

## ALTAR SERVER'S GUIDELINES



*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. – John 12:26*

## What the Church says about Serving

*Taken from Celebrating the Mass (CTM):*

The faithful should not refuse to serve the people of God gladly whenever asked to perform some particular ministry or role in the celebration. Women and men, the young and old, people of every race and way of life should avail of these opportunities so that the liturgy may be seen to be the work of the whole body of Christ. Through the variety of liturgical ministries in the Church, the body of Christ is built up.

Service at the Altar represents a long liturgical tradition. Servers exercise their ministry within the assembly and enhance the quality of celebration for the whole assembly by taking part in processions and by ensuring that all requisites for the celebration are available at the appropriate moments.

Servers hold the book while the presiding Priest proclaims the presidential prayers with outstretched hands. They bring and hold such things as books, Thuribles, water jug and towel, plates and dishes, and microphones.

They lead the entrance and concluding processions with the Cross and candles; they escort the Deacon (or Priest) to the ambo and stand at his side while he proclaims the Gospel reading. They may, on more solemn occasions, accompany the procession with the gifts.

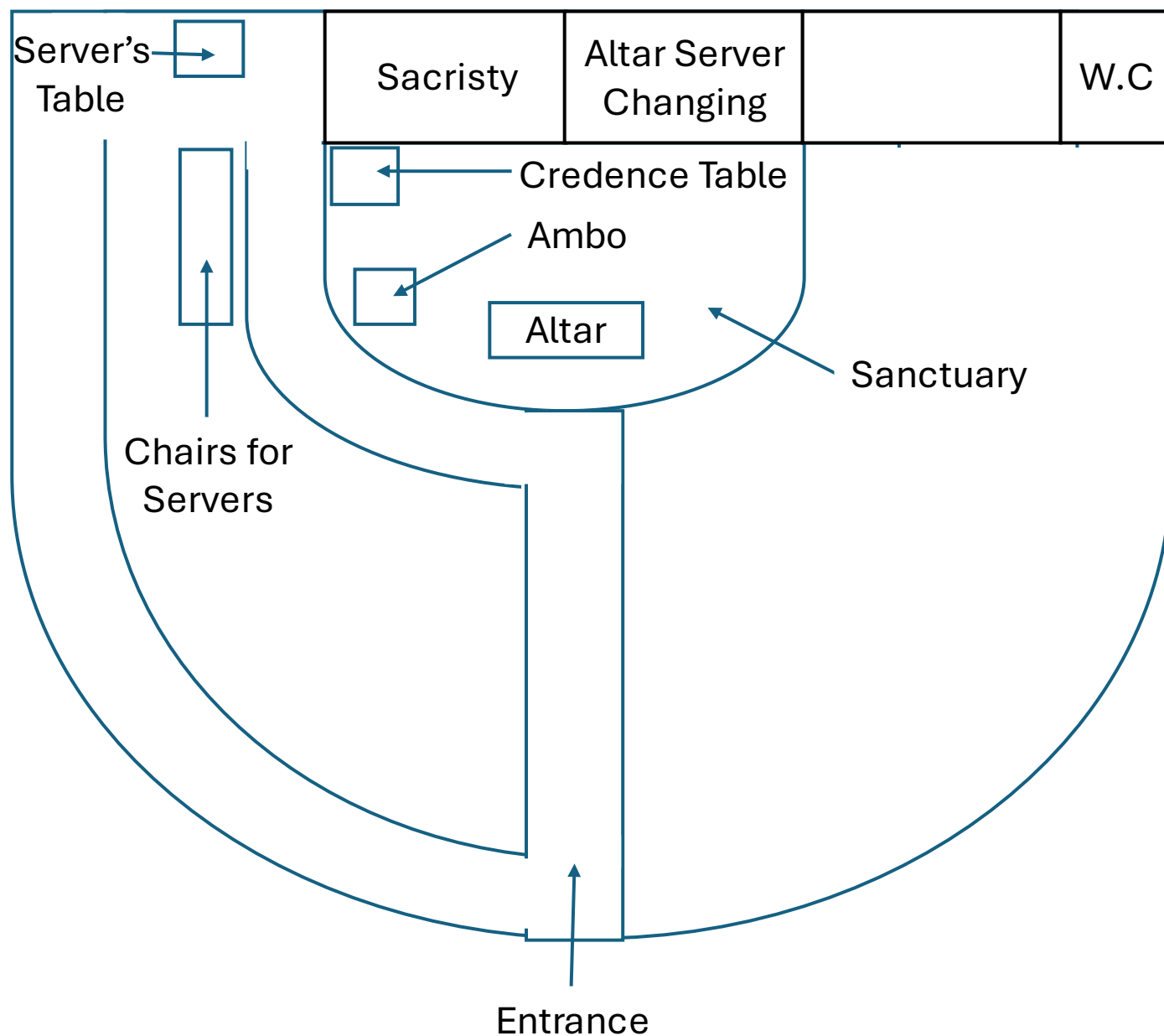
They look after the Thurible, prepare it for the Priest or Deacon, and themselves may incense the assembly and other ministers.

