

Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

Acolyte Manual



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Introduction

“In the meantime, the boy Samuel continued to serve the Lord, wearing a sacred linen apron. Each year his mother would make a little robe and take it to him when she accompanied her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice...The boy Samuel grew up in the service of the Lord.”

1 Samuel 2:18-21

Acolyte means an attendant or follower and Samuel is one of the first examples of an assistant to a priest. Your job as an acolyte is to assist the celebrant (the priest in charge of a worship service) and enhance the worship service to help glorify God. You are a minister of the church who is called to serve God. Therefore, every action you take should be done respectfully and in a dignified manner; the goal is for the attention of the congregation to be on the liturgy and not on the ministers. Serving as an acolyte is a commitment of your time and talent to the Lord’s service, which is greatly appreciated.

As described by Dennis G. Michno in *A Manual for Acolytes*:

“The patron of those who serve at the altar is Vincent, Deacon and Martyr. He lived in the late third century, was martyred in the year 304, and is commemorated in our calendar on January 22. Vincent is remembered for his love of God, his faithfulness to his bishop, and his unswerving loyalty to his responsibilities. These traits--love, faithfulness, and loyalty--are virtues that all who are privileged to serve at the altar should cultivate. Remember: our purpose is rooted in our love of God, our faithfulness is seen in our willingness to serve responsibly, and our loyalty is demonstrated in how carefully we carry out our duties. Love, faithfulness, and loyalty are the virtues we seek to perfect. The server’s aim is to be as steadfast as St. Vincent.”



Overall Responsibilities for All Acolytes

Overall responsibilities for acolytes are listed below. It is important to know your duties and be confident in your abilities. Do not worry about mistakes—they are bound to occur (even the Celebrant makes mistakes). Always act as if everything you do is supposed to happen that way and most people will never know whether a mistake was made or not. An acolyte's responsibilities include:

- serving when assigned and being prompt.
- helping to get the church ready for worship (e.g., lighting candles).
- understanding the different parts of a worship service; knowing what is supposed to happen and when.
- knowing the specific responsibilities of the assigned position (e.g., crucifer).
- performing actions carefully and with reverence.
- maintaining a neat appearance.
- helping lead the congregation in worship by joining in prayers and singing and kneeling or standing at appropriate times.

Scheduling

Each month, you can find the lay minister schedule on the church website, www.holytrinitychurch.info, under the “Acolyte, LEMs, and Lectors” portion of the “Worship” tab. The schedule is also linked to the weekly Holy Trinity Happenings email. There are six acolyte teams that rotate weekly. Each team has a partner team to go to if a conflict with a certain date arises. Team St. Ambrose is partnered with Team St. Augustine, Team St. Francis with Team St. Clare, and Team St. Lydia with Team St. Paul. If you have a conflict for the date you are scheduled, you need to arrange for a substitute from the partner team if at all possible; you can either trade with someone or ask him/her to fill in for you. After you identify a substitute, call or email the church office so that the master schedule can be updated. This process ensures that everyone serves as equally as possible.

Vestments

You should be vested 15 minutes before the start of a service; which means you should arrive no later than 20 minutes before a service starts. Acolyte and crucifer robes are kept in the vesting room. Acolytes wear red cassocks covered by white cottas. Make sure the cotta fits over the cassock easily and comes down to the waist and is proportionate in size. The crucifer wears a white, hooded alb, as well as a cross and cincture (a long white rope with knots at the ends) that are kept in the top drawer in the vesting room. The cincture is tied in a slip knot on the left side. Robes should come down to the tops of your shoes. When serving, you should always wear black or dark shoes, with dark socks.

