

Saint Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church
Upper Uwchlan Township, PA

PRACTICAL NOTES FOR PARISH USHERS: MAY, 2012

Thank you for offering your stewardship service as an usher at Saint Elizabeth Church. The following notes are provided to assist you in fulfilling this liturgical service in a faithful and competent manner. In order to facilitate our parish liturgical celebrations, please follow these procedures when you are scheduled to serve as an usher at Mass.

- 1) In order to reflect the public role of the ushers at Mass, you are asked to dress appropriately whenever you are assigned to this service. Men are asked to wear a collared dress shirt and tie (with sports jacket/blazer or sweater optional) and dress shoes, while women are asked to wear a dress, skirt & blouse, dress slacks & top, or a formal dress suit, and dress shoes. Sports recreational clothes (polo or golf shirts, jeans or shorts, sneakers or flip flops, etc.) are not appropriate attire. Please remember to put on an identification badge whenever you are serving as an usher, so that you are easily identifiable to both parishioners and guests.
- 2) The schedules for ushers and liturgical greeters are posted on the bulletin board mounted atop the ushers' table just inside the right side church door. Please arrive in the church narthex **at least fifteen minutes** before the beginning of Mass, sign in on the posted schedule, and confer with the team captain to clarify your assignment area for that day. When you first arrive, it may be helpful to take a few moments of prayerful reflection upon your liturgical service, as a personal preparation for the liturgy.
- 3) **Please do not congregate with fellow ushers in the doorways**, inadvertently blocking the entrance of congregants into the nave of the church. Your socializing should not become a distraction to others. By your own example, you set a tone for the liturgy and encourage others to remain reverent and attentive throughout the liturgy. Remember that some of our parishioners deliberately come early to pray and reflect before Mass.
- 4) Obviously, a spirit of willing cooperation should always mark the relations of the ushers and the liturgical greeters. While the liturgical greeters have primary responsibility to welcome the congregation, ushers also have an important role to play in helping people feel welcome and comfortable at church. Be attentive to everyone who enters: adults, teens and young children. Welcome people to Saint Elizabeth with friendliness, courtesy and warmth.
- 5) Keep a watchful eye for those who may have special needs (physical limitations such as crutches, wheelchair, etc.). If people appear unfamiliar with the layout of the facilities, ask if they need directions or any other particular assistance. Gently offer your help in seating the elderly and persons with disabilities, yet be sure to give them the freedom to decline help if they prefer. Such conversations should be quiet and brief. If someone needs to have Holy Communion brought to him/her, notify the celebrant, sacristan or one of the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion about the individual's location, prior to Mass if possible.

- 6) Be familiar with the location of the first aid supplies, the restroom facilities, water fountains and the janitorial supply closet. In an emergency situation, several ushers together may be needed to assist an ill or injured person, and, when called for, to contact an ambulance service, etc. A telephone is available in the Holy Family Room and in the robing sacristy, for emergency calls, if needed. Please dial "8" to get an outside line. Your attention, discretion and steadiness of manner are important in these situations. There are often medical professionals in the congregation who readily assist in an emergency; in some cases it may be necessary for one usher to approach the celebrant of the Mass to ask publicly for medical assistance. Most situations can be handled more quietly, without causing greater concern among others in the congregation.
- 7) One primary responsibility for the ushers is to assist with seating the congregation in a timely manner without drawing attention to themselves. Use good discretion so as to reduce any distraction to others while you are ushering people to the available seats. Be attentive to those with special seating needs. Remember: all are welcome; there is no need to show signs of irritation toward those who may arrive late.
- 8) Ordinarily, people are seated prior to Mass and up to the beginning of the first reading. When seating people, it is helpful to invite them in a kind manner to move to the front of the church closer to the altar. This will leave pews in the rear of the church for those who come later. Those ushers who may be standing up in the aisles to assist with seating before Mass should return to the rear once the congregation is seated for the Liturgy of the Word.

During the scripture readings and responsorial psalm, two ushers should position themselves in the narthex and politely invite latecomers to wait in the narthex until the end of the reading or psalm before they move into the nave and up the aisles to find a seat. The readers and cantors have been directed to pause briefly before each reading to allow latecomers to find a seat.

