

**Calvary Episcopal Church**  
Cleveland MS

*A Handbook for Acolytes*

# Thurifer

*The Thurifer carries the thurible in the Entrance, Gospel and Retiring Processions.*

## ***Basic description and duties***

The Thurifer's primary responsibility is to carry the thurible at the Entrance, Gospel and Retiring processions. Plan to arrive at least 20 minutes before the start of the service to allow time to get vested and complete preparations for your role in the service.

## ***Preparation of the Thurible***

- You should plan to light the charcoal in the thurible about 10-15 minutes prior to the service.
- The thurible uses a special self-lighting charcoal to burn incense. The box of charcoal is kept with the incense, boat and thurible. Holding the charcoal with the tongs, light the edge of the charcoal using a match or lighter. It's best to light the charcoal holding it over the sink- sometimes sparks can fly off the charcoal with consequences for anything that can burn from your clothes to altar hangings!
- Once lit, the charcoal needs time to burn all the way across the briquette. Another reason to arrive well prior to the service!
- The thurible should be lined with a bit of aluminum foil to make it easier to clean up.
- Once the charcoal is lit, place the briquette in the thurible with the top off. You only need a little bit to get the briquette lit, just the edge. Once it's started, the charcoal is self-sustaining.
- With the charcoal burning in a safe place, you can then vest and get ready to participate in the service. Time permitting, assist the other acolytes in their preparation.

## ***The Entrance Procession***

- The Thurifer leads the Entrance, Gospel, and Retiring Processions.
- Carry the thurible and the boat to the Narthex. When the Entrance hymn music starts, the Priest will bless the boat containing the incense. Hand the boat to the Priest and separate the thurible, exposing the charcoal. The Priest adds incense to the thurible, sprinkling it on the burning coal.
- Lead the Procession to the altar at the beginning of the first verse. Maintain a stately, steady pace. Much like the conductor of an orchestra, everyone else- other acolytes, choir and clergy- is looking to you for the right timing and leadership.
- We use a single-chain thurible at Calvary. This is the easiest type to control.
- Swinging the thurible is much like a pendulum. Once it starts, the motion is self-sustaining. Your objective is to introduce the incense without setting things on fire. Remember, there is a burning coal in the thurible! Just hold the thurible to your side as it swings so that it is kept away from your vestments, the pews and the congregants.
- When you reach the sanctuary entrance, bow and turn toward the sacristy. To make a turn while carrying the thurible, swing the thurible in clockwise circles as you turn.
- Place the thurible on the back steps, with the halves separated. This prevents tar buildup on the thurible.

- Proceed to the gospel side and take your seat.

### ***The Gospel Procession***

- Note: the Thurifer participates in the Gospel Procession at the discretion of the Priest. Consider this optional.
- At the beginning of the sequence hymn, retrieve the thurible. You may need to add a little incense at this point.
- Go the front of the choir area and remain facing the altar. The Cross and the Book will take their positions, also facing the altar.
- When the Book turns, the Thurifer and Crucifer turn toward the Narthex. The Thurifer leads the Gospel process down the center aisle. When reaching the 5<sup>th</sup> pew, stop and move to the side of the aisle, allowing the Crucifer to pass you. You will be facing either east or west. The Crucifer stops at the 7<sup>th</sup> pew and turns around to face the altar. The Book stops short of the Crucifer.
- The Priest will then use the Thurible to cense the Gospel Book. You reverence the Priest and hand him/her the Thurible. After censuring, the Priest returns the thurible to you.
- At the conclusion of the reading, you lead everyone back to the altar. The order is: Thurifer, Crucifer, Book, Priest.
- Take the thurible to the sacristy. At this point, you'll need to add another coal to the thurible. Light another briquette and place in the thurible, then return to your seat.

### ***Censing the Altar***

- After the Peace, go to the sacristy and get the thurible and boat. Return to the altar.
- Hand the boat to the celebrant. Separate the thurible so the celebrant can add incense. The celebrant will then cense the altar. The Priest will return the thurible to you.
- Take the thurible to the steps. Be sure to separate the halves so that the thurible doesn't stick together. Then return to your seat and close the altar rail.

### ***Censing the Congregation***

- Note: this is an option.
- After the Priest censes the altar and returns the thurible to you, you cense everybody.
- Censing the Priest: The sequence is: reverence, cense, reverence. When censing the Priest, reverence the Priest, cense him/her with three swings of the thurible, repeat the reverence.
- Then cense the ministers on the gospel side. Face the gospel side. Reverence, single swing, reverence.
- Then cense the ministers on the epistle side. Face the epistle side. Reverence, single swing, reverence.
- Cense the choir. Move to the bottom of the steps. Cense the gospel side, then the epistle side. Reverence, cense with a single swing or three swings, then reverence. Be sure to cense both sides.
- Cense the congregation. Move to the top of the steps and face the congregation. Reverence, then three swings of the thurible with the chain extended- swing toward the gospel side, then the epistle side, then down the center, repeat reverence.
- Return the thurible to the sacristy. Open the thurible to prevent sticking the halves together. Close the door to the sacristy.
- Return to the altar. Close the altar rail and return to your seat.

### ***The Retiring Procession***

- At the beginning of the hymn, go to the sacristy and get the thurible. Add a little incense at this point. Wait in the doorway to the hall while the other acolytes put out the candles.
- When signalled, move to the north end of the choir area. Wait facing the the altar as the Cross and Book acolytes take their places. When the Book turns toward the Narthex, the Thurifer and Cross also turn.
- The Thurifer leads the Retiring Procession. Maintain a steady, stately pace. Remember, the choir, other acolytes, lay ministers and clergy need time to process as well. The objective is to have a procession with flow rather than gaps.
- Return the thurible to the sacristy, then put away your vestments.