



ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH ACOLYTE HANDBOOK

Almighty God, you have called us to be your servants through the office of Acolyte, that being clothed in your grace, we may minister before you; guide us by your Holy Spirit, that we may both by our service in your House and by our daily walk in your world, please you and glorify your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WELCOME

Thank you for volunteering to serve as an acolyte at St. Philip's. We hope that your service will provide you with a sense of spiritual meaning and fulfillment. You will make new friends, meet new people and, through your commitment, share as a member of a worldwide acolyte community. Serving as an acolyte will also enable you to develop a habit of public poise, learn better the Book of Common Prayer, and grow closer to God.

This handbook will provide a quick reference for you as you begin your service and throughout your journey. If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to contact your Acolyte Mentor. He is ready and eager to assist you.

Thank you again for your service to God and the people of this parish.

revised October 2018

BACKGROUND

DID YOU KNOW?

The word “acolyte” comes from the Greek word *akolouthos* which means a “follower”, in the sense of a servant or attendant who waits on another.

The acolyte ministry originated in Old Testament times. The Scriptures tell us of the prophet Samuel assisting Eli the priest and of Elijah being assisted by Elisha.

The New Testament illustrates early Christian adoption of this custom, which was carried into the life of the early church and then forward to the present day. The acolyte assists priests and deacons so that worshipers may celebrate the Holy Eucharist and other rites of the Church with simple dignity. In fact, the Book of Common Prayer states, “At all celebrations of the Liturgy, it is fitting that the principal celebrant... be assisted by other priests, and by deacons and lay persons.” You are one of those lay persons.

When serving, you are actively assisting the celebrant in the worship of God. It is a very important role, and should be approached with reverence, humility, gratitude, and joy.

SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER

When serving, please remember the three P’s.

Punctuality is important. Be on time. When you are, everything flows more smoothly.

Pay attention. Be aware of where you are in the service so that you may anticipate what is needed next.

Participate. The congregation may look to you for guidance and direction. You are modeling worship by knowing when to sit, stand, and kneel. Take an active part in the worship service and assist younger acolytes in following the service.

LOOKING GOOD!

A few simple points to remember:

Gentlemen should wear dark socks and shoes. (Please, no running shoes, athletic shoes, flip flops or sandals; and please, no Bermuda shorts.)

Ladies should similarly wear appropriate socks or stocking and shoes. (Please no spike heels, flip flops or sandals).

Hair should be neatly arranged, regardless of length or style.

A FEW FINAL WORDS BEFORE WE GET STARTED

You will soon find that by being prompt and alert, you will have no problems. Learn to stay on top of things and anticipate any last minute changes. Take a few moments before the service and familiarize yourself with the service bulletin. And most of all, enjoy. Devout occasions can be enjoyed and are sometimes even funny.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

ARRIVING AND VESTING

When you are scheduled to serve, please arrive at the church 20 minutes before the service begins. Go to the Acolyte Vesting Room (at the top of the stairs just off the south balcony) and check in with your Acolyte Mentor. Select a cassock that comes to your ankles. Choose a pair of white gloves and a white cotta to wear over the robe. Should you find gloves or a cassock with candle wax stains or missing buttons, set them aside and please bring it to the attention of the Acolyte Master. Find and wear a cross, on a colored ribbon, appropriate to your years of service.

The Acolyte Mentor (there are six of them) will assign responsibilities for Crucifer, Torchbearers, Children's Cross Crucifer, Flags, and Banner Bearers. Lighting the altar candles is usually assigned to those acolytes who have participated in many services and are familiar with the order of the service. Likewise, the Crucifer is usually an experienced acolyte.

LIGHTING CANDLES

Two acolytes enter the sanctuary, reverencing the altar *together* with a simple bow, before beginning to light the candles. Begin lighting from the altar cross and then moving outward. Again, proceeding in unison, the two acolytes should synchronize the candle lighting to as to finish together. At communion services, the two larger candles should also be lit together. Reverence the altar cross together. Following the final blessing at the end of the service (during the organ introduction to the recessional hymn), extinguish the candles in reverse sequence (outward then moving inward). **DO NOT HESITATE.** (Do not smash the candle, but by covering the flame let the lack of oxygen extinguish the flame.) The snuffers are found on the opposite ends of the communion rail.

