

# St. Athanasius and Sacred Heart Parishes

## Altar Server Guide

For Sunday and Saturday Vigil Masses<sup>1</sup>

Optimized for Three Altar Servers<sup>2</sup>

December 6, 2015

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<sup>1</sup> Incensation and the specific requirements of special masses, e.g., weddings and funerals are beyond the scope of this document.

<sup>2</sup> Additional servers beyond the Vessels Server, the Crucifix Server, and the Book Server can walk in procession with candle, and can help the three primary servers as needed.



**SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE by Fr. Dwight Longenecker<sup>3</sup>:**

“...before we get down to particulars, I want you to know why we have altar servers at all. Do priests need you to bring the bread and the water and wine to the altar? No, we could do that ourselves. Do we need you to carry candles and the cross and hold the book? Not really. The priest is supposed to extend his hands in prayer, so he can't hold the book, but we could just put it on the altar. Do we need you to ring the bell and turn the page and wash our hands? No. We could do all that without you.

“You're not really employed to be useful. You're employed to help lead the worship. As long as you understand that, everything else that we teach you will follow. You see, all of us work together to lead the people of God in the worship of God — it's not just the priest. I rely on you not just to do those particular jobs. Instead, I rely on you for something far greater and nobler and more beautiful and more true.

“Our worship on earth reflects the worship in heaven. What we do here at the holy sacrifice of the Mass is a kind of distant echo of what goes on in heaven. There, the Lamb of God is offered in one timeless and eternal sacrifice. There the saints and angels worship around the throne of the Lamb. In that city there is no sun, moon, or stars, for the Lamb Himself is the light of that city. This altar you see here is a reflection of the altar in heaven. This chalice is a sign of the eternal Precious Blood of the Lamb. This host is, on earth, the sign of the Eternal Bread of heaven. The priest is an icon of Christ the Lord — and who are you? You represent and reflect on earth the heavenly host.

“That's right. I want you to represent the saints and angels. That's why we have children serve the Mass if we can, because you children remind us adults of what the Lord Jesus said: ‘Unless you become like a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.’ So just by being children you remind us what we must be like to become like the saints and angels.

“Therefore, since you represent the heavenly host of saints and angels, I want you to behave as such. Of course, I know that you are not yet saints, and I know you are not angels. You fight with your brothers and sisters. Some of you are bullies and others are cowards. You lie and cheat and have bad thoughts. You disobey your parents and are selfish and unkind. Nevertheless, you have a role to play in the Divine Liturgy, because despite all that, you are called to reflect something greater. You are called from what you are not to become all that you shall be; and if you are struck with a sense of awe at what I am expecting of you, think how *I* feel, for I am a sinner just like you are, and I am called to represent Christ Himself to the people.

“Since all of this is true, this is what we are going to do. First of all, when we come into church, we immediately put on albs and cinctures. These are your working clothes. We will serve in the Lord's temple wearing albs and cinctures and be like the boy Samuel who served in the temple of God with simplicity and goodness. When you move in the house of God, do so with simple solemnity. Not po-faced and pious, but also not silly and jokey. Just go about your business — remembering that you are in the house of God, a serious place for a serious business. As you light the candles, set out the books, and prepare for Mass, remember that the people in the pews are watching you. Your reverence and care and love for what you do will be communicated to them and help them to pray.

“Then, before Mass begins, come back to the sacristy with me. There we will put on our surplices, albs, and vestments. Then we will light the candles, charge the thurible, take our places, and wait for the Divine Liturgy to begin.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/standingonmyhead/what-i-tell-my-altar-servers>

“When you process into church, remember that you are leading the whole people of God into the presence of God. Our little procession harkens back to the procession of David and the priests up into the holy city of Zion. The cross will be lifted high, and you will walk with a solemn and stately posture, for you are leading all of us into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Know where you are going, and move there with the grace of a child and the dignity of a prince. Where you go, we will follow.

“As you sit in the sanctuary, remember that actions speak louder than words. You may not have many tasks to do, but did you know that they also serve who only stand and wait? Simply by your presence, your reverence, your listening to the Word of God with an attentive ear, you will help to lead the worship and encourage those who see you. When you have a task to do, do it with simplicity and confidence, as befits a servant of the King. Remember: If you are sloppy and casual in your attitude and your posture that will be communicated. It will distract people from Christ toward you, and the Mass is not about you any more than it is about me, the priest.

