

5e Cleric Guide

by Sky Knight

All Clerics are solid frontliners, with high armor class, decent hit points, and powerful damage spells. Clerics also have strong support capabilities, thus can be effective from the back line. Ranged options include weapon attacks and cantrips, and there's even a subclass for blasters, with *fireball*. An interesting thing about frontline Clerics is they get a lot of value from the Dodge and Help actions, because their most beneficial spells use concentration or bonus actions.

Purple ★★★★★ This feature is very strong, either in effectiveness or frequency of use..

Blue ★★★★★ This feature is very effective or frequently useful.

Green ★★★ This feature is occasionally strong or somewhat frequently useful.

Orange ★★ This feature is occasionally useful.

Red ★ This feature does not increase your power.

For those who want strong melee weapon attacks, it is recommended that you pick up *booming blade*. You can get it from Arcana Domain, Magic Initiate, Spell Sniper, multiclassing, or a race choice. Some add *shillelagh*, for attacks based on WIS. An alternative to *booming blade* is *green-flame blade*. If you aren't going Arcana, you'll want to pair your cantrip with Divine Strike, available on 8 of the other 11 subclasses. It must be stated that all of this is entirely optional, as most of your value will come from leveled spells, and your other actions can be Dodge or Help, or a cantrip with a save DC. Regardless, all frontliners are advised to take War Caster, to preserve concentration.

Non-frontline Clerics are advised to maximize WIS as soon as possible. A good feat for all Clerics is Resilient: CON, again providing concentration help. An interesting way to gain CON saves as well as *booming blade* and other spells is to start with Sorcerer, but we're getting too far afield here. We'll discuss races, then class features, then subclasses.

Races

The first thing to say about races in 5e is that all races are viable with all classes, so if you don't want to optimize, don't worry about it. If you do want to optimize, you'll get value from any race with a WIS bonus, e.g. Hill Dwarf, Wood Elf, Ghostwise Halfling, Human, or Half-Elf. Other useful stats include DEX and CON, or possibly STR instead of DEX, though DEX is usually more valuable. Another thing to consider is High Elf, who can start with *booming blade*. Half-Elf can also get *booming blade*, with the variant rules in the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide.

Class Features

Spellcasting ★★★★★

This is the strongest feature in the game, for each of the five full-casters who have it. You get spells that are cast with spell slots, which recover on long rest. Some of those spells are rituals, which you can cast without spell slots. Finally, there are cantrips, which never require spell slots. You are a prepared caster, which allows you to change the leveled spells you have available, at the end of any long rest. You also get spells from your domain. For a discussion on spells, including domain spells, check the [5e Cleric Spell Guide](#).

Channel Divinity ★★★★★

This gives all Clerics gain a strong ability to turn undead, once per short rest. Domains add further abilities, and higher levels add more uses per rest.

Destroy Undead ★★

Instead of being turned, some undead are destroyed. That's good flavor, but not a huge increase in power, because either way you win.

Divine Strike/Potent Spellcasting ★★

These are technically subclass features, but every subclass has one or the other of them, so we'll discuss them here. Both increase the damage you can deal as an action, without using a spell slot. They are effective at range and in melee, but their value is limited, because in tough battles you will cast leveled spells.

Divine Intervention ★★★

Depending on your DM, this can be inconsequential or extremely powerful.

A Note on Armor

All Clerics get medium armor, which is effective on DEX builds. Some Clerics get heavy armor, which is effective on STR builds. DEX is generally more valuable than STR, because of saves and initiative, so heavy armor is a tradeoff of those things, for +1 AC. Dwarves are effective in heavy armor even without STR, so they get the best of both worlds.

Subclasses

Arcana ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★ Despite their theme, Arcana Clerics do not have a particularly strong domain list, though they do have versatility. *magic missile*, *arcane eye*, and *teleportation circle* provide value from outside the class, while *detect magic* and *dispel magic* provide value from the Cleric list.

Arcane Initiate ★★★★★ You gain Arcana proficiency and two Wizard cantrips, which count as Cleric cantrips for you. The fact that they count as Cleric cantrips is huge, because it means they work with Potent Spellcasting. With *booming blade* and *green-flame blade* you are a strong damage dealer, because the bonus applies to attack damage and movement damage for *booming blade*, and to both targets for *green-flame blade*. Other cantrips are interesting as well, such as *acid splash* and *sword burst*, or you can take valuable non-damage cantrips such as *minor illusion* and *mage hand*.