Latecomers using the doorway nearest the chapel are welcome to enter the nave so that they can hear the proclamation of the reading; they should remain standing in the rear until the reading or psalm is completed before moving into the aisles to find a seat.
- 9) It is important that the ushers remain in position in the rear and side aisles around the church throughout the entire Mass in order to direct latecomers to available seating, to assist with the collection and to handle emergency needs. This is your stewardship service to the parish!
- 10) Please note that the two doors at the sanctuary end of the ambulatories are emergency exits only and should remain closed at all times: before, during and after Mass. The side door at the opposite end of the left side ambulatory is ordinarily "exit-only" and should not be left open before or during Mass. We encourage everyone to enter through the narthex and pass the baptistry on the way into the nave, stopping for a blessing with holy water on the way in. Some may enter by the door nearest the daily Mass chapel and move directly up the ambulatory corridor on that side of the church. At least one usher should be stationed at the inside doorway at the end of the ambulatory.

- 11) Ordinarily a minimum of seven to eight ushers are needed to take up the collection at each Mass. The collection baskets are stored on the ushers' table in the rear of the nave; please do not pre-stage the baskets on the floor or under pews around the church. If people are standing in either ambulatory or in the narthex, provision needs to be made for an usher to pass a collection basket among them as well. After the Profession of Faith is completed, each usher should pick up two collection baskets and move to the rear of their assigned sections. During the collection itself, care should be taken to watch for any overlooked rows of pews, especially at Masses with a smaller congregation. An usher should also pass the basket in the Good Shepherd Room.

When the General Intercessions are complete and the congregation is seated, the ushers will move to the front of their assigned aisles and distribute the collection baskets to both sections of pews. Please give the people time to be seated and get ready for the collection before starting to pass the basket. Place your hands behind your back, and move slowly backward as the baskets are passed through the congregation, lending assistance to this process only when necessary. Then carry the baskets back to the ushers' table and deposit the contributions into the large wicker basket for presentation along with the bread and wine. The empty collection baskets should be left on the ushers' table in the rear of the nave.

- 12) Before Mass, the team captain or another designated usher will check with the priest-celebrant to determine whether or not anyone has been enlisted to present the gifts (as is done for Baptism, First Holy Communion and other special events at Mass). If not already designated, and prior to the beginning of the Mass, the team captain will invite a family or group to present the gifts. The gift table is ordinarily located in the center aisle between the front & rear sections of pews.

Normally groups of three to five people will carry the gifts to the altar (two children can carry the collection basket together). The captain should pay attention to small children and any other special needs and select the gift to be carried by each individual, rather than have the individuals pick up the gifts on their own. When selecting people for the presentation of gifts, the captain will ask them to come to the gift table shortly after the General Intercessions are completed.

The captain will thank the presenters and then give them **simple instructions**. "Walk slowly and together up the center aisle. After all gifts are presented to the celebrant, bow toward the altar, and return directly to your seats."

- 13) A floor diagram is posted on the bulletin board mounted on the wall atop the ushers' table. Typically four ushers are needed to assist parishioners during the Communion procession, guiding them to the appropriate stations for Holy Communion. These ushers will take up positions at the front of sections A-B, F-G, J-K and E-Choir Area. Ushers may also be called upon to assist those with special needs.
- 14) After the closing prayer and final blessing, the ushers move to the exit doors; the doors should be kept closed until the closing hymn has begun. The ushers then assist the liturgical greeters as needed with the distribution of parish bulletins and other handouts and to wish

people a good day/good week as they leave. When there is an insufficient number of greeters, the usher captain will assign specific ushers to distribute bulletins at each set of doors.

- 15) After each Mass, the ushers (and greeters when available) are expected to return to their assigned sections of pews and spend a few moments to clean up the pews, lift up the kneelers and return all hymnals to the book racks (with the spine of the book in the upright position); the more neatly the books are stored, the longer they will remain in good condition. Look for any trash or spilled fluids that may need to be cleaned up and return any bulletins to the storage box under the ushers' table.
- 16) The team captain or another designated usher is responsible to ensure that the wicker collection basket is emptied into a cloth bag and the collection is safely stored in the sacristy vault room. The empty wicker basket is then returned to the ushers' table for use at the next Mass.

Note: Throughout the year there are several special services and ceremonies for which ushers are needed; these include Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, Forty Hours devotions, Confirmation, the Parish Mission and (as available) on holy days of obligation. Please volunteer your services as an usher for as many of these special ceremonies as your schedule allows. Thank you once again for your stewardship of service to Saint Elizabeth Church!