

# *A Guide for Sacristans in the Diocese of Peoria*



*“LOVE is what makes sacristan work a ministry. LOVE is what transforms our everyday, mundane, hidden tasks into the work of saints. “*



Sacristans provide invaluable help to the priest, allowing him to enter into his own prayer before, during and after Mass – and therefore helping him to offer a Mass that is more conducive to the prayer and holiness of the people gathered for the celebration.

Besides helping the priest-celebrant, sacristans serve the entire community- in the many aspects of a sacristan's job they provide essential help to the lectors, communion ministers, altar servers, music ministers, ushers – and all the other liturgical ministers. By helping the ministers do their “jobs”, sacristans help the congregation to do their “job” – full, active and prayerful participation at Mass.

However, in helping the ministers, the sacristan also gains personally. In general, sacristans come to a deeper appreciation and love for the Mass, the various rites of the Church and the beautiful riches of the liturgical year as lived out in seasons and feasts. Sacristans are invited (and expected) to know more about how the Church prays. But besides the intimacy to the altar that sacristan duties bring, the patroness of the sacristy reminds us that these duties can also be the stepping stones to sanctity.

The work of a sacristan tied in perfectly with St. Therese's desire to live the “little way”. Essentially, a sacristan is called to do “hidden” work – to tend to a thousand little details that are hardly noticed by anyone, except our Heavenly Father who sees what is hidden. Sacristans should be hardly seen – they are not called to public proclamation or witness. In fact, once the liturgical service has started they are generally not seen at all, until it is over. While they may be leaders of the other ministers, they lead in the background by making sure the lectors, communion ministers, servers, ushers and others are prepared – but they only rarely fulfill those tasks.

Besides the holiness that can be found by serving in the background, sacristans are also called to live St. Therese's model of holiness by doing ordinary tasks with

extraordinary love. The point of this short sacristan guide is to help review the nearly countless, little details that help with the orderly and reverent celebration of the sacraments. However, anyone can be hired to simply perform tasks- filling cruets, setting up a chalice, counting hosts, hardly require much skill. *LOVE* is what makes sacristan work a ministry. *LOVE* is what transforms our everyday, mundane, hidden tasks into the work of saints.

When a sacristan puts love into his or her work – or rather finds love in the details - the difference is almost palpable and is certainly experienced by the priests and ministers with whom the sacristan works. Perhaps a sacristan’s duty can be best summed up – love is in the details. To help our sacristans to love better, we present this short outline of the details of their work...

This guide is designed to be a tool for parish sacristans. It can be used as a sort of checklist or brain storming aid to help sacristans walk through the various aspects of Sunday Mass, the celebration of the various sacraments, and some important feasts of the liturgical year.

## *A Walk Through the Mass*

### *Before Mass*

- Start and end with PRAYER –even before coming to church, prepare your heart and mind for the prayerful work of preparing for the greatest Prayer – Holy Mass.
- Arrive 45-60 minutes before Mass. When need be, you can get everything ready in much less time, but it will be much less prayerful. An hour lets you carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully get Mass ready.
- Figure out what kind of liturgical day it is – a Sunday in Ordinary Time? Fest of a saint? What rank of fest day is it? What season is it? What about “votive Masses”, especially on First Fridays or Saturday mornings or for special needs like for Peace or Good Weather. The “Ordo” or Liturgical Desk Calendar can be very helpful. When in doubt, ask!

- Summary of Ranks
- Remember secular “feasts” too – Mother/Father’s Days, Thanksgiving, etc...
- Once you have figured out what you are celebrating, then it’s time to:
  - \* Mark and set out the lectionary
  - \* Mark and set out the sacramentary:
    - Entrance/Communion antiphons (when no music)
    - Opening Prayer/Prayer Over the Gifts/ Prayer After Communion
    - Preface
  - \* Mark the Book of the Gospels
    - Carried by Deacon? Reader? Or set on altar before Mass?
  - \* Any other books needed?
    - Sacramentary for the Chair? Book of Blessing, etc?
    - Set out Prayers of the Faithful. Perhaps keep a copy in the sacristy for Deacon/Lector to review?
  - \* Prepare the vestments in the color proper for the day. It can be very nice to lay out the vestments if your sacristy cabinets permit. Otherwise, keep them on their hangers but put them on a hook in their proper order:
    - For the priest:
      - ◇ Chausible
      - ◇ Stole
      - ◇ Cincture (if needed)
      - ◇ Alb
      - ◇ Amice (if needed)

