

¹GUIDELINES FOR LAY MINISTERS AT MASS

English Community – Tavira Parish

With the knowledge that we come to our service from many countries and cultures; we need to have standard practices in accord with the magisterium of the church. This guide will help with the proper protocols.

While there are some differences between priests, dioceses, and countries, the standard for attendance by lay ministers and at the altar is set in the “*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*,” Third Typical edition, promulgated by the Holy See in 2002. This book is usually referred to as the “GIRM” (as in the word “germ”). This is a worldwide standard for the Catholic church. Any deviation must be set at the level of the conferences of Bishops in a country with the concurrence of the Curia in Rome.

As we have expanded the members of our congregation who are serving as lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs), greeters, collectors, musicians, and in other roles where we are at or near the altar during Mass, it is also useful to remind ourselves of the proper protocol when at the altar, serving communion, and when interacting with our priests and bishops.

The first point of reference that anyone in a role at the altar during Mass should know is that “*you follow the priest or deacon*” **not** the congregation. If you are seated with the congregation, you follow the congregation. With that in mind, here is more specific guidance:

1. All who serve should dress modestly and appropriately. While those in the congregation will generally be permitted to “come as they are,” ** this is not the case for servers and lectors. You do not need fancy or formal clothes, but appropriate dress is important. Those who are members of recognized lay orders or organizations, e.g., consecrated orders, Catholic Truth Society, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Malta, etc. may wear clothing appropriate to their organization. We are not wearing albs (robes) currently.

**Note: It is also useful to know that it is never appropriate, even for congregants or visitors, to wear revealing clothing in the sanctuary, e.g., no hats, halter tops, open shirts, cutoff jeans, beach wear, clothing with slogans or pictures, etc. This is not strictly enforced in Portugal, but it is elsewhere in Europe and in other countries and is respectful of the sacred setting.

2. When a priest or bishop enter a room or the sanctuary, you should stand. When they approach you or you are at the altar in the presence of a priest or

bishop, you generally stand if they are standing. When they sit, you may sit or sit if they direct you to sit.

3. The appropriate greeting when speaking to a bishop is “*Your Excellency, Bishop {surname}*.” They may ask you to be less formal, but the choice is theirs. Bishop Dom is relaxed about this most of the time but in a formal setting, he should be addressed appropriately.
4. Lectors and those serving should arrive 10 to 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time of the Mass. Greeters should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to Mass. On special feast days or when a larger attendance is expected, arrive a few minutes earlier than normal.
5. Prior to Mass, ensure that the candles are lit (there is normally a lighter near one of the credence tables), the missal and lectionary are in the proper places on the altar and ambo respectively and open to the correct page for that Mass, and the bell and ringer are placed in a convenient location either next to the altar or on the credence table nearest the altar. If we have printed reflections and announcements, those should be placed on the ambo underneath the lectionary. The book of the Prayers of the Faithful should be placed on the altar next to the stand for the missal. Check to be sure that the missal, book of prayers, and lectionary are set to the proper page for the Mass that day. Turn the sound system on; the power switch is to the right of the ambo on the table. Do not adjust the sound settings on the amplifier. If there is no Mass following, turn off the power at the end of Mass. If we have musicians make sure the sound system is on.
6. Servers and lectors do not “*genuflect*” toward the tabernacle *during* Mass. If we process in, it is appropriate to genuflect as you approach the altar and upon recessing at the end of Mass.
7. Servers, EHCs, and lectors should “*bow*” instead during Mass, particularly when the celebrant kneels or bows. If you cannot easily kneel, a bow or lowering of the head is appropriate *unless* you are holding something (e.g., the host, a thurifer, a candle) in which case, you should remain upright. You also bow or bend your head in respect of the host and chalice as it approaches or passes in front or beside you.
8. The altar is the “*altar of sacrifice*” and is a symbol of Christ and his sacrifice for us. Accordingly, unless directed by the celebrant, you should never place anything or pick up anything on the altar *during* Mass or place your hands

upon the altar. Those who are preparing the altar before, or clearing it after Mass, may do so when the celebrant has yet to arrive or has departed.

