

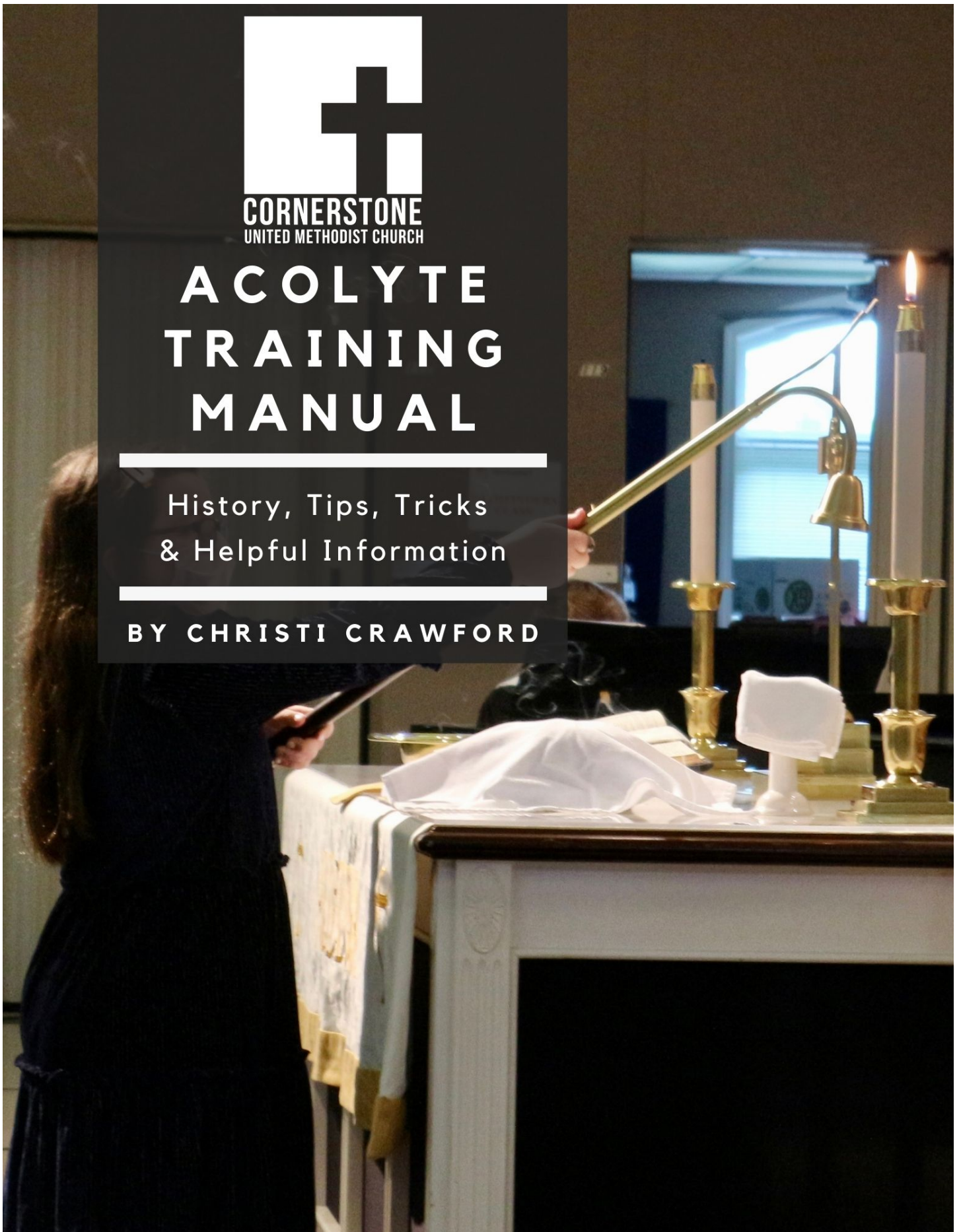


CORNERSTONE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ACOLYTE TRAINING MANUAL

History, Tips, Tricks
& Helpful Information

BY CHRISTI CRAWFORD



INTRODUCTION

When you serve God and your church by serving as an acolyte, you are doing more than carrying a flame to light the altar candles. You are symbolically bringing the light of Christ into the worship service.

