

## TRI-PARISH ALTAR SERVER PROGRAM OVERVIEW WALLA WALLA CATHOLIC PARISHES

### The Role of Altar Servers

The celebration of the Mass is the source and summit of our Christian lives. Therefore, all ministries which aid in the worthy celebration of the Mass are of particular importance and must be carried out with reverence and dignity. This is true for the ministry of servers.

The responsibility of a server is to assist the priest and deacon at Mass and, at the same time, to serve as an example to the congregation. Together with the priest and deacon, the server helps lead the congregation in the Sacred Liturgy. This is achieved first of all through reverence and fully participating in the liturgical celebration (e.g. singing, paying attention to duties and posture, showing good behavior, etc.).

In addition to this, servers are representatives of the Church. As such and by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, the Church calls servers to act as leaders and witnesses of Christian faith. Servers accomplish this in three ways: 1) By striving to develop their relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and the regular reception of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, 2) By manifesting a desire to grow in their knowledge of Christ and his Church through Scripture and catechesis, 3) By developing a willingness to bear witness to their Christian Faith through word and deed in their homes, with friends, at school and work.

### Devotion, Dedication, and Discipline: Three Virtues for Servers

As a way of fulfilling their responsibilities servers are expected to develop and demonstrate three fundamental virtues: Devotion, Dedication, and Discipline.

A server must first and foremost be *devoted* to our Lord Jesus Christ, whom they serve in the liturgy. This means servers must always keep in mind that the reason they serve is out of love for Jesus. Servers grow in devotion by making it a habit to pray before, during, and after Mass. Their behavior, dress, and attention during Mass should also be a sign of their devotion.

Secondly, servers are expected to be *dedicated* to their responsibilities. They recognize that other people – the priest and deacon, other servers, and the people in the pews – are counting on them to perform their duties well. They show dedication by arriving on time (fifteen minutes early) for the Masses they are scheduled to serve and being willing to serve even when they are not scheduled.

Lastly, servers must be *disciplined*. The amount of good habits, skills, and details that go into serving well demands that servers be attentive and focused whenever they are at the altar. Since they are often in view of everyone else in the church, any extra non-prayerful actions they make (e.g. playing with their cincture, looking around the church, looking at people/family in the congregation) can distract the others and not help them pray. This requires self-control. At the same time, servers are not expected to be “perfect” right away. Learning from mistakes and always looking for ways to improve is another part of discipline.

### **Basic Server Prerequisites and Responsibilities**

Upon completion of the mandating training, all servers will be able to perform all the serving responsibilities at a regular Sunday Mass. They will be scheduled in a regular rotation of servers for their home parish.

#### *Prerequisites:*

- Be in the fourth grade or above.
- Have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion.
- Attend the required training sessions.

#### *Duties and Expectations:*

- Know how to serve as Candle Bearer and Cross/Book Bearer (see “Altar Server Guide”).
- Make the responses for Mass.
- Show basic knowledge of the structure of Mass, sacred vessels, and vestments.
- Demonstrate correct behavior and postures when helping at the altar.
- Desire to fully participate in the celebration of the Mass, and desire to serve with faith and devotion.
- Respect others and serve with generosity and charity.
- Pray before, during, and after each liturgical action.

### **Senior Server Prerequisites and Responsibilities**

Experienced altar servers may be promoted to become “senior servers.” These servers have more responsibility, mentor newer servers, and wear distinctive vestments (cassock & surplice for boys, front-wrap albs for girls). They also are among the first to be considered for serving special Masses. A current list of senior servers will be posted in the sacristies of each church.

#### *Prerequisites:*

- Have sufficient prior serving experience\*, defined as:
  - being in 8th grade or above with (at least) 1 year of serving experience,
  - OR being in 7<sup>th</sup> grade with (at least) 2 years of serving experience,*\*At the discretion of the priests, a high schooler may be admitted directly as a senior server.*
- Pass a practicum to demonstrate familiarity and proficiency with all basic server tasks and terminology for Sunday Mass.