Vestments remind us of the garments worn by Jesus and the apostles and should be treated with respect. Make sure your robe is not torn or soiled and always hang it up after a service. As you put on your vestments, you should focus on the job you have to do; remember that you are a worship leader. When vested, your posture and actions are more noticeable than normal (and you are usually in front of the congregation). When standing,

stand straight, keeping your weight evenly balanced so that you do not sway. When you are walking or standing, your hands should be folded in front of you, just above the waist, unless you are holding something. Always walk somewhat slowly with poise and your head up. When seated, sit up straight and keep your feet flat on the floor. When you kneel, keep your back straight; don't slouch down onto your heels.

Before Worship

Candles should be lighted no later than ten minutes before the start of a service. Crucifers should check with the Celebrant (and the other acolytes with the crucifer) for any special instructions for the upcoming service (for example, during Lent a special procession is sometimes used). As soon as the candles are lighted, get items you are supposed to carry and assemble in the narthex. When the choir arrives or at the time for the service, take your positions for the procession.

Procession

The usual order for a procession is shown below. All positions are not filled at every service. Four acolytes are used for the main Sunday service: a crucifer/server, two torch bearers, and a Gospel bearer. Only a crucifer/server is used at the early Sunday service. The duties of each acolyte position are described in following sections. The procession should never begin until the Celebrant acknowledges that he/she is ready.

Procession Order

Crucifer and Torchbearers
Banner Bearer
Gospel Bearer
Choir
Celebrant

Candle Lighting Procedures

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 or beside 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.
- 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 placed in front of the altar and is lighted well before the start of the service (usually by a priest or member of the altar guild who has arrived early) 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 Celebrant 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.
- 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. The procedures listed below are for one acolyte working alone. If two are doing the job, their actions mirror each other and both the Gospel and Epistle side are lighted together. When working with a partner, do not move to the next candle until your partner has finished lighting his/her candle. If your partner is having trouble lighting a candle, please assist.

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. If your taper is too short, ask a member of the altar guild to replace it.
2. Look to see whether there is a Paschal candle. If not, light the taper of your candle lighter with matches kept in the sacristy drawer.
3. Walk around the Gospel side of the chancel to the end of the aisle in front of the sanctuary. Reverence the altar (by bowing) and proceed to the Epistle candle(s). To help you remember which candle to light first, remember that "light" and "right" rhyme and so you "light the right." If an Advent wreath is present, light the appropriate number of candles before lighting the altar candles.
4. 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. 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. If you cannot see the top, look for a glow under the brass ornament at the top of the candle. If you are working in a team, ask your partner to check. If you still cannot tell, walk back to the front of the sanctuary and look.
5. After lighting the Epistle side, cross the altar and light the Gospel candle(s). Reverence the altar when you cross the middle in front of the cross.
6. Extinguish your candle lighter after lighting the last candle, return to the end of the aisle, bow, and return the candle lighter to its holder.

Extinguishing Candles

Candles are extinguished in the reverse order as they are lighted. The Gospel side is extinguished first. Altar candles are extinguished last, unless there is an Advent wreath, which is put out last.

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.

Responsibilities of Individual Acolyte Positions

Described below are the responsibilities and procedures to be performed by each acolyte position. The crucifer/server should oversee the other acolytes, answering any questions they might have and assigning positions or recruiting help should some acolytes be absent. Remain alert during the service to remind other acolytes of or assist them in their duties.

Crucifer/Server Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the crucifer/server are:

- Check with the Celebrant for any special instructions or procedures and inform other acolytes.
- Should acolytes be absent, tell the Acolyte Master.
- Lead the processional, Gospel, and recessional processions.
- Assist other acolytes as needed during the service.
- Assist the Celebrant in communion preparations.
- Wash the Celebrant's hands before communion.
- Refill the chalice(s) as needed.
- Retrieve reserved sacraments from sacristy when needed.

Before the Service

Check to see that all the assigned acolytes are present. If not, inform the Acolyte Master. If only two others are present, do not use a Gospel bearer. If only one other is present, do not use torches.

Light the altar candles at least ten minutes before the service. Check with the Celebrant for any last minute instructions. Get the cross from the holder and be in the narthex ready to go, three minutes before the service begins. When the choir arrives or at the time for the service, make sure the torch bearers light their torches and get in position for the procession.