It is our hope that by serving as an acolyte, you will be filled with a sense of spiritual growth as you make new friends, have fun and through your commitment grow in service to your church.

This manual should provide a quick reference for you as you begin your journey as an acolyte.

As always, if you have questions, contact our minister to youth, children and families, Christi Crawford, at 501-860-5678 or by email at familyminister@cornerstoneumc.net.

As an acolyte, you are making an important promise to Cornerstone United Methodist Church by agreeing to serve as a worship leader. You begin the worship service, and you end the time of worship – and lead us out into the world to be the light of Christ.

We welcome you and thank you for helping in this significant role! It is our prayer that you are blessed by being an important part of our worship team.

HISTORY

An acolyte is a person who assists in the worship service. Normally, the acolyte serves by lighting and extinguishing the candles on the altar. Occasionally, an acolyte can serve by carrying the cross or Bible into the sanctuary and placing them on the altar.

It is the custom in our church for acolytes to be 4th through 6th graders, though youth and adults may also serve as acolytes.

BIBLICAL ROOTS

Acolyte ministry originated in the **Old Testament**. The scriptures tell us about the prophet Samuel assisting Eli the priest and of Elijah being assisted by Elisha.

The word “acolyte” comes from the Greek word “akoulouthos,” which means a servant or attendant of the Lord’s Table; one who waits on another; or helper in worship.

HISTORY OF ACOLYTES IN THE CHURCH

Since ancient times, light and fire have reminded people that God is here with us.

The practice of ceremoniously lighting candles for worship began around 800 AD when large candlesticks were carried by the acolytes and placed on or near the altar.

Soon candlesticks held a commonplace on the altar itself, and a candlelighter was needed to reach the top of the candles. The candlelighter provided a safe – and decorative – container for the light carried in the processional.

By the Middle Ages, acolytes were a clerical order. Acolytes may have a number of helping functions, from carrying the light, processional cross, banners or Bible to assisting the pastor or other worship leaders with communion, baptism or other duties.

Modern-day acolytes are best-known for lighting candles on the altar.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACOLYTE ROLE

“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.’” (John 8:12, NLT)

The acolyte officially begins the worship service by bringing the **LIGHT OF CHRIST** into the sanctuary. The presence of light reminds us of Jesus coming into our world and into our lives. The light being carried into the worship service is a symbol of Jesus coming into the presence of the worshipping community.

Worship ends with a benediction (sending forth), and the acolyte carries the flame out of the church, with the people to follow. This symbolizes us being sent out as **LIGHTS FOR CHRIST IN THE WORLD** – and helps us remember that Jesus Christ is for all people everywhere and that Christ goes with his people out into the world to serve as his living body.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS ON THE ALTAR?



Known as the **LORD’S TABLE, COMMUNION TABLE**, or **ALTAR**, it functions primarily as the place where the feast of Holy Communion is held. As such, it symbolizes God’s presence in the church and is the symbolic center of the church’s life. Holy Communion is its primary role. Every other function of the altar is secondary. It is never *just* a convenient surface on which to place books, empty offering plates, flowers, candles – or even a cross.

That said, in our church (and in many United Methodist Churches), you may find common items on the altar.

- **BIBLE:** As United Methodists, we say the Bible is vital to our faith and life, but what exactly is the Bible? Well...here are four ways to view it:

