

The Catholic Church of St Mary the Virgin
(Anglican Use)

Arlington, Texas

Directions for
servers at low Mass

These directions are supplemental to the "Directions for all altar servers". Neither takes the place of the other. They must be read together and all directions in both are to be followed.

29 December A. D. 2001

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

General instructions

These directions pertain to three different kinds of low Masses. The first is the early Mass on Sundays, which is conducted according to the “The Holy Eucharist: Rite One”, found in the Parish Mass booklet at pages 26 and following . In reading the first part of these instructions, that part of the Mass booklet should be consulted, side-by-side.

The second kind of Mass covered is the evening Mass on Sundays, at which there is both a principal altar server and an assistant.

Finally, instructions are given for the ordinary daily Mass at which there is one server.

The designation of “low” Mass simply means that nothing is chanted or sung, and the elaboration of the Mass is less than the sung Mass. However, the Mass is still the Eucharistic sacrifice, the rite that is central to our Catholic faith. Its intrinsic importance is no less for the fact that it is less elaborate and not sung. Every bit as much care should be taken in assisting at a low Mass.

Further, a server who arrives late for the High Mass on Sunday can often be more easily replaced than can one who is late or a no-show at one of the low Masses. This is because the Sunday sung Mass is the Parish Mass, and ordinarily some servers who are not assigned to that Mass are nevertheless present in the congregation. This is less likely to be true at the early Sunday Mass, at which the congregation is always much smaller, and even less likely at the evening Mass which is most heavily attended by visitors. It is therefore all the more important that the server assigned to a low Mass be sure to be in the sacristy on time, at least fifteen minutes in advance of the scheduled Mass time.

The early Mass on Sunday

Before the entrance procession

The server should vest in cassock immediately upon arriving in the sacristy. A cotta should be chosen but not donned until the altar candles have been lit.

The server should prepare to read the two readings by going over them as they are printed in the Lectionary on the ambo. He should put a copy of the day’s service bulletin on the ambo, under the upper left corner of the Lectionary. It is from this bulletin that the responsorial verses should be read. There are sometimes differences between the verses as they are printed there and the verses in the Lectionary. As the congregation will be using the bulletin, it should be used at the ambo, to avoid any possible confusion. The “Crucifer’s Copy” of the Parish Mass booklet should be either on the crucifer’s seat or lying near the credence table.

The server should also check on the Altar Guild’s preparation for the Mass. A ciborium should be on the credence table, along with the wine and water cruets, the lavabo bowl, a finger towel, and the box of extra communion hosts. The celebrant’s chalice, with paten, pall, and veil, should be on the altar and the tabernacle key laid to the right.

A few minutes before Mass, the server lights the two candles on the altar. Remember that this is done while vested in cassock only. No other candles are lit, either on the reredos or at the Marian shrine. The candle on the right side, the ambo side, should be lit first.

From the entrance procession to the Gospel

When the celebrant is ready, the server opens the altar door of the sacristy. He rings the bell with two strokes. He takes holy water from the stoup there and offers the water on his fingers to the celebrant, who will touch them to take some of the holy water from them. The server signs himself with the Cross, folds his hands, and enters the sanctuary. He turns right and walks along the pavement to the corner, then turns left and goes to the foot of the altar, just to the right of center. He walks with a deliberate pace, because the celebrant will pause to close the door behind him, and the server should not be very far before him when he comes to the center of the altar.

The celebrant genuflects and removes his biretta, handing it to the server. The server genuflects with the celebrant and takes the biretta from him. Rising, the server walks to the right, carrying the biretta, and goes past the ambo then turns left and places the biretta on the shelf under the ambo, or places it on the low table to the right of his own seat, which is the seat to the left of the celebrant's chair.

The server remains standing to participate in the opening rites.

Having read the collect, the celebrant turns to the side and comes to sit in his chair. As soon as he turns from the center of the altar, the server goes to the ambo. The server waits until both the celebrant and the congregation have been seated and have quieted. He then reads the first reading. While reading, the server should place both hands flat on the edges of the book, the fingers even with the top of the page.