Channel Divinity: Arcane Abjuration ★★★ This essentially adds celestials, elementals, fey, and fiends to your turn-undead feature. Those creature types aren't common, but they can have high power, so this feature is occasionally quite effective.

Spell Breaker ★★★ This adds dispel functionality to your healing spells. That is a strong upgrade, especially to spells that affect multiple targets, or that are cast with a bonus action.

Arcane Mastery ★★★★★ High-level Wizard spells are the most powerful spells in the game, and you get four of them. For a discussion on Wizard spells, see the [5e Wizard Spell Guide](#).

Death ★★★

Domain Spells ★★ Most of these options are quite poor, though they do provide various ways to deal damage. The best non-Cleric spell here is *antilife shell*, with *blindness/deafness*, *animate dead*, and *death ward* from the Cleric list.

Bonus Proficiency ★★★ You gain martial weapon proficiency, which allows you to use rapiers etc.

Reaper ★★★★★ You gain a necromancy cantrip, probably *chill touch*, and a limited twinned effect for necromancy cantrips, i.e. *chill touch*, *spare the dying*, and *toll the dead*. The twinned effect only applies when targets are within 5 feet of each other, but it is strong in that case.

Channel Divinity: Touch of Death ★★★★★ This feature adds damage to a melee attack. Note that it works with spell attacks as well as weapon attacks, so it applies to *spiritual weapon*. There is also synergy with *vampiric touch*, because healing is increased along with damage, but that spell is weak in the first place, so it still isn't great.

Inescapable Destruction ★ This is an extremely minor effect, and you can turn undead anyway.

Improved Reaper ★ There are very few spells that you actually want to use this with.

Forge ★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ You get strong value from *heat metal*, *wall of fire*, and *animate objects*, along with versatility from *identify*, *fabricate*, et al.

Bonus Proficiencies ★★ You gain proficiency with heavy armor and smith's tools. Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds.

Blessing of the Forge ★★★ This adds a bonus to a suit of armor or a weapon. It is strong in early levels, but fades in later levels, becoming useless when everyone has magic items. It is best on the weapon of a high-damage ally.

Channel Divinity: Artisan's Blessing ★★ This feature is the reason Forge Cleric is a well-designed subclass. It really brings out the flavor of a god of crafting.

Soul of the Forge ★★ You get fire resistance and +1 AC in heavy armor. This feature basically locks you into a STR build, but it's still barely better than a DEX build.

Saint of Forge and Fire ★★ You get fire immunity as well as nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing resistance in heavy armor. Finally, STR is clearly better than DEX for you.

Grave ★★★

Domain Spells ★★ As with Death, there is very little value here from outside the Cleric list, with the best option being *antilife shell*. Cleric options include *bane*, *revivify*, and *death ward*.

Circle of Mortality ★★★★★ You get *spare the dying*, along with quite a strong upgrade that lets you cast it at range and with a bonus action. You also get an upgrade to *healing word*, or any spell that rolls dice and brings up downed allies.

Eyes of the Grave ★★ You can sense the presence of undead.

Channel Divinity: Path to the Grave ★★★ You can double the damage of an attack, which allows beneficial combinations, depending on allies.

Sentinel at Death's Door ★★★★★ You can use a reaction to reduce a critical hit to a normal hit, much like a Lore Bard uses Cutting Words.

Keeper of Souls ★★ This is a very minor effect.

Knowledge ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★ This list has one standout, which is *suggestion*. It also has a lot of versatility, with *identify*, *arcane eye*, *scrying*, et al. The strongest Cleric option is *command*.

Blessings of Knowledge ★★★★★ You get two languages and two skill proficiencies, which is good, and then you get expertise in those skills, which is fantastic. The value of the skills you get depends strongly on your campaign, though, so the impact of this feature varies widely.

Channel Divinity: Knowledge of the Ages ★★★★★ You essentially have proficiency with all skills and tools.

Channel Divinity: Read Thoughts ★★★ This has mostly out-of-combat value, but it is strong.

Visions of the Past ★★ This has good flavor, but minor value.

Life ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★ Every single spell is on the Cleric list. This is the greatest hits of Cleric. You get flexibility in preparation, but no outside value.

Bonus Proficiency ★★ Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds.

Disciple of Life ★★★★★ You get a boost to all healing spells, especially those with multiple targets. Multiclassing allows strong combinations with *goodberry* and *healing spirit*.

Channel Divinity: Preserve Life ★★★★★ The key to Life Cleric is to hold off on healing spells until you use this feature, because if you don't you'll never use it, and it's a strong combat-healing option. Also it comes back on short rest, and spell slots don't.