- **Library:** The Bible is a collection of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These books were written over a 1,000-year period in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) and Greek. The books are of different lengths and different literary styles. In the Old Testament, we find legends, histories, liturgies for community worship, songs, proverbs, sermons and even a poetic drama (see Job). In the New Testament, we find the Gospels, a history of the early church, many letters and even an apocalypse (see Revelation). Yet through it all, the Bible is the story of the one God who stands in a covenant relationship with the people of God.
- **Sacred Scriptures:** In early times and over many generations, the 66 books were thoughtfully used by faithful people. In the process their merits were weighed, and the community of believers finally gave them special authority. Tested by faith and proven by experience, these books have become sacred and have become our rule for faith and practice. The Book of Deuteronomy was adopted as the Word of God in Israel about 621 BC. The Torah (or Law; the first 5 books of the Old Testament) assumed authority around 400 BC, the Prophets about 200 BC and the Writings about 100 BC. After a bit of a struggle, Christians determined that the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) was scripture for them too, and the New Testament as we know it was formed and adopted by church councils between AD 200 and AD 400.
- **God Speaking to Us about Salvation:** We say that God speaks to us through the Bible and that it contains all things necessary for salvation. This authority derives from three sources:
 - We hold that the writers of the Bible were inspired by God, that they were filled with God's Spirit as they wrote the truth to the best of their knowledge.
 - We hold that God was at work in the process of canonization, during which only the most faithful and useful books were adopted as scripture.
 - We hold that the Holy Spirit works today in our thoughtful study of the scriptures, especially as we study them together, seeking to relate the old words to life's present realities.
 - The Bible's authority, therefore, nothing magical. For example, we don't open the text at random to discover God's will. The authority of scripture derives from the movement of God's Spirit in times past and in our reading of it today.
- **Guide to Faith & Life:** We put the Bible to work. In congregational worship, we read from the Bible. Through preaching, we interpret its message for our lives. It forms the background of most of our hymns and liturgy, and it is the foundation of our Sunday School curriculum. Many of us use it in our individual devotional lives, praying through its implications day by day. However, we admit that there's still vast "biblical illiteracy" in our denomination, and we need to help one another open the Bible and use it.
 - And perhaps, the Bible is best put to use when we seriously answer these four questions about a given text:
 - What did this passage mean to its original hearers?
 - What part does it play in the Bible's total witness?
 - What does God seem to be saying to my life, my community and my world through this passage?
 - What changes should I consider making as a result of my study?

- **2 CANDLES:** You may have noticed there are two candles on the altar. Why?
 - The two candles point out that **JESUS is both fully GOD & fully HUMAN.**
 - The candles also help us remember that: Jesus is the **LIGHT OF THE WORLD**, and that we are supposed to be that light **OUT IN THE WORLD.**
- **CROSS:** The first appearances of a cross on the altar occurred in the 6th century, although it remained somewhat unusual for several centuries – and even often discouraged. By the start of the 13th century, it was expected that there would be a cross between two candles on the altar. Today most mainline Protestant churches have a cross displayed on or near the altar or communion table or at some central location.
- **OFFERING PLATES:** We have offering plates on the altar as a reminder that when we give, we are offering God a small portion of the abundance God has already given us. Giving is an expression of our thankfulness and praise to God. It comes from a heart of worship that recognizes that everything we have and give already belongs to God.
- **PARAMENTS:** Paraments are the liturgical hangings on and around the altar – as well as the cloths hanging from the pulpit and lectern (and can include vestments – stoles or overlays worn by those participating in worship).
 - In our church, we have paraments in purple, white, red and green. We also have special paraments, including hand-made paraments for Father's Day. Additionally, we often dress the altar in black for Holy Week.
 - **WHITE PARAMENTS** are used for high holy days in the church (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter/Eastertide, All Saints, communion, funerals and weddings; some churches use gold paraments for certain high holy days).
 - **PURPLE PARAMENTS** are used for Advent and Lent (though, some churches use blue paraments for Advent).
 - Advent is the first season of the liturgical calendar (church year), leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays. Advent means the coming of Christ.
 - Lent is the 40-day period preceding Easter that is devoted to fasting/abstinence in commemoration of Christ's fasting in the wilderness. It runs from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, not including Sundays.
 - **RED PARAMENTS** are used for Pentecost, and can also be used whenever a congregation would like to invoke the Holy Spirit.
 - Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day from Easter Sunday, and it commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ.