PROCESSING AND RECESSING

Acolytes should assemble in the narthex at least ten minutes before the service is scheduled to begin. Service bulletins will be placed in the Acolyte Vesting Room. Please familiarize yourself with the service bulletin and use it to follow along and participate (one of the three P's) during the service. Before assembling in the narthex, it might be useful to drop the bulletin off a where you'll be sitting.

The Crucifer obtains the processional cross from the north choir pew and walks to the entrance of the church and stands in the narthex away from the doorway with the Torchbearers. Please do not sit on the bench.

The banners are found at the front of the south aisle. Torches are hanging on the south wall next to the organ. The children's cross is on the south choir pew. Follow the lead of the Crucifer when entering the narthex. Please remember to be quiet and reverent while waiting in the narthex.

The Crucifer leads the procession into the church when the singing of the processional hymn begins. **DO NOT START PROCESSING UNTIL THE CONGREGATION BEGINS SINGING, NOT WHEN THE ORGANIST PLAYS THE INTRODUCTION.** Remain in the narthex while the organ plays the hymn introduction. Once past the rear gallery, the Crucifer should raise the cross high in the air and straight with elbows tightly at the sides of the torso — not elevated awkwardly. (When carrying a cross or torch, your hands should grip the pole so that the thumbs should always be above the palm.) The top of the cross should be approximately three feet above the top of the Crucifer's head.

Torchbearers should make certain that their torches are each held at the same height as one another, but lower than the processional cross. Torchbearers walk behind the Crucifer, side by side. The Children's Cross Bearer proceeds after the choir and before the lay ministers and clergy. Banner Bearers also follow after the choir enters the sanctuary. The pace of the procession should be slow, steady and dignified, taking about one normal-sized step per second. Try to walk in step with each other in a steady, controlled and dignified manner.

A useful rule-of-thumb is to pace yourself about one pew length behind the person you are following. The Banner Bearer and Flag Bearer should pace themselves two pews in length.

The acolytes proceed directly to the altar rail. Everyone except the Crucifer and the Torchbearers proceed to their seats after reverencing the altar. The Banner Bearers return the banners to the south aisle and sit in the front pews on that side (the area also known as the "south transept"). The Children's Cross Crucifer places the children's cross in the appropriate place on the south choir pew and proceeds to the altar and sits on the south side, within the altar railing (the area also known as the "sanctuary"). The Crucifer stands at the head of the communion rail with a torchbearer on either side until the entire processional is completed. The processional cross is then placed on the north choir rail and the Crucifer proceeds to the altar and sits on the north side, within the altar railing (i.e., sanctuary). The Torchbearers hang the torches on the south wall next to the altar and sit in the chairs next to the organ.

ORDER OF A PROCESSION
(This order may sometimes vary.)

		Cross
Torch Bearer	Torch Bearer	
Choir	Choir	
		Children's Cross
FB	FB	
LR	LR	
LR	LR	
Priest	Priest	
		Celebrant/Officiant

At the conclusion of the service, after the final blessing, the candles are extinguished as soon as the organist begins playing the introduction to the recessional hymn. Snuffers are located within the railing on each side of the sanctuary. As the candles are being extinguished, the Crucifer, Banner and Torchbearers get their crosses, banners and torches and prepare for the recessional. Turn (without bowing) and recess after the first verse of the hymn is completed.

The Crucifer begins the recessional. Torchbearers follow the Crucifer. The Children's Cross Crucifer and Banner Bearers follow directly behind the choir, ahead of the clergy. (See the graph on the previous page.)

The Crucifer should pause approximately five seconds at the crossing so the choir has time to assemble behind them (it may be useful to count to five slowly during the pause — the procession will look better in the long run, i.e., not all strung out). Then, continue to the narthex at the same pace as entering the church. Once inside the narthex, the torch candles are put out.

Proceed through the south doors and return to the Acolyte Vesting Room, first putting everything back as you found it; banners, crosses and torches. Please hang up your cassock and cottas when you are finished.

OFFERTORY

During Holy Communion only (not Morning Prayer), at the Offertory Sentence (perhaps "Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...."), the Crucifer closes the altar rail and puts the kneeler cushion into place.