“Remember that what we do at Mass is the most important thing in your life. Everything else comes after that. Seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else will be added to you. Here at Mass you are seeing that beauty, truth, and love are the three most important treasures on earth, and they are three things you cannot buy. Furthermore, while they are most precious, they are also (from a human point of view) most worthless. What you are doing here when you serve at Mass is not a useful thing. There is no payment. There is no reward — except the reward of knowing that your heart is right with God, and that you have spent an hour on the threshold of heaven.

“And if you have learned how to do that, then throughout your life, whatever else happens, you will be most richly blessed.”

### **PRAYER BEFORE MASS:**

Heavenly Father,

I thank You for allowing me to serve You at this Holy Mass.

Help me to be mindful and attentive of my duties,

Never seeking to draw attention to myself,

And only desiring to bring greater glory to You.

Help me to serve You well,

As if this was my first time,

My last time,

My only time.

Amen.



Saint John  
Berchmans

*Saint John Berchmans, patron saint of altar servers, pray for us.*

**ATTENDANCE and PUNCTUALITY:**

- Thank you for volunteering. Your attendance is so important, that you are expected to serve every Mass that you have been scheduled, and to arrive ***at least*** fifteen minutes before Mass starts.
- The Altar Server Coordinator will provide the server schedule. If you need to be away, please let him know in advance.
- It is your responsibility (or your parents') to arrange for a substitute if you must be absent.
- Server duty ends after finishing the cleanup at the end of Mass.

**BEHAVIOR:**

- Do not drink or eat anything (including gum) an hour before Mass. Water and medicines are okay. This is called the "Communion Fast."
- Always be reverent. Remember that you are in a public role serving at the altar of God, and that the church is holy ground. Please do not serve if you have a bad attitude.
- No running, needless talking, gum-chewing, horseplay, etc. Hundreds of eyes are watching you, so people will notice ***everything*** that you do.
- There is no need to be scared. Honest mistakes are okay, but learn from your mistakes. Always ask if you have any questions.
- Pay attention. Do not daydream or be distracted. Always try to anticipate your next step in the Mass. Watch the priest in case he may need to ask you for something. Always be ready in case he asks you to do something different. This is especially the case for visiting priests.

**DRESS:**

- White alb and cincture. (Select the cincture color to match the priest's vestments.)
- Albs should reach the ankles. Shorter than this is unsightly, but longer may cause tripping, so choose carefully. Try to remember your size number for next time.
- Athletic shoes, tennis shoes, sandals, flip-flops, "Crocs," etc. of any kind are ***never*** permitted, even during summer. Please wear dark socks and clean dress shoes, preferably black. If needed, bring your dress shoes in a bag and change into them in the sacristy.

**POSTURE and MOVEMENT:**

- The four primary postures during Mass are walking, standing, sitting and kneeling.<sup>4</sup> Maintain a straight, formal posture in all of these positions.



- Whenever you cross in front of the tabernacle:
  - *Before* and *after* Mass, genuflect (right knee to the floor) in front of the tabernacle.
  - *During* the Mass:
    - If you are not carrying something, bow at the waist in front of the tabernacle.
    - If you are carrying something, make a head bow in front of the tabernacle.
    - If there is no tabernacle in the sanctuary and you are not carrying anything, bow at the waist to the altar.

Always keep your hands in the “Praying Position” while walking or standing unless you are carrying something. Also keep your hands like this during the “Our Father.”

- Hands should be held in the “Praying Position” whenever you are not carrying something. This includes while standing, walking, and even while praying the “Our Father.”
- Do not make the Sign of the Cross if you are carrying something.
- When sitting, sit straight up in your seat, keep hands on your knees, and keep both feet flat on the floor (do not cross your legs).
- The Crucifix Server sets the pace during the processions. Walk much slower than normal, at about half normal walking speed.
- Bow your head whenever the three Divine Persons are named together (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated. This includes during the Readings and the Homily.
- Bow your head to the priest when he finishes washing his hands (he will bow back to you).
- Do not leave the sanctuary during the Sign of Peace, and only exchange the Sign of Peace with those next to you.

### **SET-UP BEFORE EVERY MASS:**

1. In the car on the way to church, begin to think of the importance of your responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Kneeling is not currently done at St. Athanasius.

2. Arrive in the sacristy ***at least*** 15 minutes before Mass begins and sign in on the altar server board.
3. Change into your dress shoes, if necessary.
4. Put on your alb and cincture.
5. Talk to the other servers and determine whom is going to do what:
  - a. Who will be the Vessels Server?
  - b. Who will be the Crucifix Server? This should normally be the tallest server.
  - c. Who will be the Book Server?
6. Light the six altar candles. (Be cautious with fire! Ask the priest or a sacristan to help you if needed.)
7. Light the ambo candles if there are any.
8. Five minutes before Mass begins put the gifts (the bread and wine) on the gift table by the double doors near the back of the church. (The sacristans may have already done this.)