As soon as the reader ends the first reading by saying "The word of the Lord", he takes up the service bulletin that is under the Lectionary. After the congregation has responded "Thanks be to God", the reader announces, "The responsorial verse", and reads the responsory from the bulletin. Because the responsory is printed in the bulletin as a sung response, it sometimes includes a repetition of a phrase. The repetition should be omitted.¹

When the congregation has responded with the responsory for the last time, the reader waits for perhaps five seconds and then commences with the second reading. Having said "The word of the Lord" after the second reading, the reader instantly steps back to his seat, making way for the celebrant, who rises from his seat to go to the foot of the altar.

The Gospel

The celebrant prays briefly at the foot of the altar, then goes to the pulpit to proclaim the Gospel. He begins with a verse, then says "The Lord be with you". After the response, he announces the Gospel (*i.e.*, "The Holy Gospel ...). At this moment, the server turns to face directly towards the celebrant. He remains facing the celebrant during the proclamation of the Gospel.

¹For example: The sung responsory might be something like "O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth, how wonderful your name!" The reader should say only "O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!"

Although it may seem rather irreverent to the Word of God, the time during the proclamation of the Gospel is the only time the server is reasonably able to count the number of people in the congregation. The count is taken as unobtrusively as possible, with hands folded throughout.²

When the congregation's response has been made at the end of the Gospel, the server sits for the sermon.

After the sermon, to the Eucharistic prayer

When the sermoner comes down from the pulpit, the server stands as soon as the celebrant has his feet on the pavement. The celebrant goes up to the altar and begins the Creed. After the Creed, the celebrant reads the Prayers of the People. The Penitential Rite then follows. The celebrant will read the introductory paragraph, which ends with "... devoutly kneeling." The server kneels on the second step of the predilla (actually the first step on his side) and participates in the prayer. After the absolution and the response of "Amen", the server rises. The celebrant says "The peace of the Lord be always with you." All respond "And with thy spirit". The server immediately retreats to stand in front of his seat. The celebrant comes down to the ambo to make the announcements. The server does not sit until and unless the celebrant invites all to do so.

After the announcements, the celebrant goes up to the altar to prepare the offertory gifts. The server rises and takes up the celebrant's biretta. This he carries with him as he goes to the foot of the altar, in the center, passing to the front of the ambo in doing so. At the center, he bows to the Sacrament in the tabernacle, then continues on to the other side. He puts the biretta on the back bench, on the seat nearer the sacristy. He takes the ciborium from the credence table and carries it up to the celebrant.³ He sets it down on the altar to the left of the corporal. The celebrant may point to the exact spot where he wants the ciborium placed. The MC whispers to the celebrant the number he counted earlier of those in attendance. The celebrant tells the server if he needs the box of hosts. If it is needed, the server goes down to the credence table and takes it up in two hands. He takes it up to the celebrant, opens it, and holds it conveniently close to the ciborium. When the celebrant has

²This is very necessary, so that the celebrant will know at the offertory whether he has enough hosts in the ciborium. The count must be of every single person, even infants, and the server and the celebrant as well. It is perhaps easiest to do this by counting each side separately. A good method is to count from the front to the back on the server's side, then check the number by counting from the back to the front. Then count the opposite side in the same way and add the two numbers together. The server's side should be counted first, because if the Gospel is short, the server may have to complete the count from his chair. It is more difficult to see heads on one's own side of the church, whereas the other side is viewed at an angle, which proves more revealing.

³The ciborium is carried by grasping the stem in the right hand and resting the first two fingers of the left hand atop the cross on the ciborium cover.

finished with the box, he and the server bow to each other, the server closes the box,⁴ and the server returns the box to the credence table.

The server takes the stoppers from the cruets and puts them down on the table. He takes up the wine cruet in his right hand and the water in the left. He holds them by putting his hands around them, not gripping the handles, but pointing the handles away from himself. If larger cruets are used, that have no handles, the wine cruet first should be put in the palm of the right hand, then the water cruet taken up by its neck. The server goes up to the celebrant, stopping one pace short of meeting him, until the celebrant takes up the chalice. The server steps forward and offers the wine cruet to the celebrant, the handle turned to the celebrant for his convenience. The celebrant takes the wine cruet. The server shifts the water cruet to his right hand and puts his left hand flat on his breast. The celebrant gives the wine cruet back to the server, who takes it by his left hand and offers the water cruet to the celebrant. The celebrant takes the cruet, the server shifts the empty wine cruet to his right hand and puts his left hand on his breast. The celebrant gives the water cruet back to the server, who takes it in his left hand. The server and the celebrant bow to each other.

