

# St. Mary of the Woods Altar Boy Handbook



*June 2018*

Welcome to the ministry of altar boy! Altar boys have an important role in serving the people of God by assisting the priest at Mass. What you do and how you do it helps people understand and appreciate the Mass better. The people in church will be watching you – not to see if you make mistakes, but to see what it means to be actively involved in the Mass. It really matters how you carry the candles, how you sit, stand and walk, and what you look like when you're serving. Visitors will get an impression of the parish from you. By your service you should give the message that serving at Mass is very important and worth doing well.

This Altar Boy's Handbook was written to help you serve the Mass well. Your duties will be explained in detail. Each priest celebrates Mass a little differently, but these instructions will help you in any case. If there is a visiting priest, ask him about any differences before Mass. Watch the priest carefully so that he can tell you what he needs as the Mass proceeds.

We'll start by covering some basic information every server should know. Then we'll move on to the procedures for serving Mass on Sunday. All altar boys should be familiar with this information, and able to fulfill any of the four roles of altar boys.

Thank you for serving Mass at Saint Mary of the Woods Parish! We want all of our Altar Boys to be the best servers they can be, and we know you want to do your best.

## **Fundamentals Every Server Should Know**

### **1. Basic Prayers**

- a. Every server must know the basic prayers of the Catholic Faith and the basic prayers of the Mass.
- b. The Sign of the Cross is to be made with the right hand: forehead, chest, left shoulder, right shoulder. Make the Sign of the Cross reverently – like you mean it and like it means something to you – it should!
- c. Know the Order of the Mass. Introductory Rite, Liturgy of the Word, Offertory, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Sign of Peace, Communion Rite, Concluding Rite. Know what happens during each part. You can study the Mass even when you are not serving – take a Missalette home and study it.
- d. Respond to all of the Mass prayers and sing when appropriate. Remember – people see Servers and do what Servers do, so set a good example. This is also important for serving funerals and weddings, when some of the people in the congregation are not Catholic and don't know what to say or sing.

### **2. Positions of Hands**

- a. Anytime a server is standing (including walking) and not carrying a liturgical item, the hands should be joined at the chest with fingers pointing upward. Never anywhere else. Holding hands at the waist looks sloppy. Hands are never in pockets or down at the sides.
- b. Anytime a server is sitting the hands are placed one top of each thigh. Do not join the hands on your lap.

**3. Proper names of liturgical items**

Ambo	Place from which the readings at Mass are read
Chalice	Vessel for wine that becomes the Blood of Christ
Cassock	Main server garb that is long and black
Burse	Item that sits on top of the chalice veil that holds the corporal.
Chalice Pall	Stiff card that sits atop the Chalice to prevent insects from flying in.
Chalice Veil	Decorative cloth that covers the chalice. Sacred items are often veiled.
Chasuble	Round, outer vestment the Priest wears during the Mass (green, violet, white, or red)
Ciborium	Gold vessel that holds Hosts (may have a lid, may or may not have a stem). The plural of Ciborium is Ciboria.
Cincture	Cord or rope-style belt worn with the Alb and tied at the waist (knot to the left)
Corporal	White linen cloth on the Altar that catches fragments of the Host
Credence Table	Table at the side of the Sanctuary where items needed for the Mass are kept
Cruet	Bottle or similar vessel that holds water or wine
Evangelary	Large book of the Gospels, usually with a gold cover
Flagon	Large glass bottle containing the wine to be consecrated
Funeral Pall	Large cloth that is draped over a casket

Host	Unleavened bread that becomes the Body of Christ
Incense Boat	Small metal container (with spoon) that holds incense
Missal	Red book that the Priest uses for Mass prayers. Also called the "Sacramentary."
Missal Stand	Wooden support that sits on the Altar to support the Missal.
Monstrance	Large vessel used to display the Host for Adoration
Processional Candle	A candle carried in processions at the beginning of Mass, for the Gospel reading, and at the end of Mass
Purificator	White cloth used to purify the Chalice
Sanctuary	Area of the Church where the Altar and Tabernacle are
Surplice	White garment the is wore on top of the cassock
Tabernacle	Gold safe where consecrated Hosts are kept
Thurible	Metal vessel with chain used for burning incense

#### **4. Focus of Eyes**

- a. Keep your eyes in the Sanctuary. When you are serving Mass your concerns should be on the Mass you are serving.
- b. Watch where you are walking – do not walk in one direction and look in another direction.

