

# GOOD SHEPHERD CATHOLIC CHURCH ALTAR SERVER MANUAL



Good Shepherd Catholic Church  
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## Welcome!

To the Parents,

Your son or daughter has expressed interest in actively participating in Mass by serving on the altar. We welcome the children. Serving at Mass is a special privilege. It allows your child to be close to the altar, to carry the cross, to carry the light of Christ, to hold the book of prayers and most importantly, to learn to understand the rites of our holy faith. Altar servers are an important part of our parish and they add so much to the celebration.

It is important to note that your child is accepting a very important ministry and he or she should be encouraged to participate fully. Once your child has completed training, he or she will begin serving at the weekend Masses, commencing with the quarter following the training.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask Fr. Leon, Fr. Lester, Deacon Bill or Deacon Ed, or myself, at any time.

To the Altar Server,

Welcome to the Good Shepherd Catholic Church Altar Servers! Service to God and one another is an important aspect of our Christian life. All of us are called to share our time and talents, to help wherever we can, for the Glory of God. The Good Shepherd community is tremendously proud of and grateful for the youth in our parish who have committed themselves to this ministry. To be an active participant in Mass is very special. By serving God in the church, you are also learning to serve God outside the church by helping people who are in need. Fr. Leon, Fr. Lester, Deacon Bill, Deacon Ed and I welcome you and pray that you will learn to understand the rites of our holy faith and serve the church with joy and reverence.

In Christ's Peace,

Bryant Cuneo  
Altar Server Coordinator  
Email: [altarservers@gscceg.org](mailto:altarservers@gscceg.org)

## BASIC GUIDELINES AND RULES

The following are a few guidelines that must be followed by all Altar Servers:

- Be punctual – Arrive **at least 15 minutes prior to the start of Mass**. If you are an Altar Server attending Mass and do not see 3 Altar Servers, you are welcome and encouraged to assist.
- Dress appropriately – Please be sure to dress appropriately. Boys should wear long pants (jeans are okay), not shorts. Shoes should be clean. Do not wear flip flops. Girls may wear dressy sandals in summer, not beach sandals. Be sure to select a garment that covers your ankles. When you are finished with serving, be sure to hang up your cassock and cincture and place it in the appropriate size area on the rack.
- Sign in – When you arrive, check the sign-in sheet in the sacristy. Select which altar server position you would like to perform during the Mass. Sign in on that sheet and also sign in on the sign-in sheet in the conference room off the narthex.
- Act with proper decorum – You are an example when you are participating in the liturgical celebration. You should participate in all of the prayers, responses and hymns. Do not whisper among yourselves unless it relates to your tasks as an altar server. If you need to yawn, be sure to cover your mouth.
- Pay attention – Your job as an altar server is to serve in whatever way you are needed. Be sure to pay attention to what is going on in the Mass so you can assist whenever the priest or the deacon may need your help.
- Do not be a “no show” – By taking on this ministry of being an Altar Server, you are making a very important commitment to your parish community and to the priests and deacons. The Altar Server Coordinator will work as much as possible to accommodate your schedule. If you cannot make your scheduled Mass for whatever reason, you should immediately try to get a substitute by sending an email or calling another altar server.

If you cannot get a substitute, call or email the Altar Server Coordinator to let them know that you are unable to serve and that you were unable to find a substitute. (Do not call the parish office). *The worst thing you can do is to simply not show up.*

**If you are a “no show” three times in one quarter, you will be dropped from the ministry.**

***For unavailable dates only: When an email is sent out requesting unavailable dates:  
[gsccliturgyscheduling@gmail.com](mailto:gsccliturgyscheduling@gmail.com)***

## **THE MASS**

You may or may not know that there are many different parts to the Mass. As Altar Servers, you have different responsibilities during each phase of the Mass. Please familiarize yourself with the parts of the Mass.

Introductory Rite	Entrance Song Greeting Penitential Rite Gloria Opening Prayer
Liturgy of the Word	First Reading Responsorial Psalm Second Reading Alleluia or Gospel Acclamation Gospel Homily Profession of Faith General Intercessions
Liturgy of the Eucharist	Presentation of the Gifts/Preparation of the Altar Prayer over the Gifts Eucharistic Prayer/Ringing of the gong
Communion Rite	Lord's Prayer Sign of Peace Breaking of the Bread Communion Communion Song Prayer after Communion
Concluding Rite	Final Blessing Dismissal Closing Song

## **PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD**

### **Posture**

Posture is how you are using the parts of your body at a particular time. A server has to carry out a number of different actions at Mass, so there are a number of different postures.

