

# GUIDE FOR ALTAR SERVERS

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# Welcome!

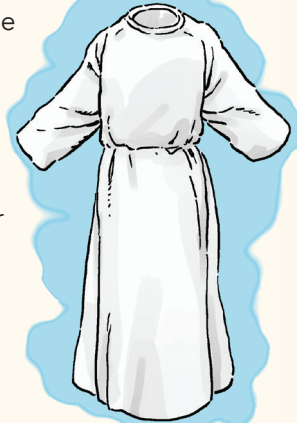
You've signed up to be an altar server. Way to go! Why did you choose to become an altar server? Maybe your religious-education teacher said you'd be good at it. Maybe you had friends who signed up. Maybe your parents asked you to think about it. You may not realize it, but there's another reason, too. God has called you to be an altar server. Often, God speaks to us through other people or through a strong desire he gives us.

Many altar servers remember their service their whole life. Altar serving is special because you are so close to what Jesus is doing. At Mass, Jesus himself is leading his people in prayer. He speaks his word to the people and becomes really present in the Eucharist. Mass is very holy. As an **altar server**, you'll serve the priest and other people at Mass. You will help to make it go smoothly for them. In this pamphlet, words in red are defined in the glossary and sometimes in the text as well, while some italicized words may be new to you and are defined in the text.

## Vestments

Have you ever been on a sports team or in a play? Did you wear a uniform or a costume? What you wore depended on what you were doing. At Mass, the priest, deacon, and servers wear vestments over their clothes. Different ministers wear different vestments. Wearing vestments shows that Mass is holy. The vestments are usually kept in the sacristy. Be familiar with the vestments that altar servers may wear:

- An **alb** is a flowing white robe. It reminds us of the white we wore at baptism. Putting on an alb is like putting on Christ. It also reminds us of heaven. At many parishes, altar servers wear albs. Priests and deacons wear albs under other vestments.
- A **cincture** is a cord or rope. It ties around your waist like a belt. The cincture keeps the alb in place. It is either white or the liturgical color for that Mass.



- A **cassock** is a tighter-fitting robe. It stretches to your feet and has long sleeves. It is usually closed by a long row of buttons. The **surplice** is a fancy white garment. It fits like a shirt. The surplice is worn over a cassock. It goes down only to the waist. At some parishes, altar servers wear a cassock and surplice instead of an alb.





## What if the Alb Doesn't Fit?

### Good to Know

Your parish should have a few albs of different lengths. Look for one that lands just above your ankles. If it drags on the floor, it's too big. You might trip. If it barely covers your knees, it's too small. If you have trouble finding the right one, ask the priest or another altar server for help. If they can't find one, ask another minister or the sacristan.

These next vestments are for priests or deacons. It is helpful for you to know them:

- A **stole** goes over a priest's or deacon's alb. The priest's stole hangs down both sides in the front. It looks a little like a scarf. The deacon wears a stole over the left shoulder and to the side. This way, it looks like a sash.
- A **chasuble** goes over a priest's stole. The word *chasuble* means "little house." Its color depends on the liturgical season. It has no sleeves. A deacon may wear a **dalmatic** over his stole. This vestment is similar to the chasuble but has long sleeves.





The **altar** is at the center of the sanctuary. It is the table of sacrifice where the Eucharist is celebrated. During Mass, we bow to the altar whenever we pass in front of it. When the procession reaches the altar, bow fully at the waist. But there's an exception. If you're carrying something, then only bow your head. The rules are the same for the final procession.



## Genuflecting Toward the Tabernacle

A **tabernacle** is a special decorated box where the Eucharist is kept. A **sanctuary lamp** burns nearby to show that Christ

is present. Is your church's tabernacle right behind the altar? If so, ministers may **genuflect** in the processions before and after Mass instead of bowing. This means they may go down on their right knee and make the sign of the cross.

Follow what the ministers do at your parish for the procession. People carrying something in a procession still only bow their heads. Notice that the people also genuflect when they go into and out of their **pews** (bench).

Good  
to Know



The main *crucifix* or *cross* is placed in the sanctuary. If your parish's *processional cross* is the main cross, it likely has a stand. If it's a smaller or secondary cross, it is placed out of view.

The altar server who carries the processional cross puts it in its proper place once the procession reaches the altar.

The *chair* for the celebrating priest or bishop is in the sanctuary, too. Seats are nearby for other clergy and for the altar servers. Go to your seat, but don't sit down yet.



## The Hand-washing Rite

After the priest has received the gifts of bread and wine and is back at the altar, it is time for the hand-washing rite. One or two servers help with this rite. The hand-washing rite is about how the priest is washed from sin before celebrating the Eucharist.

There is a small pitcher of water on the credence table. This is called a **cruet**. You need a cruet of water and a **lavabo** bowl to catch the water. You also need a **finger towel** for the priest to dry his hands.

1. Take a finger towel, lavabo bowl, and cruet of water from the credence table. Drape the towel over your forearm so you can hold the cruet in one hand and the bowl in the other.
2. The priest pours the wine into his chalice. Then he pours a drop of water into the wine.
3. After offering some prayers, the priest places his hands over the lavabo bowl. Pour a little water over his hands into the bowl. The priest then dries his hands with the towel.
4. Return the towel, bowl, and cruets to the credence table.