

# A GUIDE TO THE ALTAR ASSISTANTS



**Dr. Kurlakose Corepiscopa Moolayil**

Mor Adai Study Center



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**A Guide to the Altar Assistants**  
**with**  
**Interpretations of the Signs and Symbols**

**Dr. Kuriakose Corepiſcopa Moolayil**

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**A Guide to the Altar Assistants**  
(Indebted to the '*Susrushaka Sahai*' by  
the late Kadavil Dr. Poulose Mor Athanasius, Metropolitan)

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## Preface

It is a long cherished dream to have a book like this. When I started my ministry I experienced the lack of co-ordination among the Altar Assistants in all Churches as well as the varying practices and malpractices in different Churches. This is my humble attempt to rectify the above defect and to make a co-ordination among the Altar Assistants in various Churches.

This book came into this form only because of the blessings, support and enthusiasm of our beloved Archbishop Mor Theethose Yeldo. He was kind enough to go through the draft and made many valuable suggestions. Nevertheless he is not responsible for the views and ideas expressed here.

The general directions given in this book are mainly from the '*Susrushaka Sahai*' by the late Kadavil Dr. Poulouse Mor Athanasius Metropolitan.

I dedicate this booklet for the Glory of God in memory of the late Metropolitan and for the benefit of all the Altar Assistants in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

I am indebted to Mr. Babu Jacob for typing from my illegible handwriting. He did this work during the hard times in his life with his sick mother Hospitalized. I express my thanks.

I also record my thanks to all the Director Board Members of 'Mor Adai Study Centre', without their support I cannot do anything of this sort. May God bless this ministry.

In the service of Our Lord

Cheeranchira  
14 July 2005

**Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil**  
*Executive Director, Mor Adai Study Center*



**MALANKARA ARCHDIOCESE**  
**OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA**  
(Under the Holy Apostolic Throne of Antioch & All the East)

**By the Grace of God**  
Archbishop Mor Theethose Yeldho

No. 46/05



June 25, 2005

**FORWARD**

'Guide to Altar Assistants' is a book which was in my dream for a long time. Since the day I came to the United States of America, I have been thinking of such a guide for our people in the diaspora such as America, Canada and Europe. I have visited all our parishes in the U.S.A. & Canada, and am of the feeling that there should be some unified guideline at least in the North American Archdiocese. As you know, there are slight differences in the Church practices in the worship services, for the people from different parts of our Church in India. And there is no unified training program for the altar assistants in India either.

So I was thinking of doing something in this connection. When I got the service of Very Rev. Moolayil in our Archdiocese, I decided to ask him to take the initiative to bring up something which would be beneficial to the kids and youth who are serving in Holy Altar. Most of the Altar Assistants - Altar boys - do not know what they are doing or why. The only reason for them to do something in a particular way is that they have been told so. This book would definitely help them in serving our Lord with fear and dedication.

The main reference to this guide is the book '*Shushrooshaka Sahai*' written in this respect by Late Lamented Dr. Kadavil Paulose Mor Athanasius Metropolitan, who was my mentor and spiritual father from my school-days. It is he who trained me to serve in the Holy Altar through personal instructions and demonstrations - how to read, how to chant, how to Cense and

how to behave in the Holy Altar. After years of training, I was ordained at the age of 12 and became his Secretary thereafter.

Dr. Kadavil Athanasius Thirumeni was a well known scholar, writer, spiritual father and a speaker. Unfortunately our Church, which was caught up by the litigations of the time, couldn't make use of his talent and scholarship in a better way. This is also a humble effort to remind our people of the innumerable contributions of my spiritual father - Mor Athanasius Thirumeni of blessed memory.

Kadavil Thirumeni was a man of practical wisdom. He has given so many practical tips in the original book, which are omitted in this guide because of the irrelevance in a country like America. I have gone through the content of this guide, and found it a very useful one. And I have incorporated some instructions from the guidelines given by Late Lamented Metropolitan Mor Athanasius Yeshu Samuel of USA & Canada.

I have great joy in forwarding this guide, which is almost a translation of the '*Shushrooshaka Sahai*' for which I had a chance to help the author in its publication in different ways. I hope and pray that this booklet will help many of our fellow servants in the Altar who are born and brought up in the English-speaking countries.

I appreciate Very Rev. Kuriakose Moolayil Corepiscopos for this commendable work and the footnotes he has added to help the readers. I am also grateful to Mr. Babu Jacob Nadayil for his hard work in speeding up the process of publishing this book.

I encourage all our Clergy, Deacons and the Altar Assistants to get a copy of this guide, follow the guidelines and keep it for your reference in future.

May God bless you,



+ Archbishop Mor Theethose Yeldho  
Patriarchal Vicar

## **Mor Adai Study Centre**

Mor Adai Study Centre is a voluntary organization constituted in the Syrian Orthodox Church to promote humane and literary activities in the Church. We have published about 15 books in English and Malayalam since the establishment in 2001. We are happy that our books are being counted as most beneficial to the Church and its readers. We are indebted to the Director Board Members and the Book Club Members who are promoting us in this venture.

Director Board is constituted by those members who volunteer to support this project by contributing \$ 250.00 (Rs. 10,000/-) or above. They will assist the Executive Directors for the welfare and growth of MASC. They will be given copies of all the books published anywhere in the world free of cost and mailing charges and they will form the General Body of the MASC. Their suggestions and decisions will be the directives for the future development of the MASC.

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*Requesting co-operation and encouragement.*

*In the service of our Lord,*

**Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil**  
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**Dedicated to the  
blessed memory of the  
late Kadavil Dr. Poullose Mor Athanasius  
Metropolitan**

# A GUIDE TO THE ALTAR ASSISTANTS<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Holy Altar is designated as the 'holiest of the holies'. It is the Place where the Holy Sacrament of Eucharist is offered. Every Altar Assistant is strongly directed to learn the high importance, relevance, signs and symbols of the Church, Altar and other equipments of the Holy Eucharist. There are numerous books that deal with this in detail<sup>2</sup>. A very brief introduction to the signs and symbols is attached as Part II of this book. Altar Assistants are expected to complete<sup>3</sup> the midnight prayers<sup>4</sup> at

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- 1 In the Syrian Orthodox tradition there is no provision for Altar Assistants who are not ordained. They are all ordained Deacons of various ranks.
  - 2
    1. *Araadhana Sahaayi* - Mr. K.A.Jacob, Kumarakam, Kottayam
    2. *The Eucharist Service of the Jacobite Syrian Christians* – H.G.Dr.Paulose Mor Athanasius Kadavil, Mor Adai Study Centre, (2002)
    3. *The Queen of Sacraments* – Rev.Dr.Mani Rajan, Seminary Publications, Mulanthuruthy, St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church, LA,
    4. *Yaukaristiya* – Very Rev.Joseph Corepiscopo Pulickaparampil
    5. *Jeevante Appam* – Very Rev.Dr.Kuriakose Corepiscopo Moolayil, Mor Adai Study Centre, (2005)
  - 3 When the priests are staying in the church itself, they along with deacons shall complete the night prayers in the church itself before day break. Even the married priests were also staying in the Church itself as part of preparation and convenience. But now this is seldom practised.
  - 4 'The Book of Common Prayers' are available in English and Malayalam Mor Adai Study Centre. The prayers for Sundays and festival days are known generally as 'Penketho Prayers' and are available in syriac and parts of them are published in Malayalam. An English edition, rather a free translation, is made by Bede Griffith of *Kurisumala Ashram*.

home and the morning prayers<sup>5</sup> before they enter into the Holy Sanctuary. While entering the Sanctuary they are to say the prescribed prayers in the order given below. It is better to memorize these prayers for easy use. Anyone who is not dedicated to the full sense of these prayers are not worthy of entering the Sanctuary.

*(Everyone entering the Church, shall make the sign of the cross and pray)*

**In reverence will I enter Thy house, and offer my vows to Thee.**

*(While entering Sanctuary, the Deacon/Altar assistant shall pray)*

**Into the Sanctuary of God I come, even to the God who gives joy to my childhood.**

*(Proceeding to the Altar and bowing before it and they pray)*

**Into Thy house have I entered O God, and before Thy throne have I worshipped, O Heavenly King, forgive all the sins that I have committed against Thee.**

*(Going around the altar and kissing its corners and they pray)*

**Bind Thou, O Lord, our assemblies with chains, to the corners of Thy Sanctuary. Thou art my God, I will give thanks to Thee. Thou art my God, I will glorify Thee.**

*(While lighting the candles he shall sing)*

*For the North Side: “By Thy light we see the light...*

*For the South Side: “Thou who dwellest in the light.*

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5. A book of Canonical Prayers arranged for the days of a week is also available in Syriac and Malayalam. In the churches of Malankara the translation of the Wednesday prayers are used as the Sunday Prayers. English and Malayalam translation in its original Syriac tune is now available in print. (For English text contact *Mor Adai Study Centre*)

*(While putting on the surplice - kuppayam- they pray)*

Clothe me, O Lord God, with an incorruptible surplice by the power of the Holy Spirit. O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, grant us that by pure and upright lives, we may be guided in true faith, all the days of our lives, now and always, forever. Amen.

*(While wearing the stole- Oororo , the Rev. Deacon prays)*

Grid me with power in battle and bring under my subjection, them that rise up against me.

