

MINISTERS OF HOSPITALITY

Guidelines

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I. 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)

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.

II. SELECTION

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.

III. FORMATION

The Ministry of Hospitality is truly a service to the Church and should be treated seriously and with great dignity. Therefore, Ministers of Hospitality should have an understanding of the Liturgy in order to be effective in providing the faithful with the proper environment. 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.

Individual parishes should develop periodic training sessions to assist and reacquaint ministers of

hospitality with all aspects of their service. Having appropriate knowledge and training will help ministers to function effectively and bring confidence and joy to their experience.

IV. COMMISSIONING

It is most appropriate that ministers of hospitality be commissioned for their role in accord with the rite found in the Book of Blessings, chapter 62, an “Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers.”

V. CLOTHING

Ministers of Hospitality should be dressed in a way that expresses the respect and dignity proper to the ministry they exercise.

VI. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MINISTER OF HOSPITALITY

The duties for a Minister of Hospitality begin well before the liturgy begins. Ministers need to be in place at least twenty minutes prior to the start of worship. They might first do a quick check of the worship space to make sure there is no clutter left from the previous service. But their primary duties are to greet people, hand out worship aids and assist parishioners in finding a place to sit. By offering a word of welcome, especially to visitors and those who may feel awkward for whatever reason, Hospitality Ministers help form the worshipping community.

Ministers need to be informed if sacramental celebrations such as baptism, first communion or initiation rituals will take place during the liturgy; in that way, they can be more attentive to visitors, reserved seating areas and changes in the normal patterns. It is particularly important to be aware of those with special seating needs. Typically, there is space designated for those in wheelchairs, as well as those who need interpreting services or use a hearing device.

In some churches, Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality are encouraged to fill the front of the church first in order to leave room for latecomers in the back. If people do arrive after the

liturgy has begun, there should be an agreed-upon method for assisting them in finding a seat. For example, they would be seated after the opening prayer but before the first reading, or they should be seated in between the readings, psalm, or Gospel, not during them. On days when there are large numbers of people present, hospitality ministers should know the various options available for seating overflow crowds.

An important, but often overlooked, aspect of this ministry deals with the physical aspects of the church space. Is it too hot or too cold in church? Do doors or windows need to be opened or closed? Do the sidewalks or parking areas need to be salted? Is the lighting adequate?

B. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE COLLECTION OF THE MONETARY OFFERING

The Ministers of Hospitality are responsible for gathering the collection from the Assembly. This is to be done in an unhurried fashion, and with respect and dignity. This money is a symbol of willingness on the part of the Assembly to offer themselves and their resources to Christ, and, ideally, is presented as part of the procession with the bread and wine, not as an afterthought. This offering, however, is placed in another location, and not placed near the altar. The Ministers of Hospitality may also be responsible for selecting people to bring forward the gifts of bread and wine. This should be done with an awareness of the diversity of the entire community.

C. DIRECTING PROCESSIONS

The Ministers of Hospitality facilitate the procession to communion. Their role is to foster an unhurried and reverent sharing in this Eucharistic meal. When needed, the Minister of Hospitality assists those with limited mobility. During once-a-year celebrations such as Passion Sunday and the Triduum, well-prepared ministers are essential in facilitating indoor or outdoor processions, the washing of feet, the Veneration of the Cross, and service of light during the Easter Vigil.

D. CONCLUDING RESPONSIBILITIES

The Ministers of Hospitality distribute the bulletins to parishioners when Mass is ended. Note that this should not take place until after the procession of ministers has left the sanctuary. When the liturgy is completed, Ministers of Hospitality are also responsible for the general cleanup of the worship space. This might involve collecting worship aids, candles, palms, etc.

E. RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

Persons involved in this ministry should know the location of first aid kits, fire extinguishers, telephones and cleaning supplies. Training in CPR and general first aid, as well as defibrillator training would be useful in addition to general ministerial training. Every Minister of Hospitality should be instructed to quickly call 911 in case of an emergency. It can also be very helpful if Ministers of Hospitality know which parishioners have medical training in case their assistance is needed.