

## **How to Wash, Iron, and Care for Altar Linens: *Created Lent 2024***

### **Description of Linens Used in Communion**

**Purificator:** A 12" x 12", or 12" x 18" linen with an embroidered center cross, folded in thirds and placed over chalice. Used to wipe chalice during communion.

**Lavabo Towel:** An 11" x 17" linen with embroidered front cross. Used by celebrant to dry hands after ritual washing.

**Corporal:** An 18" x 18" or 22" x 22" (smaller size is for side altars) embroidered linen that is folded in thirds and placed under chalice during consecration.

**Pall:** A 7" x 7" (generally) square linen with a Plexiglas insert and centered embroidery. Palls are placed over the chalice during communion.

**Credence Table Linen:** An embroidered linen that covers the credence table (we have credence linens for all chapels, except for high altar credence table).

**Fair Linen:** An embroidered linen that covers the entire top of the altar, with a drop on either side.

**Undercloth (sometimes called a Cerecloth):** A coarser linen that sits directly atop wood or marble altar. Its primary purpose is to protect the fair linen from any dampness or staining that marble or wood can cause.

**Dust Cover:** Lays directly on top of fair linen when altar is not in use. They are generally polyester and should be washed as such. NEVER wash these in the same cycle as other linens.

\*There are various other linens in most parish sacristies: Amices, baptismal towels (a lavabo towel with an embroidered baptismal shell on it), etc. The same care should be applied to these items as well.

### **Laundering Linen**

No other items should be washed in a cycle with chapel linens, especially the blue altar dust covers.

Linen should be washed on the hottest water setting in a washing machine and set to the "whites" setting. A quality detergent should be used (I recommend Persil, Tide, or Cheer). Also adding an appropriate amount of OxiClean (I like the "White Revive" version) will help any yellowed linens and is extra effective with stains. Most often, the inability to remove stains is

because the laundry detergent being used is not effective, or linens haven't been able to soak in the hot water long enough (The "whites" setting on a washer typically does this).

If there are any linens that are extremely delicate or have a lot of lace, they should be washed by hand, if possible. Otherwise, they should be washed in the washer on delicate, with hot water.

Any stains should be treated as soon as possible.

It is extremely important that the linen be rinsed thoroughly as soap residue is the main cause of scorch marks when ironing later.

**\*\*Bleach, hydrogen peroxide, fabric softener, or any scent boosters should never be used with linens.\*\***

Linens should never be placed in the dryer, but instead drape them to dry naturally.

Once a linen begins to fray (generally around the edges) or holes are spotted, the Senior Sacristan should be notified, and the linen should be pulled out of rotation and set aside to be burned. Any worn linens are unacceptable to be used at the altar.

All linens should be made from **only** 100% linen. Any poly or cotton blend should be avoided because removing stains is extremely difficult (usually impossible with polyester), and they do not hold shape or stay white as long as pure linen. Other than silk, linen is the strongest and most durable of fabrics.

I highly recommend purchasing linens from: <https://altarlinens.com>

#### Tips for Palls:

The insert in modern palls is made from unbreakable Plexiglas which is not removed from the pall itself (although we do have a couple palls where the linen can be removed for washing. This is made obvious by there being a sleeve opening on one side of the pall). The pall should be spot treated if needed before washing. Fill sink with as hot water as possible with an appropriate amount of laundry detergent and OxiClean. Let pall soak for one hour. Scrub both sides of pall with a soft brush and rinse thoroughly. If possible, let palls dry in windowsill in direct sunlight, otherwise let dry on a clean towel. Once linen starts wearing into holes (generally in the corners) the linen should be cut off the Plexiglas and burned.

### **Stain Removal**

For the best results, stains should be treated promptly, whenever possible.

Generally, the best stain removers are the simplest methods. Often, laundry detergent applied directly to a stain and scrubbed, is more effective than any other complicated method. Blue

Dawn dish soap is also extremely great at removing stains. Let these sit for 15 minutes to one hour to allow the stain to be broken down. Rubbing a Fels-Naptha soap bar for trouble stains is also recommended.

