

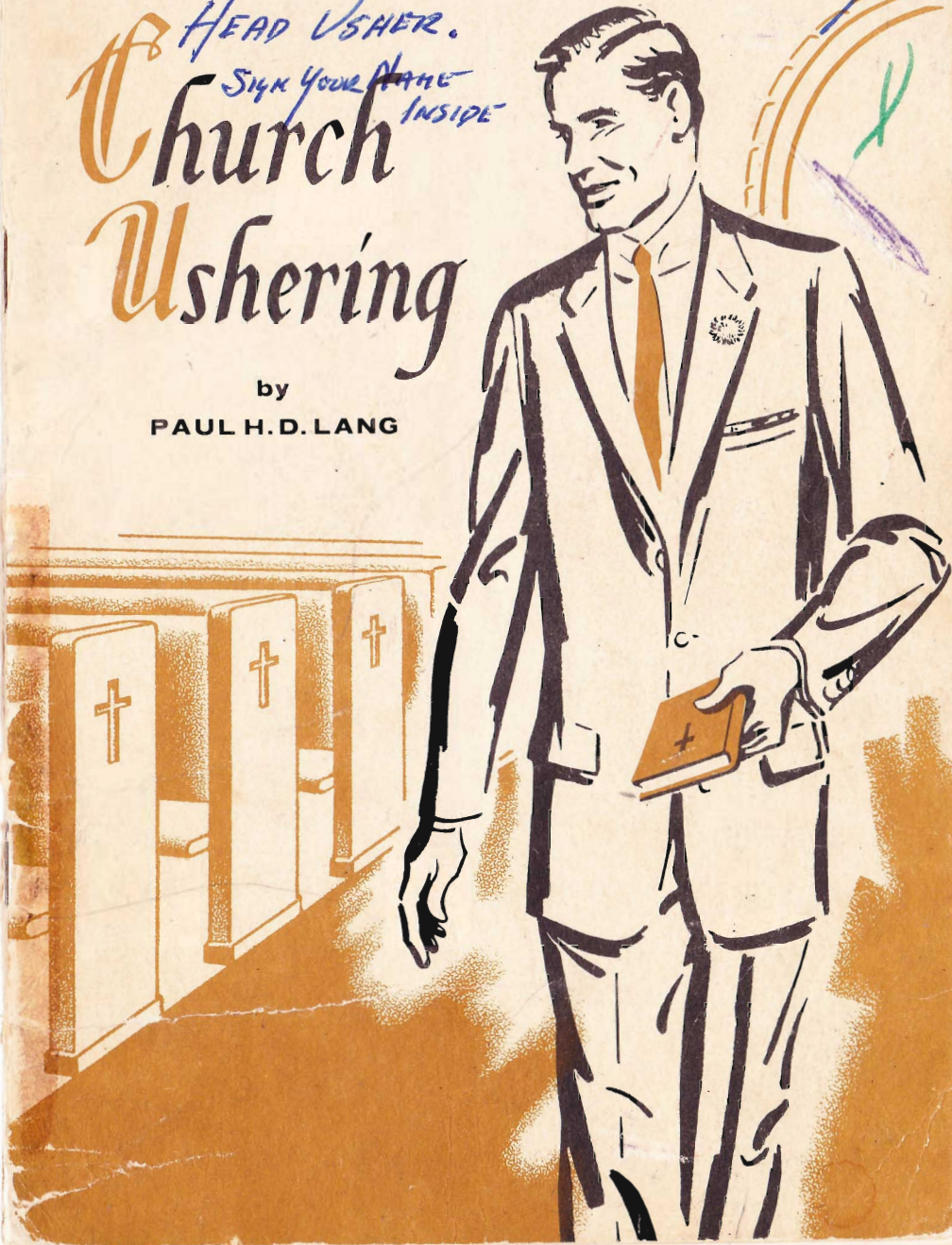
"KEEP ONE WEEK" READ & RETURN TO YOUR

HEAD USHER.

SIGN YOUR NAME
INSIDE

Church Ushering

by
PAUL H. D. LANG



I HAVE REAR CHURCH USHERING

James L. Shaible
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Mc. MacDill

F. B. Flood
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"Study to show thyself approved unto God
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

2 Timothy 2: 15

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PREFACE

This booklet presents the importance of church ushering, its purposes, its techniques, and its organization in a congregation. It is to be a handbook, giving suggestions rather than directions. It should also be noted that many of the things suggested are necessarily of a general character. Specific regulations, such as the manner in which the ushers are appointed, how many are to serve at one time, how often they are to have their meetings, whether or not they are to post hymns on the hymn board, light and extinguish the altar candles, assist in the administration of Holy Baptism, and the like, depend on the needs and customs of the local congregation. Each church may draw up such specific regulations for its own use, mimeograph or print them, and add them to this handbook.

May our Lord grant His blessings to this handbook and to all who serve as ushers in His church.

PAUL H. D. LANG

*Feast of the Transfiguration
of Our Lord, 1946*

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A CHURCH USHER'S PRAYER

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Bless, O Lord, this Thy servant, as Thou didst bless the sons of Levi who ministered in Thy holy temple, and grant me so devoutly to minister in Thy house that Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Your Work: Church Ushering

Church ushering, like all other work in the church, must be studied and developed. It is true, some churches "get by" without giving this matter much attention, but undoubtedly they would have better results, especially in our highly competitive age, if their ushering were improved. Likewise, some ushers do fairly well without any special training, but almost every usher will be benefited by such training, and all will find room for improvement. That being the case, both congregations and ushers should give this phase of church work careful consideration — not only the techniques of ushering, but the purpose and effect it has in the life and work of the kingdom of God.

The Relation of Church Ushering to the Worship Service

To begin with, we must clearly understand the relation of church ushering to the worship service.

The difference. Church ushering differs from ordinary ushering. In the home, the theater, the restaurant, the football stadium, etc., ushering is done only to serve and please people. Often it is only to direct them to their seats. Sometimes it is merely a social function which custom has made desirable. But ushering in church is more than that; it is a service rendered to God and an act which plays a part in conducting the worship service.

