

# **Usher Handbook**

## **American Lutheran Church**

### **Usher Ministry:**

Ushers serve an important role in the worship ministry. Often times an usher may be the first person visitors meet when worshiping at American Lutheran. It is important to offer a friendly greeting to everyone as they arrive and make them feel welcome. Men, women, and youth are all invited to volunteer for usher service. There is no dress code for ushers. However, ushers should always be dressed appropriately for worship services so as to project a positive image for the congregation. Name tags and Usher badges should always be worn when serving as an usher.

### **General Information:**

Ushers are organized into teams with each team having one person designated as Team Captain. Currently there are eight teams consisting of five to seven ushers per team. Schedules are published annually. During the school year each team will usher approximately once every four weeks alternating between first and second services. During the summer months one team is assigned to usher at both services. Holiday assignments are scheduled as needed and do not always appear on the published schedule. Teams will be notified ahead of time of holiday and special service schedules.

Developing an annual schedule and team assignment roster is the responsibility of the usher group. At least one person from the usher ranks should take responsibility for the schedule and another for recruiting, training, and team assignment of new ushers. These are volunteer positions and are vital to a successful usher program. Individual teams are responsible to designate one person as their team captain.

It is understandable that from time to time there will be conflicts with the schedule when an assigned usher cannot serve. It is important that all assigned ushers make every effort to be in attendance when scheduled if at all possible. Usher teams that find themselves short-handed can usually ask for assistance from members of other teams who are worshiping at that service. Teams can determine how or if they want to notify other team members if they will be absent on an assigned Sunday. If

attending worship services and you notice the assigned usher team is short-handed, it is helpful if you offer assistance if needed.

### **Duties before Worship Services:**

Plan to arrive at least 20 minutes before the service begins to make sure lights are on and everything is in order for the service. Light switches are located as follows: Main sanctuary overhead lights located on the back wall of the sanctuary and on the west wall of the chancel near the pulpit. They are marked as “house lights”. In the back they are labeled as “indirect, direct, and balcony”. The switch for the stained glass lights on west side of the sanctuary is located in the hallway behind the chancel and is labeled. Narthex light switch is behind right hand main door to sanctuary.

Check to see if there are any special instructions for the service. This could be in the form of written instructions placed in the usher handbook maintained in the narthex area or verbally from the Pastors or other staff.

Make sure bulletins are correct for the service and ready for distribution to worshipers as they arrive. Bulletins are usually marked for each service and stacked on the counter in the narthex.

Check hearing devices prior to the service to ensure batteries are in good condition and that the devices are working properly. Take any defective devices to the office with a note describing the problem.

### **Bell Ringing:**

Ring the “call to worship” (opening bell) 10 times, 10 minutes before each service begins.

The closing bell is rung after the first service only. The Organist will play the sound of the bell on the organ.

The bells are rung from the landing of the balcony stairs. Instructions for ringing the bells are posted there.

## **As Worshipers arrive:**

Try to greet everyone as they arrive and offer them a bulletin. One usher should be stationed near the bottom of the balcony stairs to greet and offer bulletins to those worshipers. There are a few large print bulletins available for each service if requested. There are usually plenty of bulletins available, but during very heavily attended services there may not be enough for everyone. In such a situation you should ask family members to share before all bulletins are passed out to ensure everyone has access to a bulletin.

Offer to assist anyone who may need some help to their seat. There are four pew locations that will accommodate wheelchairs or walkers.

There are packets of coloring books and crayons for children available in the narthex. Most children who attend regularly know about them and help themselves. Make sure to offer them to any children who might be visiting or new to the congregation.

There are a number of hearing amplification devices available for those requesting them. Regular users know where they are and usually help themselves.

If the sanctuary is crowded it may be necessary to help worshipers find seats.

## **During Worship Service:**

Be available to assist late arrivers and show them to a seat if necessary. Worshipers who arrive while the congregation is in prayer should be asked to wait in the narthex until the prayer is concluded so as not to cause any disruptions.

Assist anyone who may need directions to restrooms or the nursery. If they have questions that you cannot answer, direct them to the front desk person.

Maintain a quiet atmosphere by keeping noise to a minimum and try to be as inconspicuous as possible in the back of the sanctuary and narthex so as not to cause any distractions during the service.

Thermostats in the sanctuary are preset and cannot be adjusted. If worshipers complain of cold air blowing on them from the side registers, explain about the thermostats and suggest they move toward the center of the sanctuary. There are also magnetic covers that can be placed over the registers near the handicap locations to block the air flow.

Designate one usher to conduct a walk-through of the building during the service to ensure there are no unusual or suspicious activities going on. It is important to know where all people are in the building in the unlikely event an evacuation should be necessary.

Follow along with the service so that you are prepared to perform duties at the proper time.

Take a count of all worshipers during the singing of the *hymn of the day* following the sermon. Walk down each outside aisle and count everyone including all music and pastoral personnel as well as all ushers. One usher should take a count in the balcony. Record the attendance on the “Attendance at Worship Services” form and leave it on the counter in the narthex.

