

# LaSalle Catholic Parishes

## Altar Server Guide

### Rationale

Serving at the Altar of God in the sanctuary is a privilege which requires and deserves reverence at all times. Many of the tasks and roles you take on as an altar server are carried out by the most important angels in the Heavenly Liturgy. Few people have an opportunity to experience the holy mysteries with the closeness you will enjoy as an altar server. Approach your duties with prayer and take from your experience at the altar the profound joy of serving the Lord well.

As an altar server, you are a leader. The dignity and prayerfulness of your presence will make an impact on the faithful in the pews. Often the way you go about your service is more important than the tasks themselves. You are showing others how to pray. Serving, therefore, is the most important thing you will do throughout the week. Take care to learn to serve well for the greater glory of God and the edification of His people.

# Mass Schedule

The most current schedule is always available online. Be attentive to when you are scheduled to serve and find replacements when necessary. Please arrive at least 10 minutes before Mass, although 15 minutes would be preferred.

## Dress

Altar servers will dress in an alb tied with a cincture. A diagram to help you tie your cincture is posted in the sacristies. Young men can alternatively wear a black cassock and surplice. A properly fitting alb and cassock will reach down to the ankles. A properly fitting surplice will reach below the waist. The cincture is not used with the cassock.

Servers are to wear dress pants (or skirts) and dress shoes. Shirts or tops should be of solid or neutral color to avoid showing through the white alb. Tennis shoes, flip flops, or crocs are not appropriate.

## Posture and Position

A good server always compliments the Mass. Never do anything that draws attention away from the liturgy (i.e. play with hair, talk, swing legs, bite fingernails, play the drums on your knees, etc.). Everything you do should look smooth, slow, deliberate, and professional.

Keep these points in mind:

Standing: hands should always be folded unless you are holding something. Hold your palms and fingers comfortably pressed together at chest-level.

Sitting: hands should be relaxed on your knees (not on your lap). Keep your feet flat on the floor. (Girls may cross their legs at the ankle but never in any other way.)

Walking: always walk slowly and deliberately. Never run. Never walk backwards – turn around and walk forwards. If walking in pairs, turn inwards towards your partner.

Eyes: don't let them wander around the church. Keep them down in prayer or directed at the action of the liturgy.

Hands: when not holding anything, keep your hands folded (palm and fingers flat against each other) and at a 45° angle. If holding something with one hand, place the other hand flat against your chest.

Kneeling: keep your hands folded when kneeling if not holding something. You should not need to steady yourself with your hands on the floor when getting down or up. Rise slowly to avoid tripping over your alb or cassock.

Genuflecting: lower your right knee to firmly touch the floor. Do not rush this. Keep your back straight. The sign of the cross is not part of a genuflection – keep your hands folded. At Mass we only genuflect twice: as we process in and before we process out.

Bowing: a bow from the waist is made during the creed, but also to the altar anytime you pass in front or behind it. A bow of the head is made anytime Jesus' name is used at Mass and when leaving the priest or deacon after some action (e.g. washing the hands).

Lighting Candles: adjust the wick to control the flame. Use your cupped hand to shield the flame from the wind and to catch any dripping wax. Always extend the wick after extinguishing the taper so the wax does not harden in the tube and cause “wick-lock”.

Extinguishing Candles: never blow out the candles. It causes the wicks to burn out and splatters wax. Carefully lower the end of the snuffer over the flame until extinguished. Do not let the snuffer touch the wick.

In everything you do have good posture. Stand up straight and sit up straight. Participate in the Mass with singing and making the proper responses and gestures. If you ever make a mistake, don't panic! —act like you know what you're doing. If you are ever unsure what to do, stop and wait for help from the priest, deacon, or senior server.

# Setup and Preparation

- ◆ Sign the attendance book.
- ◆ Wash your hands.
- ◆ Vest, using the vesting prayers provided.
- ◆ Talk with the Senior Server and other servers to choose which roles each person will take in the Mass.
- ◆ Help light the candles.
- ◆ Check to make sure the lights and sound are on.
- ◆ Be ready and recollected in the sacristy until Father says the prayer.

