
ST. MARGARET MARY PARISH

ALTAR SERVER HANDBOOK



March 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Altar Servers, you are, in fact, already apostles of Jesus! When you take part in the Liturgy by carrying out your altar service, you offer a witness to all. Your absorption, the devotion that wells up from your heart and is expressed in gestures, in song, in the responses: if you do it correctly and not absent-mindedly, then in a certain way your witness is one that moves people.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the bond of friendship with Jesus. You are very close to Jesus in the Eucharist, and this is the most important sign of his friendship for each one of us. Do not forget it.

-excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Altar Servers, August 2, 2006

Serving at Mass as an Altar Server is a privilege and an opportunity for you to play a necessary role in the celebration of Mass. Therefore, just as Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” servers should set aside their own preferences and attend to every action of the Mass. Serving requires your attention, your reverence, and your recognition of the duties to be performed. The guidelines included in this handbook are meant to serve as an aid and a reminder to your training.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ALTAR SERVERS

- Must be in the 6th grade.
- Have a strong desire to serve at the Altar of Our Lord.
- Be an active member of St. Margaret Mary Parish.
- Have already made your First Holy Communion.
- Know how to genuflect properly.
- Know how to make the Sign of the Cross.
- Know how to receive Holy Communion in one of the approved manners.
- Be willing to pray aloud and make appropriate responses during the Mass.
- Make sure that your shoes and clothing are clean and appropriate for Mass. Since we are in God’s house we ought to make every effort to dress our very best. However, we want to attract as little attention to ourselves as possible. **See the appendix for the complete server dress code.**
- Be punctual, meaning being in the sacristy at least 15 minutes before Mass starts.
- Stay alert and attentive during Mass to serve the priest and deacon.
- Function without attracting attention away from the Mass.
- Wear appropriate clothing to church for serving even if not scheduled as you could be needed as a substitute.
- Be willing to fold your hands and show reverence at the Altar of Our Lord.
- No unnecessary talking or laughing during Mass.
- Be able to work together as a team.
- Show absolute reverence at the Altar in your total demeanor.
- Take direction from the priest, deacon, and sacristan for the Mass that you are serving.

TRAINING

Training is required before you are eligible to serve. You will receive appropriate training to get you started. During the training you will learn some basic information about the Catholic Church and the Mass. You will also learn how to carry out specific tasks while serving at the Altar. After you have progressed satisfactorily in training, you will be assigned to serve at the 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. weekday Masses and then at Sunday Masses with an experienced server.

POSTURES

Posture is how you are using and positioning your body at a particular time. In general, your posture should be confident, but calm. You should look reverent and prayerful, but comfortable. A server has to carry out a number of different actions at Mass. Therefore pay special attention to the following the postures.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

Know what you are to do while serving, and when you are to do it. Never fidget. Always do things smoothly. Do not allow yourself to be distracted.

WALKING

We do a lot of walking everyday and sometimes we get sloppy as we do it. Always walk with your back straight and your head held high. When you process in and out of Mass, stay centered in the aisle and keep your eyes straight ahead.

HANDS

Unless you are sitting down or carrying something (like a candle); your hands should be kept joined in front of your chest; palm to palm, fingers pointing upward, with your thumbs interlocked. Keep your hands high up on your chest. If you are carrying something in one hand, hold the other hand flat on your chest.

GENUFLECTING

Never genuflect when carrying anything. With your back straight and your hands folded prayerfully, lower yourself onto your right knee, and hold that position briefly. Be sure that your alb is not going to trip you on the way down or up.

BOWING

There are two types of bows. The head bow: bow your head slowly and gracefully by lowering your chin to your chest. There are several times in the Mass when this is done during Mass. For instance, when a priest or deacon bows to you, return the bow with a head bow. The profound bow (full bow): bend at the waste waist and bring yourself slowly to our full height. This is used

during the Profession of Faith or when you bow to the Altar (which symbolizes Jesus). **Never bow when carrying the cross, the book or a candle.**

KNEELING

When you kneel your body should be upright, not slouching or resting on your feet. Keep your legs and feet still. Hands are folded prayerfully.

STANDING

Always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor. Whenever you are not holding anything, fold your hands with palms together, in the “prayer position”. Point your fingertips upward. They should be held comfortably at about the middle of your chest. If you are holding something, hold the item firmly with one or both hands, as needed. The free hand, if you have one, should cover your heart. Grasp items firmly and deliberately. When handing something to someone else, make sure they have a firm grip so as not to drop it.

SITTING

Sit down on your chair carefully and gracefully. Once you are seated, sit tall and don't slouch. Place your hands on your lap or flat on your thighs in a relaxed manner. Feet should be flat on the floor.

