Being an Acolyte: An Introduction
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Being an acolyte is a ministry
The ministry of acolytes is an expression of their baptism, in which all the people of God come to share in the eternal priesthood of Christ. Together we live Christ’s life in the world.

Every person has a ministry – is a minister. Most people have several ministries at once – things they do that God has given them to do.

An acolyte helps the whole faith community
The word acolyte comes from a Greek word (akolouthos) that meant “helping along a way or road with others” or “assisting others on a journey.” The Latin word became acolytus, and it meant “a follower or attendant” and came to have its current meaning: assisting the other ministers in the eucharist or communion service (also called the mass). Acolytes help on the journey of faith that the whole church is on.

As an acolyte you will assist everyone in the faith community by helping with our main worship services (Sundays and holy days like Christmas and Easter as well as, occasionally weddings and funerals). You will join in this work with the ushers, greeters, readers, chalice bearers, choir, organist and the priest. Everything we do as Christians is done through people working together.

Acolytes learn about how to do their work and try to do their best at it. Typically, acolytes serve for years in this ministry, so they get better and better at it over time. No one is expected to do it perfectly (especially at the beginning), just the best they can from week to week.
An acolyte is a person working with other human beings

The worship service at church on Sunday is also called “the liturgy” which means “the work of the people.” It is usually carefully planned and all the people involved care to do it well. At the same time, it is being done by normal human beings, so it usually feels “handmade” or “handcrafted.” It isn’t a slick Hollywood production or something made by a machine, though it is often very beautiful and moving.

Everyone involved in the liturgy, including the priest, makes mistakes during the service. We try not to call attention to them and get back on track as soon as we can. But we don’t worry or get upset, knowing that next time we’ll do better (and probably make a different mistake!). We have a sense of humor and lightness about things that go wrong.

Acolytes usually help at the eucharist

The eucharist always reminds us of Easter, when Christ rose from the dead and God told us that the love that God has for us will never die.

At the center of it is recalling for ourselves and everyone the meal that Jesus had with his friends the night before he died, when he took bread and wine and promised to be with us always. He gave thanks for the bread and the wine and gave it to those who were with him saying to remember him in their own lives whenever they ate bread and drank wine.

When we gather as a community of people who are loved by God in Christ, we almost always act out this meal together. We do that to receive the gift of God’s presence in our own individual lives, literally in our bodies, our actual selves, and in our life together as Christ’s body.

Acolytes help in this enacting or presentation and participation in the meal that Jesus continues to give to all the people of earth. Often called a celebration (because it gives us a joyous message of the love and presence of God), it is both very simple and can also be big and somewhat detailed, with lots of people involved. Larger celebrations of the holy (or special and blessed) meal (communion, eucharist, mass) need more people to make them come together – so acolytes are very important people for what the faith community (church) is and does when it gathers.
What do acolytes do?

What kind of things does an acolyte do?

1. **Beautifies** the liturgy through wearing vestments and moving meaningfully in the service.

2. **Leads the processions** in and out of the church (usually) and sometimes at the time of the reading of the gospel and at other times.

3. **Carries** a cross and candles (usually called torches).

4. **Stands** while others do things.

5. **Sits or kneels** and **participates** with everyone in the service.

6. Because acolytes come to know what they are doing, an acolyte **helps to lead** the service. People look to the acolytes to know what is going on.

7. **Helps the ushers and others** by giving them things they need – like handing the offering plates to the ushers.

8. **Helps at the altar** as the priest sets the table and prays the Great Thanksgiving over the bread and wine.

9. **Gets the altar area ready** for everyone to come and receive the bread and wine.

10. **Helps people** up or down the steps, if they need help.

11. **Helps when** someone else makes a mistake or something unusual happens – if something is dropped or forgotten, or something is needed.

More specific instruction on what to do, when and how will be offered in your orientation sessions as time goes along. You can be sure that you can do this work and do it well. Many of your same age and abilities have done it before you.

A special opportunity to reflect on God’s presence and gifts

Being an acolyte gives you special reasons and a special time to be involved in and to reflect on what it means that God loves us and feeds us for the life we live today. Being an acolyte can be very meaningful as you serve in the community of faith through the years. Also, being an acolyte can help you learn what you can do with and for others. And it can be fun, funny, exciting – all the things that make life the joyful gift of God it is.
A Bible passage for Acolytes
Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don’t hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you’re in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer.

Romans 12:9-12, CEB (Common English Bible)

The Acolyte’s Prayers

**Before the service**
Thank you for your presence with me, Spirit of the Living God!
By your grace, help me to serve you in love.
Amen.

**After the service**
I praise you, O Christ!
As I have served you in your presence in the community of faith, may I also serve you in your presence everywhere I go and in everyone I meet.
Awaken my heart, mind, body and soul, all that I am, to all of who you are in the world.
Amen.