**CLEAN-UP AFTER MASS:**

- ***NEVER*** pour any crumbs from the ciboria or Precious Blood from the chalices down the sink drain. They are Jesus Christ. Ask the priest to consume any crumbs or Precious Blood immediately.
- Extinguish all candles using the candle snuffer or blow very gently. If you blow hard you will blow wax onto the altar cloths, the drip trays, or the floor.
- Place your alb and cincture neatly on their hanger. Try not to let them touch the floor (this is not only to keep them clean, but also because they have been blessed.)



## ALTAR SERVER FUNCTIONS FOR WEEKEND MASS

WHAT & WHEN	THE VESSELS SERVER	THE CRUCIFIX SERVER	THE BOOK SERVER
<b>1. Prayer before Mass</b>	Just before Mass begins, the priest will ask you to pray the <i>Prayer Before Mass</i> with him. This prayer is on p. 3 and on the wall in the sacristy.		
<b>2. Procession from back of the church to the altar</b>	Walk behind the Crucifix Server, side-by-side with the Book Server (to your right), while carrying a lit candle.	Lead the procession to the altar. Start walking when the <u>singing</u> starts, not when the music starts. Walk at only <u>half</u> of your normal walking speed.	Walk behind the Crucifix Server, side-by-side with the Vessels Server (to your left), while carrying a lit candle.
<b>3. When arriving in at the step of the sanctuary</b>	Stop and stand to the left of the priest. Leave enough room for him to stand in the middle of the altar. Bow your head when he bows at the waist. (If you are not carrying anything, then bow at the waist with the priest.)	Do a head bow at the altar, then continue up into sanctuary, place the crucifix in its holder, then stand at your seat with hands in the Praying Position.	Stop and stand to the right of the priest. Leave enough room for him to stand in the middle of the altar. Bow your head when he bows at the waist. (If you are not carrying anything, then bow at the waist with the priest.)
<b>4. After the priest bows</b>	Place your candle in its holder, then stand in front of your seat with hands in the Praying Position.	Remain standing at your seat with hands in the Praying Position.	Place your candle in its holder, then stand in front of your seat with the Roman Missal in your hands ready for the priest. (Don't wait for him to say "Let us pray" before you pick it up).
<b>5. Location of your seat</b>	Any of the server seats.	Any of the server seats.	The server seat closest to the priest.

<b>6. When the priest says or chants “Let us pray”</b>	Stand at your seat, with your hands in the Praying Position.	Stand at your seat, with your hands in the Praying Position.	Take the Roman Missal right-side up to the priest. He will open it. Hold it steady. When he closes his hands, <u>you</u> close the book and put it back on the seat near you. Be seated.
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<b>WHAT &amp; WHEN</b>	<b>THE VESSELS SERVER</b>	<b>THE CRUCIFIX SERVER</b>	<b>THE BOOK SERVER</b>
<b>7. At the Prayers of the Faithful (also known as the “Intercessions”)</b>	Stand at your seat, with your hands in the Praying Position.	Stand at your seat, with your hands in the Praying Position.	When the priest stands, bring the red “Prayers of the Faithful” book right-side up to him. He will open it. Hold it steady. When the priest closes his hands, <u>you</u> close it and put it back on its table next to the priest. Be seated.
<b>8. When the ushers are halfway done collecting the money</b>	Set up the vessels on the altar as shown in the altar layout illustration.	Assist the Vessels Server in setting up the vessels on the altar as shown in the altar layout illustration.	Put the Roman Missal on the right side of the altar book stand (or flat on the altar if there is no book stand). Leave it closed. (See photo of altar layout.)
<b>9. When the priest goes to the step to receive the gifts of bread and wine</b>	Stand to the priest’s left. He will pass some of the gifts to you. Place them on the altar. (See photo of altar layout.)	Stand to the priest’s right. He will pass some of the gifts to you. Place them on the altar. (See photo of altar layout.)	Sit, with hands on knees and feet flat on the floor.
<b>10. When the priest is going to mix the water with the wine</b>	Stand next to the altar, and face the priest. Put your left hand over your heart, hold the water cruet with your right hand, and hold it out to the priest with the handle facing him.	Stand to the Vessels Server’s left. Hold the lavabo bowl in your right hand with the finger towel draped over your left forearm.	Sit, with hands on knees and feet flat on the floor.
<b>11. After the priest has poured the wine into the chalices</b>	Take the empty wine pitcher to the credence table, return to the altar, and hold the water cruet ready to pour it.	Stand to the Vessels Server’s left. Hold the lavabo bowl in your right hand with the finger towel draped over your left forearm.	Sit, with hands on knees and feet flat on the floor.