#### **5. Standing**

- a. Stand tall – don't slouch! Don't lean on one foot – this causes you to sway back and forth and is distracting to people in the

pews. Don't lock your knees.

## **6. Walking**

- a. Remember that you are in a solemn liturgical procession. Walk slowly and hold your head high. Always look where you're going.

## **7. Kneeling**

- a. When you kneel, keep your body straight and your hands joined at your chest. (Discreetly reach back with your right hand and pull your cassock/alb up over your shoes, if needed, so it doesn't catch on your heels.) When you stand up, don't put your hands down. Lean back on your feet and rise straight up. It takes practice not to wobble!

## **8. Genuflecting**

- a. When you genuflect, keep your hands joined at your chest. Go straight down on your right knee, and come straight back up.

## **9. Head Bows**

- a. After the servers perform any task for the priest/deacon, they should bow their head slightly before turning away as a sign of respect. Usually, the priest/deacon bows first and the server responds with a bow. This simple action adds reverence to the ceremony. The server should not bend at the waist for a head bow.

## **10. General Appearance**

- a. Relax and be confident. If you learn the procedures for serving Mass, you'll know what to do and when to do it. Take your time – don't rush. A rushed or hurried movement gives the impression that you forgot something. Proceed smoothly!

## **Procedures for Serving at Mass**

### **Before Mass:**

Dress appropriately. Your clothing should reflect your role in the celebration of Holy Mass. **“Worship the Lord in holy attire.”** (1Chronicles 16:29, Psalms 29:2, 96:9). You are **expected** to be wearing black dress shoes with black socks, and black dress slacks. **No flip-flops or shorts.**

**Arrive at church at least 15 minutes before Mass time** and enter the Main Sacristy quietly. Make sure to sign-in before you start to vest. Be sure Father knows you are here before going to the Servers’ Sacristy to vest.

Turn off any cell phones or other electronic devices you may have, and leave them in the main Sacristy.

Vest in a cassock/alb of appropriate length. The cassock/alb should go down to your ankles. Use the correct surplice size/cincture size and color.

The first two Servers vested light the candles at the Altar. Go up the steps and genuflect before the Altar, and then proceed to light the candles. Genuflect toward the Tabernacle each time you pass in front of it.

Take notice of the credence table. Is everything needed for Mass on the table? Note where each item is on the credence table. Any time an item is removed from the credence table that item should be returned to its original position on the table. This leaves room for the extra ciboria after Communion.

Five minutes before the start of Mass the servers gather in the main sacristy and pray, in thanksgiving for the privilege of serving the Mass, and asking for the grace to serve the Mass well. The Mass is the most sacred thing the Church does, and we should be in a proper frame of mind to serve. Father will lead the prayer; otherwise, the server with most seniority (head server) can lead the prayer.

**Serving Mass is serious business.**

- Serving Mass is a privilege. The Mass is the holiest liturgy of the Church. Pointing, chatting, and fidgeting are not acceptable behaviors.
- You always have time to do what you need to do. Do not rush.
- The cassock/alb you wear is a liturgical vestment, not a gown, jumper, or any other ordinary robe.
- Fire is to be respected. Be careful with fueled (gas) lighters and matches when lighting candles.
- Be aware of what is happening in the sanctuary during the Mass. Know what's coming next. Servers should work as a team and help each other to make sure the Mass is served well.

**How to Carry Processional Candles**

The Processional Candles at Saint Mary of the Woods are tall; carrying one takes practice. When you carry them, always use both hands, and always keep the candle level. Walk slowly and steadily, and do not bounce. The candle should not move up or down, forward or backward. It should not lean in any direction, as this will spill hot wax.

**Roles for Servers****Mass with three servers**

- **Crucifer/Book Bearer**: carries the Processional Cross, handles the Missal during Mass, as well as any other books the priest may need, and assists with receiving the gifts at the Offertory



- **Water:** assists with receiving the gifts, carries the water bowl and pitcher for the Lavabo Rite (when Father washes his hands), and carries a Processional Candle.
- **Wine:** assists with receiving the gifts, carries the hand towel for the Lavabo Rite, and carries a Processional Candle.

