

Our Lady of Compassion

Ministry of Ushers

By taking their own proper part in the celebration

THE SIDESMAN THEMSELVES" will more abundantly draw from it those fruits which our Lord intended them to derive when he instituted the Eucharist". (2)

THE PEOPLE, welcomed and made to feel comfortable and at ease as the assembled family of God, will be more ready to take part in the celebration and to become one body, listening to the word of God, joining in prayers and song, offering sacrifice, and sharing in the Lord's table together" (62).

AND FOR ALL there will be a greater "conscious, active and full participation of mind motivated by faith, hope and charity.

Such participation of mind body is desired by the church, is demanded by the nature of the celebration, and is the right and duty of Christians by reason of their baptism" (3).

As the Roman Missal declares:

"the people should serve willingly when asked to perform some particular ministry in the celebration"(62).

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Chapter 1

The Ministry of Sidesman

"Our Saviour instituted the eucharistic sacrifice as.....a memorial of his death and resurrection....a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity", says the Decree on the Sacred Liturgy. It continues: "The Church therefore earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators." (47) And the Roman Missal insists that the faithful who gather as a community to celebrate the Eucharist should express "their deep sense of religion and their charity to everyone who shares in the celebration" (62)

The Missal makes it clear that the sidesman is a special minister at the celebration of the Eucharist. The key to his role as a minister is to be found in the above statements. His ministry is therefore defined as follows:

To attend to the needs of the faithful who gather as a community to celebrate

- *To prepare for their arrival*
- *To welcome them*
- *And to have an awareness of and a care for their needs before, during and after the celebration*

Those chosen for this ministry are to be selected with these and the following considerations in mind:

The sidesman must have a "deep sense of religion" and "charity for everyone who shares in the celebration".

His awareness of the needs of the faithful and his care for those needs arises from the sidesman's

- *Thoughtfulness,*
- *Tact*
- *Sense of responsibility*
- *And presence of mind*

which will ensure the fulfilment not only of his usual duties but also the ability to cope with the unusual/unexpected.

Both men and women may be chosen for this ministry. A number should be on duty at every Sunday Mass or other important celebration.

They will need to arrive well before the celebration is due to commence to ensure that preparations are properly made and to be ready for their duties as the people start arriving.

Chapter 2

Caring for the needs of the faithful

This chapter covers the needs of the faithful; on most occasions. However, in Holy Week and at, First Communion, Confirmation and other special occasions it will often be necessary to arrange a special planning session with the priest and others involved.

The following are the duties of the sidesmen before during and after liturgical celebrations.

1. Before the Celebration

It will be necessary for the sidesman to arrive well before the celebration is due to commence to ensure that preparations are properly made and to be ready for their duties as the people start arriving. Their first duty is to prepare:

Additional seating

On some occasions it will be necessary to ensure that additional seating is available.

Processional Routes

Arrangements must be made as necessary to ensure that processional routes will be kept clear.

Notice Boards

Check that these are tidy and destroy any out of date notices.

Books

Check that Mass books, hymn books, special sheets, etc are in position and are tidy.

Newsletters

These should be at hand, ready for distribution.

Offertory Table

The Offertory table should have been prepared already by the sacristan or servers.

However, it should still be checked for the following:

-paten with large bread and a number of small breads, jug of wine.

-collecting baskets for the number requires (usually 3 but more on some occasions).

Windows

Check the windows in the church, opening or closing them as necessary.

First Aid Box and Drinking Water

It is the sacristan's responsibility to ensure that these are available and kept in order.

However, the sidesman needs to know where they are and to check that they are in order.

Welcoming the Faithful

A word and a smile

The faithful should be welcomed as they arrive with a word and a smile. In time, the conscientious sidesman will come to know parishioners well enough to be able to welcome them by name and to be able to pick out the stranger.

Strangers should be especially welcomed: “Welcome to our parish – are you a visitor or a new parishioner?” New parishioners should be directed to the forms for completion.

New parishioners especially, but visitors also, should be introduced to the priest after Mass. If there is coffee laid on after Mass, this should be mentioned and they should be invited to come.

Books and Newsletters

Ensure that each person receives, on arrival all that is necessary to make participation easier in the celebration (Mass sheet, hymn book, special sheets if required) and a copy of the parish weekly newsletter. Do not leave them to ‘pick them up’ for themselves – it is more courteous to present them to them. Strangers often miss taking them if they are left to themselves.