**Offering:** Collect the offering at the appropriate time. Ideally there should be five ushers to conduct the offering service, four in the main sanctuary and one in the balcony. Ushers should be in place when the Pastor announces the offering. The offering begins in the rear of the sanctuary with each of the four ushers carrying an offering plate to the front of the sanctuary with two walking down the outside aisles and two walking down the center aisle. Begin with the front pews by passing the plates back and forth down each pew until reaching the back of the sanctuary. Once all plates are collected including the one from the balcony consolidate all offerings into two plates. Two ushers should stand at the back of the main aisle with the two plates until the acolytes are moving into place in front of the altar to receive the plates. Walk forward and give the plates to the acolyte(s), then turn and walk back to the rear of the sanctuary. The communion rail gates are not to be closed at either service unless instructed to do so by the Pastor(s) for special occasions.

**Communion service:** Two ushers should go forward down the center aisle while the communion servers are receiving communion and be ready to begin directing communicants forward as soon as the servers are in place. It is important to keep communicants queued up to ensure there are no gaps in the line. If communion is by kneeling, direct worshipers forward as others return to their seats so that the service is a continuous table. One usher can accompany the servers to the balcony to direct worshipers there. This is especially important during services that are more heavily attended than usual.

Any ushers remaining in the back of the sanctuary should be aware of individuals who do not go forward for communion but would like to be served in the pew so they can direct the servers to them.

**Closing bell:** For first service only, the closing bell is rung immediately following the Dismissal. Note: The closing bell is played on the organ.

### **After Worship Service:**

Station one usher near the back doors of the sanctuary to receive returned bulletins. Tidy up sanctuary and make sure Hymnals are placed neatly in the proper racks. Check to see if each pew has “Request for Prayer” cards in place and replace as necessary. Collect all trash from the sanctuary.

After second service only, remove the completed pages from the attendance registration books located at the end of each pew and place them on the counter in the narthex.

Replacement pages for the attendance books and prayer request cards are stored in the cabinet in the narthex.

If the first and second service use different bulletins, make sure after the first service all bulletins from that service are deposited in the recycle basket so they do not accidentally get issued to second service worshipers. Be especially careful during holidays when there are multiple services. If both services use the same bulletin, inspect returned bulletins from the first service to make sure they are complete and can be used for the second service.

Place all bulletins in the recycle basket when they are no longer needed.

Make sure all hearing devices are turned off. If any are returned that did not function properly make a note stating problem and leave them on the counter with the attendance forms.

Make sure the small table or any other obstruction is moved so as not to block the sanctuary doors as they are self-closing in case of a fire alarm.

Take any personal property found to front desk.

### **Safety and Emergencies:**

**Smoke and Fire alarms:** The main alarm panel is located in the hall between the kitchen and the office. Should an alarm activate, the panel will display the zone in alarm. There is a floor plan of the building that shows each zone located by the panel. When the system alarms, it automatically notifies 911 dispatch. In the case

of a false alarm, 911 should be notified immediately so they do not dispatch the fire department.

Evacuation: Should an alarm activate, determine the zone and begin an orderly evacuation of the building directing everyone to exits away from the zone in alarm. It is very important to get everyone out of the building and have them assemble in the west end of the parking lot away from the building. Check the nursery, classrooms, upper room, and basement to make sure everyone gets out. Give assistance to anyone who needs help and make sure all evacuations are conducted in an orderly fashion. Do not let anyone re-enter the building after they have evacuated until given permission from Fire or Police personnel.

If there are Fire Department personnel or other trained experts attending worship who identify themselves as such, and want to take a leadership role in an emergency situation, let them. They have the training and expertise to take charge in emergencies.

Be prepared to give the fire department any information you have when they arrive.

There are several fire extinguishers located throughout the building. Ushers should make themselves aware of their locations when conducting building walk-throughs.

There are fire alarm pull stations located near building exits and in the hall near the alarm panel.

First Aid: There is a first aid kit located on the shelf behind the ovens in the kitchen and a combination CPR/first aid kit located at the front desk.

An automated defibrillator is located at the front desk. It automatically provides verbal instructions on how to properly use it. There is an additional CPR kit located in the basement hall across from the drinking fountain. Training is offered periodically on the proper use of the defibrillator and CPR kits. It is recommended that all ushers make an effort to attend those classes.

There is a wheel chair located in the main entrance hall by the coat racks.

In any serious medical emergency it is important to call 911 immediately. Check for any medical alert bracelets if the person is unable to communicate their problem. If a medical incident occurs in the sanctuary during service, determine if the person can be safely moved out of the sanctuary so the service can continue and the person can have privacy until emergency personnel arrive. If it is determined they should not be moved, the Pastor will make the decision on how to continue the service.

## **Handbook Responsibility:**

A copy of this handbook is kept in a binder in the narthex cabinet. Included in the binder is a current usher schedule, a copy of the current usher roster, a copy of the church safety information document, an evacuation plan, as well as a tab for special instructions.

The master copy of this handbook is kept in the church office where additional copies may be obtained when necessary. It is also on the church website, [www.amluth.org](http://www.amluth.org) where it can be viewed or downloaded.

Team captains should ensure that all ushers on their team are familiar with this handbook and are provided with a personal copy.

The Worship Committee is responsible for any future changes, updates or corrections to this handbook. Ushers responsible for schedules and rosters will make sure the most current copies are in the handbook kept in the narthex.

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