- **GREEN PARAMETERS** are used for Ordinary Time.
 - The Christian year includes two central cycles focused on major events in the life of Christ: the Christmas Cycle (Advent-Christmas-Epiphany) and the Easter Cycle (Lent-Easter-Pentecost). Each of these seasons begins with a time of preparation or anticipation, followed by a time of celebration. A season designated as Ordinary Time follows each cycle.
 - The word “ordinary” here doesn’t mean “routine” or “not special.” Instead, it refers to “measured time.”
 - The first period of Ordinary Time, called the Season After Epiphany, begins on Epiphany Day and ends the day before Ash Wednesday. The central theme of this season is the calling of disciples and the early ministry of Jesus.
 - The second period of Ordinary Time, called the Season After Pentecost, follows the Easter Cycle. It begins the day after Pentecost and continues all the way to Advent. The purpose of this season is to support new disciples and the whole church living out the gifts and callings discerned through the Easter Season and commissioned on the Day of Pentecost.

WHAT TIME SHOULD I ARRIVE ON SUNDAYS I SERVE?

Please arrive **NO LATER** than 10-15 minutes prior to the service start time.

- **NOTE:** If you have not arrived 10 minutes before the service is scheduled to begin, another acolyte will be asked to take your place – regardless of whether or not you show up before the service starts.
- **UNABLE TO SERVE:** If you are unable to serve as scheduled, please either find a substitute acolyte or let Christi know ASAP by calling or texting 501-860-5678.

AWAKENING SERVICE (8:45 a.m.) | Please arrive between 8:30 and 8:35 a.m.

HERITAGE SERVICE (11:15 a.m.) | Please arrive between 11:00 and 11:05 a.m.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ARRIVE IN THE SANCTUARY?

Find where your family will be sitting and place an **ORDER OF WORSHIP** in your chair. Then meet in the back of the sanctuary. Make sure you and your candlelighter are ready.

Please sit on the aisle side of your row so as not to cause a commotion when entering and exiting your seat.

AWAKENING SERVICE (8:45 a.m.)

- **BE READY:** Stand and wait at the back of the sanctuary with your candlelighter until it's time for the service to begin. Be sure there's a lighter handy.
- **LIGHTING/EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLES:** You will light the candles during the first song, and you will extinguish the candles just prior to the benediction (walk to the altar when the pastor approaches the altar at the end of the last song).

HERITAGE SERVICE (11:15 a.m.)

- **ROBE UP:** Put on a provided robe and an overlay in the appropriate liturgical color.
- **BE READY:** Once you have robed up, stand and wait at the back of the sanctuary with your candlelighter until it's time for the service to begin. Be sure there's a lighter handy.
- **LIGHTING/EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLES:** You will light the candles during the prelude, and you will extinguish the candles just prior to the benediction (walk to the altar when the pastor approaches the altar at the end of the last hymn).

WHAT SHOULD ACOLYTES WEAR?

First and foremost, we want you to be comfortable and safe!

AWAKENING SERVICE (8:45 a.m.) | You may dress however you would normally dress for the 8:45 a.m. service – with the exception of **FOOTWEAR**.

- **FOOTWEAR:** Please refrain from wearing **flip-flops, slides** or other **sandals/shoes** without a back. This is out of an abundance of caution since you will be carrying a flame, and we do not want you to trip over your feet. Wear shoes that are **comfortable** and that you are used to walking in.

HERITAGE SERVICE (11:15 a.m.) |

You may dress however you would normally dress for the 11:15 a.m. service – with a few exceptions.

- **FOOTWEAR:** Please refrain from wearing **flip-flops, slides** or other **sandals/shoes** without a back. This is out of an abundance of caution since you will be carrying a flame, and we do not want you to trip over your feet. Wear shoes that are **comfortable** and that you are used to walking in.



