

Altar Server
Basic Manual
St Thomas More Catholic Church
(Revised April 2012)



Welcome to the Altar Servers Ministry At Saint Thomas More

A Server's Prayer: 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 to bring others closer to You. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the Altar Server Ministry. You are now a member of a very special group of people in our parish! You are a Saint Thomas More Altar Server. As a server, you are one of the liturgical ministers of our parish. Liturgical ministers have special tasks to perform during liturgies, especially during the Eucharist (Mass), which is the central worship we do as God's family.

Please remember that your ministry is important, and many people depend on you to fulfill your responsibilities. The parish needs you as a part of our worship to help things run smoothly and prayerfully. **Please take this responsibility seriously.**

Altar Serving is a liturgical ministry. It is a service to the gathering of God's people at Mass, funerals, and weddings and other solemn ceremonies. The altar server assists the priest at the Mass; prepares the altar; leads processions during Mass; guides the assembly when to stand, to sit or kneel; makes sure that what is needed for the celebration is brought, carried or moved into place. Outside of the priest or deacon, servers, more than any other liturgical ministry, are concerned with almost every aspect of the celebration of the liturgy. As a server, you are serving in several different ways:

- You are serving your parish family by helping everyone to worship and celebrate in the best way possible.
- You are serving God through your worship and prayer.
- You are serving the priest by helping him preside over the liturgy.

The most important liturgy of our church is the Mass. It is important to our parish family in much the same way as meals in your home are important to your family there. The meals your family shares at home not only keep you alive and healthy, they also give you a chance to be together and strengthen your family ties.

This manual is intended to assist you, the server, in your ministry. The following pages will show you through definitions, pictures, and descriptions, all the names, places, and procedures that are a part of our worship in the Mass at Saint Thomas More Parish. Please try to familiarize yourself with this information which will help in your becoming a good altar server.

This manual includes the **basic** information needed as an altar server during the Mass. There is still much information beyond this manual for special Masses and other ceremonies that altar servers perform their duties. Once you have mastered these basic procedures, you can ask the adult leaders in the ministry for additional instruction.

Useful Information, Terms, and Definitions

As in any activity, it is important to know the layout of the altar area, basic names of items, terms, and definitions of the altar serving.

Clothes of the Altar Server

- **Cassock:** The red garment worn by the altar servers.
- **Surplice:** The white wide-sleeved garment worn over the cassock.

Tools of the Altar Server

- **Chalice:** The large cup used at Mass to hold the wine that becomes the precious blood of Christ at the Consecration of the Mass.



- **Ciborium:** The cup-like vessel used for distributing the Host at Communion.



- **Communion Cup:** The vessel used for distributing the Holy Blood.



- **Consecration Bells:** The four small bells attached to a single handle that is rung during the elevation of the Body and Blood of Christ.

- **Cruet:** The pitcher-like vessel containing water is called a “cruet”.



- **Flagon or Decanter:** Pitcher-like vessel containing the wine that is brought up to the altar during the Offertory.



- **Lavabo bowl:** The bowl in which the priest washes his hands before

Consecration.

- **Lectionary:** The large book containing the readings from the Bible that are proclaimed at all Masses. It is used by the lector and by the priest.

- **Pall:** The stiff square-shaped white cover placed over the Chalice to protect its contents.



- **Paten:** The metal plate upon which the bread is placed upon the altar.



- **Purificator:** The triple folded napkin-like item that the priest uses to clean and dry the Chalice.



- **Pyx:** The metal case used by priests and extraordinary ministers to carry Communion to the sick.

- **Sacramentary:** The book the priest prays from during the mass at the altar.



Parts of the Church

- **Ambry:** The place where the Holy Oils are kept and the Oil of Chrism are stored.
- **Credence Table:** The small table on against the wall where the water, wine, lavabo bowl, and towel for drying the priest's hands.

- **Gifts Table:** The table located near the aisle of the church for holding the bread and wine to be presented during the Offertory at Mass for consecration.



- **Narthex:** The entrance or lobby area of a church, located at the end of the nave, at the far end from the church's main altar.

- **Nave:** The area of the church where the congregation sits in the pews.

