

Acolyte Manual/Handbook



Grace Episcopal Church

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GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH GLENDORA
ACOLYTE MANUAL/HANDBOOK
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I. INTRODUCTION

a. About this Manual

The purpose of this handbook is to help you understand the responsibilities of an acolyte at Grace Episcopal Church. Acolytes play an important role in the worship service.

Please use this manual as a quick reference as you serve God at his altar. It has been designed to *generally* define the roles and duties of acolytes at Grace Church as the typical service is expected to proceed. There are many situations, however, when the service will not proceed exactly as set forth in this manual. These can include a baptism, a service led by a bishop, various situations when the clergy need to do something different, or any number of unexpected circumstances. *So be prepared to be flexible.*

Above all, if you have any questions about this manual or during the service, **DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK!** You can ask the acolyte master, another acolyte, a LEM (lay eucharistic minister) or even the celebrant.

The goal is to make things as clear as possible for everyone so we can worship together.

b. History & What it means to be an acolyte

The word “*acolyte*” is derived from the Greek word “*akolouthos*,” meaning server, attendant, or follower. The ministry of acolytes has existed nearly as long as there have been priests. In the Anglican/Episcopal church, as well as in the Eastern and Western Orthodox and Catholic churches, acolytes have served at the altar since ancient times. *The acolyte’s service is an offering to God.*

This is an important ministry that should be taken seriously and performed with love in your heart for our Lord Jesus Christ. Know that your commitment as an acolyte makes you a member of a worldwide acolyte community.

At Grace Church, acolytes serve alongside our clergy in roles that express the liturgy of the Episcopal church. An acolyte carrying the processional cross leads the procession into and out of the church. When leading clergy in the Gospel procession, one acolyte bears the Gospel book and two others carry torches, signifying Christ’s light coming into the world as the gospel is read. An acolyte assists the celebrant at the altar; assists the ushers with offertory plates; and helps to prepare for the Eucharist. By participating in this ministry, acolytes perform major roles in the worship service.

Acolytes also work closely with members of a larger worship team that includes members of the altar guild, lay eucharistic ministers, ushers, choir, lay readers (lectors), and the flower guild.

II. Acolytes & Positions

At Grace Episcopal Church, there are three acolyte positions. But at any given service, there may be between one and four acolytes serving.

On a typical Sunday will have three acolytes scheduled with one or more covering multiple roles. On special feast days (such as Christmas and Easter) four acolytes will be scheduled. Certain other services with fewer acolyte duties (such as Ash Wednesday, Blessing of the Animals, Lessons and Carols, etc.) will have only one scheduled.

Typical acolyte positions include *crucifer*, *torchbearer* and *server*.

While the descriptions below provide a general guide for the duties each position is responsible for, all acolytes work as a team to make sure that all aspects of the service go smoothly. It is important to know your duties and be confident in your abilities. Don't 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.

a. **Crucifer**

The primary role of the crucifer is to lead all processions. This includes the procession at the beginning of the service, the Gospel procession, and the recession at the end of the service.

The best way to hold the cross is firmly with both hands in the middle, spaced out to provide a solid base to keep the cross steady. Make sure that the cross is facing outward and straight.



Walk at a steady, dignified pace to lead the procession. It is easy to get caught up in the moment and rush down the aisle, leaving the rest of the altar party and choir far behind. You also don't want to go too slow and hold up the altar party either.

b. Torchbearer

The primary role of the torchbearer is to provide symbolic (and sometimes literal) illumination during the processions and significant parts of the service. This includes the procession at the beginning of the service, the Gospel procession, and the recession at the end of the service. Torchbearers are always scheduled in pairs.

The “torch” at Grace is a candle mounted on a wooden pole. The best way to hold the torch is firmly with both hands in the middle, spaced out to provide a solid base to keep the candle steady and balanced.

Try not to tip the torch; this will drip wax all over the place, including on you. (Many first-time acolytes end up with wax in their hair until they are used to holding the candle steady and straight). Remember at all times that you're carrying a flame, and be careful to keep it away from anything that can catch fire; clothes, hair, service bulletins, etc.



c. Server

While all acolytes on the team assist throughout the service, the server acts as the “lead” acolyte and should be the most vigilant to make sure that everything is being done at the

proper time. This means keeping an eye on everything, from the timing of the processional and recessional, to the Offertory, to the Eucharist and all the needs of the priest and altar party during the service.

The server is also primarily responsible for assisting the priest and altar party in the setup/preparation for communion at the celebration of the Eucharist.

This does NOT mean that the server is SOLELY responsible for the entire service. If the service needs help, or there is another acolyte who notices and is able to take care of things, it is ok to ask or let him or her take care of it. *You are a team.* However, the server should keep track to make sure that everything is being handled properly.

III. Conduct & Posture

One who serves at the altar, whether as server, crucifer, torchbearer or any other role, must always keep in mind that the attention of the congregation is not to be on those ministering but on the liturgy. Therefore, always move discreetly and quietly – and above all with reverence.