The number of Servers will depend upon the circumstances and the tasks to be performed. Especially at largescale celebrations, there should be a competent minister or master of ceremonies with responsibility for ensuring that these various tasks are properly assigned and carried out.

Even before the celebration itself, calm and opportunities for silent prayer and reflection have their proper place in the church, in the sacristy and in adjacent areas so that those gathering for the assembly of the Church may recollect themselves and begin to prepare for prayer together. Providing opportunities for such calm and quiet is one of the many ways in which a community is able to show hospitality to those gathering for worship.

*Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. - Mark 10: 43–45*

## The Setting for the Liturgy



### **Ambo/Lectern**

This is where the word of God is proclaimed. When Acolytes are being used at the Gospel, they are positioned either side of the Lectern.

### **Altar**

The table where the most important part of the Mass, the Eucharist Prayer, takes place.

## **Altar Serving Changing Room**

The room where Altar Servers get changed and plan their various roles before Mass.

## **Boat**

Container for incense.

## **Book of Gospels**

Large book containing only Gospel readings and carried by the Deacon in the procession.

## **Chairs for Servers**

This seating area is reserved for the Servers, if necessary, the chairs in the same position at the opposite side of the sanctuary (not shown on diagram) may also be used.

## **Credence Table**

The Chalices used in the Mass are kept on this table along with the water and purificator used for the washing of hands.

## **Chalice**

The cup that contains the wine.

## **Corporal**

A square white cloth, placed in the centre of the Altar on which stand the Ciborium and Chalices once they are prepared.

## **Ciborium**

The container for the bread before consecration and the Body of Christ after consecration.

## **Cruet**

Small jug/decanter used to hold water or wine.

## **Lavabo Bowl**

The bowl used when the Priest washes his hands.

## **Lavabo Towel**

The towel used when the Priest dries his hands.

## **Lectionary**

Large book that holds the readings for Mass.

## **Purificator**

A white cloth used by ministers of communion to clean the Chalice.

## Sacristy

The room where Priests, Deacons and Servers prepare for Mass. Please keep noise to a minimum in this area and maintain a prayerful attitude.

## Server's Table

Servers place Acolyte candles, bells and any other items on this table when not being used. There is also a stand for the processional Cross next to this table.

## Sanctuary

The raised area in the church where the Altar, Lectern, Tabernacle and Priest's chair are found.

## Server Jobs

Serving involves working as part of a team. Individuals may have different jobs but each of these jobs links up with the others. Jobs should be shared out as much as possible so that everyone gets a chance to have an active part in the Mass. Servers generally have the following jobs to perform during Mass.

**Thurifer:** Server who carries the Thurible when incense is being used at Mass. Normally accompanied by the Boat-Bearer, who carries the incense boat.

**Boat-Bearer:** Server who carries the incense boat and accompanies the Thurifer.

**Cross-Bearer:** Server who carries the processional Cross at the beginning and end of Mass. The Cross-Bearer generally also fulfils the role of ringing the Altar (Sanctus) bells.

**Altar Bell Bearer:** Server who rings the Altar bells during Mass, usually also takes on the role of Cross-Bearer.

**Acolyte:** The Servers that carry the candles at the beginning and end of Mass, as well as at the Gospel. Acolytes always serve in pairs, if there are not enough Servers then the candles are omitted.

**Lavabo Bowl Bearer:** The Server who holds the bowl that the Priest uses to wash his fingers.

**Lavabo Towel Bearer:** The Server who holds the towel that the Priest uses to wipe his hands after washing his fingers.

**Gift Bearer:** The Servers who help the Priest receive the gifts at the offertory.

## General Guidance Before Serving

- Try to arrive at church at least 15 minutes before Mass starts.
- If you are at Mass, then you are encouraged to serve, but those on the rota should be given preference when allocating jobs.
- Make sure that you are neat and tidy, avoid wearing bright colours and if possible, wear black or dark coloured shoes.
- Make sure that you choose an Alb that fits you.
- Jobs can be discussed in the changing area but avoid loud discussions and try to remain silent when in the sacristy.
- Look at the readings and prayers of the Mass and use them for your own reflection and prayer

## General Guidance While Serving

- Keep your hands joined together, in front of your chest, when you are standing, walking or kneeling and you have nothing to carry.
- When one hand is being used to hold something, the other hand should be laid flat on your chest rather than down by your side.
- Keep your eyes on the Priest/Deacon/senior Server, or the reader when they are reading rather than gazing around since you may need to help in some unexpected way.
- Do not twirl your cincture (rope) unless you are being attacked by a swarm of bees.
- All movement should be calm and dignified, never run or rush even if you find yourself in the wrong place.
- When multiple pairs of Servers are moving to a new location (e.g. to accept the gifts at the offertory), the Server at the front should always go to the furthest most position.
- A small bow can be used as a gesture of thanks between Servers and Clergy.

