

A Handbook on the Ministry of Acolytes

Introduction

The role of the acolyte as an integral part of the Christian worship service is almost as old as Christianity itself. The word acolyte comes from the Greek word, *akolouthos*, meaning follower or attendant. Though traditionally acolytes were considered the fourth order of the church along with bishops, priests and deacons, and were expected to train for the priesthood, today, acolytes, at least in the Episcopal Church, are people (often young people) who have chosen this particular calling as a way of showing their commitment to God and their church. As such, acolytes today are as important to the Christian worship service as they were in the days of the early church.

Role of the Acolyte

Because the acolyte is an essential part of the episcopal worship service, it is essential that their training, behavior, demeanor, and dress be in line with the seriousness of their role during church services. Acolytes have a number of tasks before and during the service. Prior to the beginning of each service, acolytes are responsible for lighting the altar candles. During processions they carry the cross, the torches, even the Gospel. On occasion, acolytes also carry banners during the processions. Once the entrance procession is completed, acolytes will be responsible for processing the Gospel into the congregation to be read there, assisting the priest as Server at the Eucharist and handling the offering plates and alms basin and leading the altar party out of the sanctuary at the close of service.

Why is being an acolyte important?

As stated earlier, the acolytes are a vital part of the Christian worship service. Their demeanor, behavior and dress very much help set the tone for the service. Their service is a gesture of love and respect for God and for the church.

Routine Guidelines

Qualifications: acolytes must be in at least third grade to serve.

Trainings: All acolytes are required to attend a once a year training led by the priest, acolyte coordinator and the Children and Families Minister.

When you are not able to serve: Please try to swap or find a substitute if you are unable to serve on a Sunday on which you are scheduled.

On Sunday Mornings

All acolytes are expected to be at the church 15 minutes before the service begins.

Acolytes must wear an alb, cincture (rope belt), gloves (if a torchbearer) and a cross.

To the best of your ability, do not wear flip flops, or Birkenstocks. Please wear dress shoes if at all possible.

When you arrive for a service, go to the acolyte room (off the hallway in the back of the sanctuary) and vest (put your robes on).

Check in with Thom Long OR the VPOD (Vestry Person of the Day) to let him/her/them know you are here.

During the service, please participate in the service. You are a worship leader and help set the tone for the rest of the congregation such as sitting still, standing and kneeling when appropriate and paying attention to the service. Do not try to have conversations with other acolytes unless it is in regards to the service. Please no phones during the service.

After the service, return the cross or torch to its appropriate location.

When disrobing, please hang your robe, cincture, and cross properly and place gloves in the basket.

Role of Team Captain: The crucifer is usually the most experienced acolyte serving on any given Sunday. Therefore, the crucifer should consider themselves the captain for that particular day and assist the younger acolytes with their duties if necessary.

Participating in Worship

There is a lot happening in the Episcopal worship service and can seem confusing. But remember that the various traditions of this service are as old as Christianity itself and are meant to show the deepest respect for God. For acolytes, the worship service can be divided into five parts:

- 1) Pre-service Preparation, which includes getting vested (putting on your robes) and lighting the altar candles and Baptismal candle (when appropriate).
- 2) At St. Peter's, when the acolytes, chalice ministers and clergy are in place, we say a prayer before the church service with the Daughters of the King after which we line up in our places, ready to process into the service at the sound of the first hymn.
- 3) The Gathering, which includes the processional hymn, the opening acclamation, the Collect (a prayer that "collects" our thoughts), the Gloria (depending on the church season) and the collect of the day.
- 4) The Proclaiming, which includes the lessons: scripture readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms, The Epistles (or letters) and the Gospel, the Sermon and the Peace.
- 5) The Eucharist or communion, which is preceded by an offertory sentence and an offertory anthem, the Great Thanksgiving, which formally begins the Eucharist, the Sanctus, The Lord's Prayer, the passing of the Eucharist to the congregation, eucharistic anthem and prayers, the Post-Eucharist prayer, and the blessing.

- 6) The Going out to the World or procession, which includes the closing hymn and the dismissal.

How to Vest Before the Service

When you arrive 15 minutes before the service, go directly to the acolyte room which is down the hall and to the right at the back of the nave.

Go to the rack holding the albs (robes) and find the one assigned to you. Look for your name on the tag. If someone already has that robe, look for another robe of the same size listed on the tag.

Choose a cincture (rope) from the bar hanging on the side of the acolyte closet.

Tie it around your waist.

If you are a torchbearer, choose a pair of gloves from the basket and put them on.

Put on a cross. Ribbons on crosses reflect grade level not years of service.

Please do not wear:

Flip flops, Birkenstocks, tennis shoes (if possible).

Blue Jeans

Dark or brightly colored clothing—it will show through the alb.

