



## **Vergers Standard Customary**

### **Diocese of Atlanta**

#### **Introduction:**

This Customary has been developed to aid parishes that are contemplating starting a vergers ministry or are in the early stages of a vergers ministry.

For the purpose of this Customary, the word “rector” is used to denote the ordained: priest, rector, dean, presbyter, vicar, priest-in-charge or other clergy who are selected to lead a congregation. The term “Celebrant” will be used when addressing the Eucharist Service (liturgy) to designate the presider (bishop or priest).

This Customary is intended to be used for Holy Eucharist (the principal Sunday service). This Customary may easily be adapted for local customs and other services.

The vergers must be familiar with the service as is written in the Book of Common Prayer, know the rubrics and understand how the service is adapted for his/her parish. The rector is canonically and practically in charge of liturgy and has the final say on how the service is conducted. Two key elements to always remember:

**Architecture dictates Liturgy  
Rectors dictate Liturgy**

The vergers is to know the role of every person participating in the service including all acolytes, thurifer, lectors, eucharistic ministers, chalice bears, clergy, deacons, rector and bishop. The vergers is to be intimately familiar with the tasks of the altar guild, choir, ushers and those working behind the scenes to insure a meaningful service without any undue distractions. The vergers is responsible for the orderly process of the service

#### **The Vergers:**

The vergers serves at the pleasure of the rector. The position is normally an appointed position. When the vergers performs her/his tasks well, the rector (and other clergy) is free to be available for parishioners, welcome visitors and respond to pastoral concerns.

Depending on the size of the parish, the vergers may want to meet with the Celebrant during the week to discuss the logistics and form of the service. In smaller parishes or for routine services, meeting with the Celebrant 30-60 minutes prior to the service is appropriate.

The vergers should arrive and be vested 60 minutes before major services and a minimum of 30 minutes prior to regular service. The vergers is responsible for insuring everyone assigned for the service is available and prepared to serve. In the event of missing people, replacements are to be found by the

verger with sufficient time to allow the replacement to become prepared for the service. The verger must be flexible (adaptable) and double check “everything” prior to the service with an especially watchful eye for things and people being out of place.

Most of the verger’s work is done before the service begins. Once the service is underway, the verger’s duties are normally limited to movement of various people and for minor or major mid-course corrections (damage control) to keep the people’s worship flowing smoothly and without distraction.

The verger is to coordinate her/his activities and those of other participants with the wishes and desires of the Celebrant and other clergy. It is the responsibility of the verger for the service to start on time.

### **Traits of a Good Verger:**

The best way to become a good verger is to have been an active participant in church liturgies by being an acolyte, lector, eucharistic minister, usher, and/or altar guild member so that you have some expertise of the mechanics of the service.

The verger serves at the pleasure of the rector. Appointments are not taken casually by the rector. The rector is looking for many traits including leadership capabilities, success in dealing with people (especially children and parents), knowledge of the liturgy, being respected in the parish, willingness to accept direction and not become overbearing when performing the verger’s duties. Having a close working relationship between the rector and the verger is essential for success.

### **Verger Commandments:**

**1. Let everyone do their job**

The verger’s job is to enable others to do their job, not to do their job. The verger should discreetly verify that they have done their jobs and be able to perform those duties if not done, be it ushering, acolyting, lectoring, intercessing, bearing the chalice or preparing the altar.

**2. Vergers should be neither seen nor heard**

The job of the verger is to focus attention on the worship, not to distract that attention. Anything that draws attention to you (loud vestments, unnecessary movements or sounds, peering around the corner) is not helpful. Move only when something else is going on.

**3. Don’t make a bad situation worse by trying to fix it**

If the situation is not too serious, let it be. If it has to be fixed, do it as gracefully as possible and hopefully while something else is going on.

**4. Remember**

The verger ministry is wonderful and fulfilling requiring dedication, knowledge and patience. The verger does not need to be perfect. It is not that she/he makes a mistake; it is how gracefully he/she recovers from that mistake.

