

Handbook for
ACOLYTES,
SENIOR SERVERS
and
EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF
HOLY COMMUNION



Ministering to Christ in the Liturgy

Including *Instructions for Distributing Communion*,
and Guide to Certain Religious Objects

Updated: 27 March 2024

Serving as a Minister

It is a great and joyful privilege to answer the call of Christ and share in His work of drawing all people to the light, peace and joy of God. Serving at the Altar, and preparing and caring for the sacred celebration of the Mass, are the special ministries of those called by God and commissioned by the Church to work, in the Holy Spirit, toward the fulfilment of Christ's mission. Our parish is blessed with Acolytes, Altar Servers and Sacristans whose **ministry assists the ordained ministers to more easily and prayerfully celebrate Mass** with the People of God. This handbook gives Acolytes guidance on the ministries entrusted to them, for the overall service of Christ in the Liturgy.

Acolytes – Role in Brief

- a) The liturgical ministry of the Acolyte is to assist the Priest or Deacon in the service of the altar (*see General Instruction of the Roman Missal "GIRM" #98, and #183-193 for further information*)
- b) The role of Acolyte is open to **all Catholics**.
- c) The Acolyte has a particular role in preparing the altar and the sacred vessels.
- d) An Acolyte may act as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. (GIRM #98)
- e) An Acolyte is commissioned by the Bishop, according to Diocesan norms.

Before Mass

Acolytes should arrive at least **30 minutes** before Mass.

For Sunday Mass, **60 minutes** is better.

Always Begin with Prayer

Since ministry is a privilege and a calling, it is important to prepare yourself for this ministry before each Mass by thanking God and praying for His grace and assistance. Beginning with prayer will help you to remain focussed on your sacred duties during Mass and to serve in a manner pleasing to God. You are encouraged to write your own Ministry Prayer, or you may use the example at the end of this handbook.

Vesting for Acolytes

Go to the Sacristy to put on your white alb. Acolytes should wear albs with cinctures tied about the waist unless this is not physically practical. It is important that the alb be of appropriate length – hanging down to just above the shoes. The cincture should hang to between the knee and ankle.

Note: Following Mass or service, your albs and cinctures must be carefully hung on the appropriate hangers or hooks in the cupboard.

Preparing the Church for Sunday and Weekday Mass

- Ensure the Altar is set for Mass, and that the **Book Stand**, **Lectionary**, **Bell/Gong**, **Candle Extinguisher** and **Prayers of the Faithful** are in their correct positions.
- Ensure that the **Church Lights** are on at the switches in the main sacristy.

Put out the Roman Missal for the priest to use. Make sure that you are aware of the pages in the Missal that are required to be open. Check the Ordo and set the Missal before Mass so that you are confident in handling the Missal. The Missal is located on the credence table.

- Check the liturgical calendar found in the Ordo on the cabinet in the main sacristy, and then **check that the Lectionary is open to the correct page** on the Ambo.
- On Solemnities, Feastdays, and Memorials of Biblical Saints, the readings are taken **from the Saint**. On all other days, including other Memorials, the readings are **of the day** (not the saint).
- Set up the Credence table with **Chalice, Paten, and Corporal**. Each Chalice should be accompanied by 1 Purifier and 1 Pall.
- **Preparing the Chalice:** first, place one purifier so that the middle covers the top, and the two ends fall alongside the chalice neatly. Next, place the paten on top of the purifier. Then place the pall and, finally, the folded corporal. The tabernacle key may be placed on top for convenience.

N.B. For weekday Masses, only one chalice, purifier and pall is used.

