

Acolyte Handbook

Trinity Lutheran Church — Austin, TX
November 2019



Introduction

The acolyte serves a special role during the Divine Service. As an acolyte, you will be serving at the altar of God, handling holy things, assisting the pastor, and serving the worshipping congregation. These tasks are important, and this handbook was written to help you do them well. The job of the acolyte may be a little different at different churches; here is how it is done at Trinity.

Some Vocabulary

Here is a picture of the front of our church, with a few important terms labeled:



The **chancel** is the red-carpeted area. The Bible readings are read from the **lectern**, and the sermon is preached from the **pulpit**. During most of the service, you will be seated in a chair behind the lectern, next to the elder.

On the pulpit side of the church, there is a door that is labeled “sacristy” in the picture. Actually, the **sacristy** is a separate room that you could reach through that door. There is another way to enter the sacristy through an outside door, which is how you will normally enter it.

Before the Service

You should **be at Pastor's office at 10:20** to put on robes for the service. When you wear these robes, your pants and shoes will still be visible, so please remember to dress nicely when you will be the acolyte.

The robes are in pastor's closet, and you may need to try a couple to find one that fits you. You put on the black robe first, then the white one goes over that, and finally you put on a crucifix necklace. The elder will dress the same way, so he can help you.

Shortly before the service, Pastor will say a prayer with you and the elder, and then you will follow Pastor and the elder out. You will enter the **sacristy**, where the **candle lighter** is. The candle lighter looks like this:



The elder will help you light the wick, and this is what you will use to light the candles. The snuffer is not used until the end of the service, when you extinguish the candles.

During the Service

Now that the wick is lit, you and the elder will walk out and approach the altar. **You will stand on the right**, the elder will stand on the left, facing the altar and stopping before the step up. Pastor will walk behind you. You will all bow toward the altar. After this, Pastor and the elder will go to their seats, and you will step up to the altar to light the candles.

Start with the candles on the left, and light them in this order:



Do not light the two candles on the middle. You will light those later, before Communion.

After you light candle #14, go down the step, turn toward the altar, bow, and then walk to your seat on the lectern side of the church, next to the elder. Before you sit down, blow out the candle lighter and lean it carefully against the wall. Make sure it is stable and won't fall over during the service.

A Note about Conduct during the Service

Although you are helping with the service, you are also a participant in it. Remember to sing, pray, and listen when the congregation does.

When you are seated during the service, remember to sit up straight. And never cross your legs when wearing a robe!

A Note about Bowing to the Altar

Every time we approach the altar, before we step up to go behind the communion rail, we stop to bow. Every time we leave the altar, when we step down at the communion rail, we turn to face the altar and bow.

This is called **reverencing the altar**. The altar is the table from which we receive the Lord's body and blood. We bow there out of respect and reverence for the body and blood of Christ, even if it is not currently on the altar, because it is a holy place.

A Note about Which Way to Face

During the service, you may have noticed that Pastor sometimes faces the congregation and other times faces the altar. When he faces the altar, he is addressing God on behalf of the congregation. When he faces the congregation, he is addressing you on behalf of God.

So, **when Pastor faces the altar, you should also**. The rest of the time, you can face the wall opposite your chair.

When you are saying the creed, you do not face the altar. We do not say the creed to God; He already knows what we believe. But we say the creed to one another as a confession of faith. **During the creed, face Pastor** (who will be standing opposite you).

A Note about Liturgical Gestures

There are several times during the service when we bow, facing the altar. For example, when we say the *Gloria Patri* ("Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, ..."), or during the part of the creed about Christ becoming man, suffering, dying, and being buried in our place. Watch the elder to know when to bow.

We also make the sign of the cross in remembrance of our baptism at several points during the service:

- The Invocation ("In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.")
- When receiving Absolution (when Pastor says, "I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit")
- During the Creed, when we confess that we believe in "the resurrection from the dead."
- During the Benediction (the blessing at the end of the service, before the last hymn).

Watch the elder and make the sign of the cross whenever he does.

The Offering & Lighting the Communion Candles

When it is time for the offering, you will approach the altar, bow, and then walk to the shelf on the pulpit side of the altar. Take the four offering plates, walk to the top step in the chancel, and hand the plates to the ushers.

While the ushers collect the offering, get your candle lighter and **light the two candles in the center**, on either side of the crucifix. You can use one of the already-lit candles to light your candle lighter for this. Remember to bow when you approach and when you leave the altar. Return to your seat, blow out the candle lighter, and lean it against the wall again.

When the ushers walk back up, meet them in the same place. They will hand you the offering plates. The ushers will bow, but they are bowing to the altar, not you! So **do not bow back to them**. Put the offering plates back on the shelf where you got them, and remember to bow at the altar on the way there and back, then return to your seat.

Communion

When the congregation sings the *Agnus Dei* (“O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, ...”), walk with the elder to the communion rail. If you haven’t been confirmed yet, you will get a blessing from Pastor. If you have, you will receive Communion. If you prefer the individual cup, let Pastor know before the service; otherwise, you will receive the common cup.

After this, return to your seat. You will stay seated there while the rest of the congregation receives Communion. Even if you are uncomfortable singing the Communion distribution hymns while people are communing, have your hymnal open and follow along. The hymn numbers are printed in the bulletin.

Extinguishing the Candles

During the last hymn, approach the altar to put the candles. To put out a candle, just lower the bell-shaped snuffer on the candle lighter over the flame.

We **put out the altar candles first, from left to right**, and then **put out the two Communion candles last**. Before you put out the last candle, use its flame to light your candle lighter, then snuff the last candle. Exit through the door by the pulpit and go to the sacristy.

In the sacristy, blow out the flame, put the candle lighter in its holder, then walk back to the chancel. If there’s a full verse or more left in the hymn, then walk back to where Pastor and the elder are, and stand there to sing. Otherwise, you can wait by Pastor’s chair.

After the hymn, sit for announcements, then walk back to bow at the altar with Pastor and the elder, like you did at the start of the service. Walk behind the elder down the aisle to leave the sanctuary, shake Pastor’s hand, then follow the elder back to Pastor’s office and put your robe back on its hanger. You’re done!

Special Services

We have special services for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Lent, Advent, and other church holidays. A service that includes a baptism will also require you to light the Christ Candle. If you are the acolyte for a special service, just ask Pastor if there is anything special to do.

Some services have more candles!

During Advent, we have the Advent wreath. Some services have the Christ candle. Here are some notes on those:

Sundays during Advent, up until Christmas Eve (so there's no Christ candle to light yet), light the altar candles first. The Advent wreath candle(s) are lit when the congregation sings *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. Later, light the Communion candles (right before Communion). At the end of the service, put them out in this order: wreath, altar, Communion.

Wednesdays during Advent, light the Advent wreath candle(s) first, then the altar candles. At the end of the service, put them out in the same order (wreath, altar).

From Christmas Eve to Epiphany, light the Christ candle, then the wreath, then altar, then Communion. Put them out in the same order: Christ candle, wreath, altar, Communion.

Any other service, if there is a Christ/baptismal candle, light that first, then altar candles, then Communion. Put them out in the same order: Christ candle, altar, Communion.