
Ministry Formation – Altar Servers

What is an altar server?

“Being a server means serving God and God’s people,” says Fr. Kwatera in his guide for servers. It’s a ministry, like the kind of service that ushers, readers, ministers of Holy Communion offer at Mass each weekend. You support the flow of the entire service.

What does a server do?

The server helps to prepare the altar by lighting the candles and making sure everything is in place. During Mass, the server assists the priest with the actions of Mass and other services. A server knows what the priest needs at each moment and is ready to assist. He or she holds the Missal for the priest, brings water for the priest to wash his hands, carries the processional cross or candles in the procession and assists with preparing the incense if it is used.

Throughout the Mass or other service, the server pays attention to what is going on and participates by answering the prayers, singing the songs, standing and sitting along with the assembly.

A server is part of the ministry team.

Teamwork is important for altar servers who assist the priest at the altar. In addition to the other ministers, greeters, readers, etc. you may be working with other servers. Each of you will take your own a role but you will need to coordinate your actions as a team.

Principles of ministry for servers

Be prepared—arrive at least 15 minutes early for assignments, dressed well, with decent shoes especially, and clean face and hands. If you wear an alb with cord around waist, put it on carefully and make sure it looks neat.

Be attentive to what the priest does and wait attentively for your time to assist him.

Be reverent by standing tall and not slouching; this means you won’t distract the assembly.

Be deliberate in your movements.

- *Walk slowly and with confidence* in procession and whenever you need to get something for the priest or move to another part of the sanctuary.
- When bowing toward the altar, the sign of Christ, stop, bow slowly at the waist, then straighten up before proceeding. Do not bow when carrying the processional cross or candles. See the resources below for additional details.

Summary

This page is only an introduction. There are many details to master to be an altar server. And there are other services besides Mass that need the help of a competent server. Work with your priest, deacon or lay leader and use the resources below to learn everything you need to know. And practice what you learn!

Resources

- *The Ministry of Servers*, 3rd edition, Michael Kwatera, Liturgical Press, 2016
- *Serve God with Gladness: A Manual for Servers*, David Philippart, Liturgy Training Publications, 1998
- *Guide for Servers, The Liturgical Ministry Series*, Laughlin, Shaddock, Turner, Williamson, Liturgy Training Publications, 2012