

*St. Agnes Parish*  
*Altar Servers Guidelines*



February 2013



### **Saint Stephen**

The Protomartyr, First Christian Martyr Patron Saint of Altar Servers, **Feast day** - 26th December (as close as possible to the birthday of Jesus).

Being an Altar server is not just about assisting the celebrant during Mass, it is also to be a witness of faith. Hence the patron saint of altar serving is St. Stephen, he was the first Christian Martyr: Witness. Red is the color for witness, hence why some altar servers wear a red cassock.



### **St. John Berchmans**

Patron Saint of Altar Servers  
**Feast Day** - 26 November

John Berchmans was not noted for extraordinary feats of holiness or austerity, nor did he found orders or churches or work flashy miracles. He made kindness, courtesy, and constant fidelity an important part of his holiness. The path to holiness *can* lie in the ordinary rather than the extraordinary

### ***Altar Servers Prayer***

*Open my mouth O Lord, to bless your Holy Name.  
Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts.  
Enlighten my understanding and inflame my will  
that I may serve more worthily at your holy altar.  
O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest,  
obtain for me the most important grace of knowing my vocation in life.  
Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience,  
so that I may ever behold the priest as a representative of God  
and willingly follow him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ. Amen.*

## Decorum – How to conduct yourself in the Church

Standing the “nave” (where the pews are) facing the Sanctuary (altar area in front of the Tabernacle) the area at your left hand is properly called the **Gospel side** of the church. In our church we have a large blue tapestry with the stature of Our Lady of Fatima, so we can also call this the **Blue side**. Standing in the nave facing the Sanctuary your right hand area is properly called the **Epistle side** of the church. In our church we have the Divine Mercy painting, so we can also call this the **Red side**.

**At no time during Mass does any altar server need to walk behind the Sanctuary.**

When passing in front of the Tabernacle you are to pause and bow your head for a moment, then proceed with your duty.

The **Processional Cross** is carried by the tallest server, unless otherwise appointed by the Priest.

When standing up or kneeling up, your hands they should be folded up, if you do not have anything in your hands. When you are sitting your hands should be flat on your lap unless you are using a book.

**SEATING:** **cross bearer** sits on the **gospel side** against the wall. The two **candle bearers** sit on the stools beside the credence table. Then we have the Priest chair, or empty space, then the **blue side server** and **red side server** on the stools.

When possible, **red side servers**, **blue side servers** and **observers** should be following a hymnal or missalette throughout the entire Mass.

During Holy Mass *all altar servers are to participate to their fullest ability* in the songs and responses just like the congregation, standing sitting and kneeling at the proper time. Prayer books and song books (CBW, CIS and Glory & Praise) are located on the benches, behind the credence table and behind the server stools and on the pews against the walls.

Servers are the model for the congregation: don't wait for them to lead you, **YOU LEAD THEM**, by bowing and responding as indicated in the book YOU are following.

When the Priest blesses himself, the Altar Servers bless themselves.

When the Priest bows or genuflects, the Altar Servers bow.

Pause wait, do not rush to do any activity, follow the Priest, or cross bearer.

Please *do not use your hands to push yourself up* from kneeling in front of the Altar.

What if you *feel sick* when you are up on the altar, or you *REALLY* have to go to the washroom? Try to inform the server beside you or the Priest and leave the altar area in a quiet and respectful way.

What if you forget to do something you are supposed to do or don't know what you are to do? Ask the server beside you he/she will help you out **or** watch the Priest he will help you out.

