

A GUIDE FOR ALTAR SERVERS FOR SERVING THE HOLY & DIVINE LITURGY AT ST NICHOLAS ORTHODOX CHURCH MENTOR, OHIO

(Adapted from: <https://www.newmartyr.info/serversguide>)

A Basic Glossary

Ambo: the middle part of the solea, directly in front of the holy doors.

Nave: the area of the church where the laity stand.

Solea: the raised area before the iconostas on which the clergy perform certain functions during the rites of the Church.

Iconostas: the icon screen which stands at the top of the solea. There are three doors set into the iconostas: the Holy Doors, through which only the higher clergy may pass at the appointed times, and the deacon's doors, which are to the north and south of the iconostas. These are used by lay servers as well as clergy in lesser orders.

Altar: also known (less properly) as the sanctuary, this is the area behind the iconostas, where the Holy Oblation is offered. It houses the Holy Table and the Table of Oblation.

High Place: the easternmost part of the altar. It symbolizes the Throne of God. This is where the bishop's cathedra is placed. Whenever passing from one side of the altar to the other, servers make a reverence to the High Place. Before and after leaving the altar to perform any ceremonial action, servers gather at the High Place in two groups slightly to the side, make a reverence to it, and then turn to bow to the priest. **At no point should anybody stand in the center with his back directly towards the High Place.**

Zapivka: wine mixed with hot water for the cleansing of communicants' mouths.

Communion cloth: the cloth used at communion to catch any fragments of the Holy Gifts that may fall, and to wipe the communicants' lips.

Stikhar (or sticharion): the robe worn by servers.

General Principles of Serving

The most important piece of advice for altar servers is this: **servers must know the services**, for a server who knows the order and structure of the services can anticipate the next movement and prepare for it accordingly. But even the most experienced of servers forget things. And so, the second most important principle is this: **servers must be alert**. Serving in the altar is a communal offering of service to God, and by observing the clergy and other servers, it becomes possible for servers to operate as a unit and to serve almost any service smoothly and with dignity.

Finally, and above all, we must remember that everything we do is in service of God. Therefore, we try to maintain an atmosphere of prayer and worship in all that we do, both for the sake of our own prayers, and also in order to be an aid (and not a hindrance) to the worship of the congregation. Our services do indeed sometimes require swift movement. But even so, this should always be dignified and not appear rushed. If there is an accident, it should be rectified calmly and without fuss. If a mistake is made, it should be remedied discreetly (if necessary), but then servers must put it out of mind and continue with the rest of the service.

Posture during the Liturgy

The traditional Christian posture for prayer is standing. When standing in church, we should do so with our arms at our sides, with our hands free to take part in the physical gestures of our worship. This is even more important for servers, who must be ready to assist manually with the service of God. We do not fold our arms or clasp our hands at any time; rather, we keep them free and ready to serve. It should also be noted that, according to the contemporary practice of the Slavic Churches, praying with one's arms extended is reserved to clergy (and only when prescribed by the service books). Put simply: In the Church, the priest at times prays with two hands, the deacon with one (holding his orarion), and the laity with none.

There are times when a **prostration** may be called for. This is done by crossing oneself, by leaning forward and falling onto one's hands, by lowering one's head and knees to the ground, and finally by using the hands to push the body back into the upright position.

In no case should a prostration be done on a day when it is canonically forbidden (even if this principle is ignored in some place). Specifically: **Prostrations may not be made on Sunday, nor during the period of Pascha, nor on any festal occasion ranked as Paschal. Specifically: We do not make prostrations from the Nativity to the Theophany, on Transfiguration, nor on the Exaltation of the Cross (except before the Cross itself at the appointed times).**

Movements during the Liturgy

Often, one will need to communicate something to the other servers in the altar. While this can usually be done with discreet eye contact and hand signals, there are times when this simply does not work. Although it is not ideal to speak aloud to get a message across, sometimes it is less irreverent and distracting than the confused chaos that can result from unclear miming and whispering.