- **LAYERS/WARM CLOTHING:**

Remember that you'll be wearing

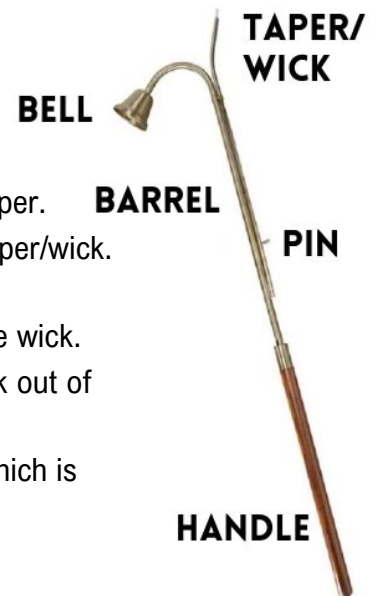
a robe over your clothes. Throughout the year, this could result in you becoming too warm. In cooler months when sweaters/jackets/hoodies/coats are the norm, you may want to wear a lighter layer underneath to prevent overheating.

- **NECKLINE:** Be aware that tops with a high neckline may show under the robe – and may also contribute to you becoming too warm. Save the turtlenecks and zipper-necks for Sundays you aren't serving as an acolyte.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT LIGHTING CANDLES?

TERMINOLOGY

- **CANDLELIGHTER:** A candlelighter is used to light and extinguish (put out) the candles.
- **TAPER/WICK:** Inside the candlelighter is a long wick called a taper.
- **BELL:** The bell is at the top of the candlelighter, opposite the taper/wick. Its bell shape is used to snuff/extinguish the candles.
- **BARREL:** The barrel is the long cylindrical piece that houses the wick.
- **PIN/SLIDE:** The pin is a small cylinder piece that slides the wick out of the end of the candlelighter.
- **HANDLE:** The handle is the wooden part of the candlelighter which is where your left hand should reside when carrying it.



BEFORE THE SERVICE

- **CHECK THE TAPER/WICK:** Check taper/wick, making sure it is secure and in proper working order. If the wax taper/wick is not inserted correctly, it can jam inside the barrel, thus it is important to check your taper/wick before each worship service. For the taper/wick to work properly throughout the service, it needs to be at least 4 inches long. If it is not at least 4 inches long, let Christi know.

HOLDING A CANDLELIGHTER | Whenever you carry the flame, the **BELL** should be on top facing you so that the **FLAME** is facing out (either toward the altar or toward the door of the church).

- Your **RIGHT HAND** should be near the **PIN/SLIDE**.
- Your **LEFT HAND** should be near the bottom of the **HANDLE**. Also, the handle should be about waist height as you're walking.
- Your **ELBOWS** should be close to your body.
- The **CANDLELIGHTER** should be pointed away from you at a 45° angle.

WALKING | Did you know that the way you walk helps the congregation get ready to worship?
As an acolyte, you begin the worship service by walking down the center aisle. Here are some tips:

- Know when you are supposed to enter and leave before the service begins. Check the order of worship provided for you or ask an usher if you are unsure.
- As you walk down the center aisle, keep your **THUMB** on the **PIN** that controls the length of the taper/wick and keep an eye on the height of the flame. If the flame starts to get too low or looks like it is going out, try this:
 - Slow down! If you're walking too fast, the wind you generate can blow the flame out.
 - Slowly push the pin on your candlelighter forward. This will increase the length of the taper/wick and give the flame more room to burn.
- Take small steps and walk slowly (or at an appropriate pace based on the music). Walk in a dignified and unhurried fashion, respectfully toward the altar. Your pace should be roughly one normal-sized step per second, taken in a controlled manner. This helps set the tone for worship – AND helps your taper/wick stay lit. If you walk too fast, your flame may go out.
 - If your flame does go out, don't worry! Stay where you are and someone will assist you (either a fellow acolyte if you're in pairs or a pastor, staffer or usher if you're flying solo), and you will proceed from there.
- If you're walking with an acolyte teammate, watch your teammate (out of the corner of your eye) and walk together at the same pace.

LIGHTING THE CANDLES | You will process into the worship space from the back center doors of the sanctuary down the center aisle.