- Place a **jug or bowl with warm water, basin & hand towel** on the credence table.
- **On Sundays**, place around 80-300 small hosts (3cm) in the ciboria (depending on how many are likely to attend that Mass), and then place the large host (15cm) on top. Always place the small hosts under the large host – it makes it easier to pick up the large host.
- **On weekdays**, place around 30-60 small hosts (3cm) in the paten (depending on how many are likely to attend that Mass), and then place the priest's host (7cm) on top.
- Please place a **spare ciborium and plastic container of hosts** on the credence table to allow for adjustment of host numbers.
- Make sure the hand sanitiser bottles are in place, and the **nozzles are clean and unobstructed**.
- Prepare the **Gifts** starting with water and wine. Fill the water cruet full, then fill the wine cruet with only a small quantity of wine.

- Then place an adequate number of hosts in a bowl, and place both items on the table at the back of the Church. Cover the hosts with a paten (to protect from dust and insects).
- Select two parishioners for the Presentation of the Gifts Procession.

Five Minutes Before Mass

- Turn on the sound system.
- Carefully light all altar candles, if not already lit.
- Turn on sanctuary lights (marked Altar).
- Ready the processional cross.
- Gather in prayerful quiet outside the main sacristy.

During Mass

Entrance Procession

Once the Celebrant is in place, all face him and he will indicate the beginning of Mass by bowing and saying “**Let us go forth in peace**”, to which all bow towards the cross and respond “**In Christ’s name, Amen.**” The Cross Bearer should then turn and lead the procession at a slow-to-normal walking pace along the back of the church towards the organ, and then down the main aisle. Not too slow – not too fast!

Note: *If a Thurifer is required for the Mass, then they lead the procession ahead of the Cross Bearer.*

- The Cross Bearer is followed by the Altar Servers, Reader, Book of the Gospel Bearer, Acolyte, any Deacon, any Concelebrants, and finally the Celebrant — in that order. During the procession, the ministers should sing along with the assembly.
- As you arrive before the first step of the sanctuary, fan out with servers and readers alternating to left and to right. Leave enough room for the celebrant and pause for him to come forward.

- When the celebrant bows towards the altar, all join except the Cross and candle bearers. Once he moves towards the altar, all move reverently to their places, and then remain standing.
- The Cross Bearer places the cross in its stand, and then moves to their place.

The Liturgy of the Word

All ministers should sit and listen with respectful attention to all that is said, and join in the responses, hymns, Responsorial Psalm, and Gospel Acclamation along with everyone else. During the Profession of Faith, all stand and join in the proclamation of the Creed. At the appropriate place in either Creed where we proclaim the Incarnation, all bow. This is the only time acolytes or servers should bow – using the middle bow.

Note: *Although the practice of bowing the head at the name of Jesus is meritorious, it is not a liturgical action, and so should not happen while serving.*

Just prior to the end of the Creed, the Acolyte or Senior Server needs to open the Prayers of the Faithful folder to the correct page. Make sure the Altar Server is moving to collect the folder from you, to hold it in front of the Priest. After the Prayers have been prayed, take the folder from the Altar Server, and put it down.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

A note about the Corporal.

The Corporal has a very specific role. It is folded into 9 squares so that if any fragments of consecrated host should fall from the paten, they will be kept within the corporal (Latin for ‘body’). Therefore, it is crucial that the corporal is only ever unfolded on the altar – *it is never carried or moved when it is unfolded*. It really doesn’t matter if it is upside down or back-to-front.

AT NO POINT SHOULD YOU TURN IT OVER OR SHAKE IT!

Just unfold it one section at a time in a slow and respectful manner. After Communion, refold it in the same way, but remain attentive. If you see loose crumbs or particles of the Blessed Sacrament, reverently consume them without distracting others from prayer.

Preparation of the Altar

As everyone sits, the Acolyte or Senior Server goes to the credence table, collects the chalice, paten and corporal and brings them to the altar, pausing to bow the head before placing them on the right of the altar. Place the corporal in the centre of the altar, unfold it, then place the paten and chalice next to it, to the right side. Take the pall and purifier off the chalice, placing them separately nearby. Bring any remaining chalices over, placing them in line with the first chalice, and place their palls and purifiers on top of the first ones to make two ordered stacks. **Empty vessels are never placed on the altar, only those containing hosts.**

Note: These roles should only be carried out by an Acolyte.

