

## USHER BOOKLET

### 10:00 SERVICE CHECKLIST (short form)

#### Arrival

- ( 15-20 minutes before start of service

#### Check-in

- ( pick up usher badges
- ( sign-in attendance record

#### Main Outside Doors

- ( throw open only on temperate days
  - ( open 15 minutes before service starts
  - ( close after procession clears the chancel

#### Before Housekeeping

- ( inspect entire worship hall
  - ( turn on lights
  - ( pick up trash and lost & found items
  - ( re-shelve books, re-stock visitors' cards
  - ( place 20 service bulletins on the table by the side door of chancel

#### Ushers & Greeters

- ( 2 ushers distribute service bulletins in narthex
- ( 2 greeters welcome visitors and parishioners – 1 is stationed in the breezeway between the Sunshine Room/ kitchen/ Mission Room.

#### Lookout

- ( 2 ushers watch over the congregation before and during the service
- ( report any worshipers who wish to receive the eucharist at their pew

#### Traffic Control

- ( during the procession, direct late arrivals to the outside aisles
- ( late arrivals should be seated only during singing
- ( retrieve K-2 children and teachers after "Prayers of the People"

#### Headcount

- ( count those in the procession 2 minutes before the procession
- ( count the congregation 5 minutes after the procession
- ( add any late arrivals to the total
- ( estimate the headcount for the eucharist based upon the total headcount
- ( write it on a slip of paper, and include the names of any worshipers who wish to receive the eucharist at their pew

### **Offertory**

- ( receive alms basins from acolyte – pass headcount note to acolyte if the service is Holy Communion
- ( take up the collection and present it to the acolyte

### **Holy Communion**

- ( 2 ushers release the worshipers by pew, to the altar rail
- ( 2 ushers take stations in the outside chancel hallways

### **Recession**

- ( throw open main outside doors on temperate days as the recession approaches the narthex

### **After Housekeeping**

- ( 2 ushers collect the service bulletins from the exiting worshipers and act as greeters. In threatening weather, remind worshipers to pick up umbrellas and coats.
- ( 2 ushers proceed to the altar, collect the alms basins, and take them to the sacristy to count only the cash offering
- ( 2 ushers inspect the worship hall to pick up trash, service bulletins in the pews, re-shelve books, and re-stock visitors' cards
- ( all ushers return their badges to the desk in the narthex
- ( 1 usher collects all of the service bulletins, lost & found items and visitors' cards, and takes them to the parish office
- ( 1 usher turns off only the narthex and nave lights after rector finishes his greetings
- ( close the main outside doors

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This booklet is an effort to consolidate information now scattered in several places. It (hopefully) clarifies the responsibilities of usher service at the Ascension. Portions

Episcopal Diocese of Alabama  
Church of the Ascension  
Vestavia Hills, Alabama

of this booklet were borrowed and others adapted from the “Usher Booklet” of the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, the Church of the Ascension’s monthly bulletins, and “The Ministry of the Usher”, by Christopher T. Connell, © 1994, Forward Movement Publications.

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Elizabeth Tanner, Sr. Warden

Glenn Creamer, Usher Chair

## **WELCOME**

Thank you for your work as an usher of the Episcopal Church of the Ascension. Usher service is a great way for parishioners to become or remain active in the life of the Ascension. In addition to the usual cadre of men, there are several ladies and teenagers on the usher roster. There is always a need for more ushers.

In the early church, the ministry of the porter was the ministry of attending the door, the entry to worship. The porter kept watch during the time of persecution. The porter knew who the baptized members of the church community were, and admitted to the Eucharist those people of God who were eligible to be present. References to the ministry of the porter can be found as early as 251 AD when Pope Cornelius wrote of the importance of this ministry in a pastoral letter.

Although the church is far from the days when it was necessary to keep watch for persecutors or to screen worshipers for their eligibility to participate in the eucharist, the ancient order of porter is now performed by the usher. The usher's job is no longer to exclude people from worship, rather it is to welcome people to worship. The job of the usher is the ministry of hospitality.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (13:2 RSV). Certainly, visits from angels are rare and wonderful. But visits from strangers can be wonderful also. Sunday morning worship involves many church members in activities and programs. But the usher performs a special and needed ministry as the one who can show hospitality and welcome to members and visitors alike. The usher can take the time to notice and welcome the stranger.

## **USHER RESPONSIBILITIES (long form)**

- 1. Absence:** If you are unable to serve on a designated Sunday, either arrange for someone to substitute for you, or contact another member of your crew so they can draft someone.
- 2. Arrival:** On the Sunday of service, ushers arrive at least 15 minutes, and preferably 20, before the service to begin their duties.
- 3. Check-in:** Check in at the desk on the right side of the narthex to collect your usher badge. Sign-in on the attendance record sheet which is in the desk. Remember, there is a small first aid kit in the desk that is equipped for minor injuries.