For God. When we gather in church to worship God, we do so to receive from Him His grace and blessing through Word and Sacrament and to offer Him our sacrifices of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. A church usher is himself part of the worshiping congregation, he has his particular acts to perform in the divine service, just like the minister, the organist, and the singers in the choir. What he does, he does "as to the Lord and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23). When he sees to it that an atmosphere of reverence and order is maintained before, during, and after the service, he does it for God. When he ushers the worshipers to their seats, he does it for God. When he gathers the offerings, he serves God. Everyone, and especially the ushers, must realize that church ushering is a service to God and a part of, and contribution to, the worship of God.

What Church Ushering Should Accomplish

From its relation to the worship service we see the real purpose of church ushering. Being itself an act of worship, its purpose is to assist in, and to promote, the worship of God. This includes the following:

Preparing for worship. The first thing church ushering should do is to establish a setting appropriate for worship. The worshipers have to gather in church, they must be seated, hymnals and bulletins need to be supplied, and an atmosphere of worship must be created by seeing to it that the people assemble in an orderly way and that a spirit of quietness and reverence prevails in and around the church building. It is written: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Maintaining order and decency. One of the few directions God has given us in the New Testament for the externals of public worship is this: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). The presence of God in the church and the use of His holy Word and blessed Sacraments require reverence and good order both in the way the service

is carried out and in the manner in which the people conduct themselves. Without such order and decency the service simply cannot be held properly. The psalmist declares: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence by all them that are about Him" (Psalm 89:7).

Acting as host for God. Church ushering has the purpose of expressing our Lord's invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The ushers act as hosts for God, not only in expressing the church's welcome, but also in looking after the comforts and needs of all the worshipers. Ushering is to help everyone feel at home. For the visitors this means the elimination of all those things which make it difficult to go into a new place, to face unknown situations, and to be among strangers; for the members of the congregation it means that the privilege of their membership and their presence in the church is made more precious and valuable.

Doing the work of evangelism. No doubt one of the most important purposes of ushering is to help win souls for Christ. Today the work of evangelism is largely done by attracting outsiders to the worship service, where they are brought in contact with the means of grace, and then doing everything humanly possible so that they will return and continue their attendance. Visitors must be made to feel welcome and at home, their names and addresses have to be secured in order that follow-up work can be done, and they must meet and become acquainted with the pastor and the members of the congregation. Much of this is the responsibility of the ushers. They are to help in the church's work of evangelism.

Promoting public relations. Our Lord said: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14). Every church, whether it realizes it or not, is an institution in the public eye and needs the support and understanding of the people in the community if it wants to do its work successfully. We all know what public opinion



means to a church. If it is unfavorable, it can quickly ruin the church's reputation and do much harm. But if it is favorable, if the church makes a good impression on the public consciousness, it will help the work of the church. That is why progressive churches are giving more and more attention to public relations and to the part which church ushering plays in their public relations program. The ushers are the representatives of the general character of the church. Visitors receive their first impression of the church from the ushers. One of the purposes of church ushering, then, is to convey to the outsider a favorable impression — to make him feel that the church is interested in him, that its members are kind and friendly, and that the things the church stands for demand his respect and should have his support. Church ushering should help make the people of the community kindly disposed to the church; it should promote favorable relations.

The Importance of Church Ushering

If it is the purpose of church ushering to help prepare for worship, maintain order and decency, act as host for God, do the work of evangelism, and promote public relations, then it is of great value to the church, as everyone realizes who knows anything about church work. Far from being unimportant, it is a very important factor in the church's program. Its contribution to the worship service is vital and far-reaching. It influences not only the work of the pastor, the organist, the choir, but the whole congregation. It may be the cause of inducing a visitor to become a regular worshiper and eventually a member of the church or of making him go elsewhere — of attracting a soul to Christ or repelling it.

Your Attitude, Conduct, Appearance Training

The Right Attitude

What has been said about the relation of church ushering to the worship service, its purpose and importance, shows that ushers must have the right attitude toward their work and the right spirit. Without this they may do more harm than good.

A sacred duty. When the invitation comes to a man to be an usher and nothing prevents him from accepting this opportunity for service, he should feel that it is a sacred duty, because church ushering is an important phase of the Lord's work. He should be glad that he is able to do this work and should be enthusiastic about it. Sometimes people have the idea that ushering is a burden and that they are doing someone a favor by being an usher. They take the attitude that it is a job someone has to do, and since no one else is particularly willing to do it, it is up to them to carry it out for others. Whoever feels that way about it will be a poor usher.

A great privilege. Church ushering is a great privilege, because it is a service to Christ and His church. Anyone who is asked to usher may well feel honored that the congregation has considered him to be a man of such fine Christian character, ability, and judgment as to choose him for this

high office. He should take as his motto the words: "I serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:24) and repeat these words to himself over and over again as he plans and does his work. And since it is the Lord's work he is doing, he should be courageous and confident of success, never discouraged and disheartened. "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

A big job. Because it requires skill and has possibilities for development and far-reaching service, an usher should look upon his work as a big job. Church ushering means far more than merely taking people to their pews. Almost anyone can do that. A church usher is not a mere crowd handler. He is a servant of Christ, whose opportunities of doing "good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), are extensive. Therefore he should do his very best, pray for the Lord's help and guidance, and "study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Not proud, but humble. While an usher should have a high appreciation of the importance of his work and office, he must not feel important himself. Nothing is more offensive than to see Mr. Usher strutting around in the narthex (the entrance hall, or vestibule, of a church) and nave (the place in the church where the worshipers are seated) as though he were the "big shot" in the place. He should have a spirit of humility and meekness, remembering our Lord's instructions: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29). He should be conscious of the importance of his work and not of his own importance. If he has the right spirit, he will keep himself as much as possible in the background and never show off, act important, make himself conspicuous, or assume a domineering attitude. The usher who thinks he can boss people around has a wrong conception of his work. He is not there to be served, but to serve.