Then any server may ensure the Missal (or Tablet) is placed on the altar.

Note: If using the Roman Missal, bring it with the book stand to the altar and open it to The Liturgy of the Eucharist.

NOTHING SHOULD BE ON TOP OF THE CORPORAL AT THIS STAGE.

If the celebrant is not yet ready, the servers remain standing to the side. The servers should always be attentive and respond to any requests to make celebrating the Mass flow easier.

Procession and Presentation of the Gifts

When the Priest rises to go to the front of the sanctuary to receive the gifts, two ministers need to go with him and stand on either side.

Note: These roles may be divided among the Acolyte and Servers as is reasonable and practicable.

When the Procession reaches the sanctuary, bow. The Priest will then receive the cruets of water and wine. He will turn and give them to a minister. Then the Priest will receive the ciboria with hosts. All bow. Then the Priest and ministers turn, and the Priest takes the ciboria to the altar. The other ministers take the water and wine to stand at the side of the altar near the processional cross.

Preparation of the Gifts

The Priest will firstly pray the blessing prayer with the bread. When he is finished, the ministers step forward, offering him firstly the wine to pour into the chalices, and then the water. When using cruets, ensure that the handle is pointed towards the Priest for ease of use, remembering that as a server, **your job is to make Mass flow as easily as possible**.

When he hands the cruet and decanter back to the ministers, they should bow slightly then return them to the credence table.

Then, one server takes the bowl while the other server takes the hand towel. Stand attentively a step back from the altar until the Priest finishes the offertory prayer with the wine. When the Priest turns to you, step forward, and hold the bowl at a height comfortable for the Priest to be able to ritually wash his hands. The other server will hand the priest the towel to dry his hands. When finished, the servers bow to the priest and return the towel and bowl to the credence table and return to their seats.

Eucharistic Prayer

This is the central prayer of the Mass. This is the time when the bread and wine are offered to become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Servers should move off the sanctuary at this time, and kneel either in the pew or on the cushions on the step. It is essential that you be still, pay attention, and not do anything to unnecessarily distract from the moment.

The Bellringer should ring the bells at three points. The first is at the *Epiclesis*, when the Priest stretches his hands over the gifts and prays for

them to become Christ's Body and Blood through the power of the Holy Spirit. At this point, the bells should be rung simply, once for about **two seconds**.

The second and third points for the Bellringer are at the Elevation – when the priest raises the Body, and then the Blood of Christ, following the “**Do this in memory of Me.**” At both of these points, ring the bells **three times**, counting three beats per ring, with a pause of one beat in between (*for a total of 11 seconds*). On the last ring, try to wait for the bells to naturally stop ringing and place them gently down, rather than cutting off the sound early.

Sign of Peace

After the Sign of Peace, one acolyte or senior server should move across to the Tabernacle and reverently remove the ciborium. Removing the lid and leave it on the left side of the altar (off the corporal). Then place the ciborium **on the corporal**. Any other vessels that are required for the distribution of hosts should be brought and placed on the right-hand side of the corporal. All acolytes should then stand with the altar servers on either side of the sanctuary.

Instructions for distributing Holy Communion

Make sure there is enough room for each person to stand. Each person should purify their hands with hand sanitiser. The acolyte should be supervising this. If we need more ministers, simply and reverently attract the attention of those in the assembly to draw some up. The priest will distribute the Body to each minister in turn. There should be four ciboria.

Each minister has a responsibility to ensure that the host that you are distributing is consumed by the person that you have served.

When the priest goes down to distribute Holy Communion, one acolyte needs to immediately distribute Holy Communion to those unable to come forward in the procession. After all the sick have received

Communion, the acolyte then returns to the front, and distributes Holy Communion normally.

If another minister has run out of hosts and comes up to you, turn to them, and reverently give them handfuls of hosts from your ciborium.

Do not tip the ciborium. Do not grab hosts from another ciborium.