## Different Roles at Mass

Roles are divided among the servers. The exact duties of each server depend on how many servers are available and whether incense is being used.

### If there are 4 servers with incense:

Server 1: Thurifer (incense)

Server 2: Crucifer (cross and book)

Server 3 & 4: Acolytes (candles and altar attendants)

### If there are 4 servers without incense:

Server 1: Crucifer (cross)

Server 2: Book-Bearer (book)

Server 3 & 4: Acolytes (candles and altar attendants)

### If there are 3 servers:

Server 1: Crucifer (cross, book)

Server 2 & 3: Acolytes (candles and altar attendants)

### If there are 2 servers:

Server 1: Crucifer (cross, book)

Server 2: Acolyte (altar attendant, assisted by Crucifer)

## Specific Duties of Each Server

As a general principle, limit yourself to only your proper duties. The objects you need to perform your role will be on the same side of the sanctuary as your seat. Only on rare occasions should you ever need to cross the center line of the sanctuary. If you do, be sure to bow low to the altar. However, if you tend only to your duties, this will be rare.

Thurifer. The Thurifer is responsible for the incense at Mass. Make sure that the thurible is always lit with a good fire. The Thurifer's ready position is center behind the altar. Incense at Mass may be used at the entrance procession, the Gospel, the offertory, and the elevation of the Host and Chalice. The Thurifer leads the procession.

Crucifer. The Crucifer is responsible for carrying the processional cross at the beginning and end of Mass. The cross should be held high, facing straight ahead, with hands held apart. When there is

no dedicated Book-Bearer, the Crucifer takes on those duties as well.

Book-Bearer. The Book-Bearer is responsible for holding the missal for the priest at the chair, handing the priest the celebrant's folder after the homily, and for carrying the altar missal to and from the altar. The Book-Bearer is often also the Crucifer.

Acolytes. The Acolytes are responsible for carrying the candles for the procession, the Gospel, the consecration, and the recession at the end of Mass. They are also the attendants at the altar and hold the communion patens. If there is only one Acolyte, processional candles are not used.

# The Order of Mass

## Procession

The procession is led by the Thurifer. If there is no Thurifer, the Crucifer leads the procession. Following the Crucifer are the Acolytes with candles. If there is a dedicated Book-Bearer, he or she follows behind the Acolytes. Keep a space of 3 or 4 pews between you and the server ahead of you. As soon as you reach the sanctuary, genuflect or bow and go immediately to stand by your seat. (If there is nothing in your hands, genuflect. If you are carrying something, bow – but do not incline the Cross or Candles.) Do not bunch-up at the stairs of the sanctuary.

## Introductory Rites

During the “Gloria,” at the words “*Jesus Christ*,” the Book-Bearer readies the missal. As soon as Father says, “*Let us pray*,” the server moves in front of him. After the prayer the server closes book and returns to the seat in the same way.

## Liturgy of the Word

The servers sit and listen attentively to the Word of God. During the responsorial psalm, the Thurifer prepares the thurible if incense is



used at the Gospel. All stand for the Alleluia or Gospel Acclamation. The Thurifer moves immediately to the chair so the priest can impose incense. Then the Thurifer moves to the ready position behind the altar. The Acolytes take their candles and stand on either side of the altar facing the altar. The servers then accompany the priest or deacon to the Ambo. The Acolytes stand at either side of the ambo facing each other, being sure to keep the candles at an equal height. When the Gospel is concluded the servers return immediately to their seats, careful not to get in the way of the priest or deacon. When the priest returns to the presider's chair after the homily, the Book-Bearer hands him the priest's folder.

## Offertory

Immediately after the general intercessions, the Acolytes help prepare the altar. If incense is used, the Thurifer brings the thurible from the sacristy and moves to his or her ready position.