Before and after any ceremonial action that requires leaving the altar, servers gather at the High Place, make a reverence to the east, and then turn (always toward the center of the high place) and bow to the senior priest.

The Small and Great entrances are processions. Therefore, the servers form a procession and all go out of the north door at a "church" pace: **unhurriedly and in a dignified fashion**, until they reach their appointed places. For actions that are not processions (such as taking the candles and fans for the Gospel), it is better to maintain symmetry. In these cases, therefore, the servers should leave the altar by both doors.

Generally, non-ceremonial movement should be as discreet as possible and kept to the minimum necessary for the performance of duties. If passing from one side of the altar to the other, servers always pass by the east side of the Holy Table, crossing themselves as they pass the High Place. **They do not stop and bow at the high place while doing this. Rather, they keep moving.** If they cannot cross themselves (e.g., because they are holding some object), they bow their heads slightly while moving; they do not stop.

In terms of crossing themselves: **While in the altar, servers may cross themselves only when the senior priest presiding at the liturgy crosses himself.** And they should cross themselves only at times when the liturgical action is not reserved to the priest. As an example: Servers may cross themselves when the priest crosses himself at the litany petitions (since all should do this), but they **should not** cross themselves when he prays to the Holy Spirit at the Cherubic Hymn or before the epiclesis (because that is an action reserved to the priest). At times other than those noted here, **servers should not cross themselves, nor should they move to bow at times when it is not prescribed to do so.**

Singing during the Liturgy

May servers sing in the altar? The traditional practice is that **servers do not sing while in the altar** (except for the Creed and the Our Father).

Incense

In our services, the censuring of objects or people is reserved to bishops, priests, and deacons. However, servers are required to maintain the censer and to have incense ready for when it is to be used. It is imperative, therefore, to learn when incense will be needed and to anticipate these moments.

Charcoal should be lit a minute or two before the incense will be needed. One tablet is quite sufficient since anything more leads to excessive charcoal smoke and to the censer becoming too hot (which can lead to the molten incense boiling, blending with the ash, and then solidifying on the inside of the censer; this is very difficult to clean). The only exceptions are occasions when the censer will be used outdoors, or when the previous tablet is about to go out and there is not enough time to clean the censer before putting the new one in. In these cases, a second tablet may be used.

A few grains of incense (e.g., four to five) is usually sufficient for a great censuring of the church. Fewer grains may be needed on other occasions. The burning of incense is primarily about the “aroma of spiritual fragrance” offered to the Lord. **The aim is not to produce as much smoke as possible. Thus, one should not pour the incense all over the charcoal.** To keep the incense fragrant (and not smelling burnt), most pellets should be placed **on the periphery of the charcoal** and not directly on top of it.

When it is not being used, the censer should be hung **with its lid open**, to allow air to flow over the charcoal. Closing the censer or adding incense to it unnecessarily smothers the charcoal, thus causing it to go out prematurely. It is also important to keep the censer as free as possible from old charcoal, ash, and burnt incense, which add to the smoke and oftentimes produce an acrid smell.

It should be remembered: The remnants of the charcoal and incense may not be discarded in the normal trash, since they have been blessed and offered unto God. **Therefore, they must be discarded in a special container** so that they may be reverently disposed of after the Liturgy. Ash from used charcoal should never be allowed to accumulate in the censer.

Preparation for the Divine Liturgy

Servers should arrive at church early enough to prepare for the Liturgy. Upon arrival at church, the server should make the usual reverences, venerate the icons, and then enter the altar by one of the deacon's doors (not the side doors into the sacristy), first venerating the saint depicted on it.

