

# Glossary

This is a list of certain “terms of art” which may be unclear or unknown to someone just starting in altar service. Each is defined, and in some cases there is a discussion of the word or of certain associated points of interest. If a word is in *italics*, that means there is an entry for that word in this list.



**altar** — the large stone construction on which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. It consists of two parts: the *mensa*, or table, and the *plinth*, or base. When the altar is consecrated, the *plinth* and the *mensa* are consecrated as a unit. The altar rests on the *predilla*. The Church has always considered the altar to symbolize Christ as High Priest and Victim.

**ambo** — also known, although less properly, as the lectern or lector’s stand. It is the stand on the *epistle side* from which all reading is done and announcements are made, except the Gospel and the sermon.

**ambry** — a cupboard or niche, let into the wall of the church, in which to keep vestments, *sacred vessels*, and other ministerial paraphernalia. At St Mary’s, the only ambry is one in which the sacred oils are kept. It is in the south wall of the *baptistry*.

**aspergillum** — a metal device, consisting of a hollow ball pierced with many small holes, and mounted on a handle, used by the celebrant to sprinkle holy water.

**baptistry** — the nook at the back end of the main aisle of the church. The baptismal font and the oils *ambry* are in the baptistry. The Paschal candle is kept in the baptistry except during Eastertide.

**boat** — the small vessel in which incense for the *thurible* is carried during *liturgies*.

**boat boy** — the server in charge of the *boat*.

**bobeche** — a circular cup or plate around the base of a candle, intended for catching any hot candle wax that drips or spills over.

**bridge** — the removable center part of the communion rail.

**candle follower** — the brass or glass cylinder placed on the top of a candle. It is intended to keep hot wax from spilling down the sides of the candle. It sometimes succeeds in doing so.

**candlelighter** — the brass instrument with a long wooden handle, used to light and extinguish candles. It has a brass tube housing a *taper* by which a flame is applied to the candles, and a bell-shaped device for extinguishing candles.

**cassock** — the ankle-length black vestment worn by all servers.

**censer** — see *thurible*.

**chalice** — the footed cup for holding the communion wine, and in which it is consecrated. Except when it is in immediate use (at the consecration and during the communion), the chalice is most properly covered with a *pall* to assure that insects and dirt and other contaminants do not get into the Precious Blood. It is one of the *sacred vessels*.

**ciborium** — a *sacred vessel* for holding *hosts*. In shape, it is much like a *chalice* with a fitted metal cover surmounted by a Cross, but the cup is usually more flattened than the bowl shape of a *chalice*. The ciborium has a *node*, but not a *lavabo cross*. A vessel for holding *hosts* that does not have a footed stem is not properly a ciborium, but a *pyx*. When it holds consecrated *hosts*, and is not being used at communion, the ciborium is most properly covered with a veil, an ancient sign of divinity.

**communion paten** — the metal plate with a straight handle, held below the chin of a communicant to catch stray particles of the consecrated *host* or, indeed, the entire *host* should it by some misfortune slip from the hand of the minister or from the tongue of the communicant. The plate part of the paten, but not its handle, is one of the *sacred vessels*.

**corporal** — the large (about fifteen inches square) linen cloth the priest lays on the *altar* at the Offertory. *Sacred vessels* actually containing the Body or Blood of Christ must be placed on the corporal, not beside it. A server who bears a *sacred vessel* containing unconsecrated *hosts* or wine always puts it down beside, not on, the corporal. Such a vessel is placed on the corporal only by the celebrant, the symbolism being that putting gifts on the corporal is the act of accepting them from the congregation. Only the celebrating priest may do this.

**cotta** — a full, bell-shaped white garment with wide mid-length sleeves, worn over the *cassock*. The cotta is different from the *surplice* in being shorter (falling only to the wrist when the hand is relaxed at one's side) and never being elaborated with lace or other decoration. Several patterns of cotta are available, but at St Mary's the only pattern used by servers is the square neck yoke with gathered seams.

**credence table** — a small shelf at the far side of the *reredos*. The table on the *Gospel side* holds the water and wine, the *lavabo* bowl and towel, and the box of *hosts*. The table on the *Epistle side* is only used to hold the secondary *chalice* until it is taken up by the Master of Ceremonies at the offertory of the solemn sung Parish Mass or by the principal server at the Sunday evening Mass.