As the server turns away from the celebrant, he turns to his right and looks to see if the ushers are finished, or nearly finished, taking up the collection. Returning the cruets to the credence table, the server stoppers the wine cruet only. If the collection is ready, or nearly so, he walks on the pavement around to the foot of the altar, in the center, bows to the Sacrament in the tabernacle, then turns around to face the main aisle. The ushers come up and bow to the server. He bows to them and takes the offering plates from them. He turns around and holds them up at shoulder height for the celebrant's blessing. He walks around to the credence table and puts the offering plates down on the second step of the predilla, against the reredos.

The server immediately takes up the lavabo bowl in his left hand and drapes the finger towel over his left wrist. He takes up the water cruet in his right hand, holding it now either by the handle or with his hand around the cruet, with the spout this time pointing away from him. He goes up to the celebrant, holds the bowl under the celebrant's fingers, and pours a tablespoon or two of water over them. The celebrant takes the finger towel, dries his fingers, and replaces the towel on the server's wrist. The celebrant and server bow to each other. The server returns the bowl, towel, and cruet to the credence table. He may stopper the water cruet.

If the ushers have not nearly finished taking the collection when the server brings the wine and water cruets back to the credence table, the server reverses the order, first taking up the lavabo items and, after returning them, taking the collection plates from the ushers.⁵

⁴Care should be taken that none of the hosts are broken in closing the box. The method is to hold the box on an angle so that the remaining hosts lean to one end, then fit the cover on the opposite, upper end. Then, still holding the cover open on the lower end, elevate that end so that the angle is reversed and the hosts lean toward the closed end. The cover is then shut.

⁵It is more proper for the celebrant to cleanse his fingers after receiving the congregation's offering, which he does symbolically by blessing the collection plates. Long ago, the offerings often consisted of real goods such as farm produce and livestock, and the celebrant would actually take hold of them. Hence the tradition of washing after receiving the gifts.

The ushers should put the communion rail bridge in place after delivering the collection plates. The server should be alert to see that this has been done. If it has not, he must put the bridge in himself at this time, while the celebrant is reading the preface to the Canon.

After exhorting the people with the words “Let us give thanks ...”, the celebrant reads the preface to the Canon of the Mass. Most usually, this preface concludes with a section that begins with the word “Therefore”. This word is the cue for the server take up the bells, not allowing any sound to come from them. At the words “Holy, holy, holy”, the server rings the bells three times.

During the Eucharistic prayer

When the Benedictus ends, with the words “Hosanna in the highest”, the server kneels on the first step of the altar, next to the credence table, the bells within reach and, if he is not perfectly familiar with the points at which the bells are to be rung, he lays in front of him the Parish Mass booklet marked “Crucifer’s copy”, opened to pages 32 and 33. The points at which the bells are to be rung are marked there on page 33. Each point is marked in the margin by a little drawing of a bell or bells. An asterisk has been inserted in the text at precisely the point at which the bells are to be rung. The number of times the bells should be rung are denoted at each point by the number of asterisks and the number of bells.

After the Eucharistic prayer has been finished and the congregation has responded “Amen”, the server rises.

During the communion service

After the Lord’s Prayer, the celebrant says “[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” and all respond “Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]”. The server then kneels. After the Prayer of Humble Access, on page 35 in the Parish Mass booklet, the celebrant shows the consecrated Host to the congregation and says “The Gifts of God for the People of God”. He then turns and prepares for his own communion. The server takes up the bells, without any sound, and watches for the celebrant to strike his breast. At the exact instant, the server rings the bells once.

The server rises and goes up to the altar. He kneels facing the celebrant, at the edge of the rug on which the celebrant is standing. The celebrant communicates the server in the Body and in the Blood of Christ. The celebrant replaces the chalice on the corporal, takes up the ciborium, and goes to the altar rail to communicate the congregation in the Body of Christ.

