

SAINT PAUL'S Greek Orthodox Church of Regina, Saskatchewan

Altar Servers Guide



DEDICATED TO THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE ALTAR SERVERS OF SAINT PAUL'S GREEK ORTHODOX
COMMUNITY, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

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Introduction



This manual is put together to guide people who wish to serve in the Altar of the Lord. Altar Servers, or Altar Boys as they are often called, have a very important role in the Church. People that serve in the Altar must understand the seriousness and importance of their roles. Not everyone can be an Altar Server, just like not everyone can be a priest. Altar Servers are people who are active in the sacramental life of the Church, especially in the Mystery of Holy

Communion. This means that those who serve in the Altar must live a Christian life whether they are in church, at school, at work, or at home. To serve in the Altar is a commitment one makes to Christ as part of his spiritual life. It is not something that should be taken lightly. This guide will explain the most important duties of the Altar Server.

You should study it carefully, so that you may better serve Christ at His Altar.

Chapter 1 - Etiquette

Punctuality

As an Altar Server you must be in the Altar, ready to serve, before the Divine Liturgy begins, 10AM. This ensures that you are ready to begin your duties right away. When you are there on time, the priest can concentrate on the service, instead of worrying whether he will have help for the Divine Liturgy. Another reason is so you are there for the beginning of the Liturgy and do not miss out on any parts. Think how rude it is to show up late for an appointment or a dinner at a friend's house. Imagine how rude it is to be late when God calls us to His Table. Punctuality is also a good character to have for the rest of your life. Being punctual shows maturity and responsibility on your part. If you are unsure what time the Liturgy starts or what time the Priest wants you to be there, you should ask him.

Entering the Church

When you enter a church, you not only enter a building of worship, but you enter the Kingdom of God – Heaven. Before you enter the church, you must concentrate on why you are there. Any worries and thoughts that have nothing to do with the Divine Liturgy should be left outside the church. The only thing on your mind should be Christ and your prayers. Remember people are there to pray and are concentrating on the service.

You should not make any loud noises, start conversations, or try to get someone's attention. The time to chat with others is after the end of the Divine Liturgy.

The first thing you do when you enter a church is Cross yourself. Then you



light a candle and make a prayer, and kiss the icons next to the candles. Candles symbolize our prayers. That is why when you light a candle, you should say a prayer, either for yourself or someone you know. People tend to light candles for sick people in their families. Candles can also be lit for those people that have passed away. We never forget anyone, and we always pray for everyone, whether they are in this life, or the next. After you light your candles, you kiss the icons next to the candles. The icons are usually the icons of the saint that the church is named after, and the saint of the day. When you kiss the icons, you venerate and give honour to the saint whose image is on the icon.

Entering the Altar

As serious as it is to enter the church properly, so much more serious it is to enter the Altar properly, along the right wall through the white door. The Altar area is where the Altar Table is located. On that table the most important service takes place: the Divine Liturgy. As Christians, our whole lives revolve around this Mystery, the Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. During the Liturgy, the Bread and Wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ, which we all consume, so that we will be one with Him. Serving in the Altar where this Mystery takes place is a great blessing and privilege. Every time you enter the altar you must cross yourself once and kiss the icon on the door (this is not necessary when first coming in through the white door).



Preparing to Serve

After you enter the Altar, find your robe and fold your belt, so that you may get blessed by the priest. If you are a subdeacon, find your orarion (belt) as well. You always receive your blessing from the oldest priest in the Altar. You approach the priest, holding the robe with both hands. You extend your hands and say, “Father bless.” The priest blesses you and you kiss his hand. You then go to the side and put on your belt. If there is a bishop present, you get your blessing from him, even if he is outside of the Altar, at his throne. You approach him and say, “Master bless.” You kiss his hand and come back in the Altar.

During the Service



The role of the Altar Server is to assist the priest and lead processions during the Divine Liturgy. It is very important that during the Liturgy, you pay attention to the priest. When you are not doing anything, you stand on the side, close to the Altar Table, and follow along the Liturgy with your book. Serving in the Altar is a serious matter, and you shouldn't be joking around and letting your mind wander. Altar Servers are also responsible for the cleanliness and organization of the Altar. Remember, if you are unsure about something, ask your priest or head altar boy.