<b>12. Help the priest wash his hands</b>	Pour water on the his fingertips. Stop pouring only when he indicates. After he dries, you and the priest bow to each other, then go stand at your seat with hands in the Praying Position.	After he washes and dries, you and the priest bow to each other, then go stand at your seat with hands in the Praying Position.	Sit, with hands on knees and feet flat on the floor.
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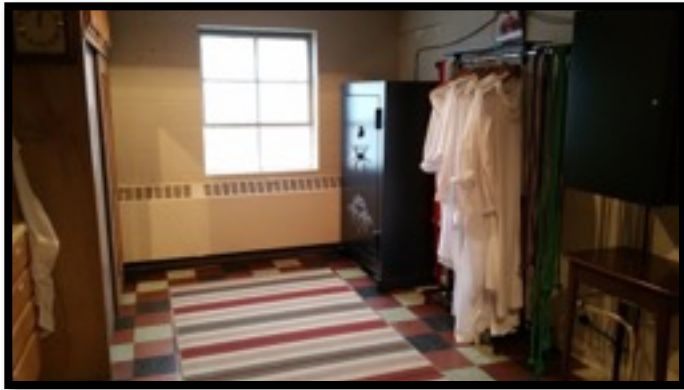
<b>WHAT &amp; WHEN</b>	<b>THE VESSELS SERVER</b>	<b>THE CRUCIFIX SERVER</b>	<b>THE BOOK SERVER</b>
<b>13. During the Eucharistic Prayer (everyone kneeling) when the priest's palms are held flat over the gifts</b>	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius). Ring the bells once. Be very observant and alert to ring at the proper time.	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).
<b>14. During the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest elevates the Body of Christ</b>	Ring the bells three times, pausing briefly between the rings. Slowly place the bells down exactly at the moment the priest places the Body of Christ on the altar.	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).
<b>15. During the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest elevates the chalice with the Blood of Christ</b>	Ring the bells three times, pausing briefly between the rings. Slowly place the bells down exactly at the moment the priest places the chalice with the Blood of Christ on the altar.	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).	Kneel (stand at St. Athanasius).

<p><b>16. When the priest goes to the tabernacle to retrieve a ciborium</b></p>	<p>Pick up a paten, then stand by your chair. (The purpose of the paten is to catch any falling hosts and particles.)</p>	<p>Pick up a paten, then stand by your chair. (The purpose of the paten is to catch any falling hosts and particles.)</p>	<p>Pick up a paten, then stand by your chair. (The purpose of the paten is to catch any falling hosts and particles.)</p>
<p><b>17. After the priest has consumed the Body and Blood of Christ</b></p>	<p>Receive communion. After you have swallowed, stand to the left of the priest and the Extraordinary Ministers with the paten as the people receive their communion.</p>	<p>Receive communion. After you have swallowed, stand to the left of the priest and the Extraordinary Ministers with the paten as the people receive their communion.</p>	<p>Receive communion. After you have swallowed, stand to the left of the priest and the Extraordinary Ministers with the paten as the people receive their communion.</p>
<p><b>WHAT &amp; WHEN</b></p>	<p><b>THE VESSELS SERVER</b></p>	<p><b>THE CRUCIFIX SERVER</b></p>	<p><b>THE BOOK SERVER</b></p>
<p><b>18. After communion</b></p>	<p>Put your paten on the altar. Put the water cruet on the altar cloth if it is not already there. Be prepared to remove items from the plexiglass to the credence table.</p>	<p>Put your paten on the altar. Put the water cruet on the altar cloth if it is not already there. Be prepared to remove items from the plexiglass to the credence table.</p>	<p>Take the Roman Missal from the altar, and be seated with it in your lap ready for the priest. (Don't wait for him to say "Let us pray" before you pick it up.)</p>
<p><b>19. When the priest places anything on (or very close) to the plexiglass</b></p>	<p>Take the items and place them neatly on the credence table.</p>	<p>Take the items and place them neatly on the credence table.</p>	

