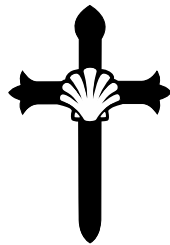




Acolyte Manual



St. James' Episcopal Church
Potomac, Maryland

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Introduction

“In the meantime, the boy Samuel continued to serve the Lord, wearing a sacred linen apron. Each year his mother would make a little robe and take it to him when she accompanied her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice...The boy Samuel grew up in the service of the Lord.” *1 Samuel 2:18-21*

Acolyte means an attendant or follower and Samuel is one of the first examples of an assistant to a priest. Your job as an acolyte is to assist the celebrant (the priest in charge of a worship service) and enhance the worship service to help glorify God. You are a minister of the church who is called to serve God. Therefore, every action you take should be done respectfully and in a dignified manner; the goal is for the attention of the congregation to be on the liturgy and not on the ministers. Serving as an acolyte is a commitment of your time and talent to the Lord’s service, which is greatly appreciated.

As described by Dennis G. Michno in *A Manual for Acolytes*:

“The patron of those who serve at the altar is Vincent, Deacon and Martyr. He lived in the late third century, was martyred in the year 304, and is commemorated in our calendar on January 22. Vincent is remembered for his love of God, his faithfulness to his bishop, and his unswerving loyalty to his responsibilities. These traits--love, faithfulness, and loyalty—are virtues that all who are privileged to serve at the altar should cultivate. Remember: our purpose is rooted in our love of God, our faithfulness is seen in our willingness to serve responsibly, and our loyalty is demonstrated in how carefully we carry out our duties. Love, faithfulness, and loyalty are the virtues we seek to perfect. The server’s aim is to be as steadfast as St. Vincent.”

More words to learn: Please use the glossary at the end of the manual whenever you come across an unfamiliar “church” word, such as when we refer to the *Gospel side* of the *chancel*.

Overall Responsibilities for All Acolytes

Overall responsibilities for acolytes are listed below. It is important to know your duties and be confident in your abilities. Do not worry about mistakes—they are bound to occur (even the Celebrant goofs up sometimes and God is still present!). Always act as if everything you do is supposed to happen that way and most people will never know whether a mistake was made or not. An acolyte’s responsibilities include:

- serving when assigned and being prompt.
- helping to get the church ready for worship (e.g., lighting candles).
- understanding the different parts of a worship service; knowing what is supposed to happen and when.
- knowing the specific responsibilities of the assigned position (e.g., crucifer).
- performing actions carefully and with reverence.
- maintaining a neat appearance.
- helping lead the congregation in worship by joining in prayers and singing and kneeling or standing at appropriate times.

Scheduling

Acolytes teams serve on a regular rotation, with some adjustments made as requested by acolyte families. The Sunday worship schedule is sent out weekly from the parish office, and includes a link to the master schedule. Review the master schedule regularly to make sure that you do not have any conflicts for the dates you are scheduled to serve. If you are not available for a scheduled date, you must arrange for a substitute. You can either trade with someone or ask them to fill in for you. After you secure a substitute, email the church office so that the master schedule can be updated.

Vestments

You should be vested 15 minutes before the start of a service; which means you should arrive no later than 20 minutes before a service starts. Vestments are kept in a closet in the flower room adjacent to the sacristy.

- Acolytes wear red cassocks covered by white cottas.
- If you are the crucifer, and there is not a red cassock available in your size, you may wear a white, hooded alb (the hood stays down), as well as a cross and cincture (white rope with knots at the end) that are kept in the acolyte drawer in the sacristy. The cincture is tied in a slipknot on the left side. Ask the clergy if you need help.
- Robes should come down to the tops of your shoes. When serving, it is preferred that you wear black or dark shoes. Please try not to wear sneakers.

Vestments remind us of the garments worn by Jesus and the apostles and should be treated with respect. Make sure your robe is not torn or soiled (take it home to be washed every once in a while) and always hang it up after a service. As you put on your vestments, focus on the job you have to do; remember that you are a worship leader and act accordingly.

When vested, your posture and actions are more noticeable than normal (and you are usually in front of the congregation). Stand straight, keeping your weight evenly balanced so that you do not sway. Fold your hands in front of you, just above the waist, unless you are holding something. Always walk somewhat slowly with poise and your head up. When seated, sit up straight and keep your feet flat on the floor. When you kneel, keep your back straight; don't slouch down onto your heels.

