

The OLMC Guide to Handling Incense

By Nathan Tran

Important Notes:

- To avoid confusion about directions on the altar, the **BOOK** side of the altar is the **LEFT** side of the altar when facing the congregation on the altar, and the **CROSS** side of the altar is the **RIGHT** side of the altar when facing the congregation on the altar.
- This is the **THURIBLE**, where the charcoal is placed. Be cautious as it is hot!



- The **INCENSE BOAT** is where the incense is stored. Do not put any incense from the boat into the **THURIBLE** by yourself, unless instructed to do so.



- The **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** will generally be located on the **BOOK/LEFT** side of the altar, behind the altar, on a stand.
- Always place the thurible and boat on the stand in the back when it is not being used.
- Generally speaking, the lead for a Mass should be the one to handle the incense.
- Remember that this guide **IS NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR ACTUAL TRAINING!** You must receive in-person training by the lead altar server to be able to use handle the incense!

General Instructions for Handing the Incense to Father:

- These instructions apply to all altar servers.
- Hold the thurible in your **LEFT** hand and the incense boat in your **RIGHT** hand.
- When handing the incense to the presiding Father, give the **INCENSE BOAT** to Father and lift the **THURIBLE** up so that Father can put the incense in the thurible easier.
- When Father is done placing the incense in the thurible, close the **THURIBLE** for him as he blesses it.
- The Father will then hand the **INCENSE BOAT** back to you. Remember to bow when receiving the **INCENSE BOAT** or the **THURIBLE** or generally any item from Father.

For Altar Servers (Weekend Masses):

- All altar servers should receive basic incense training by the lead altar server before being able to handle the incense.
- Only people who have been received permission from the lead altar server are allowed to handle the incense.
- There are potentially 4 times that the incense is used:
 1. After the opening procession: After putting the cross in the stand, go around the back of the altar and pick up the thurible and the boat. Wait on the **BOOK** side of the altar next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then return to your seat.
 - a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then hand the **THURIBLE** to you. Do everything the same as instructed above.
 2. Before the Gospel: When the choir starts singing "Alleluia," go back and get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT**. Go stand to the **RIGHT** of the Father's chair and hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, wait behind the **LEFT** altar candle as if you had a candle yourself. When Father moves towards the ambo with the Gospel, move with him to the ambo and stand directly behind him. After he presents the Gospel ("The Gospel according to..."), he will turn around to receive the **THURIBLE** from you. Hand the **THURIBLE** to him and he will incense the Gospel. He will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you and you bow to him. Return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** back to the stand and return to your seat.

- a. If Deacon is present, everything is the same as normal, but note that Deacon will carry the Gospel and incense the Gospel.
 - b. If there happens to be two altar server candle holders, stand behind the candle holder on the **LEFT** side when waiting for Father to head to the ambo.
 - c. Please remind Father or Deacon that they have to incense the Gospel if they forget. If they begin reading from the Gospel without incensing, please whisper to them to do so.
 - d. Father Patrick does **NOT** incense the Gospel as of the writing of this guide. If he is the only priest present at Mass, skip this step for incense.
3. After the Presentation of the Gifts: **AFTER** the water and wine have been returned to the back of the altar, but **BEFORE** the washing of his hands, get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and wait next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then get the pitcher, towel, and bowl from the back of the altar to wash Father's hands.
- a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then incense Father and the congregation before handing the **THURIBLE** to you. Do everything the same as instructed above.

4. During the Consecration: After the first verse of the Sanctus (the second time you hear “Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna...”) get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and kneel in front of the altar next to Deacon. Hand the **THURIBLE** to deacon and hold the **INCENSE BOAT** in your hands so that Deacon can get the incense from the boat. After the Consecration is complete (and when Father proclaims “The Mystery of Faith”), Deacon will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you. Bow your head and return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then return to the kneelers on the **LEFT/BOOK (RIGHT** now that you are **FACING** the altar) side of the altar like usual.
 - a. If Deacon is **NOT** present, skip this step.

