



# The revised GIRM and the Ministry of Serving

## **A. What are the main provisions of the General Instruction for the Server?**

1. The General Instruction makes a distinction between an instituted Acolyte, which is a permanent ministry, and those who are commissioned to serve the Priest at the Chair and the Altar. The Acolyte is instituted to serve at the Altar and to assist the Priest and Deacon. The duties of the Acolyte are outlined in numbers 187 to 193 of the Instruction. In particular, it is his responsibility to prepare the Altar and the sacred vessels and, if it is necessary, as an extraordinary minister, to distribute the Eucharist to the Faithful. (98)
2. The Acolyte may have several functions of various kinds and several may occur at the same time. It is therefore desirable that these functions be suitably distributed among several Acolytes. But if there is only one Acolyte present, that Acolyte should perform the more important functions and the rest are distributed among several Servers. (187, 109)
3. In the absence of an instituted Acolyte, lay ministers may be commissioned to serve at the Altar and assist the Priest and the Deacon. (100)
4. On Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation it is appropriate that the celebration of this Mass take place with singing and with a suitable number of ministers. Furthermore, it is desirable that, as a rule, an Acolyte, a Lector, and a Cantor should be there to assist the Priest Celebrant. In fact, the rite described in the General Instruction foresees a greater number of ministers. (115-116)
5. The function of Altar Servers is regulated by the norms established by the bishop for his diocese. (107)

## **B. What is the role of the Server outlined in the General Instruction?**

1. The Servers may carry the cross, the candles and the thurible in the processions, prepare the Altar, present the bread and cruets of wine and water to the Priest or Deacon, hold the missal for the Priest and Deacon as needed, and assist them in any other way required. Instituted Acolytes may also be deputed to distribute Holy Communion as extra-ordinary ministers. (100, 139-40, 188-193)
2. If there are several persons present who are able to exercise the same ministry, nothing forbids their distributing among themselves and performing different parts of the same ministry or duty. (109)
3. There are two kinds of bows: (1) a bow of the head (slight bow), and (2) a bow of the body (profound bow) (275).

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This is one in a series of resources prepared by the Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Kingston to introduce the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Roman Missal along with the new translation of the Mass in English.

Liturgical Commission



Archdiocese of Kingston

### **C. How will the revised GIRM and new translation affect the Server?**

1. When approaching the Altar, the Servers make a profound bow. (49, 122, 275b). If the Tabernacle is in the sanctuary behind the Altar, the Priest, Deacon and other ministers genuflect to it when they approach or leave the Altar, but not doing the celebration of Mass itself. Ministers who carry the cross or candles bow their heads in place of a genuflection (274).
2. Seats for the Servers and other ministers are to be arranged so that they are clearly distinguishable from those for the clergy and that the ministers are able to fulfil the role entrusted to them. (189, 310)
3. Money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the Faithful or collected in the church, should be put in a suitable place but away from the Eucharistic table. (73)
4. The Servers along with the people will have to learn the new responses, prayers and acclamations of the Mass.

### **D. Some Finer Points**

1. Candles are carried as a sign of respect to accompany a sacred object or symbol, thus the candles are normally carried on each side of the Cross or symbol. When this is not possible, they should precede the Cross or symbol.
2. A bow of the body (a profound bow) is made by the Servers to the Altar whenever they pass in front of it, except when they are walking in the Gospel or other Procession.
3. When bringing the chalice and missal to the Altar, the chalice is placed on the right side of the Altar and the missal on the left side. If there is a Deacon, the Servers bring the corporal, chalice, pall and purificator to him. When presenting the cruets of wine and water, the Servers hold them so that the handles may be easily held by the priest or deacon.
4. During the Eucharistic Prayer the Servers remain at their places; they do not stand or kneel behind the Altar or at the side of the Priest. A Server may assist with the missal at the Altar; in this case, the Server stands slightly back from the Priest when not needed to turn the pages of the missal.
5. In order not to delay the Communion of the Faithful, it is recommended that only the extraordinary ministers of Communion receive communion at the Altar. The Servers and other ministers may join in the Communion Procession of the Faithful.
6. When the Servers are not holding anything, both hands are joined at waist or chest level. When only one hand is occupied, the other is placed on the chest.
7. When two or more Servers are performing an action together, for example, genuflecting, bowing, or walking, they should act together at the same time and at the same speed.
8. A bow of the head (a simple bow) is made by the Servers to the Priest or Deacon before and after presenting anything to him, and before and after performing a function at the Altar. If any action is repeated several times, they only bow at the very beginning and end.
9. When two Servers are turning, they turn toward each other.

### **E. Further Resources**

A sample set of guidelines for Servers and other resources may be found at the Archdiocesan website (see Liturgy and Roman Missal).