### **A Customary for Holy Eucharist (the Principal Sunday Service):**

#### **Preparation:**

Arrive before anyone else (a minimum of 30-45 minutes prior to the service). Review the entire service in your mind. Begin checking everything pertaining to the set up for the service including tasks that have been performed by others. This includes checking that the altar hanging(s) is the proper color for the day and that the altar stack (chalice, paten, host wafer and purificator) is properly vested and is centered on the altar. Check to see the Gospel Book is properly marked and set on the altar. Ensure the candles are properly positioned and are straight.

Verify the proper lessons are available at the lectern for the lectors. Ensure all service participants have a bulletin, prayer book and hymnal located at or near their seats. Check the hymn board for accuracy. Ensure the thermostats are set properly, the lights are on and the sound system is functioning properly.

Meet briefly with the Celebrant to learn of any last minute changes or instructions. If so, communicate

them accurately to those affected. Check with the ushers and altar guild to ensure their tasks have been completed and advise of any special actions required on their part.

Check to see all service participants are prepared and vested. This includes acolytes, eucharistic ministers, lectors, thurifer, choir, clergy, the Celebrant and even the bishop, if present. **Start the service on time.**

**Processions:**

A procession is any formal movement of people from one place to another during the liturgy. The vergier is the person in charge of all processions. The principal processions at the Eucharist are those at the beginning and end of the liturgy. Lesser processions take place at the reading of the Gospel and at the offertory.

It is helpful to have a written order of procession posted in various vesting areas as well as where the procession forms. Spacing is essential to a good procession. The bunching up of the procession causes frequent stops and starts. Suggested spacing is three or four pews apart allows for bows, turns and the like.

**The Entering Procession:**

The vergier is to determine who and how many are processing. The entering procession typically starts with the first note of the entrance hymn. In some parishes the procession starts at the beginning of the first verse when the choir begins to sing.

A typical order of procession may look like this:

- Vergier**
- Thurifer**
- Crucifer**
- Torch Bearers**
- Choir**
- Chalice Bearers**
- Server**
- Vergier**
- Crucifer**
- Torch Bearers**
- Banner Bearer**
- Assisting Clergy**
- Gospel Book Bearer or Deacon**
- Gospeller**
- Celebrant**

Upon reaching the chancel, the vergier is to make sure that the acolytes have properly placed the Cross, torches and banners in their respective stands including the verge and/or beadle. Ensure all participants are properly positioned at their designated seats and prepared to begin the service when the Celebrant begins the Acclamation.

**The Gospel Procession:**

The Prayer Book directs all to stand for the Gospel. It is the custom to read the Gospel in the midst of the people. The gospel procession is normally accompanied by music. The vergers signals the start of the procession after the sequence hymn has begun.

The Gospel Book is the visual focus of the gospel procession and a primary symbol of Christ present in the midst of the people. It is the only symbol that is carried. A processional cross is only a distraction in this case and is not carried.

Since “Architecture directs Liturgy,” two examples are suggested.

For the larger church building with a wide center aisle, the procession may look like this:

- Vergers**
- Thurifer**
- Torch Bearers**
- Book Bearer**
- Gospeller**

Once the party reaches the designated location for the reading, the torches stand on either side of the Gospel Book illuminating it. The gospeller censes the Gospel Book. The thurifer receives back the thurible and steps out of the way as does the vergers. The gospeller faces the congregation for the reading. Upon completion, the gospeller gives the Gospel Book back to the book bearer. The gospel party returns to the chancel in the same order.

For the smaller church building with a narrow center aisle, the procession may look like this:

- Torch Bearers**
- Book Bearer (optional)**
- Gospeller**

The torches stand on either side of the Gospel Book. The gospeller faces the congregation for the reading. Upon completion, the gospeller hands the Gospel Book back to the book bearer who in turn leads the torches and the gospeller back to the chancel. If no book bearer, the gospeller leads the torches.

**The Offertory Procession:**

As with the gospel procession, the offertory procession varies by local custom or by the size of the church building.

For the larger church building, the procession from the narthex to the chancel may look like this:

- Vergers**
- Thurifer**
- Crucifer**
- Torch Bearers**
- Oblation Bearers**
- The Ushers**

For the smaller church building, the procession from the narthex to the chancel may look like this:

### **Oblation Bearers**

#### **The Ushers**

If additional Gifts of the People (such as food or special gifts) are to be presented at the Altar, the gift bearers process behind the oblation bearers and in front of the ushers.