## 1. Deacons

A full deacon is the rightful person to assist the priest in the Holy Eucharist. Different ranks among the deacons are specifically assigned with particular duties. The full deacon is the one who is ordained to the sixth rank of the *deaconate* (known in Syriac as *Mshamshono* and in Malayalam as *Shemmassan*).

The Malankara tradition is that all ranks above the *Korooyo of the deaconate* are called as *Semmasans*. We don't have many deacons of the full rank since they are ordained to this rank just as a step to the priestly ordination, which is the seventh. So their ranks and definite roles are not identified in church services. Moreover our **Altar Assistants** mostly act the roles of the *deaconate*.

The ranks of the *deaconate* are shown below:

1. *Olmoyo* - The layman or the faithful
2. *Maudyono* - Confessor of the faith and a Witness to the Lord
3. *Msamrono* - Singer
4. *Korooyo* - Reader
5. *Youfadyakno* - Watcher (Sub-deacon)

The Sub-deacon is expected to take care of attendance at the sharing of the Eucharist. He has to make sure that only the baptized enters the Church from the time the Nicene Creed is proclaimed until the receiving of the Eucharist. In olden times those who are preparing for baptism also came to the church to hear the word of God, Sermon and are expected to leave at the



time of the proclamation of the deacon to join the affirmation of the faith as declared in the Nicene Creed. *Youfadyakno* has the duty to keep the order and discipline inside the Church.

#### 6. ***Msamsono*** - Deacon: the one who serves

He is particularly ordained and deputed to serve at the altar by taking the Censer for the priest. It is the priest who is expected to offer the incense as we see from the Old Testament times. But the deacon is performing this **for** the priest. He has to do this only with his blessing and permission. That is why the frankincense is always put in the Censer by the priest and the deacon kisses the hands of the priest before he waves the Censer.

There is a post with high honor and duties among the *Msamsonoe* known as the ***Archdeacon***. In our liturgy his title is mentioned . He has an eminent role in the consecration liturgies and is expected to be the teacher of the lower orders. He usually guides and leads them in prayers and allot responsibilities for them. This specific rank is also not in vogue in the Malankara Church.

## 2. **Kaseeso**

The priest is the seventh rank and is the duly appointed one to administer the Holy Sacraments.

The corepiscopos is consecrated from among the priests with specific charge of regional administration or other responsibilities. This is the highest rank that a married person can be elevated. Now this rank is confined as merely an honor only with privileges of ‘first among the priests’ and are given chain with cross and specific vestment decorations.

## 3. **Episcopos**

This literally means ‘***the one who oversees***’. He is the spiritual over ruler of the church.

The episcopate has different ranks. The highest and the supreme is *the Patriarch*, who is the 'father of the fathers'. Next to him is *the Catholicose* or the 'head of the division'. The word meaning is 'the General Head'. This title has another name with equal rights and privileges, the '*Mafriyono*', meaning the 'one who multiplies or generates'. This second terminology was given to the post of the Catholicose of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Persia. When the Catholicose in Persia and his successors joined the *Nestorian* faith in the 5th century, the Syrian Orthodox Church had to abdicate this title. The political situation prevented the church to use that name (Catholicose) for the person appointed to that vacancy and was named the Mafriyono. The title Catholicose<sup>6</sup> is now used in India.

The dioceses under the Patriarchate and the Catholicate is administered by *the Metropolitan*s, the Archbishops. The term denotes the bishops of the Metropolis, the cities. Under them there are *Episcopates* with *Episcopos* or bishops.

#### 4. Altar Assitants

In the Syrian Orthodox Church outside Malankara we see only ordained deacons as the Altar Assistants. They are serving for the life term and many of them do not intend to become

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6. In Kerala there are 3 persons with the title 'Catholicose'.

- a. The Catholicose of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the legitimate lineage of the Catholicose / Maphrianate of the ancient Syrian Church. He is H. B. Basalios Thomas I. He is the second in rank to the Patriarch of Antioch and holds the post as envisaged by the council of Nicea and in the footsteps of famous Maphrians of the East like that of Mor Gregoriose Bar Ebroyo.
- b. The Catholicose of the independent Orthodox faction. He is in the lineage of the Catholicate established by the illegal act of the deposed Patriarch Mor Abdul Messiah in 1912. This Catholicate came into the legitimate lineage in 1958 and 1964. But they again broke away from the communion in 1975.
- c. Catholicose of the Malankara Catholic Church (Uniats to Rome from Malankara Church) was created only in 2005. The juridity and validity of this Catholicose is yet to be explained by the Roman Catholic authorities.

priests, unless they go for priestly training. These deacons are taught Syriac language, Syriac hymns and prayers under a **Malfono**,<sup>7</sup> teacher. They are really an asset to the promotion of the faith of the church as well as the conduct of the worship. Our Malankara churches should also go back to the old tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church to train the Altar Assistants to this level of functioning.

The paid altar assistant is usually an employee of the church who is in charge of the general cleanliness and upkeep of the *Madbaho* (Sanctuary) and the church. He is expected to go to the church every day to ring **the bell** in the morning and evening. After the ringing of the bell he is expected to pray the prayer of the hour or at least the '*kaumo*' (beginning of the prayer + the Lord's prayer), if the priest is not present in the church. He is known as the 'sexton' or in Malayalam '*Kappyar*'. The Malayalam terminology is a stigma nowadays and it is preferred to call them as chief Altar Assistant or '*Pradhana Susrushakan*'. The other altar assistants are voluntary servants of the Lord. They are to be differentiated from the 'sexton' (*Kappyar*) or the '*Pradhana Susrushakan*'.

**The Church Bell:** Every day in the morning and the evening the Church bell has to be rung. The Church bell rings to remind the time of Prayers and to call the faithful to Church for Prayers or worship.

The bell rings also to announce the arrival of a Bishop or the demise of a bishop or even to announce a disaster. The mourning bell has a special long intervelled rythm of sorrow. The bell to announce a disaster is countless ringing without an intervell.

The daily ringing of the Church bell is with regulated number of 13 or 33. On Sundays and other days having the Holy

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7. *Malfono* or the teacher is known as '*Malpan*' in Malayalam. We reserve this title to the Syriac teacher and from it we derived the term '*Malankara Malpan*' the great teacher of Malankara.

Eucharist(*Qurbano*), the first bell should be before the morning prayers, second before the prayers of 3<sup>rd</sup> hour and third after the Old Testament readings.

**The Code of Dress & Conduct etc.** The Altar Assistants should wear the special white robe over the shirt and pants. The white robes shall be used only after proper blessing and sanctification by anyone above the rank of a priest. Anyone entering the holy Sanctuary should **always** wear this white robe beforehand and there should be provisions to keep it outside the Sanctuary. The specific prayers before wearing the robe should be recited and the sanctified robe shall only be worn after kissing in reverence. It is also the tradition of the church that the Altar Assistants shall wear a black belt over the white robe. We sing that we 'serve with loins girdled'. All those who are not ordained and having no '*Oororo*' shall have a belt. All ordained shall wear belts over the black robes under their white robes. This practice is not followed in many regions of Malankara Church. In the Middle Eastern parishes very rarely unordained Assistants serve at the altar. It is better to wash this robe themselves rather than give to laundries.

The Canon of the Church restricts the entry of remarried persons in the Sanctuary. Altar Assistants should complete all the prayers of the day up to the mid day prayers before assisting the priest at the altar. He shall not eat or drink anything from midnight till the end of the Holy Eucharist. The Canon advocates for abstinence from conjugation and all worldly thoughts during the night before and prepare himself by reading the Holy Bible and other devotional books.

**Entering the Sanctuary:** According to the Syrian Orthodox Church practices the Sanctuary of a church is to be directed to the East. The migrant Churches in the Persian Gulf, Europe and Americas cannot follow this practice but we have to remember this to understand many of the directions in the books of interpretations, referring East, West, North and South. Entering

the Sanctuary shall be only through the south side (right side). If at any time an Altar Assistant is compelled to go down to the nave he has to get down through the north side(left) and get back into the Sanctuary by the south side(right) only. When entering first time one shall stand at the step to the Sanctuary and recite the prescribed prayer,

***“Into the Sanctuary of God I come, to the God who gives joy to my childhood”,***

makes the sign of the cross<sup>8</sup> himself, kiss the side wall or the pillar and enter with due reverence. It is befitting to recite Psalms 51 before entering for the first time every day. Then proceed to kiss ***the Evangelion***<sup>9</sup> and then going around, kissing

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8. The signing of the cross oneself has to be with the thumb, forefinger and the middle finger held together to revere the Trinity and touch the forehead and to the chest denoting the descend of the Son to earth and then the front of the left shoulder to right shoulder. This is to remind us of the saving from left (sin) to the right (salvation)
  9. *The Evangelion Stand:* The position of *evangelion* table in the Syrian Orthodox Churches varies in different regions.