## Processional Guidance

- When incense is being used, the Thurifer and Boat-Bearer lead the procession. At all other times, the Cross-Bearer leads, immediately followed by the Acolytes.
- The Cross-Bearer and Acolytes, when accompanying the Cross-Bearer, do not need to bow to the Altar. All others who are carrying something should bow and those not carrying anything should genuflect.
- Servers should pair up when moving in the centre aisle except for the Cross-Bearer who always stands alone in the centre. If there are an odd number of Servers then the Server at the back should stand in the centre position. At other times the Servers should move in single file.

# SERVING AT MASS

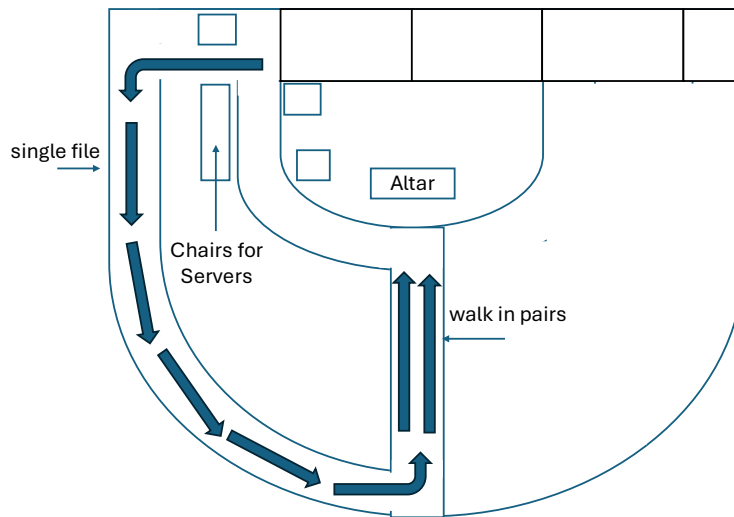
## Getting Ready

Get changed in the changing area and agree jobs with the Senior Server. When you are ready, come through to the Sacristy and maintain a prayerful silence. The Priest, Deacon or Senior Server will lead a prayer in the Sacristy before ringing the Mass bell for the entrance procession to start.

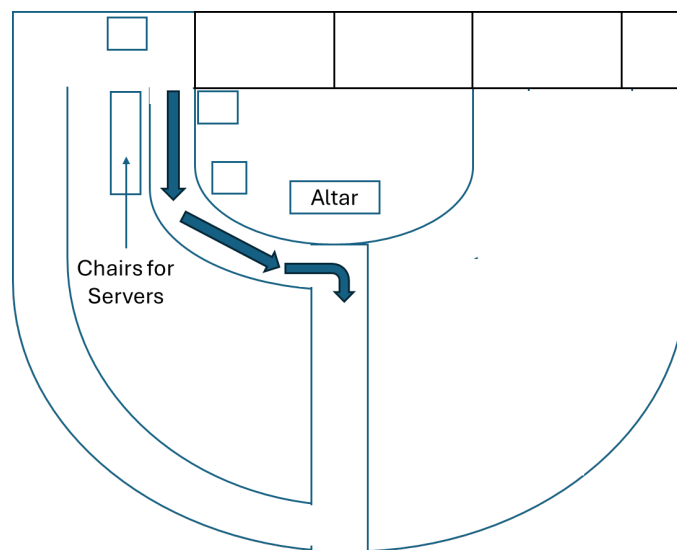
## Entrance Procession

In our parish, depending on the occasion, we either use a long procession or short procession as shown below. If incense is being used, then the Priest places some in the Thurible before the procession starts.