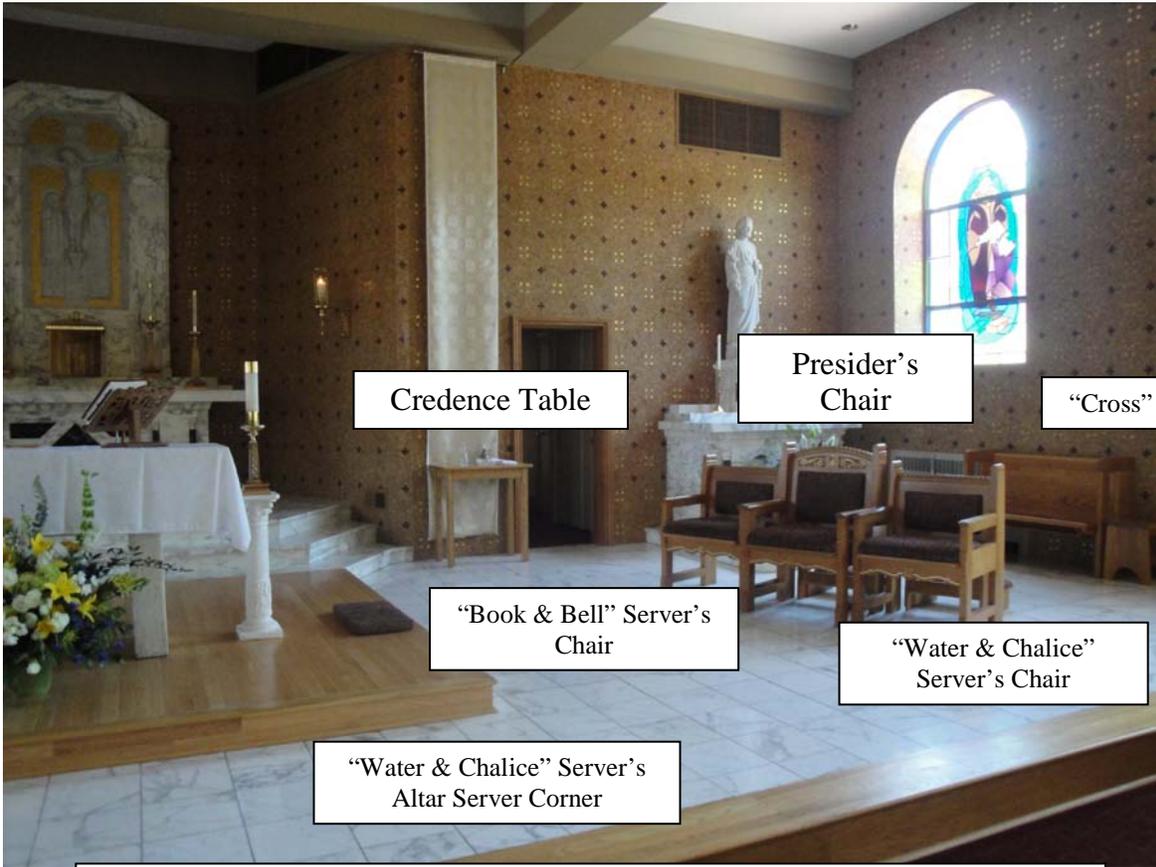


- **Presider's Chair:** The Presider's chair is the chair where the priest sits who is saying the Mass.
- **Sacristy:** The room where priests vest before Mass and for keeping vestments (such as the alb and chasuble) and other church furnishings, sacred vessels, and parish records.
- **Sanctuary:** The sacred space elevated before the congregation.



- **Stoup:** One of the holy water fountains or bowls at the entrances of the church for blessing yourself upon entering and exiting the church.





Parts of the Altar Area



Parts of the Altar Area

Scheduling for Serving Mass: Schedules for altar serving are developed for two-month periods. E-mails are sent out about a month before a two-month period requesting server's availability for the two month schedule. The final schedule will be sent home by email Adobe (pdf) formats as well as placed on the parish website at: <http://www.stmgaparrish.org/>

Showing up on Time for Mass to Serve: For regular weekend Masses, altar servers should arrive at church ready to serve at least fifteen (15) minutes early. It is important that servers arrive at the appointed time so the priest and the other servers can prepare for the celebration of the Mass. Servers should sign in. If servers are late, it causes concern for the priest, other servers, and other liturgical ministers. Too often, servers have to solicit other servers sitting in pews to find a third server. Please do not allow this to happen if at all possible.

If a server is not able to make it to Mass, it is the altar server's responsibility to find a replacement. This can be accomplished often by contacting other servers on the email list. A roster of all servers with contact information will be provided and is also available anytime from Cody Jackson.

