

# The Charity of St. Nicholas

**S**OMETIMES SERVING THE GOOD cause means more than fighting. Sometimes it is about helping in other ways. The act of giving, of caring is an act of healing. Many faiths throughout time and around the world. Standing against the darkness is noble, and there are some who will always be there for that fight. Healing the fallen is also noble, and dearly needed, but healing is not always sealing wounds. A kind word and gift can do much to heal the spirits. This is the lesson of St. Nicholas.

Below, you will find a story about Nicholas of Myra, advice on using saints and miracle-workers in your home games, and the Charity divine domain for clerics.



**WRITING** JEREMIAH MCCOY  
**COLOR ART** ELLIS GOODSON  
**EDITING** JAMES J. HAECK  
**LAYOUT** ERIC LIFE-PUTNAM

## THE REAL SAINT NICHOLAS

St. Nicholas of Myra was born to affluent Greek parents in a Roman controlled port city in Anatolia. After his parent's death, he gave much of their wealth away and began working for the church. He was elected Bishop before he was ordained as a priest. He traveled on a pilgrimage from Asia Minor, down through Egypt, back up through Palestine, and visited various holy sites before returning to Myra.

He knew some hardships, as well. He spent time in prison. During the rule of Diocletian much of the early church was suppressed, and many bishops were imprisoned. He was not released till Emperor Constantine named Christianity the official faith of the Empire.

Nicholas was invited to attend the Council of Nicea, which was the body called by Constantine to settle various theological disputes in the early church. There are many books, and few games written about the events at this council, but our fellow and future saint was memorable. While in the heat of a debate, with the very controversial Arius of Alexandria, Nicholas lost his temper and struck Arius in the face.

As early as the 5th century, Nicholas was seen as a saint and revered by the Eastern Church. He was often referred to as Nicholas the Wonderworker, and his life became the stuff of legend.

## THE LEGEND OF SANTA CLAUS

Saints are funny things. They often are revered in one place, and nearly forgotten in another. Much of Europe stopped paying a lot of attention to Nicholas after the Reformation, but his feast day was still remembered. The Feast of Saint Nicholas was often a day giving gifts, and was observed on

December 6th in Western Christian countries and on December 19th in Eastern Christianity. Some shifting occurred when the calendar changed from Julian to Gregorian, and as a result Saint Nicholas Day became closely associated with Christmas.

In Dutch, Saint Nicholas became known as Sint-Nicholas, and later as Sinterklaas. The Santa Claus known in America is a hybrid of the Dutch Sinterklaas and the English Father Christmas. All the figures were tied to the December tradition of giving gifts. The Santa Claus we know today emerged in the 19th century, with his magic sleigh, reindeer, portly build, red coat, and his propensity for breaking and entering. Even then, St. Nicholas was an interchangeable name for the fellow, even if the original figure was largely lost.

## SAINTS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

A saint is a follower of a god that elevates to a divine status themselves through their service or devotion. While the term is tied to the Catholic tradition, the idea is found in many religions. In Greek myth, many a mortal or demigod rose to divine status through great deeds as a mortal. The Buddhist bodhisattva or gurus of the Hindu or Sikh religions also are good examples; the central concept is the same.

Where to begin? First, you need to decide what god the saint is tied to. A monotheistic deity is not required, but that certainly version found in with St. Nicholas. A follower of a god of magic might achieve sainthood through legendary deeds of alchemy and sorcery, for example.

The familiar saints often have an area of influence, just as the gods themselves have a domain or a divine portfolio. They are advocates with the god they are tied to, and are particularly

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called on by specific groups. Saint Thomas Aquinas is patron saint of students and teachers. Saint Joan of Arc is the saint of soldiers. Some clerics begin their devotion by following in a particular saint's footsteps until they have discovered a calling of their own. The following real-life saints and the exaggerated legends thereof can be used as people or divine beings in your own game.

**Saint Cuthbert** is an obvious choice as the first real-world saint to be translated—however faithfully—into a fantasy roleplaying game. As a saint-turned-deity, Cuthbert can represent the ultimate step in a cleric's progression, transcending mortality itself by virtue of his miraculous deeds. In this way, Cuthbert is something to which all holy characters can aspire.

**Saint George the Dragonslayer** has a certain inevitable charm in a fantasy world. He is again a lawful good patron, but more for those who seek out monsters and slay them. Like most saints, he is associated with a legendary item, a piece of holy regalia. The discovery of his regalia, the Lance of Saint George, could be a plot hook or a mid-campaign reward for a devoted PC.

**Saint Albertus Magnus** is a saint of chemists, and in a fantasy world that could also place him a saint for wizards or alchemy. He would certainly be a more neutral figure tied to the Knowledge Domain. Legend has it that Albertus created the philosopher's stone before his death, and passed it on to his pupil.

