

Guidelines for the Ministry of Altar Server



St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church

5495 Elliott Road · Lake Charles, Louisiana 70605

Ministry Scheduler Pro

The parish uses Ministry Scheduler Pro. Download Ministry Scheduler Pro from your phone's app store and sign in with this parish ID:

Organization ID: **groundbreaking**

Use Ministry Scheduler Pro to see your assignments and to request a substitute before Mass day. Do not leave an assignment uncovered. On the day you serve, sign in at the MSP Sign-in Kiosk — step-by-step instructions are at the back of this handbook.

Welcome

Thank you for your willingness to serve. Altar serving is a real ministry, not a costume or a job to get through. You help the community pray. Your reverence, attention, and calm movement are a sign that something sacred is happening.

This handbook explains how we serve ordinary Sunday Mass at St. Martin de Porres. Read it. Practice it. Watch experienced servers. When you are unsure, move slowly and ask after Mass.

- This ministry is service to the community of faith.
- Your presence should call people to prayer, reverence, and worship.
- Experienced servers lead by example: order, silence, and readiness.

Expectations

Dress

- **Clothes under the alb:** neat and clean Mass clothes. Avoid loud logos, shorts that show below the alb, or anything that draws attention.
- **Shoes:** cleaned closed-toe shoes. No tennis shoes. No flip-flops.

God may not care what we wear to Church, but we should out of respect, honor, and worship.

Arrival

- **Arrive no later than 15 minutes before Mass and sign in at the MSP Sign-in Kiosk.** Full kiosk steps are at the back of this handbook.
- Use the restroom before Mass if needed.
- Wash your hands before vesting.
- Find an alb that fits at least ankle length — not dragging, not short. Tie the cincture in a slip knot.

- Remain in the Work Sacristy until seven minutes before Mass, unless you are lighting the ambo candle or retrieving vessels.

Commitment and substitutes

- All altar servers are on a schedule.
- **If you cannot serve the Mass you are scheduled for, you are responsible for requesting a substitute** in Ministry Scheduler Pro.
- **Three no-shows** without contacting the parish office at (337) 478-3845 will result in being taken off the schedule.

Server Roles

Ordinary Sunday Mass is planned for a minimum of three altar servers. Typical roles:

Role	Primary duties
Cross Bearer	Leads the procession and recession with the processional cross. Does not bow or genuflect while carrying the cross. Returns the cross to its stand after Mass.
Candle Bearers	Carry processional candles in, place them in the stands near the altar, and assist with vessels at the credence table and the Presentation of the Gifts. Candles are not carried out at the end of Mass.
Book Bearer	Sits on the bench closest to the priest. Holds the Roman Missal for the Collect and Prayer after Communion. Places and later removes the Missal at the altar. Assists with gifts and vessels as needed.

You must have three servers in order to have Candle Bearers. If extra servers are present, they assist at the credence table, gifts, and lavabo. Move as one team. Do not wander.

Before Mass

1. **Sign in on the MSP Sign-in Kiosk.** Find the Altar Servers block, check in under your name, and make sure at least three server positions are covered. If the kiosk is asleep or the internet is down, use the instructions at the back of this handbook.
2. **Wash hands** before vesting.
3. **Vest** in an alb (robe) and cincture (white rope). The alb must reach at least the ankle. Tie the cincture in a slip knot.
4. **Light the candle near the ambo with the candle lighter** before Mass begins. Do not pull or yank the wick. When a flame must be put out, blow it out. Never drag the wick back into the candle lighter — the wax will dry and the wick will stick. If there are fewer than three altar servers, light the candles at the altar and leave them there.
5. **Wait in the Work Sacristy** until five minutes before Mass.
6. **At seven minutes before Mass:** the Cross Bearer takes the cross. If three servers are present, the Candle Bearers take the candles near the altar. Meet the priest and readers in the hallway of the Priest Sacristy to pray together.
7. **After the prayer,** light the processional candles and line up in the narthex, away from the main church doors, in this order:

Cross Bearer → Candle Bearers → Book Bearer → Liturgical Minister → Priest

Order of Sunday Mass

Entrance procession

1. **When the music begins**, wait for the priest's signal, then process in the same order as the lineup.
2. **Space yourselves**. When one server has passed the baptismal font, the next server begins.
3. **Cross Bearer**: go directly to the cross stand. Do not bow while carrying the cross.
4. **Candle Bearers**: bow the head only at the first step. (Do not curtsey) Place the candles all the way down in the stands near the altar.
5. **Book Bearer**: bow before the first step. (Do not curtsey) Then go to the bench closest to the priest.

