

Diocese of Saint Augustine Norms and Guidelines for Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality

1. The ministry of usher and those who serve as ministers of hospitality come from the long history in Judeo-Christianity of those who were the “doorkeeper” or “gatekeeper.” Over the course of the history of the Christian Church, this ministry evolved into the minor order of “porter.” Well before the minor orders were abolished by Pope Paul VI in 1972,¹ the ministry of usher had been given over to the lay faithful. Since then, besides the ministry of usher, parishes have expanded the concept and nature of this ministry to include so-called “ministers of hospitality.” In some parishes these ministries will overlap; in others they are distinct.
2. No matter what title those who serve in this ministry are given, the purpose of this ministry is to assist in the smooth and dignified movement of the sacred liturgy. Another important aspect for those who serve is to assist in creating an environment of Christian hospitality and welcome. This requires a constant attention to the actions of the priest-celebrant, the order of the liturgy and the needs of the assembly.
3. Because of the dignity, importance and responsibility of this liturgical ministry, pastors and those charged with the responsibility for parish worship, should take great care in assessing both the spiritual maturity and abilities of those called to undertake this ministry. Everyone who serves as an usher/minister of hospitality should complete a period of training.

Pastoral Considerations in the Selection of Candidates

4. The ministry of usher/minister of hospitality is open to all members of the parish. Candidates may be either male or female. In the selection of candidates and in the review of those exercising this ministry, the following considerations may be helpful:
 - Candidates are to be active and faithful members of the parish and regularly attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. They should also be encouraged to frequently participate in the sacraments.
 - Candidates should understand the importance of this ministry, appreciate the need for preparation and the ministry’s connection to Christian life and practice. They should be comfortable with meeting and welcoming others. Appropriate respect for people, discretion and appropriate decorum are hallmarks of a minister of hospitality.
 - Candidates should be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. Candidates should show evidence that they are dependable and can put the needs of others before their own. The selection of candidates should reflect the composition of the parish as regards; gender, ethnic and racial diversity.
5. Parishes may find it helpful to select a coordinator of ushers to facilitate training and formation events, schedule and assign ministers to particular liturgies and represent ushers on the parish liturgy committee.

Formation

6. Candidates for the ministry of usher/ministry of hospitality should complete an adequate program of preparation and instruction (at least 3 hours). The formation should include instruction on the Mass and its parts and their meaning, the various objects used in the liturgy (their names and use), and the various functions of the usher/minister of hospitality during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations. They should also receive appropriate guidance on maintaining proper decorum and attire when serving Mass and other functions.
7. Those who will serve in this ministry should be recognized in a public rite preferably during a Sunday Mass. The "Order for the Blessings of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers" (*Book of Blessings*, nos. 1847-1870) may be used before they begin to function in this ministry.

Term of Service

8. Following their formation period, it is the responsibility of the pastor or his delegate to decide on the suitability of persons to serve in this liturgical ministry. Parishes may consider a normal term of service of three years, where this is possible. This can allow for a broader sharing of this ministry by others and frees persons to serve in only one ministry at a time. Please refer to the Diocese's "General Norms for Liturgical Ministers," no. 8.

Continuing Formation

9. A responsible effort should be made to provide periodic formation and study days for persons who serve as ushers/ministers of hospitality. Days of recollection, evenings of prayer and fellowship are important follow-up and support systems to those serving in this ministry. A process of periodic review of their performance may be helpful in improving their effectiveness.

The Usher in Liturgical Celebration

10. The ministry of the usher/minister of hospitality is to care for the assembly during the Mass and other liturgical functions. Christian hospitality draws people together, opens them to participation, and sets the tone for the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Those who serve in this ministry should not exercise another liturgical ministry during the same Mass.
11. General appearance, apparel and accessories worn during the liturgy should reflect the dignity of the role of one called upon to assist in the sacred liturgy. Ushers and Ministers of Hospitality are to be given a copy of the "General Norms for Liturgical Ministers" of the Diocese of Saint Augustine and are to be fully acquainted with the established dress code.
12. The number of persons required for the ministry of usher and/or minister of hospitality each liturgy will be contingent upon such things as the number of entrances into the church, the number of communion stations, and by the number of persons required to provide a smooth movement of the assembly through the communion rite.
13. Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality will normally be the first persons encountered as people enter the church. They are called upon to greet and welcome the Body of Christ as it assembles for

worship. This hospitality is continued as they assist persons in finding seating within the assembly. Seating of persons should be suspended, and persons held at the entry, once the readings from sacred Scripture have begun. In this case, it would be appropriate to seat any late-comers after the second reading (during the singing of the Alleluia/Verse before the Gospel) and at the conclusion of the Gospel. Some communities have found it helpful to reserve a number of seats near the door(s) of the church to allow late-comers to find a seat quickly.

14. Any movement of ushers/ministers of hospitality during the course of the liturgy should be slow and dignified.
15. During the Liturgy, a prayerful attitude must be maintained. It is appropriate, that the usher/minister of hospitality be seated in the assembly. They are to respond to the prayers and dialogues of the priest along with the congregation. They also join in singing the hymns and other chants of the liturgy.
16. Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality are generally responsible for coordinating the procession of the gifts, taking up the collection, organizing the communion procession and the distribution of bulletins and other materials to the assembly. Additional duties may arise from special needs of a particular liturgy.
17. At the conclusion of the liturgy, they again greet the people as they leave and distribute the bulletin and any other materials needing to be distributed at that time. It is strongly encouraged that the parish bulletin be handed out at the conclusion of Mass, not as the people enter the church.
18. **Special Considerations.** Besides being attentive to the special needs of strangers, the elderly and disabled, these ministers should be trained on how to handle emergency situations. They should know where fire extinguishers, medical devices and first aid kits are kept. They should be able to identify parishioners who are physicians and nurses in the assembly. Also, every usher/minister of hospitality should know where to find the nearest phone in the event of an emergency.
19. Specific needs for individual parishes should be developed by the parish as a companion to these guidelines.

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¹ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio*, *Ministeria quaedam*, “On First Tonsure, Minor Orders, and the Subdiaconate” (August 15, 1972).