Good Conduct

Courtesy, quietness, reverence. Courtesy, quietness, and reverence are the main requirements in the ushers' conduct. Ushers should be natural, not stiff and officious, yet always reverent and dignified, as it becomes the service of God in His house. They should be pleasant, kind, and hospitable. They should express love for all without distinction, remembering that everyone is precious in the sight of God, for "Christ died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:15). But they should not be familiar; the church is not a "service club." And there should be no loud talking or long conversations with the head usher, among themselves, or with anyone else, either before, during, or after the service, and no conducting of business or discussion of baseball games and the like.

Keeping your place. When their duties require the ushers to be on their feet, they should stand erect and not slouch or lean against the walls and pews. At other times they should be seated in the congregation and engaged in worship. They should not walk around needlessly or leave the church unless it is absolutely necessary in the performance of duty. They should avoid walking through the chancel (the part of the church in which the altar is located). If they want to see the pastor in the sacristy (a room near the chancel for the clergy), they should go around to an entrance other than the chancel door. It is really never proper for anyone to go into the chancel unless he is properly vested. It looks bad to see someone dressed in a business suit walk up to the altar either to light and extinguish the candles or to take the offerings from the altar. This should be done by an altar boy vested in cassock and cotta.

Disturbing, gum chewing, smoking. Ushers should be careful not to disturb people when they are worshiping, particularly not those who are engaged in silent prayer. They should also refrain from chewing gum while on duty, and smoking in the narthex, nave, and chancel (horrors!) is always taboo.



Personal Appearance

Neatly and properly dressed. We shall take for granted that in this civilized age ushers will always appear in church clean and neatly dressed, and that they will have on a coat and necktie no matter how warm the weather is, since they are serving in an official capacity. But other matters of personal appearance need to be emphasized. There is no excuse for ushers to be dressed in a light golf suit, white shoes, and a loud necktie. They should not appear at a morning service wearing a wing collar and bow tie, which belong to evening dress. But they should wear what is appropriate to the worship of God in conformity with the best local customs. This is all the more important since the ushers act as the representatives of the church.

Identification, badges. In this connection we may also consider the matter of identification. It may be desirable to identify ushers in some way so that people can tell who is an usher. This is done in some churches by requiring the ushers to wear formal dress—jacket and gray-striped trousers in the morning, Prince Albert and bow tie in the evening; or suits of the same color, such as black; or identical neckties; or arm bands; or lapel flowers. If flowers are used, they should never, never be artificial. Whatever is done in this matter of identifying the ushers must be given careful consideration so that nothing will mar the reverence and beauty of worship.

Usher Training

Instruction. Work that is of such importance and consequence as church ushering requires instruction and study. No one will want to usher, and no one should be allowed to usher, without some training. Ushers must know what to do and when and how to do their work. They should realize the possibilities of improving themselves and of doing things in a better way. In the service of God only the best is good enough.

Starting right. One who assumes the office of an usher must start right by praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which alone will enable him to do this work in the church properly and in the right spirit. Let him yield himself to the Lord to do His work in the best possible way.

Self-training. Having made this beginning, an usher should study his work by himself. He should observe those who are good ushers, ask questions, and think through the problems and possibilities of church ushering. It will also be helpful to study an usher's manual, such as this one, reading a chapter once a week or so, and practicing what is suggested. Furthermore, willingness to be corrected by the pastor and head usher is of vital importance for self-improvement.

Meetings. Private study should be supplemented by group study. One of the best ways of learning things is by meeting with others for discussion and the exchange of ideas. Therefore ushers' meetings should be held. In these meetings the pastor especially should be consulted, since by virtue of his office he is in charge of conducting the worship services, including the ushering. And all the ushers should feel obligated to attend these meetings. They should understand that they cannot do their important work properly without attending the ushers' meetings any more than the members of the choir and the Sunday school teachers can do their work without attending choir rehearsals and Sunday school teachers' meetings. These meetings need not be held often; perhaps twice or four times a year would be enough. In some churches short meetings are held before every worship service. The ushers assigned for the service meet with the pastor or head usher for fifteen minutes. For example, if the service begins at 11 A. M., the ushers meet from 10:30 to 10:45 A. M. The meeting is opened with prayer, and after that some phase of ushering is discussed, and a final checkup is made for the ushering in the coming service. This type of meeting helps to get the ushers to church on time and prepares them properly for their work.

The Techniques of Ushering

Often how a thing is done is more important than what is done. The techniques of ushering are the "hows" of doing it—how to meet people, how to handle crowds, how to usher the worshipers to their seats.

Meeting People

Friendliness. A basic requirement in meeting people is genuine friendliness. No one likes a grouch. There are times when an usher does not feel up to par, but then especially he must pull himself together and by every look, word, and deed convey friendliness. He must do this because he is to represent his church as a friendly church. It is his business to be friendly in meeting people who come there to worship. His friendliness, like sunshine, must help to warm their hearts. He must make them feel welcome and at home.

Smile. This does not mean that an usher should have a perpetual smile on his face. A smile helps if it is sincere, but a put-on grin is no asset. It is the genuineness and sincerity of friendliness that counts, and this an usher may express in his face and actions even though he does not smile.

Backslapping. Neither does friendliness mean backslapping people and calling them by their first names. Most people do not like to be backslapped when they come to church. Besides, meeting people at a worship service calls for a certain amount

of reserve, dignity, and reverence. This is not a "service club" meeting.

The greeting, mentioning names. It is generally better if ushers do not mention names when they greet the worshipers as they come to church. A simple "Good morning," "Good evening," is all that should be said before the service and, as a general rule, only then when the usher is spoken to first. Otherwise, a friendly greeting expressed silently by a slight nod of the head, a smile, or a look of welcome in the eyes, is all that is necessary.

Handshaking. The same thing is true of handshaking. Unless a worshiper offers his hand first, the usher should not shake hands when he greets him before the service.

Using name and shaking hands after the service. It is important, however, for ushers to call people by name and shake hands with them after church. People like to be called by name. It means a lot to Mr. Smith if an usher shakes hands with him after the service and says: "How are you today, Mr. Smith?" Therefore ushers must make it a point to remember names, especially the names of visitors. They should always have a pencil and notebook handy so that they can jot down new names and those hard to remember.