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

The retiring procession is led by the vergers and is normally in the same sequence as the entering procession. The start of the retiring procession is signaled by the vergers and varies by parish. Some parishes will announce The Dismissal from the altar. If this is the case, the procession will begin with the first note or the start of the first verse of the retiring hymn.

If the parish custom is to proclaim The Dismissal from the rear of the nave, the procession will begin following the Blessing with the first note or the start of the first verse of the retiring hymn. In this case, the vergers are to hold the procession party quietly in the narthex until the Dismissal is pronounced. All participants are then free to attend to their other tasks or remain to greet the members of the congregation.

### **Service Enrichments:**

#### **A Bishop's Visitation:**

The bishop's pastoral visitation to a parish or worshiping community becomes a special occasion in the life of the church. There is a companion Customary titled "Verger Standard Customary for a Bishop's Visit" available from the Mark Emory Graham Chapter (Atlanta) of the Vergers' Guild at this Web Site:

[https://vergers.episcopatlanta.org/Content/Mark\\_Emory\\_Graham\\_Chapter.asp](https://vergers.episcopatlanta.org/Content/Mark_Emory_Graham_Chapter.asp)

#### **Multiple Vergers in a Procession:**

Having multiple vergers serving in a liturgy is particularly useful for a bishop's visitation. Multiple vergers each with a verge may be used to set off different sections of a lengthy procession. Dividing points would be the choir, the altar ministers, any special groups (such as baptismal candidates or confirmands or scouts on scout Sunday), the Gospel Book and the bishop and assisting deacons.

When several vergers are used at a liturgy, the vergers leading the entering procession and the retiring procession may carry a beadle according to local custom. The other vergers in the procession will use a verge. A verge is used by the vergers when leading people within the liturgy, such as the gospel procession or the offertory procession.

#### **Deacon:**

If a parish is so blessed to have a deacon serve at the liturgy, the vergers are to accommodate her/him by placing them in the appropriate processions. The deacon's primary duties at the liturgy are to read the Gospel, call to confession, bidding for the Prayers of the People and set the table for communion and clean up after communion and pronounce the Dismissal. She/he may carry the Gospel Book or follow the book bearer in the entering, gospel and retiring processions, whichever is the parish custom. When a bishop visits, the deacon will assume normal liturgical responsibilities. The vergers will be available to assist the deacon as requested.

#### **Thurifer:**

A thurifer is utilized in about one third of the parishes in the Diocese of Atlanta. And of these, most use the thurifer only for major feasts or special liturgies. Only a few parishes employ the thurifer for weekly liturgies. The role of the thurifer is included in this Verger Standard Customary. However, if no thurifer is used, it is easy to delete this position from the Customary.

**Banners:**

Generally banners are deployed for major feasts or for visits by a bishop. Some parishes process their own church banner in every service. This Customary can easily be modified to accommodate local banner customs.

**Vestments:**

The vergers's basic vestment is a simple black cassock with a cincture. This should be worn whenever the vergers is on duty so he/she may be readily identified by those who may need assistance.

When the service is to start, the vergers typically dons a sleeveless chimere. The colors of the chimere vary widely among parishes. Typically the colors for the chimere are selected by the vergers in the parish with final approval of the rector. The vergers carries a verge or beadle when leading all processions, large and small.

Additional information on vestments, verges and beadles including suggested vendors may be found on the Mark Emory Graham Chapter (Atlanta) of the Vergers' Guild at this Web Site:

<https://vergers.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/Vestments.asp>

Or, if you wish, please visit the National Vergers' Guild Web Site:

<http://www.vergers.org>

**Vergers Community:**

A new vergers may have many unanswered questions about how to do certain things that are not covered in this Customary to the detail required. Or one may seek guidance on which type of chimere to wear or what colors to choose. The new vergers will be well served by joining and becoming an active member of the Mark Emory Graham Chapter of the Vergers' Guild.

The chapter meets in Assembly a minimum of twice a year, normally winter and summer. The meetings are hosted by various parishes throughout the Diocese of Atlanta. The variety of locations enables the vergers to participate in the breadth and depth of the Diocese. Usually one of our bishops celebrates Eucharist and participates in a dialog session with the vergers. Vergers have an opportunity to meet and discuss their respective roles with fellow vergers from large and small parishes throughout the Diocese.

