

# **Ushers Handbook**

**Revised 2011**

# What is an Usher?

The dictionary defines an usher as "a person who shows people to their seats (as in a theater, cinema or in a church)." The origin of the word comes from the French word *usher*, meaning "doorkeeper." Throughout history ushers have opened doors, ushered people to their seats and helped to maintain order in public places.

## What Does an Usher Do?

Let's break down the common denominators of an usher's role and elaborate on each item in order to gain a broader knowledge of the job description.

1. An usher is one who opens the door. Ministry starts at the door. You only get one chance to make a first impression. As the old adage goes, "First impressions are lasting impressions." Many times the first person a newcomer meets is the usher at the door. Each outside door of a church should always be manned by an usher. If you have three sets of entrance doors, you will need three sets of doors, you will need three ushers to man the posts. Opening doors is more than an age-old courtesy, it is a much-needed and much-appreciated service to the people. A new mother with a baby, or an older person challenged by limited mobility, actually needs this type of assistance. This courtesy should never be overlooked in a church. It's not just the main front doors that need to have ushers. All of the secondary entrances should have a friendly face posted to welcome them. Doors that lead to children's wings are most often used by mothers with small children who definitely need social attention.

Let's not limit this wonderful service to just the outside doors. Inside areas of the church should also have ushers. The good thing about this job is an usher doesn't have to miss any of the worship services. Simply man the post until the doors to the sanctuary are closed for service. It is also good practice to keep the ushers to the outside doors on the job just a little past the starting time for the sake of those who are running a bit behind schedule.

2. An usher is one who closes the door. We talked about opening doors, but how about closing them? Not just the act closing a door-that will happen automatically every time it is opened. I am referring to extending this courtesy to those who are leaving the building. Many churches have people to welcome you in, but no one to help you out. Ushers who open and close car doors for people being picked up is one of the things that sets an excellent usher program apart from a good one. "Smile them in and smile them out" is the usher's motto. Another wonderful courtesy is for the ushers to open all of the doors exiting the sanctuary at the end of a worship service and to prop them open. This allows those leaving to do so easily without added congestion. These simple courtesies will make a huge statement on the overall excellence of the church, the care that is given to the people, and about the servant heart of the volunteers. It is a greeting card in and of itself.
3. An usher is one who helps people to their seats. If you have ever gone to a large theater for a musical, play or concert, you saw ushers assisting people to find their seats. As a matter of fact, one of the first things you usually do is look for an usher. Most of the old theaters are dimly lit and all you have is a number on a ticket to tell you where to sit.

These nice people don't tell you where you sit, they take you to where you sit. Telling and taking is the difference in good and great ushering. When a person takes the time to find an usher, they are usually indicating they need help.

The best thing to do is take them, not tell them. The usher can simply walk down the aisle and stand by the entrance of the row, and motion for them to sit there. This not only helps them find their seat, but it also keeps them from walking up and down the aisles looking for a seat. In a very crowded church, it is best to use a spotter. A spotter is an usher who stands in the middle or front of the aisle until everyone is seated. The usher in the back indicates by holding up the number of fingers that represents how many seats are needed. The spotter finds a place where that many people can be seated and walks to that row. The usher in the back simply instructs the person or group to walk down to the spotter and the spotter will show them their seats. The reverse technique is also quite effective. In the reverse order, the spotter simply holds up the number of seats that are available and the usher in the back sends that many people to the spotter. Once the worship service has begun, it is very important for the ushers to be available to seat people, especially if the congregation is standing. In some churches, the ushers actually stand in their section until the minister begins to speak.

4. An Usher is one who assists the people. There is no way to exhaust the meaning of this word, assist. It can include helping an older person up from their seat, carrying a diaper bag for an overwhelmed mother, holding a child, assisting someone who is carrying something, helping with a coat or handing someone a tissue. Ushers assist! This means that if someone is in need, the usher is there to help.

Ushers should always know where to get, tissues, cough drops, bottled water, or even a piece of candy if a There should be a box in the sanctuary that is accessible to all of t he ushers that contains these types of items. Ushers need to have reserved seats so they can always sit in their section. Even on a Sunday that the usher is not on duty to serve, he should always be available to assist anyone with a need. Giving assistance is more of a calling than a duty.

### **Who Can Be an Usher?**

Traditionally, ushers in the church have been male, while ushers at a public theater have been male or female. The trend of church ushers is changing and more women are being added to the usher core. Male ushers seem to give more of a regimented appearance, while females on the usher team give the church a family-friendly atmosphere – especially where it come to making women feel welcome. In addition, including women allows families to participate in a ministry together. The usher teams should reflect the overall constituency of the church. It should be made up of male and female, as well as various ages and ethnic groups. The most important ingredient is that they are responsible, trustworthy, friendly and have a heart for serving.

Ministry Area/Department	Stewardship
Position	Lead Usher
Accountable To	Ministry Coordinator
Ministry Target	Congregation and guests
Position Is	Volunteer
Position May Be Filled By	Church member
Spiritual Gifts	Helps / Service / Stewardship / Administration / Leadership
Faithful Tither	Requirement for all ushers
Talents or Abilities Desired	Able to stand for periods of time. / Enjoy greeting and seating people / Dependable / Able to work with a team / Gracious
Passion For	Serving, leadership and welcoming others
Length of Service Commitment	One year minimum, no limit

## The Usher Team

The size of the usher team may vary according to the size of the church. But regardless of the church size, each team should report to a team captain. The team captains should report to the director of hospitality, if the church has one. In a smaller congregation, the captains may be in charge of the program or they may report to someone called the head usher. Usher teams should serve in the same assigned area each time they serve.

### Organizing the Teams

The key to organization always follows the same simple plan:

- Everything has a time.
- Everything has a place.
- Everything has a purpose.

