Altar Server
Basic Manual
St Thomas More Catholic Church
(Revised March, 2014)
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.

• **Sacristry:** 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 bowels at the entrances of the church for blessing yourself upon entering and exiting the church.
Parts of the Altar Area

- Credence Table
- Presider’s Chair
- “Cross” Server’s Bench
- “Book & Bell” Server’s Chair
- “Water & Chalice” Server’s Chair
- “Water & Chalice” Server’s Corner

Image description: A photograph of an altar area with labeled parts.
Parts of the Altar Area

Consecration Bells

“Book & Bell” Server’s Altar Server Corner
**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.stmgaparish.org/](http://www.stmgaparish.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 Bob Jacoby 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.
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!!*

**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.