The server rises and goes to the center of the altar. He genuflects in adoration of the Sacrament on the altar, even though he has himself just received the Body and Blood of Christ. He takes up the chalice and the purificator lying in front of it, and goes to the altar rail to communicate the congregation in the Precious Blood.⁶

⁶At this point, the reader should consult the separate “Directions for cup bearer”.

After communion

When the server has finished administering the Precious Blood, he turns and goes up to the altar. If the celebrant is still at the altar, the server approaches from the celebrant's right side. He places the chalice on the corporal, toward the right side, and lays the folded purificator he has been using in front of the cup. He genuflects to reverence the Sacrament.

The server goes to the credence table, takes up the water cruet, and bears it up to the celebrant, standing one step away from him until the celebrant turns to him with the chalice. If the ciborium has been emptied, the celebrant cleans it out, covers it, and puts it to the left of the altar Missal. When the celebrant turns to him with the chalice, the server steps forward and pours a tablespoon or so of water in the chalice. The celebrant drinks this off, then wraps the purificator around the rim of the chalice and holds the chalice with his fingers over the cup. He turns to the server, who pours a few tablespoons of water over the celebrant's fingers. They bow to each other. The server takes up the ciborium, if the celebrant has put it to the side, and returns both the ciborium and the cruet to the credence table. He stoppers the cruet and kneels on the first step.

After the Prayer after Communion, on page 36 of the Parish Mass booklet, the celebrant gives his blessing and the dismissal. After the response to the dismissal ("Thanks be to God"), the server rises, takes up the celebrant's biretta, and goes along the pavement to the foot of the altar, stopping to the left of the celebrant and facing the altar. He gives the biretta to the celebrant, and genuflects when the celebrant does. Both turn to their left and walk along the pavement to the sacristy, the server leading. The server opens the door to the sacristy, passes in, holds the door as the celebrant enters, and closes it after him.

After Mass

In the sacristy after Mass, the server does not put off his cotta until the brief prayer, led by the celebrant, is ended. He then goes to extinguish the altar candles. He goes to the foot of the altar, genuflects, then goes up to the left (sacristy) side and extinguishes the candle on that side first. He steps to the center in front of the altar just off the rug and bows to the Sacrament in the tabernacle, then goes to the right and extinguishes the other candle. He turns, goes down to the foot of the altar, genuflects, and returns to the sacristy. If the ushers did not take the bridge out of the altar rail after communion, the server goes out again to take the bridge out and put it on the floor just behind the altar rail, on the side towards the pulpit.

Particularly if the Altar Guild is not there to do so, the server should bring the cruets and other items into the sacristy.⁷ The server may then make preparations for the sung Mass, if he is to be the

⁷The restored discipline, as directed by the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal, permits only a man in orders or solemnly instituted as an acolyte to handle the sacred vessels, including their cleaning. The altar guild may deal with other things, but either the celebrant or the server must bring the ciborium and the chalice back to the sacristy, clean them at the sacrarium, and either put them away or set them up for the next Mass.

Master of Ceremonies at that Mass, or for the convenience of the one who will be.⁸ The server is responsible for hanging up in good order the vestments he has taken from the rack.

The Sunday evening Mass

Two servers are assigned for this Mass. One is titled “Altar Server” and the other is the “Assisting Minister”. In the following directions, these titles are reduced to “server” and “assistant”, respectively. The procedures at the evening Mass are largely the same as at the early Mass, so these directions are mostly restricted to detailing the salient differences. However, the rubrics followed are not “The Holy Eucharist: Rite One”. They are instead those followed in all other Masses, and are found in the beginning of the Parish Mass booklet. The latter rubrics being the standard, the differences from the preceding instructions in this respect will not be noted.

Before the entrance procession

The server is responsible for seeing to all the preparations for Mass, except for the lighting of the candles, which is properly the responsibility of the assistant. At this Mass, the wine cruet will be the middle-sized one, but the water cruet may be the same small cruet used at the early Mass. At this Mass, there is a secondary chalice placed on the credence table on the ambo side of the altar, covered with a purificator and a pall. A service bulletin should be put on the back servers’ bench (to the right when facing the sacristy) for the convenience of the assistant.

