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# Acolyte Handbook

"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

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## **HISTORY OF THE ACOLYTE - [ TOP ]**

As a St. Philip acolyte, crucifer, bannerbearer or bookbearer, you are joining the ranks of those who have helped with the worship service since the early Christian church. 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 "attendant" or "one who helps". Whether you light the candles, carry in the cross or are a bannerbearer or bookbearer - you are considered an acolyte. In accepting this position you will be serving as a companion 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 St. Philip bringing to each worship service a special ministry.

## **BEFORE THE SERVICE - [ TOP ]**

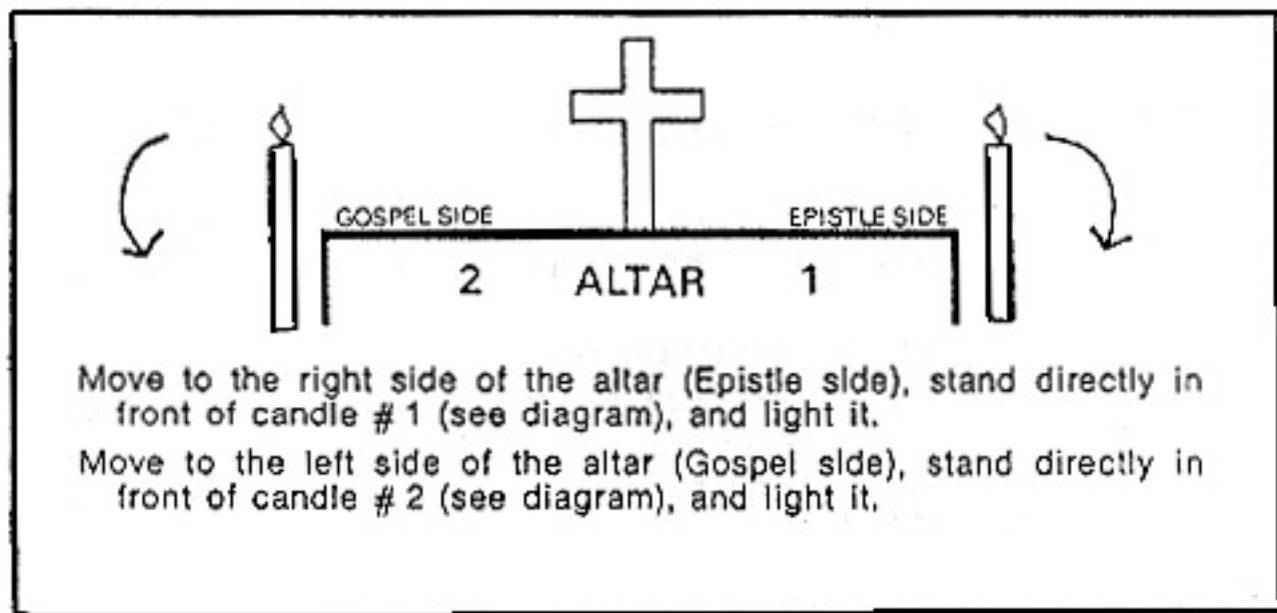
1. Arrive 15 minutes before the service. Put on a robe and an acolyte cross found in the narthex closet.

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 try to avoid wearing sneakers. Dress shoes, loafers, deck shoes are all appropriate and look much nicer than sneakers.
3. Take a bulletin and a Lutheran Book of Worship and place them on the acolyte chair.
4. Be sure there are matches and that the taper in the candlelighter is long enough.
5. Check with the Pastor for any special instructions.
6. Light the candlelighter (the ushers are there if you need help) and then hold it in front of you with flame pointing ahead of you and the bell pointing back toward you. 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.

## AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SERVICE - [ TOP ]

1. As the prelude begins, stop inside the sanctuary with the lighted candlelighter. Walk in a dignified and **unhurried** manner up the center aisle toward the altar. Keep your head up and your eyes straight ahead.
2. 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.
3. Step up to the altar. **Light the right candle first** by holding the candlelighter so that the taper is horizontal and touches the wick. Hold the taper on the wick until you are sure the candle is lit.
4. Never carry the candlelighter across the altar. The linens on the altar are very precious. Dripping wax or tiny pieces of wick could damage them. Instead, after lighting the candle, lift your candlelighter up and over the edge of the altar. (See diagram)
5. Now, do the same for the left candle.
6. Snuff out the flame. Step down from the altar. Turn toward the cross and bow your head.
7. Go to the acolyte's chair. Carefully and quietly place the candlelighter in its stand.

8. As you sit or stand during the worship service, you will be a reminder to the other worshippers that they should be reverent when worshipping God. Please sit up straight and refrain from fidgeting.



## A REMINDER FOR SPECIAL SERVICES - [ [TOP](#) ]

\*\*\*During Advent, light the wreath candles after the altar candles.