In many of the churches in Malankara *evangelion* table is placed at the right side (south side) of the holy Sanctuary all the time other than at the time of the reading of the Gospel. In the middle eastern and the related *diaspora* churches it is placed at the middle west end of the Sanctuary outside the veil at all times other than the public celebration of the holy Eucharist after reading of the Gospel. In some of our churches it is placed at the left side(north side) closer to the altar. This tradition is followed at the *Manjanikara* Monastery and *Karingachira* St.George Cathedral. During the holy week *Evangelion* table is placed below the Sanctuary and the Gospel is read from there. This difference of practices is on the basis of different interpretations by different teachers of the Church. The approach to the Sanctuary and Altar can be only through the Gospel and the Bible in general. This is the reason of keeping it at the center of the Sanctuary. This is also the reason why it is kept on the right side so that any one approaching the altar should approach it through the Gospel. Teachers also gave importance to the left side of the sanctuary. The prominence of the priority and protocol in the church tradition is given to the North (left). If a bishop/senior is present he has to stand on the left. So also the Thurifer (one who carries the censer) can give next priority while offering the incense to the Gospel, immediately after Altar without a straight crossing to the right side. Here the priority is Christ the person (Altar) and then the (logos- word) the Gospel. See also footnote No. 12.

the four corners of the Holy Altar beginning from the south-west side(right corner), reciting the following prayer:

***“Bind O Lord, our assemblies with chains, to the corners of Your Sanctuary, You are my God; I will give thanks to You. You are my God; I will glorify You”.***

All the Altar Assistants shall attend and serve at the altar with true piety and devotion. The Altar Assistants should receive Holy Eucharist on all possible days that they attend and the adult among them shall do the confession at least every forty days. The young ones shall receive the Holy Eucharist after receiving absolution from the priest. This should not become a ritual but always come prepared as per the direction of St.Paul in 1 Cor. 11:21-23. They shall not involve in any unholy acts and shall set a good example to all others. All Altar Assistants shall consider themselves as the ones set apart for the Lord’s Service.

The Altar Assistant shall not cross the altar in the front other than at the time of offering the incense. He shall go through the back of the altar when he is not holding the ***censer***. Similarly he shall not stand directly to the back of the priest when he is holding the censer. He has to stand only to the left half of the left (North) side of the altar. This is to give enough clearance to the celebrant to enable the participants to see him. The one who takes the censer shall read the first and sixth ***diaphthicoon*** (Diptychs), commonly known as ***Thubden***.<sup>10</sup> These are the prayers of intercession for the living (first three) and the departed (last three).

While reading the lections (Acts of Apostles or Epistles), the readers stand on the Sanctuary-step. Stepping down from the Sanctuary symbolizes the fact that the Apostles were sent by heavenly authority. The Altar Assistant who takes the censer has

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10. *Thubden* is the first Syriac word by which those prayers are begun, meaning 'Again (we)' The Syriac word *diaphthicon* is the Syriac derivation of 'diptych' the Greek word meaning a tablet. This refers to the tablet when the names to be remembered are written.

to read the epistle from St.Paul.<sup>11</sup> This was the direction from H.H.Ignatius Yakoob III Patriarch who stayed and taught at Manjanikara, Kerala. At the time of reading he shall give the censer and the candle to another Altar Assistant. The person who does take the censer shall assist from the beginning to the end of the Holy Eucharist. This duty shall not be handed over to others in between unless for a crucial reason. He is expected to stand at the side of the altar to do any assistance that may be needed for the priest during the entire time of the Holy Service even if he is not holding the censer. He shall not walk around, take rest or sit somewhere unless he is very much pressed by a real valid reason.

All Assistants in the Sanctuary have to be very keen and shall attend to the duties with high vigil and awe. They are representing the Angelic multitudes in heaven always **standing** in awe to the Most Holy. They have to stand in the Sanctuary either facing East or facing the celebrant. They are not expected to look around or backwards to the people or look to distract/attract the attention of the worshippers. They have to be keen and attentive to grasp any signals or nods from the celebrant and do accordingly. Do not compel the celebrant to talk or to give a verbal command or direction. They are also not expected to share directions by verbal commands among themselves. **Any talking, whispering or murmuring should be avoided during the time of worship.** Never stand lazy, easy or lean on anything inside the holy place. The Altar Assistants shall stand only with utmost care, attention and piety to all the actions of the celebration with an eye and ear to serve and assist the celebrant in the Eucharist service. The celebrant and the assistants shall function like different organs of one body. They have to bear in mind that they serve the Lord in the Eucharist service and also serving the celebrant as Lord's representative. One should not think: "I am assisting at the altar **only for** singing, reading or chanting". All assistants are expected to do

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11. This is the direction given by H. G. Dr. Kadavil Poullose Mor Athanasius Metropolitan in his book, '*Susrusha Sahai*'.

everything of these plus any other assistance that are necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist and also for keeping the Sanctuary, Altar and the church building neat and tidy. Never allow any item or decoration of the church to be shabby, out of place or untidy. Clean and keep anything and everything in its place without any fuss or show.

The Epistles are to be read by deacons or the elder ones or those who read legibly and clearly. (According to Late Metropolitan H.G.Dr.Paulose Mor Athanasius Kadavil, the Thurifer has to read the Epistle from St.Paul at the south side as mentioned above.) The prime intention of the reader of the epistle shall be to impart the content of the passage. It will be apt not to compromise legibility for tune.

All the Assistants inside the Sanctuary shall be beware of all the candles that are kept lighted. Whether the wax is overflowing, over-burning or the candles are upright. Check the air flow from the fan and keep it properly adjusted not to affect the flame of the candles or check whether it is placed properly for the use of the celebrant. Take care of the wind flow through the windows too. Nowadays the Assistants shall also check the function and proper distance, tone, howling and volume of the microphone used by the celebrant. Make sure all these are done while they are inside the Sanctuary before moving the veil for public celebration of the holy Eucharist. It is really awkward to see some priests have to adjust themselves the positions of the microphone to have proper audibility and resonance. All the Assistants in the '*Madbaho*' shall be vigilant to check the adding of charcoal to the censer or the cleanliness of the altar and the chancel, the removal of dirt and impurities in the frankincense and the proper placing of all the accessories used inside the '*Madbaho*'. They are collectively responsible for the neatness and cleanliness of the '*Madbaho*', especially in India where we can find cobweb and other dusty and untidy articles adding to the altar and '*Madbaho*' everyday. Anyone concentrating on the Holy Altar should feel the **Holiness and Piety**.



All things and everything that the celebrant need like that of the Bread, wine, water, Towel, etc. shall be made available for use at the appropriate time without asking or waiting. The time and occasions for offering frankincense in the censer shall have to be remembered and shall be ready at the correct position for the convenience of the priest. The upper lid of the censer shall be kept high enough to provide ample space in between and also the pot of frankincense has to be held closer to the censer so that by chance no part of the frankincense shall fall on the floor or the celebrant has to balance the spoon with his fingers for holding the frankincense. It will be ideal to keep the frankincense pot somewhere handy near the altar but **not on the Altar**. It shall be noted that the ringing sound of the censer shall not be heard when the Gospel is read. Take care that the charcoal in the censer shall be kept inflamed enough to fume the frankincense, don't think that all the charcoal should be kept inflamed red always. If at any time the flame glows high the upper lid of the censer shall be lowered to cover the flame. Take care always not to jerk the burning charcoal from the censer to fall down by hitting somewhere or injudicious tilting. If accidentally it happens never try to hush the glow with hands or legs but only remove it by a spoon or pour water over it first and then remove. If an unlit wax candle is handy for use it can be rolled over the burning that the melting of the wax may control the burning of the carpet.

Every time the priest put the frankincense the assistant shall kiss his right hand, except during the passion week. The assistant shall keep a hand kerchief or facial tissue paper to wipe his forehead if he perspires, before kissing the hands of the celebrant, to avoid sweat touching the celebrant and the altar. He shall not use the towel used by the celebrant that is usually placed on the altar. The assistants shall not wave the incense to the center of the altar, but only on the sides of it. Only the celebrant shall offer incense at the center (*Tablitho*) of the altar. The assistant shall wave thrice at the right(south-west) corner,

kiss there, wave again thrice and then pass to the left(north-west) corner of the altar to wave thrice before and after kissing. He shall wave from the right to left through the front side behind the celebrant and not absolutely necessary to go around the altar while offering incense. Turning to the Gospel Stand<sup>12</sup> he has to wave thrice and bow his head and again thrice before waving to the side altar, if any. Here take caution not to twist suddenly to the sides and again turning back to wave to the west. Waving to the side altars can be done along with the waving to the west to the people. When he turns to the west and wave to the centre of the church (passage) he shall again bow his head. He shall also bow to the baptismal font at the south side.

