THE MINISTRY OF ALTAR GUILD

The Altar Guild is the liturgical partner of the Priest. The altar guild is a ministry - a gift of time and talent to serve God in His house. It is a very great privilege to serve God in this way. The housekeeping and decoration of God's house should be done with sincere devotion and dignity in good taste.

The duty of the altar guild is to prepare all the things necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist or any of the other sacraments and offices of the church. These services are included in the Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Occasional Services.

Altar Guild also cares for the sanctuary of the church. The work of the Altar Guild is to ensure that our sanctuary reflects the holiness and the joy that we all create together in our worship.

Each team has members that have one or more of the talents needed to serve on God's altar: flower arranging, silver and brass polishing, washing, ironing, vacuuming, dusting, watering plants, trimming candles, marking the Bible lessons, or mending.

OBSERVING LITURGICAL TRADITION

WHITE
Symbol of purity, joy, and the bright light of truth; used for seasons and days of the Church Year relating to our Lord, such as Christmas, Easter, The Epiphany, The Ascension, Trinity Sunday, and The Transfiguration. Also used for unmartyred saints, at the administration of Holy Baptism, the celebration of a Marriage, and the Burial of the Dead, Thanksgiving Day, and other certain special occasions.

The proper emblems of our Lord are: IHS, Chi Rho, the crown, lily, rose, Agnus Dei, and Alleluia. Gold and colors may be used for embroidery on white hangings. White, including white linen, is always an appropriate color for all services.

PURPLE
The color of penitence and expectation is traditionally used in the season of Lent, and in some churches also for Advent. Unbleached linen or similar material is an alternative usage for Lent.

Emblems of the Passion of our Lord include the crown of thorns, three nails, passion flower, the cross, pelican, IHS, the Chalice and Host, and grapes and wheat.

BLUE
The expectant color of Mary is being used in more and more churches during Advent. Advent is still a season of reflection and preparation, as soberly penitential as Lent.

Appropriate symbols are the Tau Cross and symbols of Mary.

RED
The symbol of the Holy Spirit and the blood of martyrs, used for the Day of Pentecost and for the days of Martyrs, Confirmation, and Ordination. Red is also used on Palm Sunday, and in many churches a deeper red (ox blood) is used during Holy Week.

Appropriate symbols are the dove, rays of glory, Chalice and Host, IHS, Agnus Dei, lily, and rose.

GREEN
Symbolizes hope, life, growth, and nature; used for the more common seasons after Epiphany and after Pentecost, formerly the Trinity Season.

Appropriate emblems show the Trinity, Holy Holy Holy or Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus, triangles and circles, trefoil, three circles, or the cross growing out of three circles.

NATIONAL ALTAR GUILD PRAYER

Most gracious Father Who has called me Your child to serve in the preparation of Your Altar, so that it may be a suitable place for the offering of Your Body and Blood; Sanctify my life and consecrate my hands so that I may worthily handle Those Sacred Gifts which are being offered to You. As I handle holy things, grant that my whole life may be illuminated and blessed by You, in whose honor I prepare them, and grant that the people who shall be blessed by their use, May find their lives drawn closer to Him Whose Body and Blood is our hope and our strength, Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

CARE AND CLEANING

On Saturday
1. Clean and dust the sanctuary.
2. Polish silver and brass appointments.
3. Prepare candles for use.
4. Prepare vessels used for the Eucharist.
5. Prepare fresh linens and clergy vestments for use.
6. Set up the sanctuary for the Eucharist:
    a. Seasonal hangings.
    b. Altar linens.
    c. Fresh flowers.
    d. Service book (missal)

On Sunday
1. For the Eucharist, arrange all vessels and linens.
2. For Morning Prayer, mark the lesson in the Bible.

3. Cleanse and put everything away immediately after services, and consult the clergy about taking altar flowers to the sick of the church.

On Weekdays

1. Arrange for any weekday service.
2. See that all vestments and appointments are in good repair.
3. Launder linens and vestments.
4. Do any pressing that is necessary.