**Santa Muerte**, sometimes known as Sacred Death or Our Lady of the Holy Death, is a deity worshiped in modern-day Mexico, linked to healing and safe passage into the afterlife—like most Mesoamerican incarnations of death, Santa Muerte is not a villain. Though her worship has been denounced by the Catholic Church, Santa Muerte has become unexpectedly popular in the 21st century. Just as the real life Sant Muerte can be traced back to the Aztec Lady of the Dead, your version of the Sacred Death may also have a long history of being lost, destroyed, and revived by various civilizations.



## SAINT NICHOLAS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Below is a generic version of a St. Nicholas priesthood that can be dropped into any fantasy world. As usual, some tweaking might be required to make them fit in specific settings and pantheons.

Nicholas was not a warrior in life, and his priests are more concerned with acts of charity, though they do not turn back when combat is unavoidable. St. Nicholas is Neutral Good with Lawful tendencies; the core tenets of his worship are to help the poor, protect the defenseless, and only punish the cruel when necessary. Most of his followers follow the Charity domain, and adventurer members of the church will often collect the charitable donations, and distribute them to the poor. These clerics rarely keep the treasure they find while on adventures, preferring to use it to buy food, build buildings, and provide to the poor.

Regional heads of Nicholas's temples are found in major cities and hold the title of Presbyter. They often have a storehouse to hold food, clothing, and other useful goods. Lay members are always



on hand to help. Traveling members of the church are required to make a pilgrimage at least once a year to a main temple and report to a Presbyter. This is usually an opportunity collect information on places in need throughout the realm.

In times of famine, war, or disaster the church organizes a Great Mission. They call together the entirety of their priesthood, ask for aid from nobility across the land, and go to the place of need bringing the considerable resources they collect. The Mission stays in place till the need has passed. A few permanent cities have started in refugee camps over the centuries. The Grand Mission is often what allows that to happen. Luckily, such disasters do not happen often.

The Church of St. Nicholas is popular in many kingdoms. It is hard to work up a dislike for a religion founded around charity and good works. Many noble garners favor or prestige by giving lavish gifts to the church. The Feast of St. Nicholas is popular throughout the lands, and is honored by peasant and noble alike.



The church does face some resistance, here and there. Some nobles have objected to the churches neutral application of aid. It doesn't matter if there is a war on, the church will give aid where it is needed, an act which often puts them at odds with priests of war gods. For this, the church's benevolent acts also frequently draw the attention of the servants of evil. While it is not a church militant, it is often on hand giving aid to those who oppose evil forces. They are also not popular with priests to gods of trade or wealth.

St. Nicholas is unusual for a god, in that he does not have a set celestial home. Instead, he wanders the celestial realm or invisibly in the material plane. His humility is legendary and charity is hard to perform from a distant perspective.

## CHARITY DOMAIN

The Charity domain focuses on good works. It is less about fighting evil, or rebirth, or even nature. It is about the giving of gifts and service to others. The gods of Charity promote kindness and generosity to those in need rather than just those who fight against evil. It is not directly about healing, though priests will do that as well, but about performing kind acts to heal the soul or community. This Domain is almost exclusively claimed by good aligned deities. The evil do not concern themselves with the good of others. You need a good nature to provide gifts and help the needy. Greek Goddess Eunomia and her three daughters (often call the Charities) would be a good example of a god aligned to Charity, as would St. Nicholas, of course.

### CHARITY DOMAIN SPELLS

#### Cleric Level Spells

1st	<i>sanctuary, unseen servant</i>
3rd	<i>aid, lesser restoration</i>
5th	<i>beacon of hope, create food and water</i>
7th	<i>locate creature, guardian of faith</i>
9th	<i>hallow, greater restoration</i>

### **Bonus Proficiency**

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you gain proficiency with one type of artisan's tools of your choice. Crafting even the smallest gift can be an act of charity.

### **Kindness to Strangers**

At 1st level, your presence is a balm for the needy and the poor. You have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion), Wisdom (Insight), and Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks with creatures in dire need. This benefit only applies to creatures that are not in combat with you.

### **Channel Divinity: Bestow Health**

Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to relieve ailments.

As an action, you present your holy symbol and you can relieve a disease or one condition from the number of targets within 30 feet equal to your proficiency bonus. The conditions can be blinded, deafened, paralyzed, or poisoned. You may cure a single target of multiple effects by reducing the total number of targets by the number of additional conditions cured.

### **Gift of Healing**

Beginning at 6th level, whenever a healing spell you cast would heal a target above their maximum hit points, they may choose to share the remaining healing with a creature of their choice within 30 feet.

### **Wisdom of Giving**

Starting at 8th level, once per turn when you or a creature within 30 feet makes a saving throw, you may add your Wisdom modifier to the roll as a reaction. You must choose to use this feature before the roll is made.

### **Spirit of Graciousness**

At 17th level, you may cast *mass suggestion* without expending a spell slot a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. The spell usually affects up to twelve creatures, but you may expend additional uses of this feature to affect an additional twelve creatures per use. Your suggestion cannot be used to incite violence, even if the crowd is likely to do harm.