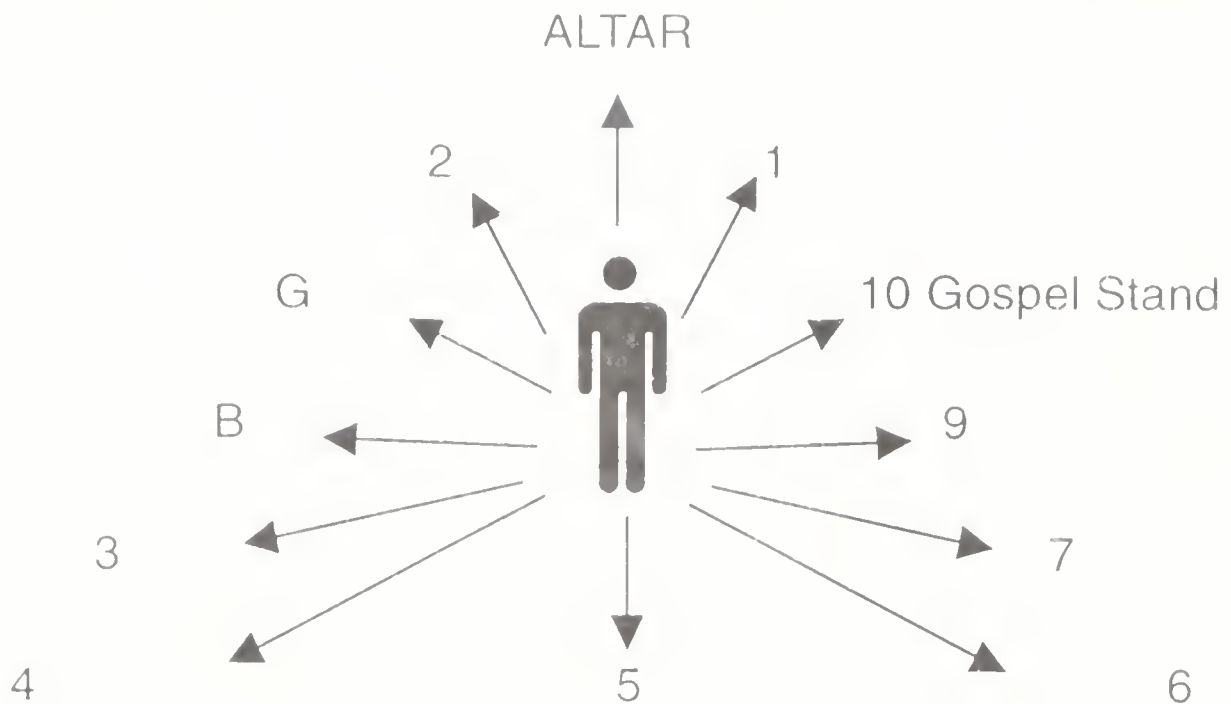
Never wave the censer with sudden turns, tilts, fluttering moves, circling high above shoulders, etc.

Those entering the '*Madbaho*' need to say the prayers before entering and kiss the altar corners only once a day at the time of the first entrance. All the other times do remember to enter in reverence and piety. Some teachers of the church said

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12. There are three traditions in the Syrian Orthodox Church on the position of placing the Gospel Stand (Evangelion Table) at times other than reading the Gospel.
- a. In the Middle East tradition the Gospel Stand is kept right at the middle of the '*Madbaho*', outside the curtain and the Gospel Book is kept decorated on the front in the standing posture so that anyone coming inside the church can kiss it and seek blessing. After reading the Gospel in the Eucharist the Gospel Stand is moved to the north side of the altar. It is placed back after '*Seloon Baslomo*' and the congregation kiss the Gospel before they disperse. This practice is seen only at Manjanikara in India. In this tradition there will be no 'table of prayers' at the center down the '*Madbaho*', instead there will be two tables leaving the central part free. The two groups of singers (*goodo*) stand at the two tables. They sing the prayers alternatively.
  - b. The general practice in India is to keep the Gospel Stand, with the Gospel book on top of it as/when the celebrant reads, be kept on the right (southern) side of the '*Madbaho*', NOT near the altar). H.G.Dr.Kadavil Mor Athanasius directs this way in his diagram given to the guidelines to the Altar Assistants.
  - c. In some churches it is placed on the left (north) side of the '*Madbaho*'. The gospel book is placed at the top.

to have 'prohibited' kissing the altar. But Mor Athanasius Kadavil says that it was only a precaution of the said teachers not to kiss with the sweaty forehead. It should not be considered as a total prohibition. There are prayers in the text of the Eucharist to be recited 'when kissing the corners of the altar'. If there is a prohibition, how can there be prayers for such occasions ?

When the Assistant goes to the western side inside the church, while the holy Creed is recited (and at other occasions) he is expected to wave thrice to the west (outside), towards the front of the church building. This is to revere the cross erected at the western front of the church. If there is no cross, no need to do that unless people are standing in the porch due to lack of space inside the church. This should be the order of waving of the censer at the time of prayers. During prayer time incensing and kissing of the altar at the south side alone is needed. If a bishop is present he is the one who puts frankincense in the censer always. At all times, after kissing the altar on both sides, the Thurifer has to wave the censer thrice towards the bishop, kiss his hand or cross and wave again three more times towards him. The Assistant shall always kiss the south-west corner of the altar and then the hand or cross of the bishop (if present) before keeping the censer back to its stand. If the bishop is present and standing at the north side the Assistant needs not wave the censer to the Gospel stand, if it is placed on the south side. He may do it when he turns around after waving to the west. At times of the Eucharist he may do like this, including the time of the reciting of the creed. Mor Athanasius Kadavil gives a chart as below:



I have added 'B' to denote bishop, if present, and 'G' to denote the Gospel Stand, if it is kept at the north side.

When he goes towards the west-end of the church while the Nicene Creed is read he shall wave the censer to the right towards the people on the north side and when returns wave to his right towards the people on the south side and then stand at the south entrance of the *'Madbaho'* with the censer chains holding together with both hands stretched a bit apart. After the celebrant stands up and gets on the *'Dargo'*<sup>13</sup> the assistant shall go (this time no kissing on the side wall or pillar) to the right hand side of the priest and turn exactly towards north facing the celebrant with stretched hands holding the chains of the censer loosely. At the time of prayer of peace the celebrant shall hold the middle part of the chain in between the stretched hands of the assistant and kiss the chains first and he holds for the assistant to kiss the hands of the celebrant who holds the chains. When he releases the chains the assistant shall kiss the altar, then the *capa* (phino or vestment of the celebrant)<sup>14</sup>, goes to the north side of the altar to kiss the corner, then the *capa* (phino)

13 *'Dargo'* is the step in front of the altar where the celebrant stands during the Eucharist. No one other than a bishop, priest or a full deacon(rank#6) shall step on *'Dargo'* for any reason.

14 Meaning of vestments can be read in part two of this book

again, turns to the fellow Assistants standing on the left side in the 'Madbaho', give them peace and then goes down to share the peace to all standing down in both sides of the nave, then goes to those standing south side in the 'Madbaho' and then releases the chain and take his position behind, little to the left of the celebrant. Whenever he moves out and returns to his position the assistant should **always** go there through the back and north side of the altar.

At one time in the Eucharist, when we remember the incarnation and second coming of the Lord the assistant shall stand at his position waving after taking incense from the celebrant. Here there is no turning around and waving. Whenever there is a procession the Assistant holding the censer must walk in the front of the celebrant waving, holding a lighted candle. At all times of the celebration of the cross<sup>15</sup> the assistant shall stand waving in front right side of the celebrant facing him **except** when the celebrant facing the east. When facing east he shall stand behind the celebrant as usual. Before the celebration of the cross he should approach the celebrant to put the frankincense.

After the consecration of the Holy Elements before the 'diptych' (*Thubden*) he shall wave three times at the south-west corner of the altar, kiss there and hold the censer with both hands, go to keep it on its stand and readily come back to read the 1<sup>st</sup> diptych (*Remember, whenever the assistant finishes waving the censer other than handing over to someone else like another priest he shall always wave thrice and kiss the altar as above*). He has to read the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of the diptychs. When the diptychs are read by others it is advisable that he shall stand near the celebrant on the left(north) side of the altar for any assistance that he may need. If he has to move from there for any reason another one among the other assistants should take this duty. It is better for all other assistants to stand in their

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15. *Havde Malake...* etc.

positions inside the 'Madbaho' watchfully listening while each diptych is read by the assigned ones. After reading the 6<sup>th</sup> diptych he has to kiss the altar on both sides, kiss the hands of any bishop/priest and then he shall give peace to all fellow assistants. Now he has to wash his hands, wipe properly and then go reverently to the 'Anaphora'<sup>16</sup> or the 'Soosefo' to fold it properly and keep it back under the 'M'kablono'<sup>17</sup>, the cover of the Chalice placed on the left hand side of the celebrant.

We have also traditions of the seeking of blessing and with permission from the celebrant kissing the *cappa* or the holy vestment, while assisting inside the sanctuary for the holy Eucharist. The vestment is kissed before reading the epistles or when keeping the censer back on the stand for reading diptych.

### Leavening of the Dough

The Altar Assistants should also learn to leaven the dough for making the bread for the Eucharist.

This has to be done before the evening prayers of the day prior to the day of celebration of the Holy Eucharist with clean hands and nails. The elements needed are:

1. Clean wheat flour
2. Fresh water
3. Salt
4. Leaven and
5. Oil.

Before mixing the flour take care that the elements and vessels needed are available handy and clean for use. Olden days a flat bronze dipper (*chattukam*) is used to place the bread over the flame to bake and another smaller one is used to detach the bread from the big one. Those who follow this method has

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16. *Anaphora* refer Part two

17. *M'kablono*, Chalice etc. see part two

to check (especially in Malankara) whether properly dried clean coconut shell charcoal is made and clay pot is available to inflame in the same. In Malankara the same coal is used in the censer too. To prepare this charcoal from coconut shall selected dry coconut shell has to be ablazed on a sunny day at a place on firm earth on a flat iron or tin sheet. When the shells are ablazed the flame has to be hushed by sprinkling water over it so as to turn the glowing shell pieces into black and all fire particles to be sprinkled with water. This has to be done with utmost care not to over burn, half-burn or soak with water. If over burnt it will turn to ashes and if half-burnt it will be smoky and will be unpleasant to use. Now in most places we use electric oven, gas flame or hot plates. Baking in the oven is much easy. There will be heat from up and to base so there is no need of a flat dipper. The bread can directly be placed on an aluminum foil and placed in a pre-heated oven for 10-15 minutes at 250 degree fahrenheit. In all the methods when the bread turns to a light brown color it is correctly baked.

