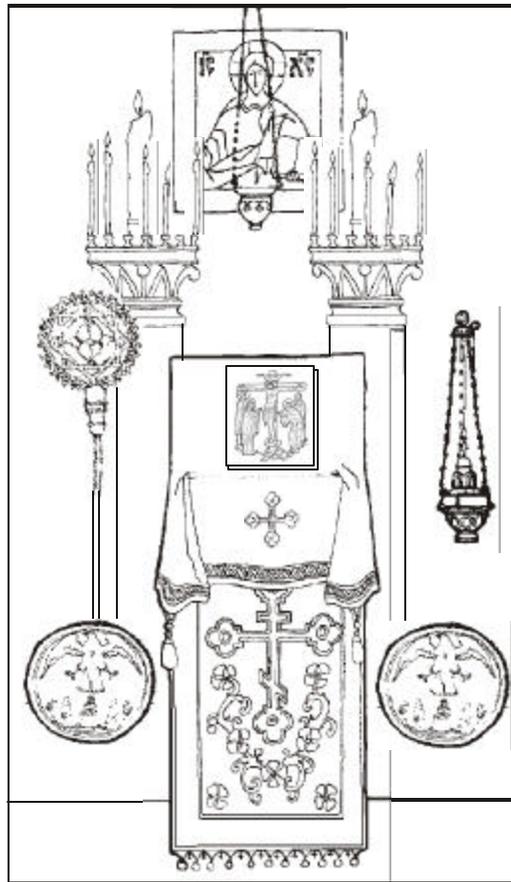
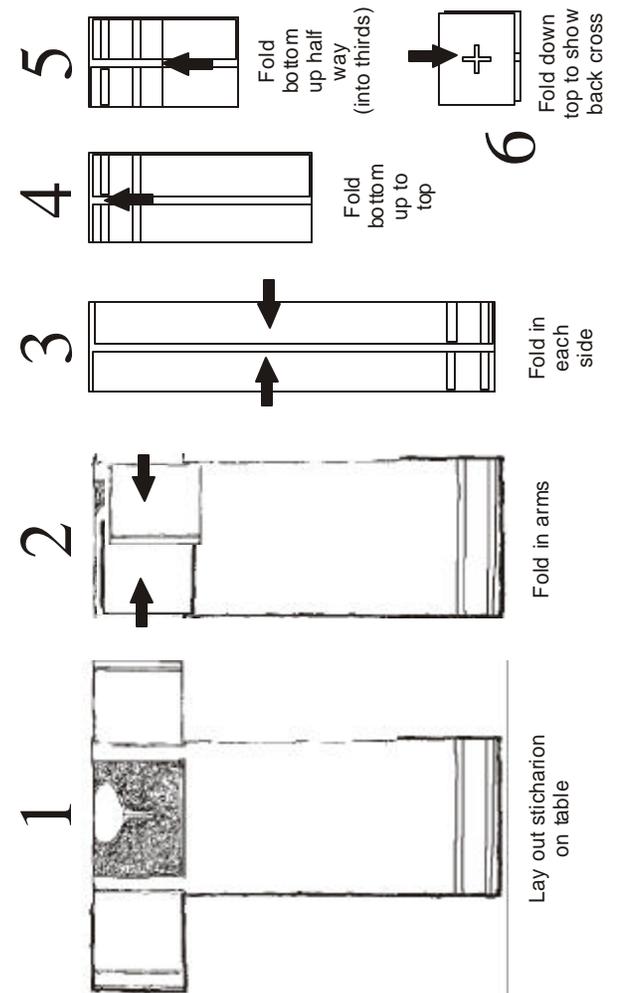


A Guide for Sacristans in the Orthodox Church



Method of Folding Sacristan *Sticharion*



Father Geoffrey Korz

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A Guide for Sacristans in the Orthodox Church

This small book is written with the purpose of providing some small guidance to the prayerful exercise of the duties of a Sacristan in the Church. Many of the duties of the Sacristan have over the centuries gradually fallen to the oversight of various other faithful in the Church: subdeacons, altar boys, brotherhood, pious laymen and women. Yet the integrity of the ancient order of Sacristan is evident in parishes where the material order of the church is approached with care and love. In almost all such cases, a single individual or two is blessed to take on oversight of these responsibilities: this individual is the Sacristan, whether the person bears the title or not.