Candles and their Care

Two Eucharistic candles are used on the altar. They are lit only when the Eucharist is being celebrated. These are the only candles on the altar during Eucharist. Either office lights or candelabra may be used to adorn the sanctuary at all services. Candles with a self-fitting base are convenient to use. Tapered candles are not used in the church.

THE SACRISTY

The word 'sacristy' is derived from the Latin word sacra, meaning holy things. The 'holy things' kept in the sacristy are the sacred vessels and the vestments for the priest and altar. In most churches the sacristy is also the Altar Guild's workroom. In temporary buildings it may be a corner set apart by a screen. Regardless of the building type, each sacristy should have:

1. A wardrobe or closet for the priest's vestments.
2. A cabinet for storing the vessels and other articles used for the Eucharist.
3. A large chest of drawers for altar hangings and communion linens.
4. Sink with hot and cold running water or hot plate, kettle, and bowl.
5. A table, counter top or other work surface.
6. A cabinet for cleaning supplies and supplies for flower arranging.
7. A piscina, a basin that drains directly to the ground.

The sacristy should be kept clean, neat, and in good working condition at all times.

FLOWERS

Flowers are not necessary for a church service. They are a free offering of the people and are symbols of the Resurrection. They are arranged and placed by Altar Guild members only. Florists and other helpers do not work in the sanctuary. For this reason, a place for flowers near the altar is desirable. When there is a retable or a shelf back of the altar, vases are placed there. Wall baskets and flower stands are sometimes placed in the sanctuary for the flowers. Flowers are given to the glory of God and should be taken to the sick or home bound after the service. If there is a definite preference for brass vases, they should be selected with great care. Consider the overall space that flowers may take and still not overpower the cross. As a general rule the flowers and candles should not be taller than the cross-arm of the cross. Flowers should not extend over the altar, or interfere with the candles, and especially should not get in the priest's way. Special caution is urged here, to assure the neck of the vase is

wide enough and the vases not too tall, or some other difficulty that makes them unsuitable for your own sanctuary.

Guide for Arrangement of Flowers

1. Simple lines. Flowers should have a natural appearance.
2. Massed flowers and foliage. Only mass, form, and color will carry to the back of the church.
3. Prominence of the cross. Flowers should help focus attention on the cross.
4. The flowers should not be taller than the cross-arms of the cross.

Equipment and Tools

Have a supply of floral needs for arranging flowers: scissors, knife, green wire for stems, oasis, hammer for crushing woody stems, etc. Keep these articles clean and together in a box or drawer. Have a container or some floral paper and ribbon with which to wrap the flowers from the altar, and a neat white card on which to write a message to whoever will receive them.

Color and Variety of Flowers

There is no universally established rule for choice of flowers or greens to be used at the altar. It is wise, however, to keep in mind the liturgical colors that are to be used and choose flowers to harmonize with the hangings. Only live or dried flowers are to be used in the sanctuary. Do not use artificial flowers. Parish tradition should be considered; however, new ideas may be better than those of years past. You may have new vases, etc, that give you an opportunity to learn newer and better ways of using God's gift of flowers. Flowers and greens are for Advent, Christmas, and Easter. Red gladioli are beautiful for Pentecost and Confirmation, as they remind us of the tongues of flame that descended on the Apostles. White flowers are often used for All Saints' Day. Thanksgiving Day can use gold chrysanthemums or symbolic fruit and grain. Be conservative. Avoid looking like a "fruit stand". Weddings have traditionally used white flowers, although this is changing. Flowers, berries, and green foliage from gardens, fields, or the woods can be used effectively. Proper precaution should be observed to see that the flowers are kept well watered and in moderate temperature. When the church is closed and the temperature is hot, wait until near the time of the service to put flowers in place. Never allow a wilted flower to remain in the church. Cut the stem of the wilted flower, rather than pulling it from the arrangement to prevent the arrangement from falling apart.