

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Metropolitan of  
All North America

## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

### ANTIMINS OR ANTIMENSION

(Greek word meaning "in place of the table")

In the Orthodox Christian liturgical tradition, the Antimins is among the most important liturgical adornments used in the altar during the Divine Liturgy. It is a type of icon, a rectangular cloth, traditionally sewn of either linen or silk. Beautifully embellished, it always reflects the image of Christ's entombment, the four Evangelists and scriptural passages related to the Eucharist. A small piece of a martyr's relic is ceremoniously and prayerfully placed into the fold of the Antimins as each one is blessed. It is an essential component without which the Holy Eucharist cannot be celebrated. This Antimins is inscribed with the text from the Holy Saturday Troparion, *"The noble Joseph, taking down Thy most pure body from the tree, wrapped it in clean linen and sweet spices, and laid it in a new tomb."*

The Antimins, once properly folded, sits in the center of another slightly larger cloth called the eileton by which it is completely encased and protected. The two, which are folded in the same manner, are then placed in the center of the altar table, underneath the Gospel Book and unfolded only during the Divine Liturgy in the moments before the great entrance. After the Great entrance, the chalice and diskos are placed on the Antimins and the Gifts (bread and wine) are consecrated. The Antimins remains unfolded until all have received Holy Communion at which time the chalice and diskos are then returned to the Table of oblation (Prothesis). The priest must very carefully inspect the Antimins checking that no particles are left behind, on or underneath it or between the Antimins and the eileton. At the end of the liturgy, the Antimins is folded into thirds, beginning horizontally from the bottom up, and then in thirds again vertically from left to right. The same follows for the eileton. When the two are unfolded for use once again, the opened Antimins reflects creases that form the sign of the cross. A flattened natural sponge (usually natural loofah), used to collect any crumbs which might fall onto the *Holy Table*, is kept inside the folded Antimins.

The Antimins is consecrated and signed and/or sealed by the presiding Metropolitan. Upon the arrival of the Metropolitan to any church or monastery under his omophorion, he first enters the altar and checks the Antimins to ensure that it has been properly cared for and that it is, in fact, the one he himself issued. The Antimins and the chrism are the means by which a hierarch gives his blessing for priests to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and Holy Mysteries in his absence. It is, in fact, the only means by which a priest is authorized to conduct divine services. In the rare case that a Metropolitan was to withdraw his blessing from a priest to serve the Holy Mysteries, he would confirm that decision with the gesture of removing or retracting the Antimins and chrism. Since the Antimins is a consecrated object of the church, it should only be handled by a vested bishop or priest and no one else. One should, at the very least, be vested in his stole (epitrachelion).

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

The Antimins, being a substitute for the altar table, may be used to celebrate the Eucharist even on top of an altar table that has not yet been consecrated. In emergencies, when an altar table is not available, the Antimins serves an important function in enabling Divine services to take place outside of churches or chapels. In the early church, if the priest celebrated at a consecrated altar, the sacred elements were placed only on the eileton. However, the current practice is for the priest to always use the Antimins on top of the eileton even on a consecrated altar table already housing relics.

Great care should be taken not to stain or damage the Antimins in any way including never washing or dry cleaning it. The Antimins has already been cleaned and protected against spills and stains of any kind. Should the Antimins become worn, torn or damaged, please contact the Metropolitan's office for instructions on return and replacement protocol.

No writing or inscription should be present on the Antimins with the exception of the Metropolitan's signature and seal signifying his blessing to his clergy to serve as well as his authority in the archdiocese entrusted to his care. The Antimins you are receiving is larger than usual in order to accommodate all sized parishes throughout archdiocese as well as the use of multiple chalices.

Each Antimins has been consecrated in the archdiocesan chapel of St. John Chrysostom and contains a relic of St. Raphael of Brooklyn. Please take this opportunity to share the meaning of this important church vessel with the faithful by showing it to them properly and referencing this letter if needed. In light of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his repose as well as his relic being placed inside the Antimins, you might encourage your parishioners to learn the Troparion to St. Raphael.

We beseech you to follow this guide carefully. We welcome any questions and encourage you to contact the Archdiocese Office for any further clarification, if needed.

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

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