

**A Manual for Acolytes**  
according to the customs and practices  
at  
St. George’s Episcopal Church, Arlington, Virginia

What follows are notes adapting *A Manual For Acolytes* by Dennis G. Michno for use at St. George’s. Every acolyte should read the *Manual* for a comprehensive understanding of the role of acolytes. Please note the differences for St. George’s.

**Acolyte Coordinators:**  
John and Mary Martha Churchman

## **An Introduction to Serving**

### *Chapter 2 The Server’s Prayers*

#### *An Acolyte’s Prayer*

O God our Father, you have invited us to serve as acolytes at your altar. Give us reverence and respect for all that is holy. Make us faithful and helpful to all whom we serve that we may be like your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to serve in your Name. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### *Before the Service*

Lord, I thank you for allowing me to serve at your altar and be surrounded by holy things. Guide me always to do what is right that I may bring glory to your name. Amen

#### *After the Service*

Lord, I thank you for this opportunity to serve. Help me to carry what I have experienced into the world that I may bring glory to your Name. Amen.

### *Chapter 3 General Instructions*

#### 2. Posture:

Those who serve at the altar must always keep in mind that the attention of the congregation is not to be on those ministering but on the liturgy. Therefore, always move discreetly and quietly – and above all with reverence.

When *standing*, stand straight up, and if you are carrying a torch or processional cross make sure that it is straight.

When *kneeling*, put all your weight on your knees and kneel upright. Do not squat or slouch. It looks terrible.

When *bowing*, use a simple bow. The simple bow is made with the head, inclining the shoulders slightly. *One never bows when carrying a torch or the processional cross.*

When *sitting*, sit up right in the chair, knees together, and feet together.

#### 3. What do I do with my hands?

Unless you are carrying something, your hands should always be folded and held above the waist. They should never hang down at your sides or hand folded below your waist.

When sitting, either fold your hands in your lap or place them straight on your knees with palms down.

#### 4. Responses

One of your responsibilities is to lead the people in prayers and responses. Therefore, make sure you know them, and say (sing) them audibly and reverently; do not rush or lag behind! Keep the pace set by the celebrant or the congregation.

#### 6. Walking

Always walk slowly and with dignity when serving at the altar. Your movement should never appear rushed or hurried. But at the same time avoid stiffness. Military steps, square corners, and quick turns are all out of place.

#### 7. What do I do with my eyes?

When one is serving, eyes should always be focused on the action at the altar, on the reader, or on the preacher. It is very distracting to have a server staring into the congregation or at the ceiling. If you do not know where to look, keep your eyes lowered and look at the floor.

### *Chapter 4* **The Vesting of Servers**

Those who serve at the altar regularly vest in cassock and cotta. The cassock, worn over street clothes, should be of such length as to come to the top of the shoes. Wear the white cotta over the cassock

Neatness is always in order: combed hair, clean shoes, clean hands and fingernails. Remember, your appearance should not distract the congregation.

Always be vested fifteen minutes before the service is to begin. This will leave you time for last minute preparations and instructions.

### *Chapter 5* **The Lighting of Candles**

During the Season of Advent, the church hangs an Advent Wreath from the rood screen. At the beginning of the service, light the candles as the weeks progress: one on the first Sunday, two on the second Sunday, and so on until all four candles burn on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. It is traditional to light those candles first.

During the Easter Season, the church lights the Paschal Candle. Fifteen minutes before the beginning of the service, light the Paschal Candle.

The SERVER lights the candles during the service at the Offertory.

The traditional way of lighting the candles is as follows:

Always be vested before lighting the candles.

Make sure the taper in the candle lighter is long enough.

Bend the taper slightly in case the wick of the candle is down.

Light the taper from one of the processional torches. During the Fifty Days of Easter, the taper is lighted from the Paschal Candle. If this candle is not already burning, it is always lighted first.

If there are two candles on the altar, light the one on your right as you face the altar first. Then light the one on your left. Once you have lighted the candles on the altar, proceed to the pavement candles.

