

St. Sophia Cathedral

Acolyte Program 2021-2022

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INTRODUCTION

To serve in the Sanctuary is an immense blessing that we cannot take lightly. Historically, Orthodox countries did not have seminaries; clergy were trained in serving largely *by serving*, from a young age, inside the altar with more experienced altar servers and clergy. Even with the advent of seminaries, liturgical formation is still mostly conducted while serving or observing, from inside the Sanctuary, the Divine Services of the Church. The unordained men who served in the altar are traditionally termed “Acolytes.”

Saint Sophia Cathedral has a venerable custom of extending the blessing to serve as an Acolyte to all young men who are enrolled in the 14-year-old class of the Cathedral Sunday School. For these young men, this blessing comes at a time when they are starting to come into their own manhood, and thus thinking and praying about the course of their lives. We extend this blessing as a way for them to:

- Further their Christian formation and education,
- Be involved in a different capacity in the ministry of the Cathedral, and
- Discern a potential call to the priesthood.

This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated preventative measures having prevented three classes of our young men from experiencing this blessing. To that end, we have opened the program to all young men 14, 15, and 16 years of age.

This document is intended to serve as a reference for those involved in the Acolyte Program: Cathedral staff, volunteers, parents, and the young men who will serve as Acolytes. It will be updated and re-issued as needed in the future. Please read all sections carefully and send all requests for clarification to frpanayiotis@saintsophiadc.com.

All instructions in this document are for “basic,” non-Hierarchical services (services without a Bishop). Further instruction for Hierarchical services will be provided in person and recorded in an addendum.

PEOPLE IN THE SANCTUARY

- The **Clergy**, primarily the **Priests** assigned to the Cathedral, lead the Divine Services. Acolytes are to address them as **Father**.
 - Occasionally, we will have **Deacons** serving at the Cathedral. They are also members of the Clergy, and are to be addressed as Father, as well.
- The **Sextons** are experienced altar servers who wear black robes. Acolytes are to address them as **Sir**, or **Mr. [Last Name]**, unless otherwise directed.
- The **Acolytes** are the young men, enrolled in the Cathedral Sunday School program, who have been given the blessing to serve in the Sanctuary.

AREAS IN/NEAR THE SANCTUARY

- The **Sanctuary** is the term for the area behind the Iconostasis (icon screen). This area is also commonly referred to as the **Holy Altar** or simply **Altar**.
- The **Altar Table** is the central structure of the Sanctuary, in front of which the Priest leads the Divine Services. The Altar Table, as it is the central structure of the Sanctuary, is also commonly referred to simply as the **Altar**.
- The **Prothesis** is an enclave to the North of the Altar Table, where the Priest prepares the Holy Gifts for the Divine Liturgy. Prothesis means “offering”; the area is named after both the physical offering of bread and wine, and the act of offering up these gifts in prayer and preparation to become Holy Communion.
- The **Diakonikon** is an enclave to the South of the Altar Table, where different books and other materials that will be used in that day’s Divine Services will be stored. The Diakonikon is named after the deacons, a rank of clergy whose role is to prepare materials for usage during the Divine Services.
- The **Synthronon** is the bench in the back (East side) of the Sanctuary, which contains a throne in the middle. The Synthronon’s primary use is for the Hierarch—it is his throne that is in the middle. Its name is derived from the fact that it originally was a number of thrones attached together (“syn” meaning “together” or “addition”).
- The **Vestry** is a room to the South of the Sanctuary where the Priests vest for the Divine Services.

LITURGICAL IMPLEMENTS

Liturgical implements are the items that are used in serving the Divine Services. They are stored either inside or directly adjacent to the Sanctuary on the North side. Acolytes must be familiar with the following:

- The **Censer** (also infrequently called the **Thurible**) is used for burning incense and spreading the fragrant smoke throughout the Cathedral. Acolytes will typically **not** use the Censer, unless directed to do so by the clergy or one of the sextons.
- The **Candles** are used for the Small Entrance, the Gospel Reading, and the Great Entrance.
- The **Fans** are portable, metallic icons of the Seraphim (Angels with a face and six wings), and are used during the Great Entrance.
- The **Cross** is a portable, cross-shaped, metallic dual icon of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, one on each side of the cross shape. One Cross is used during the Great Entrance.

