

Ushers and Greeters: Ministers of Hospitality



Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church
Lake Ozark, Missouri
2019

About the cover: This scene is the illustration of the feast of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, from a Missale Romanum published by the Society of St. John the Evangelist of Belgium in 1932. St. Joseph stands as a model of hospitality for us all as he welcomed the Lord Jesus into the world.

CREATING SPACE FOR STRANGERS

Living in a World of Strangers

The first characteristic of the spiritual life is the continuing movement from loneliness to solitude. Its second equally important characteristic is the movement by which our hostilities can be converted into hospitality. It is there that our changing relationship to ourselves can be brought to fruition in an ever-changing relationship to our fellow human beings. It is there that our reaching out to our innermost being can lead to a reaching out to the many strangers whom we meet on our way through life. In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. Although many, we might even say most, strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to *offer* an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast *off* their strangeness and become our fellow human beings. The movement from hostility to hospitality is hard and full of difficulties. Our society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm. But still—that is our vocation: to convert the *hostis* into a *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.

A Biblical Term

At first the word “hospitality” might evoke the image of soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness. Probably this has its good reasons since in our culture the concept of hospitality has lost much of its power and is often used in circles where we are more prone to expect a watered down piety than a serious search for an authentic Christian spirituality. But still, if there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality. It is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insight in our relationships to our fellow human beings. Old and New Testament stories not only show how serious our obligation is to welcome the stranger in our home, but they also tell us that guests are carrying precious gifts with them, which they are eager to reveal to a receptive host. When Abraham received three strangers at Mamre and offered them water, bread and a fine tender calf, they revealed themselves to him as the Lord announcing that Sarah his wife would give birth to a son (Genesis 18:1-15). When the widow of Zarephath offered food and shelter to Elijah, he revealed himself as a man of God offering her an abundance of oil and

meal and raising her son from the dead (I Kings 17:9-24). When the two travelers to Emmaus invited the stranger, who had joined them on the road to stay with them for the night, he made himself known in the breaking of the bread as their Lord and Savior (Luke 24:13-35).

When hostility is converted into hospitality then fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. Then, in fact, the distinction between host and guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in the recognition of the new found unity. Thus the biblical stories help us to realize not just that hospitality is an important virtue, but even more that in the context of hospitality guest and host can reveal their most precious gifts and bring new life to each other.

During the last decades psychology has made great contributions to a new understanding of interpersonal relationships. Not only psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, but also social workers, occupational therapists, ministers, priests and many others working in the helping professions have made grateful use of these new insights in their work. But maybe some of us have become so impressed by these new findings that we have lost sight of the great wealth contained and preserved in such ancient concepts as hospitality. Maybe the concept of hospitality can offer a new dimension to our understanding of a healing relationship and the formation of a re-creative community in a world so visibly suffering from alienation and estrangement.

The term hospitality, therefore, should not be limited to its literal sense of receiving a stranger in our house—although it is important never to forget or neglect that!—but as a fundamental attitude toward our fellow human being, which can be expressed in a great variety of ways.

From *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen © Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1975

Sequence of Actions for Ministers of Hospitality

Welcoming the people of God into Church is extremely important. Welcoming is much more than an usher opening doors and taking up the collection. You are a minister at the sacred liturgy, a minister of hospitality. You are the first person most people see when they enter the church for Mass. The way you greet first-time visitors to our church, as well as long-time parishioners, can leave a lasting impression on those individuals and set the stage for a positive experience in the Liturgy. Your most important job is to make a person feel welcome just as you would welcome someone who comes to your home. Remember to greet the children, as they are an important part of the assembly. You can do this by smiling and saying hello or shaking hands. Remember, to visitors, you *are* the face of the parish. Do your part to make people feel at home.

But your job is much more than greeting; it involves making sure that every member of the congregation finds an appropriate place to be comfortable in church. It means guiding the congregation to open pews or chairs, it means accompanying them as they leave. Hospitality also entails making the environment of the church welcoming and comfortable, such as checking the pews for left items or trash. Ensuring that the church remains neat and clean before, during and after services can help make our worship holy and befitting service to God.

Hospitality, especially as it has been lived throughout the ages, means ensuring the safety of a guest. The duty of an usher to attend to unsafe conditions or emergencies during liturgies is an important contribution.

The following “Sequence of Actions” has been written specifically for our parish. Familiarity with them will assist you in your ministry. Please note that there are four essential tasks for those who are involved in hospitality: 1. Greet people as they enter; 2. Usher people into open places in the Church; 3. Take up the collection(s); 4. Ensure that there is a safe and hospitable environment for worship.

