

Altar Guild Handbook 2025

Trinity Episcopal Church
317 Franklin Street
Clarksville, TN 37040

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1. Foreword

Membership in the Altar Guild is a high privilege, which carries with it a depth of reverence and a strong sense of responsibility.

The work of the Altar Guild, though always unobtrusive and often unseen, has a real part in furthering the worship of the church. It is highly specialized and has deep spiritual significance.

Altar Guild work is open to all persons of the church. Prospective members are expected to attend a training session.

2. Altar Guild Prayers

Opening Prayer

Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that we may handle Holy Things with reverence and Godly fear, and perform our work with such faithfulness and devotion that it may rise with acceptance before Thee and obtain Thy blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favor, and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy Holy Name, and finally, by Thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Heavenly Father, accept, we pray Thee, the work of each member of this Altar Guild, and grant that such service may be a gift of the heart, offered in love and reverence, and to thy honor and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, rest upon us and upon all our work and worship done in his name. May he give us light to guide us, courage to support us, and love to unite us, now and evermore. Amen.

Bless all who worship thee from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same - of thy goodness, give us; with thy love inspire us; by thy spirit guide us; by the power protect us; in thy mercy, receive us; now and always. Amen.

Closing Prayers

Almighty God, grant, we beseech thee, that we may handle holy things with reverence and perform our work with such faithfulness and devotion that it may rise with acceptance before thee and obtain thy blessing; through Jesus Christ Our lord. Amen.

Almighty God and Heavenly Father, look down with mercy and favor on this parish and people. Accept, we pray thee, the services of this Altar Guild and grant its members such reverence of mind and purity of heart in making ready thy sanctuary that they may truly please thee through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

3. General Instructions

1. Begin all work with a prayer and end with thanksgiving. You will find the prayers on the previous pages helpful and inspirational.
2. Always check the bulletin board in the sacristy for notes before starting work.
3. When you arrive on Saturday morning, see that proper hangings are on the altar pulpit and the lectern. The color for the day is marked on the calendar in the sacristy.

4. The fair linen is kept on the altar at all times and should be free from soil. Replace it with a clean one when necessary.
5. The perpetual light remains on at all times.
6. Notify the Altar Guild chairperson (Mary Smith) or Rector if anything is out of place, in need of repairs, or anything else unusual which you notice, whether or not it has to do with your own particular duties.
7. Please leave the sacristy in a neat condition, make sure that the door to the sanctuary is closed and all lights are out unless there is a service following. Make sure the alarm is set before leaving.
8. Candles:
 - a. Fill all candles with oil.
 - b. Check the wicks for length and trim if necessary.
 - c. Clean the tops of candles with Q-tips to take residue off the tops. After doing all this, re-light candles to see if all will light.
 - d. Candle lighters should be filled weekly.
 - e. The Paschal candle should be placed next to the altar for Baptisms, funerals, and the season of Easter up to and including the day of Pentecost.
 - f. The Advent wreath & candles (which use the same stand as the Paschal candle) should be placed next to the altar for each Sunday of Advent, and it remains out through the season of Christmas.
9. Linens:
 - a. Each chapter is responsible for laundering linens used during the week.
 - b. See the Linen Care booklet for correct laundering and ironing instructions. You can also reference the linen care manual from St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Annandale, VA: <https://wearestalbans.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AG-Manual-Section-4-Care-of-Linens.pdf>

4. Saturday Cleaning

The chancel (from the communion rail back to the high altar) is to be cleaned thoroughly each week under the direction of the Altar Guild person of the week. No work, except the care of the floor, will be done in the chancel by anyone other than members of the Altar Guild.

Each week, the cleaning will include anything needing attention. This includes cleaning of the silver to be used for the service during the week and dusting all woodwork and surfaces. The eagle lectern and pulpit have been lacquered and have no need for polish. The font and the stoop in back of the church need to be cleaned and refilled with water.

5. Preparation for 7:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist

1. Dust the entire chancel and altar rail.
2. If the fair linen is soiled, replace it with a clean one.
3. Check your calendar and bulletin for the proper color hangings and veil for the week or service. Change if needed.
4. Place the altar missal stand on the left side of the freestanding altar.
5. Place the filled Eucharistic candles on the front corners of the altar about 2 inches from each side..
6. Vest the table and chalice as follows on the altar:
 - a. Place the corporal on the altar. There is a sheet of plastic that goes under the corporal.
 - b. Place chalice in the center of the corporal.
 - c. Cover chalice with purificator.
 - d. Place paten on chalice over purificator.
 - e. Place the priest's wafer on paten.
 - f. Place a pall over the paten.
 - g. Veil the chalice.
 - h. Place the burse on top of the veil, opening toward the priest. Make sure the burse contains an extra purificator and corporal.
7. Set the credence table
 - a. Put credence linen on credence table
 - b. Place matches on silver tray on right side
 - c. Place second paten on second chalice and cover with purificator and pall. Place in front of matches.
 - d. Fill water cruet with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water and place on left side with handle to the back
 - e. Place the lavabo bowl and towel next to the water cruet
8. Place the large receiving basin and two alms basins under the freestanding altar.
9. Fill ciborium with wafers and place a count inside.
10. Fill the flagon with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of wine. There should only be one vessel of wine.
11. Place the ciborium and flagon on the shelf in the back of the church next to the swinging glass doors. Altar Guild members should present the gifts when the ushers go up to receive alms basins.
12. If flowers are on the high altar retable, make sure they do not cover up the cross or go higher than the cross.
13. Check to make sure no standing water is on the high altar.
14. Mark the Gospel Book and place it on the freestanding altar in front of the chalice.