Ushering

The Roman Missal refers to the sidesmen as “those who meet the people at the door, lead them to their places, and direct processions” (68b).

One or more sidesmen should therefore be available to usher the people to their places. When there is sparse attendance, an effort needs to be made to gather the people closer together. If there is singing, the people will find it easier to join in if they are not isolated from the others in the pews; often their spoken responses become half-hearted if they are not close to one another; this will enable the collection to be taken more easily. The people are a community, we are God’s people, and we should appear to be so; “The Lord’s Supper, or Mass, gathers together the people of God”, says the Missal (7). “They are “to become one body, listening to the word of God, joining in the prayers and song, offering sacrifice, and sharing in the Lord’s table together” (62).

Disabled People

Special arrangements will need to be made for handicapped people who arrive for a celebration. Special seating may be required, especially positioning of wheelchairs, which whilst avoiding obstruction for others will enable the handicapped to feel welcome and to take part fully in the celebration.

If the handicapped wish to receive Holy Communion, arrangements should be made with the priest on their behalf for him to come to them. This is easy if the handicapped are seated in the front rows.

Other duties

Other duties will be necessary according to the needs of the particular church and the particular celebration.

For example, car parking problems sometimes arise. Visitors may need to be directed to a suitable parking position. Neighbours who complain “one of your people has blocked the entrance to my garage with his car” should receive courteous sympathy and a solution found, even to the extent of passing a note of the car number to a reader or server so that he can ask for the car to be moved; or, the sidesman might himself choose a suitable pause in the celebration to go to one of the microphones to make an announcement.

In these or similar circumstances, sidesmen should come and go as unobtrusively as possible, using a side aisle if there is one.

Preparation and Briefing: Presentation of the Gifts

The role of the sidesman and of the collector is distinct. Anyone –man, women or child – may assist in the taking up of the collection and the presentation of the gifts. The sidesman has a special ministry which, although it involves organising the collection and presentation, should not normally involve taking the collection or presenting it (68b and 68c).

Before Mass, one of the sidesmen should select those who are to collect and present the offerings and the bread and wine. Those selected should be briefed by the sidesman.

Ideally, every parishioner (above first communion age, as the presentation of the gifts and the reception of communion are so closely linked) should have the opportunity to be involved from time to time. Some parishes evolve rota systems, but this is very difficult to achieve and perhaps a little over-organised.

For special celebrations, e.g. confirmation, reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, first communion, etc., members of the families involved should be the ones chosen to take part in the collection and presentation of gifts. On these occasions it is better that the priest should arrange it with them beforehand and let the sidesman have a list of those selected.

The normal procedure is for one of the sidesmen, **before** the celebration begins, to select those who are involved and give them a briefing. The same sidesman would be at the back of the church at the beginning of the “offertory” to watch over the procedure.

Occasionally one large family might be chosen to do everything. At other times, members from two or three families, or separate individuals, should be chosen, so ensuring that everyone has the opportunity of taking part from time to time.

There is sometimes a temptation to rely on two or three families who always arrive early for Mass. Resist this temptation! Also, if only children are chosen, adults will tend to "leave it to the children" which may be sweet but children alone do not properly represent the faithful who are gathered.

Sometimes a little pre-school child will happily accompany a father or mother as the parent takes the collection or carries the gifts, thus overcoming the difficulty of having to leave the little child alone in the seat.

Normal requirements

Three collectors, who will also present the bread and wine.

Arrange before Mass

All should be arranged before Mass begins.

Each collector should have a basket with him in his place.

The collectors and the presenters of the bread and wine should, if possible, take their places **towards the front of the church**, i.e. close to the altar; so that the celebrant may proceed with the prayer "Blessed are you, Lord of all creation" immediately he has received the bread and arrived back at the altar. If people have to return all the way to the back of the church, the priest will need to wait for them.

The full procedure to be followed is described in the next section "During the celebration".

2. During the Celebration

Sidesmen will need to take note of any special arrangements they have made with the celebrant, M.C., choir, readers or others.

One sidesman at least (or two or three for special celebrations) will need to be positioned near the back of the church during the celebration. Their duties include the following:

Entry procession

Where an entry procession of the celebrant and the ministers comes from outside, ensure the doors are open and the way is clear.