If there are only two servers, there will be no candles in the processions (just the cross). The **crucifer** will also serve as an **acolyte**.

### **Entrance Procession**

The **crucifer** will carry the processional cross, **Water** and **Wine** will carry processional candles. After praying together in the sacristy, all servers line up just inside the church doors for the procession. Process slowly, and stay together.

The Servers line up as follows:

- **Crucifer:** Leads the procession, and walks down the center of the aisle. The Crucifer must be careful not to hit the Processional Cross on the door or low ceiling at the entrance.
- **Water** and **Wine** (with Processional Candles): side by side (Water on the right, Wine on the left).

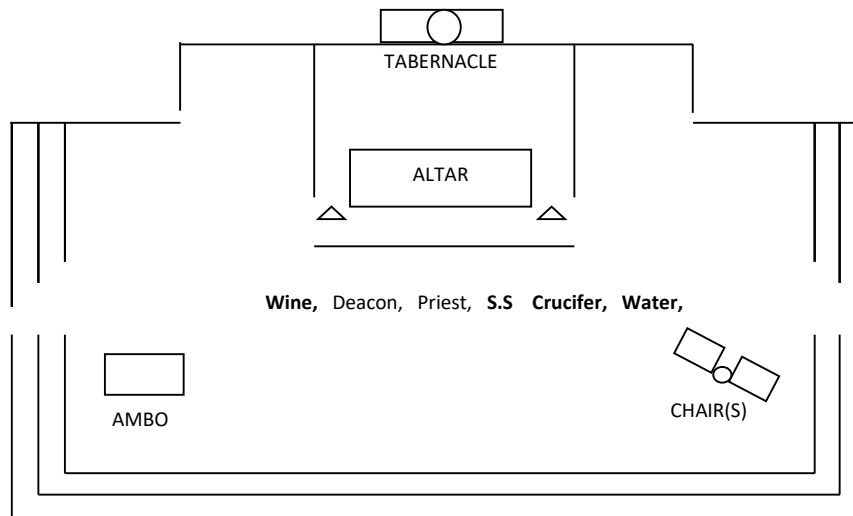
When the people begin to sing, the **crucifer** leads the procession slowly toward the Sanctuary. **Water** and **Wine** wait until the **crucifer** has taken three steps before moving.

Proceeding in this way ensures that each server has time to reach the proper position in front of the Altar without crowding.

Continue up the sanctuary steps and line up in front of the Altar:

- **Crucifer** goes to the right and, (in front of the Altar Candle) facing the Tabernacle.

- **Water** goes to the right to line up on the corner of the Altar lines up at the South corner of the Sanctuary, facing the Altar.
- **Wine** goes to the left to line up on the corner of the Altar to the North corner of the Sanctuary, facing the Altar.



The **crucifer**, **Water** and **Wine** gently plant the base of the cross/candles on the ground as they wait. Servers that are carrying something do not genuflect when the priest does; instead, they bow their heads slightly toward the Tabernacle when the priest genuflects. Servers all then take one step backwards, in unison, to let the priest (and deacon) pass.

All then turn to the right. In a single file line, servers go around the side of the altar to the back of the sanctuary to place the processional cross and processional candles in their stands.

Servers will then move in a single file line to their positions in the pew. The book bearer/crucifer will be at the far left side where the missal is placed (furthest from the wall). The two acolytes will be to the right of the book bearer/crucifer.

### **Introductory Rites**

When the priest says, "Let us pray," the **crucifer** carries the missal to the priest's chair. Carry the missal with two hands at the bottom while resting the top on your chest. Hold the book with both hands supporting the bottom of

the book as the priest opens it to the proper page. Your hands should be at or above your stomach, not at your waist, to make the book easier for Father to use.

After the opening prayer, the priest may tap the edge of the book as a signal that he is finished. Close the missal and return to your pew.

All servers remain standing until the **crucifer** has returned; then all sit at the same time. Note: The people will sit first; servers sit together.

### **Liturgy of the Word**

Servers sit during the readings and Responsorial Psalm. Servers should participate in the Mass – they should say the Mass responses and sing. Remember, people in the pews will take their cues from you! Your active participation in the Mass is a gift to God and helps the congregation maintain a reverent attitude.