The Procession

When you are in position for the start of the service, the Celebrant will signal to the organist to begin the processional hymn; be ready early, the service should not wait on you. When the organist finishes the introduction to the processional hymn, check that the Celebrant is ready and proceed down the aisle slowly with dignity, as the singing begins.

Carry the cross with your right hand below and near your waist and your left hand on top in a reversed position (hand behind the cross with your palm facing forward) near your chin. The cross should be held high enough so that your feet and/or robe do not bump it as you walk. Be aware of low objects (such as beams) that may be in the path of the cross.

Proceed to the end of the aisle, and turn right and then left. When you reach a position next to the cross holder, put the cross away securely and take a place in front of one of the seats in the sanctuary. Because of their special duties, crucifers/servers may not sing in the choir when they serve as an acolyte.

The Gospel Procession

At the start of the Gospel hymn, remove the cross from its holder and stand and wait for the torch and Gospel bearers to join you. Proceed around the chancel and down the aisle to the **fifth** pew. Turn around and face the altar, continuing to hold the cross aloft. After the Gospel has been read, the reader and Gospel bearer will step to the side of the aisle enabling you to lead the procession back around the chancel. Pause when you reach the cross holder to let everyone go by; put the cross away and return to the sanctuary for the sermon. Remain seated in the sanctuary during the sermon in case the speaker needs any assistance.

Preparation for Holy Communion

During the time of the offering, you will assist the Celebrant in preparing the elements for communion. At smaller services, the oblations (bread, wine, and water) are found on the credence table. At some services, the oblations are brought forward by members of the congregation or the ushers.

Assist the Celebrant by handing items to him/her from the credence table. After the altar is set, hold the lavabo bowl in your left hand with the small towel draped over your left arm. Hold the open water cruet/flagon in your right hand by the handle and stand by the Celebrant. When the Celebrant turns to you, pour a small amount of water over the fingers he/she holds in the bowl. Extend your arm to offer the towel and wait for it to be given back to you. Return the bowl, towel, and water to the credence table and go back to your seat.

Following the Lord's Prayer and Fraction Anthem, when the Celebrant holds up the large wafer of bread and breaks it (called the fracture), the crucifer should move the extra chalice to the altar from the credence table. During communion, stand behind the altar with the flagon of consecrated wine to refill the chalice(s) as needed.

If an extra lay Eucharist minister is needed, be prepared to administer a chalice during communion. Always use a purificator when you pour so that wine does not drip.

The Recession

At the start of the recessional hymn, remove the cross from its holder and wait for the torch and Gospel bearers to get into position. As **soon as the torch bearers join you**, proceed around the side of the chancel. Stop at the end of the aisle, in front of the sanctuary facing the altar; you may rest the cross on the first step. When signaled by the Celebrant, turn and proceed down the aisle.

Torch Bearer Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the torch bearer are:

- Check with the crucifer for any special instructions or procedures.
- Carry a torch during the processional, Gospel, and recessional processions.
- Work in synchronization with the other torch bearer.
- Distribute and collect the offering plates.
- Close the gate for communion, then re-open the gate after communion.

Before the Service

Get your torch from its stand and be in the narthex ready to go, three minutes before the service begins. When the choir arrives or at the time of the service, light your torch (matches are kept in the cabinet in the narthex) and get in position for the procession by standing next to the crucifer.

The Procession

When signaled by the Celebrant during the processional hymn, the crucifer will proceed down the aisle at a slow pace. Your job during a procession is to stay behind the crucifer, wherever he/she may go.

Carry your torch upright with your right hand below and near your waist and your left hand on top in a reversed position (hand behind the pole with your palm facing forward) near your chin. The torch should be held high enough so that your feet and/or robe do not bump it as you walk. It is important that you 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. Be aware of low objects (such as beams) that may be in the path of the torch.