Before Worship

Light the candles no later than 15 minutes before the start of a service. Crucifers should check with the Celebrant (and the other acolytes with the crucifer) for any special instructions for the upcoming service.

Prepare for worship through prayer and reflection on the service you are about to perform. One prayer to use before worship is found on page 833 of *The Book of Common Prayer*:

O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

After lighting the candles, gather outside of the Rector's office for last-minute instructions and prayer. From there you will go and get whatever you are supposed to carry and assemble in the narthex. When the choir arrives or at the time for the service, take your positions for the procession.

Procession

The usual order for a procession is shown below. All positions are not filled at every service. Four acolytes are used for the main Sunday service: a crucifer/server, two torch bearers, and a Gospel bearer. The duties of each acolyte position are described in following sections. The procession should never begin until the Celebrant acknowledges that they are ready.

Procession Order

Crucifer and Torchbearers

Gospel Bearer

Choir

Lay Eucharistic Ministers

Priest(s)

Candle Lighting and Extinguishing Procedures

There is a traditional manner for lighting and extinguishing the candles that all acolytes should know and follow. Candles remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World; they also recall the days of the early Christians when candles and oil lamps were the only sources of light indoors. There will always be at least two candles on or beside the altar. As you face the altar from the nave, the right side is known as the Epistle side and the left as the Gospel side. There are some basic rules to know when lighting and extinguishing candles:

- Gospel candles never burn alone.
- Candles are lighted starting from the cross and going out to symbolize that the light of Jesus shines out from the cross; they are extinguished in reverse.
- A paschal candle is used during the 50 days of Easter and at baptisms and funerals. It is placed in front of the altar and is lighted well before the start of the service (usually by a priest or member of the altar guild who has arrived early) and is **not** extinguished at the end of the service. If a paschal candle is present and not lighted by the time you are vested, ask the Celebrant whether you should light it.
- Advent wreath candles are lighted during the service and extinguished at the end of the service after all other candles have been extinguished. The number of wreath candles lighted corresponds to the week of Advent. A rose-colored candle represents the third Sunday of Advent.
- Use caution when carrying a candle lighter near the altar so that wax or soot does not drop on the linen.

Lighting the Candles

Candles can be lighted by an individual or a team of acolytes. The procedures listed below are for one acolyte working alone. If two are doing the job, their actions mirror each other and both the Gospel and Epistle side are lighted together. When working with a partner, do not move to the next candle until your partner has finished lighting his/her candle. If your partner is having trouble lighting a candle, please assist.

