

# Deacon and Acolyte Handbook for Sunday Masses

Saint Thomas Aquinas  
Catholic Church  
Pilot Point, TX

Updated as of June 2023

### Before Mass

Before each weekend, deacons and acolytes should know what Mass they are scheduled for and ensure they can be there or notify the director of liturgy in advance that they will not.

For each Mass, deacons and acolytes should ensure they are properly disposed to fully participate in the celebration of the Mass, participating in the sacrament of reconciliation prior to Mass if necessary. They should be properly dressed for the sacredness of the Mass and the importance of their ministry at Mass:

- Nice pants, either slacks or jeans
- Footwear should be nice and not impede walking up and down the sanctuary steps, closed-toe shoes with little to no added heel, no sandals
- A clean t-shirt may be worn

If, for the penitential act, the deacon will lead the people in option C, prior to Mass, he needs to inform the choir that they will not sing the Kyrie.

If a Mass has two deacons, the responsibilities are divided between the Deacon of the Word and the Deacon of the Altar.

15 minutes prior to Mass, the Acolyte does the following:

- Turn on sound system (if not already). Switch is next to steps from sacristy to sanctuary
- Light altar candles
- (if incense is used) light charcoal

5 minutes prior to Mass, the priest leads the ministers (priest, deacon, acolyte, and altar servers) in prayer. They go to the back of the church (deacon with evangeliary [book of the Gospel]). The acolyte may need to assist the servers in lighting their candles in the back of the church. The ministers line up in the narthex in the following order, from front to back:

- Thurifer\*
- Crucifer
- Candle bearers
- Deacon
- Priest

### During Mass

#### *The Procession and Introductory Rites*

The procession begins once the words of the processional hymn begin. **All ministers** reverently walk toward the sanctuary. As **each minister** (including **acolyte**) reaches the first step of the sanctuary, they genuflect (or bow if carrying something). The **deacon** places the evangeliary on the altar on the (its placed there before Mass if no deacon). The **deacon** waits for the priest to join him at the altar and they both reverence it with a kiss. the crucifer and candle bearers place their items in their stands then proceed to their seats.

After the genuflection/bow during the procession, THE EUCHARIST IN THE TABERNACLE IS NOT REVERENCED AGAIN until the recession (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 274).

For the penitential act, if using option A, the **deacon** leads the people in praying the Confiteor, or if using option C, the **deacon** leads the people in the *tropes* (short phrase before each Kyrie/Christe). If no deacon, the priest leads the penitential act.

Near the end of the gloria (or immediately after the penitential act during Advent and Lent), the crucifer brings the missal to the priest for the *collect* [opening prayer]. Once the priest closes the missal, the crucifer places it on the stand and all the servers sit for the readings.

### *The Liturgy of the Word*

When everyone stands for the alleluia (or other sung phrase during Lent), the **candle bearers** proceed to stand in front of their candles at the altar. The **deacon** receives the blessing from the priest. Once the deacon (or priest if no deacon) takes the book of the gospel and begins walking toward the ambo, the candle bearers proceed to stand on either side of the ambo, facing each other. The **deacon**, WITH HIS HANDS TOGETHER (*GIRM*, 175), introduces the Gospel then proclaims the gospel reading. After concluding the reading, the **deacon** places the evangeliary on its stand on the side altar then returns to his seat. After the deacon/priest says, “the gospel of the Lord,” the candle bearers return their candles to the altar and sit at their seats for the homily. **All ministers** stand with everyone for the Credo.

At the end of the Credo, the **deacon** (or second reader if no deacon) goes to the ambo for the Universal Prayer. The **priest** introduces the prayer, the **deacon**/reader leads each intercession, then the **priest** concludes the prayer. The intercessions should use the following formula (*GIRM*, 70):

1. For the needs of the Church
2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world
3. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty
4. For the local community

### *The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparing the Altar and the Offertory*

After the priest concludes the prayer, the **deacon** goes to the altar. the crucifer brings the missal with its stand to the deacon (or acolyte if no deacon [*GIRM*, 139]) at the altar. The deacon/acolyte places it to the far left side of the altar. Next, the crucifer immediately retrieves the processional cross and proceeds to the back of the church. Directed by the **Acolyte**, everything else for the altar is brought from the credence table and placed on the altar by the **deacon/acolyte** and the evangeliary stand is removed from the altar. **Candle bearer 1** brings the presider’s chalice to the deacon/acolyte/priest. **Candle bearer 2** brings the glass cruet of water to the deacon/acolyte/priest.