**4. Main Outside Doors:** On pleasant weather days, it is permissible to throw open the main outside doors before and after the service. This facilitates traffic flow and aids in cooling the crowded narthex. Open the doors no earlier than 15 minutes before the start of the service. Close the doors after the procession has entered the chancel (during the processional hymn).

The music director says the pipe organ is affected by changes in temperature and humidity. He is not concerned with the open doors during temperate days. However, if he is presenting a special music program (other than the 10:00 Sunday service) then the doors need to remain closed.

On intemperate days it is not sensible to throw open the main doors because the wide fluctuations in temperature increase our heating and cooling costs – not to mention the adverse effect on the pipe organ.

**5. Before Service Housekeeping:** Do a quick inspection of the narthex, nave, and chancel. Pick up any trash and lost & found items, and re-shelve any books lying on the pews. Re-stock depleted visitors' cards on the hooks at both ends of each pew. Place the cards so they face forward. Fill the hard candy dishes – 1 is on the table on the left side of the narthex and the other is on the small table in the left chancel hallway (before the outside doors which lead to the parish garden). Turn on all lights. The switches are located ...

- ( narthex lights and outside lights - panel is at back of narthex
- ( nave and chancel - panel is in the alcove on the left side of the narthex - let the altar guild control the chancel lights from the panel in the chancel
- ( 2 narthex alcoves - panels are in those alcoves
- ( 2 coat/ umbrella/ storage alcoves - panels are in those alcoves (back of narthex)
- ( right chancel hallway (behind the organ) - panel is on that wall

**6. Ushers & Greeters:** The 4 ushers present decide among themselves who will distribute the service bulletins (need 2) and who will be greeters (the other 2).

**a. service bulletins** – The supply is provided by the parish secretary and is located on the table in the narthex to the left of the inside doors. Verify they are for the current service (if not, find the parish secretary). Check to make sure that approximately 15 bulletins are on the small table in the left chancel hallway. The

parish secretary places a supply there also. They are for worshipers who enter the nave through the side doors. Ushers take their stations inside the narthex at both sides of the main outside door.

**b. greeter stations** – One greeter takes a station in the breezeway between the Sunshine Room/ kitchen/ Mission Room and directs traffic (especially newcomers) down to the worship hall. Be in position 15 minutes before the start of the service, and remain there until 10 minutes after the start of the service. Then re-join the other ushers in the narthex. The other greeter takes a position in the nave close to the ushers. This greeter aids with traffic control (it gets hectic about 5 minutes before the procession) and maintains situational awareness.

**c. practical suggestions for greeters** – when you see a visitor (or for that matter, a parishioner you don't know) ...

- ( Remember you are 1 of the first people whom visitors and parishioners will likely encounter as they enter the Ascension, so be welcoming. Being interested, loving and caring is not just the job of the ushers. It's the job of every parishioner of the Ascension.
- ( Get to know the active members of our parish family. If you can, greet them by name. For those you don't know, introduce yourself and say, "I don't believe we've met, have we? My name is \_\_\_\_\_." Or try "Good morning. I am \_\_\_\_\_. I see you each week , but I don't know your name. This goes a long way toward solving the problem of greeting an unrecognized worshiper and also provides some direction for conversation.
- ( Repeat the person's name, and use it. Recall that some sage once said "your name is the sweetest sound to the ear."
- ( Be sure to greet children. They are our parish's future.
- ( If the person is a visitor, ask, "What brings you to our Church today?," or "How did you learn of our Church?" This may provide some information how the Ascension may continue to serve that person.
- ( At some point in the conversation, you might state in 1 sentence what you most appreciate about the Ascension, such as "I really like this Church

because ...”

- ( If the visitor shows interest in the Ascension, ask if they would like to receive the monthly bulletin in the mail. If the response is “Yes”, then instruct the visitor to sign in the visitors’ register.
- ( If it can be done graciously, introduce the visitor to someone who you may know shares some common interest with the person you just met. In time you will grow to know who are the vestry members and the naturally gregarious communicants. Consider introducing the visitor to any of these parishioners.
- ( Be sure to extend an invitation to the visitor to go to the Sunshine Room after the service for fellowship and coffee (you may need to give directions). If they do, and you also go to the Sunshine Room, look out for them and make appropriate introductions.
- ( During the academic year, if the visitor attends on a Sunday when we have Our monthly covered-dish luncheon (September – May), invite them to break bread with us. You might even invite them to sit at your table.
- ( Remember to invite the visitor to attend another service at the Ascension.

