

# GUIDELINES OF CONDUCT

## FOR ADULT ALTAR SERVERS

### OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



Presented by Edward A. Essayan  
Coordinator - Adult Altar Servers  
Edited and approved by Deacon Dale Konas and Fr. Mark A. Szanyi, OFM Conv.  
August 2017  
St. Lucie Catholic Church  
Port St. Lucie, Florida

# Common Rules and Practices Performed by Adult Altar Servers

## Table of Contents

1. Purpose of Guideline: .....	4
2. Definitions: .....	4
Rubric.....	4
Tradition.....	4
3. What is an Altar Server? .....	4
4. Patron Saint of Altar Servers .....	5
5. Quotes for Contemplation: .....	6
6. Shoes and Clothing: .....	6
Shoes:.....	6
Clothing:.....	6
7. POSTURE .....	7
Standing: .....	7
Sitting:.....	7
Kneeling: .....	7
Folded Hands:.....	7
Walking: .....	8
Uniformity of Action: .....	8
8. Carrying the Processional Cross: .....	8
9. Carrying the Roman Missal: .....	9
What is the Roman Missal?.....	9
Proper Procedure to Present the Roman Missal.....	9
10. Genuflections and Bowing: .....	10
Genuflections: .....	10
Bows: .....	10
11. Genuflecting toward the Altar.....	11
12. Presenting the Cruets: .....	12
13. Thurible (Censor) .....	12

14.	How to Ring the Bell.....	12
15.	Conduct During the Sign of Peace .....	13
16.	Assuming the Orans Position.....	14
17.	Common Courtesy .....	14
18.	Interesting Notes .....	15

## 1. Purpose of Guideline:

“The purpose of this guideline is to establish uniform practices and procedures for the Adult Altar Server ministry at St. Lucie Catholic Church. These procedures follow the practices set forth by the Roman Catholic Church.”

By following these guidelines, we respect the example established by our patron saint, we maintain church protocol and give reverence to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## 2. Definitions:

### Rubric

- A guide or set of rules as to how a church service should be conducted.
- The main purpose of rubrics is to assess performance.

*In this context, it refers to the rules and regulations found in the Catholic General Instruction on the Roman Missal. (GIRM)*

### Tradition

- The transmission of customs, values or beliefs from generation to generation; it means “that which is handed down”
- The transmission of traditions keeps the balance of values; it allows us to know God and what he expects us to do. *(The New Catholic Answer Bible pg. U1)*
- Tradition is maintained by discipline and consistency of actions

## 3. What is an Altar Server?

Altar servers are not ordained, but are 'commissioned' by their parish priest to assist the priest in the celebration of the liturgy during Mass. This is done through specific actions and by setting an example to the congregation by active participation in the liturgy (hymns, responses, etc.), by looking alert and sitting or standing at the appropriate times.

Servers carry the cross, the processional candle(s), hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary.

“Altar servers are a very important ministry in the Church. It is a privilege to assist the priest at the Altar. Being a server means serving God and his people at mass. Part of the ministry of servers is to help "set the pace" for all who take part in the Mass. What they do can help others to understand the Mass better which in turn can make their love for God stronger. Altar Servers are very fortunate to have been chosen by God to serve during the celebration of the liturgy. Their role is very important as they are one of the closest persons to the Altar and the Priest during Holy Mass and the administration of the Sacraments.” *(St. Lucie Catholic Church Website)*

## 4. Patron Saint of Altar Servers

St. John Berchmans, a Dutchman (13 March 1599 – 13 August 1621) was a Jesuit scholastic and is a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. He is the patron saint of altar servers.

At the age of 7, John would get up at 5 am and serve 2 or 3 Masses, carefully listening to the sermons. He was known for his diligence and piety, impressing all with his holiness and stress on perfection in little things and to conduct his responsibilities with precision and reverence. For this reason, John was later made the patron saint of altar servers.

He died on August 13, 1621 at the age of 22. Many miracles were attributed to him after his death, and he was canonized in 1888. His feast day is November 26.