Once the altar is set, the **priest** and **deacon** (or acolyte if no deacon [*GIRM*, 139]) proceed to the first step of the sanctuary. Once they are at the step, the **crucifer** leads the gift bearers to the sanctuary, places the cross in its stand, and returns to their seat, standing.

The **priest** and **deacon** return to the altar to continue preparing the gifts. **Candle bearer 1** waits at the altar. Once the deacon/priest finishes with both the cruets, he hands them to candle bearer 1

who returns them to the credence table. The **deacon** (or priest if no deacon) adds the wine and water to the presider's chalice.

Meanwhile, **candle bearer 2** stands ready with the lavabo bowl in one hand, the pitcher in the other, and the towel on the bowl hand's wrist. After the priest bows and says the silent prayer, he turns to **candle bearer 2** who pours water over his hands into the bowl. After the priest dries his hands with the towel, **candle bearer 2** returns the lavabo bowl, towel, and pitcher to the credence table. If necessary, the **crucifer** may assist candle bearer 2. **All servers** return to their seats, standing.

*The Liturgy of the Eucharist: The Eucharistic Prayer*

Following the Sanctus, all servers kneel at their seats.

Once kneeling, the **crucifer** prepares to ring the bells. At the epiclesis, the **deacon** kneels and the **crucifer** rings the bell once. After the words of institution, the crucifer rings the bells three times during both the elevation of the host and of the chalice. The ringing during the elevation of the chalice is the last time the bells are rung. The **deacon** stands with the priest after his second genuflection.

*The Liturgy of the Eucharist: The Communion Rite*

**All servers** stand with everyone for the Pater Noster. At the sign of peace, the **deacon** (or priest if no deacon) says EXACTLY "let us offer each other the sign of peace," or "dense fraternalmente la paz" (*Missal*, "Order of Mass," 128). During the Agnus Dei, the **deacon** (or acolyte if no deacon) retrieves the tabernacle ciborium and places it on the altar. **Candle bearer 1** places the small ciborium on the altar. All servers kneel with everyone following the Agnus Dei.

When the priest self-communicates, all servers stand and form a line with the acolyte. Once the priest gives communion to the deacon, he will give communion to the servers and acolyte. Once they have received communion, all servers kneel at their seats in prayer.

For the distribution of communion, the **priest** and **deacon** (EMHC if no deacon) distribute communion under the species of bread to the people in front of the sanctuary. The **acolyte** brings communion using the small ciborium.

THE PROPER AND ONLY PERMISSIBLE FORM FOR DISTRIBUTING HOLY COMMUNION IS TO OFFER THE CONSECRATED HOST BY SAYING, "THE BODY OF CHRIST" OR "EL CUERPO DE CRISTO." NO OTHER WORDS OR NAMES MAY BE ADDED. THE FORMULA SHOULD NOT BE EDITED IN ANY WAY (CF. *GIRM*, 161; 284-287). IF SOMEONE COMES FORWARD IN THE COMMUNION PROCESSION DESPITE NOT RECEIVING COMMUNION, NEITHER AN ORDINARY (BISHOP, PRIEST, OR DEACON) NOR EXTRAORDINARY (ACOLYTE OR OTHER LAY PERSON) MINISTER SHOULD TOUCH THE PERSON OR MAKE ANY GESTURE WITH THEIR HANDS, THE HOST, OR THE CIBORIUM. IN THIS CASE, THE MINISTER SAYS ONLY "MAY GOD BLESS YOU" OR "DIOS TE BENDIGA."\*

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\* According to Canon Law, "A deacon can impart only those blessings expressly permitted by law" (CIC, 1169 §3). Unless a deacon's pagella says otherwise, he is to never give blessings when a priest, who acts *in persona Christi*

After distributing communion, the **priest** and **deacon** return to the altar. The **crucifer** receives the missal and stand from the priest, places them on their table, then returns to their seat. Meanwhile, **candle bearer 1** places the cruet of water on the altar. While the priest purifies the vessels, the **deacon** (or acolyte if no deacon) returns the tabernacle ciborium to the tabernacle. The **candle bearers** wait to receive the vessels from the deacon/acolyte to place them on the credence table.

