

OLPH Altar Server Duties and Procedures – Updates – November 2023

The following is an overview of the altar server duties and procedures at OLPH Parish.
A few changes and reminders are highlighted throughout.

Positions	Duties
Altar Server #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries candle in procession and recession • Holds candle during Gospel • Assists Celebrant in receiving gifts at offertory • Brings water cruet to Celebrant • Carries lavabo dish and pours water for Celebrant to wash his fingers • Rings the bells
Altar Server #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries candle in procession and recession • Holds Roman Missal for Celebrant to read prayers • Holds candle during Gospel • Assists Celebrant in receiving gifts at offertory • Brings wine cruet to Celebrant • Carries finger towel when Celebrant washes fingers
Altar Server #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries processional cross in procession and recession • Brings water cruet to Celebrant after Communion • Clears chalice and ciboria from the altar after Communion and takes them to the sacristy
Altar Server #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepares altar, during offertory hymn/collection, for Liturgy of the Eucharist • Carries candle to back of church at offertory hymn/collection and leads procession with offerings to the altar • Clears Roman Missal and missal stand from the altar after Communion and takes them to the sacristy
Altar Server #5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepares altar, during offertory hymn/collection, for Liturgy of the Eucharist • Carries candle to back of church during offertory hymn/collection and then leads procession with offerings to the altar
Altar Servers #6, #7, #8, #9, #10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually on special occasions (e.g., Christmas, Easter) • Have no specific duties but reverent participation in the Mass is appreciated

If there are less than five altar servers at Mass, then the duties are performed by the altar server above in position.

Preparations before Mass

Altar servers should arrive at church 15-20 minute before Mass to prepare.

Upon arrival and before going to the sacristy, altar servers should sign in on the form located on the ledge behind the back pew on the left-hand side of the church.

Once in the sacristy, firstly, altar servers will put on cassock and surplice. A sign hanging below the bulletin board in the server's sacristy will indicate whether to wear the black or red cassock. Because altar servers are adding two layers of clothing, it is suggested to wear lighter clothing underneath. Bulky sweaters or hoodies should be removed.

Altar servers should take the time to check the length of their cassock. It should be at ankle length or just above the tops of their feet. Any longer is a tripping hazard and will get dirty and damaged dragging on the floor. The surplice should be mid-hip length.

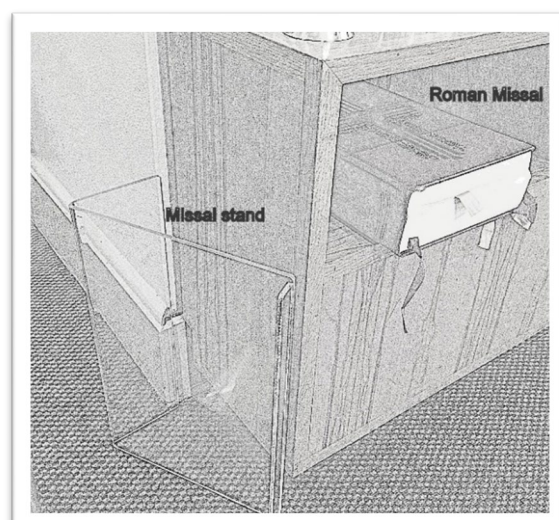
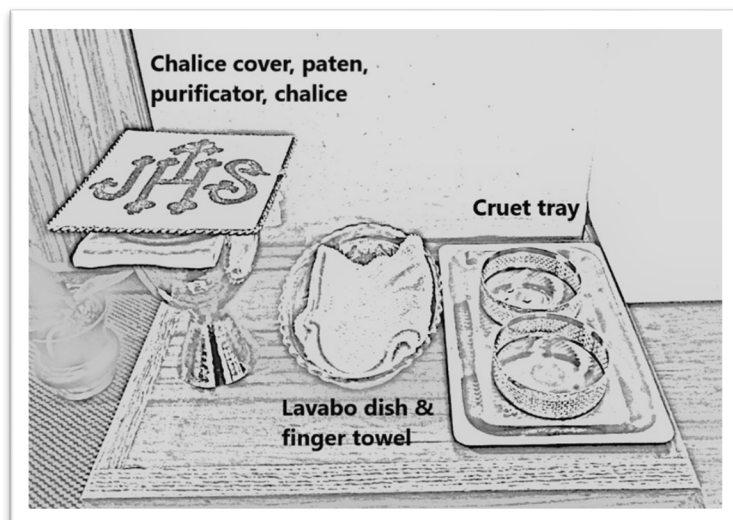
Altar servers with long hair should wear it tied back for safety around candles and to prevent the temptation to play with their hair during Mass. New hair elastics are available in the servers' sacristy.

