

Usher guidelines

Saint Mark, Shoreline

Dear friends,

Thank you for volunteering to assist as an usher. Whether it be at Mass or other liturgical gatherings, you are taking on an important work in the life of our community. With a smile, a held door, and a few friendly words, you will help assure everyone who comes to Saint Mark parish that this is a place where they are welcome.

As ministers of the Mass and other liturgies, you stand as models for the Christian community. For this reason, the Church teachings that “(t)he lay Christian faithful called to give assistance at liturgical celebrations should be well instructed and must be those whose Christian life, morals and fidelity to the Church’s Magisterium recommend them.”¹

Though the *how* of being an usher may take time to learn, always remember the why: you are assisting the People of God in gathering for prayer, worship, and fraternity. If you set this as your first and highest, everything else will fall into place. This demands holiness – and that means asking God’s help to be holy! You must have a habit of prayer, of regular confession, and worthy reception communion as often as possible.

This manual is designed to give you directions for our parish Masses and to be a guide to help you assist in ushering. Much of what is written here will be already-familiar parts of your regular life – other aspects will be learned on-the-job. Your reverence for Christ and His people will ensure that in all you do, your ministry will be a gift.

I look forward to ministry with you. Let us pray for each other, that we may glorify God in all that we do.

your brother in Christ,

Father Maurer

¹ Redemptionis Sacramentum, 46

Requirements for ministry as an usher

The following requirements apply to all who wish to be ushers:

1. Be an active member of the parish community and a Catholic in good standing
2. Complete a background check
3. Enthusiasm for service to all who come to our parish
4. Awareness of one's ministerial presence to visitors & parishioners alike
5. Knowledge of the relevant policies of the pastor, parish, and archdiocese
6. Readiness to gently share and – when called for – firmly enforce those policies
7. Attentiveness before, during, and after Mass to the needs of those present
8. Knowledge of basic emergency equipment and protocols

Understanding ushering as a ministry

It could be easy to approach ushering as task-based – opening doors, gathering & securing collections, helping people in and out of the church. While these are certainly important aspects of ushering, the heart of an usher is in fraternal care: helping each person to know that they are welcomed and cared for. Much of what an usher does revolves around anticipating and serving the needs of the people.

An ugly stereotype of ushers – at least in the United States – is of the long-toothed parishioner who ‘runs the parish’. They’ve been around forever, know everyone, are used to things being exactly so and their expectations are law. This kind of usher has come to serve their own standing, rather than standing ready to help those around them. **Be wary of falling into this trap!**

Healthy ushering is flexible – anticipating that the person in a walker will need a door held open, gently (but firmly!) reminding a child to walk rather than run, answering familiar questions with the same enthusiasm as the first time it was asked, and so on. There are clear tasks that must be done, but the greatest work is a cheerful readiness to help as needed in a given moment.

First impressions: dressing appropriately

One's ‘Sunday best’ is the standard for ministry. Ushers should be covered from shoulders to knees, with attire and footwear that is neat, presentable, and formal.

Men are expected to wear:

- A buttoned dress shirt
- Long pants
- Dress shoes

Women are expected to wear:

- A buttoned dress shirt or blouse
- Long skirt or pants
- Dress shoes (no heels)

Ladies might understandably ask why heels are not permitted. There are two rationales: the first is that heels are quite loud, especially on solid surfaces like marble tile. Ushers often move throughout the church at key moments in the Mass (as during the offertory) – the sound of heels on hard surfaces will understandably distract congregants from prayer. The other reason is practicality, as an usher may need to move quickly to assist someone in distress, possibly to help lift or move belongings – and sometimes people – in the process. In such scenarios, heels present a serious risk for tripping, possibly injuring oneself or the person being assisted.

Keeping track of the tasks of an usher

In general ushers are responsible for several specific areas:

- Storing the bulletins before Mass
- Being present and ready to assist in the narthex at least 30 minutes before Mass
- Carrying out the collection during the offertory during Mass
 - o During times when this is not possible, ushers will put out the collection basket in the narthex and ensure that it is attended at all times
 - o Following the tamper evident bag procedure for all collections
- Putting out the bulletins after Mass
- If needed, helping the sacristans to secure the building before departing
- At any given time, standing ready to respond to emergencies

Being ready to respond to the extra-ordinary moments

In addition to their regular tasks and general presence of welcome, ushers also assist in guiding those who stray back to the proper practices and policies of the pastor, the parish, and the archdiocese. Often this will take the form of a gentle reminder of some basic rule that has slipped someone's mind – an easy smile and a soft word will address the problem without conflict. Other times it will take the form of a firm direction or call to change one's behavior. On rare occasion, it may mean calling for emergency services or even police presence.