Upon entering the altar, the server should make three bows or prostrations (as prescribed) to the Holy Table. He then approaches **the senior priest** for a blessing. The server should wait for the higher clergy to vest first and then approach, with his stikhar (and stole, if blessed to wear it), folded in the customary manner. The priest will give a blessing to vest, and then he will place his hand on the stikhar. The server should kiss his hand and then the Cross on the vestments. He should then stand to one side of the altar and reverently don the vestment(s), ensuring that they are properly in place before commencing his duties.

The following duties must be completed in preparation for the Liturgy. Typically, these are shared among the subdeacons and servers:

- The lamps in the altar, on the iconostas, and around the nave must be lit. If there are candles or a candelabra set on the Holy Table itself, subdeacon or one of the higher clergy should light these since **nobody below the rank of subdeacon is to touch the Holy Table or anything upon it at any time.**
- The servers' candles must be in place, secure, and long enough to last for the duration of the Liturgy.
- Sufficient water must be boiled in a kettle and poured into a flask. If there is no flask, the kettle should be filled with water, which will be boiled again near the end of the Anaphora.
- A candle in the sacristy or other side room by the altar should be lit. This will be used to light charcoal and candles throughout the Liturgy. For this reason, this candle should remain alight throughout the Liturgy.
- Charcoal should be lit and placed in the censer so that it is ready for use by the priest and deacon when they commence the proskomedia. If there is no deacon, it may be helpful to the priest if the censer stand, with some incense, is placed next to the Table of Oblation so that he can easily reach it when necessary.
- When the priest is ready to begin the proskomedia, the servers should collect the people's loaves with the lists of the names of people to be commemorated, and place them near the Table of Oblation. If there is nowhere to put them other than on the Table of Oblation, a subdeacon or one of the higher clergy should do this since nobody **below the rank of subdeacon should touch or place anything upon the Table of Oblation (since, in our practice, it is to be treated with the same reverence shown to the Holy Table since it too is a place on which the holy Gifts are placed).** The servers should also be sure to put the basket/bowl back in its place so that any laity who come late can offer their loaves.

- When needed, give the censer to the deacon at the end of the proskomedia. If there is no deacon, a server may hold the censer for the priest. **In no case should the server say the responses that are prescribed in the *Service Book* for the deacon.**
- When the priest has finished the proskomedia, the servers should cut the remaining bread into small portions for the zapivka and antidoron. Since some people take more than one piece of bread (for consumption during the week or to take to sick friends or relatives), the servers should remember to cut more pieces than appears necessary. If there is not enough time to do this before the Liturgy begins, it can be finished during the antiphons.
- The servers should prepare the zapivka. For each of the higher clergy, prepare a small cup half-filled with wine and place it on a small plate with two pieces of bread. **This should be left in the sacristy; it should not be placed it upon the Table of Oblation.** For the laity, the servers should place a number of cups on a tray, along with a pitcher of wine. Since hot water will be added to the wine in the pitcher later in the Liturgy, the pitcher should not be overly full.

The Hours

At the end of the Third Hour, a **server** stands ready to open the curtain at the Holy Doors in time for the beginning of the Sixth Hour. The doors themselves remain closed.

At the same time, as the Sixth Hour begins, a **server** prepares incense. At the beginning of the psalms of the Sixth Hour, he gives the censer to the deacon (or priest, if there is there is no deacon), who performs a great censuring of the church and people. He stands ready to receive it back from him once the censuring is complete. **Two servers** should stand ready to open and close the side doors to allow the deacon to pass through them unhindered.

The servers then stand prayerfully in their usual places.

The Short Litany and Beatitudes/Third Antiphon

During the hymn “Only Begotten Son,” a **server** lights the candles in readiness for the Little Entrance.

At the “Amen” of the second Short Litany, **two servers** open the Holy Doors.

At the beginning of the Beatitudes (or Third Antiphon), the **two servers** take up the fans, while **all remaining servers** take up candles. They stand in two groups at the High Place, facing towards the east. They then sign themselves with the Cross, bow to the High Place, and then turn and bow to the priest. They continue to face west to await the beginning of the procession.

