



Acolyte
HANDBOOK

A Manual for Acolytes

As a Cross of Christ acolyte, you are joining the ranks of those who have helped with the worship service since the year 250 A.D. Some say that acolytes have an even longer history—that Samuel, who assisted Eli in the Old Testament Temple was really the first acolyte.

The word acolyte means a "companion" or "one who helps." In accepting this position you will be serving as a companion or helper to your pastor: performing a number of important functions before, during, and at the close of the worship service. You therefore, are a minister of Cross of Christ bringing to each worship service a special ministry. Read the following pages carefully so that you will know exactly what you are to do, when you are to do it, and how you are to do it properly!



"I AM THE LIGHT
OF THE WORLD,
WHOEVER
FOLLOWS ME WILL
NEVER WALK IN
DARKNESS BUT
WILL HAVE THE
LIGHT OF LIFE."

John 8:12

ACOLYTE VOCABULARY

ACOLYTE means "companion" or "one who helps." An acolyte helps the pastor perform various tasks in the worship service.

ADVENT means "coming." It is the first season of the church year. It's the time before Christmas when we prepare for the coming of Jesus. There are four Sundays in Advent.

ADVENT WREATH has five candles which are lit during the Advent season. One candle is lit on the 1st Sunday in Advent, two on the 2nd, and so on. The first candle stands for the prophecy of Jesus' coming; it's lit in anticipation. The second candle stands for Bethlehem where Jesus was born; it's lit in longing for Christmas. The third candle is the Shepherd's candle; lit in judgment. The fourth is the angel's candle; it's lit in fulfillment of the Scriptures. The fifth candle is the Christ candle, which is lit on Christmas Eve.

ALTAR is the table at the front of the church. It is a reminder of the family table. God's family gathers around the symbolic table. It also recalls the sacrifice of God's Son. When facing the altar, the left side is called the Gospel side. The right side is called the Epistle side. In the early church, the lector (reader) read the Gospel from the left side of the altar and the Epistle from the right side. Epistle means letter, referring to the New Testament Letters in the Bible.

CANDLE LIGHTER is used by an acolyte to light candles. It consists of a taper or wick from which the candles are lighted, and a bell for snuffing out the flame.

CHANCEL is the area in the church building where the pastor leads the worship service. The altar is in the chancel, as is the railing where people commune.

CHRIST CANDLE is the fifth candle of the Advent wreath, lit on Christmas Eve. It stands in the middle of the other four candles, reminding us that Christ is the center of Christmas and of our lives.

ACOLYTE VOCABULARY

CHURCH YEAR is a 12-month cycle of Christian celebration. The first season is Advent which prepares for Christmas when Jesus was born. Epiphany is the next season, beginning when the three Wisemen see the Christ Child, including Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Lent follows Epiphany and recalls Jesus' suffering for us. It is a time to think about baptism and rebirth in preparation for Easter, a seven-week festival which starts when Jesus rises from the dead. The Day of Pentecost and The Season after Pentecost are celebrations of the Holy Spirit active in the life of the Church.

ETERNAL LIGHT is the candle on the Altar that is always lit, night and day. It is a reminder to us that this is a place where the Lord dwells. We welcome the constancy of the flame representing the ever-present nature of Christ. Many churches have found it meaningful to have an eternal candle or flame burning in their sanctuaries at all hours of the day or night. It can remind us that the Lord 'neither slumbers nor sleeps'.

EUCCHARIST is a Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." It is another word for Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper.

EWER is the pitcher of water a pastor uses to fill the Baptismal font.

FONT is the bowl or basin from which water is taken during the sacrament of Baptism.

NAVE is the section in the church building where the congregation sits.

NARTHEX is the entryway into the worship space. It is where your ushers and greeters meet the worshippers.

OFFERING is taken at a time in the service when the members of a church offer gifts to God in the form of money. Ushers usually pass offering plates through the pews in which members place their money.

PASCAL CANDLE is the large white candle by the Baptismal Font symbolizing the risen Christ. It is used during the Easter season and for baptisms.

ACOLYTE VOCABULARY

PRELUDE is the music that is played at the beginning of the service to help the congregation prepare their hearts and minds for worship.

PULPIT is the place in our sanctuary where the scripture lessons are read and where the Pastors deliver their sermons.

REVERENCE THE CROSS means to say a short prayer or pause momentarily in respect for the cross, and the sacrifice our Lord made on the cross.