If there are six or more candles on the pavement, start with the one on your right nearest the center and continue with the others, going to your right. Go back to the center, start with the one on your left nearest the center, and then light others, going to your left.

After you have finished lighting all the candles, pull the lever on the pole to extinguish the taper and then immediately push it up again so that the taper is visible. This is done to prevent the wax on the taper melting inside and clogging the tube.

With two people assigned to light the candles, the procedure is basically the same. However, each lights the candles nearest the center first (each taking a separate side) and work outward. Do this in a quiet, coordinated and dignified way.

#### *Chapter 6* **The Extinguishing of Candles**

- Once the altar party has cleared the table of books and vessels, SERVER extinguishes the candles on the altar.
- If there are pavement candles, begin with them. Start with the one on your left farthest from the center and work toward the center. Then go to the one on the right farthest from the center and work toward the center. Once you have extinguished the pavement candles, extinguish the altar candles. If there are two candles, extinguish the one on your left as you face the altar first. Then extinguish the other.
- Do not reverence the cross each time you cross the middle of the altar. Reverence the cross when you first enter the sanctuary and the last time you leave.
- With two people assigned to extinguish the candles, the procedure is basically the same. However, they extinguish the candles farthest from the center first (each taking a separate side) and work inward. Do this in a quiet, coordinated and dignified way.

Important notes on extinguishing candles:

Be sure to check the inside of the extinguisher, making sure that there is no residue wax. If there is, clean it out before extinguishing the candles. Old wax can easily melt and create a messy blotch of wax and soot on altar linens and vestments.

When extinguishing candles, the purpose is not to drown them in their own wax, crush the wick, but rather to cut off the supply of oxygen. Therefore, do not plunge the extinguisher down over the top of the candle, but rather hold it gently over the flame until the candle is out.

After extinguishing each candle, turn up the snuffer. This will keep melted wax from spilling on the altar linen.

If for some reason you must blow a candle out rather than extinguishing it, be careful. Place your hand behind the flame before you blow.

## *Chapter 9* **Basic Instructions and Duties of the Server at the Eucharist**

### *The Word of God*

#### **The Entrance**

After a prayer of preparation in the foyer, ASSISTANT SERVER carries the cross to lead the SERVER, altar party and CELEBRANT into the sanctuary.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER go to assigned places to stand.

#### **The Lessons**

SERVERS sit at assigned place while persons read lessons and/or epistle.

SERVERS make the responses at the conclusion of the readings.

SERVERS pray the psalm with CELEBRANT.

SERVERS stand facing the reader for the proclamation of the Gospel and make the responses.

#### **The Sermon**

Following the sermon, the SERVERS stand and recite the Creed with CELEBRANT.

#### **The Prayers of the People**

SERVERS remain standing and makes responses

#### **Confession of Sin**

After the invitation, SERVERS either stand or kneel depending on the church season (kneel during Lent).

SERVERS say the Confession with CELEBRANT.

CELEBRANT alone stands for the Absolution. If kneeling, SERVERS remain kneeling.

#### **The Peace**

SERVER stands and exchanges the Peace with CELEBRANT, according to the custom of the parish. SERVER exchanges peace with others.

### **Announcements**

ASSISTANT SERVER lights Eucharistic candles on altar. The SERVER lights the electric lights in sanctuary (red dots indicate the appropriate switches and rheostats)

## **The Holy Communion**

### **The Offertory**

After the Offertory Sentence, the ASSISTANT SERVER goes to the Ambry table. ASSISTANT SERVER distributes offering plates to the ushers from the bottom chancel step (the ushers will carry the elements to the altar and then return to the bottom of the sanctuary steps to receive the offering plates). SERVER goes to the credence. The altar party carries Altar Book, tray with cruets and vested chalice to the altar.

When the altar has been completely prepared for Eucharist (indicated by the assistant moving the tray to the back of the altar) the SERVER returns the tray to the credence table. EM move to bottom of sanctuary steps.

