
February 2024

An invitation to men and women in our parish to serve God as an Acolyte

Shared personal experience gives a window into this ministry: An Interview with Andrew Fricot Why did you choose to become an acolyte?

Becoming an acolyte was a natural progression for me, however my inclination towards this ministry was borne out of the deep desire I have to serve our Lord at the altar of sacrifice and my passion for the eucharist.

I made my first holy communion when I was in year 2 of primary school. After that, I, like other young boys in Catholic primary school during the 1980's, thought it was a good way to have something to do while at Mass.

Not truly understanding the most wonderful gift I had in the eucharist, I recall one day as a child was reprimanded by a Josephite sister for not being reverent with the eucharist I had received. However, from that day, I became more aware and did my best not to want to offend my Lord and saviour with a disrespectful reception of Holy Communion.

From that time, I also began to take more pride in my role as a junior altar server (altar boy) and realise the seriousness of my role. Over the years, I became more curious about my role of service and it sparked questions about why we did what we did and how it was done. This curiosity led to a deeper appreciation for the Mass and has further nourished my appetite for a fuller understanding of what the Church refers to as the 'Source and summit of our faith'. I have come to realise I will spend my whole life learning more and more about the infinite graces bestowed through partaking in the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass. So much so, that I want to share this joy and knowledge that God has given me with the whole world (Well at least my parish community and anyone who "has ears to hear" and wants to listen.

One of the most amazing things I love about being an acolyte, is that it drives me to want to learn more about the sacrament, such as its Jewish roots, as a fulfilment of the Old Covenant. The tablets of the old law (the Ten Commandments), now replaced with Christ, as the completion of that law and thus the New Covenant who is the 'Lamb of God' that takes away the sins of the world.

The Mass is a gift that keeps on giving, there is so much to unravel and consume. I would challenge everyone to just read the early Church Fathers about their insights and understanding of this great sacrament of which Christ commanded us to partake ("Do this, in memory of me").

What are the positives of being in this ministry?

Being an acolyte is a calling and requires discernment by one who is called to serve in this way. For me, the biggest positive of being an acolyte, dare I say, is the "closeness to the action". I pray that I may not be considered selfish for taking this opportunity to be so close to this mystical action, where simple bread and wine are transubstantiated (changed) into becoming the real body and blood of our Lord, as offered at the Last Supper, sacrificed on Calvary and raised from the tomb on Easter Sunday. I have come to learn that the altar is what unites heaven and Earth, with angels ascending and descending, with the entire communion of saints in adoration interceding for us. My thoughts are, who wouldn't want to have front row seats for such an event, such a miracle...

Another positive I appreciate about being an acolyte, is the fact that we as altar servers are trying to promote reverence and solemnity in the Mass. We do this by offering our humble assistance to the priest, which in turn promotes active participation of the congregation by helping them to keep focussed on the liturgical action, which ultimately gives praise and worship to God. Examples of this include ringing the bells, using the incense, holding the books or candles.

What are the negatives of being in this ministry?

Understanding that it is a role of service during the Mass, is of utmost importance for anyone contemplating becoming an acolyte. Consequently, the role of acolyte requires constant vigilance of the liturgical action and a readiness to assist and anticipate what needs to be done to ensure a smooth and solemn liturgy, causing as little distraction as possible. By being an altar server, "it can be hard to be Mary at the feet of Jesus, when you are as busy as Martha..." (paraphrasing and contextualising Luke 10:41-42). What I mean is that when serving at the altar, we can sometimes be so busy that it is impossible to close your eyes to pray and contemplate the gravity of the liturgical action taking place. For example, silent prayer after communion is not a pleasure, we can indulge in. However, it is a trade-off I am willing to make for the benefit of the parish community.

How supported do you feel?

OLMC Parish is a wonderful community with a great sense of fellowship. I feel supported in this ministry by being heard by the parish and its leadership team, especially when I raise concerns or make suggestions. As a trainer of servers and ministry coordinator, it is important to share ideas, experiences and learnings that adhere to Church guidelines. OLMC fosters a culture of spiritual growth and opportunities for formation of servers, which I truly appreciate.

Who is suitable for this ministry?

The diversity of gifts in the Church is a blessing. Some people are gifted with an inclination towards hospitality, reading at church, helping the needy, financial services, administrative services etc. Likewise, people called to be an acolyte should spiritually reflect and discern whether it is God's will for them to serve him in this way. What makes this ministry different from others, is that it was previously a minor order, for men on their way to becoming priests. Today, the ministry of acolyte is no longer considered a minor order and is open to both men and women.

