



GUIDELINES
for
MINISTERS
of
HOSPITALITY

Diocese of Lansing

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, hospitality has been an important part of civilized life. Indeed, in ancient cultures, hospitality was necessary for survival in a hostile environment and therefore, it was a sacred duty to provide shelter and warmth for a guest. Sacred scripture is full of examples of Old Testament heroes who provided hospitality to strangers only to realize that they were messengers from God. Jesus was a guest of "sinners," Pharisees, and disciples. It was in a simple act of hospitality—washing his apostles' feet—that he taught them true humility and service.

Our parishes, too, must be a source and model of hospitality. We welcome strangers to our churches with a kind word, we register new parishioners with a personal visit and informational packets, we lovingly inculturate the catechumen or candidate, we provide funeral luncheons, and frequently gather over donuts, dinners, and discussion.

But as a People of God, our most significant gathering is at Sunday Liturgy. Christ, himself, is "always present in his Church." He is present in his Word, in the Eucharistic elements, and in the person of the priest. He is present, too, in the assembly, "when the Church prays and sings, for he promised, 'wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'" (CSL #7)

"As common prayer and ecclesial experience, liturgy flourishes in a climate of hospitality; a situation in which people are comfortable with one another, either knowing or being introduced to one another; a space in which people are seated together in view of one another as well as the focal points of the rite, involved as participants instead of spectators." (EACW #11)

Therefore, while hospitality should permeate every aspect of parish life, these guidelines will focus on the ministers of hospitality to our worshipping assemblies—ushers and greeters.

In some parishes, these may be two different ministries. Frequently, ushers are responsible for the environment, the collection, and facilitating seating in crowded churches. Greeters may welcome worshippers at the doors of the church, distribute worship aids, offer assistance or direction, etc. In other parishes, one team may be responsible for all these tasks. In any case, men and women, entire families, and even children (with their gregarious, outgoing natures) should be trained in the art of liturgical hospitality.

FORMATION AND TRAINING

All too often, volunteers are selected at random to help with a particular task or the "old guard" maintains their post at the rear of the church for years. It should be the responsibility of the pastor and Parish Worship Commission to train suitable candidates for this ministry and to provide for the routine scheduling of their attendance. The following points might be beneficial to cover.

◦Hospitality and Gathering

These ministers are the first contact each worshipper has with the assembly. Frequently, they affect how we gather and the tone of the celebration. Even their attire should reflect the dignity of their ministry and the solemn nature of the liturgy. They arrive early to attend to the comfort of the environment and to see that all supplies (worship aids, collection baskets, etc.) are ready for distribution, recruit gift bearers, or perform any other task which is in their pre-Mass routine. They should be attentive to the special needs of the elderly, handicapped, or parents with young children. Their attitude, appearance, and smile provides the good news of God's welcome and his love for all.

◦Hospitality and Liturgy

As members of the worshipping assembly themselves, ushers and greeters should be attentive to the sacred action which is taking place. They should actively participate in spoken and sung responses and listen attentively to the words of the priest and other ministers. They should exhibit respect for various elements in the liturgical space. They should support the action of the liturgy, and the duties of other ministries, e.g., by not seating worshippers during the readings. Therefore, every minister of hospitality should be trained in a basic outline of the Mass and its parts. Moreover, they should be knowledgeable of the Liturgical Year. Finally, they should be familiar with those rites which could demand special movement or participation by the assembly, e.g. Triduum, Palm Sunday, funerals, etc.

They should facilitate the action of the assembly when needed, such as the preparation and presentation of the gifts and, if necessary, at the communion procession.

◦Hospitality and Departing

Just as these ministers set the tone for our gathering, they can impact our departing. As we go forth in our mission to love and to serve the Lord, ushers and greeters can provide a cheerful farewell and a sincere invitation to return as they dispense bulletins or other materials.

◦Hospitality and Special Circumstances

Besides being attentive to the special needs of strangers, the handicapped, or elderly, these ministers should be trained to handle emergency situations. They should know where medical

supplies, wheelchairs, and first aid kits are stored. They should know the location of all the restrooms, exits, phones, and fire extinguishers. Emergency numbers should be visibly posted and the attendance of local doctors and nurses might be noted.

REQUIREMENTS

Candidates who desire to pursue the ministry of hospitality need to be persons who by their very nature are friendly, caring, and giving. They should be persons of good Christian witness and active in the sacramental life of their church. They must exhibit a willingness to enter initial and ongoing formation and to be responsible to their scheduled duties.

Once the formation is completed and the willingness to assume this ministry is discerned, the person is appointed as a minister of hospitality. They are commissioned for a period of two years at a public ceremony in the midst of the Sunday assembly whom they will serve. They may be recommissioned after a suitable period of discernment and an opportunity for updating.

RESOURCES

The following resources can be helpful in formation and training. They are available through the Diocesan Office of Worship—(517) 342-2480 .

Video:

Training for Hospitality: The Ministry of Ushers and Greeters, The Liturgical Press.

Books:

NCCB. *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*.

Challancin, James. *The Assembly Celebrates*, Paulist Press, pp. 71-78.

Fleming, Austin. *Yours is the Share: The Call of Liturgical Ministry*. The Pastoral Press, pp. 11-14.

Hovda, Robert, *There are Different Ministries*. The Liturgical Conference, pp.26-32.

Smith, Gregory O. carm. *The Ministry of Ushers*. The Liturgical Press.

Young, Elizabeth. *Touchstones for Liturgical Ministers*. FDLC, 1978, pp. 31-32.

Untener, Bishop Kenneth. *Sunday Liturgy Can Be Better!* St. Anthony Messenger Press.

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