Common Duties for All Altar Servers before Mass:

- Show up 15 minutes early and sign in on the sheet on the book outside the church entrance.
- Go to the dressing room and dress in appropriately-sized altar server garments for Mass. Be sure to genuflect to the tabernacle.
- **Be sure to wear your cassock and surplice correctly!** Be sure to select a cassock that fits and does not drag on the floor when you walk. *We do not want anyone tripping over their cassock!!* Button **all** the buttons. Select a surplice that fits and be sure to check that it is not tucked underneath somewhere. Check out other servers and let them know and correct them if something isn't correct.
- After dressing, go to the candle room inside the entrance to the church nave.
- Consult among the servers and decide who will be what position and if there are anyone who is unfamiliar with their position duties.
 - Each server should be knowledgeable of the duties for each position. If a server is new and not comfortable that they are capable to perform the duties of a certain position, that server should not be placed in that position. However, that server should be reminded by the other servers of the importance of knowing all the duties for this ministry.
 - *If a server is having trouble with their duties, please contact Cody Jackson or Tina Guyden for follow-on instruction. We are here to help each server in knowing their duties.*
- Light the gospel candles (candles that will be carried in the procession) and get the Cross and wait for the priest to arrive to start Mass. When the priest is ready, he will tell you to get ready to process in.



Proper Altar Server Dress



Improper Altar Server Dress

Collar unbuttoned

Surplice wrong size

Cassock too long
(tripping hazard)

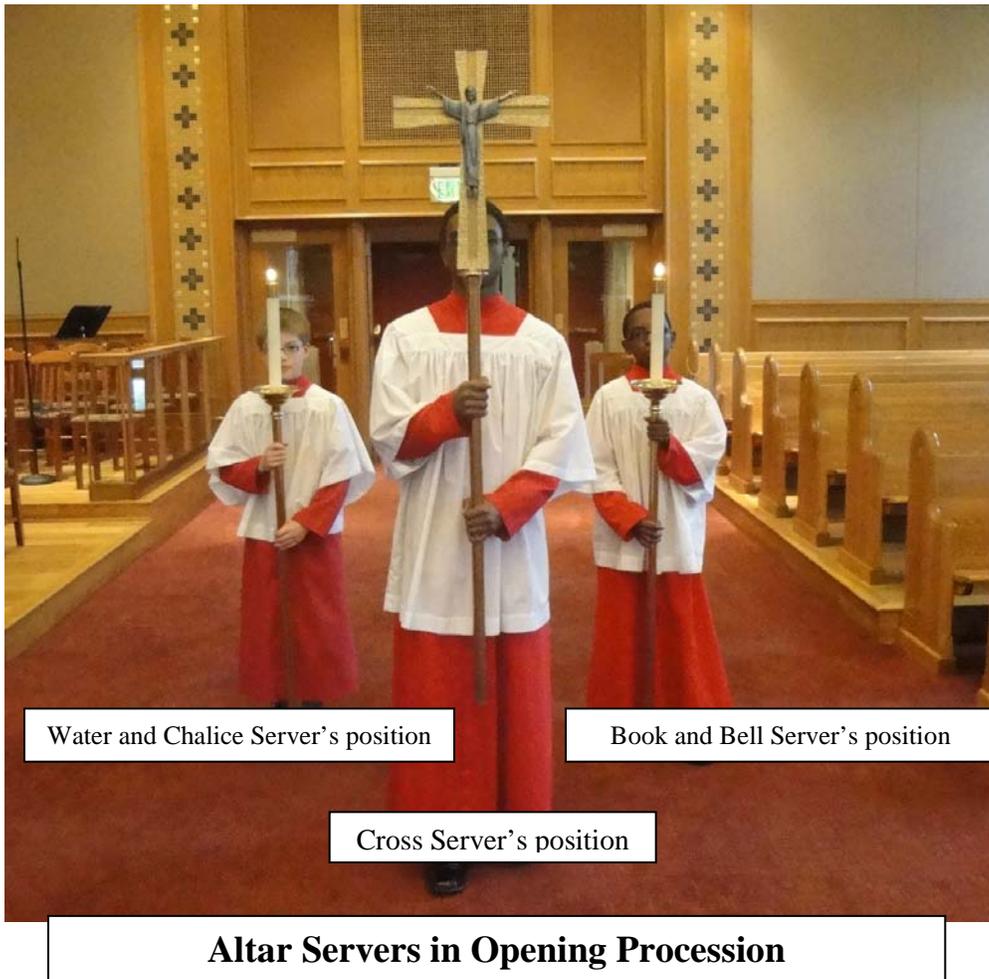
Altar Server Positions at Mass: At Masses at Saint Thomas More Catholic Parish, as at most parishes, there are three positions for servers at an ordinary weekend Mass. The positions are formally these are called:

1. **Cross Bearer** (informally called “Cross”): This position should be typically reserved for the oldest and most experienced server. This position has the fewest formal tasks during Mass. During Mass, it is the server performing the “Cross” duties to observe and help or correct the other servers as needed to ensure the duties of the altar servers are fulfilled correctly.
2. **Book Bearer** (informally called “Book and Bell”): This position has the most tasks to perform. This position has the job of holding the book of prayer for the priest at the beginning and end of the service and will ring the bells at the consecration.
3. **Acolyte** (informally called “Water and Chalice”): This position is responsible for prepares the altar, brings the water for mixing with the wine, assists in washing the priest’s hands for Consecration, and assisting in clean-up of the altar after Communion.

Because of its common usage with the servers, for the purpose of this manual we will use the informal position names.

The Altar Server roles of the servers are described organized by the part of the Mass.

Roles for Servers during the Opening of the Mass/Opening Prayer



Cross (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): The “Cross” server leads the procession at the beginning of Mass.

Individual Tasks:

- The Cross server set up for the procession to begin Mass at the back of the nave, next to the choir. The procession begins at the beginning of the second verse of the opening song or when the priest says to begin.
- The “Cross” server sets the pace for the procession and should walk in a slow steady manner that allows the procession to stay together. Take your time and move deliberately and with dignity. Walking in church is never a race and should never be hurried. When you carry the processional cross, carry it straight and with the image of Christ facing forward. Do not walk at a speed that moves too far ahead of the other servers, who should remain only a few feet behind the Cross.
- As the Cross server approaches the altar, move to the far right side of the front of the altar (called the “altar server corners”). The “Water and Chalice” server will stand with the gospel candle to your left.

- Wait until the priest comes up to the altar and then bow with the priest. The Cross position does not bow.
- Walk behind the main seats and place cross in the holder.
- Sit on the bench behind the priest and participate in Mass as usual but look to help the other altar servers as needed. *No slouching!!*



Altar Servers at Altar during Opening

Book and Bell (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): During the opening procession, the “Book and Bell” server will carry a gospel candle and hold the Sacramentary book for the opening prayers.

Individual Tasks:

- The “Book and Bell” server and line up a few feet behind and to the left of the “Cross” server in preparation for the opening procession.
- In the procession, the “Book and Bell” server should try to keep the same distance from the “Cross” server and *must always* remain even with “Water and Chalice” server as you walk up the aisle. When servers walk together, they should always remain together, side-by-side, walking at the same pace.
- The gospel candles should be held high enough so the bottom of the candle is no lower than halfway down your calf but not higher than your knee. This will help ensure you don’t trip during the procession. Be sure you have a firm grip on the gospel candle while you are carrying it.
- When you get to the altar, move to stand to the left of the altar at the altar server corner and wait until the priest comes up to the altar and then bow to the tabernacle with the priest.
- After bowing, go and place the candle in the candle holder on the far side (left of) the lectern.
- Go and stand in front of the chair to the right of the priest’s chair (the presider’s chair).
- ***Be sure to bow as you cross before the altar.*** Make a respectful and deep bow at the waist. It should be a smooth motion, and not a jerky or quick bobbing.



