

GUIDELINES for USHERS

INTRODUCTION

People experience the presence of Jesus Christ in the world through the ministry of the church. The first task of the parish community is to reach out to all people in Christian love and service. Christian hospitality draws people together, opens them to participation, and sets the tone for the liturgy. Every Christian is called to ministry and gifted by the Holy Spirit. This calling is rooted in our baptism. By means of our initiation into the Church and strengthened by grace, God empowers each person with the resources for ministry.

Ushers are equipped for this ministry by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts make that ministry effective and enable the Usher to build up the Body of Christ. In their welcome and Christ-like attitude, Ushers ensure that the faithful see and experience the love of Christ.

The ministry of Usher is crucial because it is so visible in the Church. Certainly the attitude, conduct and even the appearance of the Usher directly affects, either positively or negatively, the experience of the faithful at Mass.

Conscious of this vital ministry and its significance for the faithful, St. Michaels has created a separate ministry of greeters, apart from Ushers, to help create a sense of welcome and hospitality.

REQUIREMENTS

Those who desire to serve as an Usher should be active and faithful members of the Church. They should be of godly character and reputation. Respect for others, discretion and appropriate decorum are the hallmarks of an Usher. Above all, Ushers should be noted for their care to the assembly. These qualities are found in a mature Christian – qualities that transcend chronological age.

Furthermore, the Usher should be comfortable meeting and greeting others. They must always extend a sense of welcome to others and make them feel at home. Such qualities are a blessing, especially to the stranger in our midst.

SELECTION

Although men have traditionally filled the role of “usher” in most parishes, women, teenagers and children, are invited to serve as Ushers. As St. Paul reminds us: *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:27-28). Indeed, variety in and among the members of this ministry better represents the diverse nature of our Church.

DRESS AND DECORUM

Male Ushers should wear dress slacks, shirt and coat with a tie. During the summer months, the jacket is optional. Women Ushers should be in a modest dress, skirt or pant suit. No short skirts or sleeveless tops. No cleavage or open backs. No flashy colors. Teenage and younger Ushers should follow the same dress, except that for boys the jacket is always optional. This manner of dress is to ensure that the parishioners can find you when needed and to set you apart as a minister participating in the Mass.

SEATING

The proper place for Ushers of hospitality is within the assembly. Always attentive to the needs of the faithful, they should sit in those places that would enable them to best exercise their ministerial role, i.e., near the doors, throughout the church, etc.

PROCEDURES BEFORE THE LITURGY

Greet and welcome the faithful as they gather for worship. Ushers should be at each of the entrances of the church. They should avoid congregating in only one area of the church, as well as speaking with their fellow ministers to the exclusion of those who are gathering for the liturgy.

Assist with the seating of the assembly before the Mass begins.

PROCEDURES DURING THE MASS

Ushers are part of the worshipping community. As such, they are to participate fully in the music, responses, and prayers of the Mass. At times, however, the special duties of the Usher may limit his or her ability to participate. Yet, every effort should be made by the Ushers to be models of participation in the worship of the Church.

During the liturgy, Ushers should assist with the following:

The seating of latecomers with as much haste and as little disturbance as possible, at the conclusion of the Opening Prayer or at the conclusion of the First Reading or Responsorial Psalm.

Collect the offerings of the people. Both the faithful and the offerings are to be treated with utmost dignity and reverence. The faithful should be given adequate time to deposit their gifts during the collection.

Appoint and assist those who will be taking up the gifts in the procession for the Preparation of the Gifts.

Direct the communion procession in an orderly manner. Two ushers should go to the front of the pews to let the people out. Move back several pews at a time and always

move back before the pew in front of you is completely empty. This makes those not receiving Communion more comfortable. If one side has emptied out, the ushers should let out those on the other side beginning with the last pew and working up until you reach the other usher. Direct these people up the side that emptied out first.

Be aware of the placement of first aid supplies and an emergency telephone if the need should arise.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF THE MASS

Ushers should distribute the parish bulletins and any other pertinent materials at the conclusion of the liturgy. They should also be available to assist those with special needs. Finally, they can assist in preparing the worship space for the next Mass, making sure it is well organized and inviting.

USHERS SHOULD...

Be appropriately dressed for their ministry.

Always wear their usher badge.

Find a replacement if unable to be present.

Be present for all liturgical functions, not just MASS.

Have first-aid kits available as well as emergency phone numbers and access to a phone, should it be needed.

Know the location and have the ability to operate fire extinguishers.

Be aware of and know how to operate lights, heating and cooling systems and be able to make adjustments as needed.

Distribute bulletins after MASS, not before.

Thank you for agreeing to serve the parish as either an usher or a greeter or both. The Church's liturgical books call for communities to develop these ministries in order to have a welcoming presence for all who come to worship, especially guests and visitors. Although greeters do not double as ushers, at times ushers do act as greeters. That is why the guidelines for these two ministries are brought together in one booklet. It is important to review each year the expectations and procedures for those who are ushers and greeters. The Eucharist is the heart of our worship and you are one of the public witnesses to its meaning. It is important that this service not become merely routine but continually challenge us to grow in our own faith, our trust in God, and our appreciation for the Eucharist. You are one of the first and key ways that people see present the full, conscious and active participation toward which the Second Vatican Council asks all Catholics to strive. You are the "face" of the parish to every visitor or guest who arrives and is seated.