### **Lavabo**

SERVER washes CELEBRANT’S hands. SERVER places towel over left arm, takes lavabo bowl in left hand and open water cruet in right (by the handle). SERVER pours water over CELEBRANT’S fingers, and then turns slightly to present towel. When CELEBRANT is finished, CELEBRANT returns towel to SERVER’S arm and SERVER goes to credence to replace vessels.

At the presentation of the offering, the ushers bring the offering directly to the altar. ASSISTANT SERVER has no responsibilities.

SERVER moves to place at credence.

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

SERVER stands at credence. ASSISTANT SERVER stands at seat.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER make responses to salutation and preface.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER bow with the CELEBRANT at the Sanctus.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER remain standing after Sanctus or kneel according to the season of the Church Year.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER say memorial acclamation.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER respond with AMEN at end of Doxology.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER recite the Lord’s Prayer with CELEBRANT.

### **The Breaking of the Bread**

After the Breaking of the Bread, SERVER brings a Chalice, Paten, and the Purificator Bowl from the Credence Table to the Altar. Walk to the top of the stairs to exchange these items.

After the Invitation to the People (“The Gifts of God for the People of God”), SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER close all three altar rail openings and place the kneeler cushions. SERVER pushes the Celebrant’s kneeler back to clear a path to the stairs; ASSISTANT SERVER, the acolytes’ kneeler back to clear a path to the stairs.

During the distribution of Communion, if the CELEBRANT needs anything from the Ambry, the CELEBRANT will hand SERVER the key and ask SERVER to bring the needed element.

When *everyone* has left the altar railing after receiving Communion, SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER open the altar railings and remove kneeler cushions (open the one by the credence first). SERVER returns the Celebrant’s kneeler into position, ASSISTANT SERVER, the acolytes’. SERVER helps to clear the altar: return the offering plates to the shelf under the Ambry. Altar party returns everything (except the key and spoon) to the Credence Table.

ASSISTANT SERVER extinguishes the altar candles. SERVER turns off the altar lights (the switches and rheostats marked with the red dots)

### **Thanksgiving, Blessing**

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER remain kneeling for the prayer of Thanksgiving. SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER recite prayer with CELEBRANT.

SERVER and ASSISTANT SERVER kneel for Blessing.

ASSISTANT SERVER leads the procession from the Sanctuary.

### **Dismissal**

CELEBRANT dismisses people

### **After the service:**

ASSISTANT SERVER returns the Processional Cross to its holder.  
SERVER straighten prayer desks and removes extra service leaflets.

## ***Part Three***

### ***Chapter 10 When There Is More Than One Server***

SERVERS sit at their places, one on each side of the Sanctuary. Each SERVER performs those duties that originate on her/his side of the Sanctuary.

### **Chapter 11 The Acolyte -- Torchbearers**

#### Some General Principles:

- Grasp the pole firmly with both hands in such a way that the torch is balanced and you will not tip it and drop wax on the floor or on yourself. When standing still and holding a torch, you may rest it on the floor to keep it balanced.
- Carry the torch so that the junction of the wood and the brass is above the top of your head. If the torchbearers are different heights, the shorter lines up with the taller.
- Carry the torches at the same height and never above the processional cross.
- **AT THE PROCESSION:** Walk with the CRUCIFER lining up on her/his shoulder. At the top of the Chancel Step, stop at the black line of tiles, allow the CRUCIFER to pass to your left and then follow. Walk directly to the torch stands and place your torch in its stand. Torchbearers coordinate their movements with each other.
- **AT THE GOSPEL:** During the Gradual Hymn, TORCHBEARERS take your torch and prepare for the Gospel Procession. The CRUCIFER takes the cross and proceeds directly to the center of the Sanctuary step. The TORCHBEARERS follow the CRUCIFER single file to the center of the sanctuary step and flank the CRUCIFER, one torch on each side. Rest the cross and each torch on the Sanctuary step while you wait. The Gospeller will tap the CRUCIFER on the back to indicate it is time to process. When the CRUCIFER raises the cross to process, raise each torch. When the CRUCIFER turns to follow the Gospeller, each torch turns toward the CRUCIFER to take position on each shoulder. The Gospeller carries the book and precedes the crucifer and torches. When the Gospeller stops, the CRUCIFER stops, but the TORCHBEARERS continue until they flank the Gospel book, one on each side. They then turn toward the book and wait. The Gospeller then announces the reading of the Gospel and raises the book. As the Gospeller lowers the book, the TORCHBEARERS lower their torches. When the Gospeller completes the reading and raises the book, the TORCHBEARERS raise their torches. When the Gospeller turns, the CRUCIFER turns 180 degrees and the TORCHBEARERS turn inward toward the CRUCIFER and process toward the CRUCIFER. When the TORCHBEARERS flank the CRUCIFER, s/he begins processing back to the Sanctuary. The procession continues as a normal procession into the Choir.