EYES

During Mass **always** look toward the place where the action is: the celebrant's chair, the Ambo, or the Altar. When a lector is reading the scriptures, you should be looking at the lector. When you are talking to someone, you expect that person to look at you – the same is true at Mass.

SMALL SIGN OF THE THREE CROSSES

When the announcement of the Gospel has been made, use the right thumb and trace a small sign of the cross first on the forehead, next on the lips, then over the heart. This symbolizes the Word of God being made present in your mind, on your lips, and in your heart.

MISTAKES

Never get flustered when you make a mistake while serving Mass. Everyone makes an occasional mistake – Priests, Deacons, Lectors, and Altar Servers. However, to keep the sacred liturgy flowing smoothly, it is often best to continue along as though whatever happened was deliberate – don't quickly reverse direction or get flustered. This will merely call attention to the mistake. Get into the habit of keeping an eye on the action at the altar. That will help make you aware if the Priest or Deacon are trying to get your attention to take care of something you may have forgotten or some unexpected special task.

ALTAR SERVER DUTIES

BEFORE MASS

Be sure to dress properly before arriving to serve Mass. Arrive 15 minutes before Mass. Vest in your alb and cincture, and help the other servers prepare.

Find your server card in the file and date and sign it; do not return it until the priest, deacon, or sacristan has also signed it (note: this may not be until after Mass). Also sign in on the register next to the server card file.

Ten (10) minutes before Mass, one server will light the candles on the main Altar (and any other candles if asked by the priest) Use the candle lighter and be sure to keep the wicks out for enough to get into the top of the candle so that the candle will light. Keep the candle lighter upright (vertical) to keep from dripping wax on yourself or the floor. After you pull the wick of the lighter down to extinguish the flame, push the wick back out about an inch so that the wax on the wick does not melt in the lighter.

Five (5) minutes before Mass begins, two Servers get the processional candles and one gets the cross. Return to the sacristy and be ready for Father to start Mass. Remember to be reverent and alert to what Father needs, and fold hands when not holding something.

ROLES DURING MASS

The Cross Bearer: The cross bearer carries the cross in procession. In this guide, they are referred to as the “**Cross**”.

The Candle Bearer: The candle bearers carry the candles in procession, hold the candles at the Ambo during the Gospel, and lead the gift bearers to the altar. In this guide, they are referred to as “**Candle(s)**”.

The Book Bearer: The book bearer holds the Roman Missal for the priest. In this guide, the book bearer is referred to as the “**Book**”.

Mass Servers: The server who carried the Cross and the server who acts as book bearer, also are the **Mass Server(s)**. They sit on the two stools next to the credence table.

AFTER MASS

Extinguish the candles using the candle snuffer. Do not blow them out. Bring the items that are on the credence table back to the sacristy. Take off your alb and cincture, and hang them back up in their proper place. Make sure your server card is returned to the file.

THE ORDER OF THE MASS

THE ENTRANCE PROCESSION

GENERAL RULES

The Cross is held high
Hands are wide apart
Centered (nose)

The Candles are held high
Match the candle height with your partner's candle
Hands are wide apart
Centered (nose)
Never hold the candles crooked

The Book Bearer
You may be asked to process with the Book



Your hands are folded if **not** carrying the Book

Spacing
Keep two **full paces** of even and consistent spacing between the Cross and Candles and the Book. The two candles **always** process shoulder-to-shoulder with one pace between each other.

Begin the Procession
The order for the procession is shown above in Figure 1.
Start processing with the lyrics of the processional hymn
The Pace is **SLOW**.

ENTERING THE SANCTUARY

STEP A (Figure 2)

As the procession reaches the front of the church the **Cross** and **Candles** step into the Sanctuary. The **Cross** proceeds to the first step in front of the altar and **stops** (Do **NOT** Bow).

