

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

307 Montrose Drive, Folsom, CA 95630

ALTAR SERVERS MANUAL



Revised July 16, 2026

Thank you for being an altar server. It is a privilege to serve at the altar of God.

It helps you to grow deeper in your relationship with God.

It gives you an opportunity to serve the people of God.

Please serve reverently with love and passion.

Altar Server Ministry Contacts

Coordinator: Barbara Bowden, (916) 984-9476, barbarabowden@pacbell.net

The Altar Server Ministry Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the coaches, communicating the needs of the Pastor, providing training for the coaches, communication with the Mass Coordinators, etc.

Schedule Coordinator: Hugo Schmidt, 916-817-4541, altarservers@folsomcatholic.org

The Schedule coordinator is responsible for updating the Altar Server schedule.

All Altar Servers should be registered on line at:

<http://mycatholicplace.org/altarservers/join.cfm>

Registering will get you scheduled for your Sunday Mass and will receive email communications regarding Altar Server training and events.

General Guidelines

Parent Responsibilities

- Please check the Altar Server website (<http://www.mycatholicplace.org/altarservers/>) for your child's **schedule**, update contact information, etc.
- Please have your child to church **20 minutes before** the start of Mass. The altar servers need time to change into an alb, figure out the job assignments and receive any special instructions from the coach or Mass coordinator. If your child does not arrive by 10 minutes before Mass, it will be considered **A NO SHOW** and an **unscheduled substitute** will be considered.
- If you know that your child cannot make their scheduled Mass time, it is **you and your child's responsibility** to find a **replacement**. Please follow the instructions on the website to request a substitute via email. Please email the Mass coach(es) when you find a replacement.

Altar Server Responsibilities

Attire:

- **Dress** in your **"Sunday Best"**. Think about what you would wear to meet a king, and remember that during the Mass you meet the King of Kings!
- Shoes should be clean and quiet. Squeaky shoes or hard heels can disturb everyone at Mass. Some shoes call too much attention to themselves (for example, yellow tennis shoes with blue stars all over) and should not be worn for serving.
- **Please come to Mass with your hair combed, face and hands washed.**

Conduct & Demeanor:

- Be **present** and **attentive**. Stay focused on the events of the Mass. Help the Mass go **smoothly and flawlessly**. **Respond** to the prayers and sing along.
- **WORK AS A TEAM!** If you know that another server needs to do a particular task and forgets - REMIND THE SERVER QUIETLY AND RESPECTFULLY!! Help each other.
- Let all your **movements be graceful and reverent**.
- After giving Father something, always **gently bow** your head as a sign of respect.
- Show your **devotion, reverence and respect** while doing your duties. When you are not doing something or holding anything in your hand, always keep your **hands folded in prayer** with either the fingers pointed straight up or



laced in front of your chest in devotion. This is followed whether you are walking or kneeling or standing.

- Do not fidget and look around at the congregation behind you. Remember to listen, sing, and pray with the other people who have gathered to worship God.
- As a general rule remember that if you have a candle or the cross in your hand, you do **not bow**.

Altar Server Duties Before Mass

Once you Arrive for Altar Serving:

- Remember that you should arrive **20 MINUTES BEFORE MASS** starts. If you have not arrived by 10 minutes before the start of Mass, please understand that an unscheduled substitute may be located to replace you. Please come check the altar server room to see if you are still needed, but please be understanding if you have been replaced.
- Get dressed in right **length alb** and **color cord** of the day. The alb should come down to your ankle.
- **Choose your job** consulting with your team members & **sign in** on the clipboard.
 - **Cross-bearer = server 1**
 - **Candle-bearers = servers 2 and 3**
 - **Credence (Book & Bells) = server 4 and 5**
- Your job will dictate where you will sit and line up.
- Check the **oil level** in the candles & replace if necessary. **Light** the candles. Be very careful when lighting the candles, as the glass shade around the flame is breakable and fragile.
- When it is time to line up (usually 5 minutes before Mass): **Cross-bearer** get the processional cross, **candle-bearers** get your candles, then **all altar servers** join the other ministers of the Mass in the vestibule for preparatory prayer.
- Sitting assignments:
 - The Cross-bearer will sit in the 1st chair (closest to the aisle)
 - Left candle-bearer next (2nd chair)
 - Right candle-bearer next (3rd chair)
 - Bells (4th chair)
 - Book (5th chair).

