

## **Introduction**

The most important thing a community of faith does is worship. It is so important that many resources and much time are focused on this central activity of the church. Worship defines who we are as Christians and it helps to shape our faith. Worship is no little matter. For the assembly to worship well the competent exercise of various leadership roles is crucial.

Acolytes are, first of all, members of the assembly. But they are members of the assembly who have been entrusted with various tasks that can be listed under three headings:

## **Preparation**

Acolytes help to prepare the worship space in a variety of ways. The preparation that is most visible is the lighting of the candles. Candles may be lighted anytime before or during the prelude (opening music).

After going to the center of the altar, reference the altar (bowing from the waist), while holding the candle lighter at an angle, the acolyte lights the candle on the right side of the altar first, followed by the candle on the left side of the altar. Then light the candelabras from the 'center out' starting with the one on the right. The taper should then be extinguished by pulling the trigger back until the flame disappears. Then the taper should be moved just to the opening of the candle lighter so that wax does not harden inside making it impossible for the next person to use.

During the season of Easter (and during Baptisms), the paschal candle should be lighted before the worship service and the rest of the candles should be lighted from it

During the season of Advent, the previous week's candles (if any) on the Advent wreath should be lighted before to the altar candles. The weeks candles will be lighted at a special time during the worship service. (If there are three candles of one color and one pink candle, the pink one is lighted on the third Sunday in Advent.)

Before the service begins, acolytes should check the place they will sit for all necessary books and bulletins so that they will be able to fully participate in the liturgy. They should also make sure, at least fifteen minutes prior to the service, they are prepared for worship.

## **Leadership and Assistance**

Leadership and assistance are exercised by acolytes when they help the assembly to focus on the reality of God's presence in word and sacrament, and in the gathered community. Holy things and holy people become vehicles for the divine presence. During the worship service acolytes participate fully; standing, singing, responding with the congregation and keeping eyes focused on the liturgical action are all ways in which the acolyte also leads the congregation.

During the offering, acolytes will give offering plates to the ushers and receive the offering and place it on the right "shelf" (aka speaker). Acolytes must remember to reference the altar each time they pass in front of it.

On Sunday morning, during the distribution of communion, acolytes will hold the flagon (wine pitcher) so that chalices (wine cups) may be conveniently refilled. Acolytes will commune with ushers and communion servers.

At the end of the worship service, after the pastor has processed out, the acolyte will extinguish the candles in the reverse order they were lighted. Working "outside in" candles will

be extinguished starting with the candelabra on the left, then the candelabra on the right, and finally the altar candles, with the candle on the right being the last extinguished.

Acolytes can help the altar guild to clear the worship space of sacramental vessels (communion elements), books, folders, etc. thus ensuring that the space is ready for the next worship service.

## **Special Times**

Acolytes will need to be well prepared for days and times of the church year that involve leadership in ways different from ordinary Sundays...

During special services, Sunday of the Passion, Easter Sunday, etc., there may be additional processions and different orders of worship. Acolytes will need to check with the pastor and other worship leaders to make sure they are well rehearsed and clear on special instructions.

Acolytes will participate in the procession to the font and assist the presiding minister during baptism. The pastor's book will need to be held so that the hands of the pastor are free. The acolyte will stand slightly in front of the pastor and hold the book at the bottom with the top of the book resting on the collarbone of the acolyte.

## **General Considerations**

It may seem strange to emphasize, but walking with dignity and grace is crucial to the acolyte's leadership. The two extremes of slouching with hands swinging at the side or marching in a military manner are to be avoided. Acolytes need to stand up with their backs straight and heads held high, walk with ease, and communicate by their demeanor the importance of worship. Standing is a sign of the resurrection and the posture of those who are alive. We walk and stand in such a way that we communicate that we are people who have been baptized into God's new life. When the acolyte is carrying nothing, hands should be folded at waist level. When the acolyte is carrying an object it should be done in such a way as to communicate the relative importance of the object.

When nothing is being carried and the acolyte passes in front of the altar it is appropriate to stop, face the altar and reference (bow). The bow is done from the waist, slowly enough to provide a sense of dignity. The altar/communion table is the central piece of furniture in the worship space. It is a symbol of the presence of Christ. On it rest the body and blood of Christ. Bowing before the altar is an acknowledgement of the awesome mystery of worship.