

From Father Roos, Pastor:

The liturgical life of the parish is how we give due worship to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church unites herself in prayer with the prayer of Jesus which is offered to the Father.

The various liturgical ministries of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, lector, altar server, ushers, choir, cantor, sacristan, and the like, are roles of service to the worshipping assembly. Over the years, having both male and female altar servers at St. Agnes has been suggested to me. I have given much prayer and thought to the ministry of altar servers and decided that the Parish should seek permission from Bishop Loverde to permit both males and females to be altar servers. The roles of service flow from our baptism; they are a privilege and not a right.

This process to obtain permission is described in the *Norms for Altar Servers*, below:

Note: The *GIRM* is the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.

NORMS FOR ALTAR SERVERS CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON

The Acolyte and Altar Server

The acolyte is instituted to serve at the altar and to assist the priest and deacon. In particular, it is for him to prepare the altar and the vessels and, if it is necessary, as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, to give communion to the faithful (*GIRM*, 98).

In the absence of an instituted acolyte, lay ministers may be designated for service at the altar and to assist the priest and the deacon. They may carry the cross, candles, censer, bread, wine and water. As well, they may be designated to distribute Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers (*GIRM*, 100).

While the stable ministries of Lector and Acolyte are not open to women, a July 11, 1992 authentic interpretation of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts clarified that can. 230, §2 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* permits females as well as males to exercise the liturgical function of altar server (cf. AAS 86 [1994], 541; *BCL Newsletter* 30 [April, 1994], 13).

Service at the altar by the lay faithful, both male and female, is permitted in the parishes and high schools of the Diocese of Arlington, as well as on college campuses, in convents, at home Masses, at retreat centers, and at hospitals and convalescent homes, in accordance with the following particular norms:

1. Prior to introducing the use of female servers at a parish, the pastor must consult with the pastoral council and the parochial vicars and deacons (if any). If, upon such

consultation, it is determined that the use of female servers would be of pastoral advantage in the local situation of the parish, female servers may be introduced in accordance with these norms. The pastor must advise the Bishop in writing of the outcome of the consultation and receive a written confirmation from the Bishop prior to the introduction of female servers at parish liturgical celebrations.

2. In accordance with a clarification published by the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments dated July 27, 2001 (see *Notitiae*, Vol. 37 [2001] Num. 8-9, pp. 397-399), no priest shall be required to make use of female altar servers at any Mass at which he presides. However, in view of the tender age of many of our altar servers, the sacrifices made by both servers and their parents to enable them to serve, and the reverent love of our Lord which these young people bring to their service at the altar, priests are encouraged to exercise pastoral sensitivity and good judgment in situations (e.g., substituting for a brother priest who is ill) in which they may be called upon to preside at a Mass for which female servers have been scheduled in advance.

3. If, after female altar servers have been introduced at a parish, further consultation by the pastor at a subsequent date with the pastoral council and parochial vicars and deacons (if any) indicates that the use of female servers is no longer pastorally advantageous, the use of female servers may be discontinued by the pastor. The pastor must advise the Bishop in writing of the outcome of the consultation and receive a written confirmation from the Bishop prior to the discontinuation of a policy of using female servers at parish liturgical celebrations.

4. The norms for introduction and/or discontinuation of female altar servers at diocesan high schools shall be the same as for parishes, except that the determination shall be made by the chaplain upon consultation with the school principal.

5. All altar servers must be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out correctly and with appropriate reverence. Servers must be no younger than seven years of age, and must have already received their first Holy Communion.

6. All altar servers must receive proper formation, including instruction on the Order of the Mass, the various objects used in the liturgy, and the various functions of the server during the Mass and at other liturgical celebrations.

7. Altar servers must also receive appropriate instruction on maintaining proper decorum when serving Mass and at other liturgical functions, and on proper attire. In particular, servers must be instructed to exercise good judgment with regard to clothing that may be visible outside of their vesture, so as to avoid items (including but not limited to ostentatious or excessive jewelry, bright colors, glitter or

spangles, athletic or other inappropriate footwear, etc.) that might be distracting to the faithful or otherwise detract from the dignity of the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Makeup and hair color, if any, must be minimal and present a natural and wholesome appearance. Any tattoos or piercings (other than ears) should be discouraged and, if present, must be covered to the greatest extent practicable.

8. If female altar servers are introduced at a parish, special effort must be made to retain males to serve at the altar as well, such that females do not tend to predominate. Reasonable steps are to be taken to ensure that former servers continue, and that new servers are recruited in such a way that an imbalance of female servers does not arise.

“... [T]he Holy See wishes to recall that it will always be very appropriate to follow the noble tradition of having boys serve at the altar. As is well known, this has also led to a reassuring development of priestly vocations. Thus the obligation to support such groups of altar boys will always continue.”

– Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences*, Prot. n. 2482/93 (March 15, 1994)

If, over time, female servers come to predominate at a parish and the situation is not rectified by the pastor, permission for the use of female servers at that parish may be withdrawn by the Bishop.

9. If female altar servers are used, they must be vested in albs or similar altar robes. Cassocks and surplices may not be worn by female servers. For male servers, albs may be worn, or vesture of cassocks and surplices may be chosen, at the pastor’s discretion. For daily Masses or other liturgical celebrations served by adult men or women, the pastor has the discretion to prescribe appropriate vesture.

10. If female altar servers are used, no distinction may be made between the functions carried out by male servers and those carried out by female servers.

11. Suitable catechesis must be given to the faithful to remind them of the following:

a. That, in the words of Pope John Paul II, of happy memory,

“[W]ithout discrimination women should be participants in the life of the Church’... This is the way to be courageously taken. To a large extent, it is a question of making full use of the ample room for lay and feminine presence recognized by the Church’s law. I am thinking, for example, of theological teaching, the forms of liturgical ministry permitted, including service at the altar Who can imagine the great advantages to pastoral care and the new beauty that the Church’s face will assume, when the feminine genius is fully involved

in the various areas of her life?” – Pope John Paul II, *Angelus* message (Sept. 3, 1995).

b. That, notwithstanding the foregoing, service at the altar by the lay faithful is in no way connected to the question of the ordination of women, concerning which Pope John Paul II clearly stated the position of the Church: “that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” – Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone (May 22, 1994).

c. That the non-ordained faithful do not at any time have a right to service at the altar; rather, they are “capable of being admitted by the sacred Pastors” to such service. – Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, (August 15, 1997), no. 4.

In order to fulfill this process, these are the steps that I will be taking:

1. Discuss the proposal to allow females to join males as altar servers in a meeting open to all parishioners in the Parish Hall on Thursday, November 10th at 7:30 p.m.
2. Consult with the Parochial Vicar and with the Parish Pastoral Council regarding permitting females to join males as altar servers.
3. Incorporating that counsel, submit a written request to Bishop Loverde to allow the use of female altar servers.
4. To meet the immediate need for altar servers to participate at Sunday Mass, funerals, Masses during the holidays, etc., we will offer training sessions for altar servers for boys in the 5th grade or higher. A formal announcement will be sent to Saint Agnes School students and those in the Religious Education program, Home-schooled students may contact the parish office directly.

I know that there are many strongly held views on this subject. However, it is my responsibility as pastor to determine the pastoral advantage of changing our longstanding practice of having only males serve at the altar. It is my hope and prayer that conversations among people are respectful and done in Christian charity.

The ministries of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and that of lector (reader) are important ministries because lectors deliver (proclaim) the Word of God, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion distribute the Holy Eucharist. If women can fulfill these important ministries, it seems that service at the altar by females should be prayerfully considered.