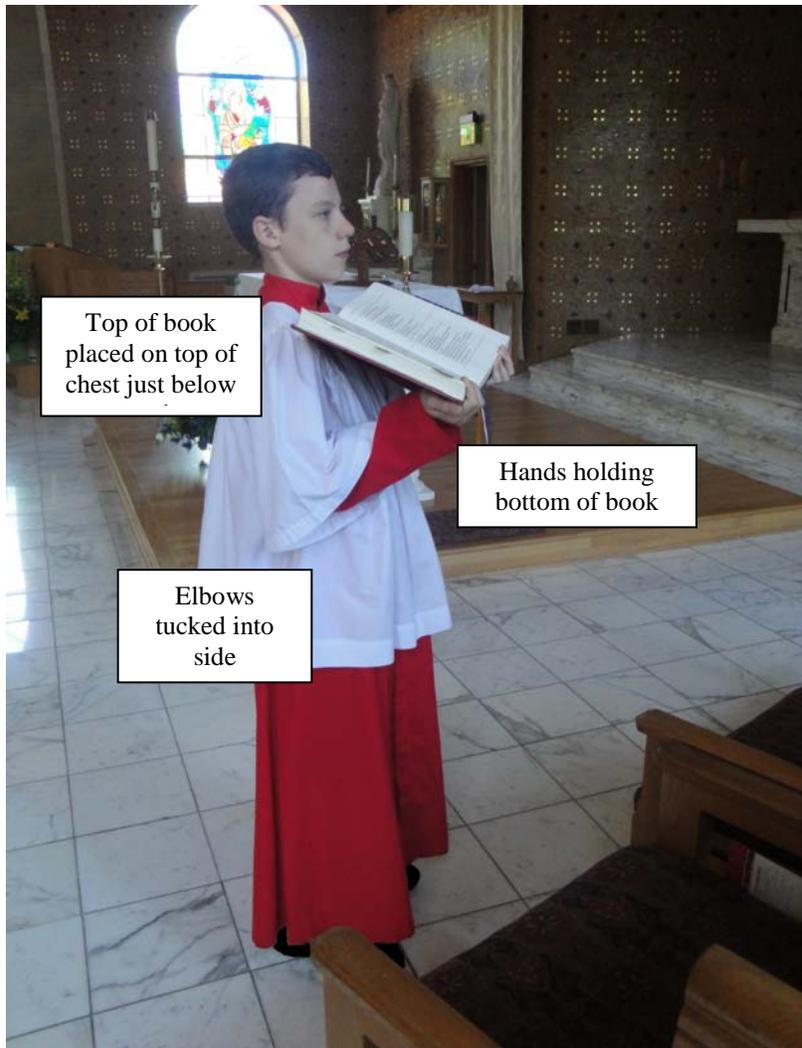
Altar Servers bowing in front of altar at their altar server corners

- During the opening prayers, the priest will say “let us pray,” pick up the Sacramentary book and hold it so the priest can read it.

- Be sure to place the top of the Sacramentary book on your upper chest and hold it open with your hands. It is also wise to brace your elbows into your body. This allows you to hold the book steady as the book is heavy.

- Do not look down at the book and block the priest’s view of the book. Look up at the priest.

- Upon completion of the prayer, place the Sacramentary book on the arm of your chair on the same side as the priest



- Sit down and prepare to listen to the Readings. *No slouching!!*

Water and Chalice (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): During the opening procession, the “Water and Chalice” server will carry a gospel candle.

Individual Tasks:

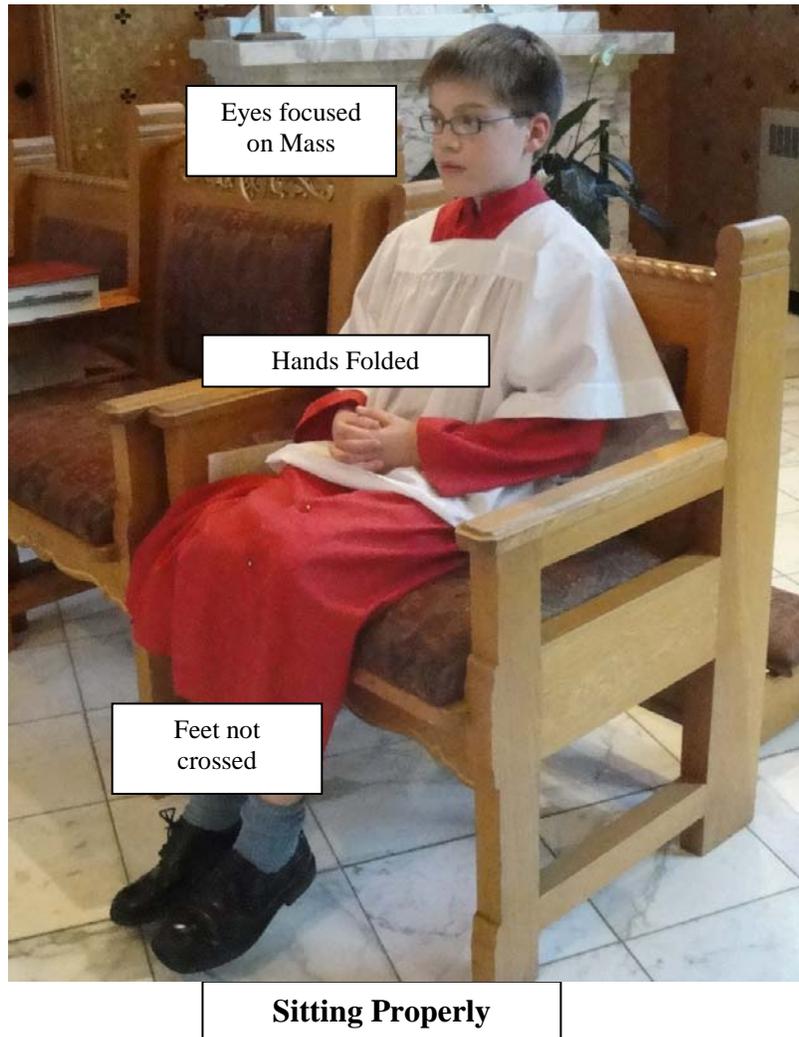
- The “Water and Chalice” server will line up a few feet behind and to the right of the “Cross” server in preparation for the opening procession.
- In the procession, the “Water and Chalice” server should try to keep the same distance from the “Cross” server and *must always* remain even with “Book and Bell” server as you walk up the aisle.
- The gospel candles should be held high enough so the bottom of the candle is no lower than halfway down your calf but not higher than your knee. This will help ensure you don’t trip during the procession. Be sure you have a firm grip on the gospel candle while you are carrying it
- When you get to the altar, move to stand to the right of the altar to the left of the “Cross” server and wait until the priest comes up to the altar and then bow to the tabernacle with the priest.
- After bowing, go and place the candle in the candle holder on the near side (right of) the lectern.
- Go and stand in front of the chair to the left of the priest’s chair (the presider’s chair).
- ***Be sure to bow as you cross before the altar.*** Make a respectful and deep bow at the waist. It should be a smooth motion, and not a jerky or quick bobbing.
- Stand with good posture during the Opening prayers.
- Upon completion of the Opening prayers, sit down with good posture in your chair and prepare to listen to the Readings. *No slouching!!*