All stains should be pre-treated before the linen is laundered. If detergent or dish soap does not work, these specific stain removal options are helpful:

**Lipstick/Oil:** a grease-based stain and dish soap is specifically designed for grease stains. If this does not get all of it out, apply a cotton ball of rubbing alcohol to the stain and let it sit for 15 minutes. Then, pour boiling water over the area to knock out the remainder of the stain. Or you may want to fill sink/laundry tub with scalding water and plenty of dish soap (and some Borax or Washing Soda). Let soak for an hour and agitate every 15 minutes. Rinse and then wash as normal.

**Wax:** Wait until wax is completely hardened then scrape off the buildup with the dull side of a butter knife. After as much buildup has been removed, put a piece of paper towel or a plain paper bag over the wax stain and skim a warm (not hot!) iron over the area(s). The wax will melt and be absorbed by the paper. Then, soak the scraped linen in boiling water until wax melts off linen. You may have to do this multiple times. Do not dump the water down your drain, as the wax will cool and clog. Staying on top of washing the fair linens and altar dust covers will help lessen the amount of wax to be removed.

You generally will have oil stains on linen once you use an iron to get the majority of it off. Pretreat with dish soap (may need to soak first depending on how much wax was on linen. Rinse and wash as normal.

**Wine:** Since we use white wine, red wine stains should generally never be a problem. If so, soak the linen immediately in cold water. After a few minutes rub in a few drops of dish soap, then rinse with cold water. Then apply some vinegar and laundry detergent. Wait 15 minutes and rinse in cold water again. If stain is still present, make a paste of salt and club soda and rub into stain and let sit. Rinse with cold water. Generally, adding OxiClean to your linens in the washer should knock out the remainder of the red wine stain.

**Scorches:** You can prevent scorches entirely by rinsing soap out of linens thoroughly. If a scorch does happen, rub half of a cut white onion onto the burn and wait for one hour. Then wash as normal. Drying in sunlight will also bleach linen and help remove the scorch.

**Soot:** Soot stains on the linen are caused by the interior of candle snuffers not being cleaned adequately (and they can/should be completely avoidable if Sacristans are cleaning snuffers regularly). Soot stains are dirty wax build up that fall on linen from the inside of the snuffer. These stains should be treated exactly like wax stains. However, getting the black soot completely out of the linen (especially on the poly-blend ones) is nearly impossible. After wax is melted off, mix some hydrogen peroxide and baking soda and scrub into stains. Launder as usual.

### **Ironing Linen**

Linen should be ironed on the hottest setting with the iron set to the fullest steam setting. Some people prefer to iron the linens where they are just slightly damp with a dry iron, but this involves checking the linen multiple times and doesn't really change the quality of the finished product once ironed.

Laying linens as flat as possible with making ironing much easier. If linen is too dry and badly creased, it can be misted with water and let to sit so the fibers can relax and make ironing easier.

All the linens should be ironed upside down first (seam side facing up to you) and then flipped over and ironed top side up.

For any linens that need to be folded in certain ways (corporals, purificators, lavabo towels, etc.), each fold should then be gone over with the iron, with the final press being done on top of the finished product.

Any embroidery should be done with multiple hits from the steam button to help smooth the linen around the embroidery detail.

Any lace ends of a linen should not be ironed directly. Place a white towel or white sheet over lace, spray with water, and then iron. If lace is ironed directly, the tip of the iron can catch and tear the detail.

### **Storing Linen**

Your Senior Sacristan and/or Director of Chapel will dictate where and how linens are stored. Most smaller linens are kept in drawer, ironed and folded, ready for immediate use.

Fair linens and undercloths, once ironed, are taped onto a dowel, and wrapped taut around it. This way, linen can be unrolled directly onto altar when needed, with no creases made on it during storage.