\*\*\*On Christmas Eve, begin with the Christ candle.

\*\*\*On Christmas Eve and other times when there are candles in the windows, they are lit before the worshippers enter the sanctuary.

\*\*\*During the Easter season, light the Paschal candle before the worship service begins.

\*\*\*For Baptisms, light the Paschal candle at the beginning of the service before walking up the center aisle.

## OFFERING/BAPTISMS

### OFFERING - [ [TOP](#) ]

1. Leave your acolyte chair, walk behind the altar to the credence shelf.
2. Pick up the alms basin with the offering plates. (The alms basin is the large tray that the offering plates sit in.)

3. Enter the chancel at the back, walk around the altar, step down one step and wait for the ushers to approach you.
4. Beginning on your **right**, let the ushers take the plates from the stack you are holding.
5. Return the alms basin and extra offering plates to the credence shelf.
6. Return to the acolyte chair.

## **BAPTISMS - [ [TOP](#) ]**

1. At the beginning of the service, before walking up the center aisle, light the Paschal candle found at the back of the church near the Baptismal font. We do this because our Baptism marks our new and eternal life with the resurrected Lord.
2. At the appropriate time in the service, the Pastor and the Assisting Minister go to the altar. You join them by standing on the lower step to the left of the altar.
3. You lead the Pastor and the others to the Baptismal font and then stand to the left of the font. During the baptism, you hold the baptismal napkin for the Pastor. You share the peace with others, then help the Pastor distribute the baptismal and sponsor certificates.
4. Return to your acolyte chair when the Pastor and Assisting Minister return to the altar.
5. The Paschal candle is extinguished at the end of the service when you walk to the back of the Sanctuary.

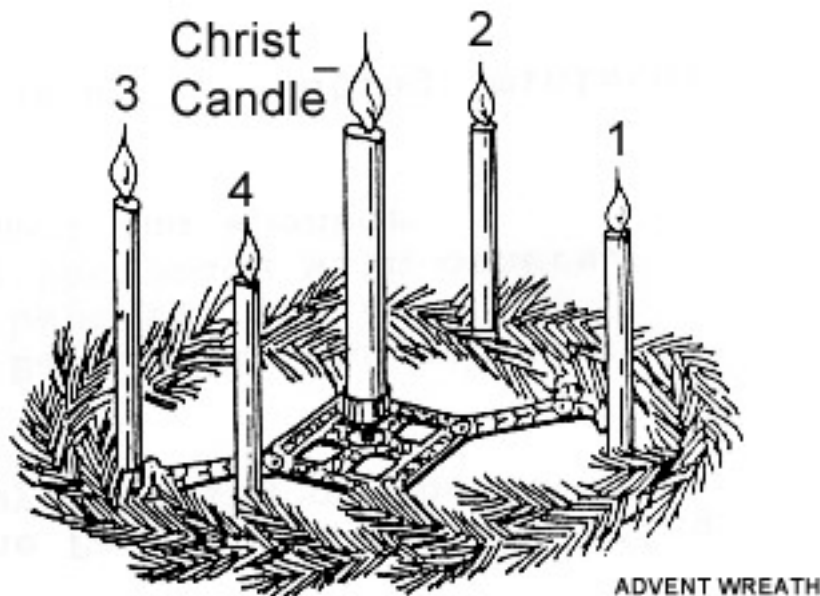
## **SPECIAL SERVICES - [ [TOP](#) ]**

### **ADVENT**

During the four weeks before Christmas, we place an Advent wreath in our Sanctuary reminding us of the time needed to prepare for the birth of Christ. The wreath holds five candles that the acolyte lights.

1. After the reading of the first lesson, take the candlelighter to the altar. Remember to bow your head at the foot of the steps and again when you reach the altar.

2. Go to the left side of the altar and light your taper.
3. Bow your head again at the center of the altar before you proceed to the Advent wreath.
4. On the first Sunday, light one candle ( see diagram)
5. Extinguish your taper and return to your chair.
6. On the second Sunday, at the beginning of the service after you light the altar candles, go to the Advent wreath to light the first candle. Then, after the first lesson is read, follow the above directions to light the second candle (see diagram).
7. On the third Sunday, you will light two candles at the beginning of the service and one after the first lesson (see diagram).
8. On the fourth Sunday, you will light three candles at the beginning of the service and one after the first lesson (see diagram).
9. During the postlude, pause and bow in front of the altar and go first to the Advent wreath. Extinguish the Advent candles in the reverse order that you lit them - start with the one you lit last. Now, return to the altar and extinguish the altar candles.



## CHRISTMAS

The candle in the middle of the Advent wreath is called the Christ candle. **On Christmas Eve, light it first** and then the other candles on the wreath.

