



ST. GEORGE
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Acolyte Training Manual

February 2016

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your commitment to serve the Lord as an Acolyte. As an Acolyte, you are actively assisting the clergy in leading the worship of God. You are an integral part of the service whenever you participate. This is an important ministry that should be taken seriously and performed with love in your heart for our Lord, Jesus Christ. Know that your commitment as an Acolyte makes you a member of a worldwide Acolyte community.

Please use this manual as a quick reference as you serve God at His Altar. It has been designed to define the roles and duties of Acolytes at St. George. There are many situations, however, when the service will not proceed exactly as set forth in this manual, such as a baptism, a service led by a Bishop, or various situations when the clergy need to do something different. So, be prepared to be flexible. Acolytes often find their service is not only fun, but also spiritually fulfilling. Remember to serve with dignity, humility, and care, always with love of Christ, in all His Glory.

HISTORY

The word acolyte comes from the Greek word *akolouthos*, which means follower or attendant. The ministry of “acolytes” goes back to at least the third century. In the early church, acolytes were included as members of the clergy – ordained to assist in the liturgical service alongside bishops, priests, deacons, and others. Although acolytes are now lay members, their primary role is still the same – to take charge of the candles (lighting, processing, and extinguishing), assist in preparing for the Eucharist, and help lead and define the tone of worship for the community.

The patron saint of acolytes is St. Vincent of Saragossa, who lived in the late third century, was martyred in the year 304 for his defense of Christianity in a Roman court, and is commemorated on January 22. St. Vincent is known for his unwavering love of God, his faithfulness to his bishop, and his loyalty to his responsibilities as a servant. These are the traits of an Acolyte: love, faithfulness, and loyalty.

At St. George, Acolytes can begin serving during their third grade year and usually continue to serve through high school. Our Acolytes are also often asked to serve at their school worship services.

ACOLYTE’S PRAYER

Gracious God, the epitome of light and love: You call us to light the way for your people in a world of change and uncertainty. Grant to your Acolytes reverent hearts, steady hands, and the will to persevere in service at your altar and at prayer. Bless and guide us by your wisdom and help us to spread your word throughout the world; through Jesus Christ our lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

NUMBER OF ACOLYTES AND POSITIONS

At St. George, there are five Acolyte positions. But at any particular service, there may be between one and five Acolytes serving. The number of Acolytes and the positions they will fill are as follows:

- 1 Acolyte – Crucifer
- 2 Acolytes – Crucifer and Banner
- 3 Acolytes – Crucifer, Epistle Torch, and Gospel Torch
- 4 Acolytes – Crucifer, Banner, Epistle Torch, and Gospel Torch
- 5 Acolytes – Crucifer, Banner, Epistle Torch, Gospel Torch, and Gospel

The Gospel is usually a newer Acolyte whose primary role is to watch and learn. The guidelines in this manual, therefore, are based on the roles of the four other Acolytes. If there are fewer than four Acolytes at a service, the other positions will simply perform additional duties. For example, if there are three Acolytes, the Epistle Torch will perform some of the Banner's duties.

CONDUCT

- Arrive at least 15 minutes before the service begins.
- Please try to eat and drink something before you arrive. It can get hot in the front of the church wearing a robe, especially in the summer.
- Do not chew gum.
- When standing without an appointment (cross, torch, etc.) keep your hands folded at waist level.
- When facing, entering, or exiting the altar, bow in reverence. Do not bow while holding the cross, banner, or torch.
- Stand and sit straight, and do not lean against anything or slouch in your chairs looking out the window. Keep your eyes on whomever is leading the service. Remember, the congregation is looking to you for guidance, and you are an example to other potential Acolytes.
- Remember, you are a church leader and are recognized as such. Be careful not to disrupt the flow of worship.

BEFORE THE SERVICE BEGINS

Attire

- Wear clean, close-toed shoes or sandals.
- Make sure your hair is neatly kept, regardless of length or style.
- Wear your robe ankle-length, with the cincture (belt) tied with a knot on either side. The Crucifer wears the yellow cincture, other Acolytes wear white cinctures.
- Wear a cross. The Crucifer wears the purple cross, the other Acolytes wear either metal or wooden crosses.

Lighting the Altar Candles

Approximately 10 minutes before the service begins, the Acolytes should light the altar candles. The altar candles are usually lit by the Epistle Torch and Gospel Torch, but any one or two Acolytes can do it.

- The torch lighters are in the Sacristy, by the door. Matches are found above the silver piscina (sink). If you need help lighting the torch lighter, ask an older Acolyte or adult to assist you.
- With the lit torch lighter, proceed to the center of the altar rail and bow.
- If there are two people, light the Epistle torch (on the right as you face the altar) and the Gospel torch (on the left) in unison. If there is one person, light the Epistle torch first, then the Gospel torch.
- Proceed to light the three candles against the wall. Light these candles from the inside (candle nearest the Aumbry) out. If there are two people, try to light the candles in sync with each other.
- Once the altar candles are lit, blow out the torch lighter.
- Return back to the center of the altar rail and bow.
- Return the torch lighters to the Sacristy.

Gathering behind the Pews

About 5 minutes before the service begins, all Acolytes get their respective processional appointments (cross, banner, torch, or gospel) and gather behind the pews with the clergy and LEMs. The Crucifer will ensure the priest knows which Acolytes will be serving and find out if the service requires anything out of the ordinary. The Crucifer will ensure all the Acolytes are properly vested and know their roles.

