

Mass Linen Ministry

St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church • Iowa City

Updated April 2026

Welcome and Thank You! Your service in caring for these sacred linens is a vital part of our worship. This guide will walk you through everything you need to know.

★ Before Your First Week: Schedule a Training Session

Please contact **Margaret Post** to schedule a hands-on training at her home before you begin your first week of linen ministry. She will walk you through the entire process in person and answer any questions you have. Do not hesitate to reach out — training is an important part of getting started!

1. Identifying the Linens

There are three types of linens used at Mass. Learning to recognize each one will help you wash, iron, and fold them correctly.

Linen	Size & Shape	Purpose at Mass
Corporal	Large square cloth (~20"×20"), white with a small red cross in the center	Spread flat on the altar under the chalice and paten
Lavabo Towel	Rectangular strip (~8"×18"), plain white with no markings	Used by the priest to dry his hands during Mass
Purificator	Smaller rectangle (~12"×18"), white with a small red cross in the center	Used to wipe the chalice and purify the priest's fingers after communion

Tip: Both the corporal and purificator have a small red embroidered cross. The key difference is size — the corporal is noticeably larger and is folded into a square, while the purificator is smaller and folded with pleats.

2. Collecting Soiled Linens from Church

On your assigned week, collect the soiled linens from the East Sacristy after the 10 AM Sunday Mass (or Monday morning if Sunday is not convenient) — the sacristan or priest will have placed them in a plastic tub of water on the left side of the counter.

1. For each linen, rinse it five times in the sacarium (the holy sink that drains to the ground), then wring out the excess water.
 2. Place each rinsed linen into the muslin bag hanging near the sacarium.
 3. Take the muslin bag home to launder.
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3. Washing the Linens

Machine Washing

- Wash church linens separately — do not mix with personal laundry, towels, or other household items.
- Place the muslin bag and all linens into your washing machine.
- Set the machine to cold water on the delicate cycle.
- Use a normal amount of laundry detergent. Do not use fabric softener or any other additives.

Drying

- Transfer linens to the dryer as a separate load. Do not add dryer sheets or any other items.
- Set the dryer to medium heat.
- Dry fully (approximately 30–40 minutes, but adjust as needed for your dryer)
- **Important:** Make sure linens are completely dry before ironing. Unlike older guidance, linens should not be left damp.

Treating Stains

- **Spot cleaners and stain sprays ARE permitted** and encouraged for stubborn stains, especially from communion wine.
 - For heavy stains, hand-wash the affected area first, then machine wash as normal. Repeat hand-washing if needed.
 - Wine stains can be difficult to remove completely — do your best but don't be overly worried if faint staining remains.
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4. Ironing the Linens

Set your iron to hot. Each linen type is ironed and folded differently — follow the steps for each item below.

Corporal

The corporal is the large square cloth spread on the altar under the chalice and paten.

1. Remove from dryer and spray lightly with starch. (If you forget at dryer time, spray just before ironing.)
2. Place the corporal on the ironing board right side up.
3. Spray with water and iron the entire surface. Make sure all hems are lying flat. Iron the wrong side too if needed.
4. Fold into thirds (**top-to-bottom**). This won't always line up perfectly — just do your best.
5. Turn the corporal over **so the side with the cross faces UP**.
6. Fold into thirds again (left-to-right). **You MUST fold left side to the middle first, then right side to the middle.**
7. Iron both creases firmly. You should now have 9 equal squares.
8. Open the corporal like opening a book from the back. It is now ready to store.

Note: The corporal may already show its fold lines from the previous use, even after washing. This is normal.

Lavabo Towel

The lavabo towel is the plain rectangular cloth the priest uses to dry his hands.

1. Place the lavabo towel on the ironing board with the wrong side facing up.
2. Spray with water and iron until fully pressed and smooth.
3. (Optional) Turn over and iron the right side as well, though this is not required.
4. With the wrong side still facing up, fold the longest side in half vertically (fold it lengthwise).
5. Press the crease firmly.
6. Set aside and repeat for remaining towels.

Purificator

The purificator is the smaller cloth used to wipe the chalice and the priest's fingers during communion. It has a distinctive pleated fold that keeps the cross hidden inside.

Folding Tip: A video demonstration of purificator folding is available from your coordinator. Watch it before your first time if possible — the pleats are easier to learn by watching than by reading.

Step-by-step instructions:

Iron the Purificator

1. Place the purificator wrong side up on the ironing board.
2. Iron the entire purificator until all wrinkles are removed. Check that the hems are flat.

Create the Vertical Thirds

3. Fold the purificator in thirds vertically (folding the long sides inward).

4. Iron the crease on each third so you have a long, narrow strip.

Flip and Fold in Half

5. Flip the strip over **so the cross is now facing DOWN** (hidden on the bottom).
6. Fold the strip in half by bringing the two short ends together.

Add the Pleats

7. On one open end, fold back approximately 1 finger's width to create a small pleat. Flip over and press the pleat firmly with the iron.
8. Repeat on the opposite end: fold back 1 finger's width, flip over, and press.
9. There should be a visible crease through the cross area when finished.

The finished purificator should look like a compact rectangle with neat pleated edges and the cross hidden inside.

5. Returning Linens to Church

1. Bring linens to church and place them in the drawer on the left side of the sink in the East Sacristy.
2. All linens must be returned before the following Sunday.

Note: You do not need to iron everything in one sitting. Feel free to take breaks and complete the ironing over several sessions.

Quick Reference: Supplies Needed at Home

Item	Notes
Washing machine & dryer	For church linen only — no personal laundry mixed in
Laundry detergent	Regular detergent; no fabric softener or dryer sheets
Stain spray / spot cleaner	Permitted and encouraged for wine stains
Spray starch	Apply before ironing corporals
Ironing board & iron	Set iron to hot
Plastic shoebox bin	For transporting ironed linens back to church

Thank you for your ministry and dedication to St. Wenceslaus!

Questions? Contact Margaret Post for guidance.