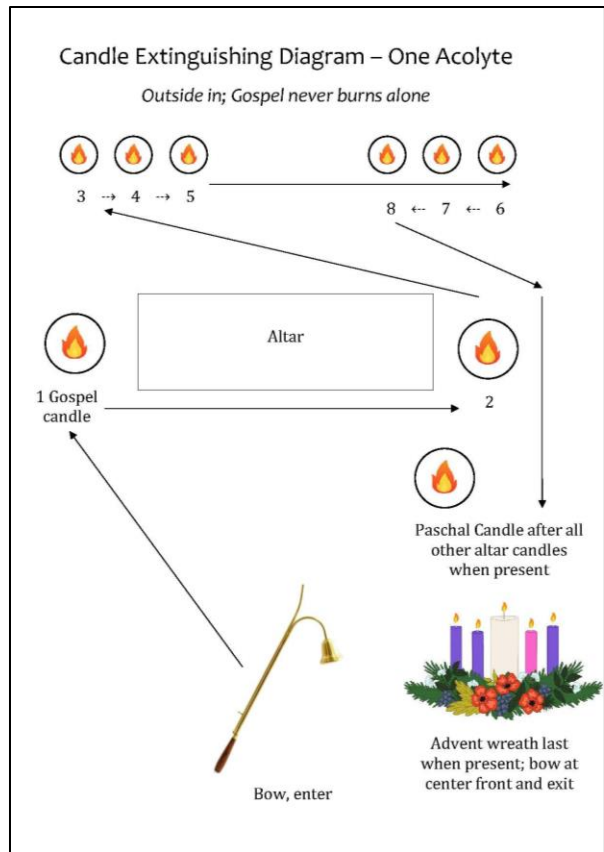
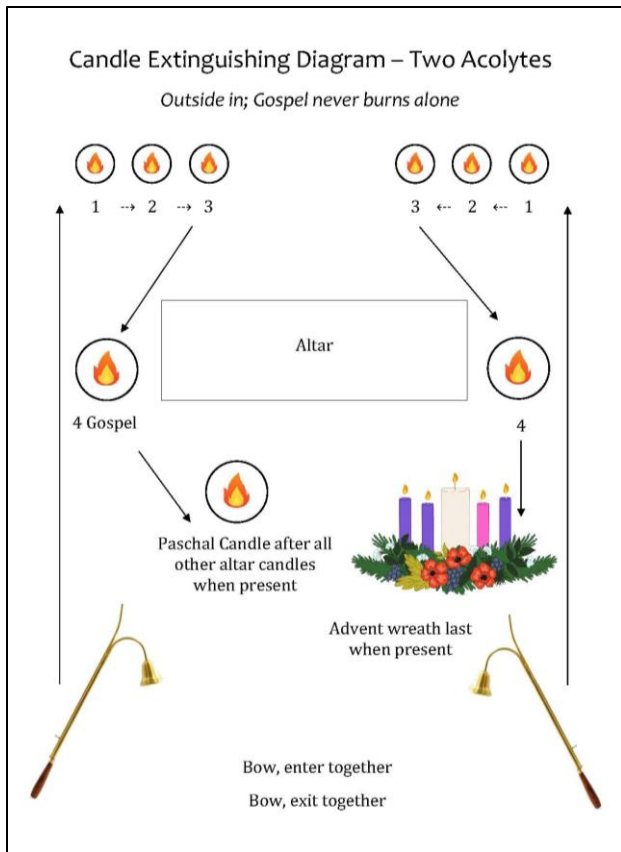
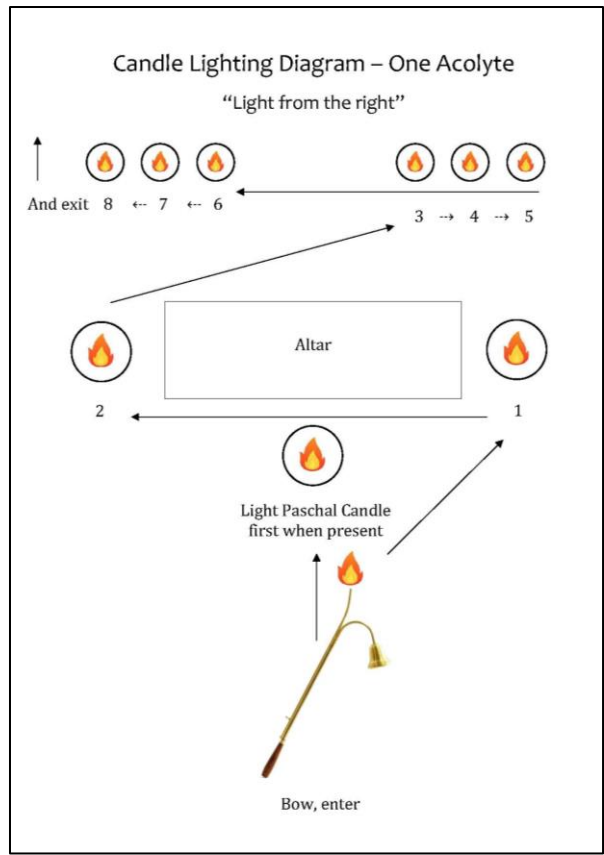
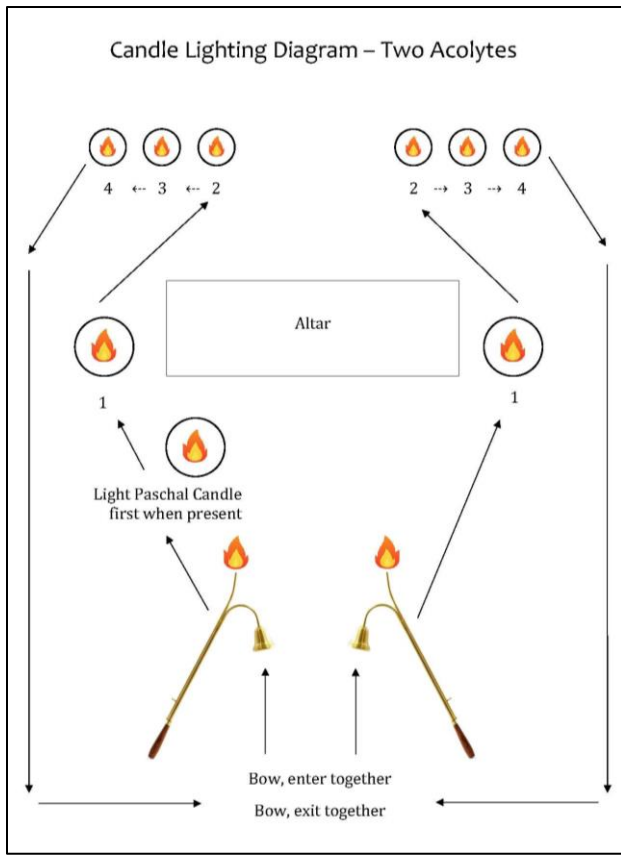
Use the following procedures when lighting candles (see diagrams that follow):