The title *Sacristan* comes from the term *Sacristy*, literally a place for preparing holy things. From earliest times, Christian churches saw the order of the Sacristan blessed by a special prayer as one of the lower orders of clergy, along with other orders such as the Doorkeeper, the Chanter, the Candle Bearer, and the Catechist, which have fallen in modern times into formal disuse. Practically, each of these responsibilities continues to play an important role in most parishes, and the lack of formal prayers for their help and assistance at their investiture is a sad commentary on the free and easy attitude sometimes taken toward the care of the holy services and places. The care and integrity of holy things certainly bears such intentional organization and attention. In Greek parishes, the prayers for a Sacristan are still used in many places; these are included at the back of this booklet for convenience of use by bishops as the need arises.

The responsibilities of a Sacristan relate in every way to the proper care and use of holy things, and their proper placement within the temple. While other faithful may assist in many of the tasks of the Sacristan, it is the duty of the Sacristan himself to oversee the pious and attentive care of all the objects used in the divine services, other than the holy articles used on the Holy Table (Altar Table) and the Table of Preparation (*Proskomedia*). These areas are the responsibility of the priest, deacon and/or subdeacon; in cases where the Sacristan is an ordained subdeacon, he may also have care of these holy articles.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ bless, through the use of this book, those who labour in His Holy Church.

I - The Foundations

The foundation of the life of a Sacristan must be prayer and reverent service within the Holy Altar. The Altar of every Orthodox Church reflects the New Covenant parallel of the Old Testament Holy of Holies in the Temple of King Solomon. A Sacristan does well to read and consider the scriptures surrounding the construction of the Old Testament temple, the care of its artifacts and holy objects, and the sacrifices offered therein. Yet the New Covenant temple - the Orthodox Church - sees an ever more magnificent Sacrifice: the Unbloodied Sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ, offered once and for all on the Cross, yet presented again and again at the Divine Liturgy each time it is offered. It is to this wondrous and terrible Altar whose temple the Sacristan attends.

Care of Liturgical Objects

The Sacristan has the primary responsibility for the physical care of

liturgical objects. Most liturgical objects are crafted with solid construction, offering a long lifetime of use, provided these items are given proper care. The following points should be observed:

1. **Placement:** Liturgical objects each have a particular place of storage in the Altar, or somewhere nearby, such as in the sacristy. The Sacristan should be familiar with these storage places, and is responsible for ensuring their easy access. Holy objects should be stored in such a manner that they are neither crushed nor broken. Their storage place should be proscribed, in order that each object is returned to its rightful place after each use. In many cases, certain liturgical objects are used only at particular festal seasons, such as the water blessing at Theophany, the Shroud during Holy Week, or other examples. As such, the articles must remain easily reachable, and not forgotten in some back room or closet.
2. **Cleaning:** A regular routine of cleaning must be established in every parish. It must also be carried out. A dirty or disorganized altar is a dishonour to God. To ensure the cleanliness and orderliness of the altar, the priest, sacristan(s), and acolyte(s) must establish responsibilities for each person to carry out *on a weekly basis*.

Experienced sacristans also have the added responsibility to instruct new acolytes in proper and effective methods of cleaning and maintaining altar items.
3. **Handling:** All liturgical objects require careful and reverent handling. In some cases, only a senior cleric can handle certain items, while other items may only be placed in certain places. Care should always be used, and the priest consulted in cases of doubt.

Conduct of a Sacristan

A Sacristan should strive with God's help to exhibit humility, sobriety, and care appropriate to his order. Outside the Church, a Reader should exercise care to speak and act with Christian love and dignity, and to avoid activities that even give the appearance of behaviour unbecoming to a member of the clergy, such as drinking to excess, riotous laughter and parties, and frequenting places of a dubious or sinful character. In all these things, a Sacristan should exercise modesty in his decisions, reflecting on his own sins alone, never giving even the appearance of condemning others.

It is especially important for a Sacristan to refrain from making light of holy things, or joking about holy objects or services. Because such levity outside the Altar is easily recalled during divine services, it is best to never allow such thoughts to take up residence in the memory of one who would serve within the Holy Altar.

Unlike higher orders, the Sacristan is not required to wear clerical attire outside the Church; indeed, Sacristans always wear everyday attire outside the Church, and only wear a cassock within the Church if they have a special blessing to do so. When serving in the Altar, a Sacristan normally wears a sticharion; if the Sacristan is also a subdeacon, he wears the orarion appropriate to that office.