Favoritism. In greeting people at church, ushers must never show partiality to their friends. There must be no favoritism. When a man serves as an usher, he is acting in an official capacity and, like a judge on the bench, must be fair and impartial to all.

Discourtesy. Under no circumstances is a worshiper to be embarrassed. He must never be told that he is wrong, that he has made a mistake, or that he should have known better. No matter how provoking a situation may be, ushers must always control their feelings and be courteous.

Courtesy, tact. This brings us to our final and most important requirement for ushers in meeting and dealing with

people, and that is courtesy and tact. Ushers must always be gentlemen through and through. It is supremely important that they handle difficult situations without hurting anyone's feelings and that they say and do the right thing. They must always be kind, considerate, and patient. They are there to serve the Lord Christ and, in doing so, to serve people, to please them, to be "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Hurt feelings. But sometimes it happens that people's feelings are hurt. Take the case of the parents with the unruly child. When the child caused too much disturbance, an usher suggested to the parents that they might take the child to the nursery. This suggestion the parents resented and walked out of the church, not to come back again for a number of Sundays. When the usher noticed this, he made a call on the parents and in Christian love explained to them that, while parents should bring their children to church, the church is no place to train children at the expense of the worship of the congregation. Fortunately the matter was settled and the parents came back to church. If an usher has made a mistake, he should apologize and, if possible, correct the matter. If he was not at fault, he should express regret and explain his action. In every case of hurt feelings, the usher must make an effort to straighten out the matter as soon as possible. And in doing this, he should remember that "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

Controlling Crowds

Be prepared. Many people have the habit of coming to church "just on time." This causes the forming of a crowd at the beginning of the service. Also on special occasions and festival days the ushers are often confronted with the problem of handling a crowd. Unless they are prepared for this situation and know how to handle a large number of people who all want to enter the church at the same time, there will be disorder and confusion.

Have a plan of action. Ushers must solve this problem by carefully laying out a plan of action. A sufficient number of ushers must be on hand, so that two or more are stationed at every entrance into the nave. In large churches other ushers should be stationed down the aisles. Each usher must have his particular work, and he must not interfere with the work of others. The ushers must not move around more than absolutely necessary. It is better to direct the worshipers from one usher to another than to have the ushers walk up and down the aisles. If there are no aisle ushers, one usher must always be at the door to keep the people from crowding and coming into the church without being ushered. Never should too large a group of people be allowed to enter at one time — not more than the ushers can handle conveniently. Signals can be given with the fingers to indicate how many should come in. It is also wise to have extra ushers on hand for special work. If, for instance, extra chairs must be brought in for an overflow crowd, the head usher must see that this is done by others and not by those who are already on duty.

Keep calm. Next to the planning for the handling of a crowd — and there is no excuse for not planning for it — is the matter of the emotional reaction of the ushers. The ushers must keep calm. If they become excited, the crowd will also become excited; and that means trouble. They must have self-confidence and poise. They must not hurry unduly, but carry out their assigned duties quietly and smoothly. This will cause the people in the crowd to remain quiet and patient. Thus an atmosphere of reverence and devotion will be maintained even though a large number of people enter the church in a short time.

Seating the Worshipers

Study the seating arrangement. To seat the worshipers properly involves more than merely showing them to their seats. It requires, first of all, a thorough knowledge of the seating arrangements of the church. This includes, besides the

main body of the nave, the transepts (the transverse sections of a cross-shaped church), the balconies, choir, and overflow rooms. Even if the church has no other seating space than the nave, it is important to consider its possibilities. The ushers should study the entire plan of the church and know where to seat the people to gain the best possible results for the worship service. They must take into consideration such problems as the relation of the seating capacity of the church to the probable attendance at a given service, where to seat the people in order to obtain the best worship atmosphere, what seating arrangement will help the minister and contribute to the comfort of the worshipers, what possibilities the layout of the church offers to make ushering convenient and orderly, what arrangement will make the best impression on visitors.

Direct the seating. These are important problems. To solve them, the ushers not only have to study the seating arrangement of the church but also to get the people to sit where they want them to be seated. In some churches the majority of worshipers are allowed to choose their own seats. They are not ushered to their seats. Only the visitors are ushered in. Every congregation will have to decide what procedure is to be followed. Undoubtedly the best results are achieved when everyone is ushered in and assigned a seat by the ushers.

Learn their preferences. This does not mean that the ushers should insist on seating people where they do not want to sit. If a worshiper prefers to sit in a certain place, the ushers should learn to know his preference and take him to that seat. Some ushers make it a practice to ask everyone the question: "Any preference?" But this is not necessary. Most people do not have a preference, and the question only causes hesitation, delay, and undesirable conversation. The ushers can and should learn people's preferences. If this is done, the members will soon co-operate with the ushers, and most of them will go where the ushers want to seat them. A little tact in handling this situation will usually overcome all



difficulties. We remember the case of an elderly lady who insisted on sitting in a certain place. Whenever the service was unusually well attended, or if she came late, "her seat" was often taken. This would make her very provoked. The problem was discussed at an ushers' meeting, and one of the ushers was appointed to visit her and tell her in a friendly way that no seats in the church are reserved, but that the ushers would make every effort to keep her seat open for her, and if she would come on time, she could be fairly sure of being able to sit there. The result was that she came to church much earlier, and when it happened that she was late and her seat was taken, she willingly followed the usher to another place.

GOOD **Aisle seats.** One of the vexing problems of ushers is the contest between early arrivals and latecomers for the much-coveted aisle seats. Early comers seat themselves next to the aisle. Late arrivals pause in the aisle hoping the occupant of the aisle seat will move toward the center of the pew. But he refuses to budge. The others, then, must crowd past the seated person, and the usher stands by in patience and embarrassment while that wordless contest is being settled. One church solved this problem by placing a sign at the end of each pew: "Please move toward center." An amusing story on this subject is told by Dallas Wood, editor of the *Palo Alto Times*, Palo Alto, California. He says, "A bit of drama, witnessed one Sunday morning, was enacted by two women. One, comfortable in an aisle seat, was asked by a later arrival to please move over. She did so with evident reluctance. The usurper of that aisle seat, after having sat there just long enough to establish her own claim, decided to go outside for a moment and said to the dispossessed one, "Hold this seat for me until I get back."