Instructions for Serving during the Holy Mass

A. Introductory Rites:

STEP 1

- **Get positioned** at the main door.
- Stand quietly and prayerfully.
- **Cross bearer sets** the pace by **walking slowly** forward as the choir begins singing the opening song.
- **Keep a decent distance**, one after another (Cross + Candles + Credence).



STEP 2



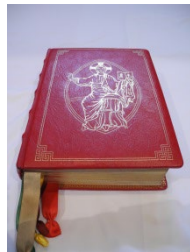
- As the procession **reaches** the Altar, The **cross-bearer** walks to the side (choir side) and places the cross in the stand. The **candle-bearers go up** to the altar, place the candles on the stands and then they return to the bottom of the altar ready to **bow along** with the rest of the procession.
 - Candle-bearer will be on either side of the priest
 - Cross-bearer next to the left candle-bearer
 - Bells next to the cross-bearer
 - Book next to the right candle-bearer
- **Everyone bows to** the altar along with the priest and other ministers. The priest then walks up to kiss the altar.

STEP 3



- As the priest kisses the altar, the servers **move to their chairs, except the book holder.**

STEP 4



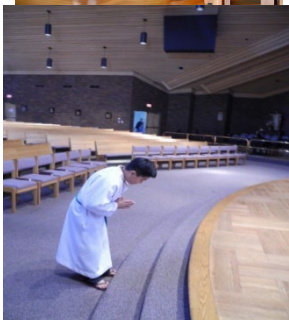
Sacramentary

The **book holder** walks directly up the stairs to retrieve the book from the small table next to the Altar and **stands** by the brick wall near the chair of the celebrants and waits.



- **After** the **Gloria** (for Advent, Ash Wednesday & Lent this will be after the Lord have Mercy/Kyrie Eleison), as the priest says the words “**Let us pray**”, come to the front and hold the book for the priest.

- Once the opening prayer is finished, the **book holder places the Sacramentary** (book) back on the small table by the Altar.



- Then exits the altar by walking behind the priest, **goes down** to the foot of the altar and **bows**. Then joins the other Altar Servers that are seated.



B. Liturgy of the Word:

STEP 1



- When the choir sings **Alleluia** (or during Lent: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ), the **candle-bearers** go to the altar **to retrieve the candles** and **stand face-to-face** as the minister picks up the Book of the Gospel.

STEP 2



- Then on the priest's lead turn and **proceed** to the ambo and **stand close to the ambo** until the end of the Gospel reading.

STEP 3



- Once the Gospel Reading is over, begin **walking back** to the candle stands by taking the same path and placing the candles back on the stand.



- Then go down **to the foot of the altar** and **bow together**.
- And **join the other altar servers who are seated** to listen to the homily, pray the creed and respond to the Prayers of the Faithful.

STEP 4

- Towards the end of the Creed, the **book holder** walks directly up the stairs to hold the intercessions for the Universal Prayer (small binder) enabling the Priest to assume the orans position at the conclusion of the intercessions.

C. Liturgy of the Eucharist:

Preparing to Escort the Gifts & Setting the Altar



- After the Prayers of the Faithful, **altar servers** proceed **to the credence table**;
 - **except the book holder who will retrieve the Sacramentary** (Missal/book) and place it on the bottom left corner of the altar, then proceed to the credence table
 - **If there are 5 or more altar servers**- the **cross-bearer** and the **candle-bearers** will retrieve the cross and candles and then **proceed to the back of the church** (near main door) to escort the gifts to the altar. The remaining altar servers will set up the altar with the priest/deacon.
 - **If there are 4 altar servers**- before retrieving the cross and candles the **cross-bearer** and the **candle-bearers** will help set the altar as follows: **Cross-bearer** to

set the **Chalice** on the Altar before retrieving the cross. The **candle-bearers** will set the **ciborums** on the altar before retrieving the candles. They will then **proceed to the back of the church** (near main door) to escort the gifts to the altar. The remaining altar server will finish setting up the altar with the priest/deacon.

