Does Second Communion.

If three servers:

If procession, senior server carries cross, and others carry processional candles.

Server One:

- Rings bell at start of Mass & during Mass
- Does Second Communion.

Server Two:

- Does First Communion
- Does Communion with EM/priest holding patten.

Server Three:

- Does First Communion.
- Does Communion with EM/priest holding patten.

If there are four servers:

If procession, senior server carries cross, and two carry processional candles & other follows.

Responsibilities are broken into pairs; one pair doing First Communion & second pair does Second Communion:

Server One & Two:

- Rings bell at start of Mass & during Mass
- Does Second Communion.

Server Three & Four:

- Does First Communion.
- Does Communion with EM/priest holding patten.

Serving At a Funeral

If there is a funeral in the parish, a WhatsApp message will go out on the parents/guardian Altar Severing Group.

- Please discuss with child about serving at a funeral as some children may be uncomfortable.
- Usually, 3 servers are required for serving a funeral.
- Mass is as normal until the end.

At the end of the Mass, servers do as follow:

- Server 1 gets the Processional Cross
- Server 2 gets the thurible & boat
- Server 3 gets the Holy water bucket

The servers go outside the altar railings and stand facing the coffin

- Server 1 stands in the middle & servers 2 & 3 on either side.

Prayers and then said, and the coffin is blessed with holy water and incensed. After this, the servers remain where they are. At the end of the prayers, the priest will leave the sanctuary and move down towards the aisle. The servers go ahead of the priest, stopping about quarter way down the aisle & turn to face the altar.

- Server 2 with thurible goes first walking in the middle.
- Server 1 with processional cross is second, walking down the middle of the aisle.
- Server 3 with holy water follows.

They wait with the priest, until the procession with the coffin is ready. Once ready, all turn and walk slowly down the aisle. Once outside, the servers stand in line with the priest as follows:

- Server 1 stands in the middle & servers 2 & 3 on either side.

All wait until the coffin is blessed, and once blessed all return to the sacristy.

Key Words in Altar Serving:

Candle Bearer: The name given to a server who carries the processional candles, served in pairs, and may carry candles at the beginning and end of the Mass, as well as at the gospel.

Cross Bearer: The server who carries the processional cross at the beginning and end of the Mass.

Head Server: This is the most experienced server who assigns what each server does. The main task is to ensure the roles are rotated. They usually take the lead role in the procession e.g. carrying the processional cross, and if there are any other specific roles or duties to be done at a particular Mass that are not usually done.

Thurifer: This is the name given to the server who is responsible for the thurible. It is prepared at the start of the Mass for special occasions and the thurifer is the server who will carry the thurible on special occasions and bring it to the priest as required.

Boat Carrier: This is the server who carries the boat which holds incense for the charcoal in the thurible. This server walks beside the server with thurifer.

Server's Alb: This is the vestment servers use and is usually fastened around the waist by a rope that is called a cincture. An Alb is used in severing to recall and remind the server of their baptism. On the day of their baptism, they would have worn a white baptismal gown and a white shawl.

Cincture: A rope or cord is often used as part of the altar servers' robes; called a cincture, it is a symbol of faithfulness to God.

Ambo: The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the reading and homily are given

Chalice: A cup of precious metal that holds the wine, which becomes the Blood of Jesus after the consecration

Ciborium: A large container of precious metal with a cover of the same material which will hold the Body of Jesus after the consecration for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful

Corporal: A white linen cloth, usually with a Cross in the centre, used to protect any particles of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus from falling to the Altar cloth. It is

always folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from being lost. The Corporal is like the body winding sheet used to hold the crucified body of Our Lord in the tomb.

Credence Table: The table in the Sanctuary where the cruets, handing washing bowl, chalices and ciborium are kept before and after the Consecration

Lectionary: The large book of readings used for the Liturgy of the Word during Mass. It is usual found on the ambo.

Missal (or Sacramentary): The large book containing the prayers said by the Priest during Mass, usual red cover and on a stand on the altar.

Paten: A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal that holds the Large Host the priest will use during Mass. It is found on top of the chalice.

Purificator: A linen cloth used by the Priest to dry the Chalice after washing and purifying it. It is identified usually with a cross in the middle of the cloth. It is placed on top of the chalice, and the paten is then placed on top of the purificator.

Pall: A square piece of cardboard or plastic covered by linen and used to cover the Chalice. It is placed on top of the paten.

Communion Paten: This is a plate with a handle that the server uses at communion time to hold under a person's hand to catch any Communion host crumbs.

Sanctuary: The area where the ambo and altar, along with the tabernacle are located. It is often marked out by altar railings and/or change in flooring.

Sanctuary Lamp: This is a candle holder, with a lit red candle usually suspended from the ceiling. It is lit to indicate the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle.

Stations of the Cross: These are 14 pictures or paintings depicting the journey Jesus took on Good Friday.

Sacristy: The room or area where servers and priests dress for liturgies and where most items such as chalices, communion patens, cruets etc are found.

Key Dates in the Year

September:

- Sent out notes inviting anyone from third class to six class to become altar server
- Set Up Parents/Guardians WhatsApp Group.
- Do up Rota for Altar Servers
- Set 'Training Day' for altar servers Shrule & Glencorrib.
- Organise Vetting & Training for Supervisors
- Hold presentation 'Thank You' for altar servers who have left.

Christmas

Get 'Selection Box' for altar servers

Easter

Get 'Easter Eggs' for altar servers

June

Hold a party/day trip for altar servers.

**Forms
to be
Completed
by Altar Server
Parents & Guardians**

Forms to be Completed by Parents/Guardians

Each parent/guardian of an altar server is to complete:

- Application Form SG-04
- and to be given the leaflet
- 'Information & Guidance for Children/Parents'

These forms can be found on the diocesan website:

<https://www.galwaydiocese.ie/safeguarding/policies>

**Forms
to be
Completed
by Altar Server
Supervisors**

Forms to be Completed by Altar Server Supervisors

Each parent/guardian who is to be a supervisor is required to be Garda vetted. This may be done by completing the form titled 'Western Province Diocesan Vetting Service' form. Hard copies are then given to the local priest and forwarded onto the diocesan office. They will input the information, and the applicant will then receive an email and online form from Garda Vetting Services, which applicants need to complete the online form within 30 days to complete the vetting process.

- Western Province Diocesan Vetting Service' form NVB-1
- Proof of Identity:
 - Photographic ID
 - Proof of Current Address

In addition to the above, the following need to be completed also.

- Form SG-01
- Form SG-02
- Form SG-03

and is required to attend training session.

The local priest and local Child Safe Guardian representative will assist and support in this process.

These forms can be found on the diocesan website:

<https://www.galwaydiocese.ie/safeguarding/policies>

How Many Can You Name Game!

Below are some of the religious items found in the church – play a game with the altar servers to see how many they can identify and name!