### **Walking**

We do a lot of walking every day and sometimes we get sloppy as we do it. Always walk with your back straight and your head held high.

### **Bowing**

When you bow to someone or something at Mass, it should be a smooth forward inclining of your head and shoulders. When you bow to the altar, bow deeply at the waist and bring yourself to your full height. When you bow to the priest, bow your head slowly and gracefully. Never walk and bow at the same time; stop before bowing.

### **Genuflecting**

When you genuflect, keep your hands in front of your chest while you go down on your right knee. Keep your body straight. Be sure that your cassock is not going to trip you on the way down or up.

### **Kneeling**

When you kneel, your body should be upright and your hands should be in front of your chest well above your waist. If you lean your body forwards or backwards, you will hurt the muscles in your back or the ligaments in your knee.

### **Standing**

Always stand up straight with both feet firmly on the floor.

### **Sitting**

Sit down on your chair carefully and gracefully. Once you are seated, sit tall and do not slouch. Place your hands on your lap or flat on your thighs in a relaxed manner. Watch how the priest holds his hands and do as he does.

### **Hands**

Unless you are sitting down or carrying something, your hands should be held as if in prayer, fingers pointing upward. Keep your hands high on your chest.

### **Eyes**

During Mass, **always look towards the place where the action is happening**. When a lector is reading the Scripture, you should be looking at the lector or following the reading in the missal.

**In General** - Try not to fidget. If you make a mistake, do not get flustered and just move on.

## Summary of Duties of Altar Server Positions

### A. All Altar Servers:

#### Before Mass:

- All altar Servers should sign in in the Conference Room in the narthex area. There is a separate "Altar Server Sign-In Sheet" that altar servers need to sign and choose the position you wish to do.
- If you are the first one to come, check if the four candles are lit. If not, light the candles.
- After dressing up, proceed to the narthex immediately to join in prayer with the priest, deacon and other liturgical ministers.

#### During Mass:

- Prayer over the Gifts: All altar servers will kneel in their place facing the sanctuary.
- All altar servers should remain in the sanctuary during the Lord's Prayer and Sign of Peace.
- During the Lord's Prayer, you have an important task if you are at a Mass where the priest invites the children to come to the altar.
  - Assist in welcoming all children to the altar.
  - Be mindful of the 4 altar candles.
  - Let the children hold the priest's hands.
- Receiving Communion: All altar servers should line up along the west side of the sanctuary. All should receive the body of Christ. If you don't wish to receive the precious blood, cross your arms. Be sure to kneel back down and pray first before getting back up to clean the altar.

#### After Mass:

- Be sure to hang up your alb and cincture in the proper place.
- *Acolytes* (aka Candle Bearers) should make sure to extinguish the candles before leaving – please do this task in you altar server garment, not your street clothes.

### B. Altar Server: **Book-Cross Bearer:**

- Before Mass, remove the processional cross from its holder outside the entrance doors and proceed to the narthex.
- Before Mass, check the seat on the sanctuary to make sure the Sacramentary is on the Cross-Book Bearer's seat.
- *Book-Cross Bearer* will start the procession. Be careful not to hit the Exit Sign.
- *Book-Cross Bearer* will go *right of the sanctuary*. Bow your head when the priest does it.
- During the Introductory rite, *Book-Cross Bearer* will hold the Sacramentary for the priest. *Do not stand in front of the priest – stand to his left.*

- During the Offertory the *Book-Cross Bearer* is responsible for placing the corporal on the altar. It will be located on the credence table.
- The *Book-Cross Bearer* will also place the Sacramentary Book on the altar – on the left side of the altar.
- The *Book-Cross Bearer* will ring the gong three times when the priest raises the Host and again when the priest raises the Chalice.
- At the beginning of Communion, the *Book-Cross Bearer* folds and removes the corporal from the altar (just after the *Acolytes* remove Father’s Chalice and Sacramentary Book.) Once this is done, kneel in front of the three chairs until the Blessed Sacrament is placed in the Tabernacle.
- Recessional: The priest will stand to say a Prayer. The *Book-Cross Bearer* will hold the Sacramentary for the priest. Leave the Sacramentary on the seat before you go down the altar.
- Recessional: *Book-Cross Bearer* will lead the recessional and return the Cross to the original position.