Altar servers should not wear perfume or cologne or strong scents, or chew gum at Mass.

Once they have put on their vestments, then they will do the following set up for Mass.

Place in the Sanctuary on the credence table (see images below):

- Tray for water and wine cruets
- One chalice and purificator cloth
- Paten with large host
- Chalice cover
- Lavabo dish and finger towel
- Roman Missal in shelf below credence table
- Missal stand on floor next to credence table



Also to be placed in Sanctuary are:

- Bells on corner of top step near Altar Server #1's seat
- Lectionary on lectern, opened to the day's readings
- Book of Gospels on the altar in the centre
- Tabernacle key on altar in front of tabernacle
- Binder with Prayers of the Faithful at Reader's seat
- Small Roman Missal for the Celebrant at Altar Server #2's seat

Place at back of church on small table in centre aisle:

- Water and wine cruets
- Ciborium with Communion hosts
- Small ciborium with low gluten Communion hosts

Even if all of these have already been placed out before altar servers arrive, it is still the altar servers' duty to check that everything is in its place.

The altar servers present will decide among themselves which position they will perform. Altar Servers #1 and #2 are usually more experienced altar servers, as they are directly assisting the Celebrant.

Once all the set up is completed and 10 minutes before the start of Mass, one altar server lights the altar candles by the tabernacle and the processional candles by the altar.

Five minutes before the start of Mass, the altar servers head to the back of the church, from the sacristy and down the side aisle, carrying the processional cross and candles as appropriate.

[If there are only two altar servers, the cross is placed on the stand in the sanctuary, and only the candles are carried in the procession. If there is only one altar server, only the cross is carried in the procession.]

The candles should always be held in an upright position, with hands spaced apart to provide balance.

Procession

At the Celebrant's signal, the altar servers line up in the centre aisle:

- Altar Server #3 in front, carrying the cross
- Followed by Altar Servers #1 and #2, side-by-side, carrying the candles
- Followed by Altar Servers #4 and #5, side-by-side, etc.

Altar servers who are standing side-by-side, line up according to which side of the Sanctuary they'll be sitting – odd numbered altar servers on the left and even numbered altar servers on the right.

At the Celebrant's signal after the entrance hymn has started, the procession begins, with Altar Server #3 setting the pace – a slow walk up the aisle.

As they approach the bottom step of the Sanctuary:

- Altar Servers #3, #1 and #2 proceed directly up the steps to place the cross and candles on the stands and then go to their seats (**Altar Servers #1 and #2 should always bow to the altar together before going up the steps to their seats on either side of the Celebrant's seat**)
- All other altar servers pause at the bottom step of the Sanctuary and bow to the altar before going up to their seats.
- Altar servers remain standing for the opening prayer.

During Mass, all altar servers while walking, standing or kneeling and not holding anything should keep their hands together in the prayer position with fingers pointing upwards, as a sign of reverence.

Holding the book of prayers for the Celebrant

At the appropriate time(s), the Celebrant will pick up the small Roman Missal and hand it to Altar Server #2, who should go down one step and stand directly in front of the priest while holding up the Roman Missal for the Celebrant to read from. They hold it from the bottom with fingers at the front to hold open the pages and thumbs propping up the book at the back.

Before and during the Gospel

When the congregation stands for the Gospel Acclamation, Altar Server #1 and Altar Server #2 go to the altar with the priest and pick up their candles. They remain at the altar until the priest has picked up the Book of Gospels from the altar and turns to go to the lectern. They then walk together to the lectern with Server #2 in front of the priest and Server #1 behind him. They stand on either side of the lectern facing each other across the lectern. **They should leave some space between the candles and the lectern.**

After the congregation's response at the end of the Gospel, they return the candles to the stands and return to their seats, bowing together to the altar before going up the steps to their seats. All altar servers remain standing until they are all ready to sit together.