*The first rule is to give everything a time.* This requires making a schedule. The schedule for the ushers operates around the service times for the worship services. A good rule of thumb is to have every usher at the meeting 45 minutes before service begins. The meeting room can be any designated place to meet. Once everyone is there, make sure they are aware of any special assignments for that day, such as handouts or special orders of the day. Only the people serving in that service should attend the pre-service meeting. After the announcement segment is completed, the director should make sure the team captains have their assigned area covered for the day.

Next, director should have a brief devotion or prayer. The meeting should conclude with a pep talk from the leader – and “attaboy speech” that basically says “Thank you, and go do your best because you are a part of a great team.” This meeting should last no longer than 15 minutes, which gives 30 minutes for the ushers to complete their designated duties before the service begins. If more time is needed, adjust the meeting time accordingly. *The second rule of thumb for organization is to make sure everything has a place.* Follow this rule in several ways.

**First**, make sure there is a designated meeting room to get equipment, badges and/or anything the ushers may need for that day. There should be items in stock like guest packets, extra badges, tissues, first-aid kits, ink pens, walkie -talkies, and any other devices or products used on a regular basis.

**Secondly**, there should be a designed place to meet before each service, as covered in the first paragraph of this section. **Finally**, there needs to be a diagram showing each person where his or her assigned area is in the building. It should have a layout of the sanctuary, illustrating the positions of each person on the team. The same should be done for hallways and doors. This ensures that all the ushers know their area.

*The third rule of organization states that everything must have a purpose.* This is accomplished through training meetings and the pre-service organizational meeting. The ushers should have a copy of the handbook in order to refer to the usher policies as often as necessary. Extra copies of the usher handbook should be available in the meeting room.

## **Receiving the Offering**

One of the primary responsibilities of the usher is to receive the offering. Each church has its own idea on the best way to do this. Some churches start from the back, receive the offering, and then have prayer over it before it is taken to be counted. Typically, the ushers are called forward by the speaker and, as soon as the prayer is finished, they begin passing the offering receivers.

Offering receivers may vary from shiny gold plates to velvet bags or buckets. The team captain should be responsible for making sure the usher knows how to properly cover the section assigned to him or her. Times in the service also may vary. Some churches take up the offering at the beginning, some in the middle and some at the end. It all depends on the preference of

the leadership. As soon as the offering is received, the ushers should take the money to a designated location. Usually the money is escorted by at least two or three individuals to the church business office. The team captain should be responsible for instructing the ushers on the church's policy for handling money collected in the offering.

## **Communion**

Communion is another ministry that may vary from church to church. Many churches use elders, deacons or another designated group to serve Communion. However, the most common method is to use the ushers. Communion elements may also differ from place to place. Some churches use the disposable containers that have the elements prepackaged. Other churches serve individual containers for the juice and bread while others serve the traditional way.

The team captain should inform the usher as to which method the church has adopted. As a rule of thumb, a trial run is appropriate before an usher serves Communion the first time. A great way to train ushers is to have them work with another usher until they feel confident to serve on their own. Since Communion involves liquid and bread that can spill, special instruction should be given before a person is expected to serve in this sacrament.

## **Usher Identification**

Usher should be easily identified. Some of the identification methods used are jackets, vest, sashes, boutonnieres, white gloves or badges. Regardless of the method of identification that is chosen, each usher should also wear a name tag that says "Usher" along with the person's name. Most people feel very uncomfortable asking for assistance from "hey you." Identifying the usher by name gives a warm and personal feeling to the

Person using his/her services. It also makes the ushers feel appreciated when someone calls them by name.

## **Monthly Schedules**

If a church chooses to use a monthly schedule for the ushers, it should be posted for easy access in the monthly newsletter or weekly bulletin. In addition, it is a good idea to mail copy to each usher. Every Sunday, in the pre-service meeting, the schedule can be reviewed. There should also be a place where it is posted at the church in the event someone misread it at home.

## **Usher Hospitality**

There should be a central location for all of those working in the hospitality ministry. Others involved in the hospitality ministry may include greeters, parking attendants, assistants or green-room attendants.

## **Team Building**

Doing ministry as a team is, without a doubt, the best way to minister. Being part of a team promotes friendships, develops a support network and allows you to feel camaraderie of ministry. There are many ways to build the team spirit. Special meals for this team can be provided by the team captain. Potluck dinners with groups games or team-building exercises can be very effective. Special holidays such as Christmas are also a great time to have a team party. The director of hospitality may wish to have a team-building day where all the teams engage in light exercises Designed for team building. Usher team pictures may be displayed on a wall. You may wish to give each team a name, or better yet, allow them to choose a name. Names work better than numbers or letters because numbers and letters seem to indicate a ranking order.

## Lead Ushers / Ushers

The lead usher will recruit and direct the usher team. He will serve as a servant leader to assist with literature distribution; welcoming, directing and seating guests and others as needed; and collecting offerings.

## Anticipated Time Commitments

Doing ministry/preparing for ministry: Two-and-a-half hours a week. Participating in and leading meetings/training: minimal, as needed.

## Responsibilities/Duties

- Always wears his/her Covenant Life identification tag.
- Recruits, supervises and trains all ushers on usher team.
- Recruits and trains usher's to serve as parking attendants. (future)
- Provides ongoing training for members of the usher's team.
- Arrives promptly by 9:10 A.M. and ready to perform responsibilities for morning service.
- Attends regular usher meetings for informational purposes. (requirement for all ushers)

- Maintains a high level of order before, during and after services or functions held at our church.
- Consults with Ministry Coordinator to gain needed insight for every service.
- Responsible for supervising the mid-week service the following Sunday.
- Works in conjunction with greeter's to ensure everyone is given needed information.