

# **LEARNING TO BE AN ACOLYTE**

## ***Making Disciples Making a Difference***



Acolytes are worship helpers directly connected with The Main Things..  
**The Story** of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

There are plenty of things which other people do to get ready for **The Story** in worship. A lot of these things are important but not very visible. But we'd miss them if they weren't done well. Behind the scenes, for example, someone...



thinks of something to say... which makes sense to people young and old. (Tell Pastor Kristie you appreciate her hard work ☺ !)

## ***Making Disciples Making a Difference***



Acolytes have some of the important responsibilities because **you help with the central, most important things in worship**. You help to tell The Story of God's love through symbols (reminders, like the cross) and through sacraments (Holy Communion and baptism). **Acolytes help the pastors and the people concentrate on the main things** and not on the details. When you are helping the pastors well, the pastors do their jobs better and the people of God worship best. That's the difference you're making!

When you get ready to come to church on the day you are an acolyte, be sure to **dress nicely**. At Family of Christ, we're not fussy about a "dress code." But it is important that you dress in a way that shows that you and your family respect what you are doing as an acolyte, and respect the people who serve and the Lord we worship. So dress well.

When you arrive at church to serve as an acolyte, the very first thing you do is to **check in with one of the pastors**. It gets pretty busy on a Sunday morning, and pastors don't always know that you're here and ready, so **personally** talk to one of them. If there are some special details to tell you about that Sunday, we can tell you about them. (By the way, the first couple of times that you acolyte, you really should **arrive at least 20 minutes before the service**. We'll tell you and your parents why in a moment.)

It's a good idea to **recruit your mom or dad**, if possible — or your friend's parent, perhaps — to be with you, especially for the first couple of times in getting prepped for your service as acolyte. They can help you.



Go into the office area, to the closet in the corridor, and get dressed in **an acolyte's robe**. Sometimes these robes are crumpled on the floor and they get wrinkled. Please do your part and hang up your robe when you're done for the day — and make sure your robe is secure on the hanger.

Find a robe that is **long enough and not too short**. The bottom of the robe should be just above your ankles. Don't wear something so short that it looks like a mini-skirt! Most robes are zip-up. Use a belt — one of the "ropes" that are hanging there. There's no official way to **tie the belt**; just make sure it is snug enough to look neat and won't flop down below your waist. Take a cross necklace and put it on.



Use the **mirror** in the office corridor. Be sure that...

- Your robe is zipped up all the way to your neck
- The pocket-linings are tucked in
- Your overall appearance is neat and orderly



Next, **check your equipment** — the lighter. There are two lighters, but the one to use is the lighter with the “bell” on the end of it; you’ll use that bell to extinguish candles after worship. But if necessary, you can use the simple lighter. Either way, be sure that the wick and the lever that moves the wick up and down are working properly. Check the length of the wick; if it’s 4-6 inches or less, remove it and throw it away. You don’t want the wick to burn out while you’re trying to light the candles! **Replacement wicks** are in a long box on the acolytes’ shelf in the closet. Insert the bottom of the new wick through the small opening in the bottom of the slider, bend the wick back on itself, pull the slider back into the tube, and move the lever back and forth to check that it moves smoothly. If the wick is too long for the lighter, use a scissors and cut off some of it.

Sometimes the wick and the lever are stuck in the tube. Here you learn one of the most important things about serving as an acolyte: Don’t let that

happen! When you are lighting the candles, pull the lever into the tube to extinguish the flame — then **IMMEDIATELY push the wick OUT again** so that the hot wax on the wick does not stick inside the tube!!! If it does stick, sometimes it takes a lot of work to get it unstuck again, and the next acolyte could have major problems. Don't do that to them, just as you would not want them to gum up the lighter for you!