The dough should be mixed thoroughly so that it will be properly leavened and then only it will be soft. The mixed dough has to be kept properly covered after and safe. Early next morning this dough has to be taken out washing and cleaning the hands. A small portion has to be kept apart as leaven for the next time. The rest of the dough has to be divided into equal parts as small balls using both hands, as to the number of the breads to be made.

Those dough balls are to be placed at the centre of the properly cleaned 'mould' and press it from the centre to the periphery to make the bread in a circular shape. Using the thumb finger a very little quantity of olive oil has to be smeared on top of the mould before placing the dough ball so that detaching the baked bread from the mould will be easy. This will also help to keep the shape of the 13 crosses embedded on the bread intact. With a pointed edge 5 holes are to be

pierced on the bread before baking. It reminds the five pierced wounds of our Lord on the cross. It will keep the bread from bulging or becoming shapeless by the water vapor produced during baking.

When an assistant is making the bread he has to be very careful in all actions of measuring, mixing and making the bread. When a person makes the bread for the first time, do it only under the supervision and guidance of an experienced assistant, a deacon or a priest. However, it is ideal for all altar assistants to learn the process of making the bread of the Holy Eucharist.



## Beware of the Dos and Do nots

1. When burning the coal in the censer never use a lighted oil wick. It produces an unpleasant smell. Never add wooden blazes from the fire places as it scatters ashes. Never use half-burnt coconut shell charcoal, it smokes and irritates. Never add wax drops from burning candles into the charcoal inside the censer. The charcoal should only be filled in the censer up to a half level of the lower cup so that the frankincense or the glowing coal will not fall down and burn the carpet etc. on the floor. Likewise the frankincense pot also should be filled only up to half level.
2. Never talk inside the '*Madbaho*' and never stand crowded on one side, but always try to keep equal number of persons on both sides. Reciprocate the actions, use of '*marbahotho*', holding of candles, etc. on both sides. While holding lighted candles always keep the base of the candle holder flat on the left palm and hold straightly the holder in the middle by right hand so as to prevent the melted wax falling on the floor or on the vestment of the assistant or others.
3. The two sets of assistants assigned to carry the candles or the fans should always act in unison, holding their candles and fans properly and at the same level. These persons should keep an eye on one another in order to act in unison.
4. The readings have to be shared by all. Never monopolize on special readings. Never use the Eucharist time for any training. All trainings and practices shall be done before at an appropriate time and place.

5. Never go to church without familiarizing the readings and bible lessons of the day or recite any reading without being understood. If the reader understands, the listeners will also understand.
6. Never go late to the church. Try to be present in the church before the starting of the morning prayers.
7. Never leave the celebrant alone in the '*Madbaho*' especially at the time of '*Thooyobo*'<sup>1</sup> or at the time of conclusion and be vigilant of the needs of the celebrant.
8. Never fill the bowl '*Msamsonetho*' used along with the chalice up to its brim so that the water will not spill when the celebrant puts his fingers and the fingers washes.
9. Never allow the Holy Sanctuary to be left shabby or unclean. Clean the dust, papers or the cob webs if seen, then and there itself.
10. Never take a new candle and push it on the nail of the candle holder. First, that nail has to be heated over a glowing candle and then make a hole through the bottom of the new candle and gently rotate it with light pressure downwards so that the candle will well fit on the nail. Take care to avoid breaking the lower end of the candle and also not to spill the melted wax on the altar or the floor. A glowing candle should not be turned or tilted to light another one but hold the unlighted candle thread over the lighted candle.
11. Never step on the '*Dargo*' (altar step) to light the candles, to remove anything from the altar or for any other purpose. None below the rank of a full deacon is allowed to step on the *dargo*. Some masters even prohibit the full deacons too.
12. Whenever there is a current of air from a fan, air conditioner or wind through an open window take care that the lighted candles are properly protected.

13. Never light all the candles before the public celebration of the Eucharist. One at the centre is the minimum needed and two on either side are allowed. Even when the electric candles are switched on, at least one wax candle should be lighted. Similarly after '*Seloon Baslomo*' (Benediction) all the candles except the one in the middle can be switched off/blown off. Keep in mind the order to light candles starts from the north side of the altar. Always try to avoid candles made of animal fat inside the sanctuary.
14. Never drink or eat anything inside the Holy Sanctuary other than the Holy Eucharist and the blessed *Burktho*. '*Burktho*' is the blessed bread prepared extra for the Holy Eucharist. It has to be blessed by the celebrant at the time of '*Bas Malko*' (*Ninnal Stuthiyodu...*). A piece of *Burktho* should be kept aside for the celebrant to break his fasting after he finishes the Holy Eucharist. The rest shall be distributed among the altar assistants and the faithful. *Burktho* is prepared from the same dough that is prepared to make the holy Eucharist. It should be received with awe and piety. It is a symbol of thanks giving, for blessings and mercy. It is also considered as the breaking of the fast after receiving the Holy Eucharist.
15. All should take care of the censer and the fire inside should be kept alive. Never heap the charcoal in the censer. The glowing charcoal should be on the top when the frankincense is placed in the censer by the celebrant. The authority to place frankincense in the censer is vested upon the ranks of priests and above only. That authority along with the right to lead the prayers is always with the highest ranking clergy present. When so many of them are present together the senior/ high priest shall lead by saying '*shubho Labo..*' (glorifying the Trinity). Remember to make a sign of cross oneself always on hearing of this glorification. Some people make signs of cross at the time of saying '*Barekmor*' which is wrong.

16. Neither keep the left palm away from the chest while waving the censer nor keep it stretching forward or open upwards imitating the priest while he incenses.
17. Never give signals and signs from *Madbaho* to anyone standing down in the holy place or in the nave while the Holy Eucharist is offered. It not only distracts every other person in the church but also may not reach the right person. It is apt and right for the altar assistant to go (only if it is urgently needed) to the concerned person and fulfill the need.
18. The altar assistants shall never behave like the directors of everything that goes on in the church giving instructions, commands or directions. They shall only behave like the servants before the Lord and exhibit propriety and humility. While inside the *Madbaho* the worldly family relations among the altar assistants such as father, son, brother or friend etc. are to be felt diminished and turned into a status of angelic hoarse. They shall try to the maximum **not** to move around inside the *Madbaho*. Those altar assistants other than the one assigned for the day to wave the censer should stand in their spots (the order of these spots are by seniority starting from the north-west side of the *Madbaho*) attentively holding and looking in the service books. Do not keep the hands free or inside their pant pockets/pouches during the celebration.
19. The altar assistants shall not stand facing westwards in the *Madbaho* looking at the people at any time either while a speech, a prayer or at the time when people come forward for offertory or to seek blessing from the celebrant.
20. Never unveil the curtain without having at least one lighted candle on the altar.
21. The altar assistants shall not have a 'take it easy' attitude when and how the curtain shall be unveiled. When it is unveiled do it slowly with reverence. **Never** unveil the curtain

at a 'super fast' speed. For evening prayers the curtain shall not be unveiled until the '*kaumo*' of the evening prayer is started. Normally before the evening prayers there will be prayers of the 'ninth hour' which also is completed with a '*kaumo*'. The unveiling of the curtain during the prayers of the midnight is ONLY just before the '*Haleluyya, Haleluyya*' is said. The assistant shall go into the *Madbaho* well in advance to lit the candle and shall be ready to unveil. Similarly he shall take special care to prepare the censer sufficiently earlier to the time of prayers.

22. The altar assistants shall never take or touch the '*Tablito*' or the bottles of the Holy Oils. None below the rank of a Priest or at least a full-Deacon is allowed to handle the Holy Oils, particularly the Holy *Mooron* as well as the *Tablito*.
23. The altar assistants shall not stand along with the people **at any time** during any of the prayers or of sacraments conducted in the church. They shall not think that they are assistants only for Sundays. They shall always remember that they are dedicated to **all** the Holy Services of the church.
24. The altar assistants shall not assist anyone to change the currencies at any time inside the Church. They shall have no right to pick any amount from the offertory box. They or anybody else, other than the appointed one in the church, shall not take any amount from the offertory. They are not the assistants for the money matters of the church. Those who are to put the offertory shall come prepared with sufficient changes at hand or they will put the offertory after the service is over, getting the changes from the authorized persons.
25. Never read any portion of the readings of the Eucharist without proper practice. There are variable portions to be specially noted. There are changes when a Corepiscopos/ Bishop/Catholicose or Patriarch celebrates the Eucharist.

The reader should note the rubrics in the Service Book and learn the difference. Similarly in the 1<sup>st</sup> diptych the names of the Patriarch/Catholicose/Diocesan Bishop/any visiting Bishop shall be appropriately remembered.