Clothing with writing—it will show through the alb.

After The Service.

Please do the following:

Return your gloves to the basket.

Hang up your cross.

Hang your cincture on the hook on the wall.

Hang your alb up on the hanger with the tag that has your name or the corresponding robe size.

Processions

Procession In

The following is the order of procession (walking in);

Crucifer

Two Torchbearers

Two Chalice Bearers

Priest

Walk slowly in a dignified manner. There is no rush.

Crucifer, and chalice bearers walk straight to their seats (on the right of the altar). The crucifer puts the cross in the stand with the cross facing the congregation.

The torchbearers walk up the steps to the altar and place the torches in their stands (one on each side of the reredos, where the flowers sit). Then the torchbearers move to their seats. It is customary for the torchbearer closest to the chairs to wait for the other torchbearer to join him/her and move to their seats together.

Recession (walking out)

Crucifer

Torch Bearers

Chalice Bearers

Priest

During the closing hymn, at the priest's cue, the crucifer and torchbearers move to gather the cross and their torches. When these items are in hand the acolytes move to the altar rail where they get into formation with the cross leading and the torchbearers following 2 in a row. Pause here until all are in formation.

Again, walk slowly down the aisle.

When you come to the back of the church, turn and face the congregation and wait for the priest to offer the dismissal.

Once the dismissal is given, torchbearers extinguish their torches and return them to their stands.

One of the torchbearers extinguishes altar candles

Gospel Procession

During the hymn before the gospel reading, wait for the priest's cue then torchbearer and crucifer take up the cross and torches and move to the altar rail and wait there.

The crucifer waits for the priest to pick up the Gospel book and join them at the altar rail. Then, together they all process to midway down the main aisle to about the fourth row.

Here is the arrangement:

Crucifer

Torchbearers

Priest

Once the midway point of the aisle is reached, the crucifer stops and the torchbearers make space for the Gospel to be read between them.

When the Gospel is read, the priest steps aside to allow the crucifer and the torchbearers to make their way back to the altar.

The crucifer and torchbearers return the cross and torches to their places then take their seats.

The Crucifer/Server Role

Crucifer:

The main role of the crucifer is to carry the processional cross during the worship service and to lead the altar party and clergy into the service.

The cross always leads a procession with few exceptions.

The cross is the most important and recognizable symbol in Christian worship. It must be carried with dignity and pride. The cross should be carried high enough so that everyone in the congregation can see it as it passes. If you are right handed, grasp the cross with your right hand, with your left hand providing stability below. Reverse this if you are left handed. Your hands should be about 6 inches apart. Carry the cross forward so that the pole is in front of you and not between your legs. This will allow you to walk easily.

The crucifer begins the procession when the opening hymn begins.

Here at St. Peter's, the crucifer also assists as server and handles the offering plates and alms basin.

Server:

As server, the acolyte carries the vessels back and forth between the credence table (table to the right of the altar on which the vessels and other items used for celebration of the Eucharist are kept).

There are two parts to this:

Before Eucharist: Bring the water to the priest who is setting the table. When the priest has returned the water to the server, the server goes back to the Credence table to retrieve the Lavabo Bowl (silver bowl for washing) and the purificator (towel). The bowl is held in the server's hand with the purificator draped over the same arm. In the opposite hand, the cruet (container of

water) should be held. (For those who are right handed, the bowl and purificator are typically held in the left hand while the cruet is held and poured with the right.) Bring this over to the priest who will hold his or her hands over the bowl while the server pours water over them. The priest will offer a short prayer and dry their hands with the purificator. The server then returns these items to the Credence table.

After Eucharist: The server stands near the altar ready to receive the Eucharistic vessels from the priest as he or she clears the altar. These items are taken and placed, respectfully, on the Credence table. When the altar is cleared, the acolyte returns to his or her seat.

The Plates:

The crucifer also collects the plates from the shelf below the Credence table. When the ushers, or whomever is bringing up the bread and the wine for Eucharist reaches the altar rail, the crucifer brings them the offering plates, carrying them in the alms basin, the large gold plate in which the offering plates are both distributed and collected. When the offering has been collected by the ushers, they are brought to the altar rail where the crucifer collects them in the alms basin and brings them to the priest to be presented. The priest returns the offering to the crucifer who places them back on the lower shelf of the Credence table.

During Communion:

The crucifer holds the gluten free wafers during the distribution of communion, paying attention to whether the priest has a request for a gluten free wafer.

The Torchbearer Role:

The torchbearers carry the torches in procession before, during and after the service. They are also responsible for lighting and extinguishing the candles both on the altar and those (the torches) beside the reredos (table behind the altar).

The torchbearer also is responsible for putting the programs down on the seats for the acolytes so that they have a program waiting for them after they have completed the procession.