1. Check that the wick in your candle lighter is long enough to do the job. If it's not lighting well, ask a member of the altar guild to replace it.
2. Light your candle lighter behind the altar screen using the lighter kept on the wall.
3. Walk around the Gospel side of the chancel (*remember there's a glossary of these words at the end of this document!*) to the end of the aisle in front of the sanctuary. Reverence the altar (by bowing) and proceed to the Epistle candle(s). To help you remember which candle to light first, remember that "light" and "right" rhyme and so you "light the right." If there is more than one candle on each side of the altar, light the innermost candle first and proceed outward.
4. To light a candle, hold the flame from your candle lighter at the top of the candle; tip up the back end of your candle lighter to place the flame near the wick. We use oil-based candles so they light quite easily. Hold the flame in place for a few seconds, and then check whether the candle is lighted. If you cannot see the top, look for a glow under the brass ornament at the top of the candle. If you are working in a team, ask your partner to check. If you still cannot tell, walk back to the front of the sanctuary and look.
5. After lighting the Epistle side, cross the altar and light the Gospel candle(s). Reverence the altar when you cross the middle in front of the cross.
6. If there are candles on the shelf behind the altar, light them next. As on the altar, light the Epistle side first.
7. Extinguish your candle lighter after lighting the last candle, return to the end of the aisle, bow, and return the candle lighter to its holder.

Extinguishing Candles

Candles are extinguished in the reverse order as they are lighted (**see diagrams that follow**). The Gospel side first, and from the outermost in. Altar candles are extinguished last, unless there is an Advent wreath, which is put out last.

Use the bell-shaped snuffer on the end of the candle lighter to extinguish a candle. Hold the bell down over the top of the candle until you see smoke escaping, which tells you the candle has gone out. Do not push the snuffer down on top of the candle or you will ruin the wick.



Responsibilities of Individual Acolyte Positions

The responsibilities and procedures to be performed by each acolyte position follow below. The crucifer/server should oversee the other acolytes, answering any questions they might have and assigning positions or recruiting help should some acolytes be absent. Remain alert during the service to remind other acolytes of or assist them in their duties.

Crucifer/Server Responsibilities

- Check with the Celebrant for any special instructions or procedures and inform other acolytes.
- Reassign positions or recruit help should some acolytes be absent.
- Lead the processional, Gospel, and recessional processions.
- Assist other acolytes as needed during the service.
- Assist the Celebrant in communion preparations.
- Wash the Celebrant's hands before communion.

Before the Service

Check to see that all the assigned acolytes are present. If not, recruit help or reassign as follows. If only two others are present, do not use a Gospel bearer. If only one other is present, do not use torches. Before the service begins, tell the Celebrant the number of acolytes present and ask for any special instructions; be sure to pass them on to the other acolytes.

Make sure the torch bearers light the altar candles at least 15 minutes before the service. If they don't, light them yourself. Check with the Celebrant for any last minute instructions. Gather outside the rector's office to receive last minute instructions and to pray. Then get the cross from the holder and gather in the narthex. Make sure the torch bearers light their torches and that the celebrant is ready. Then, get in position for the procession by standing between the two wooden columns at the back of the nave. The celebrant will signal to the organist that the procession is ready to begin.

The Procession

When you are in position for the start of the service, the Celebrant will signal to the organist to begin the processional hymn; be ready early. When the organist finishes the introduction to the processional hymn, check that the Celebrant is ready and proceed down the aisle slowly with dignity, as the singing begins.

Carry the cross as best you can, hopefully with your right hand below and near your waist and your left hand on top near your chin. The cross should be held high enough so that your feet and/or robe do not bump it as you walk. Be aware of low objects (such as the entrance to the sanctuary) that may be in the path of the cross.