Ah ha! Now you know **the reason to arrive 20 minutes early**, especially when you're just learning to serve as an acolyte. **There's a lot to do!** The first time or two, because this is all new to you, you'll take some time getting ready — finding the right sized robe, learning where the lighters and the wicks are, getting your pocket liners tucked in, going to the bathroom before church starts. That's all part of it, and especially when you're serving for the first time, you don't want to be stressed because you're late. **So get to church early!**

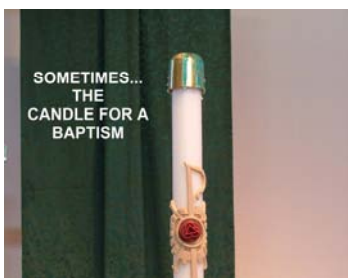


Now you're ready to light the candles. Ask one of the pastors when they want you to enter the sanctuary for lighting candles. Usually it's 5-10 minutes before the service begins. Also **ask which candles you should light**. Sometimes we light the big, tall candle; sometimes we do not. Sometimes there are additional candles, like the Advent wreath or mission trip candles. Be sure to ask the pastors. **Matches** are on the shelf in the acolytes' closet. If you don't want to light a match, ask for help.



Go into the sanctuary through the door next to the kitchen. Walk... slowly but not too slowly, quickly but not too fast. **Keep your thumb on the lever** which pushes the wick up and down, and **keep your eye on the flame**. Don't let the flame get too low, or it will burn out. But also don't keep the wick so long that the flame smokes and flares. Some acolytes cup their hand around the flame to keep it from going out while they walk into church, but if your flame is the right length and if you walk the right speed, you won't need to do that.

Come up to the altar on the main floor, and stand smack in the center in front of the altar. **Make a small bow to the altar**. That shows your respect for the altar and for the cross. Then step up to light the candles, in this order:



First, the tall Easter candle (sometimes called the Christ-candle). Next, the two tall candles on the altar. Light either one first. Then any smaller candles which may be on the altar, OR the correct candles in the Advent wreath



You may have trouble lighting one of the candles. If the candle is very tall, you might have a problem reaching it. Sometimes the candle's wick is broken (or the acolyte before you smushed it into the wax when they were putting out the candles). When you have trouble lighting, **stay calm** and do whatever you may need to:

- Step up as high as necessary, or go next to or behind the altar to get at it another way
- Use the steps hidden in the pulpit to step up and reach the Easter candle
- Hold the candle in one hand and maneuver it
- Ask for help

After lighting the candles, **do not blow out the wick!** Pull the lever for the wick back into the tube and right away, push it out again. Remember why? Then step back to the center on the floor in front of the altar and **make another small bow**, and then move to your seat. Tuck the candle-lighter beneath your seat — the long way, not sticking out in a way that you or someone might trip on it.

Be sure you have what you need for worship — a worship folder or hymnal, if necessary. Be sure you **take part in the service**. Sing. Say the words that everyone is saying. Pray. Look at the pastor and listen. You are participating in worship, even as an acolyte — and people (especially little guys who look up to the big kids) are watching you. How you act and what you do when you are an acolyte shows your respect.



**Serving at Communion** is another important weekly task. On Sunday mornings, usually one of our pastors is the preaching pastor and we'll be at the chairs with you and signal when to move for Communion. But you should pay attention yourself, because sometimes the preaching pastor is also the presiding pastor and then you're on your own from knowing when to move.

Step up behind the altar to **receive your Communion** — usually after the Lord's Prayer. If you aren't sure when to come to the altar, watch the pastor at the altar who will signal you.

Even if it's not your usual preference, we suggest that this is a fine time for you to receive the wine by the chalice; it's good practice for you, and you'll see that it's OK to receive that way. However, if you want to use a little glass for your Communion, take it right away as you step behind the altar. Then after receiving the bread, drink it when the pastor says, "The blood of Christ for you."



After all the helpers have communed, your job is to **re-supply the servers during the Communion**. You'll need to keep an eye on the servers and to react quickly when the trays they are serving begin to run low on glasses. Don't wait until their trays are empty! It's better to hand them a full tray too early than to wait too long and delay the serving line. Bring the partly-empty Communion tray back to the altar and then begin to transfer full glasses from one tray to another in order to keep full trays available.

Sometimes we have several additional “stations” for Communion near the sides of the sanctuary. In that case, acolytes will be busy! Also, on busy Communion days, be alert to **re-supply bread to the pastors** if necessary.

As the Communion is ending, **help the servers re-stack the trays** and then put the lid on the stack of trays before you return to your seat.



After the final “Go in peace, serve the Lord...” is said, using the candle-lighter with the “bell” on the end of it, **extinguish the candles**. Again, **make a bow** in front of the altar. Then extinguish the candles in reverse order from lighting. Return to the office hallway, take off your robe, **HANG IT UP PROPERLY**, be sure the closet area is order, and you’re done!



