

ABOUT ALTAR SERVERS

Dear Altar Servers, you are, in fact, already apostles of Jesus! When you take part in the Liturgy by carrying out your altar service, you offer a witness to all. Your absorption, the devotion that wells up from your heart and is expressed in gestures, in song, in the responses: if you do it correctly and not absent-mindedly, then in a certain way your witness is one that moves people.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the bond of friendship with Jesus. You are very close to Jesus in the Eucharist, and this is the most important sign of his friendship for each one of us. Do not forget it.

-excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Altar Servers, August 2, 2006

GUILD OF ALTAR SERVERS, UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF SAINT STEPHEN, DEACON AND MARTYR

WHAT IS THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF ST. STEPHEN?

The Archconfraternity of St. Stephen is a guild established for the instruction and sanctification of altar servers. It is most commonly known as "The Guild of St. Stephen."

The objectives of the Guild are threefold:

1. The sanctification of the server by teaching him that to serve in the sanctuary is a great privilege.
2. Instructing the server in the rubrics (i.e. the movements of the liturgy).
3. Encouraging the server to understand the meaning and the purpose of the ceremonies in which he takes part.

HISTORY

THE guild was formed in March, 1905, by Father Hamilton MacDonald, chaplain to the Sacred Heart Convent, Hammersmith, by permission of the Archbishop of Westminster, the late Cardinal Bourne, and it was blessed by His Holiness Pope Pius X in the following November.

On the 4th December, 1906, the Holy Father erected the Guild into an archconfraternity "prima primaria" having the power to affiliate to itself other similar Guilds outside the Archdiocese of Westminster in the British Isles.

On the 19th February, 1934, His Holiness Pope Pius XI extended this privilege throughout the British Empire.

MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP of the Guild is open to any boy or man, without any limit of age, who can serve Mass, and who has shown proof of a desire to conform to the objectives of the Guild. It is recommended that a server, after admission to the Sanctuary serve at least six months before being admitted to membership of the Guild. The local director of the church decides whether a candidate is eligible, and is empowered to perform the ceremony of enrolment according to the form prescribed on page 2 and to invest the server with the Guild medal. The medal and cord may be obtained from the General Secretariat.

Every member on enrolment promises to observe the following rules:

1. To serve at the Altar reverently, intelligently and punctually.
2. To make the short acts of preparation before, and of thanksgiving after, serving Mass.
3. To observe silence in the sacristy, and great reverence in the Sanctuary.
4. To recite daily the Guild prayer.

Postulants and members are recommended to receive Holy Communion as often as possible, particularly when serving Mass. Enrolled members should always wear the Guild medal when serving.

Unless taking part in the ceremonies, members are recommended always to use a mass guide when assisting at Mass.

THE GUILD'S SYSTEM OF PROMOTION

Service at the altar is a serious responsibility. Altar Servers must demonstrate commitment at all times:

1. Devotion: a commitment to what we believe
 - a. A love of God and the Catholic Faith
 - b. A strong desire to do God's work and serve his people
 - c. A willingness to conduct yourself in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord
2. Dedication: a commitment to how we act
 - a. The commitment to fully meet the requirements of the service for which you have been chosen
 - b. The commitment to fulfil your duties when you are scheduled
 - c. The commitment to help the entire altar server team to do well
3. Discipline: a commitment to how we serve
 - a. The self-control that allows Altar Servers to carry out their duties with precision
 - b. The determination to do what needs to be done, the right way every time

- c. The desire to be prepared, to arrive early to help prepare for Mass, and to ensure that the rest of the Altar Server Team is prepared
- d. The initiative to pay attention and think about what they will do next
- e. The ambition to improve each time they serve. Asking at the end of each Mass, "What could I have done better?"
- f. The motivation to listen to coaching with an open mind and a willing heart

The most disciplined Altar Servers are rewarded with more responsibility. The serving ranks within the Guild are:

1. **Aspirant:** An Aspirant is a candidate that is learning how to become an Altar Server. Aspirants will be scheduled at the Masses they wish to serve. Aspirants observe and learn from the Altar Servers. After 6 months of service, the aspirant may be promoted to the level of a fully qualified altar server.
 - a. Aspirants must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:
 - i. The Lord's Prayer
 - ii. Lamb of God
 - iii. Hail Mary
 - iv. Mysteries of the Holy Rosary
 - v. The Guild Prayer
 - b. Following training, aspirants must be able to identify the following parts of the church:
 - i. Altar
 - ii. Ambo
 - iii. Credence Table
 - iv. Narthex
 - v. Nave
 - vi. Sacristy
 - vii. Sanctuary
 - viii. Tabernacle
 - c. Following training, aspirants must be able to identify the following Sacramentals:
 - i. Roman Missal
 - ii. Chalice
 - iii. Ciborium
 - iv. Corporal
 - v. Cruets
 - vi. Lavabo
2. **Junior Altar Server:** Once an aspirant becomes certified, they are promoted to Junior Altar Server. Junior Altar Servers are learning new parts of the Mass and new responsibilities. In this first year, they are demonstrating to themselves and to the community their skills, knowledge and spiritual maturity in their service at the Altar. The Junior Server:
 - a. Must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:

- i. The Lord's Prayer
 - ii. Lamb of God
 - iii. Sanctus
 - iv. Gloria
 - v. Hail Mary
 - vi. Mysteries of the Holy Rosary
 - vii. Guild Prayer
 - b. Must be able to identify the following parts of the Church:
 - i. Altar
 - ii. Ambo
 - iii. Ambry
 - iv. Baptismal Font
 - v. Choir
 - vi. Credence Table
 - vii. Narthex
 - viii. Nave
 - ix. Sacristy
 - x. Sanctuary
 - xi. Tabernacle
 - c. Must be able to identify the following Sacramentals:
 - i. Roman Missal
 - ii. Lectionary
 - iii. Chalice
 - iv. Ciborium
 - v. Corporal
 - vi. Cruet
 - vii. Finger Towel
 - viii. Lavabo
 - ix. Paten
 - x. Pyx
 - d. Must be able to demonstrate the following:
 - i. Profound Bow
 - ii. Head Bow
 - iii. Genuflection
 - iv. How to light candles using a candle-lighter
 - v. How to properly extinguish a candle
 - vi. When and how to present cruets to the Priest
 - vii. How to present the Lavabo and the Finger Towel with one server and with two servers
3. **Senior Altar Server:** Senior Altar Servers are promoted to this position based upon their proven track record of service. They may learn new responsibilities for special services, but their competence at Sunday Mass is well established. This opportunity is normally offered once a server has attained at least 3 years of Service; however, in special circumstances, due to demonstrated knowledge,

maturity and leadership potential, servers may be nominated for promotion to Senior level by the Guild Director earlier than the 3-year mark. The Senior Server:

- a. Must meet all Junior Altar Server requirements
 - b. Must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:
 - i. The Lord's Prayer
 - ii. Lamb of God
 - iii. Sanctus
 - iv. Gloria
 - v. Nicene Creed
 - vi. Confiteor
 - vii. Hail Mary
 - viii. All other responses of the Mass
 - ix. Guild Prayer
 - x. Describe the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary
 - xi. Describe the Decades of each of the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary
 - c. Must be able to identify all referenced Vestments
 - d. Must be able to identify all referenced parts of the Church.
 - e. Must be able to identify all referenced Sacramentals and describe their uses.
 - f. Must be able to demonstrate all the postures, processes, duties and responsibilities during a Mass.
 - g. Must directly participate in the direct training of a more junior server.
4. **Lead Altar Server:** Some Senior Altar Servers will demonstrate an exceptional commitment to leadership in their service. They reach out to newer servers to help them learn. They drive their Altar Server teams to excel. These servers may be recognized as Lead Altar Servers and given responsibilities beyond what other servers are asked or permitted to do. These Servers are the peer leaders in the Ministry; they demonstrate the greatest knowledge, expertise, spiritual maturity and exceptional leadership potential. Lead Servers constitute a very small population of our Servers, normally no more than one or two for every Mass Group; therefore, not all servers will become Leads. Candidates must be nominated the Guild Director before being installed into this position.

BEING AN ALTAR SERVER

Training

Training will be scheduled regularly for all new altar servers. Once servers have completed the initial training, they will be able to begin serving as an Apprentice. After a server has qualified to serve, they will be added to the regular altar server schedule. All servers continue to participate in ongoing training through:

1. The Guild's system of promotion

2. Training resources
3. Regular practices

Altar servers will be trained to handle all of the tasks assigned to each specific duty. Servers will be required to memorize the prayer responses of the Mass, know the names of the vestments and vessels of the altar, and to learn the Order of the Mass.

Practice

Practice will be held at regular intervals. Practices give every server the occasion to improve their current skills as well as the opportunity to learn new ones.

Currently, servers are required to attend a practice at least once every three months. Servers who fall below this requirement may be excluded from the schedule until they attend practice.

Wherever possible, attempts will be made to offer practice at various times to allow for flexible schedules.

ADVANCEMENT

As servers grow in their knowledge, their skill, and their maturity, they will be recognized through advancement in the Guild's System of Promotion.

Advancement through the levels is not automatic, nor is it guaranteed. Altar Servers will have to prove themselves ready for promotion by demonstrating their Devotion, Dedication, and Discipline.

CONDUCT

GENERAL CONDUCT

Altar Servers should come to Mass prepared to meet the Lord in Holy Communion. They should consider whether they ought to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation ahead of time, and, if needed, make appropriate arrangements.

Once an Altar Server puts on the cassock and surplice, their conduct always must be professional and reverent. From the time they put on the cassock and surplice before Mass until the time they take it off after Mass, an Altar Server is "on duty".

Altar Servers must always show respect for the sanctity of the church and the sacred vessels. The care of the vessels and vestments is a primary responsibility of the Altar Server.