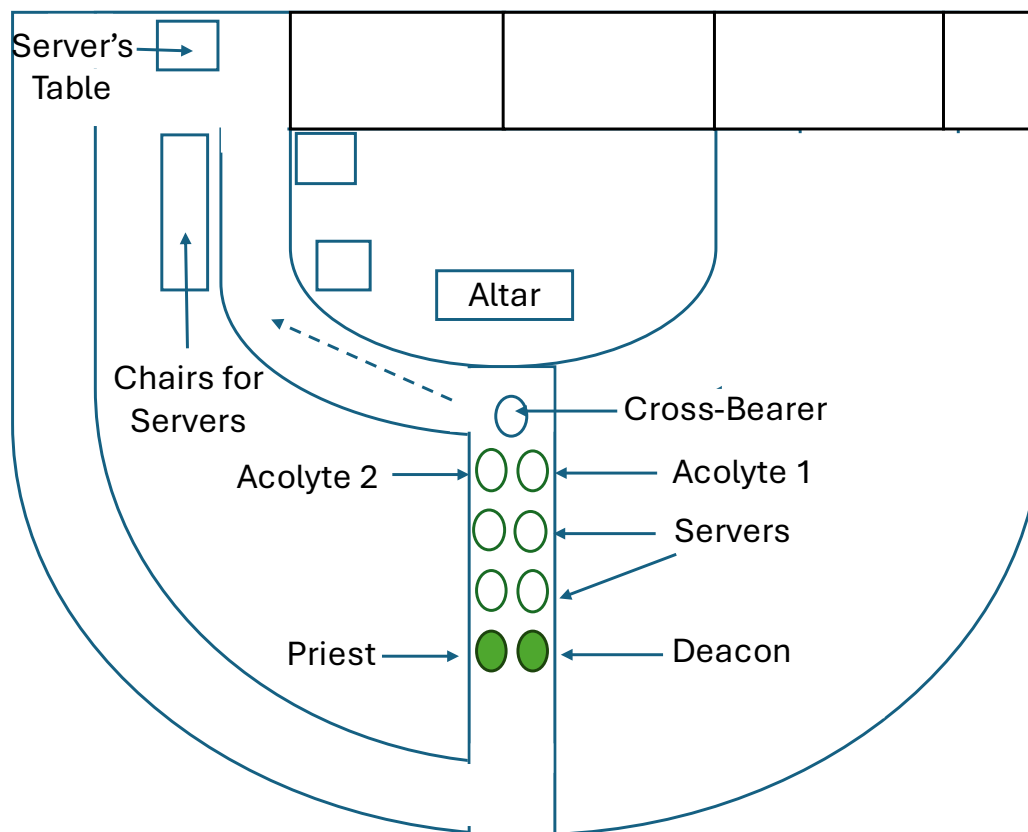
Long Procession:



Short Procession:



The procession pauses at the foot of the Altar typically in the following formation:



The procession should move at a calm pace, be careful not to run ahead of the Priest and Deacon!

In the case of the short procession, please leave enough room for the Priest and Deacon to move to the back of the line up.

After a brief pause at the Altar, the Cross-Bearer moves towards the Server's table and places the Cross in the stand before standing in front of the chair that is positioned nearest the sacristy.

As soon as the Cross-Bearer moves, the Acolytes take a step forward towards the Altar, pausing briefly before moving to the Server's table, placing the Acolyte candles on the table and then moving to the chairs to the right of the Cross-Bearer.

The remaining Servers repeat this process approaching the Altar in pairs and either bowing (if carrying something) or genuflecting before moving to their chairs.

If all chairs are used, then the Servers may use the chairs on the opposite side of the sanctuary.

If incense is being used, the Thurifer and Boat-Bearer should wait in the sanctuary rather than standing in front of their chairs.



## Blessing of the Altar

*ONLY WHEN USING INCENSE AT MASS*

The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer wait on one side in the sanctuary until the Priest and Deacon arrive and kiss the Altar.

The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer approach the Priest. The Thurifer opens the Thurible, and the Boat-Bearer opens the boat allowing the Priest to add incense to the Thurible. After closing the Thurible, the Thurifer hands the Thurible to the Deacon to pass on to the Priest or if there is no Deacon, directly to the Priest.

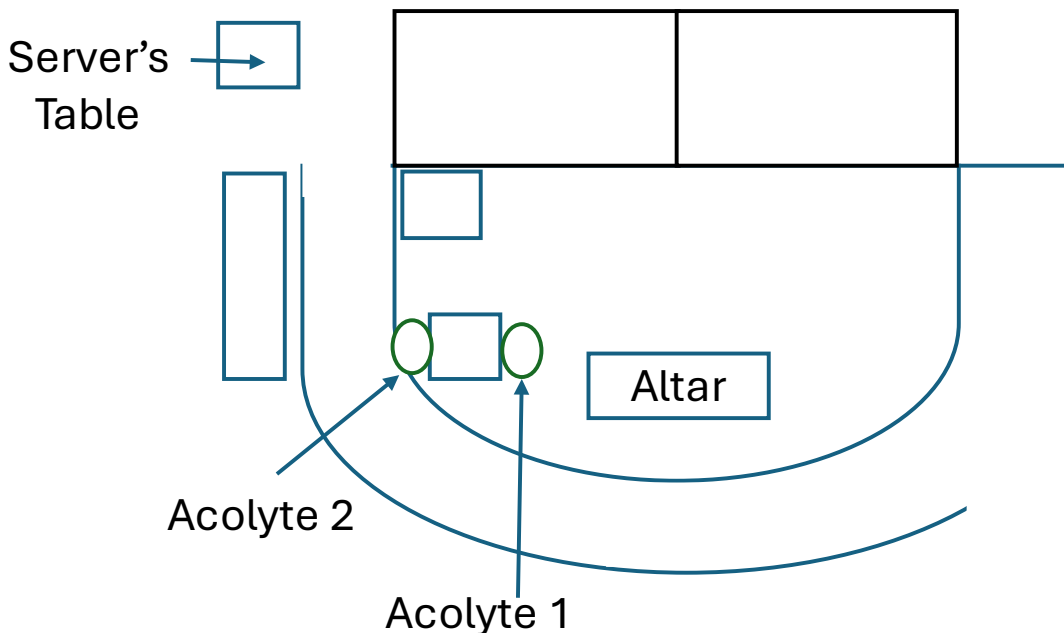
The Priest accompanied by the Deacon incenses the Altar by walking around it, pausing to incense the Cross on route. Following this, the Priest passes the Thurible to the Deacon who passes it back to the Thurifer who should remain waiting with the Boat-Bearer in the sanctuary.

