

# ALTAR SERVER HANDBOOK



*“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones.”  
-Hebrews 6:10*



## St. Mark Catholic Church

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# PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

Grounded, fortified and nourished by the Eucharist, the members of St. Mark Church share with all the unconditional love of God through active witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by learning, living and loving our Faith.

## CALL TO SERVE

"You are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

All liturgical ministers are, first and foremost, members of the Body of Christ. Through their baptism they are the "holy people and royal priesthood" whose right and privilege it is to participate in the ministry of Christ. How the lay faithful exercise this ministry in the world varies, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been "conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist" (*General Instruction Of The Roman Missal - GIRM, Introduction #5*).

Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the "action of the whole Church" (*GIRM, Introduction #5*), everyone in the assembly has "an individual right and duty to contribute their participation" (*GIRM #58*).

Some of the faithful are called to serve God's people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it need nurturing and support.

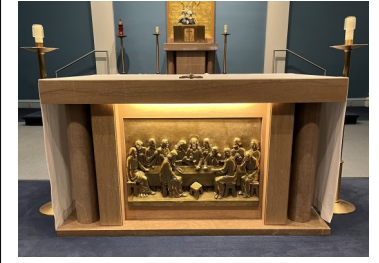
This handbook has been prepared to help you grow in a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, your ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve. This handbook is designed to assist in properly preparing for Mass so as to assist the faithful experience Jesus Christ in His Word and through His Body.

# GLOSSARY

Alb



Altar



Assembled Chalice



Bells



Ciborium



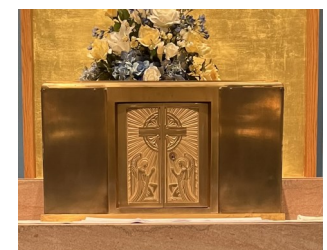
Cruets



Lavabo Bowl and Towel



Tabernacle



## THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the eternal High Priest. You lead all your saints in heaven and your people on earth in praising God, our Father. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for letting me come before your altar, so that, with your help, I can praise my Father in heaven as his server. Help me to find joy in serving at your altar. Help me to find gladness in knowing and doing your will in all things. Glory to you, Lord Jesus, and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.  
Amen.

## NOTES

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## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Just like any formal setting, altar servers are expected to follow certain rules and regulations. These include:

- Wear appropriate footwear and attire for Mass.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes before Mass begins and pray the Preparation Prayer.
- Sign-in on the schedule in the sacristy.
- Know the duties associated with your assignment. You are free to switch positions.
- Choose an appropriate size alb that falls to your ankles.
- Once Mass begins, do not leave the sanctuary unless directed to by the priest or deacon.
- Always sit or stand with the priest (except during Communion).
- Remain attentive during Mass so that you anticipate your next duty and pick up on cues from the priest or deacon.
- After Mass, return your alb neatly to the same hanger.
- If you are scheduled to serve but are unable to fulfill your assignment, a parent/guardian MUST help you find a replacement. A contact list will be provided to you. Please take this requirement seriously! “No shows” will be contacted and may, depending on the circumstances, be placed in a probationary period or dismissed from the ministry.
- Use “**prayer hands**” while in the sanctuary unless carrying or holding something.
- There may only be two altar servers, or you may be by yourself. Be prepared to carry out the duties of the altar server positions not filled at the Mass.
- If there is a deacon at the Mass, just go with the flow. He may or may not hand you items. Just do your best.



- Practicing Catholics who are in the 4th grade or older are invited to be altar servers.
- Please contact Daria Kaas at [daria.kaas@archbalt.org](mailto:daria.kaas@archbalt.org) with any questions or concerns.

Always remember that, as an altar server, you are serving God, your parish, and the presider. Displaying reverence, like paying attention and using “**prayer hands**,” is a sign of respect! You are a role model, especially for our young parishioners.

## PREPARATION PRAYER

Father in Heaven, your Son, Jesus Christ, showed his love for you by serving his brothers and sisters in need. I now ask you to give me your help as I serve you and your people. Open my mouth to praise you in word and song. Open my ears to hear your word. Open my hands to do your work well. Take from my heart all evil and distracting thoughts. Help me to know what I should do, and do it well. Help me to serve reverently at your holy altar, and so give you praise and glory, now and forever.

Amen.

## BASIC ORDER OF A CATHOLIC MASS

Knowing what happens when should make you feel more comfortable in your ministry. Even when you are not serving, be attentive to what is happening during Mass and watch what the servers, priests, and ministers do.

### **Introductory Rites**

Procession (Entrance), Greeting, Penitential Act (“Lord, have mercy”), Gloria, Collect (Opening Prayer... “Let us pray.”)

When in the vestibule, don’t forget to smile and greet people!

Please use the left side aisle to return to the sanctuary. The Cross Bearer should secure the cross to the sacristy wall. The candles should be returned to the table.

Pray the Thanksgiving Prayer.

Please return your alb to the same hanger.

Thank you for your service! Please take the time to study this guide so that your server experience is positive and fulfilling!



When the priest sits, everyone sits, including the Servers.