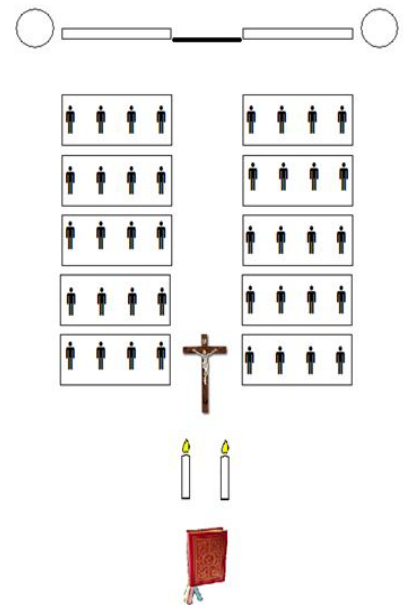


FIGURE 1

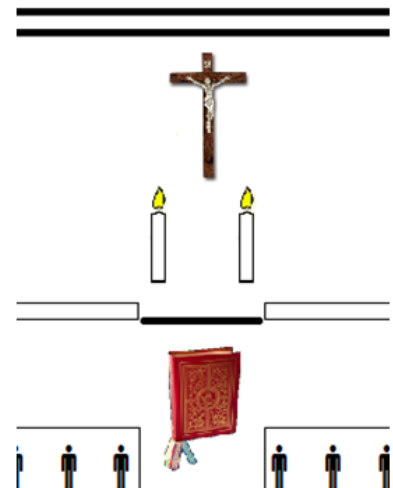


FIGURE 2

STEP B (Figure 3)

After the **Cross stops**, the **Candles** move forward and flank the **Cross** in front of the first step in front of the altar and **stop (DO NOT BOW)**.

At the same time the **Book** steps into the Sanctuary and **stops** behind the **Cross**.

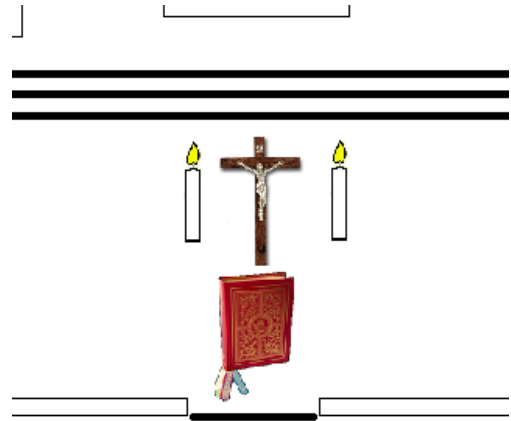


FIGURE 3

STEP C (Figure 4)

The **Cross** and **Candles** turn and face left as shown in

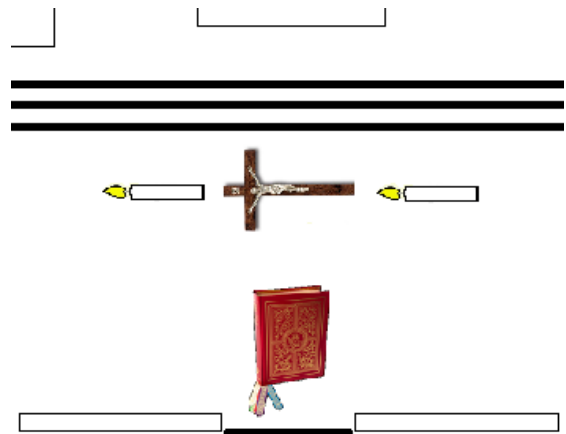


FIGURE 4

STEP D (Figure 5)

The **Candle** on the left becomes the leader and **slowly** leads the **Cross** and other **Candle** across the front of the Sanctuary toward the stairs to the left of the ambo.

As the **Candles** and **Cross** pass by, the **Book** moves forward to the first step in front of the altar and **stops**.

If **not** holding the book, then **genuflect**, turn left and **slowly** follow the procession.

If **holding** the book (**DO NOT BOW**), turn left and **slowly** follow the procession.

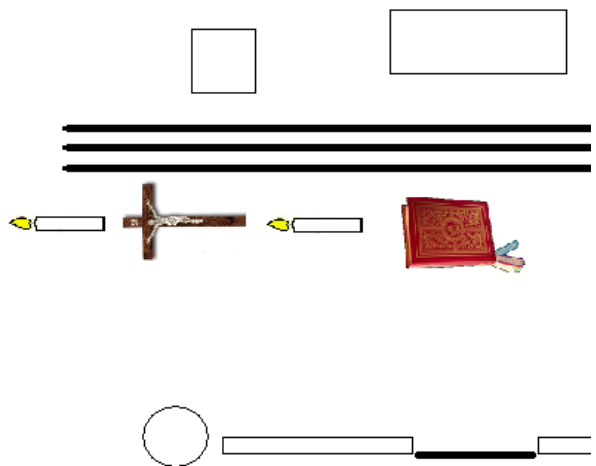


FIGURE 5

STEP E (Figure 6)

The lead **Candle** leads the other servers to the right and up the stairs between the handrail and the ambo. The cross and candles are stored.

If carrying the book the **Book** bearer goes straight to the Priest's chair and remains there until after the Collect (the opening prayer). If **not** carrying the Book, the **Book** bearer goes to his or her seat.

