

Diocese of Saint Augustine Norms and Guidelines for Altar Servers

Altar Servers

1. The purpose of the altar server's ministry is to assist the celebrant in the orderly celebration of the sacred liturgy, especially the priest-celebrant at Mass. This requires a constant attention to the actions of the priest-celebrant as well as other ministers in the order of the liturgy.

Pastoral Considerations in the Selection of Candidates

2. Because of the dignity, importance and responsibility of this liturgical ministry, pastors and those charged with the responsibility for parish worship, should take great care in assessing both the spiritual maturity and abilities of those called to undertake this ministry. No one should exercise this ministry who has not been prepared.
3. The ministry of altar server is open to all members of the parish. Candidates may be either male or female. In the selection of candidates and in the review of those exercising this ministry, the following considerations may be helpful:
 - As with all lay liturgical ministers, candidates are to be fully initiated into the life of the Church, i.e., they are to have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. In the case of school age children, they are to have been baptized and should have already made their first Holy Communion and first Penance.
 - Candidates should regularly attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. They should also be encouraged to frequently participate in the sacraments.
 - Candidates should understand the importance of this ministry; appreciate the need for preparation and the ministry's connection to Christian life and practice.
 - Candidates should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. The selection of candidates should reflect the composition of the parish as regards gender, ethnic and racial diversity.

Formation

4. Candidates for the ministry of altar server should complete an adequate program of preparation and instruction. The formation should include instruction on the Mass and its parts and their meaning, the various objects used in the liturgy (their names and use), and the various functions of the server during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations. Servers should also receive appropriate guidance on maintaining proper decorum and attire when serving Mass and other functions.

It is recommended that new servers who are under the age of 16 be guided by another server who has served in this ministry for at least two years. This person can then serve as a mentor for the new server. The length of time that a new server will be guided by the mentor is to be determined by the pastor of the parish in consultation with those who assist him in training and supervision of altar servers.

5. “The Order for the Blessings of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers” (*Book of Blessings*, nos. 1847-1870) may be used before servers first begin to function in this ministry.

Term of Service

6. The Diocese’s “General Norms for Lay Liturgical Ministers,” no. 8, does not specify a term of service for those who are altar servers. Pastors may wish to consider an appropriate term of service for adults (those over the age of 18) who serve in this ministry as outlined in the “General Norms.”

Continuing Formation

7. Regularly scheduled times for continuing formation and updating of altar servers is necessary in all parishes. Altar servers should be brought together at least once a year for the purpose of continuing formation.

Parishes may find it helpful to select an Altar Server Coordinator to facilitate training and formation events, schedule and assign ministers to particular liturgies and represent altar servers on the parish liturgy committee.

The Altar Server in the Liturgical Celebration

8. The ministry of the altar server is primarily to assist the priest-celebrant during the Mass and other liturgical functions. The altar server should not exercise another liturgical ministry during the same liturgical service.
9. For the liturgical attire of altar servers, see the “General Norms for Lay Liturgical Ministers” of the Diocese of Saint Augustine. The alb (and cincture, if necessary) is the preferred attire for altar servers.
10. Since the role of server is integral to the normal celebration of the Mass, at least one server should assist the priest. On Sundays and other more important occasions, two or more servers should be scheduled to carry out the various functions normally entrusted to these ministers.
11. Liturgy calls for a solemn formality that is neither pompous nor stiff. The movement of the altar server should be dignified and graceful. In the procession to the sanctuary, one altar server carries the cross and all servers walk in front of the priest-celebrant. The entrance procession should be done slowly and reverently. Upon entering the sanctuary, the altar server(s) either bows or genuflects as required by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd typical edition).¹ The cross is placed in a suitable place for the duration of the liturgy.

12. During the liturgy, a prayerful attitude must be maintained. It is appropriate, that the altar server be seated in the sanctuary. Servers respond to the prayers and dialogues of the priest along with the congregation. They also join in singing the hymns and other chants of the liturgy.
13. Servers carry the cross, the processional candles, open and hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the celebrant and deacon as necessary.²
14. When there is no deacon present at Mass, the altar servers are responsible for placing all of the sacred vessels along with the corporal and purificators on the altar.³
15. At the conclusion of the liturgy, the altar server processes with the priest-celebrant. The cross is carried out of the sanctuary at the head of the procession.⁴
16. Specific needs for individual parishes should be developed by the parish as a companion to these guidelines.

Final – September 8, 2009

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd typical edition), no. 274. (Hereafter cited as *GIRM*.) See also *GIRM*, nos. 120 and 122.

² See *GIRM*, nos. 100, 139, 140, 145, 187, 188, and 189.

³ *GIRM*, no. 190.

⁴ *GIRM*, no. 193.