The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer return the Thurible to its stand (usually in the sacristy) before returning to their seats.

## Liturgy of the Word

All Servers sit and listen to the readings.

At the end of the reading before the Gospel, the Acolytes take the candles from the Server's Table and proceed to the left and right of the Lectern, entering from the front on the Sanctuary. The Acolyte at the front should take position 1.



If the book of the Gospels is on the Altar, then a Server may optionally remove the lectionary book and place it under the Lectern so that the Lectern is free for the book of the Gospels to be placed there.

If incense is being used, the Thurifer and Boat-Bearer should retrieve the Thurible and boat and move to the sanctuary leading the Acolytes. The Priest will add incense to the Thurible and the Thurifer should stand next to the Deacon at the Lectern.

After the Deacon says “A reading from the holy Gospel...”, the Thurifer passes the Thurible to the Deacon who incenses the book of the Gospels before returning the Thurible. The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer remain in the sanctuary until the Gospel reading ends.

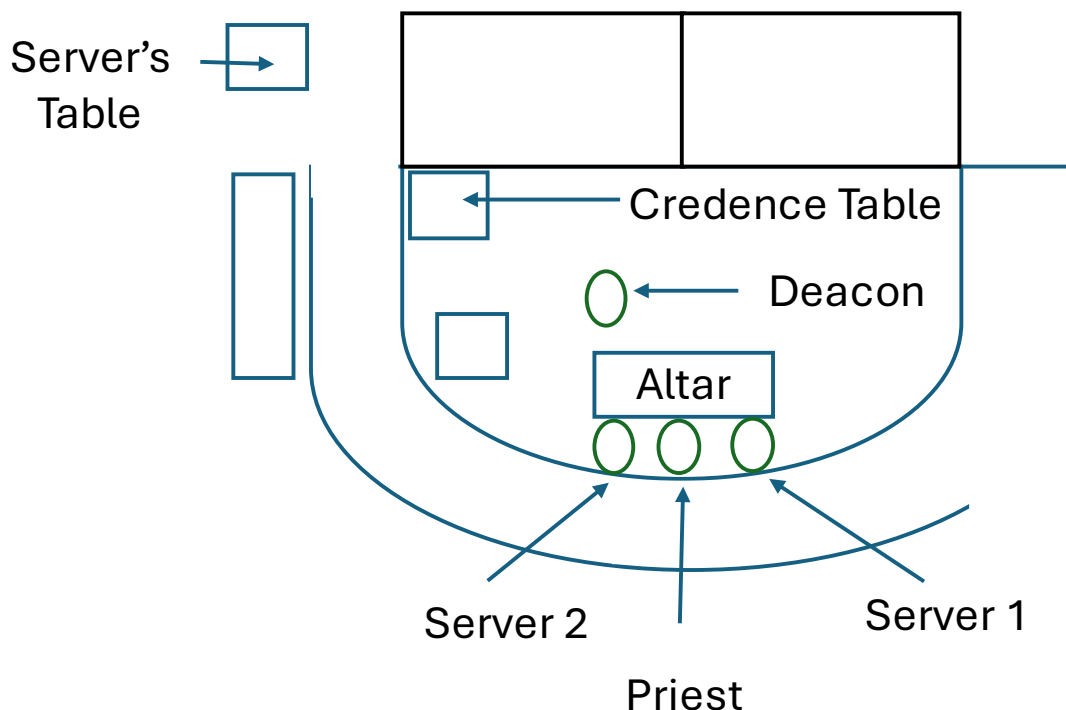
At the end of the Gospel, the Thurible is returned to its stand, the Acolyte candles are returned to the Server’s Table and the Servers sit and listen to the homily.

