

# The Duties of the Acolyte:

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**Crucifer:** Carries the processional cross in the entrance and recessional procession (beginning and end of Mass).

- The *corpus* (body of Christ on the cross) should always face the priest/bishop.
- Leads the procession (unless there are 4+ acolytes AND incense is being used)
- Upon the cue of the priest, he begins the procession at a somewhat slow pace entering and only slightly faster pace exiting.
- During the procession, when he reaches the lower communion rail, he pauses very briefly, bows his head, and proceeds into the sanctuary directly to the processional cross stand where he places the processional cross, genuflects, and then takes his seat.
- After Holy Communion, he goes to get the processional cross when the priest says, “Let us pray”. If the processional cross is on the far side of the altar from where he is sitting, he should go *behind* the high altar and walk at a slow pace.
- He waits beside the cross until the priest/deacon says “The Mass is ended go in peace” (or similar words), the congregation has responded “Thanks be to God,” and the priest (and deacon) have moved to the altar of sacrifice to reverence it. At this point he proceeds down to the lower altar rail, turns and faces the high altar until the priest genuflects.
- Then he turns to face the main entrance of the Church keeping the corpus of the cross facing the priest/bishop. This procession is only slightly faster than the entrance.
- When he reaches the back of the Church, he turns around keeping the corpus facing the priest. The rest of the procession should gather around the cross until the celebrant reaches the cross and dismisses everyone.

**Candle bearers:** carry the processional candles in the entrance, Gospel, and recessional procession

- One candle bearer should make sure that the candles around the altar are lit before Mass begins. The wick and snuffer as well as lighter are in one of the closets in the sacristy where the priest vests before Mass.
- The candle bearers always follow immediately the processional cross in the procession. The two candles should be carried at the same height and held symmetrically.
- When the candle bearers reach the communion rail they should bow their heads, turn to face each other, and take one small step back to make sure that the rest of the procession can pass easily between them.
- When the priest has entered the sanctuary, the candle bearers turn back to face the sanctuary, walk up the steps, one going to his right and the other to his left, they should place the processional candle on the middle step of the *predella* of the high altar. [The candle should be even with the altar so that access to the altar is not blocked.] They then genuflect and take their seats one on each side of the sanctuary.
- After the lector finishes the second reading and the congregation responds “Thanks be to God,” the candle bearers go to get the candles for the Gospel procession (this is done when the Gospel is read at the high pulpit). The candle bearers move symmetrically to the congregation’s side of the altar of sacrifice directly in front of the altar candles. They wait here until the priest/deacon picks up the Gospel book, and bows his head.
- The candle bearers then turn and walk down the steps to the area between the altar rail and the sanctuary. Walking at the same pace, when they arrive at the foot of the high pulpit, they *turn and face each other* keeping the candles at the same height.
- When the priest/deacon finishes reading the Gospel and the congregation responds “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,” the candle bearers reverse their path to the altar of sacrifice. They wait here until the deacon and priest meet between them and bows OR, if the

priest/deacon stays in the high pulpit to preach, they bow their heads at the same time and return the candles to the high altar.

- After the closing prayer when the priest/deacon says “The Mass is ended, go in peace” (or similar words), the candle bearers go to retrieve their candles. They should follow the crucifer to the congregation’s side of the altar at the top of the steps, and then turn and face the priest. When he genuflects to the tabernacle, they should bow their heads turn towards the other candle bearer and follow the crucifer to the back of the Church.
- At the end of the procession, one candle bearer should be on each side of the cross and should remain their until the priest has bowed to the cross and given the dismissal.

**Book Bearer:** Holds the large Missal (Sacramentary) for the priest for the opening and closing prayers. At special liturgies, he may need to hold the Missal at other occasions.

- Check with the priest celebrating the Mass to see if he would like to use the Missal for the Penitential Rite (the Lord Have Mercies). If the priest DOES want to use the Missal for this, you will need to bring it to his chair following the opening sign of the cross.
- If the priest only wants the Missal for the opening and closing prayers (this is most commonly the case), the acolyte picks up the large Missal towards the end of the **Gloria** (e.g. at the mention of the Holy Spirit). If the Missal is being brought from the high pulpit side of the sanctuary, the acolyte should pass in front (the congregation's side) of the altar of sacrifice pausing very briefly to bow to the tabernacle when he passes in front of it.
- When the acolyte is shorter than the priest, he should hold the book directly in front of him with his hands on the bottom of the book. The priest will open and close the book himself. If the acolyte is taller than the priest, he holds the Missal to his right side, so that he does not block the congregation's view or the priest's use of the microphone.
- After Holy Communion, the book bearer brings the Missal to the celebrants chair again when the priest stands and says/sings "Let us pray." [He follows the same path as with the entrance.] The book bearer should keep the Missal open until the priest closes it. (Sometimes there are "prayers over the people" or special blessings that follow the closing prayer).
- When the priest closes the Missal, the book bearer returns it to where he found it and prepares for the recessional.