## St. Agnes Altar Server Duties

1. When entering the church, bless yourself with the Holy Water either at the doors of the church or at the entrance of the Sacristy itself. No need to do it both times.
2. Do your best to place your mind and heart in a prayerful state with three calming breaths, one for each of the Holy Trinity, to remind yourself why you are here. If you wish to say a prayer, there is a prayer card with “Prayer before Mass and Prayer after Mass”, for you to use on the counter by the window
3. Find your alb or cassock and surplice, and dress for Holy Mass. Assist servers who are in need of help. Keep the room tidy.
4. If your hair is long enough to be in a pony-tail, put it in a pony-tail. Comb your hair if it is not neat. It would be good for all servers to bring a brush or comb to fix their hair before Mass.
5. All servers are asked to dress properly for Holy Mass even though you will be wearing a holy garment over your clothes. Proper foot wear, neat and tidy clothes are a must, and dark coloured dress shoes should be worn, whenever possible. It is a good idea to dress in layers so you can be cool under your vestments.
6. Who lights the candles on the altar? First, whoever the Priest assigns; second whoever is available to light them safely. If you are not tall enough to do it safely, DON'T, and then inform the priest you need help (other ministers would help, like a lector or musician, etc.). **This altar server(s) must also move the Sanctus bells from under the altar to the edge of the step.**
7. Who lights the processional candles prior to Mass? Same as # 6
8. ***Prior to the Saturday evening Mass***, when you are lighting the candles on the altar, ***remove the weekday Lectionary*** from the credence table or the ambo and put it on the counter behind the credence table, so the processional candles can be put on the back corners of the credence table.
9. If you are asked to bring something up to the Altar before Mass, walk up at a respectful pace. **If you have something in your hands, bow**, just before stepping up to the Altar. If you do not have something in your hands, genuflect just before stepping up to the Altar. Genuflect when you are leaving the Altar, before processing back to the Sacristy at a respectful pace. If you have something in your hands then bow.

10. **Observers** have an important role: to participate in Holy Mass through their prayer and **observe** what is happening in the Sanctuary. From time to time, the celebrant needs something during Holy Mass (a hymnal, a battery for the microphone, the holy water, etc.), and you can be available to get that if you are observing intently. **When possible Altar Servers and Observers should be following a hymnal and missalette throughout the entire service.**
11. When there are more than five servers, those other servers are the **Observers**; they sit on the **RED side** by the Divine Mercy painting at the Choir end of the pews. When duties are being assigned try to balance out the number of servers sitting on both sides against the walls. It looks best with the same number of servers on both sides.
12. Holy Mass is best served by a **cross bearer**, two **candle bearers** and two servers acting as **red side** and **blue side**. **Cross bearer** sits against the **blue wall**.  
**( 5 servers)**
13. In the case of four servers; seating is as follows: **candle, candle, Priest**, two servers fulfilling the **red** and **blue** side duties. **One of these servers will also be cross bearer** Cross bearer sits beside the Priest or the credence table.  
**( 4 servers)**
14. In the case of three servers; one **candle bearer** does the **red side duties** and the second **candle bearer** does the **blue side duties**. The cross bearer then sits on the stool beside the credence table. **( 3 servers)**
15. In the case of two altar servers, one server is the **Cross bearer and does the blue side duties**, the other server does the **red side duties**. No candles are used  
**( 2 servers)**
16. If only one server is available to serve during Mass, then that server is the **cross bearer, red side, and blue side**. And sits on the **blue side** stool beside the Priest.  
**( 1 server)**
17. The tallest server leads the procession carries the **processional cross**. However the Priest may reassign this duty.

