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Master of Ceremonies
Master Server

Tools for Vocations

It is not uncommon for young men to become less connected to their faith during high-school and college. How can a parish help form young men during this critical time? Some pastors have found providing a special role, not available to younger altar servers, can help them grow and stay engaged in their faith. Learn how this has helped some young men discern their vocation.

SPARK
Serra Promotion and Resource Kit

Summary

A young man standing on the altar next to Father, assisting with the Mass has a unique experience. According to Father Paul Sullivan, Vocations Director of the Diocese of Phoenix, acting in the role of Master of Ceremonies takes the young man from the role of observer, to being on the altar "shoulder to shoulder" with the priest. To be immersed in the mystery of the Eucharist and to be intimately involved in the Mass, makes our Lord's presence very profound. Many young men find during their time on the altar serving the Mass, a special closeness to Our Lord and an openness to hearing His voice. According to Father Will Schmid of St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church in Gilbert, AZ, it is during this time at Mass that many young men hear Our Lord's call to their vocation to the priesthood. This is one of the great benefits of the "Master of Ceremony" program.

Program Outline

- Modeled after the tradition of the Church, in raising more mature and experienced young men to positions of greater responsibility.
- Gives the priest a unique opportunity to share the joy of his vocation with young men; by leading them in formation and helping them during the time in their lives when discernment of their vocation is central.
- Involves young men who have had prior experience serving at the altar, as well as other young men showing a serious interest in their faith.
- The duties may include spending time in prayer, directing and mentoring younger altar servers, and helping father as he sees the need.

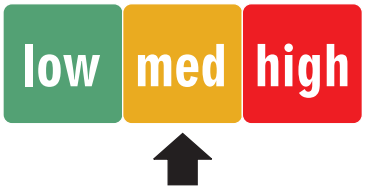
Implementation

Time of Year

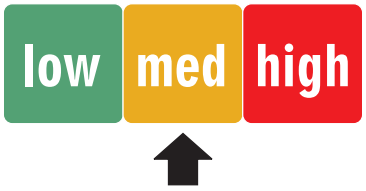
** Programs involving students tend to start during the summer or when the school year begins, but the pastor may consider candidates individually.*

Spring Semester

Lead Time



Effort



Cost

Serrans / Volunteers

- Assist the Pastor as needed in planning an annual appreciation event for Masters of Ceremony
- Underwrite appreciation events
- Remember the Masters of Ceremony in their prayers for vocations

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Historically, the church had a natural progression in the roles and responsibilities of young men as they served the church and discerned their path to God. Roles such as altar server, acolyte, lector, sub-deacon, and deacon were traditional and if it was the will of God, this might lead to the priesthood. During this time, while working closely with the priests and other likeminded young men, special relationships developed, mentoring, formation and discernment took place. These relationships and responsibilities within the Church provided a natural environment conducive to discernment of the workings of God in their lives.

To highlight one Master of Ceremonies (MC) Program: Father Will Schmid from St. Mary Magdelene Catholic Church in the Diocese of Phoenix, looked to this historical model when he discovered many of his altar servers were "aging out". He found that older servers in his parish often felt altar serving was only for the young children and as they approached high school age they were no longer fulfilled in their role as servers. Father Will, who has a special enthusiasm for his vocation, saw this as a challenge to draw them back into service and help them grow into outstanding Catholics. He asked them to stay on and help him by becoming Masters of Ceremonies. In this special role they would work closely with him to help guide the younger altar servers on the altar and take part in other special responsibilities. This was accepted with great enthusiasm.

In Father Will's MC program young men go through an extensive process of preparation for their new role. They are trained and mentored by Father and the Coordinator of Sacred Liturgy. They begin by educating the young men thoroughly in all the rubrics and background of the Mass, drawing them into the mystery of Eucharist and a full appreciation of all that is happening during the Mass. He noted that most young men hear their call to the priesthood during the Mass, so it is very important that they are fully immersed. As a priest, Father has a unique opportunity to help them grow in their overall holiness by instructing them in prayer and working with them as they discern what God is calling them to in their lives. One of the requirements of the MCs is that they pray every day that God will reveal their vocation to them.

He has found that this process has led to very serious discernment in his parish. In addition, he has taken the opportunity to share the joy of his life in the priesthood and has had the opportunity to take several of his MCs and their parents to visit the seminary to experience firsthand the life of a seminarian. St Mary Magdalene parish has experienced a great increase in the number of enthusiastic young men entering the seminary.

St Mary Magdalene Parish is one example of a successful MC program. As of May 2018, Father Sullivan, shares that 6 young men have entered the seminary as a direct result of this program.

Parishes may develop their own version of the program, customized to meet the needs of their diocese and parish. The information in this program is designed to provide some food for thought as you embark on your Master of Ceremonies / Master Server program.

Additional Resources

academia.edu – An article providing an overview of the altar server and master of ceremony guidelines:

http://www.academia.edu/6523887/Altar_Servers_and_Master_of_Ceremony_Guidelines

St. Catherine of Siena Parish (Trumbull, CT) – A webpage which provides a summary of qualifications/age levels of altar servers and the liturgical master of ceremonies—as they're referred to in this parish:

http://www.stcathtrumbull.com/altar-servers---mc-s.html

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church (Bullhead City, AZ) – A webpage detailing how the parish utilizes different categories of altar servers, including masters of ceremonies. (In this case, candidates must be at least 12.5 years old to qualify—and must have at least 6 months of service as an altar server, too.)

https://stmargaretmarybhc.com/71

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church (Bangor, ME) – Downloadable pdf of their Program for Youth Altar Servers, including the Masters of Ceremonies. See page 7 for details on the requirements the church has set in place for people desiring to serve as masters of ceremonies.

https://stpaulbangor.me/altar-servers Download the Altar Servers Manual at the bottom of the page.

All Saints Catholic Church (Dunwoody, GA) – All Saints Catholic Church has 5 service levels of Altar Servers, including the 4th level of Master Alter Servers and 5th level of Guardian Altar Servers. There are several useful items on this site, including downloadable self-study programs.

https://allsaintsdunwoody.org/worship/altar-servers/ Downloadable self-study programs are at the bottom of the page.

St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church (Van Wert, OH) – web page which discusses the role of the Master of Ceremonies vis-à-vis those of other altar servers.

http://www.stmarysvanwert.com/ministries2.html

St Anthony Catholic Church (Des Moines, IA) – webpage dedicated to providing an outline of what the parish is looking for in a master of ceremonies.

http://www.stanthonydsm.org/ministries/liturgical-ministry/master-of-ceremonies.html

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Additional Resources

St Thomas the Apostle (Amarillo, TX) – webpage also dedicated to providing an outline of what the parish is looking for in a master of ceremonies—including detailed bullet points that lay out the requirements for candidacy as well as the commitments one takes on as a master of ceremonies.

https://stthomasamarillo.org/master-servers

St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral (Amarillo, TX) – A sample announcement for a master server training event at this could be used as a template for your parish's training event:

http://www.stmarysamarillo.com/news/new-master-server-training

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Tools for Vocations

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