Remember, you are a church leader and are recognized as such. Be careful not to disrupt the flow of worship.

a. When *standing*

Stand up straight, keeping your weight evenly balanced so that you do not sway or lean. If you are carrying a candle or the processional cross, make sure that it is straight. Unless you are carrying something, your hands should always be folded and held above the waist.

b. When *sitting*

Sit up straight in the pew with your feet flat on the floor. Do not lean, slouch, or lounge. Either fold your hands in your lap or place them straight out on your knees with palms down. They are not meant to support your head!

c. When *bowing*

There are two types of bows: the solemn and the simple.

The solemn bow is from the waist, inclining the head and shoulders so that if your hands were out in front of you, they would almost touch your knees.

The solemn bow is used when reverencing the altar and at other times as directed.

The simple bow is made with the head, inclining the shoulders slightly.

The simple bow is used at the name of Jesus and at other times of reverence.

Unless you are carrying something, always bow in reverence when facing, entering, or exiting the altar.

IV. Before the Service

a. Vesting

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.

Acolyte albs (robes) are in the closet in the working sacristy. Make sure your alb is the proper size. It should be ankle length on you.

Cinctures – long ropes worn around the waist – are in a drawer opposite the closet. Cincture should be tied around the waist with a slip knot. Place the knot and any extra rope length on your left side.

Place one of the acolyte crosses, also hanging in the closet, around your neck. Put it under the hood of the alb.

b. Lighting the candles

Candles should be lit no less than 10 minutes before the start of the service.

(While any acolyte who can do so safely may light the candles, it is the server's responsibility to make sure that they are lit at the proper time.)

Always vest (put on your robe) before lighting the candles.

The taper to light the candles is in a bracket on the acolyte pew behind the pulpit side of the altar. Light the taper with the lighter located in either the acolyte pew or next to the lectern.

Approach the altar, and reverence (bow) as you enter the altar rail.

When lighting the candles, always remember: the Gospel candle never burns alone. The Gospel book is on the pulpit side of the altar. Light the candle on the lectern side of the altar first, and the candle next to the Gospel book last.

After lighting the candles, reverence the altar as you leave. Gently blow out the taper and return it to the bracket on the acolyte pew.

c. Gathering in the narthex

After vesting and lighting the altar candles, all acolytes should gather in the narthex to prepare for the service.

Crucifer – The processional cross is kept in the sacristy where the celebrant and LEMs vest. Take the cross from the stand and take it to the narthex. Watch the top of the cross as you pass through the doors and breezeways to avoid hitting the cross on the frames and doors. *DO NOT lean the cross against the brick walls in the narthex.* The cross is silverplated and gets scratched and damaged by the brick. The altar Guild members do their best to keep it polished, but scratches and chips in the silver plating CAN NOT be repaired.

Torchbearers – The torches are kept in brackets in the working sacristy with the acolyte vestments. Take both torches to the narthex. The ushers will help you light them if needed.

Server – Check to make sure that all acolytes are present, vested and have everything that they need for the service (cross, torches, etc). Check for any last-minute preparations or any changes to the service that need special preparations.

Five minutes before the service, line up near the doors to the central aisle to prepare for the procession. Stay to the sides to allow members of the congregation entering to pass through until it is time for the procession to begin.

V. During the Service

a. Procession

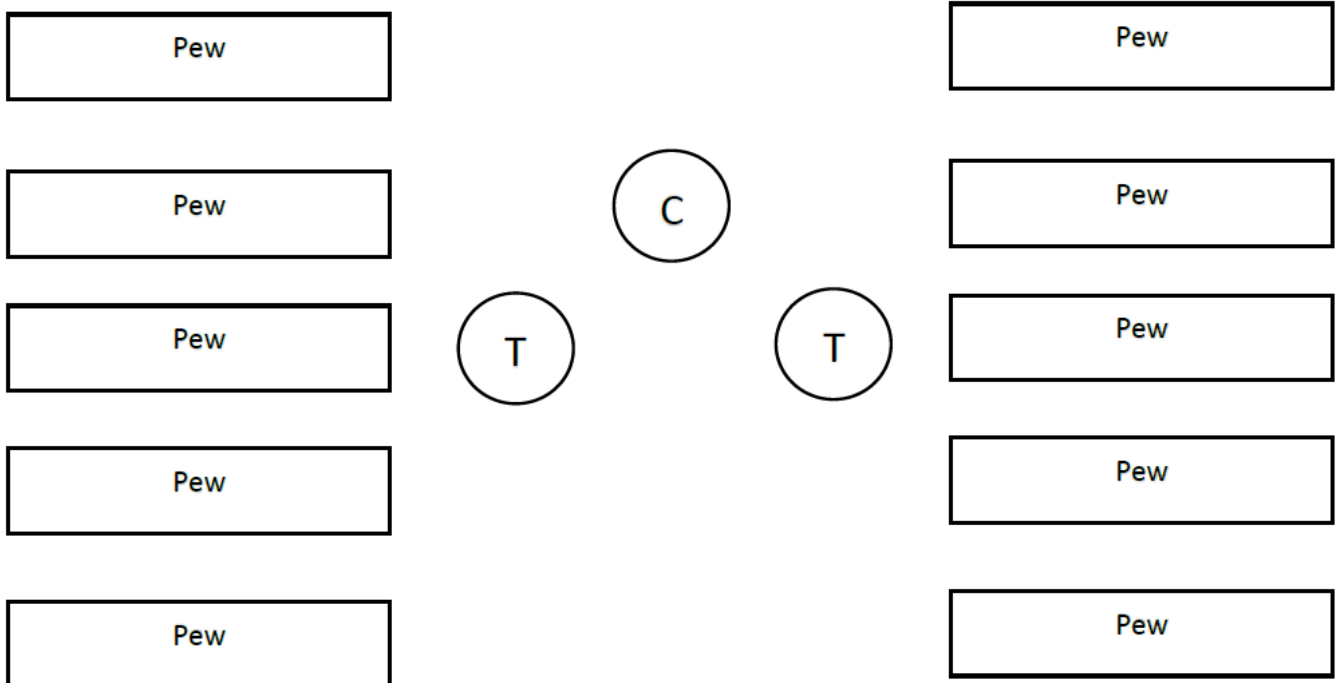
When the music begins, lead the procession down the center aisle toward the altar. When the choir is processing as well, you can check with the choirmaster about whether you should start processing when the music starts or when the singing starts.