At the End of the Service

For most people the service ends when the priest gives the Antithoro (bread) to the people. However, there is still some work to do for the priest and the Altar Servers. You must make sure that the priest always has enough Antithoro in front of him to hand out to the people. After, when the Antithoro is given out, you must return to the Altar and make sure everything is ready for the next service. That means cleaning any messes, including breadcrumbs, and putting your robes away on a hanger and properly hung up. When you finish all your duties say goodbye to anybody inside the altar as it is rude to just leave without saying anything.



Exiting the Altar

When you exit the Altar after you've taken off your robe, you kiss the icon of the Archangel and cross yourself.

Exiting the Church

When you leave the church to go home, you kiss the icons at the back of the church by the main doors, cross yourself, and leave. This is to show respect to God and the Church and show just because you are leaving doesn't mean you forgot how to be a Christian.



Chapter 2 – Altar Items

All the items you use in the Altar have a meaning and an importance. It is very important that you treat everything in the church with care and respect.

The Altar Servers' Robes

The robe you wear symbolizes your commitment to serving the Church as Altar Server. The robe also distinguishes you from the rest of the congregation, as you have a specific role in the Church. When you wear the robe, you are not only a Christian, but specifically a servant of God at His Altar. In Greek, the robe is called the Sticharion, and the belt is called the Orarion. You must treat your robe with care and respect so it will last and will look presentable when you serve. After you leave the Altar, you should make sure your robe is neatly folded or hanging, so it will not wrinkle. If you feel your robe needs repair or cleaning, you should speak with your priest or the head of the Altar Servers.



The Candles

The candles are what you use most of the time during processions, readings and special services. As we said, candles represent our prayers to God. The candles you carry also symbolize the light of Christ shining for those who believe in Him. When you carry a candle at the front of a procession, you also announce the beginning of the procession to the people, so they may stand still and pay attention. You should not play with your candles or swing them from side to side. When you are standing still, most of the time it is okay to rest the pole of the candle on the floor. When you stand in front of the Altar with the candles, you face the Altar Server across from you. The same goes if you stand in front or on the sides of a table. Remember, you must never turn your back to the Altar or the priest. It is considered disrespectful.



The Censer (Thymiato)

The censer is what we burn incense in. It hangs from chains, and on the chains are attached bells. Incense is a gift to God. That tradition was used by the Jews when they would burn incense at the Altar as a gift to God. We continue that tradition. Incense also symbolizes our prayers to God. The lower part of the censer symbolizes the earth. The top part of the censer symbolizes Heaven, where the smoke rises, like our prayers. Normally, there are twelve bells on the chains, and they symbolize the Twelve Apostles of Christ. The sound of the bells symbolizes the Apostles glorifying God. Although it is fun to use the



censer, you must make sure that it is properly lit and cleaned at all times. A dirty censer starts to smell bad after a while. Make sure the charcoal is lit and there is plenty left. You must also be careful about how much incense you use each time. Every time the priest uses the censer and gives it back to you, you should clean out the remaining burning incense and put it in the small container next to the censer stand. You should also clean out any ash left over from the burning charcoal.

When you give the censer to the priest, you hold the ring on the top of the chains with your right hand and the chains with your left hand. Make sure there is enough space on the chains between your hands, because that is where the priest will grab the censer. Make sure you lift your left hand a bit, so the part between your hands doesn't drop straight down, but is on an angle. That makes it easier for the priest to take the censer from you.

When the priest gives back the censer to you, you grab it from the chains or from the top loop, if the priest is not holding it from there. If the priest censes you, when he gives you the censer, you cense him twice. If it is a bishop that gives it back to you, you cense the bishop three times. When the priest censes you, you don't cross yourself. You simply bow towards the priest.

In a procession, the censer always goes ahead of the lead priest.

The Processional Cross and Fans



you were holding a candle. In a procession, the Cross goes ahead of the censer, and the Fans go ahead of the Cross and behind the candles.

The Banners (Lavara)

The Banners are usually located on the solea, outside the altar and are only used for special feast days and occasions. Your priest will let you know when they are to be used.