SCHEDULING

You will be scheduled for the Masses you prefer, except in extraordinary circumstances, or if you request otherwise. If you are available to substitute at another Mass, please let the Guild Director know.

Servers should work with their parents to ensure that they are serving at the Masses for which they are scheduled. However, emergencies sometimes happen. Every server is required to make sure that they inform the Guild Director if they are unable to serve.

ARRIVAL

Altar Servers must arrive early to prepare for Mass. It is important to arrive before your designated serving time, a minimum of 15 minutes prior to Mass beginning. There are several duties that a server must perform before Mass. Often, there is some additional instructions regarding that day's liturgy that the priest and deacon may need to give to the servers.

All servers are responsible for signing in when they serve. This should be your first duty before Mass. Locate the Altar Server Book in the Sacristy. Sign in under today's Mass.

APPEARANCE AND DRESS

All servers are expected to wear "Sunday clothes" at the Sunday Masses. Modesty should be preferred over fashion. Shorts are not allowed.

Shoes must be clean dress-style shoes. Black dress shoes should be worn whenever possible. Athletic shoes, beach sandals, and flip-flops are not appropriate.

Shoes should have a conservative heel, and good traction. Worn soles and high heels present a real hazard for tripping and slipping.

Servers should refrain from excessive or flashy jewellery. Watches may be worn if they are not a distraction to the server or others. Watch alarms and cell phones must be silenced. It is greatly preferred that cell phones not be carried while serving.

Short hair is strongly preferred. Long hair must be very neatly presented so as not to fall into or on any sacramental.

POSTURES

The posture of the Altar Server should be one of near invisibility. If people are paying attention at Mass, they should not even notice you. If someone looks at you, they should see a server who is reverent and paying attention. It should remind them that they, too, should be paying attention to the Mass, and not to you.

In general, your posture should be confident, but calm. You should look reverent and prayerful, but comfortable. Move smoothly, but deliberately, not slowly.

Always look "where the action is". When someone is speaking or reading part of the Mass, you are listening to them. When the Eucharist is being consecrated, you are looking at it. When the choir is singing, you are singing with them.

Make no distracting motions or noises. Do not wave, smile, or wink at people. Friends and family will be very proud of you. They may smile or even wave at you. Impress

them further by attending to your duties at Mass without acknowledging them. You will have time to visit with them after Mass.

Coughs and sneezes should be covered with a handkerchief or facial tissue. Make a habit of bringing them with you in case they are needed. Suppress the urge to yawn.

Do not leave your place during Mass for any reason. Bodily needs should be attended to before and after Mass.

If you are holding anything, you are excused from the hand motions at that time. For example, the server holding the candle does not make the triple sign of the cross before the Gospel reading.

STANDING

When standing, stand up straight. Balance your weight evenly on both feet, but do not lock your knees.

Whenever you are not holding anything, fold your hands with palms together, in the "prayer position". Point your fingertips upward. They should be held comfortably at about the middle of your chest.

If you are holding something, hold the item firmly with one or both hands, as needed. The free hand, if you have one, should cover your heart. Grasp items firmly and deliberately. When handing something to someone else, make sure they have a firm grip so as not to drop it.

PROCESSING

The procession is a sacred act. It is more than just a way for the priest to get to the altar. It is a very formal way of welcoming and glorifying Christ himself into our presence.

When you process, walk at a deliberate, but respectful pace. It should be just slower than you normally walk. If you are not the lead in the procession, keep pace with the lead.

When carrying something while processing, hold it reverently with both hands and slightly in front of you, not resting on your chest.

WALKING

Walk. Never, run. You are the model of reverence, calm and grace. Walk deliberately to your station. Watch for others in your way and plan ahead to step around them. Never get in the way of the priests or any sacred minister. Hands are folded prayerfully or firmly grasping whatever you may be carrying.

SITTING

While sitting, sit up straight, not slouching. Feet should be directly in front of you. Legs should never be crossed. Keep your legs and feet still. Hands are folded prayerfully or are resting comfortably in your lap.

Respond to prayers and sing songs deliberately, and fully participate in the Mass.

KNEELING

While kneeling, keep your torso up straight, not slouching or resting on your feet. If kneeling behind a chair or pew, do not lean over it. Feet should be directly behind you. Keep your legs and feet still. Hands are folded prayerfully.

BOWING

There are two types of bows.

The bow of the head: Lower your chin to your chest and hold it there briefly. There are several times in the Mass when this is done. Also, anytime a priest bows to you, return the bow with a brief head bow.

The profound bow (full bow): Bend at the waste and bow forward (like a Japanese greeting). This is used during the Profession of Faith and a few other times.

GENUFLECTING

With your back straight and your hands folded prayerfully, lower yourself onto your right knee, and hold that position briefly.

NOTE: We only genuflect to the real presence of Christ. Genuflecting to the tabernacle, whenever Jesus is reserved in the tabernacle, is required. Our Lord's presence in the tabernacle is usually signified by the red sanctuary light. When it is not lit, the tabernacle is empty, as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday