

The VERGER



VERGER'S
CUSTOMARY
OF SAINT
JOHN HENRY
NEWMAN
VICTORIA
ORDINARIATE
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The Verger's Prayer

Almighty Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, who has called us into the fellowship of your Church, grant, we pray, that in all our churches we may fulfill the duties and enjoy the privileges of our spiritual homes. And on those who offer themselves for service as vergers in the house of God bestow the fullness of your grace, that, united in love to you, and to one another, we may show forth your glory and hasten the coming of Your Kingdom, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

OVERVIEW | The vergers are servers who act as *Master of Ceremonies* in the Nave during Mass or the Divine Office. Duties of the vergers include leading liturgical processions (in the nave and outside the church) and escorting lectors to and from the lectern during Mass or the Divine Office.

Ordinarily, the vergers sit in the nave. His chair may be placed near the lectern.

The 'virge' is the rod of office (Latin – *virga*; Old French – *vergier*) and is used to ensure that processions are not impeded during worship.

When to use a Virge | Typically, the average parish will have a single virge.

In this case, it should be used in all processions, large or small. Where the parish has a virge and a beadle (long staff), the beadle should be used to escort the processions at the beginning and end of the liturgy. The virge should be used within the liturgy, as at the *Gospel* or *Offertory* processions, or when escorting individuals.

Carrying the Virge | When leading (accompanying) a person or groups in procession with the virge, the virge should be held in the right hand at a 45° angle from your body (extended position). At other times (when standing in place or going to get those to be led in procession), it may rest on your right shoulder or cradled in your arms (at rest position).



SUMMARY

1. When walking alone, carry the virge resting (reposed) on your right shoulder. The left hand is usually allowed to hang free.
2. When waiting, cradle the virge, resting it across your body.
3. When accompanying and processing, extend the virge forward at a 45° angle.
4. When turning, turn to the right or toward the ritual action.
5. When bowing, cradle the virge.
6. Weddings: if required, guide the groom, groomsmen, bride and bridesmaids to their appointed positions, e.g., to the altar rail, to the (signing of the) register.

If it is your responsibility to conduct the bishop from the episcopal chair in the sanctuary to the pulpit for a sermon,

1. carry the virge (on the shoulder) to the bishop's chair,
 2. make a simple bow to the bishop, and
 3. turn and carry the virge (extended) to the pulpit.
 4. Arrive at the pulpit, wait for the bishop to take his place and
 5. then put the virge at rest (on the right shoulder),
 6. again, bow to the bishop, and
 7. go take your seat for the duration of the sermon (and cradle the virge). In some places, the virge is always carried in the at-rest position on the right shoulder.
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MASS: ENTRANCE PROCESSION

1. The vergers lead the procession to the sanctuary. He walks to edge of sanctuary, genuflects to the Blessed Sacrament, steps to the right then faces toward the procession, cradles the virge, bows to the processional crucifix as it passes into the sanctuary and bows to any clergy as they pass.
 2. Once the processing clergy have entered the sanctuary, the vergers return to the centre facing toward the altar, genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament, then (turning to the right) proceeds to his seat and cradles the virge.
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ACCOMPANYING LECTORS

The vergers should begin moving toward the lector at the end of the previous prayer/reading, so that they are in motion and near the lectern in a timely manner.

THE LESSON

1. The vergers meet the lector at his seat (or at the gate if the lector is an acolyte seated in the sanctuary).
2. Cradling the virge, the vergers and lector bow to each other, then (virge extended) the vergers lead the lector to the gate where the vergers bid the lector to his left side. Both genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament (or bow as circumstances dictate).
3. Virge extended, the vergers then lead the lector to the lectern.
4. During the Lesson the vergers wait to the left of the lectern facing across the nave, i.e., toward liturgical North, cradling the virge.
5. After the Lesson, the vergers lead the lector back to the gate (virge extended), both genuflect to the tabernacle, and then lead him (virge extended) back to his seat in the nave.

THE EPISTLE

1. The vergers go to the epistoler, and they bow to each other, then lead the Epistoler to the gate, genuflect with the epistoler toward the Blessed Sacrament.
2. If the epistoler is an acolyte situated in the sanctuary, the vergers meet him at the gate, and they bow to each other.
3. The vergers then lead the epistoler to the lectern and wait as before (cradling the virge).
4. After the Epistle, the vergers extend the virge and lead the epistoler back to the gate to genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament, then accompany the epistoler to his seat in the nave (unless he is an acolyte seated in the sanctuary) and then return to his seat and cradle the virge).