The Antithoro (Blessed Bread)

The Antithoro is the blessed bread that is given out at the end of Divine Liturgy. Historically, this bread was given to those who had not taken Communion, as a substitute. However, today it is given to all at

the end of Divine Liturgy. The Antithoro is cut up during the service from the prosfora that people bring to the church. It is important that the Antithoro is cut and ready to be blessed very early in the Liturgy, as it is given to the priest to be blessed about half way through the service.

The Thikero-Trikera (Bishop's Candles)

When a bishop is visiting the church, the Thikero-Trikera are used. These are two candle stands, one with three candles and one with two candles. The one with the three symbolizes the Holy Trinity. The one with the two symbolizes the two natures of Christ (Divine and Human). When the bishop visits, these candles are held by the deacons, subdeacons or altar boys. The three candles are always to the right of the bishop. For further instruction on how to carry the Thikero-Trikera please ask your parish priest.

The Zeon (Hot Water)

The Zeon is heated during the Divine Liturgy once The Creed has been said, and is brought to the priest right as he says "SOPHIA ORTHOI PROSCOMEN" which is right before he gives Holy Communion. The Zeon is always brought to the priest on his right side. The priest will take the Zeon and pour it into the chalice with the wine and return it back to the altar boy. Then the altar boy must dump the remaining water into the bottle found on the Prothesis and fill the cup back up so the priest may use it again after the service has ended.



The Prothesis (Preparation Table)

The Prothesis is located off to the left side of the altar. This is the table where the priest prepares the gifts before Orthros starts. The altar boys are not responsible for this in any way as this service is done before they arrive at the church. However, it is important to be aware of this table's importance. This is where the priest will go to get the gifts before the Great Entrance.



Chapter 3 – Processions

Small Entrance (Entrance of the Gospel)

The first procession of the Divine Liturgy is the Small Entrance where the priest goes around the church with the Holy Gospel. There are only candles in this procession (no Cross or Fans). In this situation, the altar boys are to line up side by side and go onto the Solea (platform in front of altar). The priest will follow the candles. The boys on the right side will make an 'L' shape route and the boys on the left will make a 'U' shape route. They will line up on each side of the Royal Doors (centre doors of the altar) facing each other. When the priest passes and goes into the altar, the altar boys immediately turn to face the altar, then enter through the doors on their own side.



Gospel Reading



When the priest is ready to read the Gospel, the altar boys will split into two groups, each exiting from each side door of the altar. They are to come out and line up on each side of the Royal Doors facing each other. They are to wait there until the Gospel is read and then turn, and enter through their respective side doors (just like in the small entrance). Only candles are taken out for the Gospel reading.

Great Entrance (Entrance of the Gifts)

The Great Entrance is when the priest comes out with the Holy Gifts that are to become the Body and Blood of Christ. This procession utilizes the candles, the Cross, the Fans and the Censer. The order of the processions should be: candles, lanterns, fans, cross, censer, priest. Whoever is holding the Censer is to cense the priest, walking backwards around the whole church and all the way up to the Royal Doors, where he stands off to the left side.



Holy Communion



During Holy Communion two altar boys need to help the priest with the Makro (red cloth used to wipe people's mouth). It is VERY important that the person doing this is very careful that all children are wiped well and that no Holy Communion falls from the spoon onto the floor. This **MUST NEVER HAPPEN** as this is the **BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST**. There must also be two altar boys holding Antithoro for the people.

Artoclasia (Blessing of the Five Loaves)

Sometimes at the end of Liturgy there will be an Artoclasia service. If this is the case then only four altar boys should come out with candles and stand on each side of the table with the loaves. One more altar boy should come out with the censer and stand to the right of the Priest, wherever he may be standing. When the priest is done the Artoclasia, the altar boys are to re-enter the Altar by the closest side door unless there is a memorial service, in which case they would walk over to that table and stand on each side as was done with the Artoclasia.



Mnimosino (Memorial Service)



Sometimes at the end of Liturgy there will be a Mnimosino. If this is the case, then the altar boys stand on each side of the Mnimosino table on the Solea, the same way they do for Artoclasia. When finished, the altar boys can enter the Altar by the nearest side door. Bowing is not necessary. **Note: Thymiato must be ready when Father says “allelujah”, and when he is not chanting and speaking English. (Thymiato is needed 2 times)**