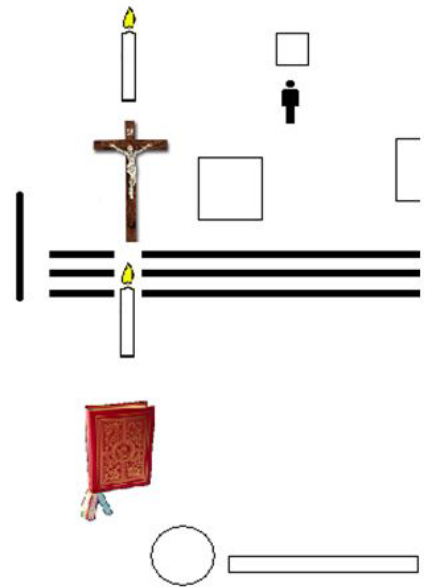


FIGURE 6

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

GREETING AND SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Priest will begin by making the Sign of the Cross along with the whole assembly –all of the Altar Servers join in making the Sign of the Cross and responding with “Amen”.

PENITENTIAL RITE

The Priest invites the assembly to reflect on their sins and then the Priest or Deacon leads the congregation in penitential prayers which are followed by “Lord have mercy” ... “Christ have mercy” ... “Lord have mercy” (In certain seasons the Greek acclamations of Kyrie eleison and Christe eleison are used). Altar Servers are to join in these responses.

THE GLORIA

The Gloria (Glory to God in the Highest...) is sung or recited on Sundays, solemnities, and feast days except during the season of Advent or Lent when it is omitted.

THE COLLECT (OPENING PRAYER)

If the **Book** bearer did not carry the book in the procession, he or she brings the book to the priest when he says “Let us pray”. At the end of the Collect, the people and all Altar Servers respond “Amen”. When Father closes the book, return to your chair with the book.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

When the priest stands for the Gospel the **Candles** **immediately** get their candles and slowly walk down the stairs and flank the ambo. Turn and face each other.

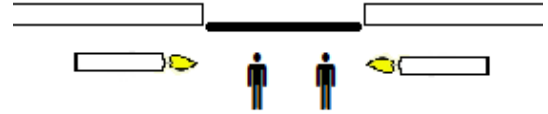
Remember, the candles are held high and your hands are wide apart. Center the candle on your nose. Match the candle height with your partner's candle. Never hold the candles crooked.

THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

STEP A (Figure 7)

After the Prayers of the Faithful (the Petitions) the **Candles** **immediately** get their candles and **slowly** walk down the stairs and along the west aisle to the back of the church. Move to the center of the back aisle and wait for the gift bearers.

Remember, the candles are held high and your hands are wide apart. Center the candle on your nose. Match the candle height with your partner's candle. Never hold the candles crooked.



When the gift bearers are ready, lead them down the aisle at a **slow pace**. Proceed until you reach the end of the communion rail, stop, and turn to face each other. You will end up on either side of the gift bearers.



FIGURE 7

After the gift bearers return to their pews, the **Candle** on the left turns around and slowly leads the other **Candle** along the **outside** of the communion rail and turns right and up the stairs between the handrail and the ambo. The candles are stored.

STEP B

At the same time that **Candles** begin to proceed down the west aisle, the two **Mass Servers** place the book and chalice on the altar. The book goes on the left and the chalice on the right.

If there is **second chalice** on the credence table, bring it to the altar and place it on the right side.

If there are ciboria on the credence table **with hosts** in them, bring them to the altar and place them on the right side.

If there are **empty** ciboria on the credence table **do not** bring them to the altar at this time.

Then return to your places.

STEP C

When the priest and deacon go down the stairs to receive the gifts, the two **Mass Servers** follow them. One stands to the left of the priest, the other on the right of the deacon. The priest or deacon will give the wine to the **Mass Server** standing to his right.

STEP D (Figures 8 and 9)

After the gifts have been received the priest (and or deacon) goes to the altar:

The **Mass Server** holding the wine goes to the position shown below at the **edge** of the altar and **in line** with the altar candles.

The other **Mass Server** (walking **behind** the priest's chairs) goes to the credence table, gets the water, and returns to the position marked below next to the server with the wine. Both **Mass Servers** end up aligned as seen in Figure 8.

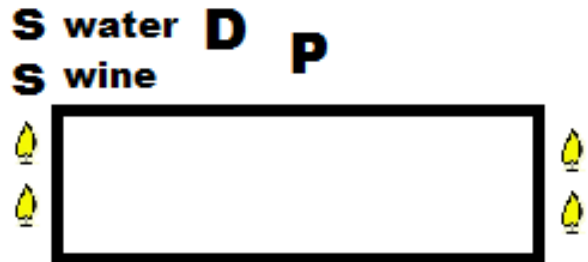


FIGURE 8

After the priest hands the water back to the **Mass Server**, both **Mass Servers** **bow** and (walking **behind** the priest's chair) go to the credence table to return the wine.