9. Anyone who has not been ordained, e.g., not a priest or deacon, should not extend your arms with the hands open at any time as is done by the celebrant during the consecration of the host. It is acceptable, during the Lord's Prayer, to hold your hands out slightly with the palms open. When the prayer concludes, return them to your sides or together in front of you. You do not hold out your hands for the "Final Doxology" that follows, i.e., "*for the Kingdom and the power...*"
10. Following Mass, return the books and the placard for low gluten wafers to the credence table nearest the doors to the office, remove the printed reflection and announcements from the ambo, and place the Portuguese missal on the altar. If a Portuguese Mass follows, leave the candles lit.
11. Instructions for EMHCs:
 - a. It is recommended to use hand sanitizer prior to receiving communion and allow sufficient time for it to dry before touching the host.
 - b. EMHCs serving regular hosts should stand to the right of the priest in front of the center aisle of the church when serving.
 - c. The EMHC serving regular hosts should serve the musicians before or after the congregation if they do not enter the serving lines.
 - d. Hold the paten or ciborium with one hand and offer the host to the congregant (when they approach) with the other hand. Raise it a few inches above the paten and place it in their open hands. If they do not show their hands but offer their tongue instead, place it in on their tongue. When serving the host say: "*The Body of Christ.*" The congregant should reply with "*Amen.*" If they cross their hands in front of their body or are a child too young to have been confirmed and accompanied by a parent, then bless the individual by placing your hand on or over their shoulder while saying "*May God bless you.*" You do not make the sign of the cross. Do not touch young children or infants but instead hold your hand over them.
 - e. If those receiving the Eucharist present a small container, known as a *pix*, then place the wafer into the *pix*. They may do this in addition to receiving the host or instead of reception. They may ask for more than one additional host and this is acceptable.

- f. When you have exhausted the available hosts, return to the altar, and place the paten or ciborium on the altar next to the water and oils. If there are hosts remaining, then wait and when the celebrant has finished offering hosts to the other congregants, gently tip the paten and pour the hosts into the appropriate ciborium so they may be returned to the tabernacle. One EMHC should accompany each ciborium to and from the tabernacle.
- g. If you need additional hosts before Mass for consecration, these are kept in the sacristy. The tabernacle has the ciboria for previously consecrated hosts. The key to the tabernacle is underneath the tabernacle frontal cloth. The lock is recessed and inside the opening at the bottom of the tabernacle. One EMHC for each ciborium (regular and low gluten) should walk to the tabernacle and obtain the ciboria during the consecration by the priest and bring them to the altar, remaining there to receive communion themselves. Follow the priest out to serve the Eucharist. After service is completed, return the ciboria to the tabernacle.
- h. If you are serving the low gluten wafers, it is best not to touch the ordinary host when you take communion; instead, take communion on your tongue if possible. Take the placard for low gluten with you when you serve and place it around your neck. When serving low gluten hosts stand behind and to the side of the priest and other EMHC. Which side is chosen depends on whether we have music or there are chairs or displays on one side of the altar area.
- i. If someone approaches you and they do not recognize that you have only low gluten hosts or believe you are a “third” EMHC for general service, then gently say “*I only have low gluten hosts.*” If they request the host or do not return to the other line, serve it to them without further comment.
- j. In the event there are not low gluten hosts available, or the celebrant does not consecrate them, it is acceptable to offer the chalice instead to those who cannot consume the regular hosts. This is however dependent on the priest having consecrated sufficient wine.
- k. When serving with the chalice, hold it up at a position comfortable based on their height and say, “*The blood of Christ*” and the

congregant should reply with “*Amen.*” Before serving the next person in line, use the purificator (the cloth) and wipe the rim inside and out, and turn the chalice one quarter (90⁰) of a rotation. If any wine should drip, place a purificator over the spill and inform the celebrant. Do not clean the spot. If the host becomes soiled, return to the altar and retrieve another purificator if available or obtain another from the sacristy.