<p><b>20. When the priest says “Let us pray”</b></p>	<p>Stand.</p>	<p>Stand.</p>	<p>Take the Roman Missal right-side up to the priest. He will open it. Hold it steady. When he closes his hands, <u>you</u> close it and put it back on your seat. Then, stand at your seat with hands in the Praying Position.</p>
<p><b>21. When the priest goes to kiss the altar</b></p>	<p>Pick up your candle and stand facing the front of the altar on the left side. Leave enough room for the priest to stand in the middle.</p>	<p>Pick up the crucifix and face the altar, standing several paces behind the priest.</p>	<p>Pick up your candle and stand facing the front of the altar on the right side. Leave enough room for the priest to stand in the middle.</p>
<p><b>22. Procession from sanctuary to the back of the church</b></p>	<p>When the priest genuflects or bows, bow your head and rotate clockwise. Walk behind the Crucifix Server, side-by-side with the Book Server (to your left), while carrying your candle.</p>	<p>When the priest genuflects or bows, bow your head and lead the procession to the back of the church. Remember to walk at only <i><b>half</b></i> of your normal walking speed.</p>	<p>When the priest genuflects or bows, bow your head and rotate clockwise. Walk behind the Crucifix Server, side-by-side with the Vessels Server (to your right), while carrying your candle.</p>
<p><b>23. At the end of the procession, the priest will say to you, “Praised be Jesus Christ” and he will bless you.</b></p>	<p>You respond, “Now and forever. Amen.”</p>	<p>You respond, “Now and forever. Amen.”</p>	<p>You respond, “Now and forever. Amen.”</p>

The Sacristy:

The Sanctuary:



The Altar:

The Nave:



The Credence Table (Side Table):

The Tabernacle:



The Priest's Chalice:



The Sanctus Bells:



The Purificators (one needed per chalice):

The Corporal (the foldable Altar Cloth):





The Ciborium (note different styles and sizes):



The Water and Wine Cruets with caps removed:



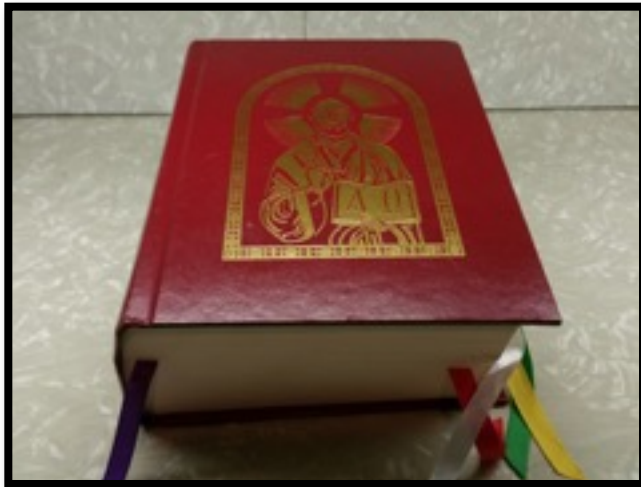
The Patens:



The Lavabo Bowl and Towel (for hand washing):



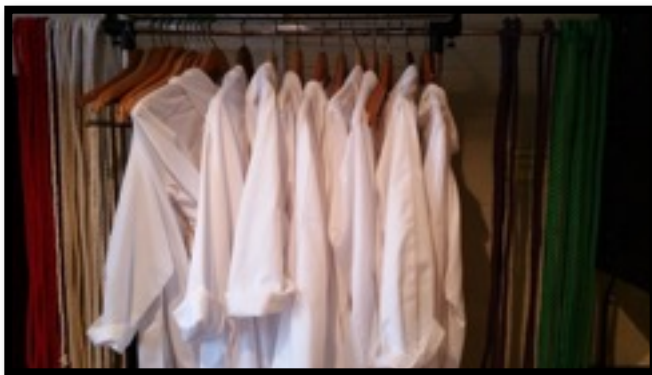
The Roman Missal (the priest's THICK red book):



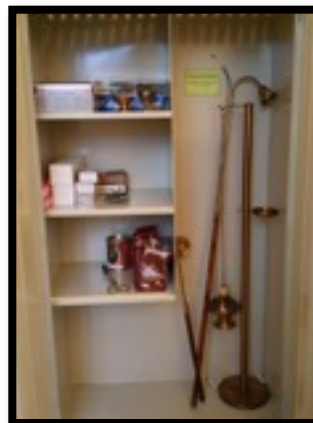
The Prayers of the Faithful book (don't confuse it with the thicker Roman Missal):



Albs and cinctures:



The Fire Cabinet (with candle snuffers/lighters on the right):



## Placement of Items on Altar<sup>5</sup> (Altar Layout)



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<sup>5</sup> The number of chalices and ciboria may vary.