Blessed Healer ★★★★★ This improves your frontline support capabilities. It also has synergy with *warding bond*.

Supreme Healing ★★ The most powerful healing spells don't use dice, so the effect here is minor. The strongest gain is with *mass cure wounds*.

Light ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ Notably, you have ranged damage options. The standout here is *fireball*. You also get *faerie fire*, *flaming sphere*, and *wall of fire*, though there is redundancy with top Cleric spells, i.e. *bless*, *spiritual weapon*, and *spirit guardians*. You get divination with *scrying*.

Bonus Cantrip ★★ You get *light*, which has value in dim light and darkness.

Warding Flare ★★★★★ This is a strong defensive feature. With a reaction, you give disadvantage to an enemy who attacks you.

Channel Divinity: Radiance of the Dawn ★★★ This eliminates magical darkness and deals area damage. It is strong at low levels, but scales poorly.

Improved Flare ★★★★★ Warding Flare now applies to your allies. This is a valuable upgrade to your support capabilities.

Corona of Light ★★ At such a high level, this feature is weak, though it can have synergy with particular allies.

Nature ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★ You get a bunch of Druid spells, most notably *spike growth* and *plant growth*. The one spell that is also a Cleric spell is *insect plague*, which continues the theme of area control. One thing that must be said is that in a nature-heavy campaign, this list becomes **blue**, and the subclass becomes **purple**.

Acolyte of Nature ★★★ You get a skill and a Druid cantrip. The standout is *thorn whip*, for use with *spike growth* and *spirit guardians*. *shillelagh* is also popular.

Bonus Proficiency ★★ Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds.

Channel Divinity: Charm Animals and Plants ★★ This is a mass charm effect, quite valuable in the right campaign.

Dampen Elements ★★★★★ This is like at-will *absorb elements* that can target your allies. It's fantastic.

Master of Nature ★★ Your charm feature now allows complete control, using bonus actions. The value depends on your campaign.

Order ★★ ★

Domain Spells ★★ ★ Strong non-Cleric options include *heroism*, *slow*, and *compulsion*. The good Cleric spell is *command*. Overall, this list is not bad or great, but ok.

Bonus Proficiencies ★★ ★ You get proficiency in heavy armor and a skill. The skill is the good part. Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds.

Voice of Authority ★★ ★ ★ This strongly upgrades your support spells. Most of its use is with *healing word*, but it's also good with *bless*, *heroism*, et al. The problem with higher-level spells is you're taking slots away from *spiritual weapon* and *spirit guardians*. That said, *lesser restoration* and *dispel magic* are still strong, and even little-used spells like *protection from poison* have value.

Channel Divinity: Order's Demand ★★ This is a mass charm effect, but unfortunately it only lasts one turn. If your targets are humanoids, you can make them drop what they're holding.

Embodiment of the Law ★★ You can cast a leveled enchantment spell with a bonus action instead of an action. This seems like it would be awesome, but Clerics don't have many enchantment spells. Your best options are *bane*, *bless*, *command*, and *heroism*. Other than that, it works with *calm emotions*, *hold person*, *zone of truth*, *compulsion*, and *dominate person*. Also, a Cleric's actions, when they are not leveled spells, are not as impactful as those of a Fighter, a Paladin, etc.

Order's Wrath ★★ This is a minor buff to your melee attacks.

Tempest ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ *thunderwave*, *shatter*, and *destructive wave* provide blasting, and you also have area control. Your strongest area-control spell is *spirit guardians*, of course, so there are diminishing returns.

Bonus Proficiencies ★★★ You get martial weapons and heavy armor. Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds. Martial weapons have more value for DEX builds than STR builds, because they include rapiers and longbows.

Wrath of the Storm ★★★ If you are hit by a nearby attacker, you can use a reaction to deal damage to that attacker. Unfortunately, the damage is small, and you can only do it a number of times equal to your WIS mod, per long rest.

Channel Divinity: Destructive Wrath ★★★★★ You can do a lot of damage with *thunderwave*, *shatter*, or *destructive wave*. You also might use this with *booming blade*, if you have it, or *call lightning*.

Thunderbolt Strike ★★ This brings a slight upgrade to Wrath of the Storm and *call lightning*.

Stormborn ★★★★★ You can fly, without concentration.

Trickery ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ This is a fantastic list. Every spell here is strong, with *mirror image*, *pass without trace*, *dimension door*, and *polymorph* as standouts. It is by far the best domain list.

Blessing of the Trickster ★★★ You can improve an ally's stealth, whenever you want. In some campaigns, this is **purple**.