**Preparation of the Altar:** this may involve several acolytes. After the prayers of the faithful (Lord hear our prayer), the acolytes prepare or help prepare the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

- The first thing brought to the altar should be the altar Missal (using the stand only if it is there). The Missal is placed slightly off center (towards where the priest celebrant is located).
- Following this the principal chalice is brought to the altar with the chalice veil. The chalice is carried with the acolyte's right hand on the node of the stem and his left hand on top of the veil. When he reaches the altar, he hands it to the deacon or priest and bows his head. If no deacon or priest is present, he sets the chalice on the altar, carefully takes off the veil and folds it up. He then unfolds the corporal in the middle of the altar. The corporal (if folded correctly) should unfold like one opens a book: left, right, top, bottom. If two corporals are present, the second one is then unfolded at the pulpit side of the altar.
- If there are additional chalices, purificators, and ciboria on the credence table, these are then brought to the altar. No acolyte should ever carry more than one thing in each hand. You can make multiple trips if necessary.
- At least one and preferably two acolytes should accompany the priest (and deacon) to the altar rail for the presentation of the gifts. The priest and deacon may hand you a ciborium of altar breads and the flagon of wine.
- If the priest hands a ciborium of altar breads to you, follow the priest immediately to the altar and hand the ciborium to him when he turns to you.
- If you receive the flagon of wine, proceed to the credence table to get the cruet of water. If you are carrying both to the altar, carry the wine in your right hand and the water in your left. If there are enough acolytes present, a second acolyte may accompany you on your left with the water. The cruets should have their handles facing the priest and the tops should be left on the credence table.

- After the deacon/priest prepares the chalice(s), he will hand back the flagon and cruet(s) and you should make a small head bow. If no incense is used, the next thing to do is the “lavabo.”
- The lavabo dish is where the priest washes his hands. The dish should be carried in acolyte’s left hand and the cruet of water in his right. If there are enough acolytes present, a second one accompanies him with the towel (unfolded) and stands to his left at the altar. If there are not enough acolytes, the towel is placed on the acolyte’s left forearm.
- After the lavabo, the acolytes return the bowl, cruet, and towel to the credence table and take their seats.
- Following Holy Communion when the priest/deacon places the remaining Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, he will sometimes turn immediately to the side with the keys and empty ciboria/ communion plates. You should walk up the steps and take them from him. Otherwise he returns to the altar of sacrifice to purify the vessels.
- Bring the cruet of water and pour the water over his fingers into the chalice or ciborium until he gives you a signal (lifting the chalice slightly, nodding his head, or saying “that’s enough). Return the cruet to the credence table and then return to the altar to receive the purified vessels. (More than one acolyte may help with this task.)
- When the priest/deacon returns to his seat, remove the altar missal placing it on or beside the credence table.

**Bell Ringer:** The acolyte rings the “Sanctus” bells at the elevation of the Body and Blood of Christ.

- During the Eucharistic prayer, after the priest says “This is my body, which will be given up for you,” he raises the host. The acolyte should ring the bell three times.
- Immediately following is the consecration of the chalice. When he raises the chalice, the bell is rung three times again.

**Holy Communion:** the acolytes stand to receive Holy Communion after the priest has consumed the Precious Blood from the Chalice. They should form part of a single-file line on either side of the sanctuary. After receiving Holy Communion, they should return to their pews kneeling and praying until the priest and extraordinary ministers of holy communion return to the sanctuary. The acolyte(s) helping with the altar should then go towards the credence table and genuflect when the priest or deacon puts the ciborium back in the tabernacle.

**Boat Bearer:** An additional acolyte *may* accompany the thurifer each time incense is to be added to the thurible. The incensing of the altar at the beginning of Mass *should* take place without additional incense being added to the thurible, but this is not a widely known rubric and most priests will expect the incense boat each time the thurible is used. The boat bearer should remain by the side of the thurifer during each of these functions with two exceptions: 1) if the thurifer has to incense the congregation and ministers at the offertory, and 2) if the thurifer is to incense the Blessed Sacrament during the Elevations within the Eucharistic Prayer. During the entrance procession, the boat bearer walks to the left of the thurifer at the front of the procession.

N.B. The thurifer should be at the center of the processional line, so, unlike the other ministers in the procession, the thurifer and boat bearer do not follow the same line of symmetry.