For Adult Altar Servers (Weekday and Saturday Morning Masses):

- All adult altar servers should receive basic incense training by the lead altar server before being able to handle the incense.
- Only people who have been received permission from the Pastor are allowed to handle the incense.
- Adult altar servers should ideally sit on the pews on the in front at the **RIGHT** of the church, located on the **LEFT** when facing the congregation.
- Good practice for the weekday Masses is to check in with the presiding Father before Mass to see when they want to use incense. This guide describes every **POSSIBLE** instance incense might be used, but it may change from Father to Father and from Mass to Mass.
- There are potentially 5 times that the incense is used:
 1. After the opening procession: Before Mass starts, go around the back of the altar and pick up the **THURIBLE** and the **INCENSE BOAT**. Wait behind the altar so that you are just peeking out from behind the wooden wall. When Father goes to kiss or bow before the altar, approach him and wait next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then return to the pews.
 - a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then hand the **THURIBLE** to you. Do everything the same as instructed above.

2. Before the Gospel: When the Responsorial Psalm or Second Reading has concluded, go back and get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT**. Go stand to the **LEFT** of the Father's chair and hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, wait behind the **LEFT** altar candle. When Father moves towards the ambo with the Gospel, move with him to the ambo and stand directly behind him. After he presents the Gospel ("The Gospel according to..."), he will turn around to receive the **THURIBLE** from you. Hand the **THURIBLE** to him and he will incense the Gospel. He will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you and you bow to him. Return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** back to the stand and return to the pews.
 - a. If Deacon is present, everything is the same as normal, but note that Deacon will carry the Gospel and incense the Gospel.
 - b. Please remind Father or Deacon that they have to incense the Gospel if they forget. If they begin reading from the Gospel without incensing, please whisper to them to do so.
 - c. Father Patrick does **NOT** incense the Gospel as of the writing of this guide. If he is the only priest present at Mass, skip this step for incense.
3. After the Presentation of the Gifts: **AFTER** the water and wine have been returned to the back of the altar, but **BEFORE** the washing of his hands, get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and wait next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then get the pitcher, towel, and bowl from the back of the altar to wash Father's hands.
 - a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then hand the **THURIBLE** to you. Do everything the same as instructed above.

4. During the Consecration: After the first verse of the Sanctus (the second time you hear “Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna...”) get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and kneel in front of the altar next to Deacon. Hand the **THURIBLE** to deacon and hold the **INCENSE BOAT** in your hands so that Deacon can get the incense from the boat. After the Consecration is complete (and when Father proclaims “The Mystery of Faith”), Deacon will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you. Bow your head and return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then return to the pews.
 - a. If Deacon is **NOT** present (which for weekday Masses, is typically the case), skip this step.

5. Incensing the Coffin/Urn: After the last eulogy has started, get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and wait behind the altar so that you are just peeking out from behind the wooden wall. After the last eulogy is concluded, stand to the **LEFT** of the Father’s chair and hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and follow him to the coffin/urn and he will incense it. Wait some steps back so he can incense the coffin/urn. After he is finished, he will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you. Bow your head and return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then return to the pews.
 - a. A reminder that this step is for funerals **ONLY**.
 - b. Check in before Mass to see how many eulogies there will be and who will preforming the last one, so that you are ready beforehand.
 - c. Father Patrick does **NOT** incense urns with incense, so skip this step if he is the presiding priest and an urn is present.

For Acolytes (Specially Designated Altar Servers):