Channel Divinity: Invoke Duplicity ★★★ You create an illusory duplicate of yourself that you can move with your bonus action. You can cast spells through it, and if it is next to both you and your target, it gives advantage on your attacks. With creative use, this is interesting, but in straight combat it is limited because it requires concentration.

Channel Divinity: Cloak of Shadows ★★ As an action, you become invisible until the end of your next turn. There can be value here, but it is very situational. One good thing is it does not require concentration.

Improved Duplicity ★★ This has high shenanigan value, but low power.

War ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★ The best non-Cleric spell here is *crusader's mantle*, which has value in a party with many attackers. On the Cleric side, you have the two power spells, i.e. *spiritual weapon* and *spirit guardians*.

Bonus Proficiencies ★★★ You get martial weapons and heavy armor. Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds. Martial weapons have more value for DEX builds than STR builds, because they include rapiers and longbows.

War Priest ★★★ This is strong in early levels, but weak in later levels, as you gain better options. The greatest value here is to add damage to a ranged build; as it turns out, this is the best subclass for a Cleric with a bow.

Channel Divinity: Guided Strike ★★★ You can turn a miss into a hit, but your hits don't do a lot of damage. In later levels, you might use this with *booming blade*.

Channel Divinity: War God's Blessing ★★★★★ Now you can use your Channel Divinity on those who do much better damage than you. If you have a Rogue in your party, this is **purple**.

Avatar of Battle ★★ At such a high level, this adds little value.

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Appendix: Tasha's Cauldron of Everything

Peace ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ You are well-set-up for a backline Cleric build; *aid* and *warding bond* are among the strongest options for that style, *aid* often with upcasting. Of course, you can also go frontline, as can any Cleric. All of your spells have strong value in the right situations, especially *aura of purity* and *Otiluke's resilient sphere*. *heroism* is great if an ally is frightened, and *greater restoration* can save lives. In general, you have a lot of spells that offer protection. You also have strong communication spells; *Rary's telepathic bond* is fantastic as a ritual.

Implement of Peace ★★ You get a skill proficiency, which will have value in the right situations.

Emboldening Bond ★★★★★ This is *bless* without concentration. Also it's *guidance*. It's fantastic. The fact that it doesn't require concentration means you can stack it, for double *bless* or double *guidance* or *bless* + some other spell, like *spirit guardians*. The fact that it isn't a spell means you can activate it on the same turn you cast *spiritual weapon*, for example. It isn't exactly like *bless*; targets can only use it once per turn, but it's bananas. You can activate it a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, per long rest.

Channel Divinity: Balm of Peace ★★★★★ This is Dash, without provoking opportunity attacks, and all creatures you go near get 2d6 + your wisdom modifier of healing, unless you don't want them to. This is very strong at low levels, less so at high levels.

Protective Bond ★★★★★ Your allies can teleport in combat. If players in your group are strategic, this is super-duper. I'm rating it **blue** because they might not be, but really it's **purple**. Don't complain to me about the conditions.

Expansive Bond ★★★★★ Your bond features get better, with expanded range and resistance to the damage from teleportation. Protective Bond requires you to take an ally's damage to teleport. So now even that is a benefit.

Twilight ★★★★★

Domain Spells ★★★★★ Right away you get 2 super spells with *faerie fire* and *sleep*. Of course you already have *bless*, so this is an embarrassment of riches. You also get top-tier options in *Leomund's tiny hut*, *greater invisibility*, and *circle of power*. The rest of the spells have strong value in the right situations. Trickery now has competition.

Bonus Proficiencies ★★★ You get martial weapons and heavy armor. Heavy armor improves STR builds, but it doesn't make them better than DEX builds. Martial weapons have more value for DEX builds than STR builds, because they include rapiers and longbows.

Eyes of Night ★★★ You get incredible darkvision, and you can share it with allies.

Vigilant Blessing ★★★★★ You can give advantage on initiative to yourself or someone else. Winning initiative is very strong on spellcasters, because they can lay down effects before melee happens. Most other casters have stronger control spells than you, past early levels, so you will often want to share this.

Channel Divinity: Twilight Sanctuary ★★★★★ Tasha's Clerics are breaking my rating system! Each turn, all of your allies get temporary hit points. Also, you can end the charmed and frightened conditions. A minute ago, Peace was the strongest subclass; now it's Twilight.*

Steps of Night ★★★★★ You can fly.

Twilight Shroud ★★ Twilight Sanctuary provides half cover.

* For those who are strategic, it's still Peace.

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