THE HOLY GOSPEL

1. Following the Epistle, the vergers approach the gate at the altar rail to be in position while the priest is laying on incense prior to the Gospel.
2. As the priest (or deacon/gospeler) genuflects, the vergers genuflect and then turn to their right and proceed down the main aisle (nave) to the centre of the nave or designated place (the third pew at St John Henry's), then halt.
3. Once the Gospel procession is in place, the vergers turn about (toward the action) and face the Gospeler (or, at SJHN, move off into the cross aisle, turn and face the Gospeler).
4. As the Gospel concludes, the vergers (at SJHN return to the nave and) follow the procession as it moves back into the sanctuary. They genuflect at the altar rail, turn left or right and then proceed to their holding position.

MASS: PROCESSION TO THE SACRISTY

1. After the Last Gospel, the vergers arrive at the foot of the sanctuary, genuflect, stand facing the altar at the foot of the sanctuary with the virge resting on their right shoulder.
2. As the Celebrant turns, the vergers turn (to their right), extend the virge, and lead the procession to the sacristy. With the servers and ministers, they observe the concluding prayers in the sacristy.

INDOOR PROCESSIONS

There are two types of procession: celebratory and penitential. The *celebratory* is conducted in a clockwise direction and the *penitential* in a counterclockwise direction.

The standard route, regardless of the type of procession utilized [at SJHN], is what is called a "pretzel." This is carried out by proceeding

1. down the centre aisle and then turn left or right as appropriate at the narthex door.
2. It is important to pace the route in advance while reciting the text of the procession script. This will determine the length and detail of the route followed.

In general, the route begins as described above then,

4. move forward along a side aisle,
5. across the front of the nave (at the transept) parallel to the Altar Rail and then
6. back along the opposite side aisle. Additional laps may be used depending on the length of the procession and if there are stations along the route.

Stations are the intermediate or end place of the procession. E.g., the procession of the Bambino at Christmas to the Crib has the Creche as a station. Ascertaining whether there is a station will help the planning process.



CONSULTATION

It is important that the verger brief the servers with whom he will directly interface – lectors and crucifer – during the course of his duties.



On occasion, the thurifer will be next in the procession behind the verger, so he must be briefed as well. It is essential that the thurifer understands the timing and the significance of each movement, as his role in carrying the thurible is crucial for setting the tone of the ceremony. Adequate preparation will ensure that the procession flows smoothly and that all participants can perform their duties with confidence.

Of primary importance is to consult with the priest celebrant to confirm the nature of the procession, any stations, or any other facts pertinent to the procession. This ensures that all participants are well-informed and can contribute meaningfully to the ceremony. To align the movements and actions of the procession, it is important to coordinate with the music director to determine the pace of a hymn or chant.

HISTORY

A verger (sometimes *virger*) is a specialized form of sacristan, so a Biblical origin for their office can be found in those members of the priestly tribe of Levi set aside by King David and the Prophet Samuel: *The gatekeepers were... in charge of the gates of the house of the Lord...*

as guards... and they had charge of opening it every morning. Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they were required to count them when they were brought in and taken out. Others of them were appointed over the furniture, and over all the holy utensils, also over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices (1 Chronicles 9:17–29). Over time the same practical concerns appeared within Christianity and by the fourth century four “minor orders” of clergy had developed to aid Bishops and Priests; one of these — the Ostiarius, or Doorkeeper — is the beginning of the verger’s history in the Church. The next millennium saw liturgies becoming ever more complex with a corresponding increase in the number of clerics required for their preparation and performance; as an example, there were 130 such functionaries at Salisbury Cathedral by A.D. 1390. That Cathedral’s distinctive practice, the Sarum Use (or Use of Salisbury) — England’s dominant “dialect” of the Roman Rite and the foundation on which Cranmer built his Prayer Book — contains references to some of them of particular interest: *procedat minister virgam manu gestans, locum faciens processioni* (A minister goes in front, bearing a rod in his hand, making room for the procession) and *Imprimis Sacristes, virgas in manibus gestantes, deinde...* (At the beginning: sacristans bearing rods in their hands; then...) so some of these clerics — in addition to their curatorial functions — had become part of public liturgies and begun to carry the wands which would eventually become their badge of office and give them their name: the virge. In Latin, such a one was a *Virgarius* (rod-man) or “*virgifer*” (made by adding “-fer,” from the verb “*fero*,” to carry, to what was carried, following the pattern of Crucifer or Thurifer). The modern English form might possibly come directly from *vergifer* (several centuries of lazy pronunciation having removed the awkward “f”); but more likely it derives from the Norman French *vergerar* or — *verger*. | K.D.P. McDermott

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Virge



Beadle



✠ SAINT JOHN HENRY NEWMAN ♦ ORA PRO NOBIS ✠