Clothing worn beneath the sticharion should be clean and neat, and avoid patterns or bright colours (black or white shirts are ideal; dark pants, shoes, and socks are appropriate).

It is not appropriate to wear shorts or ties under a cassock or sticharion at any time. (Saint John Maximovich used to send out of the Altar anyone wearing a tie under his vestments: he argued that ties were items of fashion, too frivolous for the Church, and that

they resembled the noose with which Judas took his own life).

II - In and Around the Church

The Church is the Temple of God: it is not a theatre, a racetrack, a gymnasium, or a legion hall. As such, certain behaviour is proper and becoming in Church, which may require an initial and extra effort necessary to form a habit of conduct:

1. **All movements within the Church are purposeful.** One must avoid running, or even rushing about, as this can cause confusion, accidents, or even sacrilege toward the Holy Mysteries or the Holy Place.
2. **All speech within the Church is purposeful.** Any talking within the Church, and especially within the Altar area, should only be concerned with the conduct of the holy services. If it is necessary to conduct a conversation on another matter, take the conversation outside, into an adjoining room, such as an office (the sacristy is part of the Church, and should be treated as such for these purposes).

Speaking within the altar should always be done with reverence for the Holy Things, *sotto voce* (with a soft voice). If mistakes are made, or accidents should occur, one should avoid exclamations, loud apologies, etc., but instead strive to proceed smoothly and deliberately with the task at hand. Similarly, yelling or argumentativeness must be avoided, and while correction may be necessary, this must be done with discretion and gentleness.

If the priest offers correction during a service, this should be accepted without any visible indication of dissent or disagreement. It is the ultimate responsibility of the priest to ensure liturgical order, and every effort must be made to

avoid conflicts during services. Such issues are appropriately addressed in private, outside the service, and in a timely fashion.

3. **It is never appropriate to joke, laugh, whistle, applaud, or sing secular songs within the Church.** While all these things have their good and joyful place in the Christian life, they undermine the prayerfulness of the holy place, and as such, should be avoided in the Church. In any case, all sound within the Church is moderate.

III - Preparation for Services

Arrival

The Sacristan should arrive no later than thirty minutes before the service is scheduled to begin, or earlier if he has other responsibilities. Upon arrival, the Sacristan should:

1. Make three bows before the doors of the Church, and pray: "I shall enter Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy, in fear I shall worship toward Thy holy temple."
2. Upon entering the nave, venerate the icons.
3. Upon entering the altar, make three large prostrations to the ground at the side of the altar (except during the Paschal season, in which one may make three small prostrations from the waist). Only a bishop, priest, deacon, or subdeacon may touch the Holy Altar or Table of Preparation.
4. When this is completed, the Sacristan should check the icon

on the main icon stand, to ensure the correct icon for the feast day is in place. The covers on the stands should also be checked to ensure they are the correct colour for the feast day. When in doubt, ask the priest.

5. Upon arrival and during regular use, the Sacristan should check the carpets used in the Church, ensuring they are straight, clean, and avoiding bunching up alongside other objects. It is important that carpets not be found to be a hazard that could cause the priest or another person to trip. It is proper for a Sacristan to take the time to comb the trim on area rugs within the Church, using a wooden brush, or some other instrument which will not damage the carpet.

Candles and Candle stands

Holy Tradition teaches us that each candle or vigil lamp that is lit before an icon represents a request for the prayers of holy people. Consequently, the care and safety of these items is an important service to the Church.

Considerations for the Care of Candles

- Stubs must be removed from candle stands in the nave before and after each service. Candles used in the altar may be of sufficient size to use for more than one service.
- In the case of altar candles (such as those used in a seven-branch candle stand), candles of equal length should always be used.
- When putting new candles in place, always pre-burn them; i.e. light the candles and allow the wicks to burn completely, then trim or break off the burn wick, leaving one quarter inch of wick. (A pre-

burnt, trimmed wick stands a much lower chance of going out after it is lit for a service). Be sure to trim the wick to this length before each use.

