

DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON

Norms for Servers in the Diocese of Arlington

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GIRM	<i>General Instruction of the Roman Missal</i> (2010)
GfAS	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <i>Guidelines for Altar Servers</i> (1994)
SC	Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (1963)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Holy Spirit refreshes the Body of Christ, inspiring new aspirations towards holiness and the participation of the lay faithful in the activity and life of the Church.¹ The sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”² All who participate in liturgy are earnestly encouraged to enter into the celebration with their whole mind, heart, and body, so that the sanctification of humans and the glorification of God, through Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, may be achieved with due reverence and a spirit of joy.³

2. Among the diverse liturgical ministries at the service of the reverent and joyful celebration of liturgy, the Church institutes Acolytes “for service at the altar and to assist the Priest and Deacon.”⁴ In order to foster solemn and fruitful worship in all communities, even when instituted Acolytes are not available, the Church also permits lay persons to be appointed for some of the duties of instituted Acolytes,⁵ and in the United States, these are identified as Servers.⁶

3. This document establishes the norms regulating the ministry of Server for the Diocese of Arlington. In accordance with universal law, the Bishop of Arlington issues the following norms proper to the Diocese of Arlington.

NORMS

4. In accordance with universal law, the Bishop of Arlington permits lay men and boys and lay women and girls to exercise the liturgical function of Server.⁷ In view of the pastoral situation of the Parish or Chaplaincy and with the appropriate consultation, the Pastor or Chaplain makes determinations regarding the exercise of the liturgical function of Server by lay women and girls.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1998, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 81 (1989), p. 396, no. 2.

² Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963, *Acta Synodalia* 2/6, 409-497, no. 10; also see no. 6. Subsequent references are cited as SC.

³ Cf. SC, no. 10.

⁴ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 98, in the *Roman Missal*, third typical edition, 2010 (published 2011). Subsequent references are cited as GIRM.

⁵ Cf. GIRM, no. 100.

⁶ Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Guidelines for Altar Servers*, 16 June 1994, no. 2. Subsequent references are cited as GfAS.

⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 1984, can. 230, § 2; Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, *Responsio ad propositum dubium [Response to a proposed question]*, 11 July 1992, AAS 86 (1994), 541; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences*, Prot. N. 2482/93, 15 March 1994, AAS 86 (1994), 542; GfAS, no. 1. Also, cf. John Paul II, Angelus, 3 September 1995; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994, AAS 86 (1994) 545-548; Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, 15 August 1997, AAS 89 (1997) 852-877, no. 4; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Letter of the Congregation*, Prot. N. 2451/00/L, 27 July 2001, *Notitiae* 37, nos. 8-9 (2001), 397-399.

5. No distinction should be made between the functions carried out in the sanctuary by lay men and boys and those carried out by lay women and girls.⁸

6. Servers should be no younger than the age of reason, and they should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. They should have already received Holy Communion for the first time and normally receive the Eucharist whenever they participate in the Mass.⁹

7. Servers should receive proper formation before they begin in the ministry. The formation should include instruction on the liturgies for which they minister. Most especially, Servers should be instructed in the Mass and its parts and their meaning, the various objects used in the liturgy (their names and use), and the various functions of the Server. Servers should also receive appropriate guidance on maintaining proper decorum and attire when serving in the liturgy.¹⁰

8. Servers wear the alb or other appropriate and dignified clothing.¹¹ Lay women and girls may not wear cassock or surplice.

9. Servers “serve at the altar and assist the Priest and the Deacon,” and they may “carry the cross, the candles, the thurible, the bread, the wine, and the water.”¹² Servers may not purify the sacred vessels or distribute Holy Communion, unless mandated by the Bishop.

10. In addition, Servers should actively respond to the prayers and dialogues of the Priest along with the Assembly. They should also join in singing the hymns and other chants of the liturgy.¹³

11. Servers should be seated in a place from which they can easily assist the Priest and Deacon. The place next to the Priest is normally reserved for the Deacon.¹⁴

12. The *Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians, and Ushers* may be used before Servers first begin in the ministry.¹⁵

This document is promulgated by the Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Arlington, on August 6, 2019, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, and is effective immediately in the Diocese of Arlington. Any particular law that is contrary to these norms is abrogated with this promulgation, and any custom *contra legem* that is contrary to these norms is hereby reprobated.

⁸ Cf. GfAS, no. 2.

⁹ Cf. GfAS, no. 3.

¹⁰ Cf. GfAS, no. 4.

¹¹ Cf. GIRM, no. 339.

¹² GIRM, no. 100.

¹³ Cf. GfAS, no. 8.

¹⁴ Cf. GfAS, no. 9.


¹⁵ *Book of Blessings*, chap. 62; cf. Cf. GfAS, no. 11.

Given in Arlington on August 6, 2019 by:



Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Arlington

Witness by:



Reverend Jamie R. Workman, J.C.L.
Chancellor