Introductory rites

8. **After the Opening Song and Gloria, when the priest says "Let us pray,"** the Book Bearer holds the Roman Missal for the Collect (Opening Prayer). Hold the book with the ribbons facing the priest and stand at the designated spot at the altar.
9. **After the Collect**, all sit quietly for the Liturgy of the Word. No talking. No fidgeting. Hands still.

Liturgy of the Word

10. **At the beginning of the Creed**, the Book Bearer comes forward to be ready for the Prayers of the Faithful. Remain attentive through the readings, homily, Creed, and Universal Prayer. You are still serving even when you are sitting.

Preparation of the altar and the gifts

11. **After the Prayers of the Faithful**, go to the credence table and prepare for the Presentation of the Gifts.
12. **Book Bearer**: place the Roman Missal on the altar, left of the corporal, at an angle. Then stand by the credence table.
13. **Cross Bearer and Candle Bearers**: bow and go to the credence table.

Who sets the altar

Watch who is in the sanctuary.

14. **If Deacon Donohoe is present — or if Msgr. Eskind is presiding**, do not arrange the chalice and cups on the corporal. Bring the chalice, communion cups, and purificators to Deacon Donohoe or Msgr. Eskind and hand them to him.
15. **If a visiting priest is presiding and Deacon Donohoe is not setting the altar**: the altar servers set the altar. One server places the chalice to the right of center on the corporal. The others bring the communion cups two at a time and line them in pairs, left to right, on the corporal, with the purificators on the inside.

Water in the communion cups

16. **After the chalice and cups are on the corporal**, one server brings the water cruet to the altar.
17. **Deacon Donohoe or the priest pours water into the communion cups only**. He then hands the water cruet back to the server.
18. **That server returns at once to the credence table** and keeps the water cruet there. The water cruet does not stay on the altar.

Presentation of the Gifts

19. **All other servers stand at the credence table** until the priest stands to receive the gifts.
20. **If Deacon Donohoe is present, only one server is needed to assist with the gifts themselves**. That server receives the offertory basket and places it in front of the altar.
21. **Once Deacon Donohoe brings the wine or if a server brings the wine cruet to the altar**, the server holding the water cruet follows immediately behind the wine — do not wait.

22. **When the wine and water have been used, both cruets return to the credence table.** They may not remain on the altar.

Lavabo

23. **Two servers**, one with the lavabo bowl and pitcher and one with the towel unfolded, should be ready and standing near the ambo on the top step. Walk toward the altar as soon as the priest bows for the prayer.
24. **After the priest washes his hands**, bow your head to acknowledge his thanks and return the bowl, pitcher, and towel to the credence table.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

25. **Line up on the steps near the ambo** and remain in place. Pass cushions down so servers can kneel.
26. **Return the cushions** to their original place. Remain standing and make room for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to approach the altar.

Holy Communion

27. **Receive Communion**, then follow the path behind the church seating.
28. **Allow everyone in the left-hand section of the church to receive Communion** before you return to your seats.
29. **Book Bearer**: remove the Roman Missal from the altar and return it to the bench.

Prayer after Communion and announcements

30. **When the priest says “Let us pray,”** the Book Bearer brings the Roman Missal, holding it properly (ribbons toward the priest), for the Prayer after Communion.
31. **Return to your seat** and sit quietly during announcements and the blessing.

Recession

32. **Near the end of Mass**, the Cross Bearer takes the cross and waits in front of the doorway.
33. **When the closing music begins** and the priest goes to reverence the altar, the Cross Bearer walks to the main aisle, followed by the Candle Bearers (not carrying candles) and then the Book Bearer. All turn to face the altar.
34. **When the priest genuflects in front of the altar**, all altar servers except the Cross Bearer also genuflect. The Cross Bearer does not genuflect while holding the cross.
35. **All turn and recess out** in procession.

After Mass

- The Cross Bearer returns the cross to its stand.
- One server carefully and slowly snuffs out the candles on the altar.
- **Every server hangs the alb and cincture back in the closet.** Do not leave them on the closet floor.