Roles for Servers during the Reading and the Homily

The altar servers do not have any specific duties during the Readings and the Homily. Servers are reminded to maintain good posture and to pay attention.

Things to Remember

- During the celebration, when you are not performing specific tasks, you will be sitting or standing. Everything you do as a server, no matter how ordinary it may seem, should be done carefully and reverently, because everything is a part of the worship you are giving to God.
- Always look where the action is. You should not be gazing aimlessly around the church, looking at different things and people during Mass.
- Sit up straight and keep your knees together. Do not cross your legs or tap your feet. Feet should never be swinging! Hands should rest flat on your lap if you are not holding on to something while you are sitting.



Roles for Servers during Offertory and Preparation of the Altar

Cross (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): During the Offertory, the “Cross” server will lead the procession of the gifts up to the altar:

Individual Tasks:

- Once the ushers have begun taking up the collection, (when they get to the second row) the “Cross” server should retrieve the cross and carry it down the center aisle to the Gifts Table and await the Gift Bearers (those carrying the bread (in the ciborium) and the wine (in the flagon)).
- Once the Gift Bearers are ready, the “Cross” server will lead the procession in the same manner as at the beginning of Mass. Take your time and move deliberately and with dignity. Do not walk at a speed that moves too far ahead of the Gift Bearers, which should remain only a few feet behind the Cross.
- As the Cross server approaches the altar, move directly to the cross stand and place cross in the holder.
- Return to the bench behind the Presider’s Chair and participate in Mass.
- Participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.
- Continue to observe the other servers and help them as needed.

Book and Bell (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): During the Offertory, the “Book and Bell” server will place the Sacramentary book on the altar, assist in setting the altar, assist in receiving the Gifts, remove the empty wine flagon from the altar, and bring the towel to dry the Priest’s hands. The final step is to move to the location to prepare to ring of the Consecration Bells.

Individual Tasks:

- Once the ushers have begun taking up the collection, (when they get to the second row) the “Book and Bell” server will to assist in the preparation of the altar.
- Set the Altar
 - Take the Sacramentary book and place on the altar.
 - If Monsignor Paul is saying Mass, place the Sacramentary book on the book stand on the altar.
 - If Father Brian is saying Mass, place the Sacramentary book directly on the altar toward the middle and slightly to the front in order to leave enough space for the chalice, pall, paten, and purificator to be set appropriately on the altar.
 - Also place the 2 or 3 smaller chalices to the right side of the altar in a diagonal manner.
- Receive the Gifts
 - Upon completing the setting of the altar, move to the front of the altar and await the priest to receive the gifts. Stand slightly behind and to the right of the priest as he faces the Gift Bearers.
 - When the priest takes the gifts (wine flagon and ciborium containing the bread), he will hand one of them to you. Take the gift and place it directly on the altar and return to your altar server corner.
 - Bow with the “Water and Chalice” server then move to the credence table
- Mixing the Water and Wine
 - The priest will pour the wine from the flagon into the chalice to mix with the water. The priest will then place the wine flagon on the edge of the altar. Take the wine flagon and place on the credence table.
- Washing the Priest’s Hands
 - When the time comes to wash the priest’s hands, take the towel and stand by the “Water and Chalice” server. When the “Water and Chalice” has washed the priest’s hands, present the towel to the priest. Await the priest to dry his hands and receive the towel from the priest.
 - With the “Water and Chalice” server, ***bow together*** and return the towel to the credence table.
 - Move to your altar server corner; with the “Water and Chalice” server, ***together at the altar server corners as you cross in front of the altar.***
 - Move to your position to the right of the altar near the Consecration Bells
 - Participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.