**C. Altar Servers: Acolytes (aka Candle Bearers)**

- Before Mass, *Acolytes* should light the processional candles located in the sanctuary and proceed to the narthex.
- During the Entrance Procession, *Acolytes* will follow *Book-Cross Bearer*. One will go to the left and the other to go on the right of the sanctuary. Bow your heads when the priest does it.
- *Acolytes* should return the candles back to the original position. All 3 altar servers will bow to the tabernacle before seating down. They will be seated down and to the left of the priest.
- When the choir is singing the “Alleluia” and as soon as the priest stands, the two *Acolytes* will walk with the candles on each side of the priest or deacon. Altar servers will pause in the middle of the altar facing the congregation then will continue with the procession. The *Acolytes* will stand across from each other next to the ambo – alongside of the priest or deacon. They will hold the candles during the reading of the Gospel. When the Gospel Reading is finished, return the candles to their holders. Face the tabernacle together and bow before being seated.
- **Presentation of the Gifts and preparation of the altar**
- At the start of the offertory, the *Acolytes* will remove the Book of Gospels and its stand and take them to the lower shelf of the credence table.
- As soon as the Book-Cross Bearer sets the corporal, *Acolytes* will bring the chalices and a cruet of water from the credence table and place them on the altar.
- During the Presentation of Gifts, *Acolytes*, along with the deacon, will go down the sanctuary and stand on each side of the priest to receive the wine flagon and bowl of hosts.
- If you are given the bowl - Wait for the priest to return to the altar and hand the bowl directly to the priest; *do not place it on the altar*.
- The wine flagon should be placed to the right of the priest on the corner of the corporal.

- As soon as the priest starts to fill the chalices with wine, *Acolytes* should be ready with a bowl, water and hand towel to pour over the priest's fingers.
- Take the empty decanter of wine away from the altar and place the wine cruet on the credence table.
- After the sign of peace, *Acolytes* should take the bowls from the credence table and place them on the altar.
- At the start of Communion, the *Acolytes* are to remove Father's chalice from the altar (and the Book-Cross Bearer removes and folds the corporal and the Sacramentary.) Once this is done, kneel in front of the three chairs until the Blessed Sacrament is placed in the Tabernacle.
- Recessional: *Acolytes* will retrieve the candles from the holders and line up for the recession. One *Acolyte* will stand at one side of the priest (or deacon if present) and other will stand at the other side. Watch for the priest to genuflect, and then bow with him.
- After Mass has concluded (choir has finished singing): *Acolytes* will return to the sanctuary and place the candles back on their stands and extinguish the candle. Also make sure the four candles on the side of the altar are extinguished as soon as the recessional song is finished.



## Responsibilities by Parts of the Mass

### A. Before Mass:

- Altar Servers should sign in first in the Conference Room in the narthex area. There is a separate Altar Server sign-in sheet that you need to sign and select which position you wish to serve during Mass.
- If you are the first altar server to arrive, check to see if the altar candles have been lit. If not, use one of the strikers to light the four altar candles.
- If you are an *Acolyte*, light the processional candle located in the sanctuary and proceed to the narthex.
- If you are the *Book-Cross Bearer*, remove the processional cross from its holder outside the entrance doors and proceed to the narthex.
- All should gather in the conference room off of the narthex to join in prayer with the priest, deacon and other liturgical ministers.

### B. Entrance Procession:

- *Book-Cross Bearer* will start the procession. Be careful. *The cross is very tall and make sure it does not hit the "Exit" Sign.*
- *Acolytes* will walk together behind the book bearer.
- *Book-Cross Bearer* and one *Acolyte* will go to the right of the sanctuary; the other *Acolyte* will go to the left side of the sanctuary. Bow your heads when the priest does.
- *Book-Cross Bearer* will place the cross in the stand on the right side of the sanctuary.

### C. Sanctuary Seating:

- Altar Servers will be seated in the chairs to the left of the altar.