From the entrance procession to the Prayers of the People

The assistant follows the server in going into the sanctuary. The assistant takes the holy water from the server and offers it in turn to the celebrant. The assistant stops at the left of center, so that the celebrant when he comes in will stand at the center between the server and the assistant. All genuflect together. The celebrant hands his biretta either to the server or the assistant and goes up to the altar. If the server has taken the biretta, he transfers the biretta to his left hand and gives it to the assistant, who takes it with his right hand. Were it possible, this passing of the biretta in front of the tabernacle would be hidden from sight. That is not possible, but it should be done with the least possible notice being taken of it. So the server and the assistant do not directly face each other to pass the biretta, and do not bow to each other after they have passed it. Both go to their seats and remain standing for the introductory rites, the assistant first opening the sacristy door and placing the biretta on the counter just inside the door.

During the Gospel neither the server nor the assistant need take a count of the attendance, as this will be done by the ushers.

⁸Those preparations are detailed in the “Directions for Master of Ceremonies”.

From the offertory to the communion service

As the sermoner comes down from the pulpit, the assistant rises when the server does. The server goes to the credence table on his side and takes the chalice up to the celebrant, just as the Master of Ceremonies (MC) does at the sung Mass. The assistant brings up the ciborium as the server does at the early Mass. The assistant then goes to the credence table, takes the stoppers from the cruets, takes up the cruets, and steps up to the second step with them. The server comes to the side and takes the cruets from the assistant. The wine cruet does not have a handle, so the server handles it just as the MC does at the sung Mass. When the server has finished serving the celebrant with the cruets, he carries them back to the side, where the assistant takes them from him. They bow to each other and the assistant replaces the cruets on the credence table. He puts the stopper in the wine cruet and takes up the lavabo bowl, finger towel, and water cruet. He goes up to the celebrant and ministers the water to him just as the server does at the early Mass.

The server turns around and goes to stand on the top step, on that same side of the altar, facing forward. He takes up the collection plates from the ushers just as the MC does at the sung Mass, except that one of the plates should have on top of it the slip with the attendance count on it. Coming back to the sacristy side, the server gives the plates to the assistant, but he takes the attendance slip out and carries it up to the celebrant. The assistant puts the plates down on the second step of the predilla, against the reredos. The assistant stands on the pavement next to the credence table and the server goes down to stand at his right. The assistant rings the bells at the points noted in the Crucifer's Copy of the Parish Mass booklet.⁹

From the communion service to the end of Mass, and after Mass

When the assistant has rung the bells at the celebrant's communion (when the celebrant strikes his breast), he and the server rise and go up to the altar. They kneel facing the celebrant, at the edge of the rug on which the celebrant stands. The server kneels to the right of the assistant. The celebrant communicates both in the Body of Christ, and then administers the Precious Blood to each of them. He takes up the ciborium and goes down to begin communicating the congregation. The server and the assistant rise together and go to the center of the altar to take up the chalices and communicate the Precious Blood to the congregation. They now proceed as at sung Mass, the server having the place of the MC and the assistant the place of the cup bearer.

There will be no communion paten for the assistant to take back to the sacristy, so he first takes the ciborium to the sacristy (even though it earlier came from the credence table), and then returns to get the chalice. Coming back, he brings back the celebrant's biretta and shuts the door. Both he and the server now kneel at the side, on the first step.

When the response has been made to the dismissal, the server and the assistant rise. The server takes up the celebrant's biretta. The server and assistant both walk, on the pavement, to the places they took in front of the altar when they first entered the sanctuary. The server hands the celebrant's biretta to him, holding it in such a way that the celebrant can take hold of it by the middle of the three

⁹Father Hawkins usually uses the third Eucharistic Prayer at the Sunday evening Mass, page 17 of the booklet.

horns atop it. The server and assistant genuflect with the celebrant. The assistant turns left and starts walking to the sacristy door. The server follows the assistant. The assistant opens the door and holds it as the server and the celebrant pass into the sacristy. He then shuts the door. Either he or the server or both extinguish the altar candles and conduct any other cleaning up that the Altar Guild does not see to. One of them should retrieve all the service bulletins which are still on the servers' seats and take them back to the church foyer.