Proceed to the end of the aisle, pause, and proceed around the choir side of the chancel. When you reach a position next to the cross holder, stop and let the torch and Gospel bearers walk past you. Put the cross away and take a place in front of one of the seats in the sanctuary.

The Gospel Procession (when we have one)

At the start of the Gospel hymn, remove the cross from its holder and stand and wait for the torch and Gospel bearers to join you. When the reader of the Gospel is in position behind you, proceed around the chancel and down the aisle to the **second** pew. Turn around and face the altar, continuing to hold the cross aloft. After the Gospel has been read, the reader and Gospel bearer will step to the side of the aisle enabling you to lead the procession back around the chancel. Pause when you reach the cross holder to let everyone go by; put the cross away and return to the sanctuary for the sermon.

Preparation for Holy Communion

During the time of the offering, you will assist the Celebrant in preparing the elements for communion. The oblations (bread, wine, and water) are found on the credence table. The bread is in the tall silver ciborium, the wine is in the large silver flagon, and the water is in the smaller glass flagon.

Go to stand behind the credence table when you see the Celebrant walk up to begin preparing the altar. If directed by the clergy, open the ciborium containing the wafers, placing the lid back on the table (some clergy do this themselves). The Celebrant may acknowledge the end of each step of the preparation process with a slight bow; if so, return the bow and proceed to the next step.

When the Celebrant turns back to the credence table, pick up the flagon containing the wine and hand it to the Celebrant with the handle facing out. Next, take the stopper out of the flagon containing the water, pick up the water flagon, and hand it to the Celebrant with the handle facing out when they return to the credence table.

When the celebrant gives you back the water, hold it in one hand and place the small towel over your arm. Pick up the lavabo bowl and hold it in your other hand. When the Celebrant turns to you, pour a small amount of water over the fingers he/she holds in the bowl. Extend your arm to offer the towel and wait for it to be given back to you. If there is more than one priest present, wash each of their hands as well. Return the bowl, towel, and water to the credence table, turn toward the priests and offer one another a bow, and then go back to your seat.

The Recession

At the start of the recessional hymn, go and help the torch bearers light the torches. Then, remove the cross from its holder and stand next to the choir risers and wait for the torch and Gospel bearers to join you. (Altar candles will be put out after the service.)

As soon as the torch bearers join you, line up and wait for the first words of the recessional hymn to begin, then toward and down the main aisle.

Torchbearer Responsibilities

- Check with the crucifer for any special instructions or procedures.
- Light and extinguish the altar candles.
- Carry a torch during the processional, Gospel, and recessional processions.
- Work in synchronization with the other torch bearers.
- Collect the offering plates when a Gospel bearer is not present.

Before the Service

Light the altar candles at least 15 minutes before the service. After lighting the candles, join the other acolytes outside the Rector's office for last minute instructions and prayer. Afterwards, get your torch from its stand and be in the narthex ready to go, three minutes before the service begins. When the choir arrives or at the time of the service, light your torch (additional matches are kept in the drawer of the table in the narthex) and get in position for the procession by standing next to one another, one step behind the crucifer between the two wooden columns at the back of the nave.

The Procession

When signaled by the Celebrant during the processional hymn, the crucifer will proceed down the aisle at a slow pace. Your job during a procession is to stay one step behind the crucifer, wherever he/she may go.

Carry your torch with your right hand below and near your waist and your left hand on top in a reversed position (hand behind the pole with your palm facing forward) near your chin. Hold the torch high enough so that your feet and/or robe do not bump it as you walk. It is important that you hold your torch at the same height as the other torch bearers. The tallest torch bearers should set the height and the other match it. Be aware of low objects (such as speakers or beams) that may be in the path of the torch.

The crucifer will proceed to the end of the aisle. Follow the crucifer down and around the choir side of the chancel. The crucifer will stop next to the choir risers allowing you to pass and put your torch away. Do not lower your torch nor put it out until you have passed behind the altar screen. After putting your torch away, take a place in front of one of the seats on the Gospel side of the sanctuary. If you sing in the choir, you may take your place in the choir instead of in the sanctuary.

The Gospel Procession

At the start of the Gospel hymn, remove your torch from its stand, light it, and exit from behind the altar screen to wait next to the crucifer, who will be standing by the choir. When the reader of the Gospel is in position behind you, the crucifer will proceed around the chancel and down the aisle to the second pew and turn around, facing the altar. You should stop at the first pew and turn in, facing the other torch bearers.