PROPRIETY

- While in the Cathedral proper, in general and especially during services:
 - Acolytes must hold a **general attitude of reverence**.
 - Acolytes **must be silent** as much as possible. Any conversations inside the Sanctuary should be kept to a minimum. Please exit the Sanctuary to the North side to engage in necessary, longer conversations.
 - Movements should be neither rushed, nor lazy. Acolytes must **move with purpose**, at a majestic pace.
- Acolytes must adhere to the following **standard of dress** when coming to serve:
 - Black dress pants.
 - Black dress socks.
 - Black dress shoes.
 - White collared long-sleeved dress shirt.
 - Black necktie (no bowties, ascots, bolo ties, or any other form of neckwear).
- Acolytes must come **prepared hygienically**:
 - Bathed from the night before or morning of the Divine Service.
 - Hands clean, including fingernails trimmed and cleaned underneath.

- If a beard is worn, it must be neatly trimmed. Acolytes are to be clean-shaven if directed by the clergy.

PROTOCOL

- Acolytes must arrive in the Sanctuary no later than **9:30 AM** on days on which they will serve.
 - If an Acolyte arrives later than **9:50 AM**, he shall not be allowed to serve that day.
- **Presveia**, a type of seniority ranking (literally “eldership”), dictates:
 - Who among the Acolytes will have the honor of holding the more prestigious liturgical implements, such as the Cross or the Fans, and
 - The seating order of the Acolytes.

In turn, presveia is dictated by the following two elements in the following priority:

- **Age** of the Acolyte, and
- **Time** of arrival of the Acolyte.

For example, the oldest Acolyte, assuming he arrives before 9:50 AM, will have the blessing to stand/sit directly to the North of the center throne of the Synthronon, and will hold the Cross in the Great Entrance. However, if two Acolytes are of the same age, whoever arrives earlier is awarded a higher rank for that day.

- When not actively engaged in duties requiring movement, Acolytes are to stand, according to their rank, to the sides of the center throne of the Synthronon. Those with an odd rank stand on the North side and those with an even rank on the South side.
 - The only exception to standing is during the Epistle Reading.
- When being blessed by the clergy (either by being censured or by the blessing of the hand), the proper reaction for **any** Christian is **not** to do one’s Cross, but to accept the blessing by:
 - Putting one’s right hand over one’s heart,
 - Slightly bowing from the waist, and
 - Inclining one’s head.
- On Sundays, Acolytes are **not** to kneel at any point during the Divine Services. Kneeling is reserved for weekday and Saturday Services.
- Acolytes who are to receive Holy Communion will receive **first**. Among the Acolytes, those who are assigned to hold Antidoron during Communion and after the end of the Divine Liturgy will receive **first**.

- The holders of Antidoron will exit the Sanctuary **first** with their Antidoron receptacles, so that they can go directly to their station.
- The Acolytes who are assigned to hold the Antidoron must stay until those duties are completed. The other Acolytes are to depart for their respective Sunday School classes after receiving Communion.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Acolytes must be familiar with the terminology in this document.
- Acolytes must adhere to the above protocols at all times.
- Acolytes must follow all directions of Clergy and Sextons.
- Acolytes are encouraged to ask questions, as long as doing so does not violate the protocols of reverence and silence. The best times to do this in person are before the Divine Liturgy begins, or after the Liturgy ends. Email inquiries are also encouraged.

UPCOMING IMPORTANT EVENTS

- **September 19, 2021, 12:00 PM** (immediately following the Divine Liturgy): Acolyte Training
- **September 26, 2021, 9:30 AM** - First day of 2021-2022 Acolyte Service
- **October 3, 2021** - Hierarchical Concelebration of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Bishops
- **October 24, 2021** - Hierarchical Celebration His All-Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

More information will be forthcoming for the latter two events, including official call time and responsibilities for Hierarchical celebrations.