

ST. CATHERINE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ACOLYTE INFORMATIONAL MANUAL

Welcome to the ministry of the Acolyte at St. Catherine's Episcopal Church!

It is a privilege to serve at God's Table, and it is an offering to God. It is also a responsibility and therefore requires knowledge, training and PRACTICE. By being an acolyte, you've taken on a role of leadership in the worship service. *Thank you!*

This manual includes

- a history of the acolyte ministry,
- terms you'll need to know,
- responsibilities and procedures,
- a description of the routine duties of an acolyte,
- various extra duties for the more formal liturgies, and
- written instructions for the proper manner in which duties are to be carried out.

Even as we strive to do our best while serving God and our neighbor, we all make mistakes. When this happens, please remember these three things:

1. *There is no mistake you can make that someone else hasn't already made.*
2. *There is no mistake you can make that cannot be corrected.*
3. *God loves you, regardless of any mistakes you make.*

By reading this manual thoroughly, you'll have a firm foundation for the ministry you offer and won't be as prone to making mistakes. If you have any questions regarding the services and what you need to do, please ask them in a timely manner. This means before the morning you're scheduled to serve, not just before you process down the aisle.

History and Function of Acolytes

The ministry of acolytes is a very old tradition in the Church. Acolytes have served as ministry helpers at God's altars for over seventeen centuries. Acolytes have been around as helpers to priests for almost as long as there have been priests.

Today, acolytes serve at the altar and help bishops, priests and deacons. They generally assist in processions by carrying processional crosses, torches, flags, books and other items.

Acolytes work in close coordination with members of a larger worship team. This team includes the altar guild, greeters, lectors, Lay Eucharistic ministers, musicians, ushers

and more as needed, for each service. When we all come together and work as a team, we are able to lead the congregation in a worship service that brings glory to God.

Acolyte Responsibilities

I. Preparation

The Week Before

Good liturgy always requires careful preparation. As an acolyte, you are expected to be prepared and know what to do in whichever position you serve. Most mistakes occur when we haven't taken the time to prepare. Lack of communication, last-minute substitutes, late arrival at church, etc., can result in avoidable problems.

Each acolyte is expected to know when they are scheduled to serve. Keep a copy of the Master Schedule in a visible location (refrigerator, message board, etc.). If you know you're not going to be available to serve on certain dates, you or your parent should email the person charged with creating the schedule as soon as possible so that you will not be scheduled for those dates. At St. Catherine's, our secretary Julie Seal creates the schedule.

However, life happens, and if you are unable to serve on a Sunday after the schedule has been prepared, it is your responsibility to find a substitute. Please make sure the substitute is someone who is able to carry out your scheduled duty and they have agreed to do so. Then send an email to Julie Seal (secretary@stcatherinesal.com) to report the change and the person who will be filling in for you. The service bulletin is prepared on Wednesday morning, and it is a sign of respect to make sure substitutes are recognized in the bulletin. Of course, illness cannot be known in advance, but it is still your responsibility to find a substitute.

The Night Before

Lay out your clothes and shoes the night before so that you're not rushing when you get up. Running around, stressing, and arguing with a parent before you arrive at the church does not start the day off in a good way. By preparing the night before you'll arrive ready to serve and worship the next morning.

Finally, get a good night's sleep. By being well rested you'll be alert and able to give your service your full attention.

The Morning That You Serve

Acolytes should arrive and be in the vesting room at least fifteen minutes before the service begins. You need to get your cassocks on and light the candles.

This also allows enough time to receive any additional instructions if there is a change in the service.

You'll want to allow for additional time when it's a special service – for example Christmas Eve, Easter Vigil, Baptism, etc. So please arrive 30 minutes before the service.

Come prepared to serve. Please try to eat before you serve. Also, come well-groomed and dressed properly. Make sure your hands, fingernails and face are clean. Hair should be neat. Do not wear jewelry that may catch on any of the worship implements you may handle.