### **Chapter 12 The Crucifer**

- Always carry the cross with dignity. Avoid any position that would look stiff or sloppy. Hold the cross firmly in both hands, thumbs on top. Fully extend your right hand and grasp the cross firmly. Grasp the cross with your left hand, positioning your hand in the middle of your chest. Carry the cross so that the junction of the wood and the silver is *above* the

top of your head. Be sure that the embossed side of the cross faces forward. The CRUCIFER leads all processions. Keep the cross steady and grasped firmly. Do not let it lean forward. The CRUCIFER sets the pace of the procession. Walk deliberately with dignity. Never walk so fast as to leave a gap between you and the choir. Keep the TORCHBEARS by your shoulders.

- When carrying the cross, never bow.
- Be careful of steps and low beams, hanging wreaths or the like. Lower the cross whenever there is chance that you may hit these objects. Lead the procession walking slowly and with dignity. If there are TORCHBEARERS, be aware of them. They should be on either side of you. The three of you walk as one unit.

## ***Part Four***

### ***Chapter 16 Other Liturgies***

#### **Holy Baptism**

The Baptismal rite itself takes place after the sermon. The SERVER does the following:

Join the CELEBRANT at the font following the Prayers for the Candidates (BCP p. 305)

Receive the water pitcher from the CELEBRANT after s/he has poured water into the font.

Hold the book for the CELEBRANT during the baptism and chrismation.

#### **Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage**

When the Marriage Rite includes the celebration of Eucharist, the SERVER assists as in a regular Eucharist.

#### **Burial of the Dead**

The SERVER may be required to

Lead the processional into the church carrying the processional cross.

At the Commendation (BCP 499), stand, holding the processional cross, at the foot of the coffin or urn facing the CELEBRANT.

As the procession leaves the church, lead carrying the processional cross. When the coffin leaves the church immediately, lead the procession to the funeral car.

When the Burial Rite includes the celebration of Eucharist, the SERVER assists as in a regular Eucharist.

### *Chapter 17* **Processions**

A procession is a formal walk into the church or to a particular place in the church. The order of the procession is as follows:

Acolyte      Crucifer      Acolyte  
                  Choir  
                  Server  
                  Eucharistic Ministers  
                  Assisting Clergy  
                  Celebrant  
                  Bishop

**Crucifer:** keep the cross steady and grasped firmly. Do not let it lean forward. You set the pace of the procession. Walk deliberately with dignity. Never walk so fast as to leave a gap between you and the choir. Keep the TORCHBEARERS by your shoulders.

**Acolytes:** Walk flanking the CRUCIFER, or if the aisles are narrow, as a pair behind the crucifer. Make sure that your torches are the same height and do not let them tilt. Be careful on stairs.

**Servers:** Walk in procession carrying a hymnal or prayer book. If your hands are empty, fold them above your waist.

**Banner Bearers:** Carry the banner in procession so that the banner is perpendicular to the direction of the procession. Grasp the pole firmly in your right hand, arm fully extended by your side. With your left hand, grasp the pole at such a height so you can control the banner. Begin with the banner pole vertical. With your left hand, lower the pole forward until you can comfortably walk and control the banner at the same time – the more vertical the pole, the easier to control the banner. Hold the banner high enough to see under the bottom of the banner. When you come to a corner or a stop, return the banner pole to vertical position and grasp the fabric of the banner to keep it from swaying. Turn all corners with the banner pole vertical, fabric in hand. When you place the banner in its stand, straighten the fabric of the banner.