For all ministers, it is important to remember the principle of subsidiarity: we begin at the lowest level of authority (the individual) as possible, only working our way upwards when escalation is necessary. Our demeanor and tone should reflect this, even when that of others is challenging. **While physical conflicts are rare, ushers should always be aware of the space between them and others, ready to step back and ask for assistance – always avoiding escalation.**

Ushers should know the locations of exits, telephones, and emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers and the AED (Automated External Defibrillator). **In an emergency, ushers' priorities are 1) to call for help, 2) assist in the safe exit of those present, and 3) offer aid where appropriate.**

Tamper evident bag procedure²

In the Archdiocese of Seattle, the policy for collections is laid out in the tamper evident bag procedure. Ushers should familiarize themselves with this procedure, which serves to both safeguard the stewardship of the community and ensure that their care of money is demonstrably beyond reproach:

Prior to Mass (usually completed by a staff member)

- Numbered tamper-evident bags are assigned for each Mass, with bag number, date & assigned Mass recorded on the bag log – preparer signs the log entry

During or after Mass

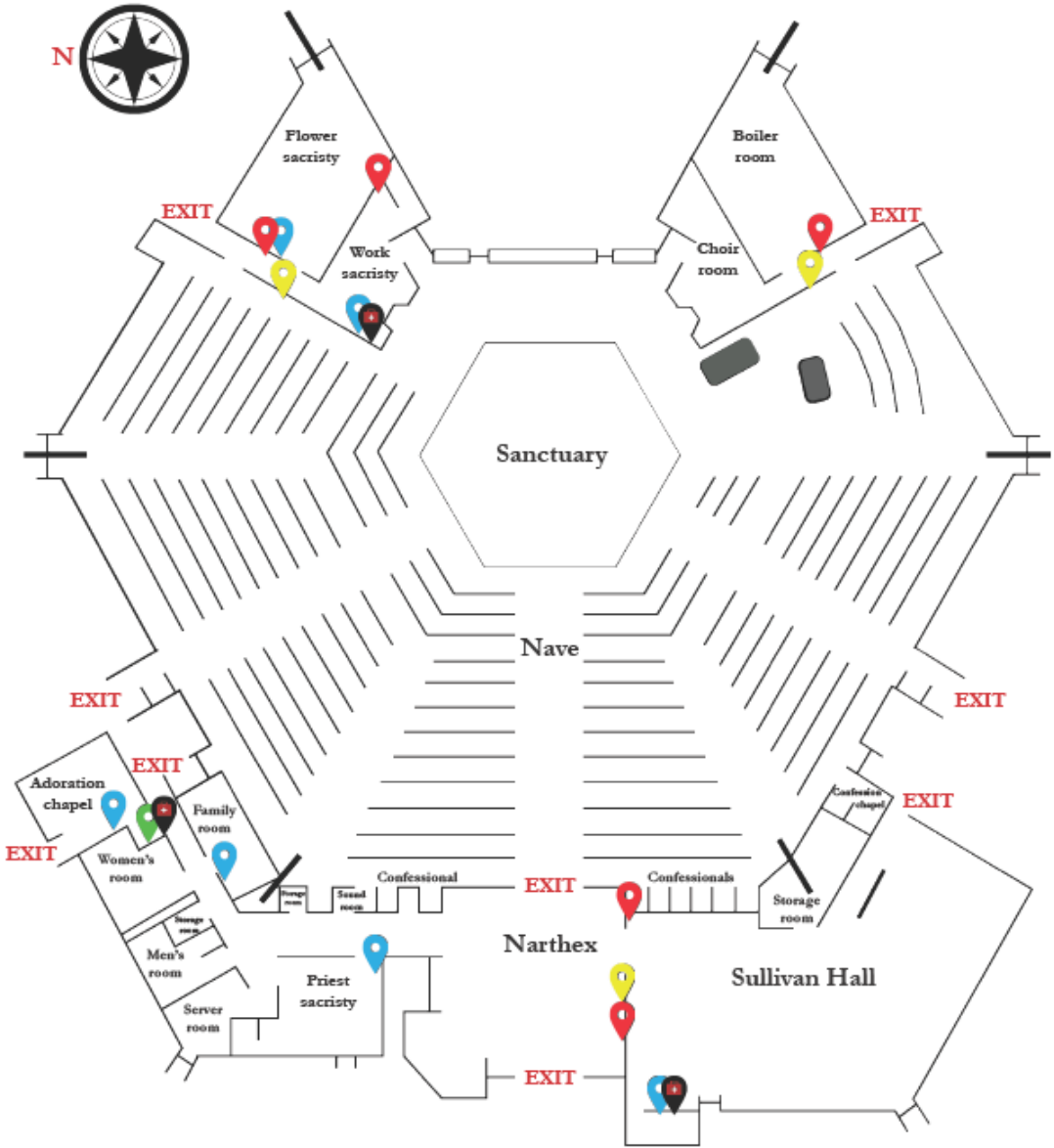
- Collection is transferred to assigned bag either **a) before collection is brought up during Mass or b) after Mass has ended**
 - o Those transferring the collection to bag should sign & date the bag with permanent marker after sealing
 - o **Only once the bag has been sealed may it be in the presence of just one person**
- Sealed bags are immediately placed in a locked fireproof safe or cabinet.
 - o Bags must never be left unattended between sealing them and securing them in locked location

At counting time

- Person(s) picking up the bags from secure location 1) should compare bag numbers with the bag log, 2) verify that the numbers match, and 3) sign off on the bag log
 - o **At least two people must be present when the bag is opened and throughout the counting process**
- The detachable bag tags or seals must be filed with deposit records or the bag numbers must be written on the tally sheets if the bag tags or seals are not kept

² “Sample Tamper Evident Bag Procedure”, *Many Gifts, One Spirit: Section A - Parish Accounting Policies*, Appendix A-1, <https://archseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/A-Policies.pdf>

Saint Mark church



-  Telephones
-  Fire alarm pull stations
-  Fire extinguishers

-  AED
(Automated External Defibrillator)
-  First aid kits