The **Mass Server** with the water **keeps** it and retrieves the lavabo bowl. The other **Mass Server** retrieves the towel and **unfolds** it as he/she walks back to the altar. Both **Mass Servers** return to the altar are aligned in the positions shown in Figure 9.

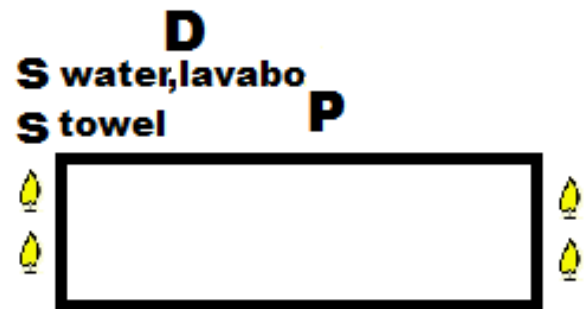


FIGURE 9

After the priest finishes the ceremonial washing of his hands he returns the towel to the **Mass Server**, both **Mass Servers** **bow** and (walking **behind** the priest's chair) go to the credence table to return the water, lavabo bowl, and towel and return to their places.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The **Mass Servers** ring both sets of bells at the elevation of the Body of Christ and again at the elevation of the Blood of Christ. Ring them by continuously "twisting" the handle to the left and the right until the priest lowers the Eucharist.

THE SIGN OF PEACE

Mass Servers and **Candles** **stay** at your place during the sign of peace. Extend a sign of peace **only** to the server standing next to you. **Do not** move from your place.

If there is one or more **empty** ciborium on the credence table, **bring them** to the altar at this time.

DURING COMMUNION

After receiving Holy Communion one of the **Mass Servers** goes to the altar, retrieves the book and returns it to the credence table.

AFTER COMMUNION

STEP A (Figure 10)

As the priest or deacon leave the altar to place the Eucharist in the tabernacle, the two **Mass Servers** **immediately** stand and go to the credence table. One server takes the water and then both **Mass Servers** come to the altar and stand.

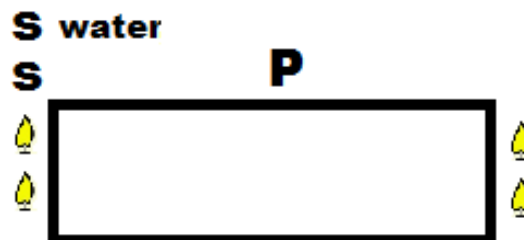


FIGURE 10

STEP B (Figure 11)

After the priest or deacon purifies the chalice he will hand the water back to the **Mass Server**. He will hand the chalice to the other **Mass Server**.

Return the bow from the priest or deacon and return these items to the credence table.

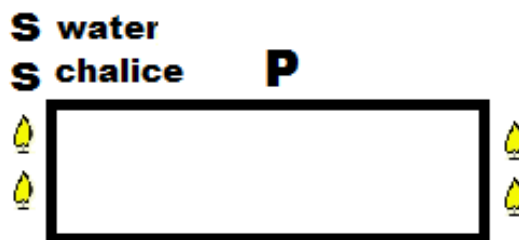


FIGURE 11

STEP C

If there is **an empty ciborium** one **Mass Server** returns to the altar and takes it to the credence table and places it on the corporal. Take the ciboria to the credence table. If there is **more than one empty ciboria** both **Mass Servers** return to the altar and bring them to the credence table and place them on the corporal. **Do not stack the ciboria.**

THE RECESSIONAL PROCESSION (RECESSION)

GENERAL RULES

The Cross is held high
Hands are wide apart
Centered (nose)

The Candles are held high
Match the candle height with your partner's candle
Hands are wide apart
Centered (nose)
Never hold the candles crooked

The Book Bearer

You may be asked to process with the Book



Your hands are folded if **not** carrying the Book

Spacing

Keep two **full paces** of even and consistent spacing between the Cross and Candles and the Book. The two candles **always** process shoulder-to-shoulder with one pace between each other.

LEAVING THE THE SANCTUARY

STEP A (See Figure 12)

Immediately after the final blessing, retrieve the cross and candles from where they are stored. The lead **Candle** leads the **Cross**, other **Candle**, and **Book** down the stairs between the handrail and the ambo. The pace at this point is **SLOW**.