- All wax should be quickly cleaned off liturgical items once it hardens. Do not try to clean unhardened beeswax: this simply smears the wax, making it more difficult to clean.
- The best tools for cleaning wax are *soft tools*: a soft cloth, a soft wooden scraper, or a soft plastic scraper. One of the best known contemporary solutions is discarded plastic cards, such as used plastic hotel room access cards.
- Cleaning using hot water should be done at least twice each year, usually just before Nativity and Pascha, for the beautification of the temple. Pouring boiling water over brass candle stands or candlesticks is an excellent way to remove the wax, although great care must be used to avoid scalding. Wax should be caught in a bucket, and disposed of by burying it.
- Avoid the use of paraffin wax candles if at all possible: they can stain, and are difficult to clean off any material if they should drip.
- To clean beeswax from rugs, scrape off as much wax as possible using a plastic scraper (hard plastic car windshield ice scrapers are ideal for this purpose). Heat a regular iron to medium hot temperature. Lay two paper towels or a clean cloth over the wax, and place the iron on the towel, allowing the heat to melt the wax, and soak into the towel. Remove immediately as wax is absorbed (if the towels are left too long, the wax will simply soak back into the carpet). Use great care to avoid burning the carpet, or allowing the wax to set it.
- Candle stands should be cleaned on a regular basis. Brass polish

may be used, with care. Before polishing, test the polish on an inconspicuous spot first. Check with the parish rector, and obtain his permission before starting.

- Candles can be held in place in a candle stand by softening the wax on the base. Alternately, one can use aluminum foil paper around the base of the candle. Care must be taken to ensure no foil is visible, since it can cheapen the beauty of the holy altar.

- Avoid changing wax floats during a service. Candles may be changed, if this can be done quickly. If during a service an extinguished wax float in an oil lamp cannot be re-lit, leave it until the service is over.

Care of Oil Lamps (*Lampadas*)

Oil lamps bring a true beauty to any church, and the offering of oil is a blessed gift for the faithful who offer it. At the same time, oil lamps require special care to avoid accidents and fires.

Cleaning an Oil Lamp

1. Empty oil on a regular basis into designated depository, or pour oil into the earth on church grounds, in a place away from foot traffic. Wash the glass lamp using dish soap and hot water, and wipe dry.
2. Fill the lamp within 1cm (about one third of an inch) of the top of the glass. Some parishes place a small amount of water in the bottom of the glass first as a precaution against fire.
3. Prepare the cork float, ensuring that the wick is **tightly secured** (to avoid losing the wick as it slips through the cork

float into the oil below), and that **exactly one quarter inch of wick is exposed at the top**: any more will make the flame dangerously high, and any less will make the flame go out.

4. Light the lamp using a taper or barbeque lighter. Avoid using a match directly on a lamp.
5. To extinguish a lamp, blow it out. Candle snuffers tend to sink the float, and can become covered with oil.

To refill or replenish a lamp, it is helpful to have an oil can with a long spout. Store the oil can in a convenient but safe place where it will not be overturned, placing a towel below it to absorb any excess oil.

Be sure to regularly wash with soap and rinse any surfaces touched by oil or containers that hold it, including tables, stands, and doorknobs adjoining the Holy Altar. Most importantly, sacristans and acolytes must **WASH HANDS REGULARLY**, to keep them free from oil, in order to avoid getting oil on candles, vestments, the censer, or anything else. This is an important thing to remember, especially since the priest cannot leave the altar to wash his hands with soap during the Liturgy, in cases where the censer is covered in oil.

Brass lampadas can be cleaned in the same manner as censers are done. Brass polish may be used after the cleaning is done, if desired. Be sure to check with the priest to see if polishing is appropriate, necessary, or desired.

Care of the Censer

A well cared-for censer is easy to use; a poorly cared for censer can

be a liturgical nightmare. Three priorities stand out:

- 1) Avoid dropping the censer.
- 2) Avoid tangling the censer chains.
- 3) Avoid losing the lit coal from the censer.

It is extremely helpful to have a censer stand, with a top hook that holds the censer sufficiently far from any walls to avoid accidental fires, and a smaller hook for raising the chain of the censer lid. If such a stand is not available, and nothing can be improvised, it is helpful to have two acolytes to care for the censer: one to hold the censer, and one to light it and to replace incense.

Holding the Censer

It is wise to always hold all chains of a swinging censer. While the main chains are enough to support the whole censer, holding all chains avoids the confusion which can lead to dropping or tangling the censer.

To raise the lid of the censer, always use the chain. Never lift the lid by holding the lid itself: if the censer is hot, the lid can burn if touched.