Please do not wear items that have colorful or bold prints that may show through a white cassock. This can be distracting to some in the congregation. We ask that you do not wear flip-flops, because the noise they create can be disturbing to some. If you choose to wear sandals, please make sure they have a strap around the back. Athletic shoes are permitted, but please make sure they are clean (and don't give off a funky odor). Make sure your shoe laces are tied so you won't trip. Some may prefer to be serve barefooted or wear socks. If you serve barefoot, feet need to be clean, toenails clipped. Socks need to be plain black or plain white - no patterns or bright colors.

Once you are vested, those assigned should light the candles 10 minutes before the service (see section III. below). Once candles are lit, all will gather for a brief prayer. After the prayer go and retrieve liturgical items such as torches, processional cross and banner and gather at the back of the Nave.

II. Vestments

Before the Service

Please arrive early enough to give yourself time to get vested (dressed). To make getting vested easier and less time consuming, take the time to try on several of the albs (white) or cassocks (black robes) and cottas (the short white robes) before you're scheduled to serve.

Find the two that fit you best. This way you'll be able to quickly find an alb or a cassock and cotta and not have to spend time trying on several looking for one that fits. All albs, cassocks and cottas are numbered, and there is a chart where you can record the number of the cassocks and cottas that fit you best.

When choosing an alb or cassock, make sure it's not too long. You have to negotiate several steps and you don't want to step on the hem of the robe and fall. You also don't want to choose one that is too short. Also make sure you do not choose a cincture (rope belt) that is too long.

Make sure the robe you wear is clean and has all its buttons and snaps. If it is in need of laundering or repair please notify the acolyte master and take it home to

be laundered or to a seamstress if in need of repair. If you take any vestments home to launder or repair them, please bring them back before the next Sunday.

The last thing you need to put on is a cross. Please note: The cross is not a form of entertainment. Do not spin it, wrap the cord around it, or twirl it. We have different crosses to symbolize one's progression in ability and knowledge. Wood crosses are worn by Junior Acolyte. Silver crosses are worn by Senior Acolyte. The criteria for each level is described below.

After the Service

Please make sure you hang your robe back up where it belongs; button or snap the top together. Put the cross back on its hanger. You didn't find the robe on the floor, please don't leave it there. If you find a robe on the floor please help to care for the robes and put it back on its hanger as described.

III. The Service Candles

About 10 minutes before the service starts, the candles are lit by the Torch Bearers.

There is a traditional manner for lighting and extinguishing the candles that all acolytes should know and follow. Candles remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World; they also recall the days of the early Christians when candles and oil lamps were the only sources of light indoors.

There will always be at least two candles on the altar. As you face the altar from the nave, the right side is known as the *Epistle side* and the left as the *Gospel side*. There are some basic rules to know when lighting and extinguishing candles:

- Gospel candles never burn alone. Therefore, the Gospel candle (left side) is always lit last, and extinguished first.
- The candles are lighted starting from the cross and going out to symbolize that the light of Jesus shines out from the cross; they are extinguished in reverse.
- A Paschal candle is used during the 50 days of Easter and at baptisms and funerals. It is to be lighted well before the start of the service and is not extinguished at the end of the service. If a Paschal candle is present and not lighted by the time you are vested, ask the Priest whether you should light it.
- Advent wreath candles are lighted before other candles and extinguished last. The number of wreath candles lighted corresponds to the week of Advent. A rose-colored candle represents the third Sunday of Advent. Always light the same candles in the same order from week to week.

- Use caution when carrying a candle lighter near the altar so that wax or soot does not drop on the linen.

Lighting Candles

Candles can be lighted by an individual or a team of acolytes. Use the following procedures when lighting candles:

1. Check that the taper in your candle lighter is long enough to do the job. The white taper is visible in the space above the knob used to slide it up and down.
2. If your taper is too short, replace it with a new one (ask for help as needed).
3. Look to see whether there is a Paschal candle. If not, light your candle lighter using the matches kept on the shelves beside the candle lighter.
4. If there is a Paschal candle, light your tapers from it.
5. Walk to the center in front of the altar. Reverence the altar (by bowing) and proceed to the candle nearest the central cross. The light moves out from the cross.
6. To light a candle, hold the flame from your candle lighter at the top of the candle; tip up the back end of your candle lighter to place the flame near the wick.
7. We use oil-based candles so they light quite easily. Hold the flame in place for a few seconds, and then check whether the candle is lighted.
8. If you cannot see the top, look for a glow under the brass ornament at the top of the candle. If you still can't tell, ask your partner to check. If you still cannot tell, walk back to the front of the sanctuary and look.
9. Light the Torches and the candles on the Lectern.
10. Extinguish your candle lighter after lighting the last candle.
11. Return to the center of the altar, bow, and return the candle lighter to its holder in the vestry room.