On Christmas Eve, we have candles in the windows. These are lit before the worshippers enter the sanctuary. Light them from the front to the back. They are extinguished after the worshippers leave, beginning at the back.

## THE PASCHAL CANDLE

The Paschal Candle is the largest and most decorated candle in the church. It is placed in front of the altar near the Gospel side during the weeks of the Easter season. It is lighted before the worshippers arrive and is extinguished after the worshippers leave.

## THE GOSPEL PROCESSION

On certain festivals, at the time of the Gospel reading, the Pastor, the crucifer carrying the cross, and the acolyte carrying the Bible move to the middle of the center aisle. This symbolic action shows that Christ and the Word of God live in the midst of His faithful people. Please see the section entitled **Bookbearer** to read how this is carried out.

## BOOKBEARER/AT THE CLOSE OF THE SERVICE

### BOOKBEARER - [ [TOP](#) ]



The acolyte who carries the Bible or altar book is called the Bookbearer. These books are carried in a special way:

Place your hands at the very bottom of the open book, cup your hands to prevent the book from slipping. Hold it so the text is facing away from your body.

At St. Philip, a bookbearer is used in two ways:

#### 1. Confirmation

The bookbearer holds the altar book during one part of the service of Confirmation. Before the service, ask the Pastor to tell you when to come forth. The acolyte goes to the altar and receives the altar book from the Pastor. You then follow him around to each of the Confirmands. As he places his hands on the head of the Confirmand, you position yourself so the Pastor can read the blessing.

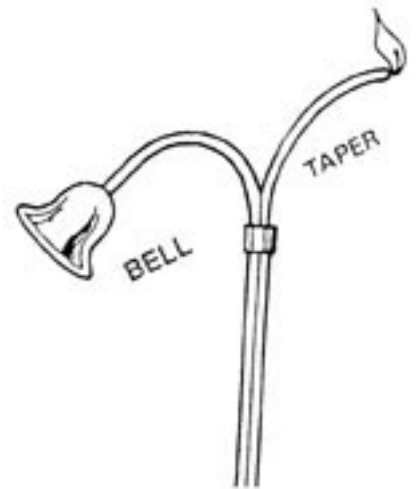
#### 2. Gospel Processional

On certain festivals or special occasions, at the time of the Gospel reading, the cross and the Bible are carried to the center of the sanctuary. Here is the procedure:

- ; The crucifer takes the cross and goes to the front of the altar (as at the close of the service) and waits there for the Pastor and bookbearer to join him.
- ; The acolyte goes to the Pulpit and receives the Bible from the Pastor.
- ; The Pastor and bookbearer walk beside the altar rail to the front of the altar where the crucifer is.
- ; The crucifer turns and leads the Gospel Processional (crucifer, bookbearer and Pastor) to a half-way point of the center aisle.
- ; The crucifer and bookbearer turn and face the Pastor and the Gospel is read.
- ; The procession returns to the altar. The processional cross and Bible are returned to the appropriate places.
- ; The acolyte and crucifer return to their chairs.

### **AT THE CLOSE OF THE SERVICE - [ TOP ]**

1. As the postlude is beginning, take the candlelighter from its stand and point the bell away from you. Again, pause in front of the cross, bow your head and climb the steps to the altar.
2. Extinguish the candles in the reverse order that you lit them. Begin with the left candle. **NOW WAIT.** Remember to light your taper on the right candle and then extinguish the candle. We do this to signify that we are carrying the light of Christ into the world.
3. Extinguish the candles with great care. Try not to let the bell touch any part of the candlesticks. Remember not to carry the bell over the altar linens, for again, soot, wax and pieces of wick are extremely damaging.
4. Turn, walk down the steps from the altar. Pause, bow your head, turn and proceed down the center aisle to the Baptismal font. At the close of the service, walk up the side aisle and return the candlelighter to its stand.



5. Return your robe to the narthex closet and hang up the acolyte cross on the special hook. Does your robe need cleaning or repairing? If so, please notify Mrs. Cooper.

## A REMINDER FOR SPECIAL SERVICES

\*\*\*The Advent wreath candles are always extinguished before any other candles.

\*\*\*The Christmas Eve (and other special occasions) window candles are extinguished after the worshippers leave, beginning at the back.

\*\*\*The Paschal candle used during the Easter season, is extinguished after the worshippers leave.

\*\*\*For Baptisms, the Paschal candle is extinguished at the end of the service when you walk to the back of the Sanctuary.