At the beginning of the Doxology, the Crucifer stands to receive the offering plates from the ushers, having first picked up the alms basin.

COMMUNION ONLY SERVICE

The Children's Cross Crucifer will also serve as the Altar Server. Begin from the right side of the credence table and hand items to the priest as directed. These items will include:

- Bread box —first taking the lid off and leaving it on the credence table.
- Wine and water cruets (small pair or one large silver wine flagon) — first removing the glass stoppers and leaving them on the credence table.

There are often several different cruets placed on the credence table. Pick up and pass the cruets with the handle facing the priest. When the priest motions or nods that all is ready, you may leave the credence table and return to your seat but be alert and attentive to the needs of the clergy. You will need to make several trips but be as efficient as possible.

At the words of invitation (“The gifts of God for the people of God...”), the Crucifer and Altar Server will proceed to the altar to receive communion within the railing. The Torchbearers will kneel at the Communion rail to receive the sacraments with the choir members. Banner Bearers will take Communion at the direction of the ushers or with their family members.

After Communion, when the chalice bearers have left the sanctuary, the Altar Server immediately returns to the credence table to help with the “ablutions” (clean-up). Have the water cruet ready for the priest when he needs it. As items are passed to the Altar Server, they are then returned on the credence table. After this is finished, return to your seat.

After the last person has left the communion rail and the chalice bearers return the chalices to the altar, the Crucifer opens the altar rail and moves the long kneeler to the side.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

The Advent Wreath and Candles

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas, a special wreath of greenery is placed on a large candle stand in front of the Eagle. In a circle are three purple candles and one rose candle (one for each Sunday of Advent) and a large white candle (the “Christ Candle”) in the center to the wreath. A candle should be lit each week, always beginning with the ones that have already been burned in previous weeks. The rose candle is lit for the first time on the third Sunday in Advent.

On Christmas Eve and for the rest of the Christmas season, the Christ Candle is also lit.

The Gospel Procession

During especially festive Sundays or feasts of the Church year, a formal procession is made to bring the Gospel Book to the center of the central aisle of the church to be read, instead of reading it from “the Eagle”. As the organist begins the gradual hymn, the Crucifer and both Torchbearers collect the processional cross and torches and then gather at the entrance into the sanctuary. When a layreader (who will be carrying the Gospel Book) and the priest (who will be reading it) are ready, turn and process to the mid-point in the center aisle (“the crossing”). There the Crucifer will turn to face the altar, and the Torchbearers will turn inward to face one another. The layreader (standing between the Torchbearers) turns to face the altar with the Gospel Book opened. The priest facing the layreader then reads the Gospel lesson. After this is done, the layreader and priest step aside, permitting the acolytes to process back to the sanctuary.

Normally the feasts that will occasion a Gospel Procession are these:

- Christmas Eve
- The First Sunday after the Epiphany
- The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
- Easter Day
- The Sunday of Pentecost
- All Saints Day (or the Sunday following)
- The Bishop’s Visitation (Confirmation)

ACOLYTE MENTOR CHECKLIST

- ◆ Call the acolytes of your team no later than Thursday before the service to remind them that they are scheduled to serve.
- ◆ If someone cannot serve on the appointed day, make sure that they have found a replacement and that you and the church office know who it is. Call the replacement to make sure they will be attending as scheduled.
- ◆ If you cannot reach one of your team members, find a substitute – it is better to have too many acolytes show up than not enough.
- ◆ If you cannot serve, call another Acolyte Mentor to take your place. Decide who will call team members to remind them.
- ◆ Arrive at least 20 minutes before the service begins.
- ◆ Make sure that service bulletins are available for each acolyte.
- ◆ Make sure your team is properly vested: cassock, cotta, and ribboned cross.
- ◆ Confirm duty assignments.
- ◆ Candles should be lit 10 minutes before the service begins.
- ◆ Check that all offertory plates are accounted for and in position.
- ◆ Make sure that prayer books, hymnals, and service bulletins are in the holders next to the acolyte chairs.
- ◆ If a team member does not show up at least 10 minutes before the service begins, find an unassigned acolyte in the church and ask if they will serve. Each Eucharist service requires at least 4 acolytes and Morning Prayer needs 3.
- ◆ Assemble your team in the narthex at least 10 minutes before the service.
- ◆ Stand clear of the door to allow parishioners to enter the church until the processional hymn begins, then get into place.
- ◆ Begin the procession when the choir and congregation begins singing the processional hymn, only AFTER the organ introduction.
- ◆ Don't forget to worship God – that's why we're here.
- ◆ At the conclusion of the service, make sure the crosses, torches and banners are returned to their proper places.
- ◆ Make sure that all vestments are properly hung.