To hand the censer to the priest, grip the two rings with the right hand, and hold all the chains together in the left hand. Hold the chain between two hands horizontally, and *let the priest take the censer*; do not release the censer until the priest has hold of it. Be sure to kiss the hand of the priest (this is done because the priest holds Holy Communion in his hand; it is a reverence for the blessing of Communion, regardless of the merits of the priest).

To retrieve the censer from the priest, grab all the chains with one hand, toward the top. Be sure to hold the chains firmly to avoid dropping the censer.

Cleaning the Censer

It is wise to periodically clean the censer, although this can be challenging. The best method for this is to use a tub of hot, sudsy water (dish soap is optimal), along with ammonia. Soak the censer in the tub of water, then scrub with a soft brush. The method is not guaranteed to work, but should provide some satisfactory results. Be aware that it is almost impossible to clean all the burnt soot off the inside of a censer.

Fire and Incense

Lighting the Censer

Before lighting the censer, be sure to remove any cold coals from previous services. **DO NOT REMOVE ANY COALS THAT MAY STILL BE HOT.** The best place for coals to cool is in the censer - leave them there.

To light the censer, hold the coal using tongs or tweezers, making sure that the coal can be easily released from the grip once it is lit. Place the coal into a flame, and wait until it begins to spark. Once this happens, immediately place the coal into the censer, sometimes lowering the censer lid to shield the outside area from sparks. These sparks rarely ignite anything, but caution should be exercised in any case. Do not attempt to re-ignite a dead coal, or to re-use coals.

The coal should be placed flat side down, in the centre of the censer, to allow it to have the best base for supporting and maximizing the incense (*See diagram below*).

To check if a coal is live (i.e. hot), blow on the coal; if it glows red, it is live. If it does not glow red even after ash is scraped aside, light another coal.



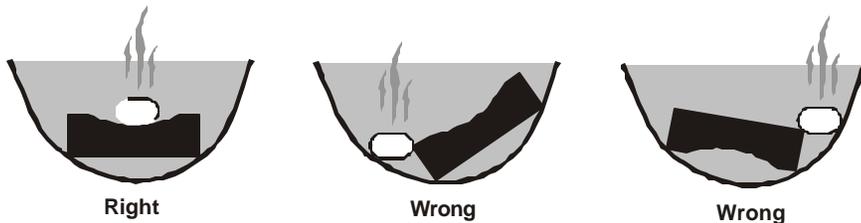
Use of Incense

Typically, incense comes in either larger pieces (1/2" squares), or a smaller, granular form. Both types need to be placed in the centre of the coal, to maximize their effectiveness. For larger pieces, it is sometimes wise to flatten each piece with a knife before use, to maximize the surface area (*See diagram, above right*).

Fire Safety

If a live coal falls to the ground - **STEP ON IT IMMEDIATELY**. Do not try to pick up the coal, or to retrieve it into the censer.

Incense should be placed on a live charcoal. It is useless to place incense on a dead coal, or on one which is unlit. Tweezers or tongs should be used to carefully place pieces of incense directly on to the charcoal, allowing each piece to burn for a moment before picking up the censer; this allows the piece of incense to adhere to the coal, to prevent it from rolling off when the censer is swung. For granular incense, a spoon is used to deliver a spoonful on incense onto one or two lit coals.



Incense and Processions

During a procession, it is essential for the Sacristan to keep a supply of incense in an accessible, flip-top container in his pocket, to ensure a ready supply for the censer throughout the procession. It is wise to light a new charcoal just prior to a procession, to ensure the coal does not extinguish during the procession. It is very difficult to light a charcoal during a procession - try to avoid the need to do so. Wait for the priest or deacon to be standing still before adding incense to the censer.

As a rule, at no time should a Sacristan swing a censer as if censuring; this is a liturgical function appropriate to deacons, priests, and bishops only.

Holy or Blessed Bread (*Andidoron*)

The Holy or Blessed Bread (*Andidoron*, literally “instead of the gifts”) is distributed to the faithful following Communion. In some places, it is distributed by the priest at the end of the Liturgy as the faithful kiss the Cross. In other places, it is made available immediately to those partaking of Holy Communion, sometimes with cold water or warm wine (Ukrainian and Russian practices respectively). For those who commune, the purpose of the holy bread is to remove any particles of Holy Communion from the mouth; for those not communing, the purpose is to receive a blessing, in lieu of Holy Communion.

