

Sts. Constantine & Helen

Altar Server Guide



Spiritual Guidance for Altar Server's

(St. John of Shanghai & San Francisco)

What does it mean to be an Altar Server?

Service in the Church is sacrificial service in the altar to the Lord offered by those not ordained to a clerical order (ex. Bishop, Priest).

What is sacrificial about this service to the Lord?

Altar servers offer the following sacrifices to the Lord:

1. The time they spend performing this service.
2. Their will – voluntary willingness to do the things that need to be done during the worship service.
3. Their minds – paying attention during the worship service.
4. Their hearts – love for the Church and for its divine services.
5. Their physical strength – the exertion required as they fulfill their duties.
6. Their spiritual qualities – humility and meekness.
7. Their spirit – ardent prayer within themselves.

Serving in church is service to God because it is participation in the divine services. Altar servers should remember that they do not serve the bishop or the priest, but the Lord Himself, Who receives the service of countless numbers of Angels. But nevertheless, out of His goodness, accepts also our heartfelt service as He accepted the widow's mite. Altar server's should remember that they are given the highest honor – to take part in serving the King of kings, Whom even the angels serve with fear.

Whom do Altar server's represent?

Because our liturgical worship is a symbolic representation of heavenly worship, the hierarch who presides over the service represents Christ Himself. The priests represent the apostles, the deacons represent the

Seraphim and Cherubim, while the altar server's represent the Angels and Archangels who served Christ invisibly during His life on this earth, and who eternally glorify Him in heaven.

Just as there is a very strict order in the ranks of Angels in heaven and subordination of lower ranks to the higher, so too in earthly service in the altar, there must be both order and obedience among those who serve and assist the priests. The junior altar servers should indisputably follow instructions by their seniors, just as the Angels immediately execute the orders given to them by their superiors.

At the same time, when it comes to serving in church, one should not seek seniority, remembering the words of our Lord: 'But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.' (Matthew 20:26-27)

We should willingly fulfill any orders given to us, so that we may hear these rewarding words from the Lord: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' (Matthew 25:21)

“For to serve Thee is a great and awesome thing even to the heavenly powers.”

(Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn)

It is critical to begin every task with a prayer so that you may perform it in a God-pleasing manner. Certainly our service in the Holy Altar must begin with a prayer.

Altar Server Prayer

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Lord help me to serve you in faith, obedience and reverence. Let nothing separate me from You.

If I am weak in my faith, strengthen me.

Help me to devote myself to Your Holy Gifts.

Guide me in the path that leads to Your kingdom.

Teach me to become a better Christian so that I may wear the altar server's robe worthily and in humility. My prayer is to serve You in all my thoughts, words and deeds and to become a better Orthodox Christian so that in all I do I may testify to Your glory.

For blessed and glorified is Your Holy name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Understanding Your Role

Everyone in the Church has his or her designated role. Without this role being fulfilled the Church wouldn't function as it's intended to. Rather than simply being a building, the Church is made up of the people who gather to worship. When we gather at the church building to worship God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we become the Church.

We may even take for granted the many and various roles that must be fulfilled in order for each service of the Church to take place. There are several obvious roles to consider, without which the Divine services couldn't take place. The first is the role of the **Bishop** who while usually not present, we always have a constant reminder (his throne) that he is the image of Christ who is our shepherd and teacher. The second is the role of the **Priest** who, fulfilling the same role as the Apostles, proclaims the good news of the Gospel. There is also the **Deacon** who, like the Angels, acts as a messenger.

Yet there are several other important roles to consider, without which a Divine service may not be conducted so easily. There is the role of the **chanter** and the **choir** who chant or sing the responses to the petitions that the Priest makes unto God. The **Parish Council** members who serve at the candle stand in the Narthex, welcome visitor's and help collect the offering. **Volunteers** who make the Prospora (bread from which Christ is taken) and Kollyva (boiled wheat used for memorial services).

One essential element missing from this list so far is the **Acolyte** or **Altar Server**. The Acolyte serves the Lord as he assists the Bishop, Priest and Deacon, making it easier to conduct the Divine services of the Orthodox Church.

It is a great privilege to be an Acolyte, not a right that every young man should feel is his. While it is a position that only young men may have, each must work to show himself approved for service in the Holy Altar.

Being Prepared for Your Role

1. Get up early like you would on a school day.
2. Make sure you are properly dressed.
3. When you enter the Cathedral, light a candle and venerate the icons in the Narthex.
4. Enter the Altar area and vestry room quietly down the left Aisle of the Nave.
5. Say an prayer and make your cross when entering the Sanctuary.
6. Select a robe that fits and comes down to the top of your shoes along with the appropriate length belt.
7. Put it on and hold the belt with reverence for the Priest to bless before putting it on. Kiss the Priest's hand after he blesses it.