**Offertory (part 1):**

Following the Petitions, Father will sit. When the Offertory Hymn begins, Servers function as a team while performing the following tasks:

The **crucifer** takes the Missal to the Altar. He will hand it to the priest/deacon. The priest/deacon will usually hand the **crucifer** the stand for the Evangeliary to him to place on the podium next to the credence table. The **crucifer** should bow his head slightly to the priest/deacon before returning from the altar. If the priest/deacon **does not** hand him the stand, he is to circle around to the front of the altar and take the stand off the altar and place it on the podium next to the credence table. He will then return to his seat.

Meanwhile, **Water and Wine** will both proceed to the credence table **together**. **Water** will take the chalice, and **wine** will take the 2 side chalices with purificators. They will then proceed **together** up to the altar with **wine** on the left and **water** on the right.

**water** will take the main chalice to the altar and place it on the corner of the altar to the priest's left. Use two hands when carrying the main chalice; the left hand should hold the stem and the right hand should hold the top. Place the chalice so that the decorative side of the veil faces the people. He then stands at the corner of the altar with his feet at the base of the step. He then takes the burse off the top of the chalice, turns the opening to the deacon/priest, and opens the burse for the deacon. Then, while still holding the burse, the deacon/priest will hand him the chalice veil which he holds one side with his left hand, and the other side with his right hand. **water** then waits for **wine**.

Meanwhile, **wine** will take the side chalices with purificators and wait next to the left of Water until the deacon takes the corporal out of the burse and hands Water the chalice veil. The deacon/priest will then take both side chalices from **wine**.

Both **acolytes** bow to the deacon/priest, and proceed back to the credence table. **Wine** will go back to his seat. **Water** will go the credence table and place the burse on a **dry** spot on the credence table. He will then fold the chalice veil and then set the chalice veil on top of the burse.

He then proceeds back to his seat.

The **acolytes** return to their seats and sit at the same time.

### **Offertory (part 2):**

When the priest/deacon stands up, the **acolytes** and **crucifer** stand to receive the gifts. With the **crucifer** leading, walk with hands joined at the chest; walk across the church in front of the sanctuary steps. Two servers will pass behind the priest/deacon and line up to his right. The other will line up to the priest/deacon's left. Servers take the gifts as the priest/deacon hands them to them. They bow with the priest/deacon, turn, enter into the sanctuary together, and bow together to the altar. Then step back to allow the priest/deacon to go to the altar.

The ciborium with the hosts is taken up to the priest/deacon at the altar. The server will then bow his head and go back to the credence table. The server with the wine goes back to the credence table and waits for the other acolyte. After the acolyte returns from giving the hosts to the priest/deacon, **Water removes** the water cruet stopper and takes the water cruet in his right hand with handle facing out with his left hand over his chest and **Wine** will remove the stopper from the wine and hold it with both hands with the handle facing out. Both proceed up to the side of the altar with **Wine** on the left (closest to the altar) and **Water** on the right. After the priest/deacon pours those, acolytes bow their heads and return to the credence table.

**Water** takes the pitcher and the bowl while **Wine** takes the hand towel and unfolds it. (It is easier to hold the pitcher around the neck than to hold the handle when pouring). Both acolytes go to the altar to wash the priest's hand. When finished, the acolytes bow their heads slightly, turn, and take their place at the bottom step of the sanctuary by the credence table. **Water** will be closest to the wall/credence table. The **crucifer** joins them along the bottom step as the people stand and the priest says, "Pray, brethren...."

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:**

All servers kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer with hands joined at the chest (not at the waist).

**Ring the Bells.**

The **Water** rings the bells. You should **not** move the bells before they are being used. Father will begin the Eucharistic Prayer. The bells are rung at the epiclesis (when he points his palms down over the chalice), at the elevation of the Body of Christ, and at the elevation of the Blood of Christ.

When the priest take the pall off the chalice and puts his hands palm down over the chalice, ring the bell **once** for **2 seconds**. The next two times is when the priest will say, "This is my Body...." or "This is the chalice of my Blood...." Wait until the host/chalice is elevated, and then ring the bells **3 times** for **3 seconds** with a **2 second pause between** each ring. Let the sound decay naturally; don't muffle the bell. Make sure that the rings are loud enough to be heard throughout the church.