Some faithful will desire to take holy bread home with them to consume each morning before breakfast. Sometimes, holy bread is given out in small plastic bags for such purposes, although faithful should be made aware that such bread should be immediately laid out and exposed to air in order to dry it upon arrival at home, in order to avoid mold. Greek-style prosphora bread is particularly

susceptible to such mold, and deteriorates quickly if not dried.

Any and all crumbs of holy bread should be taken outside and placed in an out-of-the-way place, for birds to consume, or else buried or burned. Care should be taken not to place it in areas where people will walk on it.

Cutting Blessed Bread

Typically, Greek-style prosphora bread used for Holy Communion is lighter and more crumbly than Slavic-style bread, and should be cut into large pieces, at least two inches cubed. Slavic style bread is much heavier, and can be cut quite small, even into one centimeter cubes. Care should be taken that only the bread remaining from the Service of Preparation (*Proskimedia*) prior to the Liturgy should be used for distribution; other unused prosphora may be eaten, but is not considered holy or blessed bread (*andidoron*) of this type.

Care of the Holy Icons

Holy icons testify to the Incarnation of God the Son in the flesh, and by extension, to the grace Christ gives to the world through His holy ones, His Holy Mother and the saints. Consequently, holy icons should be kept clean, dusted, and free from oils and lipstick (the latter of which should not be worn when venerating an icon, although in regular parish use, this is known to happen).

To clean an icon, it should be wiped with a soft cloth. With the blessing of the priest, tiny amount of glass cleaner may be used on printed icons, in order to remove any skin oils that get on the face of the icon. For older icons, or miracle working icons, greater care must be used: no glass cleanser should be used, although holy water can be used in tiny amounts. Soft cloths used to clean such icons should be burned.

Be sure to return icons to storage or to their hanging location on the wall of the church immediately after they are finished their time on the icon stand. Icons should be carried with two hands, facing out. For processions, icons should be held in a scarf or cloth, to avoid fingerprints on the icon, and to show loving reverence for the holy images.

Preparing a Floral Frame for an Icon



On important feast days, it is customary to prepare a decorative frame using flowers, surrounding the main festal icon in the church. Such icon frames are easily prepared using a two or three inch deep shadow box. A central block of wood, smaller than the size of the desired icons, should be covered with felt and affixed to the middle of the box back. Velcro strips attached to the back of the icons used can then allow the same frame to be used interchangeably with a variety of icons.

To prepare the frame, line the interior of the box with several layers of aluminum foil, being careful to provide a water-tight channel around the back of the icon on all sides. The foil should not protrude around the icon of the box edges. Blocks of florist oasis can be cut to fit tightly around the icon, giving support to the icon itself, and allowing for a small amount of water to be poured in to keep the flowers alive.

Once the frame is prepared and a modest amount of water has been added, flowers can be cut, allowing for about one inch of firm stem to be inserted into the oasis. It is best to use smaller flowers, particularly clustered flowers such as carnations, which give better

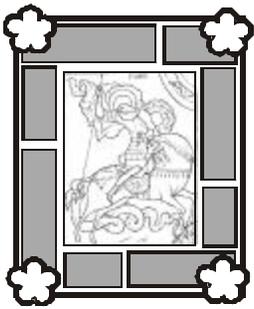


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Basic Pattern



Holy Cross or
Saint George



Memorial to
Soldiers
(with poppies)

general coverage. Do not crowd the flowers, but allow the petals a natural overlap, covering from view all the oasis. Begin by completing the corners (Figures 1 and 2), then filling in the sides (Figure 3). Any larger or more elaborate flowers can be used for accents once the general coverage is completed. Some suggestions appear in the figures that follow.

IV - Assisting the Priest

At Proskomedie (*Service of Preparation*)

Sacristans and acolytes should arrive at least thirty minutes before the beginning of services, in order to prepare their sticharion (robe), to vest, and to prepare various instruments (such as the censer, candles, hot water, etc.) for use during the service. To arrive late for such pre-service preparation is of little help to the priest, who is left to complete both the priestly prayers and preparations, as well as the tasks of the sacristan or acolyte.

In the case of great feast days, such as during Holy Week, at Pascha, on the Nativity, or at Theophany, extra time will be needed to prepare the church. Be prepared to set aside at least one hour prior to the service, or at some other time in advance.