Fulfilling Your Role (All Altar Servers)

There are many steps an Acolyte can and should take to be prepared for service in the Holy Altar. Below is a list of guidelines that will help the Altar server fulfill his role in a way that serves the Lord and assists the clergy, ensuring that the service runs smoothly.

BE ON TIME: Be in the Sanctuary at least 10 minutes before the start of the Divine Liturgy. This is a must! To do otherwise is an insult to God. If you rely on transportation to get here you must insist that you leave early enough to be here at the proper time. The Sunday liturgies begin at 10:00am and you need to be here no later than 9:50am. This is IMPORTANT!

BE STILL AND ATTENTIVE: Do not wander in the preparation area or the restroom or any other area during the service. Do not use the restroom during the service. Be attentive to the Altar and your duties. Stand straight and do not lean on the walls. Don't look out at the chanters or congregation during the service. It looks bad from the pews.

BE PROPERLY DRESSED: Altar boys must wear neat pressed pants, a white shirt (plain colors acceptable) and a tie. Your hair should be cut and neatly combed. Your hands and fingernails should be cleaned and your shoes cleaned. Wear dark socks. No shorts, t-shirts, tennis shoes or sandals are permitted.

BE QUIET: The Leader of the Altar Boy team should direct with hand signals. Altar boys should avoid speaking or whispering, or moving about as much as possible. When not engaged in an assigned duty stand attentive facing the Altar.

DO NOT WALK IN FRONT OF ALTAR: Only the Clergy - Bishops, Priests or Deacons are allowed to stand or walk in front of the Holy Altar.

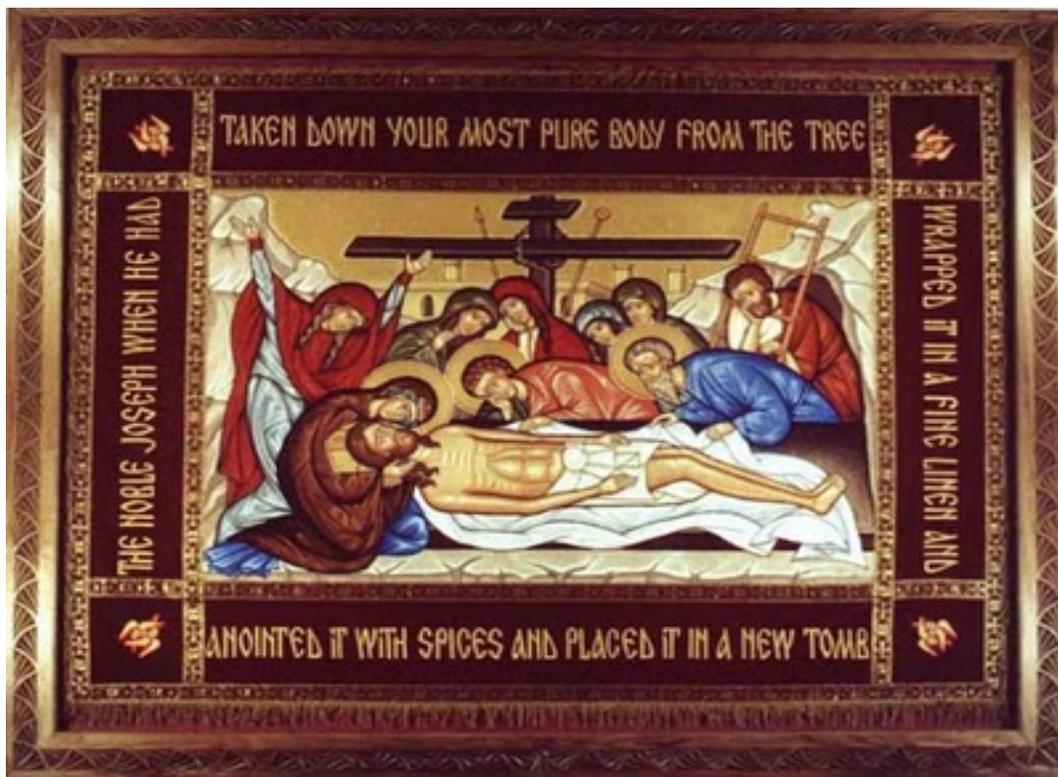
PREPARE TO RECEIVE COMMUNION: Come prepared to receive Holy Communion when you serve as an altar Boy. Do not eat any of the Andidoro or drink water before Communion is served.