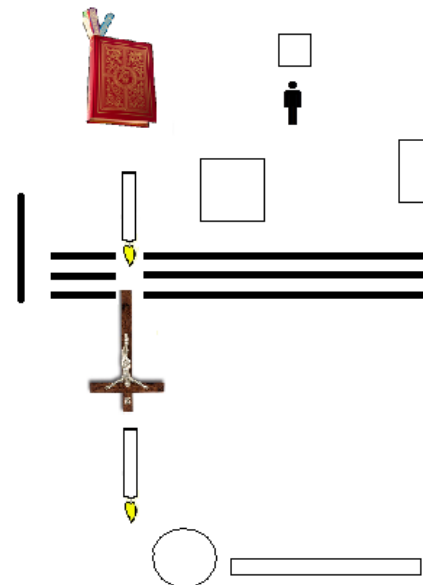


FIGURE 12

STEP B (Figure 13)

The lead **Candle** turns left and **slowly** leads the **Cross**, the other **Candle** and the **Book** across the front of the Sanctuary along the inside of the Communion Rail toward the sanctuary entrance.

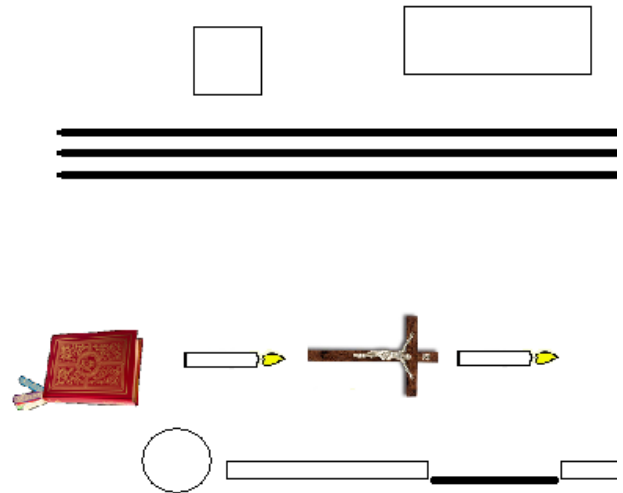


FIGURE 13

STEP C (Figure 14)

When the lead **Candle**, the **Cross** and the other **Candle** reach the center entrance to the sanctuary, **stop**, and turn right to face the congregation.

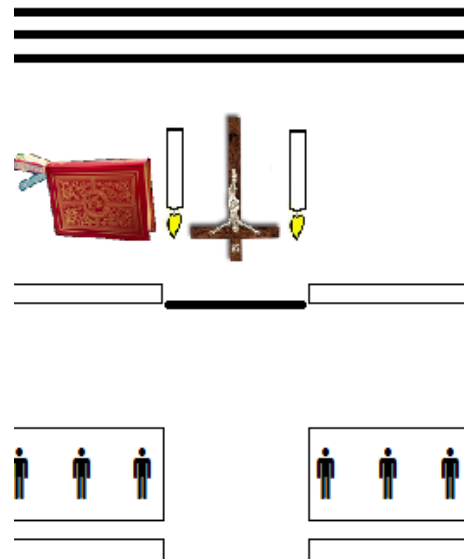


FIGURE 14

STEP D (Figure 15)

The **Cross** steps into the aisle and begins to move toward the **third** pew.

STEP E

a. The **Candles** step into the aisle and begin to move toward the **second** pew.

b. The **Book** moves to the center and turns right.

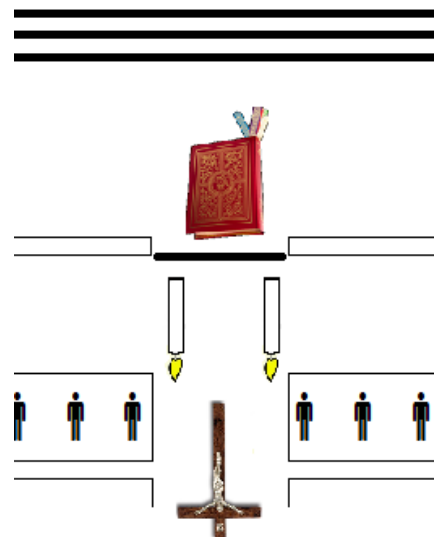


FIGURE 15

STEP F (Figure 16)

The **Book** steps into the aisle and begins to move to the **first** pew.