Reverence at the Altar

- Hands folded when you are not carrying something.
- Walk — never hurry, never drag your feet.
- Bow or genuflect as assigned for your role. Do not invent extra gestures, and do not skip the ones that belong to you.
- If you make a mistake, stay calm. Finish the action simply. Do not whisper about it during Mass.
- Phones stay put away from sign-in until you have hung up your alb.
- Learn the names of the vessels and furniture. If you can name it, you can place it correctly.

How the Vessels Are Set

Credence table

This is the working table for cups, plates, water, lavabo, and linens. Know what is on it before Mass so you do not hunt during the liturgy.



Typical layout (left to right in this photo): communion bowls, lavabo towel, bowl and pitcher, water cruet, and communion cups and chalice.



In this example: Roman Missal at left, priest's chalice, then paired communion cups on the corporal. Match the current Sunday arrangement and the number of cups prepared for that Mass.

Names to Know

Be able to point to each of these in church:

- Baptismal font
- Chalice, communion cups, ciborium, communion plates
- Corporal, purificator, hand towel
- Cruets, lavabo bowl and pitcher
- Funeral pall
- Paschal (Easter) Candle
- Roman Missal and Lectionary
- Sanctuary lamp
- Thurible and incense boat

Glossary

These are the words used in the sacristy and sanctuary. Learn the ones you handle every Sunday first; learn the rest so you are ready for funerals, baptisms, and feast days.

Alb	The white vestment common to all ministers. It recalls the baptismal garment and the common call to serve.
Altar	The table of the Lord: a fixed, consecrated table, freestanding so ministers can walk around it and Mass can be celebrated facing the people. It is the focal point of the church and is also called the Table of Sacrifice.
Altar bread	Unleavened bread made from wheat. Together with altar wine, it is necessary for the consecration of the Eucharist.
Altar candles	Candles used at every liturgical service as a sign of reverence and festivity, symbolizing the light of Christ. At least two are lit for Mass; four, six, or seven may be used when the diocesan bishop celebrates.
Altar cloth	Fine fabric draped on the altar out of reverence for the Eucharist. Size, shape, and decoration should suit the altar.
Altar wine	Wine made for sacramental use. Together with altar bread, it is necessary for the consecration of the Eucharist.
Ambo	The stand from which the Word of God is proclaimed; also called the Table of the Word.
Aspergillum	The sprinkler, often used with a bucket, that holds holy water for the sprinkling rite.
Book stand	The stand in front of the ambo on which the lector places the Lectionary after the second reading.
Bread paten	The large plate that holds unconsecrated communion bread before Mass. It is placed on the gift table and brought forward at the Presentation of the Gifts.
Chalice	The principal sacred cup used by the priest for the consecration and distribution of the Precious Blood. Smaller vessels used with it are called communion cups.
Charcoal	Self-lighting briquettes used in the thurible for burning incense.
Ciborium	A vessel used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament after Mass. It is kept in the tabernacle.
Cincture	A cord worn around the waist of the alb.
Communion plate	The plate used by ministers to serve the consecrated host.

Corporal	A square of fine cloth spread on the altar cloth. The vessels of bread and wine are placed on it for the consecration.
Credence table	A small table that holds cruets, purificators, and communion vessels needed for the Eucharist.
Cruet	A small vessel that holds water or wine used at the preparation of the gifts.
Easter Candle	The largest pillar candle in the church, lit from the new fire at the Easter Vigil and kept burning through the fifty days of Easter. Also used at baptisms, funerals, Confirmation, and weddings. Also called the Paschal Candle or Christ Candle.
Flagon	A vessel with a handle, spout, and lid that holds altar wine. It is placed on the gift table before Mass and offered at the Presentation of the Gifts.
Gift table	A small table near the main doors that holds the bread and wine brought forward at the Presentation of the Gifts.
Holy water font	Usually at the church doors. We bless ourselves with holy water as a reminder of Baptism and new life in Christ.
Incense	Grains placed on lit charcoal that give off a fragrant smoke in prayer (see Psalm 141).
Incense boat	The small vessel that holds incense grains for the thurible.
Lavabo bowl and pitcher	Vessels used when the priest washes his hands after the preparation of the gifts.
Monstrance	The vessel used to display the Blessed Sacrament for Exposition and Benediction.
Oil ambry	The cabinet near the sanctuary that holds the sacred oils: Sacred Chrism, Oil of Catechumens, and Oil of the Sick.
Sacred Chrism	Perfumed oil consecrated by the bishop and used at Baptism, Confirmation, ordination, and the dedication of churches and altars.
Oil of Catechumens	Oil blessed by the bishop and used in the Rite of Christian Initiation for those preparing for Baptism.
Oil of the Sick	Oil blessed by the bishop and used to anoint the sick.
Presider's chair	A simple, sturdy chair in the sanctuary, facing the people, used by the priest at the appointed times in the liturgy.
Processional cross	The cross that leads the community into church for worship.
Purificator	The cloth used to wipe the communion cup during distribution of the Precious Blood, then purified before it is washed.
Pyx	A small container that holds the Eucharist being taken to the sick or homebound.
Sacrarium	A special sacristy sink whose drain goes directly into the earth, with no joints. It is used for the reverent disposal of baptismal water, water from ritual purifications, leftover holy oils, or ashes from burned liturgical items.
Sacristan	The person who cares for the sacristy and the cleaning of altar linens.
Sacristy	The room near the altar used to store vessels and prepare for liturgy. This parish also uses a Work Sacristy and a Priest Sacristy.
Sanctuary lamp	The lamp that burns near the tabernacle to show that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.
Tabernacle	The locked place of reservation for the Blessed Sacrament, marked by the sanctuary lamp.
Thurible	A covered vessel on a chain that holds burning charcoal and incense.
Towel	The cloth used by the priest to dry his hands at the preparation of the gifts.