It is common in many parishes for the faithful to approach the deacon's door to hand in prayer request lists, names for whom the priest should pray at the prayers of proskomedie. As a rule, the faithful - whether male or female - should not enter the Altar to do this; the Sacristan should be attentive to receive such prayer request lists before any faithful are tempted to slip in to the Altar.

In some places, it is customary for the faithful to include money with their prayer request sheets for proskomedie; in such cases, speak with the priest about the best way to handle such monies. As a rule,

it is unacceptable to bring money into the Altar for this or any other purpose.

It is not appropriate to speak about worldly affairs in the Holy Altar. Any discussion should focus on the service at hand; other conversation should be taken outside. One should not speak to the priest during any prayers or litanies, and should especially avoid speaking to the celebrant during Holy Communion (from the triple “Amen” after the *Epiklesis*, to the end of the Liturgy).

At Holy Communion

Holy Communion is a time where the sacristan and acolytes can offer particular help to the bishop or priest in several ways:

Hand washing: This is always done for a bishop, and sometimes for priest, during the Lord’s Prayer, especially in cases where the priest had to prepare the censer for use at the service of Preparation/Proskimidia before the Liturgy (if the sacristan and acolytes were not present). Prepare a basin, a small pitcher of warm water, and a towel on the shoulder.

Hot Water (*Zeon*): This must be prepared beforehand, boiled, and placed in a thermos to ensure it remains at a maximum temperature. Typically, it is poured into a suitable gold cup (called a *chafing* or warming cup), and brought to the priest on a small platter at the appropriate time. The priest may sometimes ask for extra hot water, and this should be available. Extra water will be needed at the end of the Liturgy, when the priest or deacon consumes the Holy Mysteries left in the chalice, and subsequently rinses the chalice, consuming the water therein.

The Holy Table & Preparation Table: While attending in the altar, be aware that only ordained subdeacons may touch these

tables.

The Eagle Rug *at a Hierarchical Liturgy*

Several round rugs, bearing the image of an eagle to represent the height of honour of the episcopal dignity, are used when a bishop serves. These are placed in particular places:

- 1) At the Proskimidia Table;
- 2) In front of the Holy Table;
- 3) In front of the Royal Doors;
- 4) In front of the Bishop’s Throne;
- 5) On the platform or *solea*, in the midst of the church.

If a parish does not have a full set of eagle rugs, the acolytes or subdeacons will need to move the existing rugs into the proper place as the bishop moves. Ask the priest or bishop about this well in advance of the service.

V - Special Services

A number of special services commonly require the assistance of the sacristan or acolytes, as set out below.

Vespers with Litya - *Setting Up the Litya Table*

Place the **bread** (either a full round loaf or a smaller prosphora loaf, or five, as the case may be) on the **Litya plate**. The plate should be placed on a **small table** in the centre of the church. The table should be covered with a **tablecloth**. A **candle**, along with a container of **olive oil** (for the anointing), and a tiny **crucifix of wine**, should also be placed on the Litya table, along with a **blessing cross** (which the priest may need to bring from off the Holy Table). A **lit censer and extra incense** should be on hand.

Blessing of Palms, Pussywillows, the Yule Log (Badnjak), Fruits, Flowers, or Liturgical Objects

For these items, a **larger table** is set up in the centre of the church, covered with a cloth. The objects to be blessed are placed on the table, along with a **holy water sprinkler** (*aspergillum*) or bucket of holy water with a sprinkler (branch of basil, cedar branches, or a brush used for the purpose). The **priest's service book** should be kept near at hand, along with a **lit censer and extra incense**.

One main exception to this rule is the blessing of baskets that is done in many churches at Pascha. Because these baskets contain meats and dairy products, which are prohibited in the church, they are placed on a table outside the church proper, usually in a parish hall or outside.

Great Blessing of Waters

In the midst of the church, set up a **table**, a small or large **font**, **candles**, and a **cross** (sometimes balanced on the font, if it is very small). If the font is small and not already filled with regular water, a pitcher with an appropriate amount of **water** should be on hand. A **lit censer** should be available, as well as **extra incense**.

It is helpful to have on hand a or **bowl** to hold the blessed water, and a **sprinkler** (aspergillum, basil, cedar, horsehair brush, etc.). It is also helpful to have nearby a **funnel**, a **ladle**, and **small cups**, to allow the faithful to drink and to take home in bottles the water which has just been blessed.