- l. Congregants and EMs should not dip the host into the wine, known as “*intinction.*” Extraordinary ministers should not allow this. If they insist, you may dip the host for them and place the host on their tongue, *but this is not proper procedure and is strongly discouraged.* Note that only ordinary ministers (this is, those who have been ordained), are generally permitted to dip hosts into the wine (*c.f. GIRM:245*) and only they may offer hosts dipped in wine to congregants.
- m. In the event someone is unable to stand in line and has requested the Eucharist, it is permissible to go to their seat and serve them in the pew and then return to your place near the celebrant or to the altar if you are finished serving. It is preferable to serve those in their seats or in a wheelchair at the beginning or end of the serving of the Eucharist.

12. During Mass when you are a server/lector/EMHC and at the altar:

- a. Stand: when the celebrant enters the sanctuary or the altar.
- b. If we process in, you enter before the celebrant and when reaching the altar, stand to the side, and genuflect or bow with the celebrant and then proceed to the altar and take your seat. If the missal has not already been placed at the altar, carry the missal holding it in front of you at the level of your head. You proceed to the altar ahead of the celebrant and place it on the altar.
- c. Strike your breast three times: during the “Confiteor” at the words: “*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault;*”
- d. Sit: during the 1st reading, Psalm, and 2nd reading. When the lectors begin or exchange roles, stand next to each other, face the altar, and bow together before sitting or moving to the ambo.

- e. Stand: during the Alleluia and Gospel. Make the sign of the cross with your thumb or fingertip to your forehead, mouth, and breast when the celebrant does so.
- f. Sit: during the reflection or homily. The reader should return to their seat following the reflection and remain sitting until the celebrant stands.
- g. Stand: during the intercessory Prayers of the Faithful.
- h. Profound bow: during the Creed at the “*and by the Holy Spirit... and became man.*”
- i. Stand or kneel: throughout the preparation, prayers, and the communion. (The congregation may kneel, but you should only stand or kneel, not sit! You are in the presence of the Lord!). Remain standing throughout communion.
- j. Stand: during the Great Amen and the Sign of Peace. It is appropriate to share the sign of peace with others near the altar, and you may acknowledge the congregation, but you should remain in place at the altar.
- k. It is generally the custom in Portugal to ring the bell during the showing of the body and blood of Christ; first at the time the priest lifts the host and again when he raises the chalice. The large bell should be rung *once* for each time the priest raises their arms. Do so sufficiently loud to be heard throughout the church but not so loud that it startles those nearby. If we use the hanger with multiple bells, you “jingle” it three times. During the invocation or epiclesis, we do not ring the bell (this is when the priest holds his hands over the ciborium and chalice).
- l. Bow or kneel: when the celebrant kneels during the consecration.
- m. If the celebrant, following communion, returns to the chair and sits, you may sit until he stands again.
- n. If the celebrant remains standing during the announcements, you should also. If he bows during the closing prayers, do likewise. If he sits, lectors may ask the congregation to be seated.
- o. If there is no recession, remain standing, in place, until the celebrant departs the sanctuary, and then post-Mass actions may begin.

- p. If there is a recession, you stop and genuflect or bow with the celebrant as you depart *unless* you are holding something. You exit in reverse order of your entrance.

13. Instructions for lectors: the protocol for the liturgical introductions to the readings is as follows:

- a. *A reading from the Book of Genesis (or Exodus, Joshua, Proverbs, Job, etc., for most OT books).*
- b. *A reading from the first (or second) Book of Samuel (or Kings, Chronicles, Maccabees).*
- c. *A reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah (or Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, etc., for all prophets).*
- d. *A reading from the Song of Songs. (the only OT text not “from the Book of...”)*
- e. *A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew (or Mark, Luke, John).*
- f. *A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.*
- g. *A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans (or the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians).*
- h. *A reading from the first (or second) Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (or Thessalonians).*
- i. *A reading from the first (or second) Letter of Paul to Timothy.*
- j. *A reading from the Letter of Paul to Titus (or Philemon).*
- k. *A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. (not “...of Paul to the Hebrews”)*
- l. *A reading from the Letter of James (or Jude).*
- m. *A reading from the first (or second, or third) Letter of Peter (or John).*
- n. *A reading from the Book of Revelation. (not plural “Revelations”)*
- o. *Although Paul is called “Saint,” Timothy and Titus are not. Do as the Lectionary says, e.g.: “A reading of the first Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy,” Do not say “...from the letter of Saint Paul to Saint Timothy” (or “Saint Titus”).*