18. **Candle Bearers** should both be the same height or close to the same height. **Candle bearers** must use two hands to pick up the candles and carry the candles. They will follow the **cross bearer** at a safe distance walking side by side. All other servers in the procession are to be walking side by side, two by two. If there are an odd number of servers he/she should walk in the center of the aisle. All servers should be carrying a hymn book and singing or at least walk with their hands folded.
19. Before Mass begins all people in the Sacristy pray the *“Prayer before Mass”* together. Then the Commentator walks to the microphone. Everyone takes their place in the procession as follows; **cross bearer**, **candle bearers**, **red side servers**, **blue side servers** and the **observers**, followed by the laity and the Priest. The Priest then says with these or similar words “Let us begin”. The **cross bearer** leads the procession with everyone following at a slow and steady pace with book in hand singing, single server follows in the center of the aisle with book in hand singing.
20. The **candle bearer** on the LEFT in the procession holds their left hand on top and left elbow out with the right elbow down at their side.
21. The **candle bearer** on the RIGHT in the procession holds their right hand on top and the right elbow out with the left elbow down on their side.
22. Since the **candle bearer** is holding a candle and the **blue side server** has duties the **next server passing** pulls the bell cord. When there is no one behind the **blue side server**, the **blue side server** pulls the bell cord.
23. Once the procession reaches the Altar, watch the Priest, genuflect when he does. The **cross** and **candle bearers** do not genuflect, they bow their heads. Yes you can genuflect with a hymn book in your hands.
24. Regular seating is as follows; **Cross-Gospel side/Blue side** against the wall, two **candle bearers**, Priest, **blue and red side** servers. All other servers and **observers** sit on the **Epistle side/red side** by the Divine Mercy painting. Unless instructed otherwise by the Priest, Seminarian, Deacon or Sacristan.
25. When entering the Sanctuary enter: cross bearer, candle bearers and servers enter on the **Gospel side/Blue side/left side**. All others approach on the **Epistle side/Red side/Right side**. **Observers** should be standing on the **Epistle side/Red side** of the procession.

Approach the Sanctuary (altar area) in this order please;

**First-> Laity, and observers,**

**Then-> candle bearers and red & blue servers**

**Then-> cross bearer followed by Priest**

26. The **cross bearer** is carrying the *Corpus* (the image of the Crucified Christ) therefore he/she is to respectfully place the pole in the holder. THEN RESPECTFULLY turns the image of Christ to face the congregation. Please do not spin the pole.
27. When **red side** and **blue side servers** pass the Tabernacle, they pause and bow, then go to the credence table. They **do not go around behind the sanctuary.**
28. When praying the **Penitential Act, page 9**, **everyone says** “I confess to Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, **\*And, striking their breast, they say\***: “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”
29. **As the Alleluia begins** the **candle bearers**, with two hands, retrieve and with two hands hold the candles with **both elbows straight out**, proceed, standing straight and still on either side the ambo.
30. When the Priest is about to read the Gospel, **all other altar servers**’ stand with hands folded and their bodies turned to face the Priest at the ambo.
31. **Once the Priest** has kissed the Gospel, the **candle bearers** return the candles to the **back corners of the credence table** and return to their places. We all sit and listen to the Priest’s homily with hands flat on our laps.
32. Stand and profess the Creed together. **See Celebrate in Song page 17**  
“At the words that follow, up to and including and became man, ALL BOW.”  
In the **Celebrate in Song page 18** “At the words that follow, up to and including the Virgin Mary, ALL BOW.” ***This instruction is for everyone.***
33. All servers are to turn and give their attention to whomever is reading: Celebrant, Lector, or Commentator.

34. **Cross bearer** watches for the Ushers collecting the Sunday offerings to reach the middle of the church for the second time, ***then, followed*** by the **candle bearers**, he/she begins at a slow and steady pace, to the back of the church to lead the Presentation of Gifts to the altar. Do not rush.  
The **observers** stay seated unless the Priest invites them to participate.
35. When there is no collection, the **cross bearer** and **candle bearers** watch for the Priests' cue to lead the Presentation of the Gifts. Do not rush.
36. When there are **no candle bearers**, the **cross bearer** leads the Presentation of the Gifts. Do not rush.
37. The **red side server** and **blue side server** will join the Priest in accepting the gifts and bringing them to the credence table and the Altar. If **red side server** and **blue side server** are the **candle bearers**, the Priest will accept the offertory gifts by himself. Giving the cruets to the **Red side** or **Blue side** servers once they have placed the candles on the credence table.
38. If there is a Chalice on the credence table, one of the servers must give it to the Priest ***before*** they go before him with the water and wine.  
The Chalice should always be carried using two hands, one placed flat on top of the Paten cover and one holding the stem of the Chalice.
39. When there is no presentation of the gifts to the altar, servers must watch the Priest for the cue to bring the water and wine from the credence table to the altar.
40. After putting the cruets on the credence table, ***watch for the Priest to turn***, and then the **red side** and **blue side** servers approach the priest with the water and wine. When he has finished, then turn around and return to the credence table.
41. If you are holding a cruet, tray or towel with one hand, the other hand is to be placed over your heart or under the hand holding the item, supporting it in case anything falls, so you have one hand under the other.
42. The **red side** server brings the pall (the cloth), to the Priest.  
The **blue side** server brings the water and the tray to the Priest.