Get the people to the front. As a general rule, the church should be filled from the front to the rear. It makes the work of the minister much easier when the congregation is seated in the front, and it puts the people into a better spirit. If the

front pews are filled, everything seems to be improved — the singing, the participation of the people, and even the parts of the minister, the organist, and the choir. After church there is a much friendlier and happier spirit. You will hear remarks like these: "Weren't a lot of people in church today?" "Wasn't it a beautiful service?" Therefore it is wise to fill the front pews and to fill them as early as possible. In fact, that is the secret of getting the people to the front. If the rear and center of the nave are filled first, it will be very difficult to persuade people to sit in the front. The reason for this is psychological. It creates the impression that the front pews are undesirable, since others have avoided them. It also makes some people self-conscious — their timid natures rebel against the idea of going down the aisle past a church full of people; it fills them with fear. But they do not have this reaction when the forward part of the church is filled first.

Distribute the people. In churches which are ordinarily only half filled it is wise to distribute the people in various parts of the nave with a few in every pew if possible. This will give the appearance of a well-filled church even if it is only half full. And it will give a better impression and create a finer spirit than the sight of all the people huddled together in the rear and rows of empty pews in the front. Besides, the other places can always be filled later if, happily, more come than were expected.

The hard of hearing and the nearsighted. Special attention must be given to the hard of hearing, the nearsighted, the mothers with babies, and those who are ill. The nearsighted should be seated, not off to one side, but toward the front and directly before the altar, where they can see best. The hard of hearing should also be seated near the altar and pulpit if the church has no loud-speaker system. But today most large churches and even many small ones are equipped with some kind of amplification device, either acousticon phones or microphones and speakers. The majority of the hard of hearing also own hearing aids. Therefore, the problem of seating these

people is no longer as difficult as it was formerly. But even with modern sound systems, there may be certain places in the church where it is easier to hear than elsewhere. When that is the case, the ushers should know these conditions and seat the hard of hearing where they can hear best. But it is not good practice to ask anyone directly whether he is hard of hearing and whether he would like to sit in a special place. People are very sensitive about such things. Wait until they express their desire or find out from the head usher or others who the people are that cannot hear well. Then automatically take them to the right place without saying anything about it.

Parents with small children, persons who are ill, latecomers. Small children and people who are ill or who faint easily should be seated in the rear. This will eliminate to some extent disturbing the congregation when children are noisy and parents have to take them out. It will also put such parents, as well as persons who are ill, more at ease, because they will feel that they can go out without difficulty in case of necessity. The ushers can also keep an eye on them more easily and offer them their assistance when needed. Latecomers, too, should be seated in the back part of the church, so that they can be ushered in without causing disturbance. For that reason, it is well to rope off the rear pews and place an appropriate sign on the back of the pews in this section, stating: "Reserved for parents with small children, persons who are ill, latecomers." If someone faints or becomes distressed during the service, the ushers must know what to do. This is one of the problems that should be carefully considered beforehand, so that when the emergency arises, the congregation will not be disturbed. The ushers should take the sick person out as quickly and quietly as possible. They should have water handy and a first-aid kit, especially smelling salts. If they know that a medical doctor is in the congregation and it seems advisable to call him, let this be done if possible without attracting the attention of the other worshipers. Such emergencies do not come up very often, but it is necessary to be

prepared for them and to have a plan of action, so that when they do arise, they can be handled with calmness and the least amount of disturbance.

Nursery for small children. If the church conducts a nursery for small children, this should be made known through the church bulletin, newspaper, and other means of publicity. Then the ushers need not ask parents whether they want to leave their children in the nursery — a procedure which often causes embarrassment — but those who are interested will inquire about it of their own accord. The ushers should, however, offer to direct people to the nursery if they ask where it is conducted.

Groups of children and young people. Groups of children and young people should never be seated together. Children should sit with their parents, and if conditions make this impossible, they should have proper supervision. Young people should be seated singly or in pairs, scattered among the rest of the congregation. Both children and young people should be kept out of the balconies, transepts, and all other places that are somewhat secluded. It is much easier and wiser to forestall temptations to giggling, whispering, inattention, and the like, than to try to correct such evils.

Visitors. It is desirable to seat visitors well to the front or in places where they cannot get out and away too quickly. They should mingle with the rest of the congregation after the service and meet as many people as possible. Therefore the majority of the regular members must have the opportunity to leave the church first. It also gives visitors a good impression, if when they come out, they see a large number of people gathered in front of the church.

Method of seating worshipers. The procedure which should be followed in ushering the worshipers to their seats is this: At the door the usher indicates with his hand the number of people who are to follow him. Then he walks down the aisle, timing his speed to that of the followers, until he comes to the

pew in which he wants to seat them. Here he turns to face them, hands them a bulletin, and with a slight nod shows them their seats. He remains there until they are actually seated. After that he returns to the door for the next group. In large churches the people should be directed from one usher to another until they arrive at their seats. This will eliminate the necessity of ushers walking up and down the aisles. The less of that you have, the better.

Know where empty seats are. The ushers should know at all times where empty seats are available. While they usher in one group, they should be thinking about where to seat the next. They should never let people stand in the aisle while they are hunting for a place to seat them. If the attendance is large, they should fill every pew before opening up an overflow section or bringing in chairs.

If people do not follow. One of the common complaints of ushers is that people do not always follow them to the place where they want them to sit. Instead, they seat themselves in some pew down the aisle. When that happens, the usher must not express surprise or resentment nor take it as a personal insult, but act as though nothing had happened, return to such people, and kindly hand them a bulletin. It is nothing serious; and if the ushers show the right spirit, the people will learn to co-operate with them more and more. Sometimes the ushers themselves are at fault. They may act too domineering, or they may walk too fast for the people they are ushering. If they will gauge their speed to that of their followers, much of the difficulty can be overcome.