St. John Berchmans, Patron Saint of Altar Servers, Jesuit

Excerpt from the Altar Server Prayer: ... *“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 forever” .... Amen*

## 5. Quotes for Contemplation:

*“Altar Servers have a solemn responsibility to do their assigned duties with dignity and reverence. Our conduct is highly visible and sets examples for other parishioners. Therefore, we must be above reproach in the sanctuary and must be reverent, humble and holy.*

*A lack of reverence for sacred things is one of the great sins of our age. Unfortunately, at times it finds its way into the sanctuary.” ..... Dom Matthew Britt, OSB (How to Serve pg.1)*

*“The Catholic Church is not about bells and smells anymore” .....it is about faith and spirituality...Our Lady of Florida Spiritual Center*

*“The Holy Church is an institution where dignity, protocol, respect, and reverence are maintained. This is primarily because when we come to the church and its services we are entering the Kingdom of God on earth, His habitation, and we choose to honor this sacred place by our attentiveness to what is proper and ordered. By our actions, we have the opportunity to reflect the image of Christ. Bulletin St. James Orthodox Church- Port St. Lucie, Florida.*

## 6. Shoes and Clothing:

### Shoes:

Altar servers must not draw attention to their feet. Altar servers should help the congregation focus on the holiness of Mass, therefore do not wear distracting shoes.

Black sneakers, black athletic or black tennis shoes are allowed. Flip flops, “bright” shoes, high heels, boots, or any other distracting shoes are not allowed.

Male Shoes: Black or dark brown shoes, closed toe sandals with dark socks or dress shoes.

Females: Black or dark brown closed toe dress shoes or dressy sandals; If dress sandals are worn, they must cover a majority of the foot and have a heel strap.

Men and Women: No flip flops or open toed sandals. Feet should never be exposed.

*(Note: Sandals are an iconic part of the Franciscan habit, it is a symbol of their vocation. It is a symbolic value that brings them closer to God and the poor.)*

### Clothing:

Simple Rule: Whatever you wear underneath an alb will show through. Servers should wear white or solid colors. Please do not wear bright colors or bold patterns that will show through robes.

## 7. POSTURE

The three primary positions during the mass are standing, sitting and kneeling. As an altar server, one must also be aware of walking, the position of your hands and eyes.

### Standing:

Do not slouch. Stand erect with hands folded properly, feet slightly apart, toes facing the sanctuary. (Ref: below)

### Sitting:

Sit erect with your hands resting on knees, palms downward. (*Called to Serve pg. 29*)

### Kneeling:

The server kneels facing altar with hands joined unless holding a book or performing your functions.

Avoid looking about or behind you and do not make a fuss about covering your feet with your alb. It is better to have your feet exposed than to look about you.

### Folded Hands:

Hands should be folded in the following manner whenever you are walking, genuflecting or kneeling. Do not fold your hands in this manner when seated. (*Called to Serve pgs. 24 and 29*)

- Servers have a simple rule, palm against palm
- Left thumb over right knuckle of index finger
- Right thumb over left thumb
- Elbows near body
- Hands held in front of you breast at 45-degree angle
- Never allow your hands to hang down at the side of your body



## Walking:

There is nothing more noticeable than the way you walk. Every step must be taken in moderation and with reverence. Every server must:

- Hold body and head erect and do not sway from side to side
- Never genuflect while walking, always come to a full stop.
- Never walk sideways or backwards on steps, nave or sanctuary.
- Always turn fully in the direction of your destination and walk forward.

## Uniformity of Action:

When a server in conducting their duties with another server, a priest, deacon or other member of a ministry, all actions should be performed in unison and in the same manner.

