

ACOLYTE GUIDELINES

The following are some important matters for acolytes to learn, keep in mind and practice in their life. First, remember that the functions served by altar assistants currently are those originally given to the various ranks of deacons. Due to the lack of ordained singers, readers, sub-deacons and deacons in the local parishes, these functions have been delegated to acolytes. Therefore, acolytes should carry out their duties with the same dignity as clergy. Many acolytes are not aware of the responsibilities and behaviors expected of their position. Our fathers taught us that the altar assistants are like angels serving God. The Holy Altar is the seat of our Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of the Body and Blood placed there. All the clergy and the altar assistants are servants to the Lord. That service must be carried out in utmost humility, solemnity, serenity, rectitude and sanctity. The white alb given to them is the baptismal garment signifying purity. The deacons' stoles are the symbols of the wings of an angel. Like the angels deacons and acolytes also serve at the altar with utmost care and holiness. The following are guidelines all acolytes should bear in mind.

I. Preparation

Altar assistants should be prepared to serve at the altar at the priest's request.

- a. If an altar assistant desires to serve at the Holy Altar on a Sunday, he must begin preparation the evening before, by attending Evening Prayer and participating with the alb on.
- b. Altar assistants should complete the midnight prayers found in the *Qurbanakramam* before the Morning Prayers at the church. If you are using the Children's Handbook of Prayers, then the midnight prayers are already included in the morning prayers.
- c. Altar assistants must prepare to receive Holy Qurbana with proper fasting and prayers. He should also receive Holy Confession frequently.
- d. Altar assistants should prepare their readings and songs for the services the night before.

II. Dress

- a. Whenever an acolyte adorns himself with the alb, he must wear clothing respectful of the blessed garment. White pants and white shirts are encouraged. However, subtle colors that will not show through the alb are allowed. No jeans or shorts must be worn.
- b. All altar assistants should be neat and groomed and should not have hairstyles or piercings that will distract people from fully concentrating on Holy Qurbana.
- c. Altar assistants must wear the alb **before entering the sanctuary** and the alb must be worn at all liturgical services.
- d. Shoes may not be worn in the sanctuary at any time by anyone except the liturgical shoes worn by bishops and priests.
- e. No cell phones or other electronic devices are allowed in the altar. All focus should be on the sacraments and services being conducted.

III. Behavior/Etiquette

- a. No noise, unnecessary talk, carelessness, or pride should occur while serving at the altar.
- b. When receiving Holy Qurbana, altar assistants should approach the Holy Mysteries in the order of seniority: First other priests, then deacons, the elder acolytes to the youngest acolytes.
- c. Remember that the Sanctuary is fire and can burn those who are careless, proud, and misbehave while they serve. Move carefully around the altar being fully aware of what is happening around you. Do not make any unnecessary movements that would distract the celebrating priest and the participating faithful. Do not make noises or gestures to get the attention of the other altar assistants.
- d. Except for the celebrant and the deacon/acolyte who is censuring, no one should **ever** cross in front of the altar, but should always walk behind the altar. During the Fraction & Mingling of the Holy Mysteries, when the chancel is veiled, there should be no movement at all. The focus must remain on the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord.
- e. When completing a task in the sanctuary, or standing along the sides, do not slouch, but stand at attention and be mindful of what is happening around you. If there is any emergency, attend to it without creating any chaos or distraction.
- f. All altar assistants must show respect at all times to the holy things in the altar and to the celebrant, deacons, and senior acolytes.

