

Guidelines for Ushers

The following guidelines for Ushers reflect current liturgical practice at St. Francis Xavier parish in Parkersburg, WV, for Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and Holy Days; the guidelines have been developed from the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's *Celebration of Sunday Eucharist and Management of Sunday Collections*.

What is an Usher?

The ministry of ushers is the oldest lay ministry in the Catholic Church. The ushers of today have descended from a long line of people of God who have gone before them. We see their antecedents in 1 Chronicles where they are called the “gatekeepers.” During the time of Christ, the temple guard numbered in the hundreds and were the forerunners of today's ushers.

The more immediate predecessor of today's usher can be found in the clerical order of porter, instituted in the 3rd Century A.D. During those times, it was the duty of the porters or ushers to guard the door of the church against any intruders who might disturb the service. The porter duties were so important that they came to be included in the rite of ordination, where they were specified as: "to ring the bells, open the church and sacristy, to open the book for the preacher." In 1972 Pope Paul VI abolished the order of porter and this important task was given over to the laity.

While today's ushers don't ring bells or open the church, their primary duties and responsibilities include greeting and welcoming parishioners as they enter the church, help them to find seats, taking up the collection and wishing everyone a good day at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Celebration.

- 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.
- Through Baptism, we are all called to be a “holy people and royal priesthood” (I Peter 2:9), whose right and privilege it is to participate in Christ's own ministry. How we do so varies from person to person, but the most important way is “conscious, active, and

fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (GIRM, Intro. 5). Since the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church” (GIRM, Intro. 5), all of us have an “individual right and duty to contribute” (GIRM, 58). Some are called to do so in a more particular way through liturgical ministries such as Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Usher, Lector, or Altar Server.

- Given the centrality of the Eucharist to our lives as Catholic Christians, the importance of this ministry cannot be over-emphasized. Ushers carry a dignity about themselves even when performing menial tasks, and can handle emergency situations with composure and compassion.

Functions of Ministry of Usher

- Ushers assist in the ministry of hospitality by welcoming the stranger and helping the faithful find seating in the more crowded liturgies.
- They assist in the communal action by taking up the collection, recruiting gift bearers to take up the gifts, instructing the faithful who take the gifts to the altar and directing the communion procession when needed.
- Ushers handle the tasks of hospitality and administration that ensure a dignified flow of the liturgy. Therefore, a sense of cheerful service and good timing are essential to allow for both reverent silence and purposeful action.
- Ushers are prepared to get emergency assistance if anyone present should need it.

Selection of Candidates

- Although men have traditionally filled the role of “usher” in most parishes, women (as well as teenagers and children) are invited to serve as ministers of hospitality. 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.

- Those who desire to serve as minister of hospitality -- whether Usher or Greeter -- 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 a minister of hospitality. Above all, ministers should be noted for their care to the assembly. These qualities are found in a mature Christian, and are qualities that transcend chronological age.
- The minister 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.

Formation

Since Ushers participate in an ecclesial (church) and liturgical ministry and are not simply functionaries, they are required to have training that brings depth, reverence, and insight to this ministry.

- How does this ministry support the essential actions of the Eucharistic Liturgy.
- Ushers are oriented to the stewardship procedures in the document "*Management of Sunday Collections*" so that they understand the reasoning for procedures related to handling the collections.
- How to handle an emergency during a religious service.

Act of Ministering

Ministers of hospitality are part of the worshipping community. As such, they are to participate fully in the music, responses, and prayers of the liturgy. At times, however, the special duties of the minister may limit his or her ability to participate. Yet, every effort should be made by each

Usher to be models of participation in the worship of the Church as they assist in creating a prayerful atmosphere.

Before Mass

- Head Ushers are scheduled in advance. Please make every effort to be present at least 45 minutes prior to the masses at which you are scheduled to serve. If unable to serve, please arrange a substitute for yourself.
- Head Ushers will recruit additional helpers to total seven. Six to take up the collection, and the Head Usher to coordinate the collections and consolidate baskets.
- Make certain that all of the doors to the church are open and lights are turned on.
- Retrieve bulletins from the sacristy for distribution after mass.
- Ascertain the number of collections for this mass.
- Ensure that the gifts of bread and wine have been prepared and put out.
- Assist the faithful in finding a seat. During the liturgy, you may assist latecomers to find a seat with as much haste and as little disturbance as possible.
- Recruit at least three people to assist by bringing forward the gifts at the proper time. Please make a concerted effort to recruit a variety of families to assist. This simple involvement is one way you help to evangelize the faithful!

During the Mass

- 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.
 - Be prepared to begin the collection as soon as the Prayers of the Faithful are concluded. Understand that there are times that the order of Mass may include an exception to this rule, such as at a baptism.

- Determine which usher will go first when genuflecting at the foot of the altar.
- The collection is dropped into the first basket, and the second collection begins immediately so as to minimize any “wait” time. The Head Usher will coordinate this.
- The "Head Count" should be deposited in the collection basket.
- Help / direct those bringing forward the gifts. There should be at least three persons to bring up the gifts: one for the bread, one for the wine, and one for the collections.
 - Make a concerted effort to get a variety of families involved in bringing the gifts forward. This family should be recruited before mass begins. Ushers should understand that getting a variety of people to do this is a part of Evangelization.
 - The collection follows the bread and wine.
- If needed, Ushers will direct the communion procession.
- Also, they should inform the priest / Deacon / Minister of any person that is not able to come forward to receive communion and escort the minister to those persons if necessary.

After the Mass

- At the end of Mass, Ushers will distribute the bulletins.
- If needed, assist the elderly and those with special needs.
- Two ushers will put the collection in the bank bags, lock the bags, and put them in the safe.
 - Empty bags are marked for each mass (1st and 2nd collection) and are located on the counter in the sacristy.
 - Ushers are shown where the locked bags are to be placed.

- Assist in preparing the church for the next celebration, making certain that it appears neat and inviting.
 - The pews are neat (kneelers up, books put away, etc)
 - Inner Doors remain open
 - Back table straightened up

Seating

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

Attire

Since this ministry is an exercise of the Baptismal priesthood of the faithful, and because Ushers are seated in the assembly with their families when they are not ministering, it is appropriate that they dress neatly in apparel that is consistent with the dignity of their ministry.

- At a minimum, “business casual” is recommended. At greater feasts, more formal attire may be appropriate.

Additional Guidance

Guide for Ushers and Greeters, Lawrence E. Mick (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997).

Liturgical Ministry: A Practical Guide to Spirituality, Donna M. Cole (San Jose: Resource Publications, Inc, 1996).