- **If there are 3 servers** – the cross-bearer retrieves the cross and proceed to the back of the church. The remaining two (2) altar server(s) will set up the altar.
- **If there are only 2 altar servers**- before retrieving the cross the **cross-bearer** will help set the altar as follows: the **Cross-bearer** will help set the **Chalice**, and **ciborums** on the Altar before retrieving the cross. He/she will then **proceed to the back of the church** (near main door) to escort the gifts to the altar. The remaining altar server will finish setting up the altar with the priest/deacon.
- **If there is only 1 (one) altar server**- he/she will set up the altar before retrieving the cross and proceeding to the back of the church.

The ORDER of setting up the Altar



- The **chalice is the first vessel brought** from the credence table to the center of the altar.



Chalice

- **The remaining sacred articles** (see list below) are brought to the altar **except** the water bowl and the towel.



- Next: **Ciboria** or Ciborium



Ciborium

➤ Next: **Cups**



with **Purificators**



➤ Next: **Water Cruet**



➤ Next: **Tray with pixes** or a **pix**, if any



FINAL SET UP OF ALTAR LOOKS LIKE THIS:



Escorting, Receiving the Gifts & Assisting Priest at Altar

➤ After setting up the Altar, two **Servers follow** the priest **down** to the base of the altar and stand on either side of the priest. **However**, if there is a **deacon**, the deacon should stand directly next to the priest. The deacon will receive the decanter and the one server will receive the other gift.



➤ Once the priest & servers are waiting to receive the gifts, the **cross-bearer and candle-bearers escort** the gift-bearers down the main aisle.

- As the procession reaches the base of altar, the **cross-bearer returns** the **cross** to its stand. Then goes to stand by the credence table.
- Meanwhile, the **Candle-bearers** stand **face-to-face** on either side like book ends until the celebrant receives the gifts.



- The celebrant will **hand over** the gifts to **Servers** (however, if there is a deacon, the deacon receives the decanter from the celebrant & only one server will receive an item).
- Servers **bow** to gift bearers when priest does.



- After this, the **candle-bearers** return the candles to their stands and go to the credence table to prepare to **take the washing bowl and towel** to the priest when he's ready.



Washing bowl & Towel

- **Servers** take the **ciborium** and **decanter** received from the gift bearers and **place** them on the **altar** and **remove the lids** and **hold onto them**.



Ciborium



Lid



Decanter

- **Servers wait by the side of the altar** to receive the empty water cruet and empty decanter; once they receive it, they should place the lid back on & return them to the credence table and wait there reverently.



- After the offertory prayers when the priest is ready, the **candle bearers** bring the **water bowl** and **towel** to the priest to wash his hands; pause while he washes and dries his hands. Then bow to the priest and **return** the bowl and towel to the credence table. Next, the servers leave the altar area (see instructions below).

Leaving the Altar Area After the Altar is Prepared



- The **Bell Server** leads all other servers down the stairs to the **center** of the base of the altar and all **bow together**.
- Then, the Bell Server followed by the other servers (book, candle-bearers, cross-bearers) continues to **walk toward the bells** and all remain standing at the base of the altar with the Bell Server near the bells so he/she can eventually kneel next to the bells.
- **After** the Holy, Holy, Holy, all servers **kneel down** on the step.

The Eucharistic Prayer: Ringing of the Bells

STEP 1

- **One long strong ring (1)** at epiclesis (when the priest shows his hands in blessing over the bread and wine)



STEP 2

- **Three short rings in a row (1+1+1)** at elevation of the Body of Christ.



STEP 3

- **Three short rings in a row (1+1+1)** at elevation of the Cup.

D. Communion Rite:

- After receiving communion, the servers should return to their seats. The servers should pray and/or sit reverently during communion and pay attention to when the priest is ready to return to the altar.



