

# Acolyte Manual



South Santiago Lutheran Church  
*“Teaching the Word,  
Reaching the World”*

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**Introduction**—Thank you for agreeing to serve God by serving your congregation. Maybe that’s not what you thought you were doing. But I want to invite you to think of your acolyte responsibilities as exactly that.

In fact, I want to invite you to think of your training and your acolyte responsibilities as an opportunity to grow in faith. That’s part of what we’re all about here at South Santiago Lutheran Church. Our mission statement helps us focus on what we believe to be most important: *“Teaching the Word, Reaching the World.”* So as you go through this little booklet and as we help you to grow confident in knowing what you are doing, somewhere along the way, hopefully we connect you with some experience of God. Hopefully what that happens, this becomes more than just a job for you. I would say we would be shortchanging you if the only thing we did was train you for a job. We also want you to grow in your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

One of the ways that we can become confident in a new skill is by practicing that skill over and over and over again. You’ll have an opportunity to practice being an acolyte over and over and over again. But there are also things we can do over and over to grow in our faith and in our active practice of our faith. **So every once in a while, you might hear us talk about 4 Key Faith Practices.** These are those things we can do over and over, and they are activities that we can find described in the Bible as places and moments where God promises to meet us. These are activities help us follow Jesus. Those **4 Key Faith Practices are...**

1. **Caring Conversation:** talking about how God and our lives connect.
2. **Devotion & Prayer:** connecting with God through the Bible and prayer.
3. **Service:** making what we believe about God visible through acts of service
4. **Ritual:** making our practice part of us through repetition and habit

As we help you learn how to be an acolyte, we’ll also help you begin learning how to follow Jesus and meet God through the **4 Key Faith Practices.**

Finally, here are some things to remember about what you’re going to be learning about being an acolyte:

- This is simply the way we do it here at SSLC. You might visit another church elsewhere and see them do it completely differently. This way simply serves our congregation well.
- The way of being an acolyte is not from the Bible. You won’t find anything in the Bible about it. It’s not a law from God that can’t be changed or for which we might be punished for breaking. So we are free to do it another way if that way served our worship service well.
- We want you to take this job seriously. How you carry yourself will do much to help people be directed and focused on what’s going on in the worship service. This is no small task, and it’s much more important than just lighting candles!

God bless you in your new ministry—Pastor Mike, January 2014

## So you are going to be an acolyte.

The word *acolyte* simply means “companion” or “one who helps.” It is possible that a role somewhat similar to the one you are filling has been around since 250 AD. Think about that! For over 1,500 years, there have been “companions” or “helpers” in our Christian worship services!

When acolytes first helped with the worship service, they carried candles in processions. They lit candles on the altar. They assisted with Holy Communion. They were important people in carrying out the nitty-gritty, common practices of the worship service. They were helpers for the pastor and for the people who set-up and took care of all the objects needed for worship. (Remember what the word *acolyte* means?)



The number of acolytes a church might use is really pretty flexible. Some churches might have only one. We have two, of course. Large congregations that use processions at the beginning and end of their worship services might have any number of acolytes. Whatever the number is, the acolyte’s responsibility is to help.

**Today, your job is bigger than only helping the pastor or the altar guild.** (The altar guild are the people in our church who set up for worship—communion, baptisms, etc.) **You basically help the WHOLE congregation.** At the very beginning, you help set the tone for worship. Likewise, at the end of the service, you help set the tone for how people are thinking about what happens when they leave the worship service. If you’re being silly or looking bored with what you’re doing, how do you think that might affect people coming to worship or getting ready to leave and live their lives of faith in their regular world? **Always keep that in mind, especially if you are ever thinking that your job is too small to matter!**

## Some Bible Verses to Know About Acolyting.

John 1:1-5:

John 8:12:

- What YOU are doing is helping people connect with that Light!