**Thurifer/Incense Bearer:** Sometimes incense will be used at the morning Masses on Sunday. Please check with the priest at least 10 minutes before Mass to see IF he wants to use incense and, if he does, WHEN he wants to use it.

- The incense should be lit and put in the thurible with the curved section facing down about 10 minutes before the beginning of Mass. Swinging the thurible helps heat the charcoal.
- The priest may put some incense in the thurible before the procession. Once this is done, the thurifer goes *before* the crucifer in the procession.
- When he comes to the communion rail, he bows his head, walks up the stairs and goes to the left. When the priest and deacon enter the sanctuary and reverence the altar, he takes the incense boat and thurible to the deacon and priest. If there is a deacon, he hands the incense boat to the deacon, and raises the lid of the thurible for the priest (if no deacon, he hands the incense boat directly to the priest). The priest will place a little incense on the charcoal, bless it, and hand the boat back to the acolyte either directly or via the deacon. The thurifer should wait to the side until the priest is done incensing the altar at which point the priest will turn to the acolyte and hand the thurible back either directly, or again, via the deacon.
- The second place at which incense *may be* used is at the Gospel. If incense is to be used at this point, the thurifer (and boat bearer if there should be one) bring the thurible to the priest (and deacon if one should be serving) immediately. The incense should be put in the thurible and blessed *before* the deacon receives his blessing from the priest to proclaim the Gospel. Once the incense has been put on the charcoal, the thurifer should take his place to the *left* of the acolyte closest to the high pulpit. This will make the thurifer *first* in the Gospel procession. He will precede the deacon to the steps leading up to the high pulpit being sure to take a step back so that the deacon can pass through. The deacon will say “The Lord be with you,” “A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to N.,” sign the Gospel Book and himself, and then turn to take the thurible from the acolyte. The

acolyte may need to take a step or two up into the pulpit. After incensing the Gospel Book, the deacon will return the thurible. The acolyte should then stand at the base of the pulpit gradually swinging the thurible until the end of the Gospel. At this point, he returns to his initial position beside the candle bearer before the altar. All bow at once, and he returns the thurible to its stand.

- If incense is to be used at the Offertory, an additional charcoal should be put on at this time.
- The third time within the Mass that incense *may be* used is during the Offertory. After the deacon/priest has prepared the chalices and the priest has said the offertory prayers but *before* the lavabo, the thurifer (and incense boat bearer) should approach the altar from the credence table side. Once the priest places incense on the thurible and blesses it, close the lid, and hand it either to the deacon (should one be serving) or directly to the priest. Take a few steps back towards the credence table and wait until the priest has incensed around the altar.
- At this point, either the deacon will take the thurible from the priest (or should there be no deacon) or the thurifer will. If the thurifer receives the thurible directly, he then takes a couple steps back makes a medium bow to the priest and incenses him with three swings of the thurible. This is followed by another medium bow. From here the thurifer goes to any other concelebrating priest in the sanctuary, bows to them, incenses three times, and then bows again. Then he incenses the faithful from between the altar rail break in the same manner: bow, three swings of the thurible, and a final bow. At this point he takes the thurible back to its stand. [Should a deacon be serving, he will return the thurible to you at the same place where the priest initially took it after he has incensed the congregation.]
- A fourth possibility for using incense is during the elevation of the sacred species during the Eucharistic Prayer. This *might be done* on a very solemn occasion, e.g. Easter. Should the priest request incense at this point, the thurifer at the beginning of the Holy, Holy, Holy takes the thurible and goes and kneels at the bottom step of the steps leading into the sanctuary after passing the communion rail. He

kneels here very gently swinging the thurible in front of himself. When the priest elevates the Host and while the bell is being rung, the thurifer should incense in the direction of the elevation three times. The same is repeated with the chalice. When the congregation is singing the Memorial Acclamation (e.g. Christ has died...), the thurifer stands up, genuflects, returns the thurible to its stand and goes and kneels in his stall or at the kneeler closest to the thurible stand until the end of the Eucharistic Prayer.

- At the end of Mass, the thurible is NOT used. Both the thurifer and boat bearer, if one served in the entrance procession stand near the pillars of the baldachino and genuflect with the priest and deacon. In the recessional, these servers follow the crucifer and candle bearers two pews behind. Like all other servers they wait facing the cross until the celebrant has arrived and dismissed all ministers.

## Following Mass

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Following the end of the Procession, acolytes should blow out the processional candles, and return to the sacristy. The candle bearers should be sure to wipe off their finger prints from the candlesticks (the brass will tarnish quickly otherwise). All acolytes must hang up their albs being sure to fasten them once they have placed them on the hanger. The lavabo bowl should be emptied, and the thurible if it should be used, should be emptied outside away from any traffic areas and especially away from anything flammable.