Reserved section. If people want to enter a reserved section, the ushers should not argue with them. They should simply state that it is reserved and point out another place where they can sit.

Right to best seats. People who come early are entitled to the best seats if they want them. But no one should insist on this right contrary to the law of Christian love.

Up and down steps. If worshipers have to go up and down steps — such as the chancel steps during the distribution of Holy Communion — ushers should stand by to assist them. They should take elderly, infirm, and nearsighted people by the arm and help them.

Never run after anyone. Ushers should never run after anyone who comes in without the assistance of an usher. If such a person has difficulty in finding a seat, the usher should walk up to him quietly and show him a place where he can sit.

Rearrangement. In case the seating has to be rearranged anywhere, an usher should stand by until everyone is again seated.

No ushering allowed. After the service has started, no one should walk around or be ushered in during the time of prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Your Duties

Before the Service

On time. To be on time — fifteen, twenty, or thirty minutes (whatever has been decided) before the service starts — is absolutely necessary. Since the ushers act as hosts, they must be present to welcome the worshipers when they arrive. This is no hardship when it is remembered that ushering is a service rendered to the Lord Christ Himself. It will require effort to be on time, yes; but what worthwhile things do not require effort? Let this be an unailing rule: Every usher present on time. If it should happen that one of the ushers is not on time, the head usher must immediately telephone to find out whether he is on the way or call a substitute.

Heat, light. Upon arrival the ushers should check the temperature of the church, provide for proper ventilation, and turn on the lights wherever it is too dark. The time to do these things is now, before the service has started. It is inexcusable, except in an emergency, for ushers to walk around during the service opening and closing windows, adjusting the heating system, and manipulating light switches.

Hymnals, bulletins, special offices. The ushers should make sure that the hymnals are in place, bulletins of the right date on hand, and that anything needed for special offices is provided. The pastor should be consulted no later than the evening before concerning occasional acts which may be included

in the service, such as the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the rite of confirmation, the office of installation, the reception of new members, and the like.

Going to your station. When these preliminary duties have been done and the worshipers begin to arrive, the ushers should go to their stations and carry out the work assigned to them.

Directing the ushering. The head usher should occupy a position where he can supervise and direct the whole procedure of ushering. He may act as the official greeter, who stands at the main entrance and directs the people to the other ushers. It all depends on the size of the church and the amount of directing necessary. But whatever the situation, the head usher must direct the ushering and see to it that at least one usher is always standing at every entrance door into the nave. For instance, if only two ushers are stationed at a door, the one must remain there while the other is engaged in showing worshipers to their seats.

Giving out bulletins, hymnals. The ushers should give a church bulletin to everyone. It is better to give these out while seating the worshipers than to distribute them at the door. If the usher holds them in his hand until he has led the worshiper to his seat, it will help solve the problem of getting the worshiper to follow him. The same thing is true of hymnals if they are distributed by the ushers. It seems more convenient, however, to have the hymnals in sufficient numbers throughout the church in pew racks, so that the ushers do not have to handle them. Only for latecomers it may be desirable to keep some on hand in the narthex. This will make it possible for the ushers to give them a hymnal when they come and to point out to them the particular place in the service which is in use at that time.

Lighting and extinguishing the candles. The candles on the altar and in the chancel should be lighted before the

service begins and extinguished after the service is ended. The proper procedure is as follows: If an usher does this, he enters the chancel from the sacristy, goes to the front of the altar steps, bows reverently, and then goes up to the altar. Beginning at the cross, he lights all the candles to the right of it. Then he returns to the cross and lights all the candles to the left. This done, he returns to the front of the altar steps, bows, and goes back into sacristy. When he extinguishes the candles, he approaches and leaves the altar in the same way. The candles, however, are extinguished in reverse order. All the candles on the left side, beginning with the one farthest from the cross, are extinguished first, and then those on the right in the same manner. A combination taper and snuffer, attached to a handle long enough to reach the candles conveniently, should be used.

During the Service

Ushering and non-ushering periods. When the service has started, ushering and non-ushering periods must be observed. People may be ushered into church during the hymns, the canticles, and such other parts of the service as the congregation sings. But no one should enter while the congregation is engaged in confession, prayer, or when the choir sings, or when the minister reads the Scriptures and part of the liturgy.

Latecomers. The ushers must be tactful with latecomers who want to be seated at once, even though the service is at a point when no one should be ushered into church. A little study of the temperament of such people will enable the ushers to deal with them without causing resentment. They may hand them an open hymnal, showing them the place in the service which is in progress, and then point out to them the next part of the service during which they may enter. If possible, temporary seats should be provided in the narthex for those who must be detained during the non-ushering periods.

Needs of people, emergencies, disturbances. All of the ushers must remain on duty throughout the service. But all who are not assigned to special work should be seated in the sections where they are in charge and be actively engaged in worship with the rest of the congregation. There they should watch out for the needs of the people. They should not fail to give those a bulletin who come in and seat themselves without the assistance of an usher. They should not be unconcerned when they see someone who does not have a hymnal or is unable to follow the service. They should always be prepared for any emergency that may arise. All disturbances — crying babies, children walking around in the aisle, people playing with youngsters, whispering, giggling, talking — must be taken care of immediately and not allowed to continue. A worshipful atmosphere must be maintained at all times.

The very late. Some of the ushers will have to remain at the doors, at least at the beginning of the service, to take care of the latecomers. It sometimes happens that people come very late. Therefore one usher must be on the lookout for latecomers throughout the service. If possible, he should be inside the church, but in such a position as to be able to see anyone coming into the narthex.

In control of one usher. The control of light switches, heating and ventilating devices, as well as the transmission of emergency messages, should be taken care of by the head usher or by one of the ushers assigned to this duty. No one else should be allowed to do these things. One person must be in control, or there will be confusion. And some arrangement should be made by which the pastor can call this person at any time during the service.