43. When the priest is finished the cleansing, the Priest, and the servers bow together in response. The servers return the water, tray, and cloth to the credence table. They then return to their places **and remain standing**. **This is the time you bow to the Priest.**
44. If there is only one server at Mass, that server carries the water in one hand, and the tray in the other hand, with the pall over his/her forearm, fulfils the duties, bows to the Priest and returns to the credence table. The server then returns to his/her place **and remains standing**. **This is the time you bow to the Priest.**
45. See **page 20 of the Celebrate in Song book**, the priest says; “*Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), that my sacrifice and yours maybe acceptable to God, the almighty Father. **The people rise and reply**; “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good for all his holy Church.” **Lead the assembly, rise and reply using your book.***
46. **As the Eucharistic prayer begins,** the **cross bearer leads** the **andle bearers** to the front of the altar in a processional line. The **blue and red side servers** and the **servers** follow in a processional line to the front of the Altar.
47. The **Sanctus** (Consecration) bells should have been moved from under the altar, to be rung at the proper time.
48. The bells are rung 3 times: first- when the Priest blesses the Bread and Wine, they are rung 3 distinct turns, second- when the Body is elevated and third- when the Blood is elevated. The second and third time the bells are to be rung in a continuous manner, not fast but continuous, during the elevations.
49. **When the Priest bows, all bow. Please do not use your hands to stand up.**
50. When the Priest invites the congregation to lift their hands in prayer, the **altar servers, observers** and the assembly lift their hands and pray aloud.
51. During the sign of peace, all servers follow in line up to the Priest. Shake his hand **and wish him peace saying “the Peace of Christ”**. Then follow around the Altar, returning to their standing positions. They then turn to the server on their left and right shaking their hands wishing them peace.  
*There is no need to start at one end of the line or the other, each server shakes the hand of the server on their left and on their right.*

52. Receiving Communion; *when **the person in front** of you is receiving Holy Communion, bow your head in reverence, then step up and receive Holy Communion and return to your place. Everyone on the altar and in the assembly should bow their head in reverence, then step up and receive Holy Communion.*
53. After receiving Holy Communion each server is to walk around the Priest, returning to their place and **kneel upright, hands folded**, facing the Tabernacle. All servers should be facing the Tabernacle to the best of their ability.
54. When the Priest has placed the chalice and or the ciborium in the tabernacle, **as he rises** from genuflecting, the **red side server rings the bells 3 distinct times**, signalling to the servers and the congregation that they may now sit, they no longer need to kneel. If members of the congregation wish to remain kneeling for another few moments that is fine. \*\*This is a new action in our church (January 2013). It will be the servers, who will show the congregation that this is when they may move from kneeling to sitting\*\*
55. **Once the Priest returns to the Altar, then** the **Blue side** server goes to the credence table and picks up the water.  
Wait till the Priest is at the altar and ready, **before you bring him the water.**
56. When the Priest is finished at the Altar, that same server, the **blue side** server, retrieves all the ciboria and or the chalice(s), placing them carefully on the credence table. Return to your position and sit down.
57. **All Altar Servers are to participate in the Vocation Prayer.**
58. **After** the Priest stands, **then** the Altar Servers stand. The Priest will extend the final blessing concluding Mass. When the Priest blesses everyone, the servers and the congregation bless themselves making the Sign of the Cross.
59. Once the Priest kisses the Altar, **then** everyone proceeds from the Sanctuary to the front of the altar in this order. Don't forget to bring your hymnal and sing the recessional hymn.