Water and Chalice (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): During the Offertory, the “Water and Chalice” server will set the altar, assist in receiving the Gifts, bring the water cruet for the mixing of the water and wine, and wash the Priest’s hands.

Individual Tasks:

- Once the ushers have begun taking up the collection, (when they get to the second row) the “Water and Chalice” server will assist in the preparation of the altar.
- Set the Altar
 - Go to the credence table and retrieve the chalice, pall, paten and purificator.

- Set the altar in a manner shown in photo below.



Proper setting of Altar for Father Brian (without bookstand)



Proper setting of Altar for Monsignor Paul (with book stand)

- Receive the Gifts
 - Upon completing the setting of the altar, move to the front of the altar and await the priest to receive the gifts. Stand slightly behind and to the left of the priest as he faces the Gift Bearers.
 - When the priest takes the gifts (wine flagon and ciborium containing the bread), he will hand one of them to you. Take the gift and place it directly on the altar and return to your altar server corner.
 - Bow with the “Book and Bell” server then move to the credence table.
- Mixing the Water and Wine
 - Remove the top from the water cruet. Take the water cruet and move to stand just before the step onto the sanctuary. ***Have the handle to the water cruet facing the priest.*** When he comes to you, let him take the water cruet from you ***and bow to the priest.*** The priest will pour the water to mix with the wine and return the water cruet back to you. ***Bow to the priest*** and return the cruet to the Credence Table.
- Washing the Priest’s Hands
 - Go get the lavabo bowl and keep the water cruet and return to the step before the sanctuary. When the priest comes over to you, wash his hands by pouring the water cruet or allow the priest to dip his hands in the lavabo bowl.
 - Await the priest to dry his hands with the towel from the “Book and Bell” server.
 - With the “Book and Bell” server, ***bow together*** and return the water cruet (remember to place the top back on the water cruet) and lavabo bowl to the credence table.
 - Move to your altar server corner; with the Book and Bell” server, ***bow together at the altar server corners as you cross in front of the altar.***
 - Move to your position to the left of the altar.
 - Participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.



Top off
Handle facing priest

Feet to base of step

Presenting water cruet to priest



Bowing (with hips, no head nods)

Roles for Servers during Consecration and Communion

Cross: The “Cross” server does not have any specific duties during the Consecration prayers.

- Participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.
- Continue to observe the other servers and help them as needed.

Book and Bell (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): The “Book and Bell” server has the very important duty of announcing the Consecration by ringing the bells.

Individual Tasks:

- Prior to the Consecration, the “Book and Bell” server will continue to participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.
- During the Consecration prayer, the priest will hold up the host and say, “...*this is My Body which will be given up for you.*” consecrating it to His Body. As the priest raises the Consecrated Body, ***Ring the Consecration Bells three distinct times.***
- Following the Consecration of the Body, the priest will hold up the chalice and say, “...*It will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.* As the priest raises the Consecrated Blood, ***Ring the Consecration Bells three distinct times.***

Following the Consecration

- Continue to participate in the Mass with the Congregation until the priest says, “*Let us offer each other a sign of peace.*” Shake the priest’s hands and anyone else around.
- Pick up the purificators from the small table on the side near you and place them on the altar.
- Go and kneel with the other servers in front of the altar.
- Receive Communion and say your prayers.
- Retrieve the Sacramentary book from the altar and place on the arm of the Presider’s Chair.
- Sit down in your chair and pray.



**Altar Server’s kneeling at opposite sides of the altar.
One Server ringing Consecration Bells**

Water and Chalice (Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass): The “Water and Chalice” server is responsible for bringing the water to the priest after communion and retrieving the chalice from the priest and placing it on the credence table.

Individual Tasks:

- During the Consecration Prayer, the “Water and Chalice” server will participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting with everyone else.