RESPECT THE CLERGY: Bend and kiss the hand of the Priest or the Deacon whenever you hand them something or when they return something to him.

FOLLOW DIRECTIONS: Follow the direction of the team leader. Do not leave the Sanctuary until you have received the permission from your team leader.

RESPECT YOUR ROBE: Hang up your robes and belt with respect.

REPECT THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH: You are an example and a role model for all the younger youth in the Church. Be strong in your faith and know it well. These rules must be followed. Being an Altar Boy is a privilege.



Fulfilling Your Role

(Captains & Co-Captains)

- Be the first ones to arrive.
- Make sure that everything is ready for the Divine Liturgy.
- Prepare the Andidoro if it hasn't already been done.
- Help and instruct new altar boys.
- Check oil in candles.
- Start a fresh Charcoal in the censer during the Doxology just before the Liturgy begins.
- Prepare the water in the water heater.
- The leader should be near the Priest at all times during the Divine Liturgy. He is responsible for assigning specific duties to altar boys.

Leaders assign the following tasks:

- Candle holders
- Exapteryga (Cherubs)
- Crucifix carrier
- Censer
- Bread cutting
- Bread holders
- Assisting Priest and deacon with administering Communion
- Zeon holder

Duties during the service

- Doxology - Start a new charcoal in censer
- Small Entrance - two candles exit through the North Door and precede the Deacon who's carrying the Gospel. Bow at center of Solea and stand on either side of Royal Doors. After Priest enters Sanctuary, bow at center and return through north doors.
- Have censer ready when reading of Epistle begins.
- Gospel Reading - two candles and the cross exit through the North Door. Candles always go first. Go to Ambo and when deacon finishes go to stations on either side of the Royal door. At conclusion of Gospel bow and reenter through both doors.
- All altar servers should sit in the first few rows of pews on the left side for the Homily.

- Have censer ready at conclusion of the Homily.
- Great Entrance - When Priest gives signal exit and walk slowly down the right aisle to back of Nave and then up center aisle. Take positions on either side of Royal Door. After Priest enters Sanctuary bow and re-enter through both doors.
- Turn up heat on water.
- During the consecration (When Priest lifts up the Chalice and Paten) prostrate yourself facing Altar. After consecration have censer ready for Priest. Bring Andidoro to Altar for blessing while Deacon finishes censing.
- After Lord's Prayer pour boiling water into container (zeon) and bring to Altar.
- After Priest and Deacon receive communion prepare to exit to assist in serving communion and distribute Andidoro.
- After communion is complete return to Sanctuary.
- If there is a Memorial (leader should check at the beginning of service to find out about any special services or processions) one altar boy is assigned to light candle on table on Solea and others take out two candles and the censer and stand on either side of the memorial table.
- After the Dismissal prayers and any announcements take out the Andidoron for distribution by the Priest.
- Do not disrobe until you are given permission by your group leader.
- Hang up robes and belts carefully.
- Make your cross when you leave the sanctuary and when you leave the Nave of the Cathedral.

Explanation of the Altar Server's Vestments:

Robe – The long robe or stikharion that is similar to that of the Deacon is a reminder of the role of the Acolyte in the Altar. It symbolizes the cleanliness of mind and heart that the server brings each time he enters the altar.

Sash – The sash or orarion is also similar to that of the Deacon but is worn differently. It is worn forming a cross on the back with the two ends hanging down in front. It denotes the calling of the Acolyte to serve just as the angels of God serve Him attentively and willingly.

The Altar Server & Bread

The bread used for the Divine Liturgy, the Prosforon, is brought to the Prothesis (Preparation Table) where Christ's Nativity is depicted. Along with it there may be a list of names for the Priest to remember and pray for at the appropriate time. If you unwrap the bread, make sure you don't misplace the list of names, but take them and place them on the right side of the Prothesis.

If it is your turn to cut the bread for distribution to the faithful after the Divine Liturgy, the Antidoron, cut all pieces the same size and clean up after you've finished.

At the end of the service the Priest will call you to bring the Antidoron to be distributed to the faithful.

Clean up:

1. The Leader is responsible to see that the area where the Antidoron is prepared is clean.
2. Once the distribution of the Antidoron is complete then the lead altar boy should take the bowl with any left over Antidoron to the Social hall to give to parishioners to take home for use during the week.
3. Put out all candles.
4. Make sure the floor is clean of all incense and any other debris. Check to see that the robes are all hung properly along with the belts.
5. Make cross and exit reverently thanking the Lord for being able to serve Him in this way.