ACOLYTE CHECKLIST

- ◆ If you cannot serve, you are responsible for finding a replacement.
- ◆ Call your Acolyte Mentor and the church office with the name of your replacement.
- ◆ If you are having a hard time finding a substitute, ask your Acolyte Mentor for assistance.
- ◆ Arrive at least 20 minutes before the service begins and go immediately to the Acolyte Vesting Room to get vested.
- ◆ Get your assignment from your Acolyte Mentor.
- ◆ Be reverently quiet when waiting in the narthex for the processional to begin.
- ◆ Be alert and participate in the service.
- ◆ Enjoy the worship of God (many parishioners do) and delight in the people there.
- ◆ Thank God for the privilege of serving – and ask him to bless you this week.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ablutions ~ the ceremonial cleansing of the Eucharistic vessels immediately after the administration of the communion. The acolyte, standing at the credence table, assists in this.

Acolyte ~ an attendant who assists the clergy in public worship. Here at St. Philip's the acolytes are usually 4th through 12th graders.

Acolyte Master ~ the overall manager or director of the Acolyte Guild.

Acolyte Mentor ~ the immediate teacher and aid to a set of acolytes serving on a particular Sunday. At St. Philip's this is usually one of the father.

Advent wreath ~ a mounted circlet of greenery, set around with three purple candles (one for each Advent Sunday), a rose candle for the third Sunday in Advent, and one white "Christ Candle" in the center.

Alms basin ~ a large silver plate used to receive the offertory plates.

Altar ~ the structure (wood or stone) on which the Holy Communion is celebrated. At St. Philip's it is sometime called the "altar table".

Bread box ~ a small (usually silver) box with a lid, containing the loose wafers. Here at St. Philip's our is round.

Cassock ~ a long tailored garment with narrow sleeves and reaching to the ankles. Acolytes at Philip's wear red cassocks.

Cotta ~ a shorter, white linen version of the surplice, reaching to the waist. At St. Philip's both choristers and acolytes wear the cotta.

Chancel ~ the area in the church building where the choir and organ is located, plus the sanctuary.

Credence table ~ a side table within the sanctuary. holding the various vessels for celebration of the Holy Communion. At St. Philip's it is mounted on the wall.

Crucifer ~ the person, usually the acolyte, who carries the Processional Cross. At St. Philip's the Children's Cross Crucifer is also the Altar Server; the name varies only depending upon which function he or she is doing.

Cruet ~ a small flask (containing about 8 –16 fl. oz.) including a stopper. It is sometimes silver, but ours here at St. Philip's are glass.

Flagon ~ a large pitcher-sized vessel containing a large quantity of wine (much more than a cruet).

Lectern ~ the ornamental bookstand which holds the Bible. At St. Philip's it is lovingly called "The Eagle".

Narthex ~ a vestibule or enclosed porch leading from the main entrance of the church to the nave. At St. Philip's the clergy, choir, layreaders, and acolytes gather here before the worship service.

Nave ~ the area of the church building between the narthex (in the back) and the sanctuary (in the front); it is where the congregation sits and includes both the pulpit and the lectern. Here at St. Philip's the nave has side aisles; not all churches do.

Sacristy ~ the room in the church where the Altar Guild stores the vessels, bread, wine, and such, when they are not in use. Here at St. Philip's it is on the north side, just off the sanctuary.

Sanctuary ~ the area in the church building where the altar table is located. Here at St. Philip's it is enclosed by an altar rail.

Snuffers ~ hand-held tapers for lighting and extinguishing the Altar candles.

Torch ~ a staff (about 4 feet in height) supporting a candle, which is carried in pairs behind the processional cross.



ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH

An Anglican Congregation

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CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday
8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Friday