Since there are two torchbearers, before the service one lights the candles, and one places the service bulletins in the acolytes' seats.

Lighting and Extinguishing Candles

Steps to light the altar candles:

Find the taper to the right of the altar, behind the cutout or Baptismal Font. There will be a taper and matches or a lighter there. Use the lever on the taper to push the wax tip out of the top. Light the wax tip of the taper.

Move to the front of the altar.

Bow.

Light candles beginning with the left candle beside the reredos, move to the right candle beside the reredos, then move to the altar and light the candle on the right side of the altar, finally lighting last, the candle on the left.

Extinguishing the candles:

Using the bell-shaped cup opposite the wax string on the taper, gently cover the flame of the candle lowering the taper enough so that it meets the follower (gold band on the candle). Hold it a moment then lift the taper off the candle making sure that the flame is extinguished. Extinguish candles in reverse order of how they were lit: begin with left candle on altar, move to the right candle, back to the right candle at reredos and finish with left candle at reredos.

Proper Names of Vessels



Paten



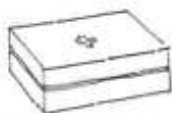
Flagon



Cruet



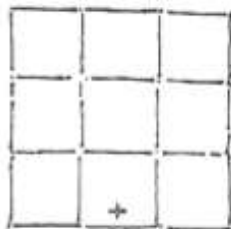
Lavabo bowl, cruet, and towel



Bread box



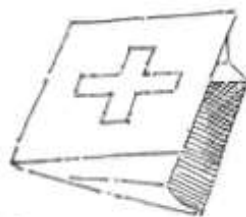
Ciborium



Corporal



Lavabo towel



Shawl



Burse and veil



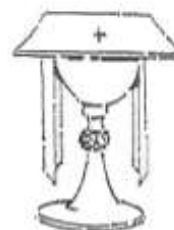
Chalice



Chalice with purificator



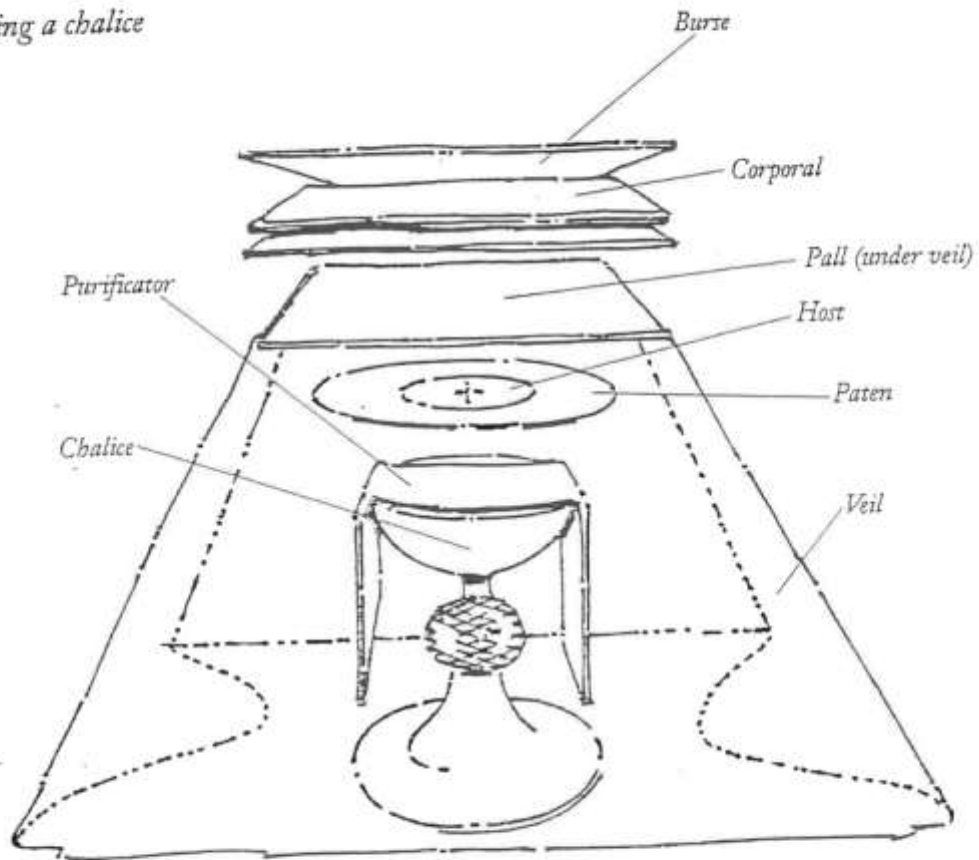
Chalice with purificator, paten, and host



Chalice with purificator, paten, host, and pall

Vesting a Chalice

Vesting a chalice



Chalice with purificator, paten, host, and pall covered with veil and topped with burse containing the corporal