## CRUCIFERS/BANNERBEARERS

### CRUCIFERS - [ TOP ]

1. Read the section **Before the Service** in this handbook.
2. The Choir Director will tell you each Sunday at which verse of the hymn to turn and lead the processional.
3. Remove the processional cross from its stand and bring it to the narthex.
4. Remember to avoid touching the brass part of the cross and to NEVER lean the cross up against anything. It is very top heavy and can easily fall over.
5. As the prelude begins, position yourself beside the Baptismal font.
6. The processional cross **should** be carried with the hands turned away from the body with elbows extended. It should be held straight and secure. Our Worship and Music Committee recognizes that we have an unusually heavy processional cross. They encourage our crucifers to **carry the cross in the manner that he or she finds most comfortable and secure**.
7. As the hymn begins, slowly walk to the foot of the altar. Remain there, facing the altar until after the Pastor and Assisting Minister have left the foot of the altar. Turn to your left. Place the cross in its stand by the credence shelf.



8. Walk behind the altar and take a chair beside the acolyte.
9. As the final hymn begins, remove the cross from its stand. Walk around the altar and stand facing the altar, holding the cross. When the choir processional reaches you, turn and exit the Sanctuary slowly. When there is no choir, wait for the Pastor and Assisting Minister to approach the altar.
10. Stop at the Baptismal font, turn, and face the congregation.
11. When the postlude has concluded, walk up the side aisle and return the cross to its stand.
12. On special occasions, the crucifer has a role to play in the Gospel Processional. Please read the section entitled **Bookbearer** to see how this is carried out.

## **BANNERBEARER - [ TOP ]**

On special occasions we use colorful and symbolic banners to enhance our worship service.

1. Read the section **Before the Service** in this handbook.
2. Remove the banner cross from its stand behind the piano and bring it to the narthex.
3. As the prelude begins, position yourself beside the Baptismal font.
4. Clasp the staff with both hands with a space of about 12 inches in between them. One elbow may rest on your hip, if you need extra support.
5. The bannerbearer is positioned in the processional after the crucifer. Since the banner is carried at an angle be sure to leave adequate room
6. At the altar, pause reverently and bow your head, but not the banner. Turn to your left, passing by the crucifer, and place the banner in its stand.
7. Walk behind the altar and take a chair beside the crucifer.
8. As the final hymn begins, and the crucifer goes to get the cross, remove the banner from its stand. Walk around the altar and stand facing the altar, holding the banner. Bow your head reverently and then follow the crucifer to the back of the Sanctuary.
9. Stop at the Baptismal font, turn and face the congregation.
10. When the postlude has concluded, walk up the side aisle and return the banner to its stand.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS - [ [TOP](#) ]**

Acolyte - from the Greek word that means "attendant" or "one who helps".

Advent - the first season of the church year. Means "coming".

Alms basin - the large plate that holds our offering plates. It is so named because in the very early church donations for the poor were emptied into a large basin.

Altar - the table at the front of the church where God's family gathers. Sometimes, the left side is called the Gospel side and right side is called the Epistle side.

Bannerbearer - this is the person who carries a banner or flag as a part of our worship service.

Bookbearer - the acolyte who carries the Bible or the altar book.

Candlelighter - 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.

Candles - we have two candles on our altar symbolizing that Christ is man and God. At St. Philip, we call both candles the Gospel candles or sacramental candles.

Chancel - the area of the church where the Pastor leads the worship service. At St. Philip, the chancel area includes the area inside the Communion rail and the altar.

Christ candle - the fifth candle found in the middle of the Advent wreath. It reminds us that Christ is the center of our lives.

Credence shelf - the small shelf on the wall to the left of the altar. It is where we keep the offering plates and some communion ware.

Crucifer - the person who carries the cross, leading the procession into and out of the worship service.

Font - it is the large basin at the back of the church from which water is taken during the sacrament of Baptism.

Nave - the area of the church where the congregation sits.

Narthex - the entryway into the worship space. It is where our ushers and greeters meet the worshippers. Off to the left of the narthex is a hall. This is where the acolyte robes and crosses are

kept.

Paschal candle - the large white candle symbolizing the risen Christ. It is used during the Easter season and for baptisms.

Pulpit - the place in our sanctuary where the scripture lessons are read and where the Pastor delivers his sermons

Sacristy - the small room behind our altar where the communion ware is stored, where the banners and altar linens are kept and where the communion is prepared.

Sanctuary - means "holy place". At St. Philip, it is the large room where we worship. It includes the nave and the chancel.

Taper - the long wax stem in a candlelighter. Often called a wick.

## **A NOTE TO 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 St. Philip. 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 acolyte schedule when it first comes out. If there are schedule conflicts, you and your youth have the responsibility of finding someone to trade dates with you.
3. \_\_\_\_\_, our acolyte coordinator is there to help you if you are having difficulty locating a substitute. Her number is \_\_\_\_\_.
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 and look neat and well groomed. Please contact Mrs. Cooper if the acolyte's robe is soiled

or needs repair.

### **MARTIN LUTHER'S PRAYER BEFORE WORSHIP**

**Bless me, O god, with a reverent sense of your presence, that I may be at peace and may worship you with all my mind and spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**