Crucifer – You are the first one leading the procession and setting the pace. Make sure that the cross is facing outward and straight.

Walk at a steady, dignified pace. It is easy to get caught up in the moment and rush down the aisle, leaving the rest of the altar party and choir far behind. You don't want to go too slow and hold up the altar party either.

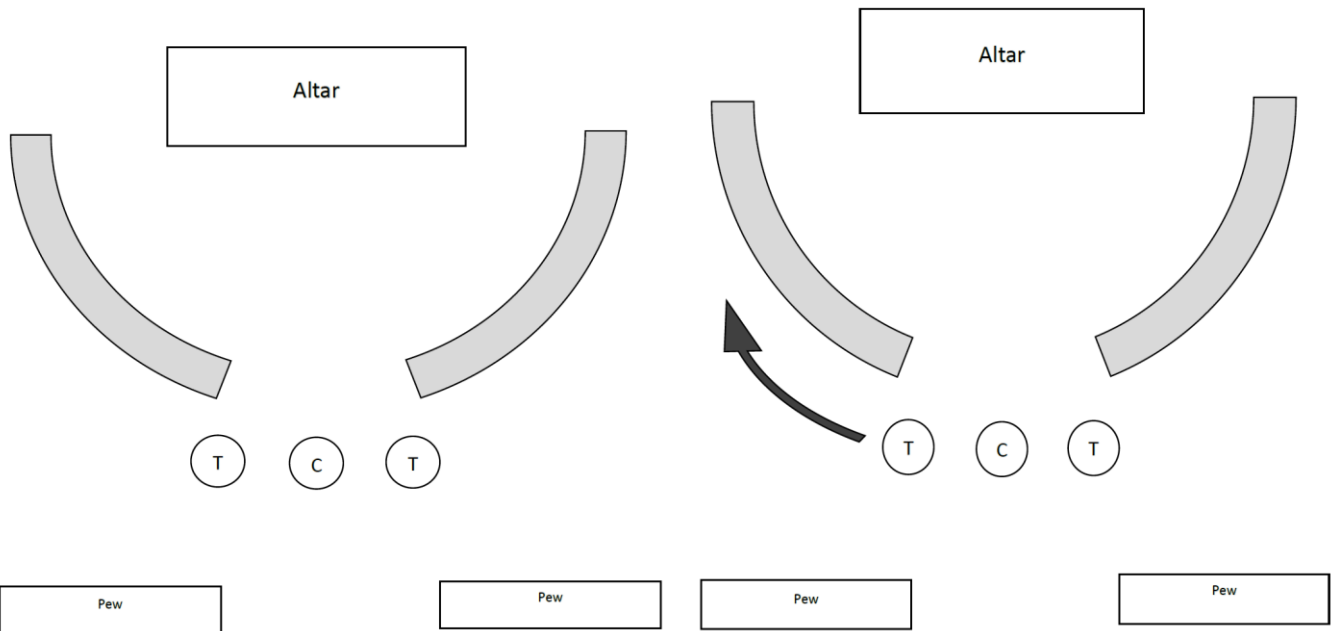
Torchbearers – Follow approximately one pew space behind the crucifer. Walk at the same pace as the other torchbearer so you stay side by side; do not get ahead of or behind the other torchbearer. Try to carry the candles at the same height. This can be tricky sometimes if torchbearers of drastically different heights are scheduled together; just do your best.

Server – *IF a four-person team is scheduled*, the server will follow approximately one pew space behind the torches. Your hands should be folded and held at the waist; OR you may carry a hymnal to follow the processional hymn if you so choose.



As you approach the altar, the crucifer will stop right at the front before entering the altar rail. Torchbearers will come up to either side of the crucifer and stop so you are all standing in a straight line.

