

# A LETTER OF GUIDANCE FOR THE ROLE OF ALTAR SERVERS DURING QURBANA

THIS IS NOT AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH, AS SUCH IT REFLECTS PERSONAL RESEARCH AND SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS AUTHORITATIVE OF ANY OFFICIAL STANCE OR POLICY.

*"Heavenly Liturgy" is the most adequate term to describe with one single expression the character of the East-Syriac Liturgy. Our liturgical processions and actions implies a double aspect of movement: of man to God, and of God to man. The magnificent surroundings, the rich vestments, the precious sacred vessels, the festive chants, the prayers, the rising incense, the sound of Makshaneesa and the awe-inspiring gestures reflects the ultimate unfolding of the glory of God in the final appearance, in the Second Coming, the apocalyptic-eschatological manifestation of the glorified Christ." - Prof. Joris Geldhof at the Ongoing Formation programme held on the 14th September 2023 at the Divine Retreat Centre, Ramsgate.*

*"Only ordained ministers (Major or Minor) are allowed to enter the sanctuary and assist at the celebration of the Holy Qurbana (Bishop/ Priest/ Deacon/ Sub deacon /Karoya). However due to the absence of deacons and minor clerics, lay faithful are allowed to carry their role by wearing a Kothina and a Zunara. The altar servers usually play the role of a deacon. Deacons keep the order of the Liturgy. By serving as a member and leader of the community, he or she helps them in the active participation of the liturgy. These are evident from the various exhortations and commands given by the deacon throughout the celebration. Deacons carry out a significant ministry and thus, they are compared to angels." - Dcn. Tony Kocherry at the Bristol-Cardiff Region Altar Servers Meet 2023*

## THE FOLLOWING ARE GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS PERTAINING TO THE ORDER OF THE QURBANA OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH, TAKEN FROM THE TRANSLITERATED THAKSA (QURBANA TEXT).

1. There are three forms for our Qurbana: the Most Solemn Form (Raza), the Solemn Form, and the Simple Form.
2. If preferred, elements may be added from the Raza to the Solemn Form or the Simple Form, as the celebrant dictates.
3. In the Raza and in the Solemn Form, the use of hymns and incense is obligatory. Even in the Simple Form, the singing of hymns and the use of incense are preferable.
4. On Sundays and Feast Days, at least the main Qurbana shall be celebrated in the Solemn Form.
7. The order for the celebration of the Qurbana is as follows: the Celebrant faces the congregation from the beginning until the entry into the Madhbaha; the Celebrant faces the altar in the same direction as the congregation during the Anaphora (Qudasha) until the Communion; the Celebrant faces the congregation after the Communion until the end.
8. In the rubrics of this Thaksa, "right" and "left" refer to the right and left side of the congregation as they face the altar.
9. The altar is at the eastern side of the sanctuary. (It is assumed that the church is facing the west). The Gospel Lectionary is placed on the altar at the left side. Only the objects which are necessary for the Qurbana are placed on the altar. Candles, flowers etc. are not to be placed on the altar.
10. There should be two bethgazas, each on either side of the sanctuary. The kasa (chalice) is set on the right bethgaza and the pilasa (paten) on the left. Water for washing the hands and a towel for wiping them are kept on the left bethgaza.
19. The bell [also read makshaneesa] may be rung during Lakumara [ p9. ], Gospel procession [ p11. ], Institution narrative [ p39. ], Epiclesis [ p44. ], and Elevation of the Host [ p48. ]; incensing may be done at the Elevation before the Rite of Fraction.
23. While receiving peace, the recipient holds the folded hands of the offeror with both hands. The giving of peace can also be done by turning face to face with folded hands and bowing the head slightly.
31. The portions designated for the Most Solemn Form (Raza) [ double line ], portions common to the Raza and the Solemn Form [ single line on left ] are marked with specified notations. Similarly, parts that can be omitted during the Most Solemn Form (Raza), the Solemn Form, and the Simple Form [ lines only on corners ] are marked with specified notations.

The "General Instructions pertaining to the Order of the Qurbana" have a total of 31 points, the above excerpt provides the points pertaining more directly to the role of altar servers. It is encouraged that you take the time to read all 31.