## 8. Carrying the Processional Cross:

When carrying the ordinary processional cross, the bottom of the pole should be kept about knee high— the right hand holding the pole at about throat level, and your left hand placed approximately one-foot lower. The Corpus (figure of Christ) should always be facing outward. When carrying the cross, the Cross-bearer does not genuflect. When the Cross is not in use, place it in the holder. (*Called to Serve pg.28*)



## 9. Carrying the Roman Missal:

### What is the Roman Missal?

This is a large liturgical book that contains all the containing all instructions and texts necessary for the celebration of Mass throughout the year. (Except the Gospel readings)

### Proper Procedure to Present the Roman Missal

- The altar server holds the missal from below with one hand on each corner
- The opening is on the left and the top rests against the breast.
- **The altar server must not open the Missal nor turn over its pages.**
- The missal should never be placed on a chair or on a pew while the priest speaks.
- The Altar Server picks up the Missal and presents it to the priest.
- The Priest will open it and the server will stand holding the book in the proper position.  
(*How to Serve pg. 27*)

*Note: As a local custom, the priest carries the Missal from and to the credence table and the altar*



## 10. Genuflections and Bowing:

The word comes for the Latin genu (knee;) and flectere, which means to bend.

From the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM 2003) #247, a genuflection is made by bending the right knee to the ground. It is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament and should be performed when entering and leaving the church.” (*The New Catholic Answer Bible pg. F4*)

### Genuflections:

- If the Blessed Sacrament is in a Tabernacle on or near the altar, genuflect when arriving or leaving the sanctuary.
- Genuflect whenever you pass before the Blessed Sacrament reposed within a tabernacle (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 233*)
- Do not genuflect when you are the cross-bearer carrying the processional cross
- Do not genuflect or make a profound bow when carrying other items such as sacred vessels, books or candles (In this case, a simple bow is acceptable practice) (*Called to Serve pg. 26*)
- When genuflecting, touch the floor with the right knee if you are able, rise to your standing position, feet together and then move forward
- Pending limitations of mobility, double Genuflect by touching both knees to the ground when the Holy Eucharistic is visible on the altar in Adoration. This will also occur if you arrive at Mass after the Consecration. In these two cases touch both knees to the ground, make the sign of the Cross, and bow. (GIRM 2003)
- As Altar Servers, we only need to genuflect with the Priest upon the beginning and closing of the Mass. During the service, make a profound bow when entering or leaving the sanctuary.

### Bows:

- Simple Bow (Bow of the Head)

This type of bow is a nod of the head. It is made whenever the server approaches or leaves the celebrant. When the server approaches the celebrant with wine and water, the Server will stop, bow their head before and then after the action. (*Called to Serve 27*)

- Profound Bow:

Wherever bowing is called for in the Mass (when the congregation is incensed by the thurifer, in the middle of the Creed, etc.) it is always a “profound bow”, which just means that you bow from the waist.

This is the kind of bow made by the deacon when he asks for a blessing before the proclamation of the Gospel. (GIRM 2003 275A)

A profound bow is made:

- Before the altar if the Blessed Sacrament is not present
- At the elevations of the consecration
- In the Profession of Faith at the words “by the power of the Holy Spirit”
- Only if the priest bows due to physical limitations, follow his lead at all times.

***There is no occasion during the mass while in the sanctuary, that an altar server needs to make a profound bow. (How to Serve pg. 6)***

## 11. Genuflecting toward the Altar

Genuflecting incorrectly is a common error, especially when the Tabernacle is not placed on or behind the altar.

Genuflecting is the most pronounced gesture of adoration and is employed during Mass. It is reserved for the highest good, the Eucharist Himself. Where is the Eucharist? It is in the Tabernacle. Whenever the Tabernacle is located, you must genuflect or bow towards it. If the Tabernacle is not present, then you bow toward the altar. “*GIRM 274*”