Once all acolytes are in a straight line, everyone turn to the left and proceed single file around the altar rail until you are directly behind the altar. Pause here with the crucifer in the center and a torchbearer on either side, facing toward the congregation until the choir and altar party have finished processing.



Once the altar party has finished processing and is in position in front of the altar, place the cross in the bracket on the side of the acolyte pew, and the torches in the stands against the wall behind the altar.

The crucifer and server should take positions in the acolyte pew on the lectern side of the altar. Both torchbearers should take position in the acolyte pew on the pulpit side of the altar.

b. Gospel procession

The Gospel is typically read from the center aisle in the midst of the congregation. This is symbolic of the fact that Jesus did his teaching from among the people, and word of Christ is to be spoken and heard from the midst of the crowd. There is a procession just before the Gospel so that the Gospel book and reader will be in the center of the aisle for the reading. The hymn sung at this time is called the sequence hymn.

Crucifer – Pay attention to the sequence hymn and verses that have been selected for the Service. Some will be longer, giving a lot of extra time, and others will be shorter, which means that you will need to start moving sooner rather than later. Do your best to judge when to start processing so the Gospel book is in place before the music ends, but not so far ahead that you are standing there for most of the hymn.

When it is time to start, signal to the rest of the acolytes (torchbearers) that it is time and gather them behind the altar.

In a typical service with a three-person team, leave the cross in the bracket. You will be handling the Gospel book for the reader.

When there is a special service with a four-person team, you *may* lead the procession with the cross, and have the server handle the Gospel book as indicated below.

Torchbearers – As the reading finishes, pay attention to the crucifer. When he or she gives the signal, take the torches from their stands and line up with them directly behind the altar.

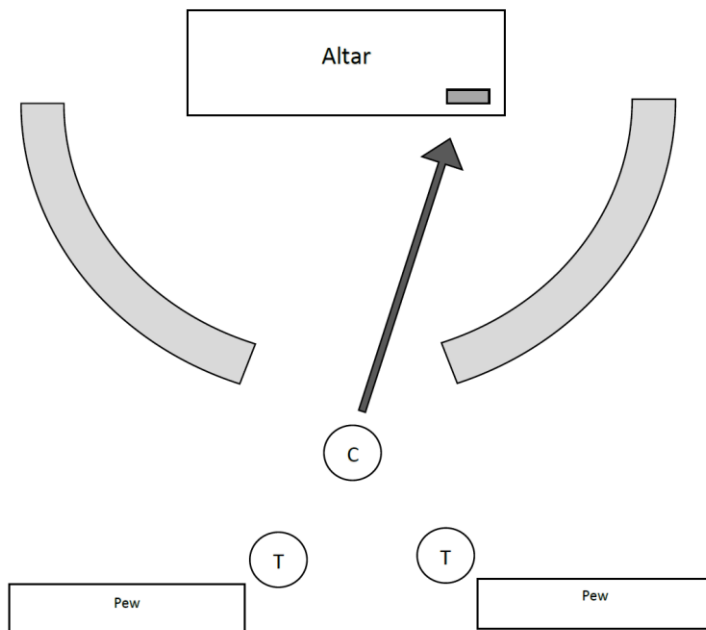
Line up with the crucifer in the center and one torchbearer on either side. Once lined up, turn to the right together and proceed single file around the altar rail to the front.

As you approach the front of the altar:

Torchbearers – Move to stand next to the first pews of the center aisle (one on either side); turn and face the altar where you will wait for the crucifer.

Crucifer – Proceed to the opening in the front of the altar rail. Bow in reverence before entering. Proceed to the altar where the Gospel book is resting and retrieve it from the altar.

Carry the Gospel Book with the front cover facing out (same direction that you are looking), above and slightly in front of your head.

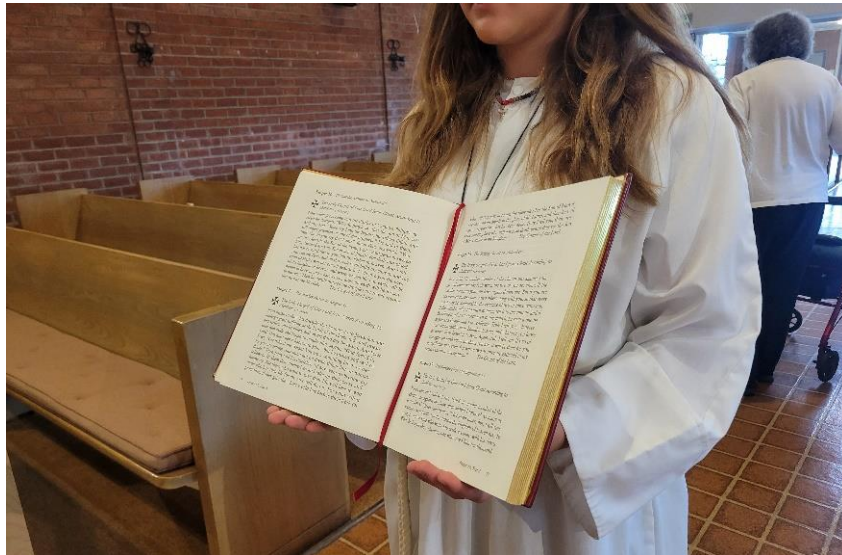


As you leave the altar, you are carrying the Gospel book and do not need to bow. Continue to the center aisle between the first pews (and torches), turn and face the altar.

