

Quick Class After Mass

St. John's Episcopal Church, Charlotte, Michigan
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Session III: Linens & Things

Source: Most materials from Altar Linens by Lynn Smith
<http://www.altarlinens.com/liturgical-linens.aspx>

The Cerecloth

From the Latin "cerum", wax - is a waxed cloth which was put directly on the altar (in the case of a stone altar) to protect the Fair Linen for being soiled by the stone. Usually, the cerecloth was left on the altar even when the Eucharist was not being celebrated.

Purificator

The size of purificators are generally 12" x 12" with an embroidered center cross. Purificators are folded in thirds and placed over the chalice and under the paten. These small linens are the most frequently laundered of all the linens in liturgical use. Purificators are used to clean out the chalice and paten after communion.

Lavabo Towel

The standard size of a lavabo towel is 17" x 11" and is used by the priest to dry his hands before the consecration of the host at the communion service. Lavabo towels are embroidered with a cross on the center front of the towel. The lavabo towel is held by the acolyte during the service. The term "lavabo towel" comes from the Latin root, "lava," meaning to wash.

Corporal

The corporal is a large square linen usually 18" x 18", and is folded in thirds and placed underneath the chalice. The corporal is used to catch any crumbs from the host during consecration. Corporals are embroidered with one center front cross. The corporal is so named because the word comes from the Latin "corpus," meaning body.

Amice

The amice is worn as a neck cloth and is a rectangular linen with long ties, usually 60" in length, and one embroidered cross. The amice dates back to the Gothic period. The amice is worn beneath the chasuble to protect the chasuble from any wear next to the skin. The amice mainly worn in Roman and Anglican Catholic churches.

Pall

Palls are square, usually 7 x 7", and stiffened with plexiglass for ease of laundering. Palls are often enlarged to accommodate a wide chalice. Palls are embroidered with a large center cross. Palls are placed over the chalice during communion. The function of the pall is to cover the Eucharistic elements during communion. Credence Linens

Credence linens are custom-made linens that cover the credence table, which holds the bread and wine before consecration. The credence table is used at the offertory. Credence linens are embroidered with one center cross.

Fair Linens (Altar Cloths)

Fair linens are custom-made linens that cover the main altar and are embroidered with five crosses, one in each corner of the mensa and a centered embroidery. The five crosses on the fair linen are meant to depict the five wounds of Christ. A fair linen usually includes a drop, which is completely at the discretion of the altar guild. Drops on a fair linen vary enormously, but longer drops are encouraged, as they are visually more pleasing. Fair linens often include a lace trim on the drop. Fair linens should be stored rolled when not in use. The fair linen represents the shroud in which Jesus was wrapped for burial.

Baptismal Towel

The dimensions of the baptismal towel are that of the lavabo towel. However, it is embroidered with a shell and not a cross. The shell is used as the symbol of water in a baptism. Baptismal towels are often given to the parents as keepsakes.

Communion Veils

Communion veils are normally square and vary in size according to the number of communicants. Communion veils are used to cover all of the elements during the liturgy. Communion veils are removed before consecration.

The Burse

From the Greek "byrsa" meaning, "a bag". The burse is the folding case made from two squares of rigid material covered in cloth. The burse is placed on top of the chalice, paten and veil, and serves to hold a corporal and/or an extra purificator. The Burse and Veil should be in the color of the Season.

The Veil

From the Latin "vela" : a curtain or sail. The veil is the large cloth square used to cover the Chalice, Paten and Pall at the Eucharist. The Burse and Veil are often part of a matching set, with the "lectern falls" or "pulpit fall", in the color of the Season.