

# **A Handbook for Ushers and Greeters**

## **A THEOLOGY OF LAY LITURGICAL MINISTRY**

*"But you are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt. 2:9).*

All liturgical ministers are, first and foremost, members of the Body of Christ. Through their baptism they are the "holy people and royal priesthood" whose right and privilege it is to participate in the ministry of Christ. How the lay faithful exercise this ministry in the world varies, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been "conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the eucharist" (General Instruction Of The Roman Missal - GIRM, Introduction #5).

Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the "action of the whole Church" (GIRM, Introduction #5), everyone in the assembly has "an individual right and duty to contribute their participation" (GIRM #58). Some of the faithful are called to serve God's people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it need nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help you grow in a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, your ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve.

## **I. THE MINISTRY OF HOSPITALITY**

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL), the Second Vatican Council teaches that Christ is present and active within the Christian community in a variety of ways:

“Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present. . .in the person of his minister; under the eucharistic elements; in the sacraments; in his word (and) lastly, when the Church prays and sings (CSL #7).

Most Catholics have been taught since childhood that Christ is present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist and in the priests who preside at sacramental celebrations. There is a growing awareness among Catholics that Christ is also present when the scriptures are read and preached in Church. Also growing is the awareness of Christ present in the people gathered to pray in his name. We call this gathering of Christians for prayer and worship the “assembly” and consider participation in the assembly as the most basic right and privilege of baptized Christians.

Since Vatican Council II Catholics have become accustomed to lay ministers serving during the liturgy as lectors, eucharistic ministers, cantors, musicians, altar servers and ministers of hospitality. Though their roles and functions differ, all of these ministers serve the assembly and assist in its prayer. Ministers of hospitality--including ushers, greeters and those who prepare and serve refreshments--do this above all by recognizing, welcoming and caring for each member of the assembly as if that person were Christ.

### **Ushers and Greeters**

Just as we greet guests to our home, make them feel welcome, and tend to their needs, so do the ministers of hospitality make the members of the assembly feel welcome and comfortable as they gather each Sunday. Since ushers and greeters are usually responsible for this during parish liturgies this handbook is dedicated primarily to them.

Well before the liturgy begins, these ministers are on hand to make sure the church is ready for the liturgy, greet people as they arrive, give out worship aids and escort people to their seats. During the liturgy, they attend to the needs of the celebration while remaining alert to the needs of the people. When the liturgy ends, they send people on their way with a friendly invitation to return.

As members of the assembly, they have a unique opportunity to model the true meaning of “full, active and conscious participation”(CSL#14). When they listen with attention, sing with enthusiasm and pray from their hearts, they encourage others to do the same.

Much is expected of our ushers and greeters. Like Martha, they are busy with many things; but like Mary, they have chosen the better part - serving God's people with generosity and kindness - and it will not be taken from them (Lk. 10:38).

## **II. TRAINING AND FORMATION**

## **Training**

All liturgical ministers have the right to adequate training from their parish communities before being assigned to service in the assembly. Ushers and greeters have many responsibilities before, during and after liturgical celebrations and need ample opportunity to learn and practice what they are expected to do. In addition to serving during Sunday Mass, they may be called upon to assist at baptisms, weddings, funerals and other parish celebrations.

Responsibilities of ushers and greeters include:

- Becoming familiar with the operation of the physical plant--lighting, heating/cooling, sound and alarm systems; location of the rest rooms.
- Knowing how to respond to emergency situations--location of first aid kits and fire extinguishers; how to contact police, fire, ambulance.
- Greeting and seating people and distributing worship aids.
- Selecting people to carry the gifts of bread and wine to the altar.
- Gathering and securing the collection.
- Handing out bulletins at the conclusion of Sunday Mass.
- Singing, praying and attentive listening along with the assembly.
- Being ready to assist the assembly, especially those with special needs, in any way required.
- Practicing to carry out these responsibilities with confidence and dignity in the space where they will serve.

Many parishes have sacristans who prepare the church and the sacred vessels before the liturgy. The responsibilities of ushers and sacristans might sometimes overlap. If your parish has a sacristan, it is important to communicate with that person regarding specific areas of responsibility. Even in parishes where a sacristan is available, it is helpful for ushers to know the workings of the physical plant and the placement of the sacred vessels.

## **Formation**

Obviously it takes time and practice to become an accomplished usher or greeter. On-going formation that develops skills and encourages spiritual growth is just as essential as adequate training and should be offered regularly by your parish.

Formation for ushers and greeters includes:

- Understanding the structure and meaning of the Mass.
- Understanding the importance of symbol and ritual in Catholic worship.
- Deepening reverence for the presence of Christ within the Christian community.
- Deepening personal prayer, especially praying with the Sunday readings and the prayers of the Mass.
- Scripture study to foster a greater love for God's word.

- Parish gatherings for prayer, reflection and fellowship on a regular basis throughout the liturgical year.

### **III. PREPARATION**

Those who exercise a liturgical ministry are expected to develop their skills by taking advantage of the training and formation opportunities offered by their parish or through the Office of Liturgy. In addition, they have a serious responsibility to prepare in a more immediate way for the liturgies at which they will serve.

This more immediate preparation for ushers and greeters includes:

- Arriving well in advance of the liturgy to become calm and unhurried before the liturgy begins and to check for any changes or special instructions.
- Making sure that everything needed for Mass is ready and in place.
- Dressing in a way that reflects the importance and dignity of this ministry.
- Notifying someone in authority if you cannot serve when scheduled and/or arranging for a substitute.