If this ministry is your vocation, you are specially blessed as you are instituted into this ministry for life, by the bishop during a liturgical rite/ceremony. In the diocese of Wollongong, despite life-long institution and blessing, the bishop promotes an opt-in five-year renewal for active service. Therefore, your level of active duty can vary according to your life's needs. Nonetheless, it requires your commitment.

Finally, in my opinion and experience, the characteristics of a good acolyte include:

- **A keen eye to detail**
- **punctuality**
- **reverence and appropriate demeanour.**
- **openness to learn and seek knowledge.**
- **problem solving attitude.**
- **prayer life with a passion for the eucharist**
- **obedience to Church teaching and guidelines**
- **ability to lead others and provide instruction (especially for junior servers)**
- **humility**

What Happens in Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults and Children during Lent?

The Role of parishioners is to Pray and journey with our **Catechumens and Candidates** (those who are already baptised are referred to as the Candidates and those who are yet to be baptised are referred to as Catechumens).

Lent is Final Stage of preparation for Easter Initiation and is called the Period of Purification and Enlightenment- It is a time to self-reflect on the path taken so far and to ask for spiritual strength to overcome any remaining obstacles in their path. The congregation joins in praying for them during the Prayers of the Faithful and at the Scrutinies.

18th February 2024 – On the First Sunday of Lent, **The Rite of Sending** occurs in the parish during the 9:30am Mass where they are sent to the **Rite of Election** which takes place in the afternoon at 2pm and is celebrated by Bishop Brian Mascord at the cathedral in Wollongong. Catechumens have their name enrolled in the Book of the Elect and the bishop witnesses the signing of their names. Candidates are already members of the Elect by their baptism, so they do not enrol their names in the book of the Elect. Instead, they present a copy of their Baptismal certificate at the Rite of Sending. Both Catechumens and Candidates have witnesses that testify before the Community and the Bishop that they are ready to be initiated because they accept church teaching and practise prayer within the church community and personal prayer.

All RCIA participants are now referred to as **the Elect**.

The Scrutinies- This year, these will take place at each of the Sunday 9:30 am Masses during the **Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent-** The Elect are called out to the front of the Assembly after the Homily and the Assembly is invited to pray for the Elect to be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin and the spirit of true freedom as children of God. At different scrutinies the assembled people symbolically “pass on” the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer while the Elect “receive “it, symbolising the passing on of faith and prayer practises to them.

The Elect take part in Retreat sessions/ Lenten groups as a time set aside to prayerfully self-reflect individually and within a parish group.

Outside of Lent, at different times of the Year, parishioners will be invited to join in a Rite of Welcome- For those who are asking to become Catholic, this Rite not only welcomes them into our parish community but marks a more formal stage in their faith journey as a Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate. This Rite can occur at any suitable time of the year and whenever a person is ready. Parishioners may witness several of these as different persons join throughout the year.

Want to know more? Go to the parish website for a description of the different stages of the RCIA journey- the home page has an interactive button called *“Thinking of becoming Catholic?”* There are also stories of those who have made this journey in the past few years in the News section of the website: www.varroville.dow.org.au/2022/06/18/rcia-so-far-in-2022/

Thinking of Becoming Catholic? - make contact with Father Shane, Sr Jill or Diane Redmayne or contact the parish office for helpful support and no pressure.

Our parish is blessed by having these adults & children journey in faith with us.

They will be fully Initiated this Easter 2024

During Lent we ask all parishioners to join in the community prayer as we pray for our Elect to continue to grow in their faith and hope in God's loving promises.

Danielle Mills, Lara and Travis

Dani is baptised Anglican and married to Matthew (shown in photo) and she has been coming to Mass in our parish for a couple of years with her unbaptized children Lara-Rose, aged 12, and Travis, aged 8. Travis attends St Andrew's Catholic Scripture classes and Lara is now in Year 7 at Mt Carmel Catholic College.

“We have found an instant connection and feel so supported in the community of OLMC parish. We have made many new friendships and been welcomed with open arms. We are enjoying the journey of strengthening our faith.”



Maree Freeman and Cooper

Maree and Cooper are a family, and began coming to the parish last year, making the decision to become Catholic. Cooper now attends Mt Carmel.

“Our hearts are overflowing, and we are beyond excited. We are looking forward to being a part of this community where we can socialise and support each other.”

Chi Thanh (Lionel) Nguyen:

Lionel Nguyen, also known as Leo, has recently moved into our parish area and has been attending Catholic Mass in both South and Western Australia for several years with his Catholic wife, Linda, and his daughter, Cherrie.

“For me this experience represents a cleansing immersion, symbolizing spiritual rebirth and a renewed connection with faith, ushering in a profound sense of divine grace and inner peace.”