Once the priest has finished purifying the vessels, **all ministers** return to their seats for a moment of silent prayer. When the priest invites everyone to stand, the **crucifer** brings the missal to the priest for the post-communion prayer. After the priest closes the missal, the **crucifer** places it on its stand.

### *The Concluding Rites and Recession*

The priest may invite everyone, including all servers, to sit for announcements or some other extra activity. If not, he immediately gives the blessing. The deacon (or priest if no deacon) dismisses everyone using one of the following formula:

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| 1. "Go forth, the Mass is ended."                   | 1. "Pueden ir en paz."   |
| 2. "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."        | 2. "La alegría del Señor sea nuestra fuerza. Pueden ir en paz."          |
| 3. "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." | 3. "Glorifiquen al Señor con su vida."                                   |
| 4. "Go in peace."                                   | 4. "En el nombre del Señor, pueden ir en paz."                           |
|   | 5. "En la paz de Cristo, vayan a servir a Dios y sus hermanos."          |
|   | 6. "Anuncien a todos la alegría del Señor resucitado. Pueden ir en paz." |

The **Priest** leads the people in the Sante Michaelae and Ave Maria. Once the words of the recessional hymn begin, the **crucifer** retrieves the cross and proceeds to stand in the center aisle, in between the first row of pews, facing the sanctuary. At the same time, the **candle bearers** retrieve the candles and proceed to stand in front the crucifer, facing the sanctuary. Once the priest and deacon are in front the servers and everyone is facing the sanctuary, **all ministers** bow with the priest, turn around, and reverently recess out of the church.

### After Mass

The **crucifer** returns the cross to the stand in the sacristy. The **candle bearers** extinguish their candles and return them to the stands in the sacristy.

The **acolyte** extinguishes altar candles.

**All ministers** devest and neatly return their albs and cinctures to their proper place.

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*capitis* (CIC, 1009 §3), is present. A deacon can only bless persons within the context of him presiding at a liturgy. He can only bless objects when using a prescribed blessing in the Book of Blessings. If the blessing is explicitly reserved to a priest, a deacon may not perform the blessing.

### Adaptations for Fewer than 3 Servers

Ideally, every Mass will have 3 servers. If not, the following adaptations will be made based on the actual number of servers present. The **acolyte** may need to take some of the server responsibilities in these situations.

#### *Two Servers*

For the procession/recession, holding the missal for the collect/post-communion prayers, leading the gifts to the sanctuary for the gifts, and ringing the bells, the **crucifer** role remains unchanged.

For the procession/recession, the **2<sup>nd</sup> server** does not carry a candle.

During the gospel, the **crucifer** and **2<sup>nd</sup> server** serve the roles of the **candle bearers**.

#### *One Server*

For the procession/recession, holding the missal for the collect/post-communion prayers, leading the gifts to the sanctuary for the gifts, and ringing the bells the **crucifer** role remains unchanged.

During the gospel, there are no candles.

The **acolyte** fills the role of the candle bearers for the other parts.

### **Thurifer Instructions**

On major solemnities such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, incense may be used at the priest's discretion. A fourth server is needed to serve in the role of thurifer.

#### *Before Mass and the Procession*

The sacristan lights the coals of the *thurible* [swinging censer that burns incense] and ensures the *boat* [container for incense] is full before Mass. Right before the procession begins, the priest adds incense from the boat to the thurible. The **thurifer** leads the procession to the sanctuary, gently swinging the thurible. After reaching the steps of the sanctuary, the **thurifer** bows and proceeds to stand behind the altar. After the priest and deacon reverence the altar, the **thurifer** hands the thurible to the priest. The priest and deacon incense the altar, walking around it, while the **thurifer** remains standing behind the altar. Once they finish, the priest hands the thurible to the thurifer who places it on its stand and proceeds to stand with the other servers at their seats.

#### *The Gospel*

After the second reading ends, the **thurifer** brings the thurible and boat to the priest who takes the boat and fills the thurible with incense. The priest returns the boat to the **thurifer** who proceeds to stand behind the ambo. After the deacon (or priest if no deacon) introduces the gospel, he takes the thurible from the **thurifer**, incenses the gospel, and returns the thurible to the **thurifer**. After the deacon/priest says, "the gospel of the Lord," the **thurifer** returns the thurible to its stand and sits for the homily.