### D. Introductory Rite:

- When the priest is about to say the Opening Prayer ("Let us pray"), the *Book-Cross Bearer* will hold the Sacramentary for the priest. Book bearer approaches and bows to the priest. Hold it at a level where the priest can easily read it. Do not stand in front of the priest. *Stand to the priest's left.*

### E. Gospel Acclamation

- When the choir is singing the "Alleluia" and as soon as the priest stands, the two *Acolytes* will walk with the candles on each side of the priest or deacon. The *Acolytes* will stand across from each other next to the ambo – alongside of the priest or deacon. They will face each other and hold the candles during the reading of the Gospel. When the Gospel reading is finished, return the candles to their holders and take your seats.

### F. Offertory – Preparation of the altar before Presentation of Gifts

- During the Offertory, the *Acolytes* will remove the Book of Gospels and the stand and place them on the lower shelf of the credence table.
- The *Book-Cross Bearer* is responsible for setting the corporal on the altar. The corporal will be located at the credence table.
- The *Book-Cross Bearer* will also place the Sacramentary on the left side of the altar.
- The *Acolytes* will place the chalices and small water pitcher on the altar.

#### G. Preparation of the altar at the Presentation of Gifts:

##### Duties of the *Acolytes*:

- Both *Acolytes* will accompany the priest and deacon to receive the wine and hosts. If you are given the bowl, head to the left of the altar; *do not place the bowl on the altar*. Wait for the priest to return to the altar and hand the bowl directly to the priest. If you are given the wine, hand it to the deacon/priest.
- As soon as the priest starts to fill the chalices with wine, *Acolytes* should be ready with a bowl, water and hand towel for the priest's fingers. After the priest has filled the chalices, he will turn to the *Acolytes* to rinse his hands. Be sure to walk forward to the priest. One server will hold the bowl/towel and the priest will wash his hands.
- The other acolyte will take the empty flagon and cruet away from the altar and place them on the credence table at the right of the altar.

#### H. Prayer over the Gifts:

- **Ring gong 3 times slowly when Father raises the hosts and wine**
- When the community concludes saying, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name..." **all altar servers will kneel** at their seats.

#### I. The Lord's Prayer:

- If Father asks the children to come forward around the altar to say the Lord's Prayer, then the altar servers should:
  - Assist in welcoming all children to the altar.
  - Take a position near the candles at the altar so as to insure that children do not bump the candles.
  - Disperse around the circle formed at the altar to hold the children's hands.
  - Always let the children hold the priest's hands.

#### J. Sign of Peace:

- All altar servers should remain in the sanctuary. Please *do not go down* for the Sign of Peace with your family.

#### K. Communion Rite:

- After the sign of peace, the *Acolytes* should take the bowls from the credence table and place them on the altar.

**L. Receiving Communion:**

- Line up as far over on the sanctuary. All altar servers should receive the Body of Christ. If you choose not to receive the Precious Blood, just cross your arms. After you receive Communion, kneel in front of your seat and say your personal prayer before you clean up the altar.

**M. At the Beginning of Communion**

- At the beginning of Communion, the *Book-Cross Bearer* should fold and remove the corporal, and place it on the credence table.
- The *Book-Cross Bearer* should remove the Sacramentary Book from the altar.
- An *Acolyte* should remove Father's chalice from the altar and place it on the credence table.
- Then go back and kneel until the Eucharist is placed in the Tabernacle.

**N. Recessional:**

- The priest will stand to say the Prayer After Communion. The *Book-Cross Bearer* will hold the Sacramentary for the priest.
- Once the priest approaches and kisses the altar, the *Book-Cross Bearer* will retrieve the cross from the holder; *Acolytes* will retrieve the candles from the holders and then line up for the recession.
- *Book-Cross Bearer* will lead the recessional, followed by *Candle Bearers*.

**O. After Mass:**

- *Book-Cross Bearer* will return the cross to the stand at the rear of the church.
- *Acolytes* will return to the sanctuary and place the candles back on their stands and extinguish the candle. *Please wait for the final hymn to be done before doing this.*
- One of the *Acolytes* should also extinguish the four altar candles.
- Return to the Altar Server Room and return your alb and cincture and make sure to hang them behind the correct size. Please do not throw them on the floor.