The celebrant or Gospel reader will (typically) bow, indicating that he or she is ready; at that time, all acolytes should turn and proceed down the aisle with the crucifer leading and the torchbearers approximately one pew space behind.

Stop approximately one-quarter to one-third of the way down the center aisle.

Crucifer – Turn around and face the altar. The Gospel book will be marked with a ribbon marker. Open the book at the marked page. Support the bottom of the book with your hands and rest the top just below your chin. The book should be slightly tilted for easy reading. Make sure that your fingers are not blocking any print OR holding the pages in case the reader needs to turn the page during the reading.



Torchbearers – Stand to either side of the Gospel book and face the center of the aisle, you will be looking directly at each other. You should be standing in such a way that the candles are on either side of the book and would provide light for the reader to see the print if there were no other light source.

After the reading:

Crucifer – When the reader has finished, he or she will close the book and hand it back to you. Carry the Gospel book with the front cover facing out (same direction that you are looking), above and slightly in front of your head. Proceed to the altar and through the railing (you are carrying the Gospel book and do not need to bow). Return the book to the same place on the altar with the front cover facing toward the congregation. As you leave through the altar rail, face the altar and bow in reverence. Return to your place at the acolyte pew for the sermon and Prayers of the People.

Torchbearers – As the crucifer returns, follow one pew space behind. When you reach the altar rail, stop together. Turn to the left and proceed single file around to the back of the altar (do NOT wait for the crucifer). Once you are both directly behind the altar, place the torches

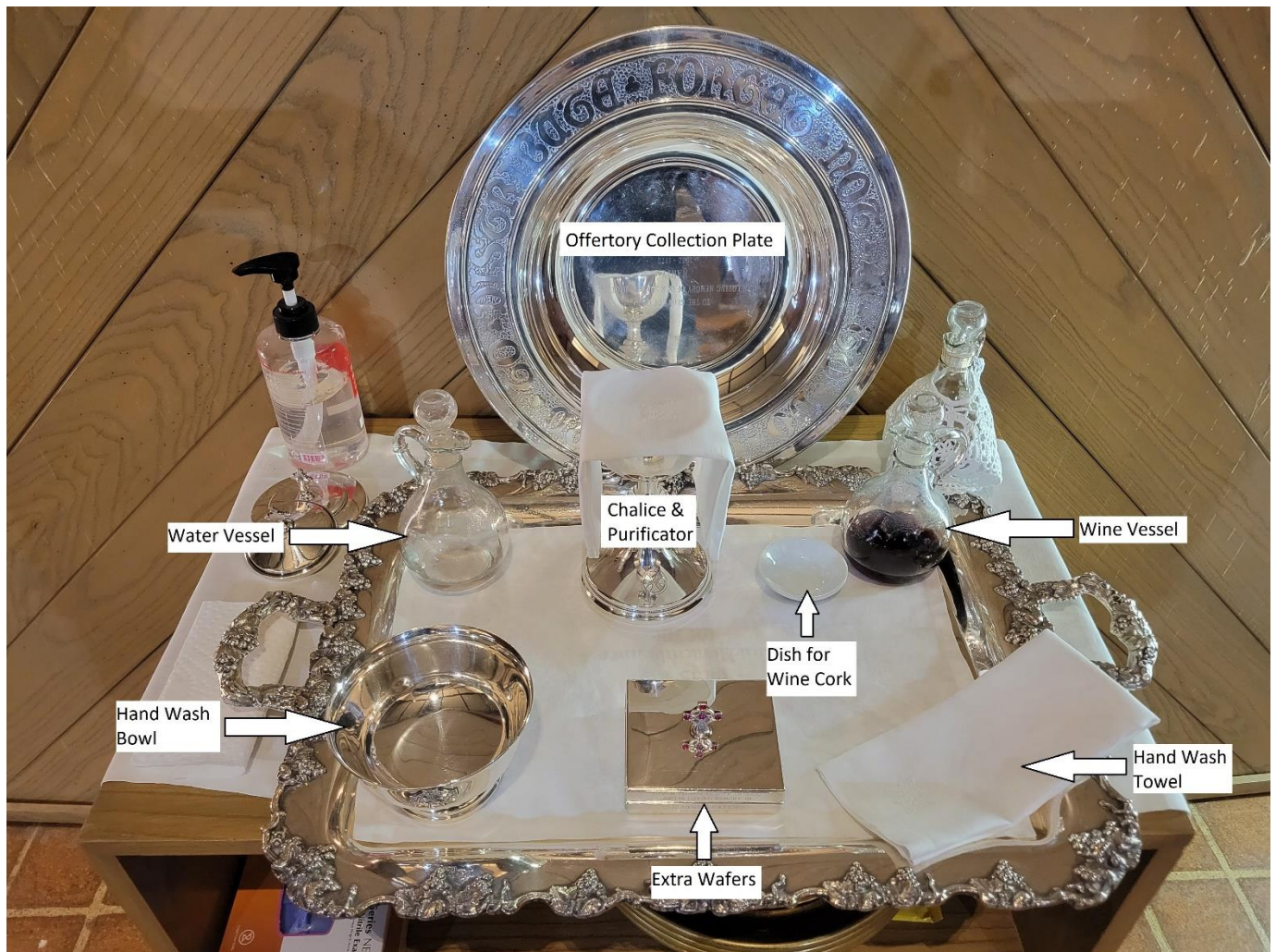
in their stands against the wall behind the altar, and return to your seats in the acolyte pew for the sermon and Prayers of the People.