- An usher (or parent or staffer) will light the candlelighter for you).
 - For the **AWAKENING SERVICE (8:45 a.m.)**, you will begin walking down the aisle at the beginning of the first song.
 - For the **HERITAGE SERVICE (11:15 a.m.)**, you will begin walking down the aisle during the prelude or first hymn, depending on pastor preference.
- If serving with an acolyte teammate light both candles at the same time.
- If serving as a solo acolyte, light the right candle first, then the left candle.
- Hold the candlelighter up horizontally or angled slightly downward so that the flame just touches the candle's wick. Keep the flame on the wick long enough for the candle to light.
- Once both candles are lit, snuff out the flame on the candlelighter by sliding the taper/wick down into the barrel, then use the pin to slide the taper/wick back out (roughly 2 inches) to ensure that it doesn't melt inside the brass barrel, becoming inoperative.
 - Do **NOT** blow out the flame unless the candlelighter isn't working properly.

- Head back to your seat, and quietly place the candlelighter underneath your chair for the duration of the service.

DURING THE SERVICE | Please remember that you are in God's house and are serving as an aid to the congregation during worship.

- You should participate in the service without distractions. Be on your best behavior and be careful not to distract other worshippers.
- Younger children in our church are looking to you as an example of how to behave. Own that responsibility and work hard to respect your role.

EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLES | As the worship service comes to a close, be ready to approach the altar to extinguish the candles. Pick up your candlelighter gently and proceed to the center aisle.

- Check your order of worship, and know that you'll extinguish candles just before the benediction.
- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Do **NOT** push the **BELL** down onto the **FOLLOWER** (brass ring at the top of the candles). This will push the wick down. Instead, simply cover the flame with the bell and count: "One Mississippi, Two Mississippi." At the end of this count, the candles should be out.
 - For the **AWAKENING SERVICE (8:45 a.m.)**, you will begin walking down the aisle toward the altar during the last chorus of the final song.
 - For the **HERITAGE SERVICE (11:15 a.m.)**, you will begin walking down the aisle toward the altar during the last verse of the final hymn.
- If serving with an acolyte teammate light the tapers/wicks of both candlelighters from the candles' flames simultaneously. Then turn the bell toward the candles to extinguish the candles simultaneously. Once the flames are out, turn the bell back toward you and stand respectfully at the altar (facing the congregation) through the benediction.
- If serving as a solo acolyte, light the taper/wick of your candlelighter from the **LEFT CANDLE**, then turn the bell toward the candles to extinguish both candles, beginning with the left candle. Once both flames are out, turn the bell back toward you and stand respectfully at the altar (facing the congregation) through the benediction.
- Following the **BENEDICTION**, you will carry the **LIGHT OF CHRIST** down the center aisle out of the sanctuary. Extinguish your flame once you've made it to the foyer by sliding the taper/wick down into the brass barrel. Use the pin to slide the taper/wick back out (roughly 2 inches) to ensure that it doesn't melt inside the brass barrel, becoming inoperative.

AFTER THE SERVICE

- **RETURN YOUR CANDLELIGHTER TO THE CLOSET:** Following the worship service, return your candlelighter to the hook in the closet at the back of the sanctuary. If you are serving as an acolyte in the Heritage Service, put your robe back on the hanger neatly in the closet.
- **HELP WHERE NEEDED:** Check the sanctuary for any loose orders of worship and put them in the trash can at the back of the sanctuary on your way out.

THE 4 P'S OF SERVING AS AN ACOLYTE:

- **PUNCTUALITY:** When you arrive on time, everything flows more smoothly.
- **PAY ATTENTION:** It helps to take a few minutes before the service to familiarize yourself with the order of worship. This will help you stay on top of things and know where your roles are in the service so you're prepared – and it will help you anticipate any last-minute changes.
- **PARTICIPATE:** You will soon find that by being prompt and alert, you will have few problems! Most importantly, though, don't forget to **WORSHIP GOD!** That's why we're all here!
- **PLEASANT:** Don't forget to **HAVE FUN** and **BE AWESOME** – all the pleasant things that come from serving God and your church!