Preparation of the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and presentation of the offertory gifts

The Mass has two parts:

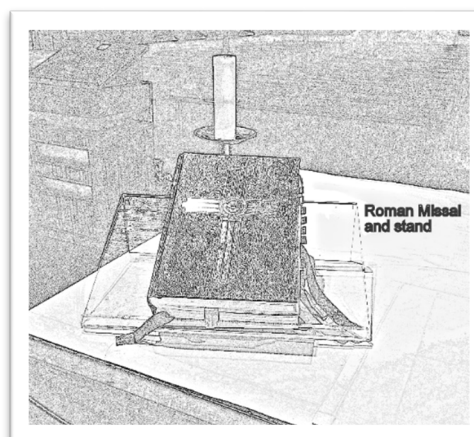
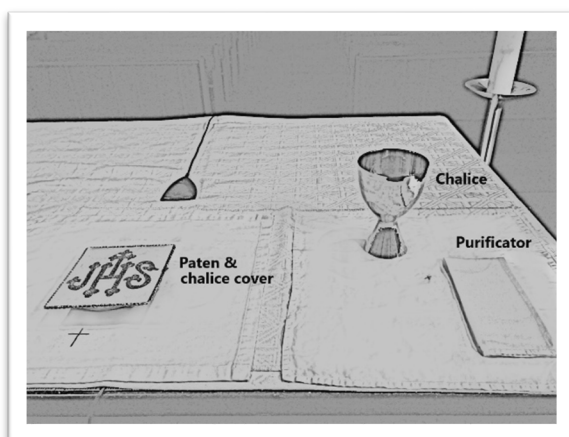
- Liturgy of the Word – prayers, readings, homily
- Liturgy of the Eucharist – consecration, prayers, Communion

Starting with the Liturgy of the Word, there should only be the Book of the Gospels on the altar.

Immediately following the Prayers of the Faithful, the altar is reverently prepared for the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

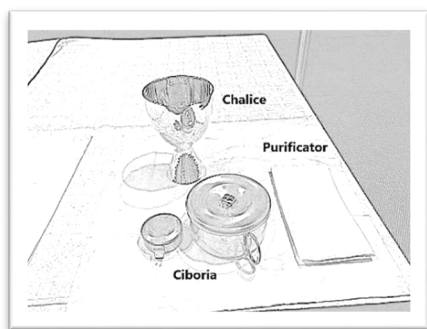
- When the congregation sits down and the offertory hymn starts, Altar Server #4 and Altar Server #5 go to the credence table
- One altar server picks up the chalice with the purificator, paten with the large host, and chalice cover on top, holding chalice with one hand and the top of the chalice cover with the other so it doesn't fall off; and one altar server takes the missal stand from the floor
- Together they go to the altar and place the chalice on the back right-hand corner of the altar and the missal stand on the back left-hand side of the altar on an angle facing towards the centre
- The altar server who carried the chalice then takes the paten, with the chalice cover, off the chalice and places it in the centre of the altar and takes the purificator off the chalice and lays it flat to the right of the chalice (see image below)
- The altar server who carried the missal stand returns to the credence table and takes the Roman Missal from the shelf and places it on the missal stand on the altar (see image below)
- Together they bow to the altar
- Then each picks up a processional candle from their stands, and they walk side-by-side down the centre aisle to the back of the church
- They wait at the back of the church until the ushers have finished the collection, and when they are ready to bring up the gifts, the two altar servers lead the offertory procession back to the altar, walking side-by-side up the centre aisle
- They proceed directly up to the Sanctuary, place the candles on the stands, and return to their seats

[If there are only four altar servers, Altar Server #3 and Altar Server #4 perform these duties. If there are only three altar servers, Altar Server #2 and altar Server #3 perform these duties. Should there be only two altar servers, Altar Server #1 and Altar Server #2 prepare the altar but do not carry the candles to the back of the church for the offertory procession.]



Offertory procession and receiving the gifts

Altar servers #1 and #2 go down with the Celebrant to help with receiving the gifts. They stand on either side and slightly behind him. When the priest receives the water and wine cruets, he will turn and hand them to one of the altar servers; that altar server waits to receive both cruets and then takes them to the tray on the credence table and waits there for the other server to join. When the priest receives the large and small ciboria, he will hand them to the other altar server; that altar server waits to receive both ciboria and then places them on the altar in front of the chalice (see image below) and then joins the other altar server at the credence table.



