



ST. BENEDICT CLASSICAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL

4609 W State Road 46
Bloomington, IN 47404

August 19, 2016

Policy letter Re: Altar Servers

We would like to take this opportunity to state our school policy regarding altar servers. At St. Benedict Classical Catholic School, Mass will be celebrated with only male servers. We believe that this is the most appropriate policy in light of Catholic teaching.

To begin, we recognize the shortage of able and willing servers most parishes face. In the recent past, some parishes have perceived a need to have girls serve at Mass. Our school's policy is in no way meant to cast judgement on these parishes. We wish simply to aim for the highest, most reverent Mass that we can celebrate. To this end, we believe that having only males serve at the altar is the better option. It more perfectly honors both genders and the Holy Sacrifice that is offered.

The altar server's function is to aid the priest during preparation and administration of the Most Holy Sacrament. It is our hope that by having male students serve at the altar, we will be able to foster religious vocations. At St. Benedict's, we hope to encourage religious vocations for both our male and female students. Having girls serve at the altar does a disservice to both genders. As Christ was a man, the priest who stands in His place (in *persona Christi*) must also be a man—as he must figure the Heavenly Bridegroom. The priesthood is, in fact, the ultimate expression of manhood. Priests serve and act after the model of Christ, the ultimate man. The priest must both serve and sacrifice himself for his bride, the Church (i.e., the rest of us). The priestly vocation is not about being “in charge” of a parish. Rather, it is about service, and even possibly service unto death—and we need boys to see this clearly.

In modern society our preoccupation with individual rights, leads to an assumption that serving at Mass should be a “right” for any boy or girl. This is simply not the case. To attend the priest during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to assist him in confecting and offering The Sacrifice. It is not simply moving dishes around or processing around the church and sanctuary. The altar servers are there to show us how to join our prayers to the Mass. They set the tone and posture for all the faithful to follow. They offer prayers with the priest to complete the ritual and liturgy. (This is most obvious when the extraordinary form of the Mass is said.) As they are the closest to the priest, the servers are in a position to know and to participate in the most intimate details of the Mass. It is only from this close vantage point that they can discern whether they might be called to the priesthood. It is critical that young men witness the true and correct masculinity of the priest's role. The Church can unwittingly feminize the liturgy when the important marital aspect of the Mass (specifically, the role of Christ the Bridegroom to His bride, the Church) is ignored. Neutering the Divine Liturgy and Sacrifice of the Mass can turn off many adolescent boys from

serving because they see girls doing it and decide that it is not masculine enough for them. Additionally, if girls are serving in this capacity, boys may not have opportunities or even be needed to serve at all.

The decision to have only boys serve at the altar is not in any way meant to imply that boys are superior or that girls are incapable. Rather, the Catholic Church recognizes that the divine plan includes both men and women—equal in dignity, yet very different. Above virtually every earthly institution, the Church has championed the rights of women and preserved a sublime and unparalleled understanding of the dignity of women. To one who has not carefully considered the teachings of the Church on this matter, this may seem counterintuitive. The world would happily propose that the Catholic Church’s teaching is oppressive or “anti-woman.” To the contrary, the Catholic Church reveres and holds women in high regard as mothers and nurturers, something which the world no longer values. Beyond this, it is the Catholic understanding that in God’s Providence and design, women have a sacred role as co-participants in God’s ongoing work of creation. As only a male can figure the Heavenly Bridegroom, only a female can figure the generative and nurturing persona of the Living God, the Creator and Sustainer of all. The greatest example and the highpoint of all God’s creation is a woman. Of all creatures, only a woman gave perfect consent to God’s will. In doing so Our Lady became *Theotokos*—MOTHER OF GOD. She is our constant example of what to do and how to achieve sanctity. She is holy not because she followed any man’s example, but because she did what God wanted her to do.

By God’s awesome design, women possess the creative power to bring forth new life. This sharing in creation with God is a gift given only to women, which sets them apart from men. In a very practical way it sets them above men, as only they can participate with God’s will by bringing new life into the world. Unfortunately, many let the worldly view of power and sexuality twist this beautiful teaching and call it oppression—falsely claiming that the patriarchy of the Church holds an unfair power over women. In reality, exactly the opposite is true. Women are owed respect and honor simply because they are women. This is how much the Church loves women, as it is only they who can perfectly exemplify the Bride of Christ—which is in reality the entire Catholic Church. When we push for our daughters to serve in the same way that men do, we are actually diminishing their position from the one who is sacrificed for to the one who is serving. In this light, it is clear that teaching girls of their ultimate dignity (as holy and set apart for God) will enable them to listen for their own important vocation.

Finally, let us consider our own approach to Mass. Often we are distracted by our daily routines and concerns, and it becomes very easy to forget that the Mass is not like anywhere or anything else on earth. As such, it should neither be treated like anything in our fallen world, nor be subject to the demands of our fallen world. During Mass, heaven comes down to meet earth and they intersect at the altar. There is no experience “in the world” that is owed as much reverence and adoration as Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament. During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we are focused on eternal things—things of heaven. The Divine Liturgy and the Sacrifice of the Mass are subject to heaven’s eternal standards rather than the whims of our 21st century society. The idea that we should have both male and female altar servers because our current society demands equal gender representation, should have no more influence on Holy Mass now than it would have had at the First Mass offered during the Last Supper. A demand to have females serve at the altar in order to achieve equality for women would subordinate the Mass to the expectations of our current society. However, the Mass should look, smell, and feel different than anywhere or anything else on earth. It should be noticeably NOT like the world.

St. Benedict’s seeks to provide its students with the best possible spiritual formation. This undoubtedly includes promoting vocational awareness and an understanding of each student’s unique role as a male or female member of the Body of Christ. With this in mind, we have carefully considered and formulated our altar server policy.

In Christ, through Mary,

The Board of Directors
St. Benedict Classical Catholic School
www.stbenedictclassical.org