## GLOSSARY

Below are some terms with which Altar Servers should be familiar:



**Alb:** A white robe worn by deacons, priests and sometimes by altar servers during Mass.

**Ambo:** The stand used to proclaim the Readings, Gospel and Homily.



**Cassock:** The black garment worn by the altar server under the surplice.

**Chalice:** The cup used by the priest to consecrate the wine during Mass.



**Chasuble:** The outer garment worn by the priest over his stole and alb. There are a variety of colors to fit the various seasons and feasts of the Church.



**Ciborium:** The vessel used for distributing Holy Communion and for storing consecrated hosts in the Tabernacle.

**Credence table:** The table at the rear of the altar on which the chalice, water, bowls, goblets, towels and sometimes hosts are kept.

**Cruet:** The vessel that holds the water which is added to the wine during Mass.

**Flagon:** The large vessel that holds the wine.

**Gift table:** Located in the center aisle at the rear of the Church, this table holds the bread and wine which is brought up from the congregation during the Preparation of the Altar and Gifts.

**Gospel book:** A book containing Gospel readings that the deacon carries in the procession.

**Holy oils:** The three types of blessed oil (used for baptisms, confirmation and the anointing of the sick) stored in bottles at the rear of the altar.

**Host:** The consecrated body of Christ.

**Incense:** A mixture of aromatic spices burned in the censor. The smoke rising up symbolizes our prayers rising up to God as a “fragrant offering.”

**Incense boat:** A small container of incense with a spoon for scooping. It is held in the left hand by the thurifer while he or she swings the censor with the right hand.

**Lavabo bowl:** This is the bowl that holds the water used by the priest when he washes his hands during the *lavabo* – the ritual of hand washing during the Preparation of the Gifts.

**Lectionary:** A book of Scripture readings used at Mass and placed on the Ambo.

**Purificator:** The cloth napkins used to wipe the chalice and other cups for Communion.

**Ring of the Gong:** A signal to the congregation that the Consecration is taking place, for those that can not see.

**Sacramentary:** The book of prayers for the Mass used by the priest for the opening prayer, the Eucharistic Prayer and the closing prayer.

**Sanctuary:** The area of the Church where the altar and ambo are located.

**Sacristy:** The room where the clergy and servers prepare themselves for the service.

**Tabernacle:** The sacred container located next to the altar used for keeping consecrated hosts in reservation.

**Thurible:** A container holding incense that is swung from a chain (used for funerals and special liturgies, such as Christmas, during Holy Week and the Easter season.)

**Thurifer:** The server who swings the thurible and takes care of it during Mass.

## ST. TARCISIUS

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Tarcisius was a twelve-year-old acolyte during one of the fierce Roman persecutions of the third century, probably during that of Valerian. Each day, from a secret meeting place in the catacombs where Christians gathered for Mass, a deacon would be sent to the prisons to carry the Eucharist to those Christians condemned to die. At one point, there was no deacon to send and so St. Tarcisius, an acolyte, was sent carrying the "Holy Mysteries" to those in prison.

On the way, he was stopped by boys his own age who were not Christians but knew him as a playmate and lover of games. He was asked to join their games, but this time he refused and the crowd of boys noticed that he was carrying something. Somehow, he was also recognized as a Christian, and the small gang of boys, anxious to view the Christian "Mysteries," became a mob and turned upon Tarcisius with fury. He went down under the blows, and it is believed that a fellow Christian drove off the mob and rescued the young acolyte.

The mangled body of Tarcisius was carried back to the catacombs, but the boy died on the way from his injuries. He was buried in the cemetery of St. Callistus, and his relics are claimed by the church of San Silvestro in Capite.

In the fourth century, Pope St. Damasus wrote a poem about this "boy-martyr of the Eucharist" and says that, like another St. Stephen, he suffered a violent death at the hands of a mob rather than give up the Sacred Body to "raging dogs." His story became well known when Cardinal Wiseman made it a part of his novel *Fabiola*, in which the story of the young acolyte is dramatized and a very moving account given of his martyrdom and death.

Tarcisius, one of the patron saints of altar servers, has always been an example of youthful courage and devotion, and his story was one that was told again and again to urge others to a like heroism in suffering for their faith. In the *Passion of Pope Stephen*, written in the sixth century, Tarcisius is said to be an acolyte of the pope himself and, if so, this explains the great veneration in which he was held and the reason why he was chosen for so difficult a mission.

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