**7. Lookout:** Be alert and sensitive to the needs of the aged and infirm. They often arrive early. If anyone appears unable to walk to the altar rail, you might inquire, in a gracious manner, if they wish to receive the eucharist at their pew. If they say yes, the celebrant will accommodate them if they make themselves available, i.e., instruct them to sit near the front of the nave and on the end of the pew along the center aisle. The usher writes the their name down on a piece of paper and passes it to the acolyte who presents the alms basins to the ushers at the start of the offertory. The acolyte passes the note to the celebrant. If possible, the usher should tell the celebrant before the processional that a worshiper wants to receive the eucharist at his pew Point out the worshiper to the celebrant.

If anyone needs to use the restroom, direct them to the nearest location. Restrooms are located ...

- ( in ground level of the parish office building

- ( in upstairs level of the parish office building
- ( across from the nursery, next to the Mission Room
- ( in the “catacombs”

During the service, 2 ushers maintain vigilance over the physical welfare of the congregation. They position themselves at the back of the nave in the outside aisles. With an average headcount of 150 at the 10:00 service, someone will someday need an usher’s physical assistance. Should an emergency occur, the rector will direct the ushers and congregation. In all likelihood, there will be trained medical person present in the congregation. The rector may direct the ushers to crowd control or to contact emergency medical assistance (a good reason to have a cell phone on you).

**8. Traffic Control:** Once the processional hymn has started block the center aisle of the nave from late arrivals (direct them to the outside aisles) until the procession has started into the chancel. Then assist late arrivals in finding seats. Once the procession is completed sit late arrivals according to the instructions in the service bulletin (look for the asterisk “\*”, it indicates that ushers may sit late arrivals during congregational or choral singing). They may have to wait a while in the narthex. Be alert at heavily attended services. You will need to monitor where the empty seats are and direct the worshipers to them.

**9. Headcount:** A record of service attendance is needed for the parish’s records and to estimate the number of communicants receiving the eucharist. Make an accurate count of those in attendance, including the procession (organist, acolytes, choir, lay readers, and clergy) and ushers. A good time to count the congregation is about 5 minutes into the service. This allows for some late arrivals. One usher takes the right/south/lectern/Epistle side and the other takes the left/north/pulpit/Gospel side, and count from the side aisles of the nave. Notice any late arrivals and include them in the final count. Enter the final number into the attendance record.

During the sermon hymn, the K-2 children leave for a 15-20 minute break (during the service of Holy Communion). Count them on the way out and enter that number into the attendance record. They will be back in time to celebrate the eucharist, of which some of them will partake. Write the total attendance number down on a slip of paper for later use during the offertory.

If it is raining, the K-2 children and their teachers may exit the nave via the door that leads from the chancel into the “catacombs”. Ushers should assist directing them to this door. Near the end of the “Prayers of the People”, and just before the “Comfortable Words”, 1 usher will retrieve them from Ware Hall.

If the weather is good, have them re-enter the nave via the narthex. If the weather is bad, the usher should guide them back to the side door of the chancel. They may re-enter the nave either during “The Peace,” the offertory hymn, or the presentation hymn (“The Doxology”). If the bad weather scenario is in effect, then the usher should stay at this door to minimize disruption of the service. Once the remaining 3 ushers proceed to the chancel step to receive the alms basins, he may time his entrance back into the nave to re-join them there and conduct the collection.

**10. Offertory:** At the conclusion of the “Good Words”, all 4 ushers immediately assemble in the narthex at the main inside doors in preparation for the offertory. Line up 2 deep. After the celebrant announces the offertory and then enters the sanctuary, proceed immediately to the step in front of the chancel. The first 2 ushers stop at the step. The 2 rear ushers split to the outside of the first 2 ushers. The acolyte distributes the alms basins to the 4 ushers starting from the ushers’ right. If the service is Holy Communion, then it is at this point that the last usher passes the note to the acolyte containing the count of those who will receive the eucharist and any worshipers desiring to receive the eucharist at their pews.

Immediately upon receipt of the alms basins, the ushers bow in unison and turn about to face the congregation. The 2 center ushers proceed down the center aisle and collect from their respective sides. The 2 outside ushers move toward their respective outside aisles and collect from there. Everyone moves to the back of the nave until all pews are covered. Re-assemble at the back of the narthex in the inside main doors in the 2 - deep formation. When the organist begins playing the prelude of the presentation anthem, proceed down the center aisle to the step in front of the chancel. The 2 rear ushers move to the step as before. The acolyte will collect the alms basins. Upon completion of the “Doxology”, all 4 ushers bow in unison and turn to face the congregation. The 2 center ushers proceed down the center aisle first with the 2 outside ushers immediately following behind.

At this point, 1 usher goes to Ware Hall to retrieve the K-2 children and their teachers. If the weather is good, have them re-enter the nave via the narthex. If the weather is bad, the usher should go directly from the chancel step, after the “Doxology,” to the inside door which leads to Ware Hall. Bring them back into the nave through this same door during “The Peace” or the offertory hymn.