Matthew 5:14-16:

- When you were baptized, you were given a candle, most likely with the words from Matthew 5:16.
- What YOU are doing is letting your baptismal light shine!
- What YOU are doing is inviting others to let their baptismal light shine!

Leviticus 6:12-13:

- What YOU are doing is participating in keeping the flame burning—both the one on the altar, as well as the flame of God’s un-ending love!

1 Corinthians 12:4-20

- What YOU are doing is leading us in worship because YOU bring in one of the most important symbols of Christ’s presence.
- We BOTH have robes, you and I, which are symbols of God’s Holy Spirit given to us in baptism.
- YOU have a gift for leadership. And I have a gift for leadership. They are different gifts. But it is the same Holy Spirit that has called you to use your gifts and me to use my gifts.

# Words an acolyte should know.

**Acolyte** means “companion” or “one who helps.” An acolyte helps the congregation and pastor perform various tasks in the worship service.

**Advent** means “coming.” It is the first season of the *church year*, which is a way of measuring time that follows the story of Jesus and the early church. Advent is the time before Christmas when we prepare for the coming of Jesus. There are four Sundays in Advent.

**Advent wreath** has five candles which are lit during the Advent season. One candle is lit on the first Sunday in Advent, two on the second, and so on. Each candle also has a special name or theme assigned to it. For example, the most traditional names are the “Prophecy Candle,” “the Bethlehem Candle,” “the Shepherd’s Candle,” “the Angel’s Candle,” and the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas Eve. However, these names can be changed to fit whatever themes the congregation is adopting for getting ready for Christ’s coming.

**alb and cincture** The alb is the white robe that the servants wear during worship. The cincture is the rope that goes around the waist. They are ancient garments that a servant might have worn, and they remind us and the congregation that what is being done by the one wearing the robe is service to them, which is also service to God.

**altar** The altar is the table at the front of the church. It is a reminder of the family table at meal time. God’s family gathers around this symbolic table. It also reminds us of the sacrifice of God’s Son. Sometimes, when facing the altar, the left side is called “*the Gospel*” side. The right side is called “*the Epistle*” side. (The word “epistle” means “letter”—for example, the apostle Paul wrote lots of letters, which we have in the New Testament.) In the early church, the reader read the Gospel from the left side of the altar (where our pulpit is) and the Epistle (one of Paul’s letters) from the right side.



**candlelighter** The candlelighter is the long-handled tool used by an acolyte to light candles. It consists of a taper or wick from which the candles are lighted and a bell for snuffing out the flame.

## candles

The candles on the altar and in the chancel remind us of a time before furnaces and electric lights when the church was heated and lit by flames. Of course, that's not the case anymore. We can think of the candles as way of saying, "What is happening up here at this table is special," of like the way you might light candles at a special family meal.

The candles in the chancel often have a meaning, though we might not always focus on that meaning. In some congregations, **one candle** reminds us of Jesus, "the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome." (We can think of the Lamp of the Abiding Presence in that way. That's the red candle that stays lit.) Here are some other possibilities:

- 2 candles** Jesus is "true God and true man."
- 3 candles** the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 4 candles** the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John
- 5 candles** the wounds of Jesus—2 hands, 2 feet, and the spear wound in his side
- 6 candles** six days of creation
- 7 candles** gifts of the Spirit: "blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might" (Revelation 5:12).

Whatever ways candles remind us something about God's love for us are all possibilities. But overall, because God created light with a word and Jesus said, "I am the Light," candles are a vital part of our Christian worship services.