Rest your torch on the ground and do not look around at the congregation during the reading. The Gospel bearer (if present) will stand between the two torch bearers and hold the book for the reader of the Gospel, if called upon to do so.

After the Gospel reading, the reader and Gospel bearer will step to the side of the aisle. As the crucifer walks past you, turn and take your place next to him/her and proceed back around the chancel. Put your torch away as you did following the opening procession. Return to the sanctuary or choir for the sermon.

At the Offering

If the gospel bearer is absent, one torch bearer will walk to the front of the chancel and collect the offering plates when they are brought up at the end of the offertory anthem and give them to the Celebrant for blessing and to be placed on the altar.

When communion is administered, join the other members of the altar party behind the altar to receive.

The Recession

As soon as the music begins for the recessional hymn go to get your torch for the recessional hymn. While you are moving behind the altar screen, light the torches. Remove your torch from its stand and wait next to the crucifer, who will be standing by the choir risers.

Follow the crucifer down the aisle. When you reach the narthex, put out your torch and proceed up the side aisle, holding your torch at your side; return the torch to its stand. After the recessional hymn, extinguish all the candles.

Gospel Bearer Responsibilities

- The responsibilities of the Gospel bearer are:
- Check with the crucifer for any special instructions or procedures.
- Light and extinguish the altar candles if the torch bearers are absent.
- Carry the Gospel book during the processional, Gospel, and recessional processions.
- Hold the book during the reading of the Gospel (if requested).
- Collect the offering plates.

Before the Service

If the torch bearers are absent, light the altar candles at least 15 minutes before the service. After lighting the candles, join the other acolytes outside the Rector's office for last minute instructions and prayer. Afterwards, get the Gospel book from the altar and be in the narthex ready to go, three minutes before the service begins. At the time of the service, get in position for the procession by standing near the table in the narthex.

The Procession

Following the torch bearers, hold the book vertically by the bottom edge in front of your chest with the cover facing forward. When you reach the end of the aisle, place the book on the altar. After putting the book away, take a place in front of one of the seats in the sanctuary. If you sing in the choir, you may take your place in the choir instead of in the sanctuary.

The Gospel Procession

At the start of the Gospel hymn, get the book from the altar and wait behind the crucifer and torch bearers who will be standing by the choir. When the reader of the Gospel is in position behind you, the crucifer will proceed around the chancel and down the aisle to the third pew and turn around. The torch bearers will stop and face each other at the second pew. You should stand between the torch bearers and turn around and face the altar.

When the Gospel reader approaches you, hold the book up for him/her to read. Allow the reader to open the book and adjust the height at which the book should be held. If requested by the Gospel reader, hold the book by the bottom edge, make sure your fingers are not in the way, and stand as still as possible. Some readers may prefer to take the book from you to read and return it to you when they have finished.

After the Gospel has been read, close the book if the reader did not do so, and step to the side of the aisle to allow the crucifer and torch bearers to get by. Follow the crucifer back around the chancel. Put the book back on the altar, and return to the sanctuary or choir for the sermon.

At the Offering

During the offertory anthem, as the ushers approach the altar, meet them to collect the plates. **Do not wait for the ushers to start moving before you assume your position.** Give the plates to the Celebrant for blessing and to be placed on the altar.

When communion is administered, join the other members of the altar party behind the altar to receive.

The Recession

At the start of the recessional hymn, get the Gospel book from the altar and wait behind the crucifer and torch bearers who will be standing by the choir. The procedure for the recession varies, depending on whether or not there is a choir.

If there is no choir or they are not recessing, the crucifer will proceed down the aisle. You should fall in behind the crucifer and before the altar party.

When you reach the narthex, wait until after the dismissal and then proceed up the side aisle and return the Gospel book to the altar. If the torch bearers are absent, go up the side immediately, return the book, and then extinguish the altar candles.

Flag or Banner Bearer Responsibilities

Flags and banners are sometimes used on festive occasions, such as Christmas and Easter. They are used only in the processional and recessional processions. Both flags and banners are carried at a 45 degree angle, with the weight resting on the left hand held in front of the chest. The right hand is used to steady and guide and is held down low on the pole, which passes on the right side of the body. The bottom edge of a banner should hang free, so that is possible to see where you are going.