Holy Unction

Holy Unction typically uses a **Holy Unction set**, which has a small **platter, candles, seven rods for anointing, and a vessel** in the centre for **oil** (**wine** is added to the mixture by the priest - keep this nearby). Alternately, a simple **vessel of oil** may be used, along with **wine**, a single **candle**, and **seven swabs** (cotton swabs with one end work well for this, and should be burned afterwards). The simpler arrangement is typical for use in a hospital.

The **priest's service book** and a **lit censer and incense** should be kept nearby

Holy Week: The Shroud (*Plaschinitsa, or Epitaphios*)

During Holy Week, a large **shroud** (*plaschinitsa* or *epitaphios*) depicting the burial of the Lord is placed in the midst of the church. In simple missions, it is placed on a **table** covered with a **white cloth**. In other cases, it is placed in the midst of an arrangement of **flowers**. In Greek usage, it is placed within an elaborate tomb, used specially for the purpose.

While it is the responsibility of the priest to prepare and to place the shroud, he will often request the help of the sacristan and acolytes. Small **glass candle holders** should be prepared, to be placed on the shroud once it is placed. In many areas, **rose petals** and/or **rose water** are sprinkled on the shroud. These must be arranged in advance.

It is very common during the movement of the shroud for accidents to happen, particularly the spilling of wax on the shroud. In anticipation of such occurrences, it is wise to use beeswax candles, and to have a set of gloves on hand, in order to move or remove hot glass candle holders.

In some parishes, particularly Greek and Arab ones, a similar practice is followed for the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God.

VI - Dealing with the Unexpected

1. If the Holy Mysteries are spilled or dropped, **DO NOT APPROACH OR ATTEMPT TO PICK THEM UP.** Keep younger acolytes back, or send them out of the Altar. The priest may ask for some assistance, such as water, etc.; be attentive and respond immediately to his request. At such times, one should pray for inner stillness of heart for all in the Altar.
2. If one needs to sneeze loudly, if one is coughing extensively, or if one needs to blow the nose, one should momentarily exit the altar at an appropriate time (i.e. not during the Little Entrance or Great Entrance, the Gospel reading, etc.)
3. If one is cut or bleeding, one should immediately leave the Altar and attend to the matter, and not return until the flow of blood is stopped. Care should be taken to not allow any blood to get on anything in the altar (it is helpful to always have a tissue or paper towel at hand for this purpose). If blood should fall on anything in the altar, including the floor, tell the priest as soon as possible.

Before Departing the Church

Before departing the church after any service, the sacristan should walk throughout the altar and nave, doing a full inspection for the following:

- All lampadas must be filled, with wick trimmed for the next use

- All flames are extinguished (This is best undertaken by turning out all lights, and taking a walk around the church, making it easier to see any flames still lit.

- Carpets should be vacuumed (a special, designated vacuum is required to pick up andidoron crumbs in nave and altar, unless these crumbs are brushed up by hand and put outside). Any loose area rugs should be centred, to avoid slipping.

- Take home the “Burn Bag”, containing towels from the priest’s hand wash bowl, andidoron crumbs, cloths with holy oil on them, etc., which must be burned. Be sure to check local bylaws before burning anything outside.

Conclusion

In every act, inside or outside the temple, the Reader does well who is first concerned with a humble, loving, and conscientious approach to holy things, the divine services, and to the conduct of his interior life in a reverent and Christian manner. Approached in this manner, the service of a Reader in the Church will be blessed by God, and will in turn be a blessing to the faithful, and a mighty aid in the salvation of the soul of the Reader himself.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ bless all those who serve in His Church, and strengthen them with love and reverence for this service.

Appendix I

Prayer for a Sacristan (*Ecclesiarch*)

Let us pray to the Lord. *Lord have mercy.*

O Lord our God, Who art faithful in promises and unrepentant in gifts, Who called Thy creation unto a holy calling, and gathered Thy servants to the heavenly way of life: Do Thou strengthen this Thy servant for serving in Thy Holy Church, becoming his Co-operator. Multiply unto him righteous labours, giving him much fruit towards the pleasing of Thy goodness.

Grant to our souls the rhythm of good order and peacefulness of heart, keep us in mutual humility, in truth without hypocrisy, granting all of us Thy heavenly kingdom. By the mercies and compassion of Thine only begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who Whom Thou art Blessed, together with Thine All Holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, unto ages of ages.

Amen.

THE END

And Glory be to God for all things!