We pray for our the continued growth, in the **Sense of Sacredness** – Our holiness and State of Grace, in the **Aesthetic Sense/ Sense of Beauty** – Ex: making sure that the candle holders are of the same height, Shoes (No trainers, preferably formal shoes), taking care of our Kothina, and in the **Common Sense** – Ex: Attention while holding candles, attention with fire, always looking at the priest and his gestures.

Below we will discuss timing and directions of Mar Sleeva, candles, Makshaneesa, incense, Communion plate bearers and peace during the Qurbana aswell as a brief excerpt of the directions provided in The Transliterated Thaksa.

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## Entrance Procession

*“The Celebrant, after having washed his hands and put on the sacred vestments, enters the sanctuary in procession accompanied by the deacons, each wearing the sacred vestments appropriate to him. A cross, censer, candles and the Gospel Lectionary are carried in the procession. The Gospel is placed on the left side. The deacons stand on both sides of the Celebrant. After bowing to the altar all go to the Bema and begin the Qurbana.” - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

Immediately before the Entrance Procession begins the main celebrant will charge the Censer with Incense. The order of the procession is as such, first the Incense, then the Mar Sleeva in line with two candles and then the Gospel Lectionary in line with two makshaneesas. Additional altar servers are to stand as two rows, so to be between the candles and makshaneesa of their respective side. The procession leads from the sacristy to the Madhbaha. The altar servers form a line below the steps of the Madhbaha, leaving space in the centre for the celebrants. The Gospel Lectionary is placed on the left side, on the thronos. The whole procession bow as one, taking lead from the main celebrant. Finally they process down from the Madhbaha to the Bema, during which the makshaneesa are rung.

See both [Qurbana @ Preston Cathedral 22Sept24](#) and [Entrance Procession @ Liturgical Conference - Rome](#) for visual demonstration.

## Lakumara

*“[Towards the end of the Marmīsa, ] The deacons bring the censer and frankincense. The Celebrant puts three measures of frankincense into the censer and blesses it in a low voice. Incensing: Symbol of reverence and worship to God, forgiveness of sins and prayers rising up to the Most High (Ps 14:1-2, Rev 8:8; 8:3-4). The sanctuary veil is drawn open. The deacon enters the sanctuary and incenses, proceeding from the right to the left; at the door of the sanctuary, he incenses the people as well. It is proper to incense, up to the main door of the church.” - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

Towards the end of the Marmīsa the censer is brought to right hand side of the main celebrant, the celebrant will charge and bless the censer. They then walk up to the sanctuary in preparation for the Lakumara. During the Lakumara, they incense towards the Thronos, from right to left, bowing at centre point of Thronos. Then they are to continue incensing down the centre aisle of the congregation until they reach the main door of the Church. Also during the Lakumara, the makshaneesa is to be rung as the celebrant bows towards the thronos.

## Epistle

*“The reader goes to the lectern on the left, takes the Lectionary of the Epistles [...] and says” - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

During the Epistle, the candle bearer on the left side takes a candle and stands next to the lectern.

## Gospel Procession

*“The deacon brings censer and frankincense. The Celebrant puts frankincense into the censer and blesses it. The Celebrant accompanied by the archdeacon and by those who carry the candles, thurible and cross goes to the altar. The Celebrant takes the Gospel from the altar and holding it to his forehead, goes to the Bema in procession with archdeacon and the ministers who carry the cross and two lighted candles and incense. During the Gospel reading, the thurifer, standing in front of the Celebrant, swings the thurible; two ministers stand on both sides, holding the lighted candles. The minister who carries the cross stands on the right side of the Celebrant. At the end of the Gospel reading The Celebrant closes the Gospel Lectionary, kisses it, and hands it over to the deacon who places it on the altar (in the Raza, at the Bema ). The ministers replace the candles in their respective places. The sanctuary veil is closed.” - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