Receiving the offerings. In receiving the offerings, the ushers selected for this purpose should know how to do so without attracting attention to themselves. If they go to the chancel before the receiving of the offerings and again when the offerings are brought to the altar, they should not goose-step or march in military precision. This is no parade. It is not

necessary that they should keep in step. If an usher is out of step, he should not shuffle his feet or make other movements to get into step. Such things look bad. Nothing beyond good order is required. No tramping of feet, no snappy timing, and no precise turning add to the spirit of worship and reverence. Everything must be done in good order and without delay and confusion. Where collection plates are used, ushers will have to be careful that the plates do not become so full that the offering envelopes or paper money will slide off while the plate is being passed from person to person. When a plate is full, it should be replaced by another. Once, when a collection plate was heaped high with money and offering envelopes, the usher, fearing the contributions would drop to the floor, cautiously stuffed some of them into one of his pockets. He has never heard the end of the kidding about "pocketing the collection."

OFFERING

Distribution of Holy Communion. During the distribution of the Sacrament of Holy Communion the ushers see that the people come to the Communion rail in groups of the right number, that no time is lost, and that the whole procedure is carried out smoothly and reverently. One usher may stand at the head of the aisle, and another may go from pew to pew in order to let the communicants know when it is time for them to go to the altar and also to regulate the number in each group. One group should always be standing in the aisle, ready to take the place of the group which has communed. It is not the business of the ushers to ask anyone whether or not he wishes to partake of Holy Communion. They should not speak to anyone during the distribution unless spoken to first. Even then the conversation must never be loud or long.

Counting attendance. Another duty of the ushers during the service is to count the attendance. In some churches they do this when they receive the offerings. In others, someone in the choir loft or balcony is assigned this duty. However it is done, the count should be given to the head usher, who will give it to the minister after the service and make a record of it.



After the Service

Silent prayer. A period of silent prayer follows the Benediction. During this prayer the ushers should set the rest of the congregation a good example by scrupulously observing it themselves. They must not open the doors, remove chairs, or do any walking around before silent prayer is ended. Everything must remain as quiet as possible during this time.

Leaving the church, greetings. When silent prayer is ended, the doors are opened, and the people will leave the church. This, too, must be orderly and as noiseless as possible. If the minister greets the people at the door, some of the ushers, or greeters, should be near him in order that he can refer visitors to them for registration and introduction to other members. If the pastor does not greet the worshipers after church, the ushers themselves, under the leadership of the head usher, must see to it that visitors are recognized and their names and addresses secured. For this reason the ushers should always have a notebook and pencil handy. They should write down the names and addresses of new people and make notes of other things they should remember.

Good **Parting Words.** In some respects the manner in which the congregation is dismissed is more important than how it is received. Last impressions are lasting impressions. After the service the ushers should make an effort to speak to the people, call them by name, and leave them with a friendly remark, such as this: "We were happy to have you with us today and will look for you again next Sunday." They should also suggest to visitors that they meet the pastor, if they have not met him. They may say: "Mr. Jones, will you wait a moment and meet our pastor?"

Closing the church. The last duty of the ushers is to put everything back in order. Hymnals must be replaced in the pew racks, the bulletins that were left behind gathered up, chairs put away, heat and light turned off, and the windows and doors closed.

Organization

Church ushering cannot be carried out efficiently and effectively in a congregation unless it is properly organized.

Authority and Responsibility

Authoritative board. Generally some official board in the congregation is given the authority and responsibility to institute and supervise the work of ushering. This may be the church council, the board of elders, or a committee on worship and service. For the sake of brevity and clearness in this discussion we shall call this authoritative board — whatever name it may have in a local congregation — the Board of Elders.

The pastor. The pastor of the congregation will be *ex officio* a member of this board. By virtue of his call he is in charge of conducting the worship services, including the ushering. He is also the one who is best informed on every phase of the work of the church because of his training and experience. For these reasons the other members of the Board of Elders should look to him for counsel and advice. His opinions should be given due consideration in the decisions of the Board.

Appointments. The Board of Elders should appoint the ushers, at least the head usher and the assistant head ushers. In some congregations the selection of the other ushers is left to the head usher. But the personnel of the ushering staff is

always the responsibility of the Board of Elders, and it must see to it that enough ushers are appointed for the church's needs and that they have the necessary qualifications.

List of names. To facilitate the selection of ushers, the Board of Elders should compile a list of names of the members of the congregation who are qualified for the work of ushering. This list should include the new members as well as the old. Consideration should be given especially to those who are not active in other church work. The list may be divided into three classes: active ushers, reserve ushers, and prospective ushers. If such a list is kept up to date, with addresses and telephone numbers, it will be a valuable asset in supervising the ushering personnel.

New ushers. From the list of prospective ushers the new ushers will be selected. After they have been chosen, the Board of Elders should send them an official letter asking them to share in this important church work for a definite time. The letter should also contain a roster of the present staff of ushers.

Select ushers with care. The ushers should be selected carefully. Every man's character and ability should be considered. The head usher and the assistant head ushers should have the qualifications of a deacon enumerated in Acts 6:3, "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." They should be members in good standing, friendly, and dependable. They should have the ability of leadership and of instructing, organizing, and inspiring the other ushers. The rest of the ushers should be selected primarily on the basis of Christian character and ability. The matter of age is not as important as a good personality, willingness to learn, and faithfulness. The younger men should be selected if possible, because it offers them a fine opportunity for church work, but their youth should not be the only determining factor in making the choice. Boys under the age of 18 years usually do not make good ushers, because they are often awkward and noisy. If the

ushers are chosen with care, it will have a good effect on the standing of this work. The impression must not be given that anyone can be an usher if he is willing to serve. Let it be understood that the ushers are a picked group of men who have an important office in the church. That will help to elevate ushering to the position which it should have in the minds of the members of the congregation, and it will make it easier to enlist men for this work.