There are other tasks you may be asked to do, too. An honor and a special task is to **carry the cross** on especially important worship days. Here’s what you do:

**Ask** the pastor if we are using the cross today. If the answer is Yes, right away go into the sanctuary and up to the altar. See where the cross is standing and with both hands pick it up off the floor-stand. Each of the crosses we use has a shaft about 24-30 inches long; that’s what you carry.

With the stained-glass cross, notice that the two screws are on the back of the cross; when you replace this cross on its stand, be sure you have it facing forward.

**Bring the cross back into the office** area and put it in a safe place where it will not be bumped or fall over. Then light the candles as you have learned to, but instead of sitting down in front, come back to the narthex.

When worship is about to begin, **carry the cross reverently** into the narthex and stand with the pastors. The pastors will be right with you at the doors, and will tell you when to begin walking into church with the cross. Carry the cross down the center aisle and hold it steady with two hands, one toward the top of the shaft and one at the bottom. That keeps it steady. Look where you're going, but also **keep an eye on the cross so that you keep it straight and vertical...**

- Not lopsided right or left
- Not twisted front or back
- Not leaning forward or backward

Walk slowly and reverently right up to the smack-dab center on the floor in front of the altar, **turn and face the congregation**. When the pastors give you the “high sign” — you'll know it; we'll wink or say OK or signal you some other way — turn and reverently take the cross to the floor-stand and place it back on the stand. Check that it's straight, parallel with the altar, and facing forward. Then step down, come back in front of the altar for your bow, and move to your seat.

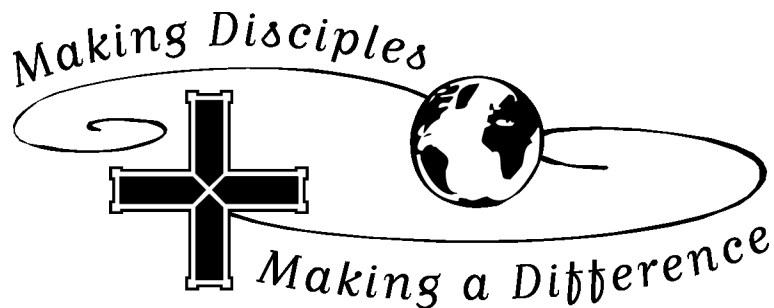
Again, before church check with the pastors about the cross: Will you carry the cross out after worship? Will there be anything else to do with the cross?



Be ready for other tasks. Sometimes the pastors will ask you to go to the kitchen for a glass of water for them. Sometimes you'll need to get another loaf of bread.

Sometimes it's something else — holding a book during a baptism, helping with the

children's sermon, or walking in with the Christ candle at Easter Vigil. Whatever you do, do it without haste and unhurriedly.



Serving as an acolyte is a time-honored way for young people to lead worship. In a lot of churches, teenagers aren't even allowed to take part. Or children are supposed to be unseen, unheard. Not in our Family!

Think of your time as an acolyte as "Making Disciples Making a Difference" — as a ministry of worship, helping pastors and people with **telling The Greatest Story Ever Told** and doing it well.

Most of the things mentioned here are on the instruction-summary or on the video\* and/or in your reminder-mail. Look things over along with your parent(s) and "talk it through" so that you know what you need to know.

We know you might be nervous. So are pastors when we are leading worship! Seriously! **"Nervous" doesn't mean something's wrong.** It only means you're aware of what you're doing and you want to do it well. It's OK to be nervous because then we're ready to be at our best. One skill as we grow up is learning to handle being nervous.

And you'll do fine. In our church we don't worry about mistakes, because we all make them. **We do our best, and our best is good enough.**

We hope this helps you feel good about your role in leading worship. We hope you give yourself a chance at serving as acolyte and enjoy it. We hope that when you've been an acolyte in our Family, after church when you go home, you'll go with a sense of satisfaction. Making disciples making a difference — you've done your part!

\* The video was developed by Family of Christ students (Brendan Jackson, Trent Jackson, Drew Nornes, Hunter Korpi) as their Faith in Action confirmation project This video is available as a link from our website [www.familyofchristonline.com](http://www.familyofchristonline.com) under Youth/Confirmation.