The Little Entrance

When the deacon and priest depart with the holy Gospel, the servers form a procession, which leaves out of the north (left) door in the following order:

Candle-bearers (those on the right side go first)
First fan-bearer (the one on the right side)
(Second deacon, if there is one, carrying the censer)
First deacon, carrying the Gospel
Second fan-bearer (the one on the left side)
Priests, in order of seniority

The **candle-bearers** descend from the solea, forming a line across the base of the ambo, all facing east. If there are concelebrating priests, the candle-bearers stand a little further to the west (away from the ambo) to allow enough room for the priests to stand in front of them.

The **fan-bearers** remain on the solea, accompanying the Gospel in the procession: one before and one after. When the first deacon, carrying the Gospel, stops on the ambo, the fan-bearers stand closely on either side of him, facing east. After the priest has venerated the Gospel, they extend the fans over it.

The first deacon exclaims: “Wisdom! Stand upright!” and the choir sings the entrance hymn as the clergy enter the altar. Once the deacon has been moved, the **fan-bearers** descend the solea to the ambo, flanking the candle-bearers on each side, and holding the fans upright. They and the **candle-bearers** remain where they are, facing east, until the priest blesses them to enter the altar. The re-entry of the servers is not an end in itself and should be done with some degree of dignified haste. They move briskly to line up at the High Place. Once all servers are in place, they sign themselves and bow to the High Place, turn, bow to the senior priest, and then go to put their candles and fans away.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no second deacon, the censer is not carried in the procession.
- If there is no deacon at all, the senior priest carries the Gospel, and the fans go before and after him.

The Trisagion, Prokeimenon, and Reading from the Apostle

Near the end of the Trisagion (or its replacement hymn), a **server** prepares incense and gives the censer to the deacon. For this censuring, a censer without bells should be used (to make sure that the Apostle Reading can be heard clearly). The deacon presents it to the priest for a blessing. He then performs a lesser censuring and returns the censer to a server, who puts it away. During the reading from the Apostle, a **server** lights the candles in preparation for the Gospel.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no deacon, a sacristan takes the censer directly to the priest at the end of the Trisagion (or its replacement hymn). After the priest has blessed the incense, the server hands the censer to him, kissing his right hand in the usual way. The server again kisses the priest’s hand when he takes the censer back from him.

The Alleluia and Gospel

As soon as the second deacon (or reader) begins to intone the Alleluia, a **server** places a lectern, on the ambo facing east, leaving enough room for the deacon to pass by. **The candle-bearers** and **two fan-bearers** again go to stand at the High Place, where they immediately sign themselves and bow to the east, and then turn and bow to the priest.

Having received the Gospel from the priest, the deacon will take it around the altar to take it through the holy doors. As he begins to circumambulate the altar, the servers depart from the high place and then leave the altar by the north and south doors so as to be ready to flank the holy Gospel as the deacon carries it to the prepared lectern.

The fan-bearers stand beside the lectern, facing east. They hold the fans upright. The candle-bearers stand in front of the lectern. After exclamation, “Let us attend,” the **fan-bearers** extend the fans over the Gospel.

At the end of the Gospel, the **fan-bearers** descend the solea to the ambo, flanking the candle-bearers on each side, and holding the fans upright (they move once the Gospel has been clasped shut). They and the **candle-bearers** remain where they are, facing east. After the priest blesses with the Gospel during “Glory to Thee, O Lord...,” the servers immediately re-enter the altar through the same side doors out of which they came, and then they line up at the High Place. They sign themselves and bow to the east, turn and bow to the senior priest, and then put away the candles and fans. A **server** puts the lectern away.