#### *Duties and Expectations:*

- Perform and model all the duties and expectations of basic servers.
- Mentor less experienced servers.
- Learn how to serve as thurifer (incense bearer).
- Learn how to prepare and use the Missal.
- Be available to serve in special liturgical events such as Benediction, funerals, weddings, Holy Week, etc.
- Obtain further and ongoing knowledge of the Catholic faith.

### **Training of Servers**

In order to prepare servers for their ministry at Mass, servers will receive formal training regarding their roles and specific functions. Formal training sessions will occur at least once a year. In these sessions, in addition to the training, servers will be provided with written summary information of the duties and responsibilities.

### **Altar Server Commitment Form**

Around the time of their initial training, altar servers and their parents must complete and sign an altar server commitment form. By submitting this form, the server officially signs up to become an altar server for his or her chosen parish. Altar servers will not be put on the regular serving schedule without a current signed commitment form on file. Commitment forms are good for one year and should be renewed annually.

### **Commissioning and Recognition of Servers**

Yearly in the fall, following the server training period, there will be a formal commissioning of servers at Mass. At this time, new servers, promoted servers, and continuing servers will be commissioned for their ministry in our parish and receive a special blessing.

Also yearly, toward the end of the school year, servers will be recognized at Mass and publicly thanked for their service to our local parish community.

### **Special Events for Servers**

Special events will be organized specifically for servers such as skating, barbeques, pizza nights, etc. As a rule, these fun community building events will be offered about twice a year. In addition to these fun events and/or in conjunction with them, further spiritual and catechetical instruction may be offered to the participants of the server program.

### **Scheduling and Attendance of Servers**

Every Sunday Mass will have a total of three scheduled servers. Servers must arrive 15 minutes before Mass begins. A server who does not arrive by that time may be replaced. Servers who arrive within 5 minutes before the beginning of Mass may not be able to serve, even if they are scheduled.

In addition to the three scheduled servers, there are two additional serving slots for a total of five for each Sunday Mass. These slots will be filled on a first come first serve basis. Therefore, those who have been trained to serve are encouraged to present themselves in the sacristy at every Mass so as to have the most opportunities to exercise their ministry.

## **Server Dress Code**

In addition to their behavior at the altar, servers also set an example by what they decide to wear to Mass. By dressing up well for Mass, servers remind everyone else in attendance that the Mass truly is a sacred event and that the Person they encounter during it – Jesus Christ – is important (this is an understatement!). People follow the same principle of “dressing up for the occasion” in other areas. For instance, if a group of people were to go to the White House to meet the president, they would dress up.

Alternatively, consider the professional attire worn by the Secret Service agents protecting the president. However, rather than guarding an earthly head of state, altar servers attend to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the Eucharist. Therefore, their dress should reflect the dignity of their ministry (though they are not being asked to wear suits and ties).

Specific dress code expectations are spelled out below to cut through various definitions of “dressing up.” At the same time, these guidelines direct the servers to dress in such a way that is fitting for servers and not potentially distracting. Some outfits may be appropriate for people in the pews but not for servers at the altar, for example brightly colored dress shirts that may show through the white alb.

*NOTE WELL: Servers who arrive at church out of dress code may be told not to serve for the given Mass.*

### ***Specific Guidelines***

- Shirts: Neutral, solid-colored polos or button-up shirts are preferred. (Bright colors, patterns, and designs will show through the alb and should not be worn.)
- Pants: Altar servers are required to wear long pants, preferably dark or neutrally colored. Servers may not wear shorts or skirts.
- Shoes: Servers must wear clean close-toed shoes with socks. Black or brown dress shoes are preferred. Clean, neutrally-colored sneakers are permissible. Servers may not wear flip-flops, sandals, or open-toed shoes.
- General hygiene: Face, hands and teeth should be clean, and hair must be combed. If a girl has long hair, it must be tied back.
- Post earrings are permitted *on girls only*, and *only in their ears*, with a diameter of no more than a quarter inch. No hoop earrings.
- Vesting for Mass: The alb (or cassock, when indicated) in which the server is vested should extend to slightly above the shoes.
  - During daily Mass and special liturgies (e.g. Christmas, Easter, weddings, funerals), basic servers may be allowed to use the vestments of senior servers at the discretion of the priest.