Follow the crucifer as he/she proceeds to the end of the aisle. As the crucifer turns right, one of you follows him/her to the right while the other torch bearer turns left. Put your torch securely away. The torch bearer who turned left goes through the sacristy to take his/her seat. After putting your torch away, take a place in front pew in the east transept.

The Gospel Procession

At the start of the Gospel hymn, remove your torch from its stand, and line up behind the crucifer. The crucifer will wait until one of the torch bearers has walked through the sacristy and is ready with his/her torch, standing with the Gospel bearer. The crucifer will proceed around the chancel and down the aisle to the fifth pew and turn around, facing the altar. You should stop at the fourth pew and turn in, facing the other torch bearer. Rest your torch on the ground and do not look around at the congregation during the reading. The Gospel bearer (if present) will stand between the two torch bearers and hold the book for the reader of the Gospel. After the Gospel has been read, the reader and Gospel bearer will step to the side of the aisle. As the crucifer walks past you, turn and take your place behind him/her and proceed back around the chancel. Put your torch away as you did following the opening procession. Return to the transept.

At the Offering

At the beginning of the offertory anthem, the ushers will bring the elements to the altar. A torch bearer will take the offertory plates from under the credence table and give one to each usher. The same torch bearer will then collect the plates when they are brought up at the end of the offertory anthem and give them to the Celebrant for blessing and to be placed on the altar.

A torch bearer will close the gate and move the kneeler cushion at the entry of the sanctuary after the ushers have received the offertory plates, then return to his/her seat. Attention will need to be paid so the same torch bearer can open the gate and move the kneeler cushion aside when communion ends.

When communion is administered, join the other members of the altar party behind the altar to receive communion then return to the transept.

The Recession

As soon as the music begins for the recessional hymn, go to get your torch for the recessional hymn. Stand in position behind the crucifer or on the other side of the chancel.

Follow the crucifer around the chancel. The crucifer will stop at the end of the aisle, in front of the sanctuary facing the altar. Turn around when the crucifer does, and follow him/her down the aisle. When you reach the narthex, put out your torch and proceed up the side aisle, holding your torch upright at your side; return the torch to its stand.

Gospel Bearer Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Gospel bearer are:

- Check with the crucifer for any special instructions or procedures.
- Carry the Gospel book during the processional and the Gospel reading.
- Hold the book during the reading of the Gospel.

Before the Service

Get the Gospel book from the altar and be in the narthex ready to go, three minutes before the service begins. At the time of the service, get in position for the procession by standing behind the torch bearers in the narthex.

The Procession

Your position in the procession is after the choir and any flags or banners and before any members of the altar party. Hold the book vertically by the bottom edge in front of your chest with the cover facing forward. When you reach the end of the aisle, enter the sanctuary and step up to the altar and place the Gospel book in the center of the altar. After putting the book away, walk to the left and enter the sacristy and take your seat in the transept.

The Gospel Procession

At the start of the Gospel hymn, go through the sacristy and stand behind a torch bearer. The crucifer, followed by a torch bearer, will proceed around the chancel as you proceed with the torch bearer on the other side. The crucifer will stop and face the altar with acolytes on either side of him/her. Get the book from the altar and wait behind the crucifer and torch bearers. When the reader of the Gospel is in position behind you, the crucifer will proceed down the aisle to the fifth pew and turn around. The torch bearers will stop and face each other at the fourth pew. You should stand between the torch bearers and turn around and face the altar. When the Gospel reader approaches you, hold the book up for him/her to read. Allow the reader to open the book and adjust the height at which the book should be held. Hold the book by the bottom edge, make sure your fingers are not in the way, and stand as still as possible. Some readers may prefer to take the book from you to read and return it to you when they have finished. After the Gospel has been read, close the book if the reader did not do so, and step to the side of the aisle to allow the crucifer and torch bearers to get by. Follow the crucifer back to the chancel, and place Gospel book back on the altar. Then walk to your left and go through the sacristy to take your seat.