26. During the services, there should be no talking inside the *Madbaho*. If something needs to be said, the remark should be brief, in a low voice and with respect for the Altar and then on going holy Service.
27. Any correction or discussions on misunderstandings concerning the service of a person at the altar should be done privately after the Holy Liturgy. Corrections should be done in a constructive and brotherly manner. Absolutely no shouting or arguments should ever take place at the Altar. Any person who behaves in such a rude fashion, the head of the Assistants should talk to him immediately after the Service and the matter shall be presented to the Priest for further disciplinary action, if necessary.
28. All persons must respect and remember their rank. Under no circumstance a deacon may argue with the priest of the parish concerning any service at the Altar. If a deacon has a legitimate complaint or concern, he should present this matter to the priest in a respectful and brotherly fashion. The priest shall have the final word concerning altar services.
29. If the head of the Assistants encounters any problems or difficulties that he cannot manage, he should report these to the priest who will, if necessary, relay them to the Archbishop for final solution.
30. Above all else, all clergy, be they priests or deacons, should set a good example for the congregation by his reverence and respect at the Altar. His relationship with his fellow clergy men should be marked by humility and brotherly co-operation, knowing that he has been called to the service of the Altar by God Almighty to whom alone belongs all honor and glory.

## Meaning of selected Syriac words commonly used in Holy Eucharist

AMEN	- True, We accept likewise
BAREKMOR	- Bless My Lord
STAUMENKALOS	- Let us stand in order
KURIELAISON	- Lord! have mercy upon us
HALELIUAH	- Praise the Lord
ALOHO	- God
KADEESH	- Holy
KADEESHO	- Saint
KAUMO	- Stand (Prayer while standing)
HOSO VABKOOLSBAN	- Now and at all times.
MOR	- My Lord
MORTH	- Feminine of 'Mor'
SLOOTHO	- Prayer
S'HEEMO	- Ordinary
S'HEEMO PRAYERS	- Prayers for Ordinary days.
SOUMO	- Lent; Fasting
HASO	- Passion, Thought
SOOTHORO	- Protection, Shade
MASMOOR	- Psalm
MIMRO	- Confession
BOVOOTHO	- Supplication

- SOOBORO - Annunciation
- YELDO - Birth, Child
- DENHO - Memorial
- MAMDONO - Baptist
- SOHDO (SAHADA) - Martyr
- KOHNO - Priest
- SOOLOKO - Ascension
- KYOMTHO - Resurrection
- HEVORO - White
- SOONOYO - Assumption
- HOOTHOMO - Seal
- NUHRO - Light
- ETHO - Church, Church Building
- MADBAHO - Altar
- ANEEDO - The Departed
- ALOHAN - Our God
- KOODOS ETHO - Sanctification of the Church
- HOODOS ETHO - Dedication of the Church (Revival of the Church)
- KTOBO KADEESO - Holy Bible
- MORAN ETHRAHEM ALAIN - Our Lord! Have mercy upon us.
- MORAN HUS RAHEM ALAIN - Our Lord! Have pity and mercy upon us
- MORAN ANINO RAHEM ALAIN - Our Lord ! Answer and have mercy upon us
- MEN OLAM VADA MOL OLAM OLMEEN - From the beginning to the eternity
- MORIO RAHEM ALAIN O ADARAIN - Lord! Have mercy upon us and help us.
- EKBO, KOLO, ENYONO, MANEESO - Are names of prayer hymns



SUBHO LABO LABRO OLROOHO KADESO - Praise to the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

- ABO - Father
- BRO - Son
- ROOHO - Spirit, Wind
- SLEEHO - Apostle, the one who is the Saint
- KOOROBO - Bring near
- QURBONO - Offering
- EME DALOHO - Mother of God
- YOLDATH ALOHO - God bearer
- MORYO - Lord
- SLEEBO - Cross
- HABEEBAI - My beloved
- AHAI - My brethren
- EVANGELION - Gospel, Goodnews
- THOOYOBO - Preparation
- HOOSOYO - Absolution
- PROMIYON - Preface
- SEDRO - Series (of Prayers)
- MOURBO - Magnificat
- THEKSO - Text (book)
- ETHRO - Incense, Prayer of incense
- FIRMO - Censer
- SLOMO - Peace
- SAINO - Tranquillity
- SOOSEPHO - Veil
- ANEEN - Answer me
- KUKLIYON - A prayer circle
- MSAMLIYONO - Thurifer (The attendant who carries the Thurible - Censer)

# Sequence of Activities of Altar Assistants

## 1. Evening Prayers

- Church Bell has to be rung
- Prepare the censer
- Unveil the curtain at the starting of the Kaumo of evening prayer. The prayers of the 9th hour have to be done with the veiled.
- Before unveiling light the candle at the center of the Altar or the left candle.
- Censer has to be waved at the time of the ending of Promiyoon, Etro, Evangelion, Kukliyon for the departed sung after the reading of the Evangelion.

## 2. Soothoro

- Light two candles on the Altar one on the left and one on the right. Blow off the candle at the middle.
- There is no '*men olam....*' after '*Subho...*' after the '*Kolo*' of the *Soothoro* Prayers.
- After reciting Psalms 91 and 120 the two reciting have to kiss the hand of the celebrant/s and give peace to all other Assistants.
- When the creed is finished all have to say together Amen. The Assistant who recited has to say '*Barekmor Stoumenkalos*' and the '*Kurielaisōn*' by all

- Incense is offered by the Assistant who takes the censer (Thurifer) He shall wave the censer at the altar and after waving to the people through the center of the Church he has to wait for the *Kukliyon* of the saints and the clergy. On Fridays this will be incense for the Sleebo. At the conclusion the Thurifer has to bow and kiss the altar and keep back the censer. If a bishop is present he has to kiss his hands before keeping back the censer at its place.
- After the incense is offered the curtain has to be drawn back and the candles blown off.

### **Prayer of Midnight**

- The prayers of the midnight are offered with the veiled curtain upto the '*Haleluia*'. He has to enter the Madbaho prior to this time and light the candle at the center and draw the curtain at the starting of '*Haleluia*'
- When the '*Kukliyon*' is sung the incense has to be offered.
- There are no '*bovotho*' in the '*Kukkilyon*' of the night prayers. So the second stanza of the *Kolos* has to be ended without '*Moriyo rahem.....*' The priest has to start the next '*Kukliyon*' direct after the second stanza of the '*Kolos*'.
- The Thurifer has to wait at the table with the censer to offer incense at the prayer of the Angelic hymn (Praise).

### **Morning Prayers**

- Incense has to be offered at the time of the ending of *Promyon*, *Etro*, *Evangelion* and *Kukliyon*. This *Kukliyon* is a general one with first stanzas of

Mother of God, Saints and the departed. The Altar Assistants has to reciprocate likewise.

- If the Morning Prayers are not followed by Holy Eucharist Kukuliyon of Mother of God and Saints has to be done with incense. The Altar Assistant has to be prepared for this.

### Holy Qurbono

- The Thurifer has to follow the celebrant to the *Madbaho* when he enters for the *Thooyobo* after *Evangelion*.
- The Altar Assistant has to keep the bread, wine and water to the left of the celebrant on the altar.
- The Altar Assistant has to keep the names of those that are to be remembered on the right side of the celebrant handy to use at the time of the *Thooyobo*.
- He has to take care of the fact that the celebrant is holding the chalice and paten with both hands and he cannot move or turn the papers or the pages of the book. The Altar Assistant has to keep the names readable for the celebrant.
- The Altar Assistant has to keep the vestments ready for the celebrant and assist him to wear them.
- When the Assistants light the candle he has to follow the directions in the Service Book.
- When the celebrant finishes the intercessory prayers and cover the elements with '*Sosefo*' and recites the *Promiyon* he has to take the censer and frankincense to the priest. After offering frankincense hand over the censer to the celebrant and wait there till he finishes incensing in the name of the Trinity at the edge of the '*Soosefo*'. When the celebrant finishes take the censer back from him after kissing his hands with the censer.

## Public Celebration

- The Altar Assistants has to take the censer to the celebrant before the unveiling of the curtain and handover the censer to him after he puts the frankincense. Then he has to hold a lighted candle and stand to the right of the celebrant ready to move in the front of the celebrant to circle the altar. When the celebrant finishes the waving he has to receive back the censer, kissing his hands and move to the left half of the *Madbaho* and wave the censer till the trisagion is finished.

## Epistles

- When the epistles are read the Thurifer has to wave the censer turning to the reader to his back.

## Evangelion

- Before the *Evangelion* is read the *Thurifer* takes the censer to the celebrant to put the frankincense kiss his hands and move down to the right side of the Evangelion and he calls the attention of the people to the Evangelion and waves incense to the Gospel stand. When the reading of the Gospel is over the Thurifer goes back to his position and stays there till the hymn is over. Thurifer then calls for '*Stoumenkalos Kurielaison*'.

## Promiyon

- When the '*Promiyon*' ends the celebrant kisses the left folded end of the *Soosefo* and unfolds it. At this time Thurifer has to be ready with the frankincense pot in his left hand and the censer on his right hand with the lids wide open so as the celebrant can easily offer the frankincense. If a bishop or a senior priest is attending the Eucharist the Thurifer has to approach him to offer the incense.