SACRAMENTS are the church rites (ceremonies) which use earthly elements and God's Word to bring his blessing. The two Lutheran sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion. The earthly element in Baptism is water and in Holy Communion it is bread and wine.

SACRISTY is the room where the participants in the service: the assisting minister, the pastor, lector, acolyte, and others; prepare for the service.

SANCTUARY means 'holy place'. It is the large room where we worship. It includes the nave and the chancel.

TAPER is the long wax stem in a candle lighter, used to light the candles. It's also called a wick.

TURN INWARD is a direction given which reminds acolytes to always turn toward the cross when turning around in the chancel area.

VESTMENTS is a general name for clothing worn by those who participate in worship services.

WHAT DO ACOLYTES DO?

Acolytes keep the worship services running smoothly. As an acolyte, you assist the worship leaders and the congregation in worship. There are a few duties that are part of virtually every service and that are the same (or similar) every time, but as an acolyte you will occasionally be called upon to do things above and beyond that normal routine. The important thing is that you learn to be flexible, so that you can be called upon at any time to do something that needs to be done.

HOW SHOULD ACOLYTES BEHAVE?

Since you are assisting the congregation in worshipping God, you should be on your best behavior. Because you are in front of the congregation most of the time, you will be setting an example for others. That means that you need to pay attention during worship, participate together with the congregation, sit when everyone sits, stand when everyone stands, etc. No chewing gum, no playing with your cincture (rope), no fidgeting, slouching, and goofing around. Remember that you are dealing with holy items during worship. Treat them properly, with respect and reverence.

WHAT DO ACOLYTES WEAR?

It depends on what type of service for which you will be an acolyte. For our first two services (7:45 am and 9:00 am), which are more traditional, you will wear an alb (robe), a cincture (rope), and a cross necklace. For our contemporary service (11:15 am service), wear the clothes that you wear to church. Either way (with or without the alb) **dress nicely**. Remember that you are serving God and God wants to see you at your very best, which includes wearing your good clothes. You should also try to make sure that your hair is combed, you've brushed your teeth, etc.

BEFORE THE SERVICE

1. Arrive **15 minutes** before the service. Put on a robe, a rope, and an acolyte cross found in the Sacristy. At the **11:15 am Service** you do not need to Robe.
2. Be sure your hair is combed and NEVER CHEW GUM. Your shoes are the only piece of clothing that show beneath your robe. Please wear appropriately nice shoes and clothing. **No Running around, after you are robed!**
3. Take a bulletin and a sermon note (if in confirmation) and place them on the acolyte chair. (*Last two chairs in row, next to table*). At the 11:15 am service, you may sit with your family.
4. The Candle Lighters are found against the wall by the Sacristy. Be sure the taper in the candle lighter is long enough. If it is not, check with Altar Guild or the Pastors for replacement tapers.
5. Check with the Pastors in the Narthex for any special instructions.
6. Meet with Pastors and Assisting Minister in the Narthex for a short prayer (**7:45 am service only**)

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SERVICE

1. Hold the candle lighter, slightly tipped, with the bell pointing back toward you and the taper pointing away from you, toward the Altar. One hand should be near the bottom of the staff and the other where it can adjust the knob that regulates the length of the taper.
If the taper is too long, the flame could grow larger than needed. If the taper is too short, the flame could go out. Usually 1" - 2" is a good length.
2. As the prelude begins. Walk in a dignified and **unhurried** manner up the center aisle toward the altar. Keep your head up and your eyes straight ahead. (**11:15 am service—light candles during the Opening Song**)
3. When you reach the front of the church, before you step up, pause and look reverently at the cross for a moment. Then, bow your head.
4. Step up to the altar. **Light your Taper from the Eternal Light on the Altar.** Back away from the Eternal Candle and move toward the center of the Altar. Pause again for a time of reverence.
5. **Light the right candle (sacristy side candle) first** by holding the candle lighter so that the taper is horizontal and touches the wick. Hold the taper on the wick until you are sure the candle is lit.
6. Go to the front of the Altar again and pause for a moment of reverence. **Now light the left candle (pulpit side candle).**
7. When there is a **Baptism or during the Easter Season**, after lighting the candles on the wall, move to the Paschal Candle, and light it.
8. During **Christmas Season**, then move to the Advent Wreath and light the outside candles first and then the Christ Candle.
9. Snuff out the flame of your candle lighter by moving the taper down. Turn toward the cross and bow your head.
10. Go to the acolyte's chair. Carefully and quietly place the candle lighter under your chair.