One Acolyte should take the veiled chalice and burse, and holding it with one hand on the base and the other on the top, carry the chalice and place it firmly on the side of the altar. The Acolyte should then take the burse and hold it open for the priest to remove the corporals. The priest will fold the veil and place it back on the burse. Both are then taken back to the credence table.

The other Acolyte at this time brings any other chalices, purificators, or ciboria to the altar. If the priest or deacon does not take

the other vessels from the server, the server may place them on the corporal. Do not set anything on the altar if the priest has not finished unfolding the corporals. Do not leave purificators on top of the communion cups.

At this point the priest will go down to the floor of the nave to receive the gifts. One acolyte goes with the priest. The other acolyte takes the water cruet from the credence table and moves to the ready position. When the priest reaches the altar he offers the bread.

The priest or deacon will then take the chalice and move to the side of the altar for the water and wine. The Acolyte with wine stands nearest to the altar. Present the cruet with your right hand only and make sure the handle is facing outward. Your left hand should be flat against your chest or holding the cruet stopper if necessary. When turning from the altar, turn inwards towards each other.

If incense is used, the altar is incensed at this time, after which the Thurifer moves towards the credence table to be ready for the Sanctus Procession with the Acolytes.

Both Acolytes return to the altar ready position with the ewer and basin and towel to wash the priest's hands.

# Eucharistic Prayer

When the choir begins to sing the words, “Holy, holy, holy,” The Acolytes carry their candles and move to stand directly in front of the left and right corner of the altar. The Thurifer moves to stands in front of the center of the altar. Symmetry is important here. The Book-Bearer, Crucifer, or other servers remain in their places. When the people kneel, the servers kneel. The Acolytes place their candles on the floor.

At the epiclesis (when Father places his hands over the gifts of bread and wine, calling down the Holy Spirit), the bell is rung one time by the server best in reach of the bell.

At the elevation (when Father elevates the Body of Christ), the bell is rung three times and the Thurifer incenses the Blessed Sacrament. The same is repeated at the elevation of the Blood of Christ.

At the Great Amen, the servers stand, bow together, return to their places, and set down their items.

# Communion Rite

When the “Our Father” is recited, servers keep their hands folded. During the Sign of Peace, servers should not move or walk anywhere. They should not exchange the sign of peace until they have first done so first with the priest and then with the deacon.

Afterwards they may, remaining where they are, briefly and quietly make the sign of peace with the server to their right and left. After the sign of peace, the Acolytes retrieve the communion patens. The servers kneel for the “Lamb of God.”

Father, Deacon, or an Extraordinary Minister will bring the servers Holy Communion where they are. As the minister approaches with the Blessed Sacrament, they bow or kneel, and receive the Lord. The Acolytes holding the patens must receive the Host on their tongue. During Communion the servers may kneel prayerfully in front of their places. The Acolytes hold the patens for the faithful.

Immediately after the Communion of the Faithful, the Acolytes give their communion patens to the priest or deacon to be purified. If the priest or deacon does not take the paten, the server places it on the altar. The Acolytes do not wait at the altar for the patens to be returned, but move immediately to bring the water to the altar. Once the water is poured, the Acolytes wait at their ready position to remove patens and vessels from the altar. Vessels are ready to be removed when the priest or deacon takes them off the corporal. Finally, an Acolyte brings the chalice veil and burse to the altar. He or she holds the burse open to receive the corporals and then takes the chalice and burse back to the credence table.

The Book-Bearer removes the missal from the altar and prepares for the final prayer.

## Concluding Rites

The priest returns to the presider's chair. When Father says "Let us pray," the Book-Bearer moves in front of the priest for the Prayer After Communion. Do not close the book on your own as there may be a special blessing after the prayer.

## Closing Procession

After the dismissal, the servers move to immediately pick up any objects they carried in the entrance procession. As the priest and deacon walk over to kiss the altar, the servers move to their place in the center aisle, turning to again face the altar. When the priest genuflects, the servers bow (or genuflect if hands are empty), turn, and process out. Remember to give 3 or 4 pews space in procession.