c. Offertory/Before the Eucharist

The Offertory and Eucharist are the busiest part of the service and where your help will be needed the most. The server will have a lot to keep track of, and this is where most of your responsibilities occur. However, ALL acolytes should be extra vigilant and prepared to assist if your help is needed, whether by the server, LEM or celebrant.

After the passing of the Peace is the announcements and special blessings. During the announcements and blessings, begin to prepare for the Offertory.

THE CREDENCE TABLE:



Below the credence table are the offertory plates. Take two plates and standby behind the altar until the offertory anthem begins.

This can be done by any acolyte, but the server must make sure that it is done.

If the choir or bell choir are NOT performing the anthem in front of the altar: ONE acolyte take two plates; separate them with your index fingers so they are easier to hand to the ushers. When the anthem begins, proceed around the altar **INSIDE** the rail until you are standing directly in front of the altar where the ushers will meet you in the center aisle. Hand them the plates one at a time.

If the choir or bell choir ARE performing the anthem in front of the altar: TWO Acolytes take one plate each. When the anthem begins, each of you will proceed on either side of the altar **OUTSIDE** the railing until you reach the front of the side aisles where an usher will meet you on each side.

As you hand the ushers the plates, they will tell you a number. **REMEMBER IT**; it is the number of people in attendance and the celebrant needs to know it to prepare for communion.

Server – During the anthem, you will assist the celebrant while setting up the altar for communion. Immediately after the ushers have been given the plates and during the entire anthem, you should be standing by the credence table unless you are actively assisting so you are ready for whatever the celebrant might need.

Here are the critical tasks that must be done for during this preparation time:

1. Remove the corks from the glass vessels holding the water and wine on the credence table. Place the cork from the wine vessel on the small dish next to it (this prevents the white linens from being stained by the wine). Hold a vessel in each hand with the handles facing away from you, making it easier for the celebrant to take them from you.



Take the vessels up to the celebrant setting the altar. Tell the celebrant the attendance number that the ushers gave you. The celebrant will take each vessel from you, one at

a time, and hand them back when done. As the vessels are handed back, the celebrant will bow; bow in return. Bring the vessels back to the credence table. Return the cork to the wine vessel.

2. Usually, the wafers at the altar will be enough, but if there is greater than expected attendance, the celebrant will ask you to bring to the altar a small silver box on the credence table containing wafers. Take the lid off and leave it at the credence table. After the celebrant has taken what is needed, return the box to the table, and put the lid back on.
3. By the time the celebrant is finished setting the altar, you should be ready to wash his or her hands. On the credence table is a bowl and towel. Place the bowl in your non-dominant hand. Drape the towel over your non-dominant wrist. Pick up the water vessel in your dominant hand, holding it by the handle so you can pour.



The celebrant will approach you and put his or her fingers into the bowl. Pour a small amount of water over the fingers into the bowl. This is a symbolic washing; you do not need to do a thorough pour. The celebrant will then use the towel on your wrist to dry his or her hands and place it back on your wrist. Put the water vessel on the credence table and return the cork to its place. Put the bowl on the credence table and drape the towel over the top.

d. During the Eucharist

After the altar is prepared and the anthem is finished is the presentation, when the ushers bring forward the collection and the presentation hymn is sung (usually the Doxology, or “Praise God from whom all blessings flow ...”)

Server – Take the large silver plate from the credence table, hold it upright with the inside of the plate facing away from you. When the presentation hymn starts, proceed around the altar **INSIDE** the rail to the front where the ushers will meet you at the center aisle. Turn the

plate so the inside is facing up and the ushers will place the offertory plates inside the large one. Turn to face the altar and hold the offertory plates upward towards the celebrant who will bless the offering. After the blessing, return to the back of the altar and place the offertory plates under the credence table.

(This can be done by any acolyte, but it is the server's responsibility to make sure that it is done.)

Server & Crucifer – Stand on the lectern side of the altar.

Torchbearers – Stand on the pulpit side of the altar.

The celebrant will continue with the Eucharistic prayer, which is the part of the service when the bread and wine is sanctified for communion.