If you drop a host – don't panic! Immediately pick up the host and reverently consume it yourself. If a communicant drops their host, encourage them to pick it up and consume it. If they are confused, simply pick up the Body and consume it yourself, and then give them a second host. **Do not place a dropped host back into the ciborium.**

If there is a spillage of the Precious Blood – cover the spill with a purifier. If you need more purifiers, they are kept in the cabinet in the main sacristy, in a drawer on the left which is marked "Purifiers".

After Holy Communion

Once your vessel is empty of the Eucharistic species, and Communion is coming to an end, return the vessel to the altar, placing it back on to the corporal to be purified. **Do not take it straight to the credence table.**

As soon as the extraordinary ministers return their vessel, they should return directly to their seats to pray. No one should purify their fingers in the water bowl at this point. If you are aware of host particles, simply consume them. You may sanitise your hands.

Communion to the Sick

It is the responsibility of the Acolyte before Mass to check with any Extraordinary Ministers or Acolytes who will be taking communion to the sick at the end of Mass, to determine how many hosts each pyx should contain. Place the appropriate number of hosts into the pyxes and leave them with their lids now closed on the corporal.

After the priest consumes any remaining precious blood, he will give the acolyte the ciborium with remaining consecrated hosts. Take this to the

Tabernacle, place the ciborium in the Tabernacle, then, while the door is still open, genuflect or bow. Then close and lock the Tabernacle. As this happens, a server should bring water to purify the vessels.

Purifying the Eucharistic Vessels

Acolytes may begin to purify their vessels as soon as they return to the altar. Only ordained ministers, and instituted acolytes may purify the vessels during Mass.

On the corporal, use a purifier to carefully and reverently dislodge any particles of host that may be on the paten or ciboria. These should be carefully moved into a chalice placed on the corporal. There is no need to rush, make sure this is done thoroughly and respectfully. When a ciborium is clean, place it off the corporal, and commence purifying the next ciboria.

Once the ciboria are purified, pour water from the cruet into the chalices. Take each chalice, in turn, and ensure the water catches any particles or fragment of hosts in the chalice, then consume the liquid. Use a purifier to dry the chalice and ensure there is no remnant of the Eucharistic species in the chalice. Remember to clean the lip of the chalice.

Once the Eucharistic vessels have been purified, a server should take them back to the credence table. Ciboria should have lids on them. Each chalice should be paired with a purifier and pall, and one chalice in addition should have the folded corporal and paten, as set up prior to Mass.

If there are any pyxes containing hosts to be given to Ministers after Communion, these are left on the corporal on the altar. Everything else is cleared away, leaving only the pyxes and candles on the altar.

Once the Prayer after Communion has been prayed and the notices read, those who are taking communion to the sick will be called forward to be commissioned, blessed, and dismissed. They should leave the assembly directly from this blessing.

Concluding Rite

After the celebrant gives the final blessing and dismissal, the altar servers retrieve the cross. When the priest bows to the altar; the servers also bow. The servers then lead the procession at a normal walking pace down the main aisle to the rear of the church in the same order as the entrance procession.

After Mass

While still vested, the sacristans reverently extinguish the altar candles and help take any remaining items to the sacristy. Only ever carry one or two items at a time. Do not stack items on top of each other. Chalices should be carried with one hand underneath them, and one hand on top of the pall or corporal.

Ensure that the Sacred Vessels, Cruets, hand bowl and towel are returned to the Sacristy, cleaned, made ready for the following Mass, or stored in their appropriate places, and the Church is ready for the next Mass.

An illustrated guide to some religious objects

ALB

A full-length white linen vestment with close fitting sleeves that is tied at the waist with a cincture. It is worn by servers and clergy at Mass and other Liturgies.



CINCTURE

A long cord tied around the waist to hold an alb in place and adjust the alb to the proper length.

CHALICE

The large cup made of precious materials used at Mass to contain the Precious Blood of Christ.





PATEN

A small dish that is large enough to cover the chalice, generally made of gold. It may hold the large Host that becomes the Body of Christ at consecration.