## After Mass

The servers process back to the Sacristy. It is a tradition to bow to the cross. Together offer the prayer after serving that is provided. Extinguish the candles and torches. Hang your vestments neatly in the closet and close the closet doors. Before leaving, make sure you have signed the attendance book.

You're done! Thanks for your attentiveness and reverence while serving at God's holy altar!

# Parts of Mass

Knowing all of the different parts of the Mass is very helpful for the server. Not only does it promote a greater spiritual awareness of the incredible realities of the holy Eucharist, but it also allows the server to approach his or her duties with a greater confidence and professionalism.

Become familiar with the basic parts of the Mass and the order in which they occur:

## Introductory Rites

- ◆ Sign of the Cross
- ◆ Confiteor / Kyrie
- ◆ Gloria
- ◆ Opening Prayer

## Liturgy of the Word

- ◆ 1st Reading
- ◆ Psalm
- ◆ 2nd Reading
- ◆ Gospel
- ◆ Homily
- ◆ Nicene Creed
- ◆ General Intercessions

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

- ◆ Preparation of the Altar
- ◆ Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)
- ◆ Eucharistic Prayer
- ◆ Consecration
- ◆ Doxology and Great Amen

## Communion Rite

- ◆ The Lord's Prayer
- ◆ Sign of Peace
- ◆ Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)
- ◆ Reception of Holy Communion

## Concluding Rite

- ◆ Prayer after Communion
- ◆ Blessing
- ◆ Dismissal

# Server Prayers

## Prayer Before Mass

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 worthily at Your Holy Altar.  
Amen.

## Prayer After Mass

O Lord, Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest,  
I thank You for the privilege of having served  
at the holy altar of Your Sacrifice.

Now, as I put aside the garments of that service,  
I ask that I may at all times think of You.  
May I ever seek You and find You;  
May I always follow You.  
Ever ready in Your service,  
may I always know and do Your will in all things and,  
by Your grace, persevere unto the end.  
Amen.

# Server Vesting Prayers

## For the Alb:

Purify me, Lord, and cleanse my heart  
so that, washed in the Blood of the Lamb,  
I may enjoy eternal joy.

## For the Cincture:

Encircle me, O Lord, with the cord of purity,  
and extinguish in me all evil desires,  
that the virtue of chastity may abide in me.

## For the Cassock:

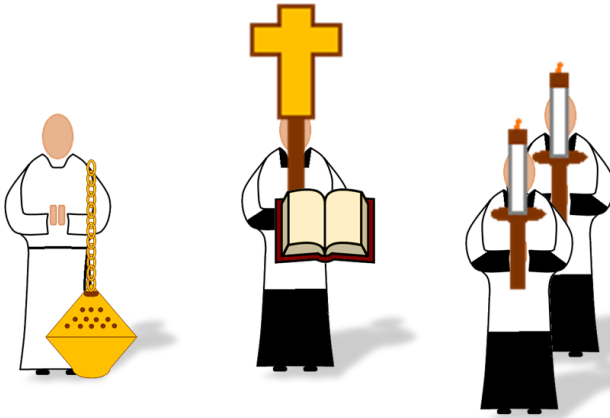
O Lord, the portion of my inheritance and my chalice,  
You are He who will restore my inheritance.

## For the Surplice:

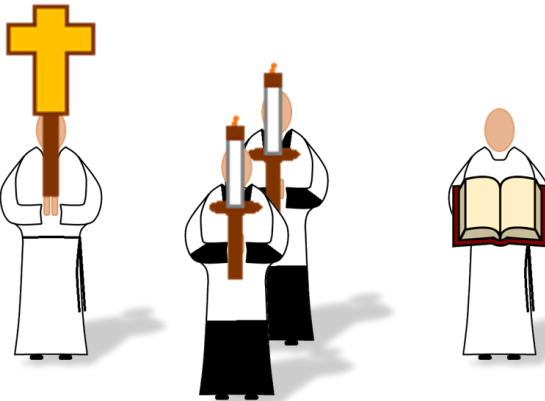
Invest me, O Lord, as a new man,  
who was created by God in justice  
and the holiness of truth.