– For the deacon:

- ◇ Dalmatic (especially for Sundays or feasts)
- ◇ Deacon Stole
- ◇ Cincture (if needed)
- ◇ Alb
- ◇ Amice (if needed)

- Will there be any concelebrants? More than one deacon? If so, make sure there are enough seats in the sanctuary and that the various liturgical roles are divided before Mass – Deacon of the Word/Eucharist, parts of the Eucharistic prayer, etc. There are many special needs when you have several concelebrants. Not all of those details are included here. – When in doubt – Ask!
- Before Mass, the altar should be bare except for the appropriate white cloth, candles and perhaps the Book of the Gospels and crucifix.
- Prepare the vessels and place them on the credence table.
  - \* Main Chalice with purificator, paten with large host, and a pall (encouraged to be covered with a chalice veil which may be the color of the day or white).
  - \* Corporal(s) in burses or placed on top of chalice
  - \* Chalices with purificators for distributing Precious Blood to the people.
  - \* Ciborium with hosts (on back table when there is an offertory procession).
  - \* Check quantity of hosts/ ciboria in tabernacle prepare more if needed.
  - \* Put the key in/near the tabernacle or on top of the chalice
  - \* Cruet/pitcher of water for mixing with wine, washing hand, purifying
  - \* Basin and towel for washing priest's hands
  - \* Book stand with Missal (Sacramentary)

- Anything else require for special celebrations?
  - \* Incense?
  - \* Holy Water?
  - \* Oils?
  
- At least 2 candles on or near the altar, lit 10-15 minutes before Mass.
  - \* Consider using different number of candles to differentiate seasons or feasts:
    - 6 candles for Christmas, Easter, other “big” feasts
    - 4 for Feasts of Saints
    - 2 for Ordinary Time
  
- Prepare the sanctuary
  - \* Seating for celebrant/concelebrant, deacon(s), servers, etc.
  - \* Books in place
  - \* Microphones/lights on. Are all the doors unlocked?
  - \* Check air conditioning/heat
  - \* Crucifix on/near altar if not carried in.
  
- Check on ministers – careful to maintain prayerful silence in the sacristy.
  - \* Servers should be vested and prepared 15 minutes before Mass. In absence of a Master of Ceremonies, review roles of each server.
  - \* Lectors – did they practice the readings? Are there any difficult words to pronounce? Any special needs? Step stools, special instructions for the microphone? Remind them to remove lectionary when the Gospel Book is used. Petitions – read by lector in absence of the deacon.
  - \* Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion – do you have the correct number for the communion stations?

- \* Ushers – will they greet people? Prepared for collection? Special collections?
  - \* Gift bearers? Special seating? Do they know their cue?
  - \* Choir/Music leaders – list of selections for the celebrant? What Mass parts are being sung? Anything special/unique to this celebration?
  - \* Any other ministers/special guests – special seating prepared?
- Check on priest-celebrant
    - \* Review liturgical books with him
      - Point out the intention of the Mass
      - Any other needs/questions?

### *During Mass*

- *PRAY!*
- Be attentive to crises – ie, sick servers, missing petitions, forgotten collections, etc. Help when you can.

### *After Mass*

- Take a moment of Thanksgiving – do not “charge” the sanctuary right after Mass (except when truly necessary). Be a model of prayer after Communion.
- When is the next Mass? Today? Prepare for the next Mass as appropriate.
- Help priest to unvest. Put vestments away. Be mindful of when vestments need to be cleaned/washed. Launder albs often in summer months.
- Clear the credence table.
  - \* Make sure vessels have been purified by priest, deacon or acolyte.
  - \* Reverently care for the various vessels. Lock away chalices/ciboria.