All servers stand immediately after the "Great Amen" (just before the Our Father). Servers **DO NOT** hold hands during the Our Father. Hands should be joined at your chest (not at your waist) during the Our Father, just as at any other time when standing.

**Sign of Peace**

All Servers will come to the side of the Altar for the sign of peace. The two **acolytes** will carry with them the extra ciboria from the credence table and give them to the priest or deacon. If the priest places his hands on the servers' shoulders for the sign of peace, servers place their hands palm up under his elbows. If the priest shakes the servers' hands, servers should do likewise.

**Communion:**

After the Lamb of God is sung three times, servers kneel together on the step by the altar and receive kneeling and on the tongue. Once one receives, he should stand. If you wish to receive the Precious Blood, do so while standing. After all have received communion, all servers return to their prior positions on the Sanctuary step and kneel until it is time to clean the altar.

When the priest and/or deacon return to the altar after distributing communion, **Water** will bring the water cruet (with the stopper out) to the altar. Meet the priest at the corner of the altar and pour water over his fingers. **Make sure you get water on his fingers.** Wait until he lifts his thumbs up against the cruet as a sign to stop pouring. **Wait** now to pour water into the side chalice when father brings it over to you. He will tell you when to stop. Once this is done, bow your head slightly before turning and going back to the credence table.

When the priest/deacon is almost finished purifying, **crucifer** will bring him the burse and chalice veil (unfolded). The chalice veil decorations should be facing him, with one side being held in each hand with his thumb and first finger. With a couple of his fingers, he holds the burse in his right hand so as to be able to “tilt” burse out to deacon. He waits until deacon takes both, bows his head when deacon bows, and heads back to kneel on the step.

After the priest or deacon is finished purifying the vessels and returns to his chair, remove all vessels and the missal from the altar. The missal stand can remain on the altar. Do not stack vessels, and do not carry more than one item in each hand. Make two trips if necessary. When finished, servers return to their pew.

## **Concluding Rite**

When the priest says, "Let us pray," the **Crucifer** carries the missal to him at his chair. Sometimes the priest will keep the **Crucifer** at the chair for a solemn final blessing. If the priest places his hand on the pages of the missal (palm down) at the end of the prayer, that is the signal to stay for the final blessing.

After the closing prayer:

- **Crucifer**: return to pew and place the Missal down and puts gloves on

## **Recessional Hymn**

When the priest moves toward the Altar, the crucifer and acolytes will pick up their candles and cross. They will circle to the foot of the altar and line up (facing the altar). Leave room for the priest (and deacon) to walk in front of them and to stand in the center. When the priest (and deacon) are in place, the servers all take one step forward to line up with the priest.

When the priest genuflects, servers that are carrying something bow their heads. If their hands are free, they genuflect with the priest. They all then turn together and process out. **Crucifer** leads followed by the two **acolytes** with candles.

The procession goes down the center aisle to the back of church. It then turns right and goes out the main exit of the church. Walk slowly, but a little faster than the entrance procession – do not rush or accelerate.

Do not extinguish candles while carrying them in procession.

Once the procession reaches the gathering space, servers line up front of the St. Therese statue. The priest will bow to the crucifix and say, "Procit." The servers respond, "Pro omnibus et singulis." This means "May the grace of the Mass be effective," "For everyone and for each here present." The priest and servers pray this final prayer together that the Mass may bear abundant fruit for all humanity.



**Acolytes** then extinguish their candles and return them to the stands. The **crucifer** returns the processional cross to its stand in the sacristy. Servers extinguish candles in the sanctuary using the snuffer. They remove all ciboria, chalices, and cruets from the credence table. The bowl from the hand washing should be emptied in the sink and returned to the credence table. The pitcher should be refilled if needed.

All Servers then return to the Servers' Sacristy, remove their cassock/alb and surplices and hang them neatly.

Before leaving the church, kneel in a pew and say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the privilege of serving at Mass and the many Graces you have received.

For server schedule, training material, prayer resources, and more visit the St. Mary of the Woods Altar Boy page:  
<https://www.saintmaryofthewoods.com/altar-boys>