Post Communion Rites

STEP 1



- Once the priest is ready to return to the altar after giving communion to the congregation, all servers should proceed to the credence table.
- On the way the **Book Server** should move the **Sacramentary** book (and stand if used) from the altar to the small table beside the altar.
- **Server 1** should **bring the water cruet** from the credence table to the right side of the altar.

- At this time, **all the servers wait reverently in a line in front of** the credence table.
- Servers will **take turns** one by one retrieving the cleaned sacred vessels from the altar and returning them to the credence table. The server closest to the congregation will go first to retrieve an item or two, then stand at the other end of the line, and so on in a **rotation**.



- **Go one by one** to clear the altar and take **no more than two** items at a time.
- Servers should always **bow** upon taking an item from the altar.

STEP 2

- **After** finishing with **clearing** the altar, Server 6 (book) leads all other servers (in order: book, bells, candles, cross) down the stairs to the center of the base of the altar to **bow** and then proceed to their **seats**, except the book holder.



STEP 3

- After the bow, **the book holder** will walk directly up the stairs to retrieve the book from the small table next to the Altar and **stands** by the brick wall near the chair of the celebrants and waits.
- When the celebrant says **“Let us pray”** the server comes forward with the book as he/she did at the opening prayer.
- When the priest is **done** with the prayer, the server should **return the book** to the **small table** beside the altar. Then walk behind the celebrant’s chairs, down the stairs to the base of the altar, bow, and return to his/her seat.
- After the announcements, the book holder will return and hold the book
 - For the blessings of
 - Vocation Cross
 - Birthday/Anniversary
 - For the Solemn blessings. Solemn Blessings begin with the priest saying: “bow down for the blessing.” This is the clue for the book holder to return to hold the book.
 - Solemn blessings are said at:
 - Christmas
 - Beginning of the Year
 - The Epiphany of the Lord

E. Concluding Rites & Recessional:



- After the final blessing and **after the celebrant kisses the altar**, the **cross-bearer** and **candle-bearers** go up to the altar to retrieve the cross and candles and then come down to the base of the altar waiting for all of the other ministers to join them for a **solemn bow led by the priest**.
- Remember, this time the **cross-bearer** and **candle bearers** **do NOT bow** but all others do in a uniform manner, led by the priest.

- Then all turn around to face the congregation. The **cross-bearer leads the procession SLOWLY** followed by the candle bearers, other altar servers, etc. down the main aisle to the main door and out into the vestibule of the church.

Altar Server Duties AFTER the Mass

- **Candle-bearers extinguish** the candles and **return** them to the altar or back room.
- **Cross bearer returns** the cross to the altar or altar server room.
- Be sure to **hang up** your **alb** and **cord** nicely. If there are any albs on the floor, please hang them up too. A special thanks to you for doing this.
- **See your Altar Server Coach.** Your coach is available to provide feedback and answer **any questions** about your serving.
- **Say a prayer** of thanksgiving for the privilege of serving our Lord and His people. As a parish, we too will say a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of your altar serving. Your contributions help the Mass flow well. May God bless you always.

PRAYERS FOR ALTAR SERVERS

Prayer before Serving	Prayer after Serving
Father in heaven, your son, Jesus Christ, showed His love for you by serving His needy brothers and sister. I now ask you to give me your help as I serve you and your people. Open my mouth to praise you in word and song. Open my ears to hear your word. Open my hands to do your work well. Take from my heart all evil and distracting thoughts. Help me to know what I should do and to do it well. Help me to serve reverently at your holy altar, and so give you praise and glory, now and forever. Amen	Lord Jesus Christ, You are the eternal High Priest. You lead all your saints in heaven And your people on earth In praising God, our Father. Thank you, Lord Jesus, For letting me come before your altar, so that, with your help, I can praise my Father in heaven as His server. Help me find joy in serving at your altar. Help me find gladness in knowing and doing your will in all things. Glory to you Lord Jesus, And to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, As it was in the beginning, is now And will be forever. Amen