**First-> cross bearer followed by Priest.**

**Then-> candle bearers and red & blue servers**

**Then-> Laity, and observers**

60. As the Priest genuflects, all the servers genuflect except the cross and candle bearers. They bow their heads. They do not genuflect.
61. The **cross bearer**, followed by the **candle bearers**, lead a slow and steady procession back to the Sacristy. All servers follow in pair singing the recessional hymn. If there is a single server he/she positions himself/herself in the center of the aisle.
62. Upon entering to the Sacristy, **cross bearer** walks up to the far end of the room, turns around and stops. **Candle bearers follow and stand on either side of the cross bearer.**
63. When entering the room the servers entering on the left side stay left, and the servers entering on the right side stay right. The Priest will excuse everyone with the words “Thanks be to God, Deo Gracias!” or similar words.
64. **Candle bearers do the clean-up** of items from the altar following Mass. Wait till the path to the altar is clear of people moving before you begin. If extra help is needed, ask the observers to help. When there are no candle bearers these duties go to the remaining servers.
- Return the Sanctus (Consecration) Bells to under the edge of the altar.
  - Extinguish the candles by using the proper tool. *Do not smash the wicks. Do not blow out the candles.*
  - All items are to be removed from the credence table, leaving only the tray which had the water in it, and the pall. The water may be carefully poured into the plant nearest you.
  - The Altar is to be cleared of everything except the Roman Missal, the bulletin and the altar crucifix.
  - Once you return to the Sacristy, clean the cruets by pouring the BLESSED wine in the Sacrarium (the sink which drains directly into the earth) under the silver dome, and pour the extra water and any unblessed wine down the drain. Rinse the cruets, and then put both cruets upside down on their tray to dry. Put the ciborium, chalice, and key on the counter on the opposite side of the room.
65. **Hang up your alb or cassock and surplice neatly.**  
Please assist in keeping the room tidy.
66. **All Servers are very much encouraged to spend a minute or two in private prayer before returning to their families and heading home.**
67. Bless yourself with Holy Water before exiting the main area of the church.

During the winter months you are encouraged to bring shoes to church to Altar Serve in. Altar Serving in your winter boots is not appropriate unless absolutely necessary. If it is at all possible, your shoes should be good "going to church" shoes.

### GENUFLECTING & BOWING

- Servers, and all others in the church, should genuflect whenever entering a church pew or the sanctuary.
- When crossing in front of the tabernacle you should pause and bow your head.
- When crossing in front of the altar pause and bow your head.
- Do not genuflect when carrying crosses, sacred vessels, sacred books, or candles, just bow your head.
- When the tabernacle is closed and the Body of Christ is not present on the Altar, after the consecration or exposed for Eucharistic Adoration, genuflect on the right knee. *The right knee touches the floor, pause, and bow your head to Jesus.*
- When the Body of Jesus is present on the Altar or Jesus is exposed in the monstrance during Eucharistic Adoration and a server or anyone is entering or leaving the church should genuflect in the direction of the monstrance.

***Please ask you parents to bring you to one weekday Holy Mass a week, if possible.***

On occasion there will be visiting Priests, Deacons, or Seminarians to St. Agnes Church;

The cross bearer or an observer should keep vigilant for any needs a visiting celebrant might have, pass him a hymnal, show him where the vocations prayer is, be prepared to assist him in any other way not usual to our practices.

1- In those cases the seating of the Altar Servers will be adjusted. Our Pastor, Deacon, a Seminarian, or Sacristan will inform the servers as to where they will be sitting.