## Blessing of the Censer

- When the celebrant completes the *Sedro* the Thurifer has to turn northwards with the frankincense pot and the Censer held high so as the celebrant can the handle of the censer as well as he can circle the hands around this lower cup and lid. If a bishop is present the Thurifer has to handover the censer to the celebrant priest and he in turn holds the censer, who has to turn northwards to face the bishop and the bishop blesses the censer.
- When the celebrant returns the censer to the Thurifer he kisses the hands of the celebrant and waves the censer and kisses both corners of the altar and with both hands holds the censer folded and goes to the north end of the step of the *Madbaho* and remains there facing East till the celebrant turns to ask pardon. When the celebrant turns back to the altar the Thurifer goes to the west end of the Church waving the incense.

## Kiss of Peace

- He returns to the entrance of *Madbaho* and remains there with the censer folded holding the three chains together with both the hands. When the celebrant steps on the '*Dergo*' and starts the prayer of peace the Thurifer has to move forward to the altar to receive the 'peace' from the celebrant and to pass to the people.

He has to give the peace to the priests, if any and to the fellow assistants and goes down to the people, and then stand in the position and wave the censer.

## **Adamo dose no**

- When the celebrant completes the prayer of consecration and remind the command to continue this Eucharist until the second coming, the Thurifer again takes the incense to the celebrant or any other bishop/priest present to offer the frankincense. He need not wave in the usual pattern this time, but to go back direct to his position.

## **Thubden**

- During the time of the Thubden (diptych) the Thurifer has to keep back the censer after kissing the altar and he has to read the first and sixth diptych. If the bishop is the celebrant the readers of the diptychs have to hold the pastoral staff (crosier) on their right hand.

## **Elevation of the Elements:**

- During the time of elevation of the mysteries he has to get the censer ready to offer incense before the celebrant raises the Paten and Chalice.

## **Prayers of Kukliyon**

- After the elevation of the mysteries the Kukliyon of the Mother of God, Saints, Priests and the departed are sung with incense offered. The Thurifer has to wave at this time as shown in the diagram on page 26. If there is special Promiyon / Sedro for any of the Kukkliyoons the Thurifer has to take the censer to the celebrant and take frankincense and wave as given in the diagram mentioned above.

## Partaking Holy Eucharist

- After the Kukiliyoon of the clergy the celebrant asks pardon and he partakes the Holy Eucharist. All those who are inside the *Madbaho* shall also partake the Eucharist at this time.

## Procession

- When the partaking is over the Thurifer takes the incense from the celebrant or the attending bishop / clergy, takes a candle with him and stands on the south side of the *Madbaho* facing the priest when he turns to the west. All the Altar Assistants shall also carry candles with them and form a line each on both sides of the altar. Two of them shall carry the *Marvohotho* (Fan) and all move forward when the celebrant moves in procession. When the celebrant returns to the altar all the assistants shall kiss the altar at the respective corners and move to their positions and finally the Thurifer kisses the south corner of the altar and keeps back the Thurible.
- He has to stand attentive to the left of the celebrant till the Eucharist service is over.
- He has to attend the celebrant and serve him with water, towel and assist also to pack the holy vessels after veiling.
- He also has to take care to fold the phino and other vestments.

## Burktho

- The Burktho has to be get blessed by the celebrant at the time of *Kukiiiyon* and the assistants shall brake it and give a piece each to all who desire it. A piece may be kept and given to the celebrant to break his fasting.



## Passion Week

- The Curtain and other vestments shall be in black during the passion week. They shall be reinstalled before the evening prayers of the Easter.
- During the Passion week days there is no kissing of hands of the celebrant, nor exchange of peace. The response to Evangelion reading is '*Amen*' and '*Kurielaison*'. Ending response is also '*Kurielaison*'. The *Madbaho* is veiled other than at the time of *Holy Qurbono* and *the adoration of the Cross*.



## Holy Eucharist

### Interpretations of the signs and symbols

#### Church

The word church has two meanings, the church universal and the church local. It is gathered in the church building. The church building is the symbol of the presence of God. It was promised to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:3 "I have heard your prayer and your supplication made before Me, I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually"

## Part Two

This promise to Solomon was in the Old Testament time when the Revelation of God in Jesus was not fulfilled. In the New Testament times Jesus is the presence of God. But this presence of the Lord is experienced in the fellowship of Christians in their Sunday gathering to 'break the bread' and to hear the word of God. At the beginning Jesus and his disciples attended the Jewish Synagogues. Acts 2:46 5:42 But they also assembled in the houses of believers. One of the first assemblies was held at St. Mark's house. This house is known as the first church in Christianity. Later in history when the church became free to construct buildings of worship and when the number of participants increased they built church buildings as was constructed by Solomon.

Just as our Lord took flesh in a Jewish family and background the NT church was modeled in the external way.



## Holy Eucharist

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Just as our Lord took flesh in a Jewish family and background the NT church was modeled in the external setting

of the Great Temple of the Lord. The Church represents Paradise. Paradise is the place where we are told about the experiencing of the fellowship of God and Man. It also is representing Eden where Man experienced the personal presence of God. The Church is also representing the Mount Sinai and the valley where Moses faced the Lord and people waited to receive Moses returning from God.

The Church Building has three parts:

1. Holy of the Holies, the sanctuary or the *Madbaho*.
2. The second part is the Chancel or the *Kestrumo*.
3. The *Nave* or the common place.

### **Holy of the Holies, the sanctuary or the *Madbaho***

This Syriac word is derived from the root *Bdah* meaning sacrifice. It is the place where the most sacred sacrifice of our Lord is actualized. The most holy act in the history is the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross. In the holy of the holies the Central Place is the altar. Altar is the *Thronos*, it means throne. The throne of our Lord is His Cross. The altar is the *Golgotho*, where the cross of our Lord was erected. The altar stands for the sacrifice of Jesus. This is also the heavenly throne of God. It is covered to signify the inability of human being to understand the spiritual meanings. The different color used and the embroidery refers to the heavenly hosts and the heavenly magnanimity. The central part of the altar is spread by a small rectangular tricolor clothe called *Thalbestho* or in Malayalam *Virikkoottam*. The holy vessels are placed upon this. This tricolor *Virikkoottam* represents the universe, earth and the church by the tricolors. The outer red for the universe, the green for the earth and the inner white/yellow for the church respectively. The holy Eucharist is offered for the whole created world as the incarnation and redemptive works of our Lord was for the whole created world.

*M'kablono* is the rectangular small piece that is used to cover the holy vessels. This cover symbolizes the clouds that

overshadowed the tabernacle, which represents the presence of the Lord. Exodus 40:34. they also represents the shroud that wrapped Lord's body and face.

*Soosefo* is the white clothe used to cover the mysteries during the first part of the holy Eucharist. It reminds the stone used to cover the tomb of our Lord, which was removed supernaturally at the time of resurrection. It also refers to the hard rock that gave water to the 12 tribes of Israel. Num.20: 2-11. It also reminds the great sheet that lowered from above before Peter in a vision. Acts.10: 11-16. This refers to the opening of the sanctified ministry to all. The boundaries of cast and tribe are abolished and all walls of separatism are made to an end.

At the center of the altar/ thronos is placed a wooden plain Cross. It should not be decorated with pictures or statues. We are remembering not the crucified Christ but the resurrected Christ. The empty cross reminds us of the resurrected Christ. The light of the candles represent the presence of God and remind us the word of our Lord, 'I am the light of the world'. We must melt for others and also the spiritual flame in us should melt our internal and external bodies. The Curtain is the symbol of separation of heaven and earth. The Gospel Stand has unique importance in the church. The importance signifies the role of the bible in the church. The faith of the church is practiced and expressed in two means that are the liturgy and the bible. True worship is true faith.

### **The second part is the Chancel or the *Kestrumo***

This is separated by rails in the traditional church building where the priests and the deacons assemble to say the prayers. It is the preparatory place before entering into the Sanctuary for the services. Here the Old Testament reading is done. This reminds the preparatory role of the Old Testament as well as the prayer of penitence done to please the sacrifice. In Psalm 51 we read, ' the sacrifice of God is a humble spirit and a broken heart God despiseth not'.

Baptismal font is also kept here. In traditional churches, the baptismal font is in a room called *Baptistery* which is attached to the right side of the church. This is also symbolic of the preparation to join the divine sacrifice or Eucharist. We cannot share the Eucharist without entering through the baptism. The Holy Eucharist is the experiencing and becoming one with God. We could only experience this through the holy baptism.

### **The Nave or the common place**

Here stands the worshippers. This stands for the valley where the Israelites waited to receive the blessings from God (Exodus 34) and the Church at large waiting for the second coming of our Lord.

The Church is consecrated and dedicated by the bishop with the Holy Chrism. Just as the Samaritans received Holy Spirit by the laying of hands by Peter and John (Acts 8:14-17). The bishop is representing the apostles and the anointing by the Holy Chrism represents the presence of Holy Spirit

### **The Holy Vessels**

The paten and the chalice hold the host and the wine respectively. In the paten there is the *Kaukbo* that is placed to hold the paten's cover, *M'Kabalono*, without touching the bread. It is kept on the left side while the paten is open. *Kaukbo* means the star; it refers to the star, which guided the wise men to the born savior.

### **The Spoon and the *Gmurtho***

The spoon is used to take the particles from the chalice. Before the Communion the spoon is placed on the left side of the vessels and is shifted to the right side at the time of remembrance of the second coming of the Lord. It also refers to the moving of the Lord from the *throne of Grace* to the *throne of Justice*.



