

ALTAR GUILD REFRESHER COURSE - Part 1 – May 2020

History of Altar Guilds

Altar Guilds date back to the last half of the nineteenth century. Before that time minor orders of monks or laymen called “sacristans” performed these duties in churches. After the Reformation Sacristans were followed by parish clerks. Then the Oxford and Cambridge movements in the nineteenth century stressed increased involvement of the laity in all phases of the church’s life, and in the latter half of the 1800s these duties were assumed by a group of volunteers who became known as the Altar Guild.

The Purpose of the Altar Guild

The purpose of the Altar Guild is to assist the clergy and to serve at his or her discretion. The Altar Guild prepares all things necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist or any of the other sacraments and offices of the church. The Rector is technically head of the Altar Guild because the liturgies of the church are his or her canonical responsibility.

Holy Hardware – or The Vessels Used in the Church

THE CHALICE

From the Latin *calix* and the Greek *kalyx*, both meaning ‘cup’, this vessel is a cup which is used at the altar to hold the elements of wine and water for consecration and communion. Most commonly, the chalice has been a large, tall, beautiful vessel of silver, lined with a mask of gold.

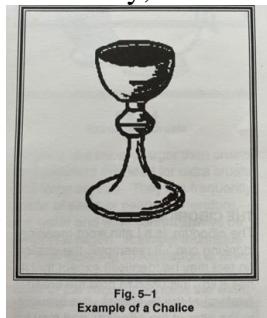


Fig. 5-1
Example of a Chalice

THE PATEN

The paten, from the Latin *patena*, meaning ‘pan or shallow dish’, is a plate made of silver, gold, or ceramic to match the chalice and upon it is placed the priest’s wafer when the chalice is vested for Eucharist.

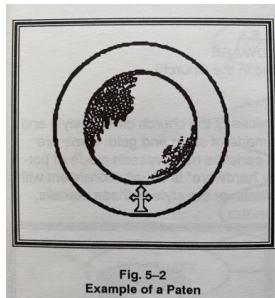


Fig. 5-2
Example of a Paten

THE CIBORIUM

The ciborium is a Latin word meaning ‘drinking cup’. It resembles the chalice except that it has a lid. It is used to hold the wafers at the Eucharist. It is brought to the altar at the offertory, and may be used in reservation of the Sacrament in the aumbry.



Fig. 5-3
Example of a Ciborium

At St. Peter’s, the chalice, paten and ciborium vessels that we usually use for services each week are a Canterbury style set.

We also have a beautiful solid silver set of vessels which are used at Easter, Christmas, weddings, funerals and other special occasions. See below:



The ciborium has British hallmarks – it was made in London in 1967. It is inscribed “In loving memory of David Perry Harmon 1907-1967”

The chalice also has the same inscription.

Much of our Holy Hardware has been given to the church in memory of loved ones or in thanksgiving. We have many beautiful pieces of silver and brass hardware which enhance the beauty and dignity of our services.