**11. Holy Communion:** Immediately after the celebrant issues the invitation, “The gifts of God for the people of God”, the ushers take their stations to assist the congregation to, and from, the altar rail. Two ushers proceed up the center aisle to the front of the

nave and stand beside the front-most pews. The other 2 ushers take their stations in the 2, outside chancel hallways.

The 2 center-aisle ushers release each pew to the altar rail as it becomes available. In order to communicate worshipers in a timely manner, release worshipers to come forward as soon as the celebrant and his assistants are in place at the altar rail to communicate the choir. Do not wait for the acolytes to take their stations at the step in the front of the chancel. Try not to have the standing line extend beyond the chancel into the nave. Be alert to the celebrant. He may direct you to release another pew if a gap opens at the rail that you do not see. These 2 ushers are the last communicants to receive the eucharist.

The other 2 ushers proceed up the outside aisles of the nave and enter the chancel via the outside hallways. They should receive the eucharist along with the choir because they are not positioned well to observe the communicants going to the altar rail. They then take their positions to assist the communicants depart the altar rail. On the left/north/pulpit/Gospel side, there is a step down from the altar rail to the outside hallway. Take a position at this step to offer assistance to any worshipers who require help stepping down. Be alert. This can be a hazardous station. Worshipers can easily stumble there.

On the right/south/lectern/Epistle side, the hallway behind the organ is dark. Make sure the light is lit. The floor is inclined here. Take a position at the top of the incline. This station is not nearly as hazardous as the other side.

**12. Recession:** As the recession approaches the narthex, weather permitting, throw open the main outside doors.

**13. After Service Housekeeping:** At the conclusion of the service, 2 ushers take positions in the narthex to collect the service bulletins. They also serve as greeters. The other 2 ushers proceed immediately to the sanctuary and take the alms basins to the sacristy. There, they segregate the cash and loose coins from the pledge envelopes, checks and visitors cards. Count the cash and coins only. Both ushers sign and date a receipt with the total cash amount listed on it. Place the entire collection and receipt into the bag and replace it on the shelf. The assistant treasurer will retrieve it for deposit. Give the visitors cards to the 1 usher who ultimately receives all of the service bulletins.

Whichever set of ushers finishes first should straighten the pews, i.e., collect any trash and service bulletins, fold any kneeling pads, gather items left behind for lost & found, and re-shelve the books in the pew racks. Re-stock any depleted visitors'

cards at the ends of the pews. One usher collects all of the service bulletins from the other ushers and takes them to the parish office for re-cycling. He also takes any visitors cards and turns them into the parish secretary along with any lost & found items. One usher remains in the narthex until the rector finishes greeting everyone. That usher shuts off the narthex, nave and outside lights (leave the chancel lights on for the altar guild because they likely will still be working). Close the main outside doors. Someone else will lock the doors.

All ushers return their badges to the desk in the narthex.

All ushers should be alert to conditions in the parish. Write down any problems in the REMARKS line on the attendance record sheet. Also, report any problems to either the usher chair, senior warden, or junior warden.

**14. Special Occasions:** The Ascension does not generally assign ushers for the Sunday 7:30 a.m. service (a faithful number of communicants have served as ushers for a number of years), weekday services, weeknight services (Ash Wednesday, Lenten services) funeral/ memorial services, private baptisms, or concerts. If you attend a funeral/ memorial service consider serving as an ad hoc usher. You can direct mourners to sign the register and assist seating them. This can be very helpful to first-time visitors. The rector, or senior warden, will contact the usher chair and provide instructions for special services such as confirmation Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter, Youth Sunday, Christmas Eve and baptisms.

## **SENIOR WARDEN RESPONSIBILITIES**

The senior warden of the parish is responsible for recruiting the usher chair. He appoints the usher chair in January, 2 months after the annual parish vestry election. He instructs the usher chair in a letter that he needs to recruit 4 ushers for each 10:00 service, the Christmas Eve services, and any other special services the rector deems necessary.

## **USHER CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Recruits, instructs, and schedules ushers.
2. Reports the next month's usher schedule to the parish secretary by the Thursday before the last Sunday of the month (822.3480, [ascenbham@aol.com](mailto:ascenbham@aol.com)).

3. Edits the "Usher Booklet."
4. Maintains the attendance record sheets and enters the information into the official parish logbook.
5. Monitors the visitors cards at the end of the pews and replenishes them when low.
6. Replenishes the hard candy bowls.
7. Maintains the first aid kit in the desk in the narthex.
8. Maintains the usher badges.
9. Reports problems to the senior warden.

Episcopal Diocese of Alabama  
Church of the Ascension  
Vestavia Hills, Alabama

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