6. Clearing After 7:30 am Holy Eucharist

1. Remove all vessels and the alms basins from the altars and credence table.
2. See that the fair linen is free of any particles which may have fallen from candles or flowers.
3. Take all used linens to the sacristy.
4. Rinse chalices, paten, and cruets in piscina, then wash all vessels, including the alms basins, in the sink with hot water and soap.
5. If a 10 am service follows, follow directions below.
6. If there is no service following, dry all vessels fully and return to the safe in their appropriate bags.
7. Make sure the lights are out, cabinets are closed, the safe is locked, and the sacristy door is closed and locked.

7. Preparation for the 10 am Holy Eucharist

1. Check your calendar and bulletin for the proper color hangings and veil for the week or service. Change if needed.
2. Refill Eucharistic candles, office candles and processional torches.
3. Place the refilled Eucharistic candles on the front corners of the altar about 2 inches from each side.
4. Check candle lighters and have matches nearby.
5. Vest the table and chalices:
 - a. Place the corporal on the altar.
 - b. Place chalice in the center of the corporal.
 - c. Cover chalice with purificator.
 - d. Place paten on chalice over purificator.
 - e. Place the priest's wafer on paten.
 - f. Place a pall over the paten.
 - g. Veil the chalice.
 - h. Place the burse on top of the veil, opening toward the priest. Make sure the burse contains an extra purificator and corporal.
6. Set the credence table:
 - a. Place second paten on second chalice and cover with purificator and pall. Place in front of matches.
 - b. Fill the water cruet with 1 cup of water and place on the left side with the handle to the back. There is no need for a wine cruet on the credence table.
 - c. Place the lavabo bowl and towel next to the water cruet
7. Place the large receiving basin and two alms basins under the freestanding altar.

Preparation for the 10 am Holy Eucharist continued..

8. Fill ciborium with wafers and place a count inside.
9. Fill the flagon with 1 ½ cups of wine. (There should only be one vessel of wine.)
10. Place the ciborium and flagon on the shelf in the back of the church next to the swinging glass doors.
11. If flowers are on the high altar retable, make sure they do not cover the cross or go higher than the cross. Make sure no water has leaked from the flowers.
12. Mark the Gospel Book and place it in front of the chalice on the freestanding altar in the center.

8. Clearing After 10 am Service

1. Remove all vessels and the alms basins from the altars and credence table.
2. The Flower Guild will remove flowers. Brass containers will stay on the altar.
3. See that the fair linen is free of any particles which may have fallen from candles or flowers.
4. Take all used linens to the sacristy.
5. Rinse chalices, paten, and cruets in piscina, then wash all vessels, including the alms basins, in the sink with hot water and soap.
6. Dry all vessels fully and return to the safe in their appropriate bags.
7. Make sure the lights are out, cabinets are closed, the safe is locked, and the sacristy door is closed and locked.

9. Preparation for Morning Prayer

1. The fair linen stays on the altar at all times.
2. Check for any dirt or soot on the fair linen. If needs be, change to a fresh fair linen.
3. The Eucharistic candles should be placed on the credence table. As there is no Eucharist, there is no need to light them.
4. The missal stand goes under the altar.
5. The Gospel Book and bells stay in the sacristy.

10. Preparation for Weekday Celebrations

1. Preparing is the same as for 7:30 am Sundays
2. Clearing is the same as for Sunday except there are no flowers to move and no offering to put away.
3. It is permissible to clear away and set up for the next service if that is to occur the following day.

11. Baptism

The Altar Guild chapter assigned for the week is responsible for preparing for baptisms that occur during that week.

1. Clear water from the font. Wash the removable basin with soap and rinse well.
2. Place on the back shelf or table:
 - a. Baptismal ewer with hot water
 - b. Baptismal shell and towel
 - c. Chrism oil
 - d. Baptismal candle
 - e. Aspergillum, assembled, in the empty glass bucket.
3. Place Paschal candle next to the freestanding altar, lectern side.
4. Use white hangings for the altar, lectern, pulpit and veil.

12. Weddings Procedures

Altar Guild should be notified if communion is part of the service so they can set up.

There is a wedding committee responsible for details pertaining to weddings in the church.