## chancel

The chancel is the area in the church building from where the congregation is lead in worship. Often, you will see three major pieces that are important in



what God is doing to us to show us his love during worship: **the pulpit, the altar, and the font.**

**Christ candle or Paschal candle**

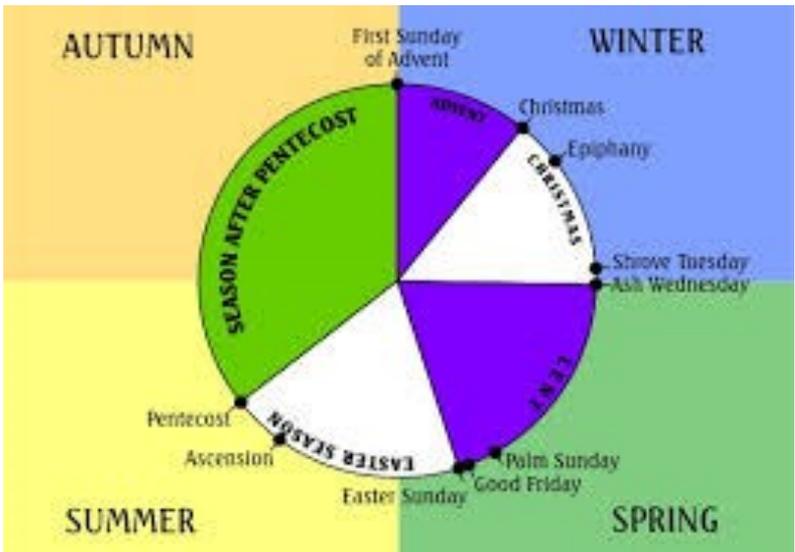
The Christ Candle is often the 5th Candle in the Advent wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve. It stands in the middle of the other four Advent candles, reminding us that Christ is the center of Christmas and of our lives. In some congregations, the Christ Candle stays lit then through Epiphany, Lent, and Holy Week and is extinguished on Good Friday, the day that Jesus died on the cross.

**Church year**

The Church Year is a 12-month cycle or calendar follows the anticipation of Jesus' coming, his birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. In addition to helping us celebrate parts of the story, the Church Year or Church Calendar helps us focus on how our life and faith in Jesus grows and becomes fruitful. Each season is marked in the church with particular colors that remind us something about what's going on in that season.

**Advent** is the first season (4 weeks) which prepares us for **Christmas** (usually 2 Sundays), when Jesus was born. Advent's colors are often purple or sometimes blue. Christmas' worship colors are white.

**Epiphany** is the next season, beginning when the wisemen or magi visit the Christ child, including Jesus'



baptism and the beginning of his ministry. The word “epiphany” means “to have a revelation or idea,” kind of like the pretend light bulb that appears over someone’s head when they have an idea. The stories that go along with Epiphany are all stories in which someone has an “epiphany,” an idea revealed to them about who Jesus is. Epiphany’s color is green, and any time we see the color green in worship, we are being invited to GROW in some way. Epiphany lasts 6 to 8 weeks.



**Lent** follows Epiphany, beginning with Ash Wednesday. It invites us to think about not only Jesus’ suffering but also about baptism and rebirth as we get ready for Easter. It’s color is purple, and Lent lasts 6 weeks.

**Holy Week** begins with Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter), and it follows the story of Jesus’ final days in Jerusalem.

Palm Sunday marks the day that Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem like a conquering hero.

Maundy Thursday marks the day of the Last Supper, Jesus’ arrest, and his trial.

Good Friday is the day of Jesus’ death on the cross.

Holy Saturday is the complete day Jesus lay dead in the tomb, and some congregations have a special service on Saturday evening for this day called Easter Vigil.

**Easter** isn’t just one day but actually a SEVEN-WEEK festival that begins on the Sunday Jesus rises from the dead. Its color is white or gold.

**Pentecost** is the longest of the seasons, lasting more than 30 Sundays through the Spring, Summer, and most of the Autumn. It begins with the **Sunday of Pentecost**, which is red, and in the Biblical story, it marks the day that the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and began to send them out in the mission of telling the story of God’s love in Jesus. The rest of the season of

Pentecost, like Epiphany, is a season of growth in the way that we follow the Holy Spirit in living Jesus' love. Its color is green.

**font**

The font is the bowl, basin, or other vessel from which water is taken during the baptism.