Extinguishing Candles

Candles are extinguished in the reverse order as they are lighted.

Extinguish Lectern candles, Torch candles and then the altar candles from the outermost in. Altar candles are extinguished last, unless there is an Advent wreath, which is put out last.

The Paschal Candle is extinguished the very last of all, after parishioners have left the nave.

Use the bell-shaped snuffer on the end of the candle lighter to extinguish a candle. Hold the bell down over the top of the candle until you see smoke escaping, which tells you the candle has gone out. Do not push the snuffer down on top of the candle or you will ruin the wick.

IV. The Opening Procession

Crucifer

When signaled by the Priest during the processional hymn, proceed down the aisle at a slow pace. Go past the table altar and up the step to the front of the high altar. Do not pause but continue on to place the cross in its stand. Go to your assigned seat and prepare to participate actively in worship.

Torchbearers

Your job during a procession is to stay next to the crucifer, wherever he/she may go. Carry your torch with your right hand below and near your waist and your left hand on top near your chin. The torch should be held high enough so that your feet and/or robe do not bump it as you walk. Try to hold your torch at the same height as the other torch bearer. The tallest torch bearer should set the height and the other match it.

Walk past the altar table and continue on to place the torch in its stand at the top of the steps. After putting your torch in its stand, go to your assigned seat and prepare to actively participate in worship.

V. The Gospel Procession

Crucifer & Torchbearers

When the second lesson ends, wait for the Priest to announce the Gradual Hymn (the hymn before the Gospel), then rise and move calmly but to the Crucifer & torch stands. Remove the Cross and/or torch from its stand, take your position on the floor below and in front of the altar, facing the congregation. Crucifer stands in front with torches immediately behind standing side by side.

When signaled by the Priest, the crucifer will proceed down the aisle just past the "short pews" and turn around, facing the altar. Torches should stop just behind the Crucifer and turn in, facing the other torch bearer. Lower your torch to the floor and keep your eyes on it during the reading of the Gospel to avoid dumping liquid wax or burning something. Do not look around at the congregation during the reading.

Torchbearers

After the Gospel has been read, the reader will step to the side of the aisle, to make room.

As the crucifer walks past you, turn and take your place next to and behind him/her, process just like the opening procession. Put your torch away and return to your assigned seat.

Crucifer:

At the end of the Gospel reading, the reader will move to the side of the aisle to allow you to pass.

Process forward between the Torchbearers back to the altar. The Torchbearers will form up and process behind you. Do not stop at the altar like you did for the opening procession, but proceed directly to the cross holder and stow the cross.

Help the Torchbearers stow their torches, then take your seat behind the altar for the sermon.

VI. The Closing Procession

Torchbearers

After the Priest gives a final blessing, rise from your seat and proceed to the torch stands to retrieve your torches. Stand slightly behind the Crucifer. Wait for the Crucifer to start moving, and then follow the Crucifer as in the opening and Gospel processions.

Follow the Crucifer all the way to the doors at the back of the nave; remain in place through the end of the hymn. After the dismissal put out your torch and then return it to its stand.

Crucifer

After the Priest gives the final blessing, rise from your seat and move to retrieve your cross. Move to the top of the stairs near the table altar, the same way you did for the Gospel procession. Leave enough room for the Torchbearers to get into position behind you.

Watch for the Priest to give you your signal to start processing calmly down the aisle. Remain standing with the Cross at the back doors until the final hymn is finished and the Dismissal has been given. Then return the Cross to its stand.