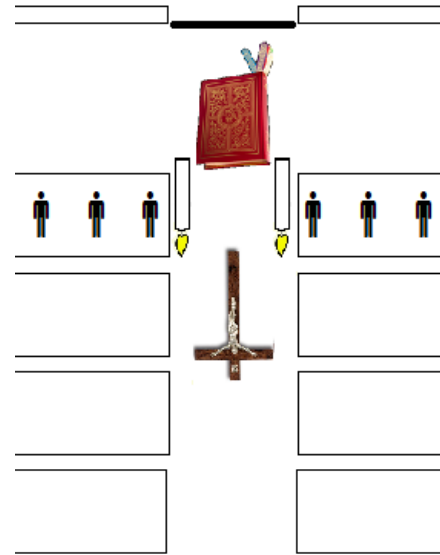


FIGURE 16

STEP G (Figure 17)

- When the **Cross** reaches the **third** pew, **stop**, turn around, and face the altar.
- When the **Candles** reaches the **second** pew, **stop**, turn around, and face the altar.
- When the **Book** reaches the **first** pew, **stop**, turn around, and face the altar.

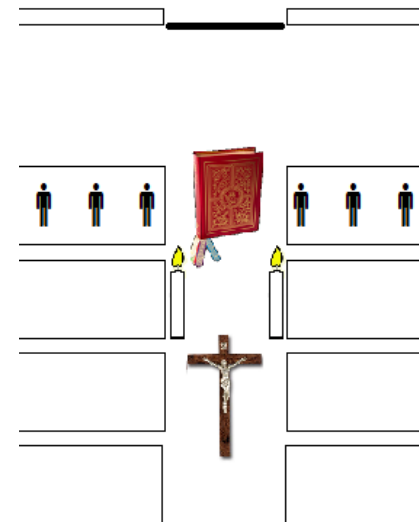


FIGURE 17

STEP H

- After the priest and deacon move to the front of the altar and genuflect, the **Cross**, **Candles**, and **Book** **turn around**, face the back of the church, and begin to process.
- Keep **one full pace** of even and consistent spacing between the **Cross** and **Candles** and the **Book**. The two **Candles** **always** process shoulder-to-shoulder, with one pace between each other.
- The recessional **pace** is now a bit **brisker** than the processional was.

DRESS CODE

Clothes for Boys

Clothes worn under an alb should be such that they do not have patterns, pictures, stripes, or any other design which will show through the white alb. Solid colored or lightly pattered shirts and dark colored pants are highly recommended. Blue jeans, shorts, or frayed pants are not permitted.

Clothes for Girls

Clothes worn under an alb should be such that they do not have patterns, pictures, stripes, or any other design which will show through the white alb. Solid colored or lightly pattered shirts or blouses and dark colored dresses, skirts (of appropriate length) or pants may be worn. Blue jeans, shorts, or frayed pants are not permitted.

Shoes

Dark colored dress shoes or dark colored sneakers are highly recommended. No house slippers, high heels, flip-flops, boots, or sandals are permitted.

Grooming

Strangely dyed hair or “unusual” haircuts are not allowed. Boys’ hair should be no longer than to the bottom of the shirt collar and should not cover his eyes. Bangs should not be over the eyes.

Jewelry

Boys: Earrings, studs, nose rings or exposed jewelry are not allowed. A watchband and one ring are allowed.

Girls: Hoop and dangling earrings, nose rings, and heavy makeup are not allowed. A watchband and one ring are allowed.

ALTAR SERVER PRAYERS

Open my mouth, O Lord, to bless your Holy Name. Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts. Enlighten my understanding and inflame my will that I may serve more worthily at your holy altar. O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest, obtain for me the most important grace of knowing my vocation in life. Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience that I may willingly follow Jesus Christ your Son, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I ask this in His name who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Loving Father, Creator of the universe, you call your people to worship, to be with you and with one another at Mass. I thank you for having called me to assist others in their prayer to you. May I be worthy of the trust placed in me and through my example and service bring others closer to you. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Altar – The table in the sanctuary at which the bread and wine are prepared and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Ambo – The platform where the readings and homily take place.

Aspergillum and Container – A perforated metal ball or tube on a handle used by the priest that holds holy water to sprinkle the people or articles to be blessed. It is kept in a glass or metal container that holds the holy water.

Baptismal Font – A stand with a basin or pool containing water in the area of church where Baptism takes place.

Bells – Rung during the consecration of the Mass.

Boat – A small metal container (sometimes shaped like a boat) which holds the unburned incense to be put into the thurible. It has a cover and comes with a small spoon

Book of Gospels – The book which contains the Gospel readings.

Candle Lighter/Snuffer – The brass device with a long wooden handle, used to light and extinguish candles. It has a *taper* in a brass tube, by which fire is applied to the candles, and a bell-shaped device for extinguishing them (the snuffer).