## Local Customs and Practices

Before the service, while robed in the red cassock only

- Confirm that there are matches and a taper in the candle lighter/extinguisher
- Confirm the Alms Basins are on ambry table
- Put a service bulletin at every acolyte's seat
- Bring the Processional Cross into the foyer; place it in the boiler room doorway

Sanctuary lights are color-coded. Turn on GREEN lights before the beginning of the service. They remain on throughout the service. Turn on RED lights at Offertory; turn off when altar is cleared following communion. The YELLOW lights are for the 9:00AM service exclusively.

### Processions

7:45 AM procession begins at the foyer door at the front of the church. SERVER leads the altar party to the center of the chancel steps, up the steps to the altar rail and to the SERVER'S assigned place. The retiring procession retraces the same path. If no one has opened the door for you, lower the cross and wait. The person behind you will open the door.

9:00 AM procession begins at the rear pf the church. SERVER takes the Processional Cross to the top of the center aisle to begin the procession. CELEBRANT and PREACHER follow. SERVER carries the cross to lead the altar party procession down the main aisle and stops at Chancel step, turns left, processes in front of the pulpit, up the stairs to the Processional Cross stand. Place Processional Cross in its stand. CELEBRANT and PREACHER stop at chancel steps then move to their seats. The SERVER sits in the congregation. The retiring procession retraces the same path.

11:15 AM procession begins as the rear of the church. A TORCHBEARER lights the torches when you arrive at the rear of the church. The CRUCIFER and two TORCHEBEARERS move to the end of the main aisle to begin the procession at the beginning of the first hymn. When the TORCHBEARERS arrive at the top of the chancel steps, stop to allow the CRUCIFER to turn left. Follow the CRUCIFER in single file. Place torches in their stands. The retiring procession retraces the same path. Turn right at the end of the main aisle. Extinguish the torches. After the dismissal, place the torches in their stands.

The Ambry lock can be tricky, practice opening and closing the door to the Ambry.

### **The Server at 9:00 AM Service**

There is only one server at the 9:00 AM service. The server dresses differently and her/his duties are different from other services. Instead of working with other acolytes, the server now works closely with the Media Person and the Eucharistic Ministers. The level of responsibility for the server requires that person to be a senior acolyte capable of handling the many new duties. Training for server at 9:00 AM will always happen in conjunction with training the Media Person.

What follows is a description of the Server’s duties. Please note the changes and when you are working in conjunction with others.

### **Participants, Dress and Seating**

ANNOUNCER dresses in street clothes and sits in the congregation  
CELEBRANT and PREACHER dress in white albs and sit in Chancel  
CHOIR dress in street clothes and sit by the piano  
EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS dress in street clothes and sit in the congregation  
GREETERS dress in street clothes and sit in congregation.  
INTERCESSOR dresses in street clothes and sits with the choir  
LECTOR dresses in street clothes and sits in the congregation  
MEDIA PERSON dresses in street clothes and sits at computer station in choir  
MUSICIAN dresses in black cassock and cotta and sits by the piano  
SERVER dresses in red cassock and sits in the congregation.  
USHERS dress in street clothes and sit in congregation.

### **Before the Service Begins**

SERVER AND MEDIA PERSON arrive at church no later than 8:30AM. At the end of the 8:00 AM service (8:30-8:40), the SERVER and MEDIA PERSON set up the projection screen. The screen is moved from behind the clergy seats and drawn along its supporting cable. Using the snap hook, attach the tie down for the left side of the screen to the tie down from the cleat by the processional cross stand. Tightly secure the screen. Straighten the bottom of the screen so it is fully deployed.

MEDIA PERSON turns on the computer and calls up the media for the day. Put the projector in place; turn it on, adjusting it as needed. Project the first slide. Take your place at the computer station.