Consecration and Eucharistic Prayer

When the Celebrant is walking to the altar after receiving the gifts:

- Altar Server #1 picks up the water cruet
- Altar Server #2 picks up the wine cruet
- Holding the cruets cupped in their hands with the handles facing away from them, the two altar servers walk together to side of the altar, and stand side-by-side facing the priest
- The priest will then take the cruets to pour the wine and water into the chalice
- When both altar servers again have the cruets in their hands, together they bow to the priest and then return the cruets to the credence table
- Altar Server #1 now holds the water cruet by the handle, in order to pour it, and in the other hand holds the lavabo dish
- Altar Server #2 holds the finger towel unfolded in both hands
- Together they return to the side of the altar
- Altar Server #1 holds out the lavabo to the priest, who places his hands over it, and then pours water over the priest's fingers
- When he removes his hands, Altar Server #2 hands him the finger towel
- When both servers again have the items in their hands, together they bow to the priest and return the items to the credence table
- Together they return to their seats

When the congregation kneels down following the “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the altar servers also kneel in front of their seats. After kneeling down, altar servers should pull the cassock off the heels of their shoes, so they don’t fall when standing up later. Altar servers kneel in an upright position (not sitting back on their heels).

During the Eucharistic Prayer, Altar Server #1 listens for the words that signal the time to ring the bells:

- “This is my body which will be given up for you” – When the Celebrant raises the host, Altar Server #1 rings the bells three times, with a pause after the first and second rings (3-4 quick twists of the wrist, pause for 2-3 seconds, 3-4 quick twists of the wrist, pause for 2-3 seconds, 3-4 quick twists of the wrist)
- “Do this in memory of me” – When the Celebrant raises the chalice, Altar Server #1 rings the bells three times, with a pause after the first and second rings (3-4 quick twists of the wrist, pause for 2-3 seconds, 3-4 quick twists of the wrist, pause for 2-3 seconds, 3-4 quick twists of the wrist)

Sign of Peace

Typically, altar servers offer the sign of peace to each other and all others in the Sanctuary. Common practice currently is to bow or make a similar gesture, instead of shaking hands.

Communion

After the sign of peace, altar servers return to stand in front of their seats, except Altar Servers #1 and #2 stand at the bottom of the steps in front of their seats, in preparation to receive Communion. The priest will walk to each person in the Sanctuary to give them Communion. Once all the altar servers have received Communion, they can sit down.

After Communion

When the Celebrant returns to the Sanctuary after distributing Communion:

- Altar Server #3 goes to the credence table, picks up the water cruet and takes it to the altar
- The priest will either take the cruet and pour water into the chalice or will hold the chalice out for Altar Server #3 to pour the water into it
- Altar Server #3 returns the cruet to the tray on the credence table and then returns to stand next to the altar
- Once the Celebrant has finished cleaning the chalice, he will place it with the purificator, paten and chalice cover on top at the side of the altar
- Altar Server #3 picks these up and carries them into the Sacristy and places them on the counter
- Altar Server #4 goes to the altar, closes the Roman Missal and picks up the missal stand with the Roman Missal on it and carries them into the Sacristy and places them on the counter; if unable to carry both items together, the altar server can take the Roman Missal first to the sacristy and then return to take the missal stand
- Once they have cleared everything from the altar, Altar Servers #3 and #4 then return to their seats

Recessional

After the final blessing and the closing hymn starts, when the Celebrant starts to approach the altar:

- Altar Server #3 takes the cross from the stand
- Altar Servers #1 and #2 pick up their candles
- All altar servers, led by Altar Server #3, go down and line up in the centre aisle facing the altar.

(Do not wait for the Celebrant to give a signal.)

From the centre aisle, when the Celebrant bows, altar servers also bow and then turn and proceed to walk down the aisle to the back of the church. Altar Server #3 again sets the pace – a slow walk.

Once at the back of the church, Altar Servers # 1 and #2 can blow out the candles, and all altar servers walk up the side aisle to the sacristy.

After Mass has concluded

Once the closing hymn has finished, one altar server uses the candle snuffer to put out the altar candles next to the tabernacle, and all altar servers bring back into the sacristy everything that had been set out before the start of Mass.

Altar servers should know when to perform each of their duties and should not wait for reminders or signals from the priest.

A copy of these procedures will be posted in the servers' sacristy for reference before serving at Mass.

Thank you!