Chalice – The metal cup (either gold or silver) used to hold the wine that will be consecrated at Mass.

Ciboria (plural) – Metal containers with a lid used to store consecrated hosts in the tabernacle.

Ciborium (singular) – A metal container with a lid used to store consecrated hosts in the tabernacle.

Corporal – The large, square white cloth which is placed on the altar underneath the chalice and platen.

Credence Table – The table located to the left of the Altar, used to hold the purificators, chalices, and other items needed for the celebration of Mass.

Crucifer – The person assigned to carry the processional cross.

Cruets – Water and wine containers.

Gift Table – The table in the back of the center aisle where the bread and wine are placed before Mass begins

Lavabo Bowl and Towel – Used by the priest for the ritual washing of hands before Eucharistic prayer. The word “Lavabo” comes from the Latin word *lavare* which means “I shall wash.”

Lectionary – The book which contains the Scripture readings.

Monstrance – This is a large, ornate sunburst-like vessel used to hold the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction and Eucharistic Adoration.

Pall – A piece of cardboard or plastic which is covered by linen and used to cover the chalice.

Paschal Candle – The tall candle which is blessed and used during the Easter season, baptisms, and funerals.

Paten – The plate used to hold the large hosts which will become the consecrated Body of Christ.

Presider’s Chair – The chair in which the priest sits.

Processional Cross/ Crucifix – The cross used to lead a procession. The cross is mounted on a pole to be held high and straight with the Body of Christ (corpus) facing forward.

Purificator – A long narrow piece of folded linen cloth, which sometimes has a small cross sewn on. It is used by the priest and Eucharistic Minister to wipe the chalice after a person takes a drink from it.

Pyx – The small metal container which is used to hold consecrated host(s) when visiting the sick or homebound.

Roman Missal – The book of prayers and instructions used by the priest during the liturgy.

Sacrarium – Sacristy sink with a drain directly into the earth for the fitting disposal of water used for some sacred purpose.

Sacristy – The room next to the Sanctuary where the priests, altar servers, and other ministers prepare for the Mass.

Sanctuary – The raised area in the front of the church. It is considered a holy and special area because this is where the sacrifice of the Mass is offered and where the word of God is read. It should be approached with great respect.

Tabernacle – The gold “safe” in which the Blessed Sacrament (Consecrated Host) is stored.

Thurible – The metal container extended from a chain in which charcoal and incense are burned for liturgical ceremonies like Benediction or special occasions.

Thurifer – The person who carries the thurible and incense boat.

VESTMENTS

Vestments are what the priest and altar servers wear during Mass.

Alb – A long white linen robe worn by the priest and altar servers.

Cincture – A cord made of silk or cotton with tassels on the ends. It is used around the waist to secure the alb so that it will not interfere with walking.

Stole – A long strip of cloth worn by the priest around his neck and shoulders.

Chasuble – Colored vestment worn only by the priest.

LITURGICAL COLOR

The color of vestments (and other liturgical items such as altar cloths) gives expression to the mysteries of our faith and is like a calendar for the church year.

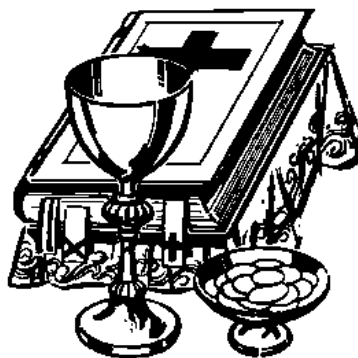
White – Masses of Easter, Christmas season, feasts and memorials of Jesus, Mary, the Angels, Saints (who were not martyrs), weddings, and funerals, symbolizes purity, holiness, joy, triumph, and the Resurrection.

Red – Used on Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday), Good Friday, Pentecost (and votive Masses of the Holy Spirit), feasts of the apostles, evangelists and martyrs. Red symbolizes the Holy Spirit and the blood of martyrs.

Green – Used during Ordinary time, symbolizing life, growth and hope.

Violet – Used during Lent and Advent, symbolizing penance, atonement and expiation.

Gold – More festive than white, which may be used on more solemn days such as Easter and Christmas, and also symbolizes joy, triumph and the Resurrection.



HOW TO TIE A ROPE CINCTURE



Fold cincture in half



Wrap around waist with knots on your right side



Grab end of loop made by the fold and overlap as shown



Using right hand, slip loop over left hand, keeping hold of cincture



Grab knotted end with your right hand



Slip knotted ends through loop (where left hand is making sure that single loop is on top of double cincture.) Feed knotted ends through loop from top to bottom



Drop loop and then tighten around waist



Knot is on left hip