THE SERVICE

The Procession

- The Acolytes process (and recess) in the following order: Crucifer in front, then Torches side by side, then Banner, followed by the Gospel.
- The Crucifer holds the cross high, in both hands, and begins processing at a slow, deliberate pace when the first verse of the entrance hymn begins. The other Acolytes follow in order.
- The Crucifer and Banner process to their respective sides (left and right) and place their appointments in their stands.
- The Torches process outside the altar rail and place their torches in their stands, in unison. Do not drop the torch into its stand.
- The Gospel processes to the front of the altar, bows, and places the Gospel on the right side of the altar (the left side as you approach the altar from the front). The Gospel then exits the back of the altar to the assigned seat.
- Once the torches have been placed in their stands, the Banner takes the small processional cross from its stand, walks to the front of the altar, and stands by the priest, facing the altar. At the priest's cue, the Banner will process down the aisle, leading the young children to Children's Chapel. The Banner then returns down the side aisle and replaces the small cross in its stand. **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch performs this task.**

Gospel Reading

- During the Sequence Hymn, the Crucifer will take the cross from its stand and walk to the front of the altar. This is the cue for the other Acolytes to get their appointments. The Banner will get the Gospel Book from the altar and stand in front of the altar. (If there is no Banner, the priest will take the Gospel Book.) The Torches will get their torches, walk around the side of the altar, and stand in front of the altar.
- On the priest's cue, the Crucifer will lead a procession down the center aisle (same order as before, Crucifer, Torches, then Banner holding the Gospel Book high).
- The Crucifer will stop at about the 7th pew and turn around.
- The Torches will stop and stand sideways against the pew, facing each other.
- The Banner will stop in the center and hold the Gospel Book for the priest to read. (The priest will give directions as needed.)
- After the Gospel has been read, the Acolytes process back down the aisle in the same order (Crucifer, then Torches, then Banner holding the Gospel Book).
- The Torches process outside the altar and replace in the torches in their stands, in unison.
- The Banner processes to the front of the altar, bows, and replaces the Gospel Book on the right side of the altar.
- Once the Crucifer, Torches, and Banner have replaced their appointments, they stand at the outside of the altar and bow in unison.

Leading Children in from Children's Chapel

- Immediately after the Nicene Creed, the Banner will take the small processional cross from its stand and walk down the side aisle to tell the Children's Chapel teachers that the congregation is saying the Prayers of the People.
- The Banner will then go to the Narthex and wait for the children to line up.
- When the children's processional music begins, the Banner will lead the children down the center aisle and return the small cross to its stand.

Offertory

- At the Offertory Scripture Sentence, the Crucifer and one of the LEMs will go to the altar rail, receive the elements from the Ushers, and place them on the altar in front of the priest.
- The Crucifer then assists the priest in setting the Table for Communion.
- While the Crucifer is receiving the elements, the Banner takes the offering plates from under the seat and brings them to the Ushers. The Banner then returns and places the plate holder under the seat. **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch will perform this task.**
- The Banner then walks outside the altar to the front of the altar and puts up the altar rail and puts down the cushion. The Banner then returns to the seat. (Remember to bow when approaching and leaving the altar.) **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch will perform this task.**
- At the Doxology, the Banner returns to the altar rail with the plate holder, receives the offering plates from the Ushers, and hands them to the priest. **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch will perform this task.**

Holy Eucharist

- When the congregation kneels during Holy Eucharist, the Acolytes come to the altar rail and kneel.
- At the invitation to Communion, the Acolytes go behind the altar and receive Communion.
- Once the priest begins to offer Communion to the congregation, the Crucifer assigns tasks to the Acolytes, ensuring they have additional wine for the LEMs and extra bread ready for the clergy either what has been left on the altar or, if that is not sufficient, from the Aumbry. The Acolytes stand in front of the altar with the additional wine and bread.
- After Communion, the Crucifer (and any Acolytes necessary) will assist the clergy in clearing the Table, including returning the reserved Sacrament to the Aumbry, giving empty wine flagons to the LEMs, covering consecrated sacraments, and removing offerings from the altar.
- While other Acolytes are clearing the Table, the Banner will go to the front of the altar, take down the altar rail, and put up the cushion. **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch will perform this task.**

- Once the Acolytes have finished their tasks, they return to kneel at the altar rail.

Retiring Procession (Recessional)

- At the time of the closing hymn, the Crucifer will take the cross from its stand and move to the front of the altar to form the recessional line.
- Once the Crucifer takes the cross the other Acolytes get their appointments (banner and torches) and go to the front of the altar. (The Gospel recesses with a hymnal open to the closing hymn.)
- At the priest's direction, the Crucifer leads the retiring procession in the same order as the procession (Crucifer, Torches side by side, Banner, and Gospel).
- Once the Acolytes reach the back of the church, they process back down the side aisles (the Crucifer and Gospel Torch down the left side and the Banner, Epistle Torch, and Gospel down the right side) and return their appointments to their stands. After putting up their appointments, the Acolytes do not bow, but move directly to their next position (i.e., in front of the altar or retrieving the extinguishers).
- The Banner goes to the Sacristy to retrieve the two extinguishers, while the other Acolytes go to the front of the altar and wait for the Banner. **If there is no Banner, the Epistle Torch performs this task.**

Extinguishing Altar Candles

- The Banner brings the extinguishers to the front of the altar and hands them to the Torches. All the Acolytes bow.
- In unison, the Torches extinguish the Epistle and Gospel torches, then move to the back wall and extinguish the candles from the outside to the inside (opposite of how the candles were lit).
- After all of the candles have been extinguished, the Torches return to the front of the altar and all Acolytes bow.
- The Banner takes the extinguishers back to the Sacristy.
- The Acolytes then return to the Acolyte Room, where they neatly hang their robes and cinctures.