IV. Liturgical Rubrics

- a. Acolytes must say the prescribed prayers before entering the sanctuary, putting on the alb, and when kissing the corners of the holy altar. ***The prayers are given in order at the end of the guidelines.***
- b. All altar assistants should sit in the congregation and pay attention to the Old Testament reading.
- c. After the Old Testament reading, all altar assistants must go into the altar in one line kissing the Gospel stand and the four corners of the holy altar while saying the prescribed prayers for each action.
- d. Never enter the Sanctuary from the Northern side. Always enter from the Southern Side and exit from the Northern side.
- e. The appearance within the Sanctuary area must also be presentable. The altar assistant should stand in two straight lines, one on either side of the Altar, and with an even number of people in both sides.
- f. A lit candle should be held by the censuring altar assistant during the Epistle readings. In our custom, when a Catholicose or Metropolitan's kalpana (letter) is read, an acolyte holds a candle there too. During the Gospel reading, two candles are held, one on either side of the celebrant.
- g. The shaking of the marbaha or the hand bells must be in a disciplined and organized manner.
- h. Censuring is essential for each Promion, Sedra and Ethro readings.
- i. While lighting a candle, light the unlit candle from a lit candle and not vice versa to avoid spilling of wax on the altar, candle stand, floor or carpet.
- j. Do not fill the censer with too much charcoal. Also, the person censuring must always check the censer to see if the charcoal is still burning. If necessary

charcoal should be replenished from time to time. The censuring person should not carelessly swing the censer to spill the contents of the censer on the floor, carpet or the altar.

V. Deacon/Senior Acolyte (Sacristan)

- a. The chief celebrant *or a senior acolyte* must assign various duties such as readings, censuring etc. to all and they all must rehearse them and be familiar with these responsibilities before coming to worship.
- b. Preparing the host (or bread) for the Holy Qurbana: After evening prayer the dough should be prepared chanting Psalm 51. Preparation of the dough should be only after one has taken a shower and after making oneself clean. Always make dough for more than one bread in case there is any emergency such as accidents in preparing the bread or requests from other parishes.
- c. Holy Chrism, Holy Oil for anointing the sick, olive oil for various occasions such as preparing the bread, funeral, leaven for preparing the dough, wine, etc. should be kept in the church in a specially designated cabinet. Except the bishop and the priest, no other person is allowed to handle the Holy Chrism (Mooron).
- d. The big church bell should be rung in the church before the beginning of worship occasions.
- e. The holy altar and its surrounding should always be kept clean and neat.
- f. All materials used in altar such as towels, albs, altar coverings, etc. should be kept clean all the time. Towels used for wiping the chalice, paten and other utensils used for holding the Body and Blood should not be used for any other purpose. Also, these towels should either be hand washed and the water used to water a plant or poured where no one will walk on it, or along with all other items used on the altar, they should be burned in a respectful manner when no longer useful.
- g. Albs, towels, etc. used by one priest should not be given to another priest unless cleaned.
- h. Any room or cabinet in which the altar materials are kept must be kept clean always.

VI. Final Advices

- a. Altar assistants must bring their own holy Bibles and prayer books for worship.
- b. Altar assistants should be informed of all upcoming liturgical events and all materials should be arranged before the liturgy begins. This will help avoid delay of the liturgy and confusion for running for materials in the middle of the worship.
- c. When a bishop enters the church and the altar, the curtain should be drawn aside and arrangements should be made to do the prayers (luthiniya) including lighting candles and preparing the censer.
- d. If possible, the church should be open every day to light the lamp and ring the big church bell.

All altar assistants are mandated to keep away from all kinds of evil and immoral practices and should lead a lifestyle that is an example to all. This will bring glory to God and dignity to the vocation of the acolyte. May God bless you and protect you from any harm in accepting this vocation for the glory of His Name and of His Holy Church.

PRAYERS

When entering the Church:

In reverence will I enter Thy house and present my offerings to Thee.

While putting on the Alb BEFORE entering the sanctuary:

Clothe me, O Lord God, with an incorruptible surplice, by the power of the Holy Spirit. O Father, Son and Holy Spirit (+), grant that we may walk in true faith and in pure and upright paths, all the days of our lives, Amen.

When standing before the entrance of the sanctuary:

I will go to the altar of God and to my God, who gives joy to my youth. (Psalm 43:4)

When standing before the altar in the sanctuary:

Into Thy house, O God, I have entered, and before Thy throne, O heavenly King, I have worshipped. Forgive me all the sins I have committed against Thee. (**Bow before altar.**)

While going around the altar and kissing the corners:

Bind, O Lord, our festivals with chains, even to the horns of Thy altar. Thou art my God; I will give thanks to Thee. Thou art my God; I will glorify Thee.