- \* Place soiled linens in appropriate basket (see appendix on care for altar linens). Rinse/soak them in sacrarium when appropriate.
  - \* Secure tabernacle key.
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- Extinguish candles if not done so by the servers.
  - Turn off lights/microphones.
  - Return liturgical books to the sacristy.
  - Secure the collection.
  - Walk through the church and straighten up as needed. Discard old bulletins, arrange hymnals, missalettes, etc. This is especially important if another Mass follows before the church can be thoroughly cleaned.
  - Check conditions of bathrooms.
  - Lock church doors/sacristy door.
  - Check and refill holy water fonts as needed.

### *A Sacristan's Walkthrough the Liturgical Year*

Many people are involved in the planning of the important feasts and seasons of the Church's year – musicians, masters of ceremonies, decorators, etc. But there are some details that are very specific to the life and ministry of the sacristan.

#### ***Advent***

The Church's year begins with Advent, but the sacristan must start preparing no later than the beginning of November. Are you in charge of preparing the advent wreath? Is it fresh? Artificial and in storage? Do you have the right candles? And enough for the whole season? Are the purple vestments pressed and ready?



## ***Christmas***

Begin reviewing Christmas schedule and liturgical needs by early-mid November. Are there special vestments, altar cloths that need to be cleaned? Candle sticks or precious vessels ready? Holy water and book of blessings needed to bless the crib? Be ready for other special rituals during this time – blessing of families for Holy Family Sunday/Epiphany blessing of homes. Candlemas (February 2) traditionally ends the Christmas season – order the supply of candles to be blessed before the Holiday rush overwhelms you.

### ***February 2 – Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas***

Order your candles before Christmas. For the feast itself, you will need candles for everyone in the congregation (like at Easter Vigil). The Mass begins outside the sanctuary. Check sacramentary for the order of blessing of candles and the procession. You will need holy water.

### ***February 3 – Feast of Saint Blasé***

Prepare candles for priest, deacons, and ministers to use to bless throats after the homily.

## ***Ash Wednesday***

Around mid January begin thinking about Lent. Order/prepare ashes. Perhaps have baskets available a few weeks before Ash Wednesday for people to bring in last year's palms or other religious items they want to dispose of reverently for burning. Check on purple/rose vestments and/or altar cloths. Launder if needed. Prepare containers for ashes. Holy water will be needed to bless ashes after the homily.

## ***Holy Week***

Around Ash Wednesday, (a week before if you can) review the sacramentary for

the many needs of Holy Week. After you have made your list, make an appointment to sit down with your pastor and review the needs. Order palms or verify standing orders. Make a list of the various vestments, vessels, and linens needed for the week – red cope/chasuble for Palm Sunday, white vestments and special needs for foot washing for Holy Thursday, red chasuble and cross for veneration for Good Friday. The Easter Vigil has a whole list all its own and will vary depending on the rituals needed by each parish for baptisms, confirmations, etc. START YOUR PLANS EARLY – and plan to take a few days off after it's all over.

### ***Easter Season***

It's appropriate to use a sprinkling rite during Easter Masses. Prepare water to be blessed as needed.

### ***May 15 – The anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral of St. Mary's of the Immaculate Conception***

This day is celebrated as a feast in our diocese – a solemnity in the cathedral. Find out the anniversary of the dedication of your parish church – it should be celebrated as a local solemnity.

### ***Corpus Christi***

Around the beginning of May, begin preparing for Corpus Christi. If there will be a procession, arrange for a canopy, and the various ministers as needed.

### ***October 1 – Feast of St. Therese***

As the patroness of our seminarian program, this feast receives special solemnity in our diocese.

## ***All Souls Day***

In mid-October, plans should be made for All Souls Day – special schedule of Masses? A Book of the Dead where the names of the deceased can be recorded? Through the month of November, it is appropriate to offer Masses for All the Dead and to remember those names listed in the Book of the Dead in the petitions.

## ***Holy Days of Obligation***

With changing liturgical law, it is always best to verify which celebrations oblige and when.