#### *The Offertory*

After the priest says the silent prayer, before the candle bearer washes his hands, the **thurifer** brings the thurible and boat to the altar, hands the boat to the deacon (or priest if no deacon) for the priest to add incense to the thurible. The priest takes the thurible and incenses the altar. The priest gives the thurible to the deacon who incenses the priest and the assembly. If there is no deacon, the **thurifer** incenses the priest and the assembly with three pairs of swings. The deacon gives the thurible to **thurifer** who returns it and the boat to their stand and remains standing at the stand.

#### *The Eucharistic Prayer*

During the Sanctus, the **thurifer** adds incense from the boat to the thurible and proceeds with only the thurible to kneel at the front steps of the sanctuary. After the words of institution, the **thurifer** incenses the eucharist with three pairs of swings when the priest holds up both the host and the chalice. After the priest says, "the mystery faith," the **thurifer** proceeds to return the thurible to its stand and kneel with the other servers.

#### *The Recession and After Mass*

Once the words of the recessional hymn begin, the thurifer retrieves the thurible and boat and proceeds to stand in the center aisle, in between the third row of pews, facing the sanctuary. Once the priest and **all servers** bow, the **thurifer** leads the recession out of the Church.

After Mass, the **thurifer** returns the thurible and boat to their stand in the sanctuary, devests, and neatly returns the alb and cincture to their proper places.

**APPENDIX**

*PARTS OF THE CHURCH*

Narthex – a room/space between the church and the outside



Sanctuary – the raised area of the church for the altar and ambo



Ambo – the stand from which the readings are proclaimed and the homily is given



Nave – the section of the church with pews



Credence Table – the table where the vessels are prepared for Mass



Sacristy – a room where vestments (vesting sacristy) and sacred vessels (working sacristy) are kept



Altar – the table upon which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered



Tabernacle – the locked box for reserving consecrated hosts



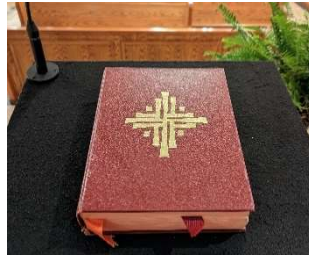


Evangelary – the book which contains the Gospel readings



*LITURGICAL BOOKS*

Lectionary – the book containing all the readings for Mass



Priest/Intercessions Binder (color can also be white, red, or purple depending on the liturgical season)



Missal – the book which contains the prayers of the Mass



*VESSELS, LINENS, ET AL*

Ciborium (pl ciboria) – the bowl(s) which hold the hosts (bread) used for the eucharist



Chalice – the cup used to hold the wine which is used for the eucharist



Paten – a plate which can be used to hold the host



Corporal – the linen cloth placed under the sacred vessels. It is intended to catch any fragments of the body of Christ or drops of the blood of Christ



Pall – the stiff piece of cloth which prevents dust/bugs from falling into the chalice or other vessels



Purificator – the linen cloth which is used to wipe the sacred vessels



Lavabo Bowl/Pitcher – the bowl and pitcher to *lavare* (Latin for “wash”) the priest’s hands



Thurible – the swinging censer which burns incense



Boat – the container for the incense



*VESTMENTS*

Alb – white vestment representing our baptism which enables participation in the Eucharistic celebration



Chasuble – the outer vestment worn by the priest



Cincture – the rope-belt worn over the alb



Dalmatic – the outer vestment worn by the deacon



Cassock – black vestment worn by clerics (bishop, priest, or deacon) or servers



Stole – the vestment worn by priests and deacons over the shoulders

*MINISTERS*

Acolyte – an instituted lay minister to assist the priest at the altar

Crucifer – the server who carries the cross

Deacon – the ordained minister who assists the priest at the altar and proclaims the gospel

Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) – laity who assist the priest and deacon in distributing communion

Priest – the ordained minister who leads the celebration of the eucharist *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ)

Sacristan – a minister who prepares the sacred vessels for Mass and can assist as a server

Thurifer – the server who carries the thurible