### **IV. DURING THE LITURGY**

#### **The gathering of the assembly**

It is important that ushers and greeters arrive early enough to attend to the "housekeeping" tasks described above so that their full energy can be devoted to the gathering of the assembly. The moments when people are arriving and gathering in the church are perhaps the most important time for ministers of hospitality. Some parishes have specially designated "greeters" who meet people at the door and welcome them in the name of Christ. In some parishes ushers fulfill this function. In any case, a smile or a friendly "hello" should greet everyone who enters so that all feel welcome.

#### **Seating**

The Christian assembly gathers around the table of the Lord each Sunday. Therefore, ushers should make every effort to escort people to seats in the front of the church where they can sit closest to the table. Seating people in closer proximity to each other helps them to more quickly feel like part of the community. Seats in the back and on the aisle should be reserved for latecomers or those with special needs.

Parishes need to establish policies for seating once the liturgy has begun. No one should be seated while the readings are being proclaimed. If seats in the rear have been left empty, it is easier to seat latecomers without disturbing the assembly.

#### **The preparation of the gifts**

It is not the specific function of hospitality ministers to carry the gifts of bread and wine during the presentation of the gifts. This belongs to the faithful (GIRM #101). Before the liturgy begins an usher should select people from the assembly to carry the gifts and instruct them in when and how to do this.

### **The collection**

Parishes vary in how this is accomplished, but ushers traditionally assist in gathering the weekly collection. It is important that ushers know the parish procedures for collecting and securing the offerings, so they can follow them with quiet efficiency. In addition, ushers are sometimes asked to distribute materials to the assembly. Advance notice and clear instructions will insure that this is accomplished without disrupting the celebration.

### **The communion procession**

Of the many ways the assembly participates in the celebration of the Mass, none is more vital than "sharing together in the Lord's table" (GIRM #62). Uniformity in movement and posture at this time is a beautiful sign of unity that "expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part" (GIRM #20). Ushers should know the parish procedure thoroughly so they can facilitate the graceful flow of the procession. They should be especially alert in assisting anyone who has difficulty coming to the table.

### **The dismissal**

As the assembly is dismissed the ministers of hospitality continue their friendly, helpful service. They hand out bulletins as people leave and invite them to return next week. They assist those with special needs and guide people to gatherings which follow the liturgy. They are often responsible to see that the church is left in good order--that pews are tidied and all is returned to where it belongs.

## V. GLOSSARY

<b>Ambo</b>	A sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet), but may also be used for the homily and general intercessions.
<b>Aspergillum</b>	A long-handled vessel containing holy water used to sprinkle the assembly.
<b>Assembly</b>	The people of God gathered for prayer and worship.
<b>Book of the Gospels</b>	The book containing the gospels that is carried in procession each Sunday and from which the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.
<b>Chalice</b>	The cup used to hold the wine for consecration during Mass.
<b>Corporal</b>	A small white cloth placed on top of the altar cloth to hold the sacred vessels used for the Eucharist.
<b>Ciborium</b>	A covered bowl used to hold consecrated hosts after Mass.
<b>Credence Table</b>	A small table placed to the side of the altar that holds items used during Mass.
<b>Incense Boat</b>	A container to hold incense for burning.
<b>Lectionary</b>	The book containing the scripture readings used on Sunday and the readings for Mass during the week.
<b>Liturgical Minister</b>	Someone who serves in a special role during a liturgical celebration.
<b>Missal/Sacramentary</b>	The book containing the prayers used by the priest during Mass.
<b>Parts of the Mass</b>	<p>The Mass is divided into four main parts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introductory Rites - The parts of the Mass before the scripture reading, from the entrance song through the opening prayer.</li><li>• Liturgy of the Word - From the first reading through the prayer of the faithful.</li><li>• Liturgy of the Eucharist - From the preparation of the gifts through the prayer after communion.</li><li>• Concluding Rite - The priest's greeting and blessing and the dismissal of the assembly.</li></ul>

<b>Purificator</b>	A clean cloth used for wiping the chalice during communion and cleaning it after Mass.
<b>Thurible/Censor</b>	A container in which incense is burned. A piece of charcoal is burned in the thurible and incense is placed on the burning coal.
<b>Sanctuary</b>	The sacred space around the altar usually set apart in some way from the rest of the church building.

## **VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

Bernardin, Cardinal Joseph. *Guide For The Assembly*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

Mahoney, Cardinal Roger. *Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide For Sunday Mass*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

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

## VII. CONCLUSION

This handbook has been prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It defines your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2nd.edition - 1975) the current directives of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

Consultation and study of the *Institutio Generalis Romani 2000* is in progress. the actual text of the new Roman General Instruction cannot be changed, however, emendations can be made for its application in the United States. While the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy continues its work, Bishop Griffin has directed that no changes be made to current liturgical practice within our diocese (protocol #09/00).

We are committed to supporting you in this ministry and in your desire to grow in your understanding of the liturgy you serve. It is our hope that this handbook will be the beginning of a dialogue between liturgical ministers that encourages us to reflect upon why we do what we do and how to enter into "full, active, conscious" participation in the liturgy through the ministry to which we have been called.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to:

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Peace and all good!

## **A MINISTER'S PRAYER**

(Adapted from an ancient Celtic prayer attributed to St. Patrick).

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the eye that sees me,  
Christ in the ear that hears me.