- The term acolyte refers to a specific position and set of duties during Mass. For our purposes however, acolyte refers to altar servers who are allowed to perform extraordinary functions with the incense.
- All acolytes should receive **EXTENSIVE** incense training by the lead altar server before being labeled an acolyte.
- Only people who have been received permission from the lead altar server **AND** pastor are allowed to be acolytes. Please ask the lead altar server if you would like to become an acolyte.
- There are potentially 4 times that the incense is used for acolytes:
 1. After the opening procession: After putting the cross in the stand, go around the back of the altar and pick up the thurible and the boat. Wait on the **BOOK** side of the altar next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then return to your seat.
 - a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then hand the **THURIBLE** to you. Do everything the same as instructed above.
 2. Before the Gospel: When the choir starts singing "Alleluia," go back and get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT**. Go stand to the **RIGHT** of the Father's chair and hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, wait behind the **LEFT** altar candle as if you had a candle yourself. When Father moves towards the ambo with the Gospel, move with him to the ambo and stand

directly behind him. After he presents the Gospel ("The Gospel according to..."), he will turn around to receive the **THURIBLE** from you. Hand the **THURIBLE** to him and he will incense the Gospel. He will hand the **THURIBLE** back to you and you bow to him. Return the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** back to the stand and return to your seat.

- a. If Deacon is present, everything is the same as normal, but note that Deacon will carry the Gospel and incense the Gospel.
 - b. If there happens to be two altar server candle holders, stand behind the candle holder on the **LEFT** side when waiting for Father to head to the ambo.
 - c. Please remind Father or Deacon that they have to incense the Gospel if they forget. If they begin reading from the Gospel without incensing, please whisper to them to do so.
 - d. Father Patrick does **NOT** incense the Gospel as of the writing of this guide. If he is the only priest present at Mass, skip this step for incense.
3. After the Presentation of the Gifts: **AFTER** the water and wine have been returned to the back of the altar, but **BEFORE** the washing of his hands, get the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** from the stand and wait next to the priest on his **LEFT** side. When he turns to you, hand him the incense as described in the general instructions. After you receive the **INCENSE BOAT** from Father, hand him the **THURIBLE** and return the **INCENSE BOAT** to the stand. Then wait **BEHIND** Father's chair for him to finish incensing the altar. He will **BOW** to the altar **ON** the altar when he is finished. Step forward to receive the **THURIBLE** from Father, bow, and prepare to incense Father. Incense him directly ahead three times, turn slightly to the **LEFT** and incense him three times, then turn to the **RIGHT** slightly and incense him three times. Bow to Father when you are finished. Then move to the center of the steps, **STAYING ON** the altar. Bow to the congregation and incense the congregation in the same way you did to Father (3 x 3 times). Bow to the congregation when you are finished. Then return the **THURIBLE** to the stand and get the pitcher, towel, and bowl from the back of the altar to wash Father's hands.

- a. If Deacon is present, Father will hand the **THURIBLE** to Deacon instead when finished, who will then incense Father and the congregation before handing the **THURIBLE** to you. After Deacon hands the **THURIBLE** to you, return it to the stand and do everything else as instructed.
4. During the Consecration: After the first verse of the Sanctus (after the first time you hear “Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna...”) go to the back of the altar and place a **SMALL** amount of incense in the **THURIBLE**. Then get the **THURIBLE** from the stand and kneel in front of the altar. After the Institution narrative (“Take this all of you and eat of it: for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.” aka when you would normally ring the bells) incense the altar **WHILE KNEELING** in the same way you incensed Father (three times in the center, three to the left, and three to the right). Bow when Father bows to the altar. Repeat this process again after Father performs the Institution narrative for the wine (“Take this, all of you, and drink from it...”). After the Consecration is complete (and when Father proclaims “The Mystery of Faith”), return the **THURIBLE** to the stand. Then return to the kneelers on the **LEFT/BOOK (RIGHT** now that you are **FACING** the altar) side of the altar like as usual.
 - a. When Father Patrick is the priest celebrating Mass, **DON’T** add any incense on the altar and instead bring both the **THURIBLE** and **INCENSE BOAT** with you to kneel before the altar. During the Epiclesis (when the bells are normally wrung once), add incense to the **THURIBLE**. Then incense during the Consecration as normal. When returning the **THURIBLE** to the stand, remember to bring the **INCENSE BOAT** back with you as well.
 - b. If Deacon is present, do this step as instructed for normal altar servers.
 - c. Check in with the priest before Mass to see if he wants to do this step at all, because some (like Father Mario) may choose to omit this step entirely.