2 - If there are changes to duties or additional duties, they will be assigned or the Altar Servers by Our Pastor, Deacon, a Seminarian, or Sacristan.

## Altar Servers -- More than "Helpers of the Parish Priest" Pope John Paul II

Address at the General Audience, August 1, 2001, the 1,000th of his pontificate  
Dear Brothers and Sisters! Dear Young People!

1. Today St. Peter's Square is the Square of Youth. About a year ago, at the heart of the Great Jubilee 2000, youths from all over the world found solicitous welcome here for the celebration of World Youth Day. Today this Square, which hosts the 1,000th general audience since divine Providence called me to be a Successor to the Apostle Peter, receives the thousands of boys and girls, who have come from all over Europe on pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles.

Dear altar servers! Yesterday you crossed St. Peter's Square in a long procession to be near the basilica's Altar of Confession. By so doing, you prolonged in some way the path that the youth of the world began in the Holy Year. The motto of your pilgrimage to the Eternal City, "Toward a New World," is a sign of your willingness to take your Christian vocation seriously.

2. I greet you affectionately, dear young people, and I am happy that this meeting has taken place. In particular, I thank Auxiliary Bishop Martin Gächter, president of Coetus Internationalis Ministrantium, who has spoken such cordial words to me on your behalf. With special joy I address the altar servers of German-speaking countries, who numerically constitute the largest group. It is beautiful that so many young Christians have come from Germany!

Your commitment to the altar is not only a duty, but a great honor, a genuine holy service. In connection with this service, I wish to propose some reflections to you.

The altar server's clothing is very special. It recalls the garment that each one puts on when he is welcomed in Jesus Christ in the community. I am referring to the baptismal gown, whose profound meaning Saint Paul clarifies: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Even if you, dear altar servers, can no longer fit into your baptismal gown, you have put on [the clothing] of altar servers. Yes, baptism is the point of departure of your "authentic liturgical service," which places you next to your bishops, priests and deacons (see [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#), No. 29).

3. The altar server occupies a privileged place in the liturgical celebration. He who serves at Mass, presents himself to a community. He experiences firsthand that Jesus Christ is present and active in every liturgical act. Jesus is present when the community comes together to pray and render praise to God. Jesus is present in the Word of sacred Scripture. Jesus is present above all in the Eucharist under the signs of bread and wine. He acts through the priest who, in the person of Christ, celebrates the holy Mass and administers the sacraments.

Therefore, in the liturgy, you are much more than simple "helpers of the parish priest." Above all, you are servers of Jesus Christ, of the eternal High Priest. Thus, you, altar servers, are called in particular to be young friends of Jesus. Be determined to go deeper and to cultivate this friendship with him. You will discover that in Jesus you have found a true friend for life.

4. The altar server often has a candlestick in his hand. How can one not think of that which Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: "**You are the light of the world**" (Matthew 5:14). Your service cannot be limited to the inside of a church. It must shine in everyday life: in school, in the family, and in different realms of society. Because, whoever wishes to serve Jesus Christ inside a church must be his witness everywhere.

Dear young people! Your contemporaries wait for the real "light of the world" (see John 1:9). Do not hold your candlestick only inside a church, but carry the light of the Gospel to all those who are in darkness and are living through a difficult time in their life.

5. I have spoken of friendship with Jesus. How happy I would be if something more sprang from this friendship! How beautiful it would be if some of you were to discover a vocation to the priesthood! Jesus Christ has urgent need of youths who will be at his disposition with generosity and no reservations. Moreover, might not the Lord also call one or two of you girls to embrace the consecrated life to serve the Church and the brothers and sisters? Even for those who wish to be united in marriage, the service of altar servers teaches that a real union must always include readiness for reciprocal and free service.

St. Agnes pray for us

St. Stephen pray for us

St. John Berchmans pray for us