The deacon or else **two servers** close the Holy Doors. (In some places, the doors remain open until the Litany of the Catechumens.) If a sermon is to be given here, they wait until after the sermon to close the doors.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon (or when there are few servers)

- If there are not enough servers to carry both fans and candles, two candles are carried at the Gospel. If there is only one server, he carries a candle.
- If there is no deacon, the priest reads the Gospel. In that case, the server who puts the lectern in place sets it **upon the solea facing west**, and the servers wait to depart from the high place until after the priest has said “Peace be unto all.” Once he has said this, the servers leave the high place and altar through the north and south doors and flank the lectern: the fans on either side of him, and the candles before him.

The Litany of Fervent Supplication

The servers should check for the last time to see if there are any more loaves to be offered.

The Litany for the Departed

If the Litany for the Departed is intoned: At the “Amen” of the Fervent Litany, **two servers** open the Holy Doors. Shortly before this, a **server** prepares the censer with fresh incense, takes it to the priest to be blessed, then goes out onto the solea and hands the censer to the deacon, before

returning to the altar. At the end of the litany, the server takes the censer back from the deacon and puts it away. After the priest's exclamation, the servers again close the Holy Doors.

The Litany for the Departed is not said on Sundays, during the paschal season, or during certain other festal periods. If in doubt, the server should check with the deacon beforehand whether this litany will be said.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no deacon, the server himself takes the censer directly to the priest. After the priest has blessed the incense, the server hands the censer to him, kissing his right hand in the usual way. He again kisses his right hand when he takes the censer back from him.

The Litanies of the Catechumens

If the holy doors are open, they are now closed by two servers while the singers chant "Amen."

The Litanies of the Faithful

During the second Litany of the Faithful, a server prepares incense and gets ready to hand the censer to the deacon for the lesser censuring before the Great Entrance. At the long "Amen" of this litany, two servers open the Holy Doors.

The Great Entrance

Before the beginning of the Cherubic Hymn, a server prepares incense. When the deacon re-enters the altar, he follows the deacon to the high place, makes the usual cross and bows with him, and then hands him the censer. The deacon then performs a lesser censuring of the church. Meanwhile, another server lights enough candles for the servers to carry.

During the censuring, the deacon will exit the altar to cense the icons of the iconostas. He will then re-enter the altar and cense the servers on each side. After he has done so, two servers take up the fans, and the other servers take up candles. Just as at the Small Entrance, the servers once again arrange themselves at the High Place in two groups, facing east. After the deacon finishes the censuring, he returns the censer to a server, who makes his way to the High Place to join the other servers. (In some places, the deacon retains the censer.) When he is in place, all the servers cross and bow to the High Place, and then to the senior priest. They face west.

The server with the censer goes at once to the Oblation Table to await the deacon and priest.

****If a 'short route' is to be taken for the entrance:**

After saying the Cherubic Hymn, the priest and deacon make their way to the Oblation Table. As they cense and take up the Gifts, the servers form the procession according to this order:

Candle-bearers
First fan-bearer
(Second deacon, if there is one, carrying the censer aloft)
First deacon, carrying the diskos
(with the censer draped over his arm, if there is no second deacon)
Senior priest, carrying the chalice.
Second fan-bearer
Other priests, in order of seniority

The **candle-bearers** descend from the solea, forming a line across the base of the ambo, all facing east. If there is a second deacon or a larger number of concelebrating priests, the servers stand a little further to the west (away from the ambo) to allow enough room for the clergy to stand in front of them.

The **fan-bearers** remain on the solea, accompanying the Gifts: one before and one after. When the deacon and priest are in place in the center of the ambo, facing the people, the fan-bearers face towards the center and extend the fans over the Gifts.

****If a 'long route' is to be taken for the entrance:**

Immediately after bowing to the senior priest, **all** of the servers go to the room wherein the proskomedia is performed (not only the server who has the censer). After saying the Cherubic Hymn, the priest and deacon make their way to the Oblation Table. As they do so, the servers form the procession according to this order:

Candle-bearers
First fan-bearer
(Second deacon, if there is one, carrying the censer aloft)
First deacon, carrying the diskos
(with the censer draped over his arm, if there is no second deacon)
Senior priest, carrying the chalice.
Second fan-bearer
Other priests, in order of seniority

The **candle-bearers** exit from the room in which the proskomedia is performed, followed by the **fan-bearers**, all in single file. The procession follows along the outside of the north (i.e., left) side of the Church.