Server – Pick up the prayer book that is next to the altar and open it where it is marked. Carefully pick up the Sanctus bells in your dominant hand. Follow along with the Eucharistic prayer. Ring the bells when indicated in the book; ring for approximately two to three seconds each time. This occurs three times and coincides with the moments that the oblations (the bread and wine) are sanctified and made holy.

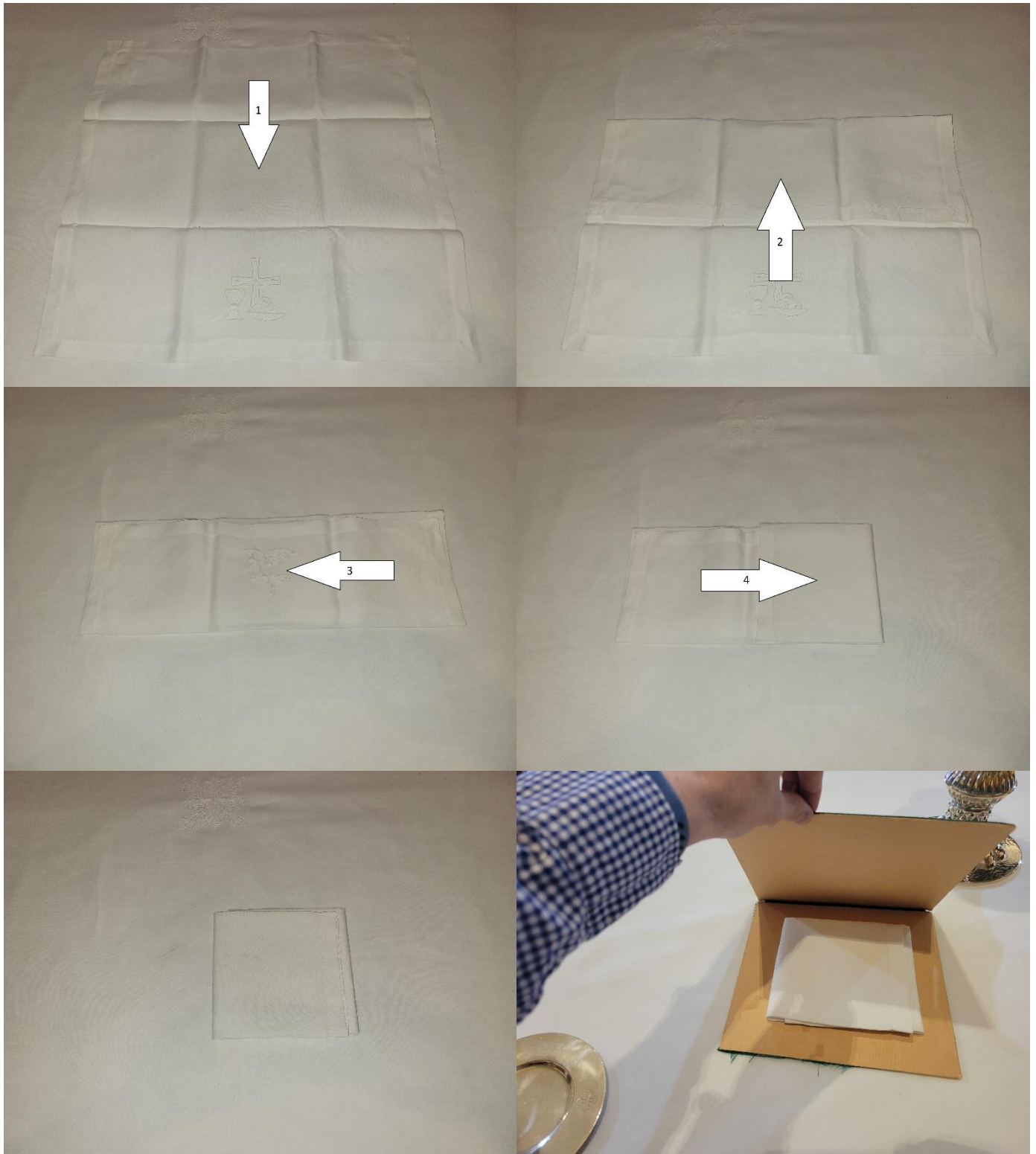
After the sanctification, the Eucharistic prayer will continue until the Lord's Prayer and Breaking of the Bread.

Server – During the Lord's Prayer, go to the credence table. Pick up the second chalice and purificator from the credence table and take them to the celebrant at the altar. Set it down on the altar next to the corporal and return to your position next to the altar.

After the Breaking of the Bread, all acolytes should move to just behind the altar and prepare to assist with communion.

Torchbearers – Each of you will be handed one of the chalices. Carefully take it with both hands and hold it steady. One of you will go with the celebrant, the other with the LEM. Escort them as they give communion to the congregation and hold the chalice steady while they intinct (dip the bread in the wine) so you do not spill.

Server – During communion clear the altar. Fold the corporal by thirds as shown below. Place it in the burse.



Take the burse and anything else left on the altar from communion and place it carefully on the credence table.

Stand by the credence table until communion is over.