Vesting room	The room where priest and deacon vestments are kept, along with altar server albs.
Vestments	Usually the outer liturgical garments worn by the priest over the alb.

MSP Sign-in Kiosk (Altar Servers)

Use this section when you arrive to serve. The same iPad is used by Extraordinary Ministers, lectors, and ushers. Do not scroll around the iPad or open anything else.

Ministry Scheduler Pro is required for your schedule and substitute requests. The kiosk is how you check in on the day you serve.

If the internet is down

Turn to the paper schedule posted in the bottom left corner of the bulletin board. Put a check mark next to your name or the altar server position you are covering.

Ten minutes before Mass, look at every altar server line. If a server position has no check mark, that position still needs to be filled.

When the internet is back, follow the laminated sheet beside the kiosk — or the steps below — so the electronic record matches the paper check marks.

What you need to know first

- **iPad passcode:** **549532** (also listed on the base of the iPad stand).
- Mass sign-in turns on one hour before Mass and stays on until ten minutes into Mass.
- The iPad goes back to sleep every 15 minutes if no one uses it.
- If the iPad is powered off, hold the button on the top right until the Apple logo appears. Touch the screen to wake it, swipe up from the bottom, enter 549532, then touch the MSP Kiosk icon.
- Ministries appear in this order: Extraordinary Ministers, then Altar Servers, then Lectors, then Ushers. Scroll only as far as Altar Servers.
- If your MSP profile has scheduling exceptions, the kiosk may ask one or two questions before it will let you take an open server position. Answer them and continue.
- This iPad is only for the MSP Sign-in Kiosk. Do not use it for anything else.

Sign in for the Mass you are scheduled to serve

1. **Wake the iPad.** Touch the screen, swipe up from the bottom, and enter passcode 549532. You should see the “Welcome! Sign in Here” screen. Touch the green START button.
 - If the kiosk is already awake and open, skip to the next step.
 - If you swipe up from the Welcome screen by mistake, you will land on the iPad home screen. Touch the green MSP Kiosk icon to return.
2. **Find the Altar Servers list.** Skip past Extraordinary Ministers. Touch anywhere on the line with your name, using the pad of a clean, warm finger — not a fingernail.
3. **Touch the green Check in button** that appears on the right.
4. **Look for the green check mark** to the left of your name. That means you are signed in. You may then vest.

If you checked in under the wrong name, touch that same name again and then touch the green Undo Check in button. Then sign in on your own line.

Cover an open altar server position (swap request)

Open positions that no one has taken yet appear in light orange. Only take an orange line in the Altar Servers block.

1. **Touch the open altar server position** you will cover.
2. **Touch Replace.** When the keyboard appears, start typing your last name and select it when it appears.
3. **Touch Sign In** at the bottom right.
4. **When the next page appears, touch OK** at the bottom right.

Fill a no-show server spot

Ten minutes before Mass, any altar server position without a green check mark is treated as a no-show.

1. **Look at the Altar Servers block.** If a scheduled server has no green check, that line needs a replacement.
2. **Use the same Replace steps** as an open position: touch the line, touch Replace, type your last name, Sign In, then OK.

After you are signed in, go vest.