## CONCLUDING RITE

When the priest stands, everyone stands, including the servers.

Upon standing, the priest will say “Let us pray.” The Book Bearer should already be reaching for the book. Turn to your left, position yourself in front of the priest and hold the book so that the priest can easily find the prayer and proclaim it. Hold the book through the Blessing, which ends with “May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” to which everyone responds, “Amen.” You may now put the book down.

After the Dismissal, everyone responds “Thanks be to God.”

At this point, the Recessional– or Exit– Hymn will begin.

The Cross Bearer will retrieve the cross and proceed down the steps, lining up with the first pew and turning to face the altar.

While that is happening the Book Bearer and Server 3 will retrieve the candles and move to the second step and turn to face the altar. Do not bow!

After the priest has genuflected and turns to face the congregation, all three servers will turn and begin to slowly recess down the main aisle. Remember to keep a space between the cross and candles!

Walk all the way into the vestibule. At that point, you may blow out the candles, but remember that they still contain hot wax!

All three of you should wait in the vestibule for a few minutes so that you can return safely back to the sanctuary without bumping into people. Please do not weave through people in a race to get back!

## Liturgy of the Word

Old Testament Reading, Psalm, New Testament Reading, Gospel Reading, Homily, Profession of Faith (Creed), Intercessions (“Lord, hear our prayer.”)

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of Gifts, Preparation of Altar, Prayer over Offerings, Eucharistic Prayer (Preface, Holy, Holy, Holy, Consecration, Mystery of Faith, Great Amen), The Lord’s Prayer, Sign of Peace, Lamb of God, Holy Communion, Prayer after Communion

## Concluding Rites

Announcements, Blessing, Dismissal, Recessional (Exit)

## THE ASSIGNMENTS

So that you will know what is expected of you before you arrive for Mass, the altar server schedule will look something like this:

Date	Time	Cross	Book	Server 3
08/28/21	4 PM	Jane Doe	John Doe	Jim Doe
08/29/21	7:30 AM	Jim Smith	Paul Jones	Jill Johns
08/29/21	9 AM	Molly Ford	Jane DeSoto	Jim Dodge
08/29/21	11 AM	Gene Dean	Pete Sheet	Jane Payne
08/29/21	5 PM	John Jupiter	Nelly Neptune	Marty Mars

The title of each assignment is not as important as the role each will have during Mass; each server is vitally important!

## CROSS AND CANDLES

This practice is new to St. Mark and involves all three servers. Referring to the schedule, “Cross” is the Cross Bearer; “Book” and “Server 3” are the Candle Bearers.

The cross is stored by a latch on the wall in the priest's sacristy; the candles are on the credence table. The sacristan will light the candles prior to Mass beginning.

At the appropriate time, the Cross Bearer will unlatch the cross and proceed to the back of the church via the right side aisle. If no one is comfortable with the cross, no one will bring it.

The Candle Bearers will take the candles from the credence table and slowly proceed to the back of the church via the right side aisle. Be sure to keep the candles upright so that they stay lit and do not drip on you, others, or the carpet! Before Mass starts, if the candles get blown out by the time you get to the main doors, there is a lighter in the maintenance closet to the right of the center double doors.

Line up in the back center aisle of the Church like this:

Cross  
Book                  Server 3  
Lector (reader)  
Priest

After the announcements, the Processional Hymn will begin. The Cross Bearer will slowly walk forward, staying in the center of the aisle until reaching the steps. Do not bow. Enter the sanctuary to the left of the altar and return the cross to the sacristy. Proceed to your chair and remain standing with “**prayer hands.**”

The Candle Bearers will wait for the Cross Bearer to pass 5 pews and then will begin walking slowly and together until reaching the steps. Do not bow. Separate, then walk up the steps to return the candles. “Server 3” will proceed to his/her seat by going behind the altar. “Book” will proceed to his/her seat by making a left turn. Both will remain standing with “**prayer hands.**”

## SIGN OF PEACE THROUGH COMMUNION

After the Our Father, the priest will invite people to offer one another the sign of peace. Come forward to exchange without contact and line up behind the priest, facing the congregation. Do not forget to use “**prayer hands!**”

During the Lamb of God, Eucharistic Ministers will enter the sanctuary to receive Communion. After you have received, and as the priest and ministers leave the altar, you may be seated.

Before being seated, the Book Bearer will remove the book from the altar and bring it back to his/her seat.

Sit quietly and reflectively. Use this as a time for prayers of Thanksgiving.

As the priest and ministers return to the altar, all three altar servers will stand with “**prayer hands.**”

The Cross Bearer will go to the credence table, remove the top from the water cruet, and proceed to the altar with the cruet. Do not wait for the priest to ask for the water cruet. Wait while the priest pours water into the chalice to purify it. When he hands the cruet back, bow and return the cruet to the credence table. Return to your seat and remain standing with “**prayer hands.**”

When the chalice is purified, the priest will return the purificator, paten, and pall to the top. Server 3 should then move forward to remove the chalice back to the credence table.

The Book Bearer should return any empty ciboria to the credence table.