When the **candle-bearers** reach the front of the church, they break off into two groups—one group going in front of the pew on the right side, and the other going in front of the pew on the left side (the servers stand mirroring the sides in which they stand in the holy altar). Meanwhile, the **fan-bearers** continue to the solea. One takes his position on the left side, the other on the right side. When the deacon and priest are in place in the center of the ambo, facing the people, the fan-bearers face towards the center and extend the fans over the Gifts.

Once the deacon and priest have made their way onto the solea, the servers standing in front of the pews 'close ranks' by moving towards the middle of the ambo (just as they stood earlier for

the Small Entrance). If there is a second deacon or a larger number of concelebrating priests, the servers stand a little further to the west (away from the ambo) to allow enough room for the clergy to stand in front of them.

****In all cases:**

After the senior priest has completed the commemorations and the chalice has been taken into the altar, the fan-bearers immediately turn the fans upright (they should move once the priest starts to turn to the holy table). Once all of the priests have returned to the altar, the **fan-bearers and candle-bearers** re-enter the altar. They proceed directly to the High Place, sign themselves and bow to the east, turn and bow to the priest, and then put the candles and fans away.

If there is a second deacon to carry the censer, the **first deacon** closes the Holy Doors at the precise moment that the priest places the aer over the Gifts. He then draws the curtain. A **server** stands ready to take the censer back from the deacon.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no deacon, at the beginning of the Cherubic Hymn, a server waits for the priest **to finish the prayer**. Then, after the priest has blessed the incense, the server hands the censer directly to him, kissing his right hand. He again kisses the priest's right hand when he takes the censer back from him and makes his way to the Table of Oblation. There, he hands the censer to the priest with the customary kiss. **The then server immediately puts the censer away, takes his candle or fan, and joins the other servers at the High Place**. If it is not practical for him to put the censer away, he may carry it **discreetly** before the Gifts in the procession. If so, he does not walk backwards, nor does he cense the Gifts.
- If there is no deacon, then after the servers have put their candles away at the end of the Entrance, a server immediately retrieves the censer and stands ready to hold it aloft so that the priest may again hold the aer in the rising incense. The server then hands the censer to the priest and later takes it back from him, kissing his right hand in the usual manner. He then puts the censer away and takes his place among the other servers.
- If there is no deacon, **two servers close the Holy Doors at the moment that the priest places the aer over the Gifts**. Once the censer has been handed to the priest, a server draws the curtain.

The Litany of **Oblation**, the Kiss of Peace, and the Symbol of Faith

At the deacon's exclamation, "The doors! The doors!" a **server** pulls the curtain aside.

The Anaphora

For the anaphora, the servers make the same customary reverences as the people:

- They make a deep bow (or prostration) at "It is meet and right to worship..."
- They make a reverence after the words of the Savior, each time, at "... for the remission of sins.

- They bow low from the waist and remain in this position throughout the epiklesis, from the priest's words, "send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts..." until the deacon's threefold "Amen," when all make a deep bow (or full prostration).
- Likewise, they make a deep bow (or full prostration) at the words "we magnify thee" at the end of "It is truly meet..." or its seasonal or festal equivalent, in honor of the Mother of God.

After the epiklesis, a **server** quickly prepares incense and gets ready to hand the censer to the deacon in time for the hymn to the Mother of God (*zadostoinik*). Once the censuring of the Holy Table (and altar) is complete, the server stands at the High Place to the right of the deacon, and with him bows to the east, then to the priest, before taking the censer back from the deacon.