SERVER sets the lighting: Turn on switches marked with YELLOW DOTS. Be sure that the lectern and pulpits spots are on.

- N. Chand. Uplifts
- S. Chand. Uplifts
- Lectern
- Pulpit
- Wall Uplifts (lower switches)

The SERVER brings the Processional Cross to the rear of the church.

MUSICIAN – no prelude

### **The Entrance**

After a prayer of preparation, SERVER takes the Processional Cross to the top of the center aisle to begin the procession. CELEBRANT and PREACHER follow. SERVER carries the cross to lead the altar party procession down the main aisle and stops at Chancel step, turns left, processes in front of the pulpit, up the stairs to the Processional Cross stand. Place Processional Cross in its stand. CELEBRANT and PREACHER stop at chancel steps then move to their seats.

SERVER sits in the congregation.

### **During The Peace and Announcements**

The MEDIA PERSON shuts down the projector.

SERVER assists the MEDIA PERSON to move projection screen. Loosen the tie down from its cleat (by the processional cross stand) and release the tie down. Unhook the tie down from the screen and tie it off at the cleat.

Draw the screen to the north side of the sanctuary, move it behind the clergy seats and tie it off.

MEDIA PERSON turns on sanctuary lights (Green dots and red dots indicate the appropriate switches and rheostats). MEDIA PERSON shuts down computer. SERVER lights the Eucharistic candles when the Table is cleared. SERVER sits by AMBRY.

## **The Holy Communion**

### **The Offertory**

After the Offertory Sentence, the SERVER goes to the Ambry table. SERVER distributes offering plates to the ushers from the bottom chancel step (the ushers will carry the elements to the Table and then return to the bottom of the sanctuary steps to receive the offering plates). SERVER then goes to the credence. When the ushers bring the bread and wine to the Table, the EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS come to the Credence Table. The altar party carries Altar Book, tray with cruets and vested chalice to the altar.

When the altar has been completely prepared for Eucharist (indicated by the assistant moving the tray to the back of the altar) the SERVER returns the tray to the credence table. EMs move to bottom of sanctuary steps.

### **Lavabo (optional)**

SERVER washes CELEBRANT’S hands. SERVER places towel over left arm, takes lavabo bowl in left hand and open water cruet in right (by the handle). SERVER pours water over CELEBRANT’S fingers, and then turns slightly to present towel. When CELEBRANT is finished, CELEBRANT returns towel to SERVER’S arm and SERVER goes to credence to replace vessels.

At the presentation of the offering, the USHERS bring the offering directly to the altar.

SERVER stands at the Credence Table.

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

#### **The Breaking of the Bread**

After the Breaking of the Bread, SERVER brings a Chalice, Paten, and the Purificator Bowl from the Credence Table to the Altar. Walk to the top of the stairs to give these items to the CELEBRANT.

After the Invitation to the People, SERVER and EMs close all three altar rail openings and place the kneeler cushions. SERVER pushes the Celebrant and Acolytes’ kneelers back to clear a path to the stairs.

During the distribution of Communion, if the CELEBRANT needs anything from the Ambry, the CELEBRANT will hand SERVER the key and ask SERVER to bring the needed element.

When *everyone* has left the altar railing after receiving Communion, SERVER and EM open the altar railings and remove kneeler cushions (open the one by the Credence Table first). SERVER returns the Celebrant’s and Acolytes’ kneelers into position. The Altar Party clears the Table: EMs take your chalices to the Credence Table and cover it with the purificator. Return to the altar to remove the remaining pieces from celebration: bowl, altar book, linens, paten, and bread dish. Leave the keys and the offering plates and basket. The SERVER removes food basket and offering plates to the Ambry table.

SERVER extinguishes the altar candles. MEDIA PERSON turns off the altar lights (the switches and rheostats marked with the red dots)

#### **Thanksgiving, Blessing**

SERVER leads the procession from the Sanctuary.

#### **After the service:**

SERVER returns the Processional Cross to its holder; straightens prayer desks.