**crucifer** — the server who carries the processional cross.

**epistle side** — the right side of the *sanctuary* and the *altar*, when facing the *sanctuary* from the *nave* of the church. Because St Mary's is oriented in the traditional way so that the congregation faces east, the epistle side is the south side.

**evangelary** — better known as the "Book of the Gospels". It contains nothing but the texts of the Gospels as they are proclaimed at the Mass.

**at the foot of the altar** — this phrase refers to the part of the *pavement* between the communion rail and the *predilla*, next to the *predilla*.

**Gospel side** — the left side of the *sanctuary* and the *altar*, when facing the *sanctuary* from the *nave* of the church. This is the north side of St Mary's.

**harrow** — a candelabra holding a row of five or seven candles. It may be adjusted so that the candles are horizontal, or slant up, or slant down on both sides.

**host(s)** — the communion breads. Consecrated hosts are the true Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. It is a doctrine "*de fide*" (it must be believed at least implicitly by every Catholic) that the consecration of the bread and wine changes the entire substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, while leaving the accidents or appearances of bread and wine unaffected. The consecrated elements are therefore not properly referred to as bread and wine, because they are no longer really bread and wine.

**lavabo** — the action by the celebrant of washing his fingers at the end of the offertory. He is assisted in this by two servers, one of whom holds the **lavabo bowl** and towel, while the other pours a little water over the celebrant's fingers. The **lavabo cross** is the small cross worked into the foot of a *chalice*.

**lectionary** — the book containing the readings for the Mass. At St Mary's, a loose-leaf lectionary that contains only the readings is kept at the *ambo*, while a large lectionary that has also all the other parts of the Mass is used at the *altar*. It is expected that the sacred books will be rearranged in the not distant future, and then a lectionary will contain only the readings, and a Missal will contain only the prayers. The latter will then be the book used by the celebrant at the *altar*, and the lectionary will be used only at the *ambo* for the various readings.

**liturgy** — any official public worship ceremony of the Church. Liturgies commonly celebrated at St Mary's are the Mass, the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours), Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Stations of the Cross, communion or Eucharistic service, penance service, wedding, funeral, baptism, and blessing. Some of these, as well as other rites such as solemn reception and confirmation, may be or always are conducted within a Mass.

**luna** — the small glass-sided circular vessel in which a large consecrated *host* is inserted, the luna in turn being inserted into the *monstrance*. Also called a **lunette** or a **lunula**.

**mensa** — the slab of stone which is the upper or “table” part of the *altar*. It is supported by the *plinth*.

**minister** — he who presides at a *liturgy* or anyone who is directly assisting in the conduct of the ceremony. Ushers, choir members, oblationers, and altar servers can all be considered ministers. **Sacred ministers** are those assisting in the liturgy who are ordained or solemnly instituted in Sacred service.

**monstrance** — a richly decorated brass instrument about two feet in height, made in the shape of a cross and having a wide base. In the center of the cross is a compartment into which the *luna* is placed so that the consecrated *host* may be displayed to the congregation. Because only the *luna* directly touches the consecrated *host*, the monstrance is not considered to be a *sacred vessel*.

**nave** — the central part of the church, up to the communion rail and outside the *sanctuary*.

**node** — the bulge in the stem of a *chalice* or of a *ciborium*. It allows the *minister* to take a secure grip on the vessel.

**oblationers** — members of the congregation who bring the gifts (cruets of water and wine, and a *ciborium* charged with *hosts*) to the *sanctuary*.

**oil stock** — a small container, about one and a half or two inches in diameter and an inch deep, made of a single piece of machined brass and fitted with a screw cover. It is used to hold a small quantity of holy oil.

**pall** — a piece of doubled linen used to cover a *chalice*. It is white in color, stiffened by plastic or paperboard, and is about seven inches square.

**paten** — the shallow saucer-like metal plate on which rests the large priest’s *host* at Mass, and which is placed atop the celebrant’s *chalice* before the Offertory and after the Communion.

**pavement** — the wide floor area in the *sanctuary*, surrounding the *predilla*. It is one step up from the floor of the *nave*.

**plinth** — the stone pedestal that supports the *mensa* of the *altar*.

**predilla** — This is the structure in the church on which the *altar* stands. It has three steps leading up to the level of the *altar*. It rests on the *pavement*. At St Mary’s, the extension of the first step to the *epistle side* results in the celebrant or the MC having to mount only two steps from their chairs to reach the level of the *altar*.