## **Bell**

The big bell is called the *Samanthron*. This calls the faithful people to worship and the time of the prayers. The sound of the big church bell awakens the faithful to divine worship, the war against Satan, in much the same way soldiers are summoned to readiness to fight a war. Hence, once the Service is started, the ringing of the big church bell is prohibited during the Service. The hand-bells call the attention of the participants in the important occasions during the Service. In general the hand-bells are to be sounded only when the response is uttered or when the Celebrant utters a repeated chant. The sound of the hand-bell is also representing the praise of angels in heaven.

The *Fan Bell* is known as the *Marvahtho*. This has the same use as the hand-bell. It represents the *Seraphims* and the fluttering of their wings.

*Note: Servers should make sure that the sound of hand-bells and fans are moderate and do not prevail over the voice of the Celebrant.*

## **Thablaitho**

This is actually a portable church. It is consecrated in the same order of the consecration of the church. It is a wooden or marble tablet kept under the holy vessels. This shows the presence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the apostolic succession. This *Thablaitho* is consecrated with holy Chrism in the name of Holy Trinity, by the Bishop.

## **Candles**

The Candles on the Thronos was in the first centuries a necessity for worship. Since they were assembled in caves or inside rooms for fear and protection. But afterwards this continued to remind the past persecutions and to denote certain meanings. The candles were made of wax, and the hearts are expected to melt in repentance like the melting of the wax. This is why we still use the wax candles along with the electric

candles. The number of candles on the altar is 12 representing the twelve Apostles. They not only are representing the apostles who spread the Gospel of our Lord but also are the witnesses and partakers of the institution of the holy Eucharist. They were deputed by Christ to continue this mission. But there is one another candle at the center of the Altar, which represents John the Baptist, who prepared the way of our Lord. This candle will be lighted during the prayer time and at the time of preparation of the Holy Eucharist. But before starting the Public celebration of the Holy Eucharist, it will be put-out symbolizing the absence of John the Baptist during the Public Ministry of Jesus Christ. The candle at the center also symbolizes St. Paul, who joined the apostolic group after Pentacost. This candle is kept unlit during the Holy Eucharist reminding of St. Paul's absence during the public ministry and the establishment of the Holy Eucharist by one Lord. It is at the time of the procession of the Holy Eucharist symbolizing the second coming, where St. Paul is also present.

### **Gmurtho**

It is a small cushion where the spoon is kept and it is raised at the time of remembrance of the Lord's second coming. The word *Gmortho* is substituted with another Syriac word '*Espoogo*', which refers to the *Espoogo* by which Jesus was given sour wine or *Chorka* while He suffered on the cross.

### **Incense**

Offering of incense signifies purification and veneration. In Ex.40:27 Moses offered sweet incense as it was commanded by God. So it was done before the tabernacle as an offering to God. It was considered pleasing to God. We also see Aaron offering sweet incense. Also in Luke Chapter 1:8&9 we see the offering of incense by Zechariah. It is also seen that at the birth of Jesus incense was offered by the wise men from the East. On the third day of the death of the Lord we

see the women going to the tomb with sweet incense to pray. Incense is the symbol of prayer in the bible.

## **Censer**

It has more than one symbolic importance. Firstly it is representing the Church, where God in the manifestation of His Trinity, the twelve apostles, 72 preachers, the heaven, earth, human beings the sinful turned to holy by the presence of Holy Spirit is symbolized. The three outer chains symbolize the Trinity. The fourth central chain represents the humanity of the indivisible trinity. That is why when the blessing of the Censer is done the two chains are held together at the time of the veneration of the Son. This shows the indivisibility of the divine nature and human nature in Jesus. So the blessing of the censer is at the same time a Trinitarian praise as well as Christological praise. The unity of the Trinity as well as the distinctive nature of the Trinity is explained in the conjoining of the three chains at the top by a circular disc. The twelve bells on the chains represent the apostles and the chirp of the bell denotes the apostolic message preached in close association with the Trinitarian divinity.

The chain is expected to be made of 72 links to denote 72 preachers. This is a very important symbol of the revelation of the faith of the church. The Lord God is revealed to us through the teachings, preaching and the writings of the apostles and preachers. We experience God through the words of these messengers. That is why the symbol of the links becomes another symbol when the links becomes the chain.

The lower cup, where the charcoal is kept is the symbol of the earth and the top cup is the representation of the skies or the heavens. The black charcoal is the symbol of the sinners and when the fire glows in it the sinner turns to Spirit-filled holiness. Those who are in contact with the Holy Spirit glows and shines in purity and Godliness. We see the presence of God in the sign of fire while revealing to Moses as well as when he descended on the Mount Horeb. Deut.4:11.

In the NT also we see the descend of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in the form of tongue of fire. Fire is always a symbol of the presence of God in Bible. Smoke rising up is the symbol of rising of the prayer from the faithful. The fragrance of the incense is the sweetness of the faithful. Our faith is manifested by the goodness, gentleness, meekness and all virtues. These virtues are symbolized by the fragrance of the frankincense.

The censer is also depicted at times as symbol of St. Mary as well as St. John in their God revealing role in the incarnation.

### **The Leaven And The Bread**

The main elements of the holy Eucharist are the bread and the wine. The bread is made of wheat flour, water, salt, oil and fire. The term used by our Lord is *Lahmo*, which means leavened bread, not *Pathero*, meaning unleavened bread. The Syrian Orthodox Church keeps this tradition handed over by our Lord through James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. We use the leaven continued from the apostolic times through this tradition. The elements of the bread represent the basic elements and components of this earth and from which the human beings are made. When leaven or life is added, it represents the man with the spirit of God. The human product becomes heavenly body just as Lord God appeared as Jesus in the perfect of human being. He appeared as human but was God. The bread appears to be merely the bread even after consecration but is the body of our Lord.

Single bread is divided among the congregation. Why not one bread for each? It shows the willingness of our Lord to break and divide himself for others. Also represents the oneness of the body that we are receiving.

## **Wine**

Bread and Wine was the offering of Malkesadek. Gen 14:18. Wine is mixed with water as it was used by our Lord. The mixing of water and wine symbolizes the perfect indivisible unity of our Lord's divinity and humanity. When our Lord was lanced Jn.19:34 blood and water gushed.

## **Lectionary**

These are the readings from the Bible. The Old Testament lessons are read before the public celebration of the Eucharist. It denotes the preparatory role of the Old Testament for the Incarnation and the redemption. The Old Testament readings are generally selections from Moses, Prophets and writings. These are the representation of the Old Testament books. *Thora*, *Nebeim* and *Ketubim*. The importance is to Moses and then to prophets. Acts and epistles are the representation of the teachings of the apostles. Pauline epistles are read later to denote his later conversion. From Old Testament we are being led to the life-giving gospel of our Lord through the apostles. The gospel is the logos or the revelation of God himself in words. Bible is the message of the incarnate word of our Lord. Gospel reading is the word of God declaring the credential of the day.

All the readings are selected as the lectionary of the Church. The lectionary covers the whole biblical background of the feasts and fasts of the Church. All the Church festivals are biblically explained through these days.

## **The Vestments**

The vestment that a celebrant uses is also significant. It is almost sure that the church designed special vestments only in the fourth century when the church became free to have open worship. The dress was modeled in

the Old Testament fashion discussed in the book of Exodus 28:2-42 and Ephesians 6;14-17. The Old Testament descriptions were given the Pauline interpretations.

The *Kutheeno* the white robe representing the purity of the sacrifice. It is a reminder to keep the true faith and to walk in spiritual purity of faith and conduct.

*Oororo* is the stole worn by the deacons. We can identify the rank of the deacon from the way he wears the *Oororo*.

*M'sone* the special shoes are the reminder to the preparedness for the gospel as mentioned in Eph. 6:15. It is also the reminder of the spiritual courage to overcome all pride and a separation to have the spiritual knowledge and exaltation.

The *Hamneeko* is the breastplate as the symbol to face the world, flesh and devil. It is a reminder of Aaron's breast plate Ex. 28;15.

The belt or the *Soonoro* is the readiness to serve and preparedness for worship. The Israelites girded their loins when they ate the passover. Ex.12:11. St. Paul also refers to it.

The *Phino* or the cope (*Kaappa*) represents the overcoat of our Lord and the purple robe put on him before crucifixion. The priest is celebrating the Eucharist standing in the place of Lord. It is the robe of royalty as explained by Peter in 1 Peter 2:9.



# A Guide to the Altar Assistants

**Dr. Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil**



"A Guide to the Altar Assistants' is a book which was in my dream for a long time. Since the day I came to the United States of America, I have been thinking of such a guide for our people in the diaspora such as America, Canada and Europe.

Most of the Altar Assistants - Altar boys - do not know what they are doing or why? The only reason for them to do something in a particular way is that they have been told so. This booklet will definitely help them in serving our Lord with fear and dedication."

These are the words of forward written by His Grace Archbishop Mor Theethos Yeldo about this booklet. He admonishes all the Clergy, Deacons and the Altar Assistants to get a copy of this guide, follow the guidelines and keep it for their reference in future.

This booklet will be of great use for all concerned and the students of the Syrian Orthodox patrimony.



**Mor Adai Study Center**

Cheeranchira, Changanassery