

A teacher's guide to **Altar Servers at Mass**

What are they?

Altar servers, by their skills and knowledge serve the Assembly and the priest by helping the smooth-running of the Liturgy. They carry, bring and fetch the things needed at the altar, they carry candles in procession.

They can also help prepare the altar, and credence and offertory tables before Mass begins.

Who can serve at the altar?

In theory any of the baptised can serve at the altar. In our diocese there is equal access to the ministry for male and female. However it is usual to reserve the ministry to those who have also made their first Holy Communion.

It is important that anyone who is asked to serve either already has acquired the skills to serve with understanding and attention. These skills will only be obtained by careful and sustained training.

The Assembly and priest are not well served when this ministry is entrusted to those who do not know what to do. Neither are the servers themselves, who are shown in a poor light if they are confused and ineffective..

It is not a difficult thing to train servers in the school, and probably one of the local clergy would be happy to arrange a couple of after-school sessions to work with volunteers.

That said it is probably simpler to make use of servers who have already be trained for service in parishes. However these too will require additional help to adapt themselves to the often very different circumstances of serving in a school setting.

What should they wear?

It is usual for an altar server to wear a white alb and cincture. It should be practical for a school to hold sufficient stock in a range of standard sizes for the children who will serve.

Alternatively it is usually a simple matter for children serving in parishes to bring their albs from their parish.

If necessary servers may assist wearing their school clothes.



How many servers should there be?

The right number for what they need to do!

The flip answer is the only really sensible one. For example if you are having an entrance procession with thurible and boat, processional cross, and two candles then you need four. On the other hand if all the server is being asked to do is bring chalices from the credence table and assist receive the Offertory gifts then only one (or two) are needed.

So agree on the degree of ritual that is to feature in your celebration and note the maximum number of servers you need at any one time, (probably it will be the number carrying things in the Entrance Procession), and that is the number of servers you need. Overleaf you will find a detailed guide to what servers do which will help you make your calculation.

You could have more, using different sets of servers for different parts of the Mass, but that can get cumbersome. Servers who are under-occupied can get bored. It is better to go for the minimum number needed than the maximum number you can 'find jobs for'.

A teacher's worksheet for Altar Servers

Altar Servers for

Mass for

on

at

in

Coordinator for Mass is.....

Priest is

Using this worksheet

The table on the right gives the full range of functions for servers at a more elaborate celebration of Mass (such as the former 'High Mass').

Most schools would attempt this level of ritual and detail only when celebrating in a church, and on a notable occasion, including when a bishop is present. The fullness of the list will be helpful on those occasions, because they are out of the ordinary.

In normal circumstances things will be simpler. So it is suggested that the RE Coordinator prepares a master copy of this page for 'Usual Masses,' labels it as such and scores through the elements of the rite most usually omitted, eg use of thurible/boat.

Value of Ritual

In recent decades there has been a tendency to downplay the importance of ritual relative to the spoken word. This is unfortunate, for liturgy is essentially a symbolic action, and symbols work most when we allow them proper time and space. It is then they are most expressive and most effective.

Careful use of the given symbols of the Mass allows the Liturgy to 'speak' to us at all sorts of different levels, and helps us respond to the presence of the Lord in all sorts of different ways. Children especially will respond well to the effective use of the symbols of the Mass.

The proposed list of ministers should be
passed to.....
for approval before.....

Do not worry: you do not need to have this many servers, and it is not usual to have thurible and boat at a school Mass. But this table indicates roles. It will help you decide how many servers you want, and to note which of them are to do what.

Introductory Rites

Entrance Procession

- Thurible
- Boat
- Cross
- Candle1.....
- Candle 2

Penitential Rite etc

- Book for Collect etc

Liturgy of the Word

Gospel Procession

- Candle 1.....
- Candle 2
- Thurible
- Boat

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of Altar

Bringing chalices etc to the altar

- Server 1
- Server 1

Offertory

Receiving Offertory Gifts; Bringing Wine/Water to the altar; Washing priest's hands

- Server 1
- Server 1
- Thurible
- Boat

Eucharistic Prayer

- Bell
- Thurible
- Boat

Final Procession

- Thurible
- Boat
- Cross
- Candle1.....
- Candle 2