**pulpit** — the raised compartment on the *Gospel side*, just in front of the *sanctuary*, having steps leading up to it from the *sanctuary*. Sermons are always preached from the pulpit. The Gospel may be proclaimed from the pulpit. The pulpit is not used for any other purpose.

**purificator** — a linen cloth, about nine inches square, used to wipe a *chalice*. In use, it is folded in thirds lengthwise.

**pyx** — a *sacred vessel*, circular in form, made of metal (except for the one made of glass and containing water, that stands beside the tabernacle), and fitted with a cover, often hinged. It is used to hold consecrated *hosts*. Unlike a *ciborium*, it does not have a footed stem.

**reredos** — the wall directly in back of the *altar*. On the reredos of St Mary's rest the tabernacle, six altar candles, and, except in Lent and Advent, floral or other decorations.

**sacrarium** — the special sink in the *sacristy* that is plumbed to drain directly into the ground, not into a sewage system. Presently at St Mary's it is the only sink in the *sacristy*. When the *sacristy* is enlarged as envisioned in the master plan, it is likely that there will be two sinks, an ordinary one and the sacrarium. The sacrarium then will be reserved exclusively for washing up the *sacred vessels*. It is now necessary that, for example, the thurifer must use the sacrarium to wash charcoal dust off his hands. But in consideration of the more proper and special use made of it, the sacrarium should not be used for unnecessary profane uses, such as to empty out a soda can, for example. Not that a can of soda should be carried into the church, anyway.

**sacred ministers** — see *ministers*.

**sacred vessel** — any vessel intended to touch the Sacred *species*, including in particular the *chalice*, the *ciborium*, the celebrant's *paten*, the plate part of the *communion paten*, the *pyx*, and the *luna*. Until the changes consequent on the second Vatican Council, it was deemed a sacrilege for anyone not in Holy Orders to touch any sacred vessel, except under dire necessity such as to prevent destruction or profanation of the Sacred Species. Moreover, to have touched a sacred vessel, even accidentally, was a "diriment impediment" to subsequent ordination, which could be dispensed from (waived) only by the Holy See. Although practice has been much relaxed in recent years, the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal restores an important part of the former discipline. Specifically, it will be prohibited for anyone to touch any of the sacred vessels unless he is ordained or has been solemnly instituted as an acolyte. In any case, not even a *sacred minister* should handle these vessels unnecessarily, or without due reverence.

**sacristan** — one who cares for the *sanctuary*, the *sacristy*, and all things in them, and sees to the arrangement of all the articles needed for a *liturgy*. However, only a person in orders or an instituted acolyte may handle the *sacred vessels*. At St Mary's, the sacristan's functions usually are carried out by members of the Altar Guild.

**sacristy** — the room off the *sanctuary* (at St Mary’s, on the *Gospel side*) in which vestments are kept as well as other ministerial paraphernalia such as books, candles, and various vessels, and in which preparations are made for the *liturgy*, such as vesting. In the Anglican tradition, the sacristy is often called the vestry.

**sanctuary** — that part of the church inside the communion rail. It is one step up from the floor of the *nave*. Before and after a *liturgy*, servers should not enter the sanctuary unless they are wearing a *cassock*, but without a *cotta*.

**sedilla** — the celebrant’s chair or throne.

**specie** — in ecclesiastical usage, the set of accidents or characteristics (visual appearance, taste, texture, color, &c.) by which something is ordinarily recognized. When communicants receive both the consecrated *host* and the consecrated wine, they are said to be receiving “under both species”.

**station** — **1.)** One of fourteen crosses on the walls of the side aisles of the church, at which the procession stops for prayer during the ceremony known as Stations of the Cross. The actual station is the cross, not the decorative sculpture next to it. **2.)** A pause in a procession, during which a prayer, versicle, or psalm is recited or chanted.

**surplice** — a full, white, bell-shaped garment with wide mid-length sleeves, worn over the *cassock*. It is longer than a *cotta*, the hem falling at least as far as the fingertips when the hand is relaxed at one’s side. Among the servers at St Mary’s, the Master of Ceremonies, and only he, properly wears a surplice instead of a *cotta*. But his surplice is otherwise of the same pattern as the *cotta*, and has no decoration such as lace or embroidered symbols.

**taper** — the waxed wicking secured inside a *candlelighter*, by which a flame is applied to light candles.

**thurible** — the instrument in which incense is burned, and is swung to reverence people and things. In much of the Roman Catholic Church, the thurible is more usually known as the censer.

**thurifer** — the server in charge of the *thurible*.