

THE DUTIES OF AN ACOLYTE

In our formation program, men are instituted as acolytes approximately one year prior to ordination. This document is meant to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the acolyte and help his pastor and parish staff to understand the unique ministry of the Instituted Acolyte. We have included pertinent quotes from the official documents of the Church as well as explanatory notes to clarify particular points for ministry in the Diocese of Phoenix.

With the increase in the number of lay ministers serving in liturgical roles such as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, altar servers, sacristans, etc., the role of the instituted acolyte is a bit obscured. It is important to remember that the acolyte is a member of the lay faithful whose ministry flows from baptism and not ordination. However, since he is instituted to the public ministry of the Church, his service should take precedence over the service of other lay ministers. Other lay ministers are commissioned to serve at their parish for a set period of time while an acolyte is permanently instituted to serve the Church.

In addition to their roles and responsibilities in the Eucharistic liturgy as outlined below, instituted acolytes serve as lay ministers at funeral vigils and committals, communal celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours, and devotional/prayer services. They may also perform the various lay blessings from the Book of Blessings using the prescribed forms. They also serve as sacristans and as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion for the sick and homebound. They can assist priests and deacons during the Rites of Baptism and Matrimony in whatever ways deemed necessary by the celebrant.

An instituted acolyte may expose the Blessed Sacrament for public veneration. He may open the tabernacle and also, as required, place the ciborium on the altar or place the host in the monstrance. At the end of the period of adoration, he may replace the blessed sacrament in the tabernacle. It is not lawful, however, for him to give the blessing with the sacrament. For this exposition, the acolyte should be vested in alb and cincture, the cope and humeral veil are not appropriate.³²

Because they have undergone the necessary training in order to fulfill this ministry, and in order to continue their preparation for ordination, it is appropriate for instituted acolytes to assist in the instruction of other lay ministers such as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, altar servers, lectors, and sacristans. Instituted acolytes should also become familiar with the sacramental records of the parish and participate in liturgical planning and preparation.

In the Diocese of Phoenix the normal vesture for an acolyte is an alb with cincture (amice if necessary). A cassock with surplice is also appropriate at Mass.

“The acolyte is appointed in order to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is his duty therefore to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass; he is also to distribute communion as a special minister when the ministers spoken of in the Codex Iuris Canonici can. 845³³ are not available or are prevented by ill health, age, or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of communicants is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged. In the same extraordinary circumstances an acolyte may be entrusted with publicly exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterward replacing it, but not with blessing the people.

He may also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who on a temporary basis are appointed to assist the priest or deacon in liturgical celebrations by carrying the Roman Missal,

³²Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Eucharistiae Sacramentum*, 21 June 1973, Nos. 91-92 ³³This refers to the 1917 Code. See Canon 910 of the 1983 Code.

cross, candles, etc., or by performing other such duties. He will perform these functions more worthily if he participates in the Holy Eucharist with increasingly fervent devotion, receives nourishment from it, and deepens his knowledge about it".³⁴

"As one set aside in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning: in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his gravity and reverence in church, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the people of God, especially for the weak and the sick. In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men".³⁵

DUTIES OF INSTITUTED ACOLYTES WITHIN THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY³⁶

187. The duties that the acolyte may carry out are of various kinds and several may coincide. Hence, it is desirable that these duties be suitably distributed among several acolytes. If, however, only one acolyte is present, he should perform the more important duties while the rest are to be distributed among several ministers.

Note: It is never allowed for an acolyte to give the homily or even a "reflection" during the Mass.³⁷

188. In the procession to the altar, the acolyte may carry the cross, walking between two ministers with lighted candles. Upon reaching the altar, the acolyte places the cross upright near the altar so that it may serve as the altar cross; otherwise, he puts it in a worthy place. Then he takes his place in the sanctuary.

Note: This, of course, does not mean that the acolyte must carry the cross but is an indication that the acolyte may be accorded a place of privilege in the entrance procession.

189. Through the entire celebration, the acolyte is to approach the priest or the deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to them and to assist them in any other way required. Thus it is appropriate, insofar as possible, that the acolyte occupy a place from which he can conveniently carry out his ministry either at the chair or at the altar.

Note: The acolyte's posture is to correspond with that of the lay faithful. In other words, when they stand, he should stand, when they sit, he should be seated unless he has a function to fulfill, and when they kneel after the Sanctus, he should kneel. He may remain standing in the sanctuary after the Agnus Dei in order to receive and help distribute communion.

³⁴Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter given "Motu Proprio: On first tonsure, minor orders, and the subdiaconate" (*Ministeria Quaedam*), August 15, 1972, no. 6.