### Preparation of the Gifts

If not already present (it usually is), the Head Server takes the Corporal from the Credence Table and places it on the Altar.

The Head Server places the Chalices and Purificators on the Altar to the right of the Corporal together with the water cruet. These are retrieved from the Credence Table.

When the Priest moves to the front to accept the gifts of bread and wine, the two Servers designated as gift bearers stand to his left and right at the front of the Altar.



The Priest will hand the gifts of bread and wine to the Servers who give them to the Deacon before returning to their place. Give the bread to the Deacon first, followed by the wine.

The Deacon will prepare the Chalices and pass the Ciborium and Chalice to the Priest.

### Washing of Hands (No Incense)

As the Priest finishes the “Blessed are you, Lord God...” prayer holding up the Chalice, two Servers should approach the Priest with the Lavabo Bowl and Towel (that are kept on the Credence Table) so that the Priest may wash his hands.

### Blessing of Gifts and Washing of Hands When Incense is Being Used

Washing of the hands is delayed until the gifts have been blessed.

The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer should prepare the Thurible during the preparation of the gifts and be ready for the Priest to add incense after he finishes the “Blessed are you, Lord God..” prayer with the Chalice.

The Priest adds incense, the Thurifer hands the Thurible to the Deacon to pass on to the Priest or if there is no Deacon, directly to the Priest.

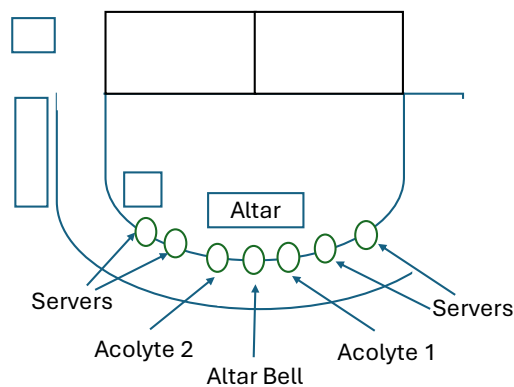
The Priest, accompanied by the Deacon, incense the gifts by walking around the Altar. The Priest also incenses the Deacon before passing the Thurible back to the Deacon, who in turn incenses the Priest.

The Deacon will move to the front to incense the people, and whilst this is taking place the washing of hands may proceed as usual.

The Deacon hands the Thurible back to the Thurifer who returns the Thurible to its stand, unless incense is being used at the consecration in which case the Thurifer retains the Thurible and more incense may be added during the “Holy, Holy, Holy”.

### Eucharistic Prayer

During the “Holy, Holy, Holy” the Servers move to the front of the Altar and kneel with the Altar bell bearer in the middle, the Acolytes at each side, and the Servers evenly spaced to the left and right-hand sides.



At the Epiclesis, when the Priest places his hands over the bread and wine and prays in these or similar words “...by sending down your spirit upon them...”, the Altar bells are rung, and the Deacon kneels.

The Altar bells are also rung when the Priest elevates the consecrated bread and wine.

If incense is being used at the Consecration, then the Thurifer should remain kneeling in the sanctuary and incenses the bread and wine with three swings of the Thurible.

After the Great Amen (immediately before the Our Father), the Servers return to their seats.

### Sign of Peace and Communion

The sign of peace is exchanged by the Servers with their nearest companions only.

The Servers receive communion at the side of the Altar near their seats in a prayerful and quiet manner. Please stand to receive communion rather than kneel (some of our Eucharistic Ministers struggle with bending down to you!)

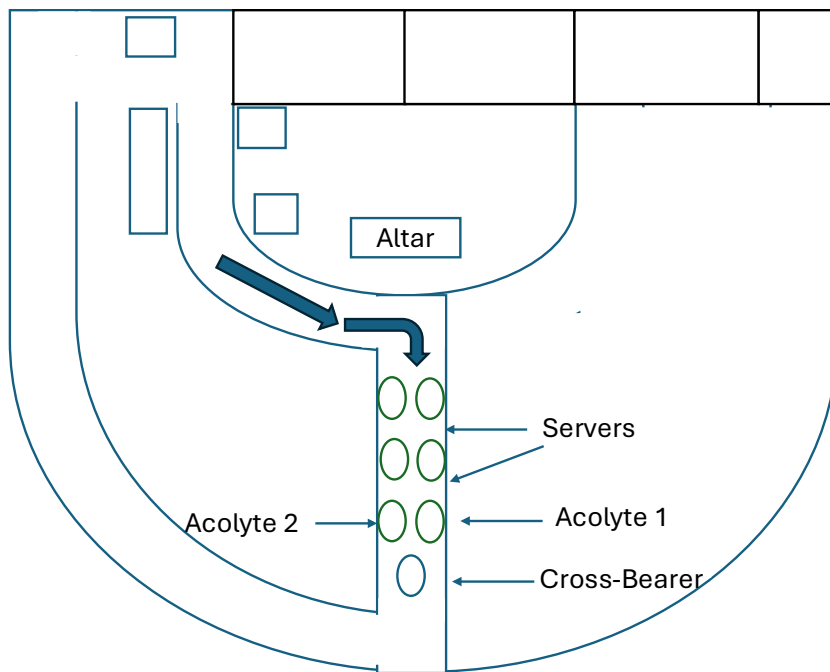
As communion ends, the Head Server may help the Priest or Deacon clean the Chalice and Ciborium by holding the cruet of water and removing any items left on the Altar and bringing them to the Credence Table.