Liturgical Conclusions:

- p. *After the 1st and 2nd readings:* Lector: “*The Word of the Lord.*” (not “This is the Word of ...”) Response: “*Thanks be to God.*”
- q. *After the Gospel proclamation:* Deacon or Priest: “*The Gospel of the Lord.*” (not “This is the Gospel of ...”) Response: “*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*”

14. Instructions for collectors:

- a. The sticks with bags for the collection are kept in the sacristy and should be retrieved before Mass. During Mass they can be placed on one of the side pews for easy access.
- b. Pick up one of the sticks at the time of the Offertory. The best procedure for the collection is to go down the center aisle then across the back of the church and up the sides so that you can pass easily by everyone in the central pews and on the side pews.
- c. Following the collection place the collection at the front of the altar and return to your seat. Following Mass, return the collection to the church office if necessary.

15. Instructions for greeters:

- a. Please distribute the Order of Mass each week, and collect any returned following Mass, placing remaining copies into the holders by each door. You will also need to distribute any handouts for lyrics and the Weekly Readings and General announcements when printed.
- b. For new visitors, offer them the “*English Community Information*” handout also. The Info handout should be returned to the holders by each entrance between Masses and remain there between Masses. There is also a laminated copy on the bulletin board areas at each entrance that should always remain posted.
- c. Lyrics and weekly readings are generally printed only during the seasons of Lent and Advent and for special feasts or Masses. At other times of the year, they are available on WhatsApp, the English community website, and the English community Facebook page, and you should refer visitors to these sources to access them. Keep links to those sources on your mobile phone and you can share these using the associated QR codes.

- d. When supplies of the Order of Mass or the Info handout run low, please let the leader of the community know so more can be printed.
- e. Make every effort to welcome each congregant or visitor to Mass and answer any questions they may have. Much of the information you will need for this is in one of three places: the current week's announcements, the long-term announcements on the reverse of the weekly reading's handout, or in the Info handouts. *Familiarity with these sources and information posted on WhatsApp, the English community Facebook page plus the community website will help you help others.* It is always best if you can answer the routine questions immediately and not have to refer visitors to other sources.
- f. It is no longer necessary for congregants entering Mass to request low gluten wafers. If they do so anyway, inform one of EMHCs of this fact.
- g. During Mass, place the rope barriers with the attached signs at the entrances. This will discourage people from entering or departing while Mass is underway, remain quiet, and remind those entering or leaving to do so quickly and quietly.
- h. At the conclusion of Mass, return to the entrances and collect any returned handouts. If the weather permits, stand just outside the doors.
- i. Handouts for lyrics or weekly readings should be removed from the church following Mass and recycled. Any handouts remaining in the pews should be collected following Mass.
- j. If we have special collections, such as the collection for the St Vincent de Paul community or priestly vocations, pick up the collection bags prior to Mass and return them to the sacristy or community representatives when you are finished with any collection.
- k. At the conclusion of Mass, encourage those in attendance to step outside to continue conversations to minimize the noise between Masses. Discourage people from standing in doorways blocking those entering or leaving.

¹References:

General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Sections 43, 49-50, 122, 124, 128, 131, 134, 137, 146, 173, 195, 210-211, 245, 251, 256, 274-275

The Order of the Mass

Ceremonial of Bishops, section 72.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Liturgical Introductions and Conclusions for Scripture Readings, Felix Just, S.J., catholic-resources.org

Minutes of Community meetings for December 2024 and April 2025, englishcommunitytavira.org

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