Note for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no deacon, the server hands the censer directly to the priest, kissing his hand as usual. Since the priest does not cense the altar after the Holy Table, the server will need to be ready to take the censer back from him sooner than on occasions when a deacon serves.

The "Our Father" and the Pre-Communion Rites

At the beginning of the "Our Father," all within the altar make a deep bow or a full prostration. On non-festal weekdays, we remain prostrate until "but deliver us from the evil one..."

The deacon directs the people to bow their heads while the priest prays. During the long "Amen" at the end of this prayer, a deacon or server draws the curtain.

A **server** lights a candle and, as the priest exclaims "Holy things for the holy," the server takes the candle out of the north (left) door, places it directly before the Holy Doors. He then re-enters the altar by the south (right) door.

Another **server** prepares hot water in a vessel and waits to give it to the deacon, and also to receive the empty vessel back from him afterwards.

Another **server** or a number of servers prepare a basket/bowl of bread and add hot water to the pitcher of wine that is used for zapivka. The bread, wine, and a number of cups are placed on the zapivka table at the north (left) side of the nave, which is brought out a little from the wall. During the communion of the people, one of the servers stands at the table in order to refill the cups after each communicant.

If there are concelebrating priests, a cup of hot wine and two pieces of bread are prepared for each concelebrant. A **server** may present this to each one in order for him to purify his mouth after receiving communion.

The Communion of the People

After the clergy have received Holy Communion, and the priest has given the signal, **two servers** pull aside the curtain and open the Holy Doors. A **server** moves the candle, which remains

lit, to before the icon of the Savior on the solea. A **subdeacon or server** then descends the solea on the north (left) side. He makes a deep bow (or prostration) at “With the fear of God...,” and stands reverently while the priest says the prayers before Communion.

As each communicant approaches, the **deacon and subdeacon/server** hold the communion cloth, fully unfolded, like a hammock, immediately before the chalice and under the chin of each communicant, so that any particles that fall may be reverently caught. After each person has received, the deacon wipes the communicant’s lips and he and the subdeacon/server lower the cloth, allowing the communicant to kiss the base of the chalice. In the case of babies, it is often easier to ask the parents to hold the baby on its back, then have the deacon/subdeacon drape the cloth over the baby like a blanket.

After all have received, **the deacon and subdeacon** fold the communion cloth and return it to the priest, who takes it, with the chalice, back into the altar. The servers should not put the cloth on the chalice themselves.

Notes for when a priest serves without a deacon

- If there is no deacon, *two* subdeacons/servers come out of the altar and assist with the houseling cloth.

After Communion

After the distribution of Communion has been finished, the candle is moved to the center of the holy doors once again, while a **sacristan** prepares incense and gives the censer to the deacon.

After the priest has blessed the people and exclaimed “O Lord, save Thy people...,” a **server** takes the candle from the solea, through the south (right) door. After the priest has censed the Holy Gifts, the server places the candle before the Table of Oblation, where it remains lit until the Gifts have been consumed. He then takes the censer back from the deacon and puts it away.

Meanwhile, **the other servers** take the basket/bowl, the pitcher of wine, and cups from the zapivka table and put them away in the altar.

The Concluding Rites

If a seasonal blessing, a procession, or some other liturgical act is to be performed within the Liturgy, the servers prepare whatever is necessary during the hymns after Communion. If a blessing (such as fruit at Transfiguration or herbs at Dormition) is to take place, they set up a table in the middle of the nave and place on it whatever is to be blessed.

After Communion, the servers return to stand reverently in their places for the Litany of Thanksgiving after Communion and the Prayer Behind the Ambo.

If any kind of rite is performed within the Liturgy, the servers (as many as necessary), take holy water, the book with the relevant prayers, the processional Cross, or whatever may be required, and they leave the altar with the priest for the Prayer Below the Ambo. Local custom varies as to when the rite takes place. Some include it right after the Prayer; others wait until after “Blessed be

the Name of the Lord...” and Psalm 33. In this parish, the rite takes place after “Blessed be the Name of the Lord...”