### Exit Procession

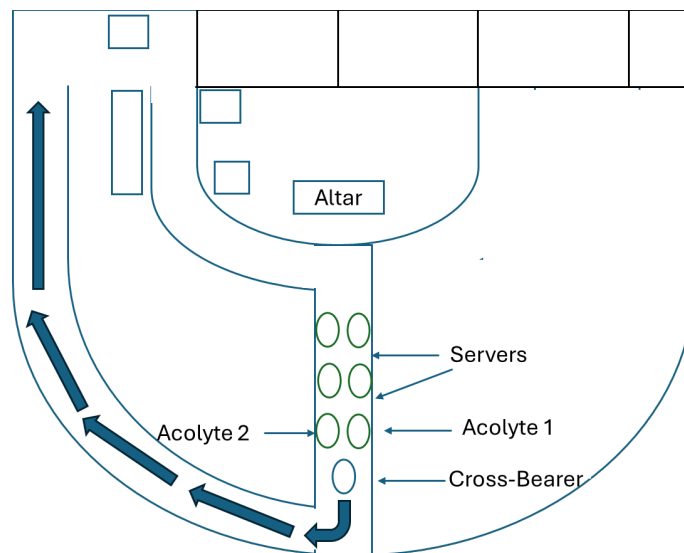
There are two kinds of exit procession (long and short) that correspond to the entrance procession, and this takes place after the dismissal.

Long Procession:

The Cross-Bearer leads the way followed by the Acolytes and other Servers and proceeds three quarters of the way up the centre aisle before stopping and turning around to face the Altar. This results in the following position:



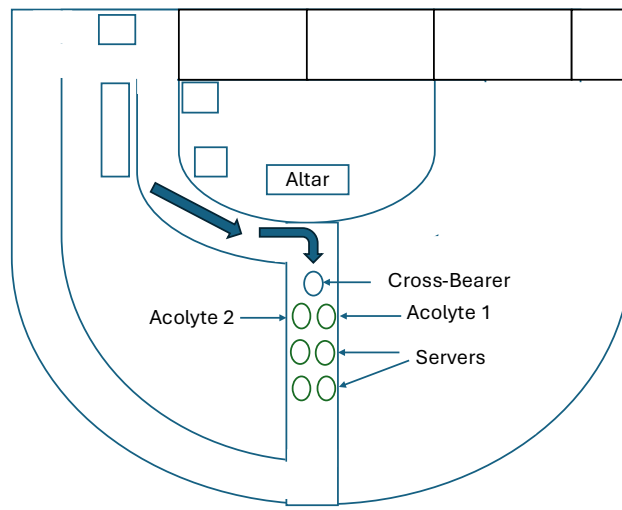
The Servers wait facing the Altar until the Priest and Deacon arrive at the front of the Altar, and those not carrying anything, bow at the same time as the Priest and Deacon before turning around and processing to the sacristy.



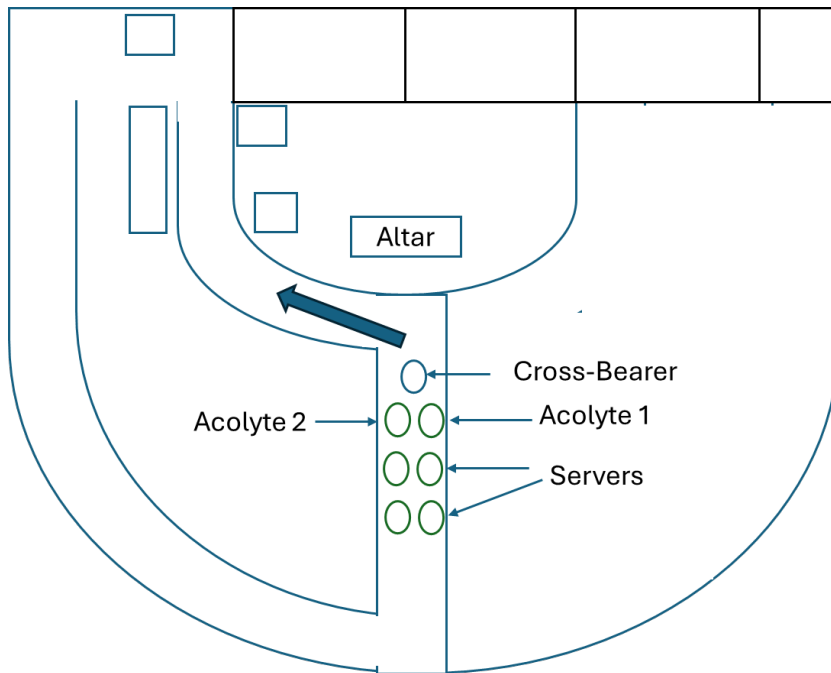
**Short Procession:**

The Cross-Bearer and Acolytes line up facing the Altar with the Cross-Bearer at the front.