Greeting those who arrive:

1. Greeters are ministers of hospitality who stand at the entrances to our parish campus and greet those who enter. Ideally there should be people available at every mass at least one half hour before the service who stand outside the doors and welcome people in.
2. When both wings are open, there should be at least five greeters at each mass stationed outside of the main center entrance under the canopy, at the northwest entrance at the top of the stairs and at the southeast entrance at the top of the stairs; one person in the fellowship hall at the top of the ramp; and one person at the office entrance door from the back parking lot.

3. It is helpful to have someone present at the welcome center kiosk before and after mass to assist those needing special assistance or who wish to register in the parish.
4. Greeters should have name badges with their home towns on them and the parish logo to identify them in their official capacity as ministers.

Ushering people into the pews and chairs:

1. Hospitality ministers who act as ushers arrive approximately one half hour before Mass to ensure everything is in order. Prior to Mass, the mass coordinator will notify ushers of any special circumstances, such as reserved seating areas, the possible need for extra folding chair seating, special collections, head counts, etc.
2. Six ushers will be scheduled for each Mass, one for each section of the church when the north wing is open. When the north wing is closed during winter, there will be four ushers needed. If an usher cannot be at the scheduled Mass, he/she is responsible for finding a replacement.
3. There should be three ushers standing inside the church, one in each wing, actively assisting people to find places in the pews and chairs.
4. Ushers should be prepared to cordially and politely request people already in their pews to move within the pew to allow others to have a seat.

Taking up the collection:

1. Ushers will make arrangements for having one other person to assist with the collection in each section. Ideally this is done before mass but one can simply ask someone in your section prior to the collection. Having a spouse or older children assist in taking up the collection is certainly a good way to encourage greater family participation in the Eucharist.
2. On holiday weekends when the church is full, the central nave should have one more set of people taking up the collection.
3. Prior to Mass starting, one of the front of the church ushers will ask a family to carry the Gifts and collection to the Altar if no family has been designated by prior arrangement.
4. After the “Universal Prayers,” ushers collect the assembly contributions. Two ushers will collect contributions in each section, alternating baskets passed along the rows. When each wing is complete, one usher brings a basket with the combined collections of the wings to the back of the central nave.
5. Ushers assist the offertory family in preparing to carry the Gifts and collection basket to the Altar. If a family is not present to carry the Gifts, ushers may ask a nearby family to carry the gifts or the ushers

can carry the Gifts and collection basket to the Altar as soon as all the baskets are assembled into one.

6. If there is a second collection, it is done immediately after the first collection as the Gifts and first collection are carried to the Altar. When that collection is completed, one usher will walk up the right-side aisle, as you look toward the Altar, entering the sanctuary by the organ and place the second collection under the celebrant's chair.
7. On holiday weekends, there needs to be four additional ushers scheduled for the central nave of the church, especially when there are second collections. Two ushers per section, will start at the front pews and stop just prior to the beginning/end of the Stations of the Cross, approximately in the middle of the pews. Two different Ushers per section will start at the beginning/end of Stations of the Cross and finish at the end of the pews. This will be on both sides. Also on occasions when the church is filled and there are chairs put out, make sure there are enough ushers to efficient take up the collection in the side sections.

Ensuring there is a safe and hospitable environment for worship:

1. After Mass, ushers should check the pews of their section to make sure they are clean and ready for the next Mass, including straightening the songbooks and raising any kneelers.
2. Ushers should check that there are bulletins available at all the entrances to the church.
3. The mass coordinator and the celebrant should be advised of any issues that have arisen in the course of the previous liturgy.
4. Fire extinguishers are located throughout the church and Religious Education wing. Locations are listed on the last page of this pamphlet. Note their locations.
5. AED (automated external defibrillator) is located at the north entrance of the church going into the Fellowship Hall by the kitchen door.
6. In case of a medical emergency, the hospitality minister may approach the celebrant to ask that it be announced that help is needed. If there is an emergency that the hospitality ministers are taking care of, do not hesitate to inform the celebrant so that he can direct an appropriate response for the congregation. The hospitality minister may also use a cell phone to call 911 for emergency or medical assistance.
7. In case of fire or other need to evacuate, the attending priest, cantor/song leader(s) or hospitality minister may announce that the parishioners should quickly leave church and the exits to be used. Ministers should be attentive to others within the church that may need assistance and help where possible in directing the parishioners to the exits. Any minister may call 911 for assistance.
8. If there is a serious disturbance within the church, any minister may

contact the attending priest concerning the problem. If someone becomes violent, do not attempt to subdue the individual. Seek assistance by phoning the police at 911 as soon as possible.

9. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding your ministry or the Ministry of Hospitality's responsibilities, please contact your chairperson.

Thank you for your service to the Church.

Fire extinguisher locations:

Church

- North furnace room
- North wing-one on each side
- By men's restroom in main entrance vestibule
- South wing entrance
- South furnace room-behind door
- Fellowship Hall entrance
- Church office entryway

Religious Education wing

- Library
- Sr. Elizabeth Ann Seton furnace room
- St. John Neumann room entrance

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