One unique aspect of the Assembly is to see the wide variety of vergers vestments, verges and beadles used in the Diocese. There is an excellent chance to see the type of vestments that will ideally fit your parish.

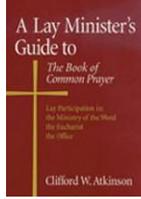
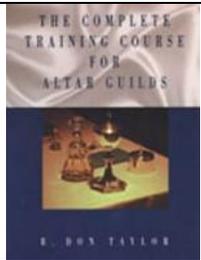
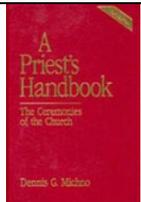
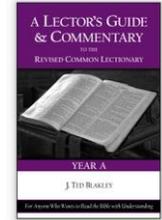
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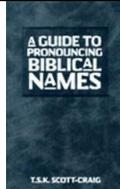
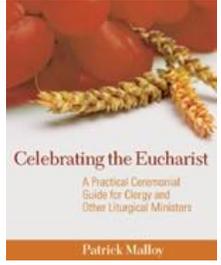
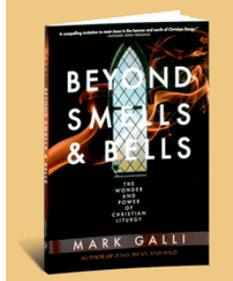
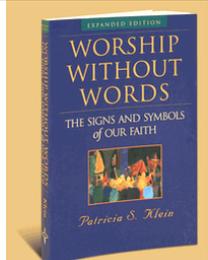
The Mark Emory Graham Chapter of the Vergers' Guild has resources available to provide new vergers training at their home parish. This training is particularly useful for parishes that are contemplating starting a Vergers Ministry or are in the early stages of a Vergers Ministry. New vergers may attend a MEG Chapter Assembly and request help from the officers of the Chapter, or contact the Chair of the Chapter whose e-mail and contact information is posted on the Web Site below:

[https://vergers.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/Contact\\_Us\\_14.asp](https://vergers.episcopalatlanta.org/Content/Contact_Us_14.asp)

## Vergers Resources:

It is recommended that all vergers newly installed or “old timers” become familiar with these resources. These books are available from the Atlanta Cathedral Bookstore or the National Vergers’ Guild Web Site or through your favorite book seller.

PICTURE	TITLE	AUTHOR
	<p><i>A Lay Minister’s Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: Lay Participation in the Ministry of the Word, the Eucharist and the Office</i></p> <p>86 pages</p>	<p>Clifford W. Atkinson</p>
	<p><i>A Manual for Acolytes: Duties of the Server at Liturgical Celebrations</i></p> <p>95 pages \$ Includes a Glossary</p>	<p>Dennis G Michno</p>
	<p><i>Complete Training Course for Altar Guilds</i></p> <p>256 pages Includes Glossary, Illustrations</p>	<p>B. Don Taylor</p>
	<p><i>A Priest’s Handbook: Ceremonies of the Church 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition</i></p> <p>299 pages</p>	<p>Dennis G. Michno</p>
	<p><i>A Lector’s Guide &amp; Commentary to the Revised Common Lectionary: For Anyone Who Wants to Read the Bible with Understanding</i> Year A</p> <p>450 pages</p> <p>Includes Pronunciation Guide and Key, Scripture Index and Suggestions for Reading Aloud</p>	<p>J. Ted Blakley</p>

	<p><i>A Guide to Pronouncing Biblical Names</i></p> <p>112 pages</p>	<p>T.S.K. Scott-Craig</p>
	<p><i>Celebrating the Eucharist: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers</i></p> <p>218 pages Recommended by our Bishop and used as a guide for this Customary</p>	<p>Patrick Malloy</p>
	<p><i>Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy</i></p> <p>142 pages Interesting background reading.</p>	<p>Mark Galli</p>
	<p><i>Worship Without Words: The Signs and Symbols of Our Faith</i></p> <p>255 pages Great resource for signs, symbols, traditions even architecture.</p>	<p>Patricia S. Klein</p>