Provide equipment. The Board of Elders should also provide the ushers with the equipment they need. Every usher should be given a handbook for church ushers. The small amount that this will cost will be a good investment, for it will bring rich returns to the congregation. It will enable the ushers to improve themselves and will make them feel that the Board is deeply interested in them and their work. A supply of handbooks should always be kept in store to present to new ushers as they are appointed. Also, if the ushers are expected to wear special dress for identification — neckties, badges, flowers, and the like — these things should be provided by the church. A few flashlights should also be kept on hand in church for use if the electric lights should fail during an evening service.

Rules for ushers. Every church has its own particular requirements and problems of ushering which demand regulations that cannot be included in an ushers' handbook. These regulations should be drawn up by the Board of Elders in a set of rules for their ushers. Such rules, when approved by the congregation, should be strictly adhered to both by the ushers and the members of the congregation. No major changes should be made without the decision of the Board.

Responsibility for dependable and efficient ushering. The Board of Elders should also see to it that the ushering is dependable and efficient. One of the great worries of a pastor, especially in a small church, is: Will the ushers always be on hand and do their work properly? Such anxiety need not

exist. The Board of Elders must exercise the authority which it has and assume the responsibility of providing efficient and dependable ushering, not only for the regular Sunday services, but for all other services as well.

The Board's attitude. If the ushers are to have the right attitude toward church ushering, the members of the Board of Elders, the governing board, must have a high regard for it. They must be convinced of its importance, be deeply interested in it, and well informed. At every opportunity they should enlist the co-operation of the other members of the congregation for this work. If necessary, they should send out letters to all members, pleading for their co-operation. They should not be satisfied with things as they are, but frequently invite the head usher to attend their meetings, talk over the problems and opportunities with him, and eagerly make every possible improvement.

The Board of Ushers

Working group. The ushers themselves must be organized into a working group. Even in a small church which has only two ushers one of these must be the head usher. Ordinarily, however, the board of ushers should consist of a head usher, assistant head ushers, and a sufficient number of other ushers to meet the needs of the church.

Manager. The head usher occupies the responsible position of a manager or executive.

Reports. The relationship to the Board of Elders which appointed him demands that the head usher carry out the wishes of the Board and make regular reports. Even if the Board does not require him to submit a detailed account of the activities of the ushering force, he should keep it informed of all matters of importance and seek its counsel and approval when anything new is contemplated.

In charge. As manager or executive the head usher is in charge of the work of ushering and of the ushering personnel.

He must personally direct the work at every church service, and if he cannot be present, he must see to it that an assistant head usher take his place.

Enlisting ushers. If only the head usher and the assistant head ushers are appointed by the Board of Elders, it will be the responsibility of the head usher to enlist the other ushers. In that case he should consult the Board, or at least the pastor, before a new usher is chosen. As stated above, every usher should be selected carefully, and after he has been chosen, an official letter should be sent to him.

Instructing new ushers. The head usher should explain the rules and regulations to all new ushers. He should go over the routine with them sometime before they assume their first duty. He should show them how to give out the bulletins and service books, how to take up the offerings, and how to assist the communicants during the distribution of Holy Communion.

Assignments. It is the duty of the head usher to instruct each usher in what he is to do, how, and when to do his work. These assignments should be specific and well defined in order to prevent, as much as possible, one usher from interfering in the work of another.

Rotation. The head usher will have to provide the necessary number of ushers for every church service. Usually this is done by a system of rotation, in which every usher serves for a definite period of time. These periods of service can be arranged so that the period of one usher will overlap the service of another. For example, if each usher serves four weeks, Usher No. 1, to begin the system, will serve two weeks with Usher No. 2. At that time Usher No. 3 takes the place of No. 1 and serves with Usher No. 2. From then on the periods of service will overlap. No. 2 will serve with No. 3, then No. 3 with No. 4, then No. 4 with No. 5, etc.

The schedule, notifications. The schedule of the periods of service for each usher should be mimeographed and sent to all the ushers. It may also be posted somewhere in the church.

Every six months or so a new schedule should be published and posted. If the head usher will do this regularly, he will have little difficulty in seeing that the necessary ushers are present for every service.

Notify the head usher. Sometimes, however, it will happen that an usher cannot be present when he is supposed to serve. Then a substitute has to be appointed to take his place. This creates one of the most trying problems for the head usher. It must be emphasized again and again that every usher must promptly notify the head usher if he cannot meet his appointment. He must do so as soon as possible. Here co-operation is essential. The head usher must make it clear to all that this is not a small matter, for it involves the work of the kingdom of God. That is why everyone must be dependable and faithful. If an usher is unfaithful too frequently — if he fails to report his intended absence to the head usher in time to secure a substitute, or if he fails to come on time or does not take his work seriously — the head usher must admonish him. Should the admonition fail to bring the desired results, it is advisable to replace him with someone who is more faithful. The work of the church must not be allowed to suffer on account of a chronically delinquent usher.

No partiality. In his dealings with the ushers the head usher dare not show any partiality. He should study each usher, know his abilities, and then, regardless of personal preferences, assign to every man the work for which he is best qualified.

Love, co-operation. St. Paul tells us that what avails in Jesus Christ is "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). While good discipline is essential in an ushers' organization, it must be a discipline based on love and not on arbitrary demands. A head usher should remember that nothing good is accomplished by carping criticism and faultfinding. If he will give honest praise, suggest how things can be done in a better way, and set others a good example, he will achieve the desired results. Since church ushering, however, is not

a one-man job but a co-operative effort, there must be good teamwork among all the ushers. Here again love, born of faith, is the guiding principle. "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Rewards of grace. Church ushering has its own rewards. Every usher who performs his work faithfully and in the right spirit will have the satisfaction of doing an important service — a service rendered to the Lord Christ Himself. And he has the assurance that one day our Lord will acknowledge his efforts and say to him: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. . . . Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Soli Deo Gloria

TEN POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Your work is important
2. You serve the Lord Christ
3. Be on time
4. You are a part of the worshiping congregation
5. Do your work quietly
6. Be friendly and courteous
7. Follow the wishes of the pastor and the governing board
8. Notify the head usher promptly if you cannot serve
9. Try to improve yourself
10. Attend ushers' meetings

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