³⁵Ibid, nos. 6-7

³⁶Numbers 187-193 are excerpts from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) ³⁷Redemptionis Sacramentum, nos. 64-74

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The Liturgy of the Eucharist

190. If no deacon is present, after the Universal Prayer is concluded and while the priest remains at the chair, the acolyte places the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal on the altar. Then, if necessary, the acolyte assists the priest in receiving the gifts of the people and, if appropriate, brings the bread and wine to the altar and hands them to the priest. If incense is used, the acolyte presents the thurible to the priest and assists him while he incenses the gifts, the cross, and the altar. Then the acolyte incenses the priest and the people.

Note: The instituted acolyte hands the gifts to the celebrant rather than placing them on the altar or the corporal himself. The acolyte is not allowed to pour the water into the wine to be consecrated or to raise the chalice at the doxology. These actions are reserved to clergy.

With A Deacon

178. After the Universal Prayer, while the priest remains at the chair, the deacon prepares the altar, assisted by the acolyte, but it is the deacon's place to take care of the sacred vessels himself. He also assists the priest in receiving the people's gifts....

Note: The instituted acolyte assists the deacon by bringing him the linens and sacred vessels from the credence table. He should hand them to the deacon and not place them on the altar or the corporal. He may bring the cruet of water for the mingling in the chalice to the deacon at the appropriate time and he may assist the priest with the washing of his hands.

Without a Deacon

139. When the Universal Prayer is completed, all sit.... An acolyte or other lay minister arranges the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Roman Missal upon the altar.

140. It is appropriate for the faithful's participation to be expressed by an offering, whether of the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist or of other gifts for the relief of the needs of the Church and of the poor. The offerings of the faithful are received by the priest, assisted by the acolyte or other minister. The bread and wine for the Eucharist are carried to the celebrant, who places them upon the altar, while other gifts are put in another appropriate place.

141. At the altar the priest accepts the paten with the bread. With both hands he holds it slightly raised above the altar and says quietly, *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord). Then he places the paten with the bread on the corporal.

142. After this, as the minister presents the cruets, the priest stands at the side of the altar and pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly, *Per huius aquae* (By the mystery of this water). He returns to the middle of the altar, takes the chalice with both hands, raises it a little, and says quietly, *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord). Then he places the chalice on the corporal and covers it with a pall, as appropriate. If, however, there is no Offertory chant and the organ is not played, in the presentation of the bread and wine the priest may say the formulas of blessing aloud, to which the people make the acclamation, *Benedictus Deus in saecula* (Blessed be God for ever).

143. After placing the chalice upon the altar, the priest bows profoundly and says quietly, *In spiritu humilitatis* (Lord God, we ask you to receive us).

144. If incense is used, the priest then puts some in the thurible, blesses it without saying anything, and incenses the offerings, the cross, and the altar. A minister, while standing at the side of the altar, incenses the priest and then the people.

Note: When incense is used and a deacon is not present, the acolyte is the appropriate minister to incense the priest and the people.

145. After the prayer *In spiritu humilitatis* (Lord God, we ask you to receive us) or after the incensation, the priest washes his hands standing at the side of the altar and, as the minister pours the water, says quietly, *Lava me, Domine* (Lord, wash away my iniquity).

191. A duly instituted acolyte, as an extraordinary minister, may, if necessary, assist the priest in giving Communion to the people.³⁸ If Communion is given under both kinds, when no deacon is present, the acolyte administers the chalice to the communicants or holds the chalice if Communion is given by intinction.

Note: Although the acolyte remains an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, by virtue of being an instituted minister, he takes precedence over other members of the lay faithful who may be serving as extraordinary ministers. When communion is given under only one kind, the acolyte should receive as any other lay person under just the one kind.

The extraordinary ministers are to receive the vessels containing the Body and Blood from the hands of the priest celebrant³⁹ or the deacon⁴⁰. Therefore, the acolyte should not be taking vessels from the altar to hand to the other ministers.

192. Likewise, when the distribution of Communion is completed, a duly instituted acolyte helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels. When no deacon is present, a duly instituted acolyte carries the sacred vessels to the credence table and there purifies, wipes, and arranges them in the usual way.

Note: The purifying of the sacred vessels may be done by more than one person if the number of vessels is large. It is appropriate for the celebrant, should he so desire, to purify the principal chalice at the altar himself while the acolyte purifies the remaining vessels at the credence table. The vessels may also be placed on the credence table and covered for purifying immediately after the Mass. In this case, the acolyte should return to the sanctuary quickly to perform this duty. The instituted acolyte is not to say the prayer "Lord, may I receive these gifts..." while cleansing the vessels. This prayer is reserved to the priest.

193. After the celebration of Mass, the acolyte and other ministers return in procession to the sacristy, together with the deacon and the priest in the same way and order in which they entered.

³⁸Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Ministeria quaedam*, 15 August 1972: AAS 64 (1972), p. 532.

³⁹GIRM # 162

⁴⁰Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, #40