## *A Sacristan's Walk Through the Sacraments*

Besides the regular celebration of the Eucharist, a sacristan may from time to time need to prepare for the celebration of one of the other sacraments. These more uncommon celebrations may have many elements unique to each occasion. It is important to check with the celebrant for details and variations. These outlines are provided as a general overview.

### *Baptism*

- Warm, unblest water in the font (not too hot, obviously). It is also permissible to use water that had been consecrated as the Easter Vigil – be sure that the celebrant knows this as the prayers are different.
- The lit Paschal Candle is near the font.
- The Holy Oil (OS) and Sacred Chrism (SC) in clearly marked containers – these are normally found in a little oil set designed for Baptism.
- A shell or some instrument for pouring the water over the head.
- A towel to wipe the head after Baptism.
- The white garment and baptismal candle for the Baptized.
- Booklets and certificates.

## *Communal Celebration of Confession - Penance Service*

- Sufficient confession stations that are designed to provide both face-to-face confessions and anonymous confessions.
- Appropriate background music – live or taped – is useful while confessions are being heard.
- Put boxes of tissues at confession stations.
- Provide bottles of water for the priests if the service may go very long.
- Purple stoles as needed.

## *Confirmation*

The Bishop's Office will provide most of the materials needed for Confirmation or will inform the pastor what the parish is expected to provide. Sanctuary seating can be a difficulty.

## *Weddings*

See note above about celebrations with special occasions – the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony is tailored to the tastes and desires of the couple and the policies of each parish. In general,, holy water and some type of paten on which to place the rings for blessing will be required. Beyond these, check with the priest.

## *Anointing of the Sick*

The Sacrament of the Sick can be celebrated in a variety of ways, including within Mass either for an individual sick person or as part of a communal anointing service. Sufficient Oil of the Infirm (OI) needs to be prepared in oil stocks or some other appropriate container. Soap or lemons should also be prepared to wash the priests' hands after the anointing. At communal celebrations, special care may be needed for wheel chairs or other handicapped participants.

## *Holy Orders*

Obviously, a sacristan in a parish church need not worry about the celebration of this remarkably beautiful albeit complex ritual. However, there may be times when a parish is involved in the First Mass of Thanksgiving for a newly ordained priest or deacon. If so, be aware of the unique elements that may personalize the celebration, i.e.: family members who may read or bring up gifts who may not be familiar with the procedures of your parish. Offer your assistance, but be ready for some elements personal to this celebration.

*The Sacristans of Carmel*  
*A Poem by St. Therese of Lisieux*

Here below our sweet office  
Is to prepare for the altar  
The bread and wine of the Sacrifice  
Which brings "Heaven" to earth!

O supreme mystery, Heaven  
Hides in humble bread,  
For Heaven is Jesus Himself,  
Coming to us each morning.

There are no queens on earth  
Who are happier than we.  
Our office is prayer  
Which unites us to our Spouse.

This world's greatest honors  
Cannot compare  
To the deep, celestial peace  
Which Jesus lets us savor.

We bring a holy envy  
For the work of our hands,  
For the little white host  
Which is to veil our divine Lamb.

But his love has chosen us,  
He is our Spouse, our Friend.  
We are also hosts  
Which Jesus wants to change into Himself.

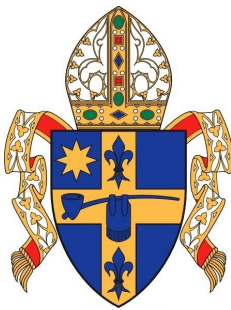
Sublime mission of the Priest,  
You become our mission here below.  
Transformed by the Divine Master,  
It is He who guides our steps.

We must help the Apostles  
By our prayer, our love.  
Their battlefields are ours,  
For them we fight each day.

The hidden God of the tabernacle  
Who also hides in our hearts,  
O what a miracle! At our voice  
Deigns to pardon sinners!

Our happiness and our glory  
Is to work for Jesus.  
His beautiful Heaven is the ciborium  
We want to fill with souls!

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