

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF COVINGTON  
INSTITUTED MINISTRY OF ACOLYTE  
INFORMATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS

**What is an “acolyte?”**

The English word “acolyte” comes from the Greek “akolouthos” which is translated as “follower” or “one who helps.” In the Church an acolyte is one who helps/assists in the celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy.

**History:**

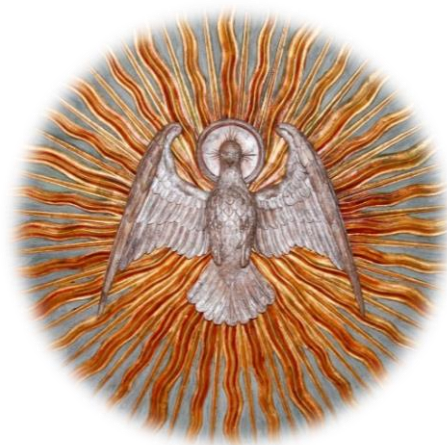
The earliest mention of acolytes comes in the year 251. Their role in the life of the Church from ancient times to modern have been varied; and have developed over the course of time. These developments have occurred for the benefit of the whole Church.

In August 1972, Pope St. Paul VI, wrote the Apostolic Letter issued *moto proprio*, *Ministeria Quaedam*, in which he revised several ministries and clerical orders. Of the ministries which were maintained was the Instituted Acolyte. In this letter, the Holy Father opened the ministry of Instituted Acolyte to suitable lay men who were not seeking Sacred Orders (although it remained a requirement for those in Priestly Formation).

In January 2021, Pope Francis released a new Apostolic Letter issued *moto proprio* entitled *Spiritus Domini*, in which he reflected on the “common condition of being baptized” as relates to different charisms in the Church. In recognizing the essential distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of all the baptized, he declared that the ministries of Lector and Acolyte are open to “all suitable faithful, whether male or female.”

**What is a ministry?**

A ministry is a type of charism (a spiritual gift establishing special abilities given to all Christians by the Holy Spirit so as to give representation to Christ and to be a channel of God's goodness for all people), which has been publicly recognized and instituted (permanent and stable) by the Church for the benefit of the holy people of God.



### **What is the role of the Instituted Acolyte?**

The role of the Instituted Acolyte is described in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal paragraphs 187-193.

#### **C) The Functions of the Acolyte**

187. The functions that the acolyte may carry out are of various kinds and several may occur at the same moment. Hence, it is desirable that these duties be suitably distributed among several acolytes. If, in fact, only one acolyte is present, he should perform the more important duties while the rest are to be distributed among several ministers.

#### **The Introductory Rites**

188. In the procession to the altar, the acolyte may carry the cross, walking between two ministers with lighted candles. Upon reaching the altar, however, the acolyte places the cross upright near the altar so that it may serve as the altar cross; otherwise, he puts it away in a dignified place. Then he takes his place in the sanctuary.

189. Through the entire celebration, it is for the acolyte to approach the Priest or the Deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to them and to assist them in any other way required. Thus it is appropriate that, in so far as possible, the acolyte should occupy a place from which he can easily carry out his ministry either at the chair or at the altar.

#### **The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

190. In the absence of a Deacon, after the Universal Prayer and while the Priest remains at the chair, the acolyte places the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal on the altar. Then, if necessary, the acolyte assists the Priest in receiving the gifts of the people and, if appropriate, brings the bread and wine to the altar and hands them to the Priest. If incense is being used, the acolyte presents the thurible to the Priest and assists him while he incenses the offerings, the cross, and the altar. Then the acolyte incenses the Priest and the people.

191. A duly instituted acolyte, as an extraordinary minister, may, if necessary, assist the Priest in distributing Communion to the people.<sup>[99]</sup> If Communion is given under both kinds, in the absence of a Deacon, the acolyte administers the chalice to the communicants or holds the chalice if Communion is given by intinction.

192. Likewise, after the distribution of Communion is complete, a duly instituted acolyte helps the Priest or Deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels. In the absence of a Deacon, a duly instituted acolyte carries the sacred vessels to the credence table and there purifies them, wipes them, and arranges them as usual.

193. After the celebration of Mass, the acolyte and other ministers return together with the Deacon and the Priest in procession to the sacristy, in the same manner and in the same order in which they entered.

### **Are there any other roles an Instituted Acolyte could be expected to preform?**

Though not an exhaustive list, an Instituted Acolyte may be expected to:

- Act as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion;
- Assist in the training and formation of other lay Communion Ministers;
- Organize ministers for bringing Holy Communion to the sick and the homebound;
- Organize ministers for bringing Holy Communion to those in hospitals;
- Assist in the training of altar servers;
- Lead a Liturgy of the Word and the Communion Service in the absence of a priest/deacon;
- Foster Eucharistic devotions;
- Expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic Adoration;
- Prepare children for First Holy Communion.

### **What is required of an Instituted Acolyte?**

In order to be considered for the Ministry of Acolyte, one must be a fully initiated member of the Roman Catholic Church (having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) and be living in full communion with Her. They must be living an exemplary and morally upright Christian way of life avoid of anything that might be the cause of controversy or scandal and with no impediments to sacramental reception, (i.e., if married, one must be in a valid union recognized by the Church). Candidates must also be doctrinally sound in their learning and catechesis so as to be able to speak and act with the “mind of the Church.”

### **How do I become an Instituted Acolyte in the Diocese of Covington?**

It must first be understood that no one is guaranteed participation in this ministry. It is through self-discernment and the discernment of the Church that one is chosen from amongst the lay faithful for fuller service in the Church. In addition, the conferral of an Instituted Ministry does not grant one the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.

It is recommended that individuals seeking an Instituted Ministry already be participating in the life of the parochial Church, particularly in different liturgical roles (ie: servers, sacristans, ushers, etc.).

All individuals presenting themselves for an Instituted Ministry must be 21 years of age.

Individuals feeling called to this ministry by the Lord, should first approach their pastor as this ministry manifested in the parochial Church. It will be the pastor’s responsibility to determine if there is a need for an Instituted Acolyte in the parish. If after prayer and discernment a need is present, then a letter from the proposed candidate, along with a letter of support from the pastor should be addressed to the Office of Worship and Liturgy.

If accepted, individuals will then be required to participate in a formation program consisting of theological and liturgical courses via the “Catechetical Institute” from Franciscan University of Steubenville and the Diocesan Office of Worship and Liturgy. Candidates may apply for exemptions from these classes depending on their past theological training. These exemptions will occur on an individual basis.

Upon the completion of the course work, candidates will be required to present to the bishop their understanding of the Instituted Ministry along with the reasons why they feel called to this service in the Church. The bishop will make the final determination as to the need for an Instituted Acolyte and the readiness of the candidate.

The Liturgical Rite for the Institute of Acolyte will occur at the discretion of the Bishop of Covington.

**Resources:**

- General Instruction of the Roman Missal
- *Ministeria Quaedam*, Apostolic Letter, Pope Saint Paul IV, August 15, 1972
- *Spiritus Domini*, Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis, January 10, 2021
- Papal Message on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Ministeria Quaedam*, Pope Francis, August 15, 2022

**Courses/Workshops from the Catechetical Institute:**

- Introduction to the Sacraments
- The Principle of Sacramentality
- The Sacrament of the Eucharist
- Understanding the Liturgy
- Essential Link Between Liturgy and Catechesis
- Key Moments in the Liturgy

**Courses/Workshops from the Diocesan Office of Worship and Liturgy:**

- Principals of Ministry at the Altar
- Principals of Ministry to the Sick and Homebound

**Contact Information**

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