

Discipleship and the Liturgy

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF ST ANN
MARIETTA, GEORGIA



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Each of the three discipleship phases fittingly culminates in a covenant with God, oneself and the community expressed through a liturgical action: parishioners are invited to walk forward and place their covenant cards in baskets at the foot of the altar.

Faith and Action

Each spring, the **Faith and Action** phase begins with the pastor preaching at all weekend Masses. His homily connects the Scripture readings with the call to active discipleship as followers of Christ. During the Easter season, these reflections naturally draw parallels to the formation and mission of the early Church. Prayers for discernment are included in the intercessions. Members of the discipleship committee are present in the narthex after Mass, along with flyers that provide information on making commitments online.

In the weeks between the pastor's homily and Commitment Weekend, prayers for discernment continue in the intercessions. In addition, witness videos are shown during the pulpit announcements before the dismissal of the community.

Before Mass

On Commitment Weekend, members of the discipleship committee—or those they have recruited—welcome parishioners in the narthex before Mass. They offer covenant cards or QR-code cards to those who have not yet completed a commitment card or made their commitment online. Parishioners may complete their commitment before Mass or during the moments provided after the homily.

Altar Call

After the homily, the celebrant invites the community to complete their covenant cards. Parishioners may indicate their commitment to parish ministries or note how they are sharing their talents beyond the ministries formally offered by the parish. The assembly is then invited to come forward and place their covenant cards in baskets at the foot of the altar. If they completed their covenant online prior to coming to Mass, that can be indicated on the paper form and brought forward. During the Offertory, the celebrant blesses the cards and offers a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

Follow-Up Weekend

On the weekend following our commitment, cards and pens are placed in the pews. An announcement is made before Mass inviting parishioners to complete a covenant card if they have not yet done so and to place it in the offertory basket when the collection is taken up.

Prayer and Presence

Beginning in the second half of the summer, the Prayer and Presence phase follows the same format as the Faith and Action phase. During this time, we reflect on how our prayer life, participation in parish social gatherings, and involvement in faith formation opportunities strengthen our relationship with God and with one another.

The period of discernment begins with a homily preached by the pastor at all Masses. He emphasizes that prayer may be either private or communal, and that formation can take many forms—from reading Scripture or a book about faith, to participating in a formal formation program or attending a retreat. Strengthening the connection to community is also by participating in parish-wide social events, like our annual parish festival, Christmas Sing-A-Long or attending our Annual Craft Show. In the weeks between the homily and Covenant Weekend, prayers for discernment continue and witness videos are shared. We then make our covenant, mindful that our commitments may also include prayer, formation, and relationships nurtured beyond the walls of our parish.

Generosity

In late fall, the third phase—Generosity—begins, once again marked by a homily from the pastor. He reminds us that while these commitments are helpful for parish budgeting, this phase is about much more than pledging to the offertory collection. It is an opportunity to prayerfully discern how we use our financial and in-kind resources to build up the Kingdom of God. Parishioners are encouraged to include not only parish giving, but also the ways they support loved ones or contribute to charitable organizations in the wider community. Witness talks are shared in the weeks between his homily and our commitment. And time is allowed on commitment weekend to finalize our commitment using a card or through the online. The baskets used at the altar call are blessed during the offertory.

Liturgical Fruits of the Discipleship Program

Since the beginning of the discipleship program, our parish has experienced a significant increase in liturgical ministers. This growth has strengthened our liturgies and enriched them with greater participation and diversity.

The most recent response to the Faith in Action phase of Discipleship included the re-commitment of approximately 250 existing Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, along with 37 new ministers. Our lector pool, previously 109, received 50 new responses. The Linen Ministry has grown from 11 to 15 members, and interest in serving as Mass Coordinators and Sacristans has increased by 20%.

Our Altar Server ministry, which has been rebuilding since COVID, has nearly doubled to 48 servers. The Adult Usher Ministry, which supports six Masses each weekend, has grown from 46 to 50 members. Participation among children at our Family Mass also continues to increase. Children now serve as ushers, banner carriers, lectors, and gift bearers alongside their families.

Our newly formed Arts and Environment Committee has grown from 2 members to 18.

This growth makes formation and training essential. For many liturgical ministries, training is not simply an option; it is a necessary step toward serving with confidence, reverence, consistency, and a deeper understanding of the ministry's role in the prayer of the community.

Although liturgical training opportunities are offered throughout the year, we increase the number of sessions following the Faith in Action phase of Discipleship to support those who have responded to the call to serve. Soon after receiving the community's response, we offer three training opportunities to help new and returning ministers of Communion, lectors, and altar servers to prepare well for their roles.

Through Faith in Action, our parish has seen a clear increase in the full, active participation of parishioners in the liturgical life of the community. The deeper fruit is that as more people become involved in the liturgy, they also become more engaged as disciples—moving beyond the pews to share their gifts with the parish and the wider community.