



NORMS FOR ALTAR SERVERS

ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

March 20, 2023

The celebration of the Sacred Liturgy requires the presence of altar servers for the reverent and fitting execution of the liturgical rites, especially for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

- For the Holy Eucharist, the altar servers carry the thurible and boat when used, the cross and candles in the entrance procession, in the recessional, and the procession with the *Book of the Gospels*. Additionally, they minister the *Roman Missal* (and other books/binders) at the priest celebrant's chair, and assist with the cruets and hand washing at the altar, ring the bell during the Eucharistic Prayer and hold the Communion Plate, if used, during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- In the absence of a deacon and/or instituted acolyte, the altar servers assist with the preparation of the altar, including the sacred vessels, and the clearing of the altar after the distribution of Holy Communion, again including the sacred vessels.
- Likewise, with celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy apart from the Eucharist, altar servers should carry out the needed roles to assist the celebrant with the various elements for the liturgical rites, especially with ministering the liturgical book(s).

Altar servers can be adult men and women as well as school age boys and girls. Those who carry out the liturgical ministry of serving the Sacred Liturgy are to be Roman Catholics who can also receive Holy Communion. As with all liturgical ministries, the role of liturgical service finds its completion in the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. *It is also possible and permitted to continue to have only men and/or boys assist as altar servers.*

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Altar servers are to be properly trained for their various roles and duties in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. Once altar servers are trained, it is recommended that they receive the blessing provided in the *Book of Blessings* for this liturgical ministry.

Altar servers are to be vested for their role in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. The unadorned white alb is the common garment for adult and school age altar servers. The alb should be fastened around the waist with a white cincture. There is no need for any additional crosses, medals and/or sashes. There should be a uniformity in the vesture and appearance of the altar servers. *Male altar servers may retain the custom of wearing the black or red cassock and surplice for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy.*

Altar servers are to be seated in the sanctuary for the ease of carrying out their duties. They do not sit on either side of the priest celebrant. Only the deacon sits to the side of the priest celebrant.

The number of altar servers assigned is determined by the ritual needs for the particular celebration. A Solemn Mass may require a thurifer, cross bearer, and two candle bearers. The cross bearer could also minister the *Roman Missal* and the candle bearers could assist at the altar. A weekday Mass may require only one server. It is important to have the number of altar servers needed without having too many or too few for the reverent and fitting celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* for the Eucharist and the introductions to the other ritual books provide guidance for the roles and duties of the altar servers.

Certain occasions during the course of the Liturgical Year, such as the Sacred Paschal Triduum as well as when a Bishop celebrates, for example for the conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation, require distinct reviews of the roles and duties for the altar servers. The importance of a review cannot be underestimated for the benefit of the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and of the altar servers.

It is recommended that each parish and institution have someone to coordinate the altar servers, to provide for training, scheduling and oversight.

Parishes and institutions are encouraged to share resources with regard to altar servers, especially when it comes to opportunities for formation and enrichment.

Altar servers should periodically be directed to focus on their actual participation in the Sacred Liturgy as their primary duty and to see this same duty, which is enhanced with serving, as the indispensable source for living a Christian life.