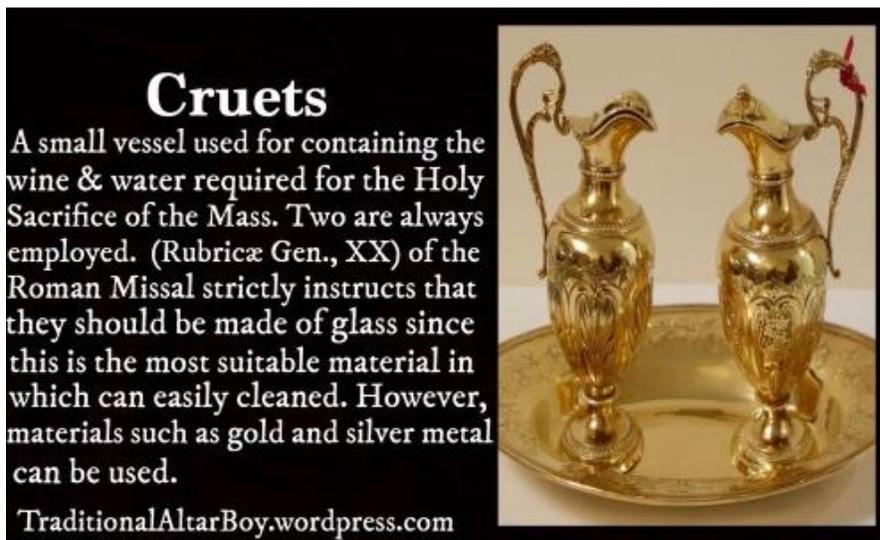


**GENUFLECTING** is the gesture of bending on your right knee to the ground as a sign of reverence or adoration.

[David Rummelhoff](#) ON [EPICPEW.COM](#) has contributed to several Catholic websites, writing about apologetics and evangelization. master’s degree in theology and is the founder of **Peter’s Square**, an online marketplace for Catholic vendors.

## 12. Presenting the Cruets:

The altar server takes the cruets from the credence table holding them from the base, handles facing outward, away from the server. (*How to Serve pg. 18*)



## 13. Thurible (Censor)

### General Rule:

- When the censor does not contain incense, it is carried with the left hand.
- When the censor contains incense, it is carried with the right hand.
- The incense boat is carried in the empty hand, close to the body.

## 14. How to Ring the Bell

**Ring the bell one time.** At St. Lucie Catholic Church, one ring consists of three tones with a left, right, and left motion.

Not too loud, not too soft; not too fast and not too slow. (Just loud enough so it can be heard by the church)

## 15. Conduct During the Sign of Peace



The Altar Server should minimize giving the sign of Peace. The matter of the sign of peace is a question of discipline, specifically, liturgical law of the Roman Rite. That law contained in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states;

" 82 ... it is suitable that each person offers the sign of peace only to those nearby and in a dignified manner. *(By David Rummelhoff on epicpew.com)*

## 16. Assuming the Orans Position



A priest assumes the “Orans” position with hands extended as pictured above. It is a posture that indicates that he is praying on our behalf. He is praying in “persona Christi capite.” The rubrics do not allow deacons to adopt the “Orans” posture. As Altar Servers, we should never assume this posture but rather assume the posture as indicated in section #3 Posture: Folded Hands.

By [David Rummelhoff](#) on [epicpew.com](#)

## 17. Common Courtesy

- Do not walk in front of the Priest while he is talking. This is highly distracting and is inconsiderate. As Altar Servers, we must respect the presence and space of the Priest.
- Do not sit in the Deacon’s chair as it is reserved for an ordained Deacon. Therefore, we must stand with a respectful posture behind the Priest while holding the Missal.
- When a Deacon is present serving Mass, all vessels should be handed to him for placement on the altar table.



**DEACONS** are men ordained to assist in carrying out the Church's ministry. They are able to proclaim the Gospel, preach, baptize, and conduct funerals and weddings outside of Mass.

## 18. Interesting Notes

### Common Holy Communion Profanations:

- Blessing oneself with the host before consuming it. (The act of blessing with the Eucharist is called “Benediction” and is reserved to clergy).
- Receiving the host in the palm of the hand, contorting the host and then finally consuming it.
- Popping the host into the mouth like a piece of popcorn.
- Attempting to receive communion with other items in your hands.
- Receiving the host with soiled hands.
- Receiving the host, closing the hand around it, then letting the hand fall to the side (as if carrying a suitcase) while walking away and/or blessing oneself with the other hand.
- Giving the host to someone else (This is reserved for Eucharistic Ministers)

Let us continually seek to increase our reverence for our Eucharistic Savior, and to eliminate anything that degrades the respect He deserves.

*Written by the Cathedral Rector by Very Rev. Fr. John Lankeit, Rector, Ss. Simon & Jude Cathedral Phoenix, AZ January 30, 2011 to his parishioners.*