1. Be in attendance at the wedding rehearsal in order to go through the details of the ceremony with the rector and wedding party (see attached wedding procedures).
2. Be at the church one hour before the ceremony to check details and assure that the timing of the wedding goes off on schedule.
3. Clear the altar and reset for Sunday services.
4. Place proper hangings (white) on the altar for the wedding and return seasonal hanging following the ceremony.

Note: If the wedding is on a Saturday, the wedding chairman should notify the Altar Guild chapter of the wedding, and the wedding committee will set up the altar for Sunday after the completion of the wedding.

Wedding Procedures Cont'd...

Candles should be lit 30 minutes before the ceremony, and the music should begin about 20 minutes before the ceremony. The wedding ceremony should begin on time.

A moment or two before, two ushers are told to escort the mothers into the church. The bridal party waits in the rear of the church until the mothers are seated.

The groom's mother goes first, holding the usher's right arm. She sits in the front pew on the right side of the aisle. Any other members of the groom's family, including his father (unless he is attending the groom as best man) should already be seated there.

The bride's mother follows, on the usher's left arm. She sits in the front pew on the left. Her family should also be previously seated. The same usher may seat both mothers, if necessary, returning to the rear of the church to escort the bride's mother after seating the groom's mother.

No runners are used in the wedding. The signal is given to the organist for the wedding march to begin. A member of the wedding committee may wait conveniently to give the signal.

As soon as the wedding music begins, the ushers start down the aisle either singly or two-by-two if there are a number of them. The same wedding committee coordinator who signaled the organist may now see that the procession moves forward properly. The priest, groom and best man may precede the ushers or enter from the front of the church.

The ushers are followed by the bridesmaids, walking alone. If there are a number of bridesmaids, as many as eight or ten, they walk in pairs, the width of the church aisle permitting.

The maid or matron of honor follows the last bridesmaid, just preceding the bride.

If there is a flower girl or a small boy bearing the ring, she or he should precede the maid of honor. If there are both flower girl and ring bearer, they walk together preceding the maid of honor.

The bride comes last with her father or whoever presents her. She holds his left arm.

Upon reaching the chancel steps, the ushers line up to the right of the groom and best man. The bridesmaids go to the left side of the chancel steps.

After the betrothals are read, the priest turns and goes up to the altar. The bridal couple follows and stands at the rail, facing the altar. The maid of honor and best man follow. The flower girl and ring bearer, if any, follow the maid of honor and best man. The rest of the bridal party remain at the foot of the chancel steps.

Wedding Procedures Cont'd...

The ceremony proceeds. The bride and groom turn toward each other to make their vows and then kneel when told.

Upon completion of the ceremony, the music again guides them and the couple march out together. The maid of honor follows with the best man, the flowergirl and ringbearer, and bridesmaids and ushers, all going two-by-two.

Immediately after the bridal party has left the church the ushers return to escort the mothers out. They are followed by the members of their families, after which the wedding guests may leave.

As soon as the bridal party has left the church, the candles should be extinguished.

Note: If there is Holy Eucharist at the wedding, the ushers should be instructed to guide the people to the altar.

The wedding committee will then clean and reset for the 7:30 am service.

13. Funeral

Two members of the guild chapter assigned for the week should be present for the service. Their duties are as follows:

1. Prepare for Holy Eucharist, if requested by the family of the bereaved, and clear following the communion service.
2. Place white hangings on the altar, lectern and pulpit.
3. See that flowers, if any, are on the high altar retable for the funeral service.
4. Place the folded pall on the back right pew and take your seat beside it.
5. When the casket is rolled in, it comes in feet first. Place the pall on with the embroidery at the foot of the casket. Please center the pall on the casket.
6. Return to your seats and remain for the service.
7. When the funeral service is over and the casket is rolled out, remove the pall, refold it, and return it to the sacristy.
8. Replace seasonal hangings on the altar, pulpit and lectern.
9. The Paschal candle should go next to the freestanding altar on the left.

If an urn of cremated ashes will be present instead of a casket, set a small table at the crossing, with the pall for the urn on top. When the urn is brought in, ensure that it is immediately covered with the pall.

14. Altar Flowers and Flower Distribution

The flower guild is responsible for flowers being on the altar every Sunday. They arrange for donors to give flowers in memory of the deceased or in commemoration of a special occasion in the life of a member of the parish. A record is kept. The flower guild is also responsible that the information be included in the weekly bulletin.

It is the responsibility of the flower guild to see that the altar flowers are taken to the sick or shut-in following the 10 am service on Sunday. They may call upon any person of the church for help, not just the Flower Committee.

Be sure to remove flowers in the florist container from the church brass container.

Be sure to remove all dead flowers from the altar.

15. Sacristy and Supply

The Altar Guild Chairperson sees to it that the sacristy is kept in orderly condition. The Altar Guild person may solicit the help of other guild members for heavy cleaning. It is also the chairperson's responsibility to order supplies as needed, including wine, wafers, oil for candles, extra wicks for candles, and linens.