**narthex**

We might call the narthex “the lobby,” and really that is what it has become. Historically, the narthex was the part of the church where those who had not yet been baptized sat so that they could listen and see what was going on in worship. Because they were not yet baptized, they were not allowed into the nave or chancel.



**nave**

The nave is the section of the church building where the congregation sits. The word is related to “water” words like “navy” or “naval” because in the most traditional churches, the nave looked like the body of a boat turned upside down. These boat and water images connected those who were worshipping there with stories like Noah’s Ark or Jesus Calming the Sea. In some ways, those stories are our stories too.



**offering**

The offering is taken at a time in the service when the worshipers offer their gifts to God in the form of money or time and talents, if they offer a musical gift. Ushers usually pass the offering plates (flat bowls) or baskets through the pews (rows of benches where the people sit in the nave). The worshipers put their gifts into those plates or baskets. In some congregations, the acolytes

might help in handling those plates or baskets.

## **paraments**

The paraments are the colored banner-like cloths that hang from the altar, the pulpit, and/or other similar worship furnishings throughout the chancel. They change as the seasons of the Church Year change, and the paraments often have symbols that remind us of some of the themes of the particular season.



## **procession**

In some congregations, especially on particularly special Sundays (Easter, for example) the procession is a ceremonial entry of those who are helping to lead the congregation's worship. It is often led by a number of acolytes carrying a cross, candles, banners, and/or the Bible.

## **pulpit**

The pulpit is the podium from which the Bible is read or the sermon delivered. In some congregations there may be two podiums, one on the opposite side of the chancel from the pulpit, and it is called the *lecturn*. In that case, the sermon is delivered from the pulpit while the Bible is read from the lecturn.

## **reverence the cross**

To "reverence the cross" is the short pause and prayer momentarily in respect for the cross and the Sacrifice our Lord made on the cross.

## **Sacraments**

The sacraments are the church rituals that God has given us in which earthly elements (water, bread, and wine) are used together with God's Word to bring us God's blessing and love. The sacraments connect us directly to Jesus. In the Lutheran church, the two sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion.

## **sacristy**

The sacristy is the special room where the worship leaders prepare for the service. It is where the people whose job it is to prepare and clean up after the Sacraments keep their supplies and do most of their work.

# So what do I need to do?

## SIGNING UP FOR ACOLYTE SERVICE:

- ❑ In general, it is most helpful if you sign-up on the Family Service Group sheets in the narthex. It's always better as we anticipate Sunday worship to know that we have volunteer servants who are ready to make worship happen rather than scrambling on Sunday morning to find servants. That doesn't lend itself well to being really mindful for worship.
- ❑ If you see that no one has signed up when you arrive on Sunday morning, please be ready to volunteer.
- ❑ As a last resort, we still may be scrambling to find worship servants. If you are asked, please be willing to help.

## BEFORE THE SERVICE:

- ❑ Arrive at least **15 minutes** before the worship service begins.
- ❑ Make sure you are fairly put together in your appearance. Please don't look like you just rolled right out of bed.
- ❑ Please do not chew gum while you are acolyting.
- ❑ Check the Family Service Board to see who the head usher is for that morning. He/She will help you get ready if you need help.
- ❑ Check with the head usher to see if there are any changes or additions to the worship service that will affect you. For example, if there is a baptism, you will need to light the Christ candle at the font if it isn't lit already.
- ❑ See if you can help the head usher get ready in any way.
- ❑ Quietly and reverently get yourself robed and ready. Your robe should neither be too long that you're stepping on the hem at the bottom, nor should it be so short that it's up around your knees.
- ❑ It might be helpful to use this little prayer or another like it:

**Father in heaven—you called Samuel when he was just a boy serving in the temple. Thank you for calling me too. Help me to remember I serve YOU when I serve my church. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

- ❑ Check in with the pastor to see if there is anything with which you can help.
- ❑ If you have an acolyting partner, check with him/her about when and where he/she is expecting to reverence the cross so that you are both doing it together at the same time.

## IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE SERVICE:

- ❑ Light the candlelighter. The head usher or other adult can help you do this if you need help.
- ❑ Move up the center aisle toward the chancel.
- ❑ Take short steps, keep your head up, and your eyes straight ahead. Walk in a dignified, unhurried manner. Do not be a distraction to those gathering for worship. Take your job seriously. In some ways, you are setting the tone for the rest of the service.

## LIGHTING THE CANDLES

- ❑ One of your chief responsibilities is taking care of the candles before and after the service.
- ❑ When you get to the first step of the chancel, pause and reverence the cross. You can do that with a slight bow of the head.
- ❑ Walk up the steps to the altar with a smooth, natural movement.
- ❑ Stop to reverence the cross again.
- ❑ If you are working alone, you will light the candle to your right first. Stop to reverence the cross. Then light the candle to your left, the Gospel side.
- ❑ An easy way to remember what to do: each time you do something new—for example, arriving at the altar; lighting a candle; lighting another candle; finishing with lighting the candles—is the place where you would reverence the cross.
- ❑ When lighting candles, expose sufficient length of the taper or wick in your candlelighter so that the flame is large enough to catch the wick of the candles. You don't want the flame so large on your candlelighter that it's roaring inferno. But you also don't want the flame so small that it's at risk of going out.
- ❑ If it does go out, DON'T PANIC. Simply re-light your candlelighter from Presence Candle (the red one that's always on).
- ❑ Before you return to the narthex of the church, stop to reverence the cross one more time.

## DURING THE SERVICE

- ❑ You can sit with your family during the service.
- ❑ It can also be a big help to the pastor to be available to hand out the

activity sheets, crayons, and treats for the kids who come up for the children's sermon.

## EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLES

- Review the point above about when to reverence the cross. You'll be doing it all over again when you extinguish the candles.
- Candles on the Advent wreath or at the baptismal font are extinguished last.
- NEW: Before you extinguish the last candle—whether that is on the altar, the wreath, or at the baptismal font—relight your candlelighter so that the Light of Christ goes out into the world with you and the rest of those who have worshiped here.**
- If you have an acolyting partner both of you can take the light out with you.
- Extinguish your candlelighter when you get back into the narthex.
- Neatly hang up your alb, cincture, and candlelighter in the usher's room.
- THANK YOU FOR A JOB WELL DONE.



# South Santiago Lutheran Church

## “Teaching the Word, Reaching the World”

### Acolyte Training

**Service**—Our church is a congregation with the heart of a servant. Backpack Buddies, Food Shelf, our Noisy Offerings, and the Thanksgiving Day Community Meal are just a few ways we regularly serve God by serving the world. Our congregation also organizes regular summer trips for people of all ages to experience the ministry of serving in other settings.

But we are also a church that seeks to grow in our service right here at SSLC. Just pulling off a Sunday service might take as many as 15 or more servants. **And being an acolyte is one of the first ways that you can learn to grow in serving God by serving others.**

#### **Breaking the Ice—**

- How many things can you think of from Sunday morning that take some help either for getting ready for worship, worship itself, or cleaning up from worship? (For example, the power point slides.)
- Do you know who does these things?
- What would happen if nobody did these things?

#### **Devotion—1 Samuel 3:1-10** (p. 108, *Children’s Illustrated Bible*)

- What do you think Samuel was doing in the temple?
- What happened to him while he was there in the temple?
- What do you think God is doing with you being here today?

Father in Heaven—**You called Samuel when he was just a boy serving in the temple. Could it be that you are calling me too? Show me how best to serve you by serving my church. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

**A Blessing for End of Class—***Turn to your neighbor; mark him/her with the sign of the cross on his/her forehead; and say:*

**Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to God who is in heaven. Amen.**