As the Epistle finishes, the censer is brought to the Celebrant, charged and blessed. During this, the makshaneesa, candles and cross prepare to accompany the Celebrant to the altar. The censer leads this procession up, candles and cross behind, with the makshaneesa on the two sides of the celebrant. During the procession down to the Bema, the same order is used, now with the makshaneesa ringing also. Once at the Bema, the makshaneesa stands behind at the two sides of the celebrant, the cross at the right-hand side and the candles slightly in front on the two sides of the Bema. The censer is to stand in front of the Bema, facing the celebrant, swinging the censer. The celebrant then says “Samādhānam ✠ ningalōtu kūṭe.” and “Viśuddha Matthāyi/ Markkōs/ Lūkka/ Yōhannān aīyiccha nammūṭe Kartthāv-Īśōmīśihāyūṭe pariśuddha suviśēsham.”, during both of which the makshaneesa is to ring out. Finally after the Gospel reading, the people respond “Nammūṭe Kartthāvāya Mīśihāykkū sthuthi.”, during which again the makshaneesa is to ring out. The candles and cross are returned to their respective places.

See [Gospel Procession @ Liturgical Conference - Rome](#) for visual demonstration.

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## Preparation of Gifts

The mysteries in the form of bread and wine are prepared on the bethgaza during the Kāfōsūsa. Immediately following the homily, the censer is charged and blessed and then goes up to the two bethgazas, first the right then the left, incensing the sacred vessels. At the right bethgaza, servers may assist by handing the wine and water cruets to the celebrant.

As seen in [The Qurbana Explained - Rite of Preparation](#).

## Rite of Preparation

*"The Celebrant washes his hands at the Bema saying 'Sakalathinteyum Nāñan āya ... cheyyatfe.'" - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

A server brings a bowl of water and a towel to the Bema, for the celebrant to wash his hands.

## Following The Creed

As the priest goes up to the Madhbaha, the Bema candles are put out.

## Exchange of Peace

*"The Celebrant gives peace to the archdeacon and the archdeacon to the deacons. The deacon gives peace to others in the sanctuary and the Questroma, and one of the deacons gives peace to the faithful. The faithful [give] peace to one another. Meanwhile the deacon (or one of the priests) says the Diptychs. [Following the Exchange of Peace] The Celebrant takes the Soseppa that is covering the holy mysteries and folds it around them. The deacon brings the censer and frankincense. The Celebrant incenses the altar and the offerings. He returns the censer to the deacon." - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

As the deacon reads out "Sahōdararē, Mišihāyuṭe snēhatthil ningaí samādhānam nalkuvin.", two servers receive peace from the celebrant and after giving peace to the others in the sanctuary, gives peace to the congregation. Following this the censer approaches the celebrant and after the celebrant charges and blesses the censer, it is handed to the celebrant who incenses the altar and the offerings. It is encouraged that the deacon holds up the hem of the celebrant's Kaapa so as to allow the celebrant to more easily incense. The celebrant then returns the censer to the deacon.

## Institution Narrative

*"[The Celebrant] takes the paten with both hands [...] raises his eyes towards heaven." - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

During the two responses of "Amen" from the congregation, the makshaneesas are rung out.

## Epiclesis

*"Epiclesis - The Invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Celebrant holds his right hand crossed over his left hand, over the sacred mysteries," - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

As the celebrant crosses his right hand over his left over the sacred mysteries and starts the prayer "Kartthāvē, ninte Pariśuddhāthmāvu ezhunaíli varatfe", the makshaneesas are rung out.

## Rites of Reconciliation & Fraction

*"Deacon brings censer and frankincense to the Celebrant. The Celebrant blesses the frankincense" - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

Following the Epiclesis the censer is brought to the Celebrant, the Celebrant charges it and blesses it. First incense towards the Celebrant, then as the Celebrant prays over the people, incense towards the people, finally as the Celebrant faces back towards the thronos, incense towards it. Following that prayer, step down from the altar and continue incensing through the during the elevation of the eucharist during the elevation hymn, the makshaneesa join during this.

## Distribution of the Eucharist.

*"The Celebrant either takes the paten with him or the deacon holds it for the Celebrant. While giving Communion in two species, the Celebrant gives the "Body of Christ", saying: 'Mišihāyuṭe śarīravum rekthavum katāngalūṭe poṭuthikkum nithya-jīvanum kārañam ākatfe.'" - The Transliterated Thaksa.*

A server with a candle and Communion plate accompanies every celebrant distributing eucharist. They are to stand on the left and right of the celebrant, with the Communion plate bearer holding the plate in such a way that any small particle of the body of Christ lands on it rather than the floor.