After communion, all acolytes return to the credence table. You will be given communion by the celebrant and the altar party.

Server – Take the cork out of the water vessel. If the celebrant and/or LEM decides to finish the wine, they will brush any crumbs from the bread into the chalice. Pour a small amount of water into the chalice(s) and they will rinse and drink it.

If the celebrant and/or LEM do not finish remaining wine in the chalice, cover the chalice with the purificator and leave the chalice on the credence table. The altar guild will know how to reverently dispose of the leftover consecrated wine.

Take any reserve sacraments that have been blessed to the aumbry, located in the chapel in the wall to the left of the altar. Bow as you are leaving the chapel altar after placing the reserve sacraments. *(This can be done by any acolyte, but it is the server’s responsibility to make sure that it is done.)*

Return to the acolyte pews for the post-communion prayer.

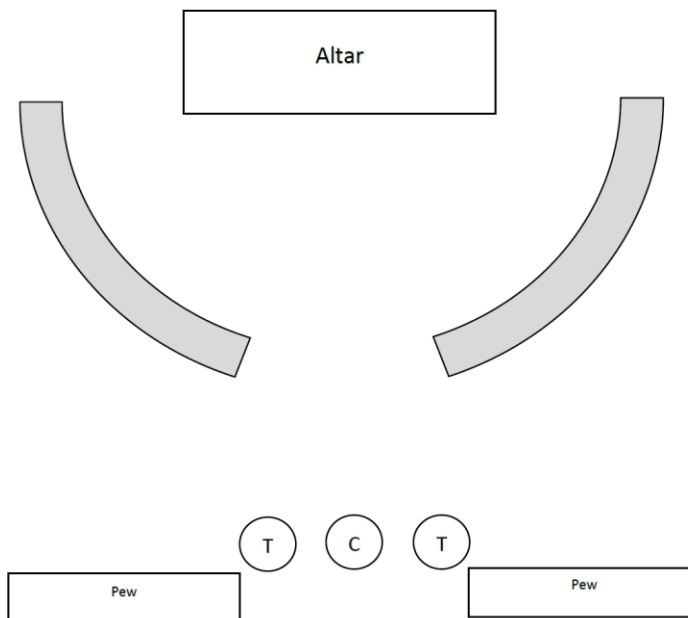
e. Recessional

When the recessional hymn begins, gather behind the altar to prepare.

Crucifer – Take the cross from the bracket. Gather the rest of the acolytes in place for the recessional.

Torchbearers – Take the torches from the stands by the wall. Line up with the crucifer, one on either side.

Once lined up, everyone turn to the right and proceed single file around the altar rail to the front of the center aisle. Torchbearers should stand next to the first pews (one on either side of the aisle) with the crucifer between them. Face the altar.



The altar party will then proceed to the front of the altar, face it and bow. After they bow, turn, and proceed down the aisle with the crucifer leading and the torchbearers approximately one pew space behind.

Crucifer – As you approach the narthex, be careful with the cross. There is a sudden low ceiling there; pay attention and make sure the cross is low enough to clear it as you approach.

VI. After the Service

a. **Returning the cross and torches to the sacristy**

Once you enter the narthex, you are done with the recessional, but not your duties as an acolyte.

Crucifer - Watch the top of the cross as you pass through the doors and breezeways so to not hit the cross on the frames and doors. Return the cross to the bracket in the sacristy where the celebrant and LEMs vest.

Torchbearers – After you are in the narthex, carefully blow out the candles. Do not blow too hard and continue to hold them steady as the wax is still hot and melted and could still splatter or drip. Return the torches to the brackets on the drawer in the working sacristy. This makes it much easier for the altar guild to clean and tend them to make sure they are ready for the next service.

b. **Put out the altar Candles**

After returning the items to the sacristy, **STAY VESTED.**

Server – Stand by the door to the Sanctuary that is next to the sacristy and listen for the final dismissal. As soon as you hear the celebrant give the final dismissal and the response from the congregation, enter the sacristy to put out the candles. The snuffer to put out the candles is on the back side of the taper that you used to light them.

When putting out the candles, the same rule applies: the Gospel candle never burns alone. Put out the candle on the pulpit side next to the Gospel book first; then put out the candle on the lectern side of the altar.

To put out the candles, carefully lower the bell-shaped snuffer over the burning wick. Do NOT smash or put any pressure onto the candle, the snuffer puts out the flame by cutting off the air flow.

Return the snuffer to the bracket on the acolyte pew.

(While any acolyte who can do so safely may put out the candles, it is the server's responsibility to make sure that they are extinguished immediately after the dismissal.)

c. **Un-Vesting**

After the candles have been extinguished, your duties in the sanctuary are completed for this service, and you may now un-vest.

Remember, even as you take them off, that vestments remind us of the garments worn by Jesus and the apostles and should be treated with respect.

Untie the cincture and return it to the drawer.

Hang the cross back on the hook in the closet where it came from.

Carefully hang your alb on its hanger in the closet. Make sure that it is hung properly and will not fall onto the floor.