# Roles & Procession Order



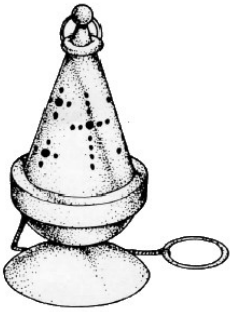
4 Servers  
Mass with  
Incense



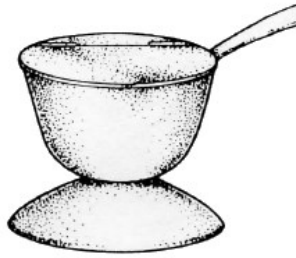
4 Servers  
Mass  
without  
Incense



3 Servers  
Mass



Thurible



Boat



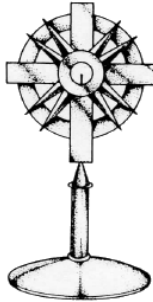
Candle &  
Follower



Extinguisher



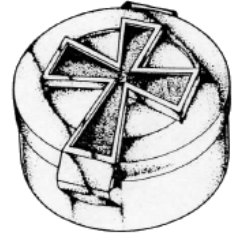
Ciborium



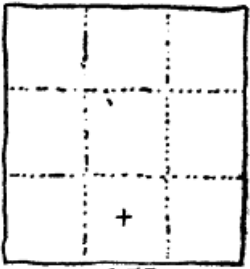
Monstrance



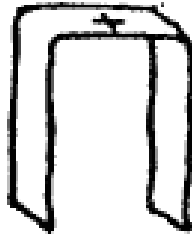
Server Paten



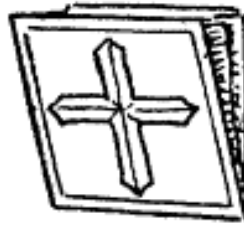
Pyx



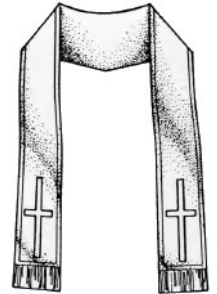
Corporal



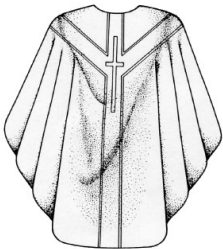
Purificator



Burse



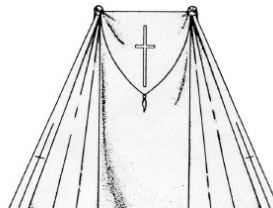
Stole



18 Chasuble



Dalmatic



Cope



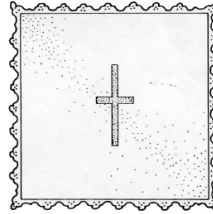
Surplice



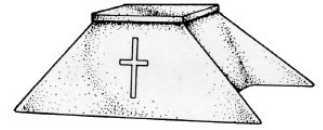
Humeral Veil



Chalice



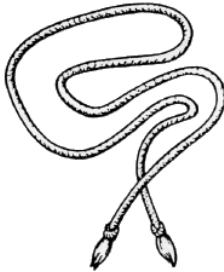
Pall



Chalice Veil



Alb



Cincture



Paten



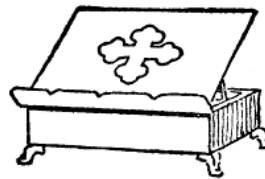
Ablution Cup



Cassock



Cruet



Missal Stand



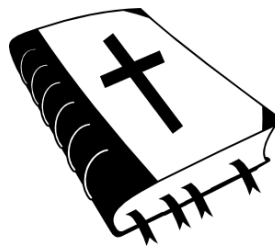
Processional  
Cross



Aspersory



Aspergillum



Roman Missal



Sanctus Bells

Please review the  
Server Schedule and  
Animated Diagrams at  
[www.lasallecatholic.org](http://www.lasallecatholic.org)