Latecomers

Care for the needs of latecomers. Latecomers will need to be held-back from walking up the church at an inappropriate moment.

It is especially inappropriate to be walking up the church DURING the rite of penance, the opening prayer, or one of the readings.

Sidesmen should rather choose an appropriate moment between one of those rites or while singing is in progress.

Whilst it is better to direct people up the centre aisle before the celebration begins, latecomers should be directed up the aisles (if there are any) as this is less distracting to others.

Standing at the back

Some adults – and through their bad example, some children – may try to stand at the back of the church even when there is plenty of room; or may even find places in an area outside the main body of the church. The sidesmen will courteously usher these to places among the rest of the assembled faithful.

Children

Sometimes children will come into the porch from outside the church and play or raise their voices. A gentle word from the sidesman is usually enough.

Parents with children

Sometimes parents will need to leave the church with children who are crying or playing –up. The sidesman should assist them – opening doors, offering any help he can.

The sick

A sidesman should care for anyone who is taken ill during the celebration: open the door, offer a chair, a glass of water, the first aid box, etc.

Windows

Windows need to be opened or closed as necessary; any sidesmen present can take on this responsibility.

SUPERVISION BY SIDESMEN

Sidesmen will need to supervise various parts of the celebration and give briefings to those involved in:

The collection

If all has been properly arranged beforehand and if the sidesmen have properly briefed the collectors, the collection will commence without delay (usually immediately after the Prayer of the Faithful). There is no need for the collectors to gather at the back of the church – each should have his collection basket with him from the onset.

There should be neither a long delay nor an over-emphasis on the collection itself. It should be brief and efficient. The emphasis should be on the actual procession with the gifts which ends with their presentation to the celebrant. This procession should be carried out with dignity and reverence.

A moment's pause may be necessary before collecting, but the people will soon become accustomed to having their offerings ready to hand.

ACTUAL PROCEDURE

Collectors go direct from their places (they already have the baskets with them) and meet between the benches at which they are to start collecting. They bow to the altar (they do not genuflect) and begin taking the collection.

The procession with the gifts

The procession with the gifts is in the following order:

At the front, altar servers, if these are to lead the procession (at some celebrations added dignity is given when acolytes come down to lead the procession).

Otherwise the first collector carries the baskets, the second the wine and the third the bread.

On arrival at the sanctuary, the celebrant will receive the collection baskets and pass them to the M.C., or other servers. This collector then steps aside far enough to leave room for all others involved in the procession to step aside in their turn.

The other collectors then present the gifts of bread and wine.

The celebrant will receive the wine and hand it to the M.C., or server. Last of all, he will receive the bread, thank the members of the procession, and as he carries the bread to present it before God at the altar, all disperse to their places by the shortest possible route.

Distribution of Communion

At special celebrations, sidesmen may be needed to control the communion procession.

Other Processions

It is the sidesman's duty to direct processions of the people and to keep professional routes clear for the celebrant and ministers.

3. After the Celebration

Before the celebrant leaves the sanctuary, one sidesmen at the back of the church needs to assist anyone hurrying out. But he should not yet open the doors as this would be an encouragement to others to leave early.

The celebrant should process down the church at the end of the celebration, led by ministers. As the procession nears the church entrance, the doors should be opened (fixed open where this is possible).

Help is usually needed to relieve people of their Mass books, hymn books etc.

If there is a retiring collection, this is taken by one of the two sidesmen. (Note that it is not permitted to take a collection during thanksgiving period after communion). For retiring collections, sidesmen stand either side of the exit doors.

Tidying up

Mass Books, hymn books etc. need sorting out and placing ready for the next Mass or need putting away altogether, especially after the final Mass of the day.

Doors need to be closed in winter between Masses to avoid loss of heat. Litter left among the seats should be cleared and the church in general should be tidied up where necessary. If additional seating had been brought it should be put away again tidily.

If no other Mass is to follow shortly, votive candles should be extinguished for safety; any toilet should be checked (lights out, windows closed, flush if necessary); where necessary, church windows should be closed.

Any money left lying around (e.g. on top of papers) should be put in the box provided.

Other duties after the celebration will depend on the particular needs of the church

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Reference: Unless otherwise stated, references in this booklet are to the numbered sections in the Roman Missal