The Servers at the rear will need to pass the ones at the front, so try to leave enough space for this to take place.



The Servers wait facing the Altar until the Priest and Deacon arrive at the front of the Altar, and those not carrying anything, bow at the same time as the Priest and Deacon before processing to the sacristy by moving forward.



### Altar Server's Prayer

When the procession reaches the Sacristy, all Servers face the Cross with the Acolytes positioned at each side and the Head Server will lead the Servers in the Glory Be.

# EASTER LITURGIES

During the Easter Liturgies there are a few variations to the Altar Server's duties (see below). Make sure you arrive early before each service so that additional instructions can be given.

## Holy Thursday

Incense is always used, so the Thurifer leads the procession, and the details are as described before.

Holy oils are brought up at the beginning of the Mass, the Servers may need to assist the Priest in receiving them and can pass them on to the Deacon.

During the Gloria, the bells are rung and then remain silent until Saturday night. Move them out of sight and do not use them at the consecration!

When the prayer after communion is completed (i.e. before the last hymn), the Thurifer and Boat-Bearer come to the front of the Altar followed by the other Servers who take up their normal position as when Mass ends.

The hosts which have been left on the Altar are incensed. After the Deacon has picked up the Ciborium, the procession moves to the Altar of Repose (near the entrance to the sanctuary).

The hosts are placed in the Tabernacle, and we wait for the final two verses of the hymn before we return to the sacristy in silence.

## Good Friday

Silent procession at the start of the service with no candles.

The service starts with the Priest kneeling at the front of the Altar. When you get to your place, remain kneeling until the Priest gets up.

The Gospel today will be a reading of the passion and Acolyte candles are not required.

After the solemn intercessions, two Altar Servers need to accompany the Deacon to the entrance – where the Cross and Acolyte candles are kept.

The Servers carry the Acolyte candles, and the Deacon carries the Cross.

The Deacon will stop three times on the way back to the Altar. Once just after the entrance doors, once in the middle of the church and once when facing the people from the Sanctuary.

At each stop the Deacon will sing "Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world". The Servers should remain at the side of the Deacon and move with him.

After the third stop, the Acolyte candles should be placed on the floor in front of the Altar - one on either side.

The Deacon will hold the Cross on top of the kneeler and all Servers will now line up in the centre ready to kiss the Cross – after the Priest.

The first Servers to kiss the Cross should move into position to hold the Cross so that the Deacon can join the queue to kiss the Cross.

The Servers should take turns holding the Cross and wiping the feet of Jesus with purificators.

Towards the end of the adoration of the Cross, the Servers need to help put the cloths back on the Altar. After this has been done the Acolyte candles are placed on the Altar.

When the last few people are coming up for adoration of the Cross, the Deacon will take over holding the Cross. When adoration ends, the Deacon will place the Cross under the Altar and removes the kneeler.

At the end of the service the procession leaves in silence.

## Holy Saturday

The service starts in the car park with the blessing of the fire, the Thurible is empty, the charcoal is being heated in the fire. The blessing and lighting of the Easter candle takes place.

Charcoal and incense are placed in the Thurible

The Deacon lifts the candle and sings – “The light of Christ”. The Priest lights his candle from the Easter candle.

The Thurifer leads the Deacon to just inside the church door and at this point the Deacon sings – “The light of Christ”. Servers now help people to light their candles using the tapers that are lit from the Easter Candle.

The Thurifer leads the Deacon to the Altar, and he turns to face the people and waits for them to come in. The Deacon sings – “The light of Christ” for the last time.

The church lights are turned on and candles remain lit. The Thurifer and Boat-Bearer go to the Priest to have more incense placed in the Thurible.

After receiving a blessing, the Deacon incenses the candle and sings the Easter Proclamation (The Exultet). The candles are now blown out.

During the Gloria, the Altar bells are rung and the Candles on the Altar are lit.

The Deacon will incense the Gospel and proclaim it in the normal way. Note: No candles are required for the Gospel reading.

At the renewal of baptismal promises, the Servers will need to help to re-light everyone’s candle using tapers lit from the Easter Candle.