After the Dismissal, **two servers** immediately take the basket/bowl of bread and another containing the people’s loaves and leave the altar by the north (left) door to stand at the north side of the nave (some distance from the priest in order to avoid congestion). **Other servers** should clean, straighten-up, etc. for a few minutes to make sure that the sacristies and altar are in good order. **A reader** says the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Communion as the people venerate the cross and then take some of the bread (and loaves).

When the priest and servers return to the altar, **the deacon or subdeacons** close the Holy Doors and draw the curtain for the final time. Subdeacons and servers receive a blessing to remove their vestments.

After the Liturgy

The work of the servers continues even after the Dismissal. The following tasks are to be done:

- The servers should make sure that their vestments are either neatly folded (or returned to their hangers) and put away.
- Pitchers, bowls, and cups should be emptied reverently onto clean ground. Their contents have been used for a holy purpose and should not be poured down the sink. The vessels should then be washed with hot water to avoid corrosion from any residual wine.
- The lights on the Holy Table are to be extinguished once all prayers have been concluded. The subdeacons should allow any candles to cool and the wax to solidify before replacing the dust covers on the Holy Table.
- The censer should be emptied of all remaining charcoal in the special receptacle for this purpose.
- Once all of the above have been completed, the subdeacons and servers should ensure that the altar is left in a neat and tidy state.
- Each server makes three reverences to the Holy Table before leaving the altar for the final time. **No prostrations should be done at this time by those who have communed.**

Some Additional Notes

- Strictly speaking, the liturgical fans are only to be carried at episcopal services (that is to say, at services at which the bishop is present *and presiding*). However, as the honor due to the Gospel Book and Gifts does not depend on the rank of the clergy carrying them, the widespread practice of the Orthodox Church in America is to carry the fans at every Liturgy for both entrances, as well as at the Gospel. (By custom, they are also used at Molebens and Cross-processions.)
- The use of the processional Cross during the Divine Liturgy properly belongs to the ceremonial of the Primatial Divine Liturgy—that is, a Divine Liturgy at which the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America is presiding. It is not carried when any

other bishop or priest serves and is, therefore, not mentioned in this guide. The Cross is, of course, always carried for cross-processions.

- Regarding the use of the censer during the Great Entrance, the following should be noted: The current rite calls for the Gifts to be censured at the Table of Oblation immediately prior to the Entrance, and again on the Holy Table immediately after the Entrance. There is no direction for the Gifts to be censured *during* the procession itself—and certainly not by anybody walking backwards. (The only place this is mentioned is in the rubrics of Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on the weekdays of Great Lent, when the Gifts have already been consecrated as the Body and Blood of the Savior, and so are censured by the deacon, who does not turn his back on them.) Therefore, if there is a deacon, he carries the censer over his shoulder simply as a means of transporting it from the Table of Oblation to the Holy Table. If there is no deacon, the censer may either be put away in readiness for the censuring after the Entrance or, if there is not enough time, a subdeacon or server may carry it discreetly in the procession. In either case, it should be emphasized: The rubrics do not allow for anybody below the rank of deacon to cense anybody or anything.
- Anciently, the three antiphons of the Liturgy were sung while the clergy entered the church in procession, and the Small Entrance was precisely that: the entrance of the clergy into the altar as a culmination of the procession. In modern times, although the preparations and vesting now take place within the altar, we still think of the Small Entrance as the beginning of the Divine Liturgy proper. Therefore, at this point, the priest gives the servers a blessing to enter the altar to perform their ministerial duties. In some places, this blessing is repeated on each occasion that the servers re-enter the altar after some ceremonial action, such as after the Gospel and the Great Entrance. However, these additional blessings are uncommon and seem superfluous. They are therefore absent from this guide.