When communion is administered, join the other members of the altar party behind the altar to receive.

The Recession

At the start of the recessional hymn, go through the sacristy, and wait behind the torch bearer. The procedure for the recession varies, depending on whether or not there is a choir. If there is no choir or they are not recessing, the crucifer will proceed around the chancel and stop at the end of the aisle facing the altar. You should follow and stop just before entering the aisle. When the crucifer turns around to continue the procession, fall in behind the crucifer and before the altar party.

Flag or Banner Bearer Responsibilities

Flags and banners are sometimes used on festive occasions, such as Christmas and Easter. They are used only in the processional and recessional processions. Both flags and banners are carried at a 45 degree angle, with the weight resting on the left hand held in front of the chest. The right hand is used to steady and guide and is held down low on the pole, which passes on the right side of the body. The bottom edge of a banner should hang free, so that it is possible to see where you are going. The Holy

Trinity banner holder is located on the Gospel side, just off of the chancel. The American flag is displayed on the Gospel side of the chancel and the church flag on the Epistle side. In a procession, the flags are carried side-by-side, with the American flag on the right. As a result, at the end of the aisle during the processional, the American flag must be allowed to cross in front of the church flag so that the two flags can be put in the proper holders during the service. In the recessional, the American flag already will be on the right side.

Glossary

Alb A long, white garment that covers from the neck to the feet and is tied at the waist with a cincture. The alb is symbolic of innocence and reminds us of the robe Herod put on Christ.

Cassock A long garment that covers from the neck to the feet with snaps or buttons down the front. It symbolizes the spirit of recollection and devotion. Red cassocks are often preferred because the color is symbolic of the blood shed by martyrs.

Celebrant The priest officiating at or in charge of a Eucharist.

Chalice A large, stemmed cup that holds the wine during communion.

Chancel The area of the church in front of the nave.

Cincture A long, white rope with knots in the ends that is tied around the waist; it is symbolic of the ropes that bound Christ at his trial and the whips at his scourging.

Cotta A white garment that is worn over a cassock; it has full sleeves and reaches to the waist. The white color symbolizes innocence and purity of heart.

Credence Table The small table, usually on the Epistle side of the altar, that holds vessels and items for the Eucharist. Holy Trinity often uses a table on each side.

Crucifer The acolyte that carries the cross and leads the procession. He/she also assists the Celebrant in preparing for communion.

Cruet A small, covered pitcher used to hold wine or water.

Dismissal The words said at the end of the Eucharist.

Elements The bread and wine used for Holy Communion.

Epistle Side The right side of the altar when looking from the nave.

Eucharist The service of Holy Communion.

Flagon A large, covered pitcher used to hold wine or water.

Gospel Bearer The acolyte who carries the Gospel book.

Gospel Side The left side of the altar when looking from the nave.

Lavabo Bowl A small bowl used to wash the hands of the Celebrant.

Liturgy Public worship services of the church. Specifically, the word means the work of the people.

Narthex The entrance area to the church, inside the door and before the nave.

Nave The large part of the church where the congregation sits.

Oblations Offerings of bread, wine, and water for the Holy Eucharist.

Offertory Plates The large, brass plates used to collect the offering.

Paschal Candle A large, white candle that burns during the 50 days of Easter, baptisms, and funerals. It symbolizes new light and the resurrection.

Paten A small plate on to which the bread is placed for communion.

Purificator A small, white cloth used to wipe the chalice.

Reverence the Altar Stopping and bowing from the waist towards the altar and cross as a sign of reverence.

Sacristy The room behind the altar where the liturgical objects and altar linens are kept.

Sanctuary The area inside the communion rail surrounding the altar.

Taper A long, white wick used in a candle lighter.

Torch Bearer One of two acolytes who carry a torch and accompany the crucifer.

Vestment Any of the garments worn by those participating in a liturgy.

Vesting Room The room downstairs where the acolyte, crucifer, and Celebrant robes are kept.