When the Consecration begins, the priest asks God to send down the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. If a deacon is also serving, you will see him kneel behind the priest. We ring the bells to call the congregants' attention to the Sacred Miracle of the Consecration.

**Bell Ringing #1:** Right after the Holy, Holy, Holy, the Book Bearer will pick up the bells carefully and quietly in anticipation of the Consecration. The priest, with hands extended, says “Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain off all holiness.” Then, he will bring his hands together and outstretch them over the offerings. When you see that and the priest says, “Let your Spirit come upon these gifts...” **ring the bells once.**

**Bell Ringing #2:** When the priest offers the Sacred Host to the congregation by elevating it, he says “Take this, all of you, and eat it; this is my body which will be given up for you.” When the host is fully elevated, ring the bells 3 distinct times, pausing for a moment between each ring. The elevation of the bread may not be so noticeable. When the bread is lifted up and the priest is quiet is the time to **ring the bells three times.** The priest will then return the host to the paten, genuflect in adoration and praise, and continue the Eucharistic Prayer.

**Bell Ringing #3:** The priest will now offer the Precious Blood to the congregation by elevating his chalice. When he says “Do this in memory of me” and the chalice is fully elevated, **ring the bells 3 distinct times,** pausing for a moment between each ring. Carefully and quietly place the bells back on the floor.

## SEATING IN THE SANCTUARY

For ease of completing your other roles during Mass, please use this basic seating chart while serving:

Cantor (singer)		Cross	
	Book*	Priest	Server 3

\*If a deacon is also serving, the Book Bearer will move one seat to his/her right.

## BOOK BEARER

Referring back to the order of the Mass, your next responsibility is to hold the book for the priest for the “Collect,” which is the opening prayer that collects– or centers– congregants in preparation for the Liturgy of the Word.

When the priest says, “Let us pray,” be sure that you are already reaching for the book. Turn to your left, position yourself in front of the priest and hold the book so that the priest can easily find the prayer and proclaim it.

When the priest has completed the prayer, close the book, return to your chair, and be seated for the Liturgy of the Word.

## PREPARATION OF THE ALTAR

Following the Liturgy of the Word (readings, homily, Prayer of the Faithful, and Creed), everyone in the church will be seated except for the ushers and the altar servers!

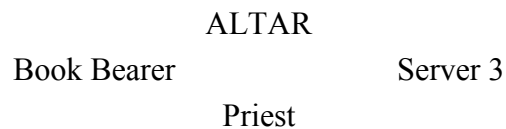
The Book Bearer will take the book and place it left of center on the altar. The Book Bearer may then be seated.

Server 3 will go to the credence table and carefully move the chalice to the center of the altar. Because the chalice has on top of it a purificator, paten (with an unconsecrated host), and a pall, move the chalice with two hands— one holding the chalice and the fingers of the other on top. If the offertory is still being collected, Server 3 may return to his/her seat.

When the priest stands to accept the offertory, the Book Bearer and Server 3 will follow him to the steps. The Book Bearer will simply move from his/her chair to the top step; Server 3 will go behind the altar to the top step. Although the Cross Bearer is not designated to receive gifts, help if needed.

Congregants will bring forward one or more ciboria of unconsecrated hosts, a cruet of wine, and the monetary gifts. After the priest accepts each, he will turn and hand you the vessels and basket. The wine cruet and ciboria are to be placed to the right of center on the altar; the basket is placed in the sacristy. So that you are not bumping into each other, Server 3 should always move around behind the altar.

How to Line up to Accept the Offertory Gifts:



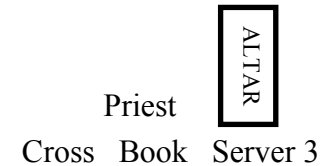
Once the gifts have been placed on the altar, all three servers will proceed to the credence table. The Book Bearer and Server 3 will stand with “**prayer hands.**”

The Cross Bearer will take the top off the cruet of water and stand to the priest’s right, ready to hand him the cruet. Do not wait for

the priest to request the water. When he turns for it, approach the altar and wait for him to hand it back to you. Move back to your position to the priest’s right.

The Book Bearer will then come forward with the lavabo bowl (finger bowl) and Server 3 with the lavabo towel (finger towel). Stand with the Cross Bearer and wait for the priest to turn toward you to wash his hands.

When the priest is ready, all three servers will approach him. The Cross Bearer will pour a small amount of water over the priest’s fingers into the bowl.



Server 3 will make sure the priest can easily access the finger towel. After the priest has dried his hands and gives back the towel, Server 3 will step forward to get the empty wine cruet.

All three servers will then bow and return to the credence table, carefully placing the items. Please do not place the towel in the bowl of water! Be alert and use “**prayer hands.**”

When the congregation kneels, please kneel on the cushions on the first step to the tabernacle. If you are the Book Bearer, please kneel next to the bells. Make sure you can see the priest’s hands, so you will know when to ring the bells.

## RINGING OF THE BELLS

Book Bearer, you must be paying attention and be ready to ring the bells! You are designated to ring the bells. The bells will be stored on the first step to the tabernacle.