The banner holder is located on the Epistle side, just off of the chancel. The American flag is displayed on the Gospel side of the chancel and the church flag on the Epistle side. In a procession, the flags are carried side-by-side, with the American flag on the right. As a result, at the end of the aisle during the processional, the American flag must be allowed to cross in front of the church flag so that the two flags can be put in the proper holders during the service. In the recessional, the American flag already will be on the right side.

See Glossary on next pages

Glossary

Ablutions The cleaning of the Eucharistic objects (e.g., chalice and paten) following communion.

Alb A long, white garment that covers from the neck to the feet and is tied at the waist with a cincture. The alb is symbolic of innocence and reminds us of the robe Herod put on Christ.

Aumbry A receptacle in the wall used to store consecrated bread and wine; it is identified by a burning sanctuary lamp.

Cassock A long garment that covers from the neck to the feet with snaps or buttons down the front. It symbolizes the spirit of recollection and devotion. Red cassocks are often preferred because the color is symbolic of the blood shed by martyrs.

Celebrant The priest officiating at or in charge of a Eucharist.

Chalice A large, stemmed cup that holds the wine during communion.

Chancel The area of the church in front of the nave.

Ciborium A covered, stemmed vessel used to hold the communion bread.

Cincture A long, white rope with knots in the ends that is tied around the waist; it is symbolic of the ropes that bound Christ at his trial and the whips at his scourging.

Cotta A white garment that is worn over a cassock; it has full sleeves and reaches to the waist. The white color symbolizes innocence and purity of heart.

Credence Table The small table, usually on the Epistle side of the altar, that holds vessels and items for the Eucharist. St. James' often uses a table on each side.

Crucifer The acolyte that carries the cross and leads the procession. He/she also assists the Celebrant in preparing for communion.

Cruet A small, covered pitcher used to hold wine or water.

Dismissal The words said at the end of the Eucharist.

Elements The bread and wine used for Holy Communion.

Epistle Side The right side of the altar when looking from the nave.

Eucharist The service of Holy Communion.

Flagon A large, covered pitcher used to hold wine or water.

Gospel Bearer The acolyte who carries the Gospel book.

Gospel Side The left side of the altar when looking from the nave.

Intinction Cup A small, stemmed cup used to hold wine into which the bread wafer is dipped.

Lavabo Bowl A small bowl used to wash the hands of the Celebrant.

Liturgy Public worship services of the church. Specifically, the word means the work of the people.

Narthex The entrance area to the church, inside the door and before the nave.

Nave The large part of the church where the congregation sits.

Oblations Offerings of bread, wine, and water for the Holy Eucharist.

Offertory Plates The large, brass plates used to collect the offering.

Paschal Candle A large, white candle that burns during the 50 days of Easter, baptisms, and funerals. It symbolizes new light and the resurrection.

Paten A small plate on to which the bread is placed for communion.

Purificator A small, white cloth used to wipe the chalice.

Reverence the Altar Stopping and bowing from the waist towards the altar and cross as a sign of reverence.

Sacring Bell The bell at the back of the nave, which is rung by the Celebrant to announce the beginning of the worship service.

Sacristy The small room behind the altar where the liturgical objects, altar linens, and Celebrant vestments are kept.

Sanctuary The area inside the communion rail surrounding the altar.

Taper A long, white wick used in a candle lighter.

Torch bearer One of two acolytes who carry a torch and accompany the crucifer.

Vestment Any of the garments worn by those participating in a liturgy.

Vestry The room behind the altar where the acolyte and crucifer robes are kept.



stjamespotomac.org



St. James' Episcopal Church

11815 Seven Locks Rd., Potomac, MD 20854

The Mission of St. James': To bring people together to be transformed by and to proclaim Christ's love through worship, spiritual formation, and service.

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Members

Yemi Agboola – Racial Justice

DeAtley Barish – Mental Health

Barbara Kamya – Fellowship

Amy Black Metcalf – Worship

Jennifer Nordin – Administration,

Christian Formation

Kate McClure – Communications

Ann Venton – Finance

Walter Weaver – Mission & Outreach

Convention Representatives

Delegates: Laurence Canete,
Sarah Hnatov

Alternates: Carolyn Ragland,
Dan Zimmerman

St. James' has discerned a call to mental health ministries. If you are ever in crisis, a 24-hour response is offered at the Montgomery County Crisis Center: 240-777-4000. OR call the National Crisis Hotline: 988