

# A Handbook for Servers

## *General Information—Booklet #1*

**A**midst all the benefits that this revision [*the Liturgical Movement*] has produced, one resultant danger has been the tendency on the part of some clergy and congregations toward a casualness in liturgical practices that fails to convey the sense that we are worshipping the God

*“before whom even angels veil their faces.”*

*James Winchester Montgomery  
Bishop of Chicago, Retired*

## Purpose

- To increase the comfort level of participants concerning their responsibilities by providing reference material that can be easily used.
- To provide easily updated instructions in the performance of liturgical duties.
- To provide guidance in the appropriate decorum.
- To ensure that liturgical celebrations reflect the diversity of the parish, both individuals and ideas.
- To heighten the joy of serving and through the service proclaim,

*“In all things, God be glorified.”*

## *Contents of A Handbook for Servers*

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Booklet #8—*Ministers' Cross*

Booklet #9—*Thurifer*

*Prepared by Barry E. Huber and Mike McGee*

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*Revised September 2004*

*Please direct any questions to Paul Carter,  
Acolyte Guild chair, at 202/332-0899*

# Decorum

*A Gentle Reminder*

***Servers present a high profile to the congregation. As such you help set the tone for worship.*** We all do well to remember a few items of deportment which contribute to the reverence and dignity of the liturgical celebration. There are other items of courtesy which will be addressed in the discussion of responsibilities of specific acolyte roles.

## *Standing*

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- Stand up straight!
- If carrying a candle or processional cross, make sure it is straight (centered both left to right and front to back).

## *Walking*

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- Walk slowly and with dignity. Follow the pace of the thurifer.
- Don't look rushed or hurried.
- Avoid stiffness in your movements. (Even if you have "stage fright", remember you're among friends.)
- Avoid military steps, square corners, and quick turns. (Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, not a warhorse.)
- When going up steps, lift the front of the foot up, so as to catch and lift the cassock on the foot. If the cassock is resting on the top of the foot, it will not be stepped upon.

## *Kneeling*

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- Put your weight on your knees and kneel upright.
- Don't crouch or slump.
- To avoid stepping on the cassock after kneeling, start *right*—genuflect on the *right* knee, and then slide the left foot back so the left knee rests beside the right knee. If the left knee is slid back, the left foot will always be under the cassock, and then, when standing (the reverse order is done) the left foot, which comes forward first, will never stand on the cassock. (*Lefties feel free to adapt this process.*)

## *Sitting*

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- Sit up straight.
- Keep the knees together and both feet on the floor. *Never, ever* cross the legs at the knees or ankles.
- Keep your arms at your sides and your hands in your lap—no draping across the back of pews.

## *The Simple Bow*

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- Bow the head, inclining the shoulders slightly.
- Use this bow at the name of Jesus and other occasions of reverence.

## *The Solemn Bow*

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- Use this deeper bow when reverencing the altar and at other times as directed.
- Bow from the waist, inclining the head and the shoulders.

## *Genuflection*

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- Genuflect (to ‘bow the knee’) as a sign of reverence to the Blessed Sacrament when reserved in an aumbry, tabernacle, or on the altar. It is the most profound and solemn form of bowing.
- To genuflect, stand up straight and bend your right knee until it touches the floor—the left knee will naturally bend a bit—keeping the back straight. There is no forward movement, there is no movement of the head.

*Note: Do not genuflect when carrying anything. Do not bow when carrying a processional cross or torch.*

## *Hands*

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- Unless carrying something, your hands should always be folded and held above the waist.
- Don’t let them hang loose at your side or folded below the waist.
- Hold hands together, palm to palm, at a 45 degree angle at mid-chest, right thumb crossed over left.
- If one hand is in use for some purpose, such as swinging a thurible or standing at the altar rail with a torch, keep the free hand flat against mid-chest. When kneeling with the torch, the free hand may be used for steadying yourself.

## *The Sign of the Cross*

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- The sign of the cross should always be made reverently and in a dignified manner.
- You are signing yourself with the Cross of Christ; your act of devotion should convey that message. It is a reminder of what Christ did for you on the Cross. In making the sign of the cross, we “glory in the cross of Christ”, and we ‘take up our cross’.
- With your right hand, fingers together, touch your forehead first, then your chest (heart), then your left shoulder, across the chest to your right shoulder and finally to the heart. This is done in one fluid action.
- Keep hand motions unobtrusive.

## *Prayers and Responses*

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- You are a leader of the people in prayers and responses.
- Make sure you know them.
- Say or sing them audibly and reverently.
- Keep the pace set by the celebrant or congregation.
- Don’t rush or lag behind.

## *Eyes*

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- Always focus on the current activity of the service—the altar, a reader, or the homilist.
- Don’t stare into the congregation or at the ceiling.
- When in doubt, keep the eyes lowered and look at the floor.

## *Entering the Nave*

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- Arrive at the church a minimum of half-an-hour before the service is to begin.
- Vest and check with the other acolytes about any specific changes or activities for the service.
- Enter *through the undercroft* to the narthex and into the back of the nave. Walk slowly and with dignity.

## *Under the Vestments*

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Like the Model T Ford, the choices here are unlimited, as long as they are black—or at least dark. In keeping with the objective of being as inconspicuous as possible during the act of preparation for the service, and so as not to distract from the service itself, it is recommended that clothing of black, dark grey, and dark blue are best. Shirts/blouses with white collars and cuffs, and dark shoes are appropriate. For the women, subdued makeup and minimal jewelry are requested.

## *After the Service*

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Acolytes help remove items from the sanctuary after the service. Please return to the sacristy and remove the cotta before starting to remove items. Acolytes should reverence the altar in moving through the chancel after placing crosses and torches in their place; however, do not remove items when performing these acts. Walk slowly and with dignity. *Do not remove the cotta until you are out of public view.*

## *When a Substitution is Required*

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If you are unable to serve when assigned there are three things to do.

- The existing practice of the assigned acolyte finding a substitute will continue. Please do this as far in advance as possible.
- Call Barry Huber in the office (202/232-4244) and let him know about the substitution. This will enable Barry to make the adjustment for the Sunday bulletin
- Call Paul Carter (202/332-0899) and let him know about the substitution. This will help reduce the uncertainty which sometimes occurs. If you can not find a substitute, please call Paul as soon as possible.



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