

Understanding the Mass

The Acolyte

Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is the **Acolyte**.*

The word **acolyte** comes from the Greek *ἀκόλουθος* or *akoluthos*, and means “attendant” or “server”. Like altar servers, the patron saint of acolytes in England is Saint Stephen, who lived in the earliest days of the Church. This is why our altar servers and acolytes are members of the Guild of St Stephen, which was originally founded more than 100 years ago, and is connected to parishes and schools all over the world.

There are *non-instituted acolytes* and *instituted acolytes*.

Most commonly, the term “acolyte” is used to describe adults who serve at Mass: *non-instituted acolytes*.

The acolyte is also an “instituted ministry”, along with that of the “reader” or “lector”. These two *lay liturgical ministries* - being for laypeople, rather than priests or religious, and specifically relating to the Mass - were created by Pope Paul VI in 1972, and replaced what were historically referred to as *minor orders*.

Seminarians ask to be admitted to these lay ministries as part of their preparation for ordination. They are *instituted acolytes*.

Like altar servers, all acolytes will serve at the altar during Mass. They may prepare the wine and water for the sacrifice of the Mass and may also carry the candles, the thurible or the processional crucifix in the entrance procession.

In addition, instituted acolytes may also distribute Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers, take communion to the sick or housebound after Mass, and instruct and guide other servers.



True or false? Circle what you think!

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|---|------|-------|
| The word “acolyte” comes from Ancient Latin. | TRUE | FALSE |
| The patron saint of acolytes is Saint Stephen. | TRUE | FALSE |
| Many of an acolyte’s tasks are the same as altar servers. | TRUE | FALSE |