CIBORIUM

A container similar to a chalice but flatter and with a lid. It is used to hold the consecrated Hosts. It is made of precious metals and the interior is commonly gold or gold-plated. Plural is ciboria.



CRUET

A glass vessel, usually either a small jug, which holds the un-consecrated wine and water as it is brought up in the procession of the gifts.

PURIFIER

A small piece of white linen, used by the priest to purify his fingers and the chalice and paten after Holy Communion. It usually has a cross embroidered in the centre.



HAND TOWEL

Used by the priest after washing his hands at the offertory.

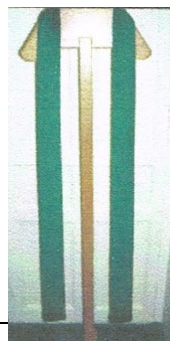


CANDLE EXTINGUISHER

Used to snuff out (smother, not squash) the lit candles at the end of the Mass. Use the electronic lighters to light candles.

STOLE

A Liturgical vestment that is 10-15cm wide, about 150cm long and is worn around the neck by priests and bishops.



It is used during the celebration of Mass, administration of the sacraments and ceremonies of the Blessed Sacrament.



CHASUBLE

A sleeveless garment worn by a priest at Mass over all other vestments. It is usually decorated with symbols and its main colour matches the liturgical season.

PYX

Generally refers to a small round metal case (usually gold-plated) used to carry a few hosts when communion is taken to the sick. Larger pyxes may hold up to 30 hosts.

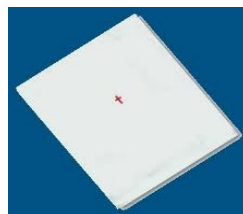


PALL

A sacred covering for the chalice at Mass. *It is usually a stiff cardboard square covered with linen, in the same colour as the liturgy.* Designed to prevent dust and insects from contaminating the chalice during Mass.

CORPORAL

A square white linen cloth placed on the altar where the Host and Chalice are placed during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is also used under the monstrance at Benediction or under the Blessed Sacrament at any time.



ASPERGILLUM

A metal encased sponge used for sprinkling holy water during certain liturgical services. It is placed inside a silver bowl of holy water with a handle. It is always used during the funeral liturgy or Mass, as well as during the Easter liturgies, or when objects or people are to be blessed during Mass.

DALMATIC

An outer liturgical garment worn by a deacon at Mass and in solemn processions. It has wide short sleeves, reaches to the knees, and is open at the sides. It is of similar material and colour as the vestments of the celebrant.



Front



Back

COPE

A floor length cape, open in front and fastened on the breast with a clasp. It is worn by priests and bishops in processions, at Benediction, and at other solemn offices, but not at Mass.

BENEDICTION VEIL / HUMERAL VEIL

This is an elongated piece of silk or vestment material worn over the shoulders and covering the hands of the priest or deacon as he gives the blessing with the Sacred Host in the monstrance at Benediction. It is also used when sacred vessels with their reserved contents are carried from one tabernacle to another or in procession.



MONSTRANCE

The sacred vessel which contains the consecrated Host when exposed or carried in procession.

LUNETTE or LUNA



Front

Side

A circular sacred vessel with glass sides, metal circled with gold or gilded metal to hold the Sacred Host upright in the Monstrance. The CUSTODIA holds the Lunette and host when in the Tabernacle.



THURIBLE

A metal container for holding charcoal and incense. It has a lid to control the smoke and fire and is suspended on chains so it can be swung safely to disperse the scent. It is also called the censer.



BOAT

A boat-shaped vessel that holds incense before it is put into a censer or thurible.

Prayer for Ministry

Lord our God,
your Son Jesus Christ showed his love for you
by serving his needy brother and sisters.
I now ask you to give me your 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 know what I should do, and do it well.
Help me to worship you in spirit and truth,
and give my whole heart to you in service,
and so give you praise and glory,
now and forever.
Amen.

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