

GUIDELINES FOR ALTAR SERVERS

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

Introduction

Since women and girls may now function as servers within the liturgy, the term "altar boy" should be replaced by "server." No distinction should be made between the functions carried out in the sanctuary by men and boys and those carried out by women and girls.

I. Requirements

1. Servers should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. They must be baptized Catholics and should have already received Holy Communion for the first time and normally receive the Eucharist whenever they participate in the liturgy.
2. It is recommended that the server be no younger than the fifth grade, however this can be left up to the pastor's discretion.

II. Function

The General Introduction to the Roman Missal states that servers are "those who carry the missal, the cross, the candles, bread, wine, water and thurible" (#68). Since the duties of the altar server can be divided among several servers, it is important that the pastor make sure that each server knows the specific duties for a specific liturgy. The server must be able to understand the Mass as well the server's role in the celebration.

The following is a list of specific responsibilities that the altar server has:

1. Assist in the preparation of the altar and sacred vessels before Mass.
2. When no deacon is present, place the corporal, chalice, purificator and Sacramentary on the altar immediately before the presentation of gifts.
3. Help the priest receive the bread and wine at the presentation of gifts.
4. Wash the hands of the priest.
5. Help with incensation.
6. Hold the Sacramentary when needed.
7. Servers may not distribute Holy Communion unless they have been mandated for this function by the Bishop. Those men and women who serve at the altar should not also serve as Special Ministers of the Eucharist (if they are mandated to do so) at the same liturgy.

III. Formation

It is suggested that the training of altar servers be comprised of the following areas:

1. Ministry to the assembly: the meaning of service as well as the different types of ministry should be explained.
2. The Eucharist: sense of its theology and structure
3. Vocabulary: this should include the terminology used to name books, vessels, vestments, locations, the seasons of the liturgical year and their importance.
4. Procedures:
 - a) servers should receive proper formation before they begin to function. The server should be prepared to know what must be done before, during and after the liturgy. The formation should include instruction on the Mass and its parts and their meaning and the various functions of the server during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations.
 - b) servers should receive appropriate guidance on maintaining proper decorum and attire when serving Mass and other functions.
 - c) it should be noted that the instructions should not consist of merely how the server is to do things. Emphasis should also be given to spiritual formation. Love for the liturgy, reverence for the Church and respect for her symbols should be encouraged.
 - d) the formation of servers should also foster in them a desire to participate fully and actively in the liturgy. Servers are to respond to the prayers and dialogues of the presider along with the congregation. They are also to join in singing the hymns and other chants of the liturgy.
5. Servers should sit in a location where they can easily assist the priest or deacon. The place next to the priest is normally reserved for the deacon.
6. Other Liturgies: the altar server should be prepared to serve at other liturgies that take place in the parish (e.g., morning/evening prayer, benediction, baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.).
7. The *Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers* (Book of Blessings #1847-1870) may be used before servers first begin to function in this ministry.

IV. Vesture

1. Under normal circumstances, servers should be vested. This is within the tradition of the Church and prevents difficulties regarding appropriate dress for these ministers. The appropriate vesture for servers is the alb, preferably white. (In those parishes where servers are presently vested in cassock and surplice, these guidelines do not imply that a parish immediately replace the cassock and surplice with the alb. However, when the present vesture needs replaced, the appropriate vestment to be purchased is the alb.)
2. All servers should be vested in the same way.

V. Fostering Vocations

Having young people involved in the ministry of service at the altar is an excellent opportunity to stress the need for more priests and religious and to encourage young people to consider whether they are being called to a life of public service in the Church.