Following the Consecration

- Continue to participate in the Mass with the Congregation until the priest says, “*Let us offer each other a sign of peace.*” Shake the priest’s hands and anyone else around.
- Go and kneel with the other servers in front of the altar.
- Receive Communion and say your prayers.

Following Communion

- Go to the Credence table and remove the top from the water cruet. Take the water cruet and move to stand just before the step onto the sanctuary. ***The handle to the water cruet should be facing the priest.*** When he comes to you, let him take the water cruet from you **and bow**. The priest will use the water to clean the chalice and return the water cruet back to you.
- Bow to the priest and then place the water cruet on the credence table.
- Return to stand just before the step onto the sanctuary and retrieve the chalice, pall, paten and purificator from the priest (***do not bow***) and place on the credence table.
- Return to your seat and sit down for the final prayers.

Roles for Servers during Closing

Cross: Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass: The “Cross” server leads the procession out of the church at the end of Mass.

- The “Cross” server will participate in the Mass along with the rest of the Congregation, by responding, singing, standing and sitting, and listening to the final announcements with everyone else until the closing song.
- Once the closing song begins, the Cross Server will retrieve the Cross from its stand and move to the far right side of the front of the altar (the “altar server corner”). Once the “Water and Chalice” server retrieves the gospel candle, he/she will stand to your left.
- The priest will come to the center front of the altar.
- Once the priest bows, the “Cross” server will lead the procession out of the church. The Cross position does not bow.
- The Cross” server once again sets the pace for the procession and should walk in a slow steady manner that allows the procession to stay together. Take your time and move deliberately and with dignity. Walking in church is never a race and should never be hurried. When you carry the processional cross, carry it straight and with the image of Christ facing forward. Do not walk at a speed that moves too far ahead of the other servers, who should remain only a few feet behind the Cross.

Book and Bell: Summary of tasks during this part of the Mass: During the closing, the “Book and Bell” server will hold the Sacramentary book for the final prayer and carry a gospel candle in the closing procession out of the church.

Individual Steps:

- During the closing prayers, the priest will say “let us pray,” pick up the Sacramentary book and hold it so the priest can read it.
 - Be sure to place the top of the Sacramentary book on your upper chest and hold it open with your hands. It is also wise to brace your elbows into your body. This allows you to hold the book steady as the book is heavy.
 - Do not look down at the book and block the priest’s view of the book. Look up at the priest.
 - Upon completion of the prayer, place the Sacramentary book on the arm of your chair on the same side as the priest
- Once the closing song begins, the “Book and Bell” server will retrieve the gospel candle from its stand and move to the left side of the front of the altar (the “altar server corner”). The same location where you stood during the Opening.
- The priest will come to the center front of the altar.
- Once the priest bows, the “Book and Bell” server will process out of the church.
- In the procession, the “Book and Bell” server should try to keep the same distance from the “Cross” server and *must always* remain even with “Water and Chalice” server as you walk down the aisle. When servers walk together, they should always remain together, side-by-side, walking at the same pace.
- The gospel candles should be held high enough so the bottom of the candle is no lower than halfway down your calf but not higher than your knee. This will help ensure you don’t trip during the procession. Be sure you have a firm grip on the gospel candle while you are carrying it.

Water and Chalice: During the closing, the “Water and Chalice” server will carry a gospel candle and line up a few feet behind and to the right of the “Cross” server.

- Once the closing song begins, the “Water and Chalice” server will retrieve the gospel candle from its stand and move to the right side of the front of the altar (the “altar server corner”) and stand next to the “Cross” server. The same location where you stood during the Opening.
- The priest will come to the center front of the altar.
- Once the priest bows, the “Water and Chalice” server will process out of the church.
- In the procession, the “Water and Chalice” server should try to keep the same distance from the “Cross” server and *must always* remain even with “Book and Bell” server as you walk down the aisle. When servers walk together, they should always remain together, side-by-side, walking at the same pace.
- The gospel candles should be held high enough so the bottom of the candle is no lower than halfway down your calf but not higher than your knee. This will help ensure you don’t trip during the procession. Be sure you have a firm grip on the gospel candle while you are carrying it.

Common Duties for All Altar Servers before Mass:

- After you have exited the nave, altar servers should put the gospel candles and the Cross away.
- Genuflect as you enter the dressing room.
- Take of your altar server garments *and hang them up properly*.
- Go back outside the dressing room, genuflecting as you leave.
- Have a Blessed Day!!!!



What Dressing Room should look like when you leave



Clothes properly hung on hangar

No clothes on ground

What Dressing Room should NOT look like when you leave