OFFERING
(All Services)

1. After the sharing of the Peace, the Pastor will have the congregation sit , and special music begins.
2. Pick up the offering plates.
3. Go to the front of the chancel area in the center. Stay on the bottom step waiting for the ushers to approach you.
4. Give each usher two plates or let the ushers take the plates from the stack you are holding. (11:15 am service—take only two plates, one for each usher)
5. Return to the acolyte chair.
6. After the Offering Special Music, when the Offertory begins, join one of the pastors to the front of the chancel and receive the offering plates from the ushers.
7. Turn inward to face the altar, raise plates towards the altar signifying offering our gifts to God.
8. Go and put plates on the table next to your chair and then sit down.

COMMUNION
(7:45 am & 9:00 am)

1. After the Lord's Prayer, the Pastor will invite the congregation to be seated and the communion assistants forward.
2. Go and pick up a communion basket and come behind the altar with the Pastors and Communion Assistants.
3. After receiving communion or a blessing, go around and collect the glasses in the basket.
4. Return the basket to the stand and then you may be seated.

AT THE CLOSE OF THE SERVICE

1. As the closing hymn is beginning, take the candle lighter from under your seat and point the bell away from you.
2. Wait until the congregation starts singing. Go to the front of the altar, bow your head and pause for reverence.
3. Extinguish the candles in the reverse order that you lit them. Begin with the **left candle**. Go back to the front of the Altar, pause for reverence, and then extinguish the **right candle**.
3. Extinguish the candles with great care. Hold bell over candles for a few seconds, or until you see smoke.
4. Turn, walk down the steps from the altar. Pause, bow your head in reverence to the cross, turn and proceed down the center aisle to the Narthex.

**If the Paschal Candle is lit, extinguish candle before leaving. Need to hold bell over candle for longer than usual.

**During Advent and Christmas, extinguish Advent wreath as well.
5. At the close of the service, walk up the side aisle and return the candle lighter to its stand. And return robe to the narthex closet and hang up the acolyte cross on the wall.

11:15 AM SERVICE

1. You do not need to wear an alb (robe). Please dress in appropriate church clothes.
2. Get candle lighter and sit with parents.
3. During first song, light candles. Follow instructions on Page 7.
4. Return to sit with your parents. Carefully and quietly place the candle lighter under your chair.
5. Please assist with the offering. Follow instructions on Page 8.
6. You do not need to help with Communion.
7. At the end of the service during the last song, please follow instructions on Page 9.

Final “Words of Wisdom”

** Remember, these are just guidelines to help you figure out what you need to do. Circumstances change, and so you have to be flexible and ready to improvise if things are not the way they are described here.

** As long as you try to do the right things, and do everything in a reverent fashion, people will appreciate your help in the service. We are all only human, so do not worry if you make a little mistake.

Congratulations!

If you have read this entire handbook, you probably know more about being an acolyte than most people in the congregation, and you will be thoroughly prepared to serve as an acolyte.

NOTES FOR THE PARENTS

This handbook was designed to be a tool for parents and youth alike. Hopefully, it will answer any last minute questions your acolyte may have. Please use it to refresh your child's memory. Often little details are forgotten when an acolyte has not served in several weeks.

Being an acolyte is a special task entrusted to our young people. Indeed they are ministers of Cross of Christ. For this reason we hope you and your acolyte will take his or her responsibility seriously.

Parents can help in these ways:

1. Keep the handbook in a safe place so that it can be readily used.
2. Carefully check the worship schedule when it first comes out. If there are scheduling conflicts, you and your youth have the responsibility of finding someone to trade dates with you and letting the church office know of any changes the Wednesday before you are scheduled to serve.
3. Krista Craft, our Congregational Life Coordinator is there to help you if you are having difficulty locating a substitute. volunteer@cross-of-christ.org
4. Last minute emergencies do happen. When you first realize that your acolyte will not make it to the church on time, please call the church.
5. Help your acolyte to perform his or her duties by ensuring they are at the church 15 minutes before the service.

ACOLYTE PRAYER

Almighty God, you have called us to be your servants through the office of Acolyte in your Church, that clothed in your grace we may minister before you; we pray that you will guide, strengthen, and sanctify us by your Holy Spirit; that always doing your will, we may both by our service in your House and by our daily life, please you and give glory to your Name, that we may always stand by your altar of worship through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.