

CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE  
of  
BALLARAT



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

# **POLICY FOR ALTAR SERVERS**

**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT**

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## **RATIONALE**

The role of altar server provides an opportunity for young people to participate in a ministry of service within the celebration of the Eucharist. This role supports the tradition of involvement of the laity in fulfilling their baptismal role in the Church.

The altar servers' special ministry is to serve in the sanctuary in areas pertaining to the altar and lectern. They assist with the smooth flow of the liturgical rites, enhancing the spirit of worship and prayer.

Active participation in altar service provides ongoing catechesis for young people, supporting them in deepening their understanding of liturgy practice – the rites, the rubrics and the theology.

The role of altar server can lead towards future participation in the rich tradition of Eucharistic ministry.

## **PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING AND TRAINING ALTAR SERVERS**

1. Altar servers play a very visible part in parish life. Their training and formation programs take place at parish level.
2. The proper training of altar servers is most important and should be the responsibility of a small team so that uniformity and consistency can be maintained throughout the group.
3. Parents, sacristans and parish members could assist in the training of young people for this ministry.
4. There is no substitute for 'on the job training,' with an experienced altar server and the gentle guidance of the celebrating priest to assist this process.

### ***ALTAR SERVERS IN THE DIOCESE OF BALLARAT:***

- Will be fully initiated into the life of the church; ie. have received their First Holy Communion;

- Will regularly attend Sunday Eucharistic celebrations;
- Will participate in some formal preparation for the ministry of altar service prior to commencing their ministry;
- Will be provided with practical training and rehearsal for special ceremonies, such as the liturgies of Holy Week and Christmas or funeral rites;
- May be persons of various ages and either gender;
- Can be role-models and a source of instruction for young people interested in the ministry;
- May be introduced to the community in a way that is appropriate to the local setting, keeping in mind they are not being committed to any length of service or ongoing duties;
- Shall have the opportunity to cease service at any time, or for whatever reason.

## **PREPARATION TO SERVE DURING MASS**

This will include instruction in the following:

### **1. Reverence of movement:**

Everyday actions such as walking, sitting and standing are vested with a deeper and more spiritual significance when enacted during the Liturgy. Altar servers will be trained in reverent performance of these actions.

### **2. Terminology:**

Developing young people's knowledge of the terms for, and purpose of, sacred vessels and books used during the Liturgy.

### **3. Order of Mass:**

Knowledge of the Order of the Mass, including familiarity with congregational responses, is important (an altar server's Mass book can be useful here).

#### 4. **Ritual:**

Organisational Practices. Altar servers will be encouraged to:

\* Arrive early to:

- Prepare the liturgical space (*according to local practices*);
- Pray with priests, readers and Ministers of Eucharist prior to Mass (*according to local practices*).

\* Stay after Mass to:

- Ensure that the liturgical space is cleared (*according to local practices*).

*See also Appendix.*

## **PROTOCOLS**

The safety of altar servers is paramount and structures should be in place to ensure that:

- Altar servers are safe and are seen to be safe;
- Priests and other adults are protected and reputations safe-guarded.

It is the recommendation of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission that:

- Parents/guardians attend training sessions.
- Parents/guardians accompany children to prepare for service; that they bring young people to the sacristy and assist them to vest;
- Visual access is available to the sacristy - an open door policy or glass door is adopted;
- At no time will a child be left alone with an adult other than the parent/guardian.

**PLEASE NOTE:** All adults working with the training of altar servers under the age of 18, must have a Working with Children Check.

#### **References**

"Guidelines for Altar Servers, Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist and Acolytes";  
Archdiocese of Perth (1999).

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat "Code of Conduct for Caring for Children".

# APPENDIX

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## EXAMPLES OF PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

*The following should be adapted to the local custom of your parish.*

### **Entrance**

- Process in front of the priest with the candles and the large cross.
  - The server carrying the cross goes first.
  - The cross needs to be carried in an upright manner.
- Wait until the priest bows before moving off to the side.
- Place candles on the side table and/or cross in its holder.

### **Liturgy of the Word**

- Before the Gospel and while the congregation is singing Alleluia or the lenten acclamation, two altar servers move to the table to take candles and then stand on either side of the lectern reverently holding the candles.
- When the reading of the Gospel is finished, return candles to the table.

### **Offertory Procession**

- At the time of Offertory, two altar servers walk down the centre aisle (with candles);
- Lead the group of people bringing forth the Gifts down the aisle;
- Place candles on the altar or on the side table (*according to local practices*).
- Assist priest to bring bread, wine and water to the altar.

### **Washing of Hands**

- After “Blessed be God forever” help priest wash his hands by pouring over the water. Second altar server offers priest a towel to dry his hands.
- Altar server then takes water and wine carafe from the altar to the side table.

### ***Eucharistic Prayer***

- Depending on local custom, bell may be rung when priest extends both hands over the bread and wine.
- Likewise, bell may be rung when priest elevates the host and when priest elevates the chalice.

### ***Communion***

- At Communion time, join the community line to receive Communion.
- Return to designated place and kneel to pray.
- When your prayers are finished, sit on your seats and wait reverently.
- Altar servers may be requested to assist with placing patens and chalices on side table after they have been purified by the priest.

### ***Dismissal***

- After the dismissal, retrieve the cross and large candles and stand beside the priest as he bows and turns to walk out.
- The altar servers lead the priest back down the church, with the server holding the cross leading and those carrying the candles following.

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