

# Macedonia Missionary Baptist Union

## Ministry of Church Ushers

The ministry of church ushers plays a vital role in the hospitality and welcome ministry of the local church.

Together with church greeters, parking lot volunteers, welcome center volunteers, and hospitality hosts, church ushers help the church member, visitor (guest) experience a wonderful worship service.

Church ushers are a significant part of church hospitality system and fulfill specific duties to accomplish that role.

### 1. What is the role of church ushers?

A role is a part that one plays in the system. For example, an actor or actress has a role in the play or film. That role contributes to the entire story line of that play or that film.

The role of pastor is, father, missionary, writer, trainer, business owner. These are in no particular order, but show that they play many different roles in their life. With this understanding of the word *role*, what is the role of a church usher?

*The role of a church usher is to help your first time guests, repeat visitors, and members experience the sacredness and joy of a worship service.*

The church usher role is one of many different roles in the system of church hospitality. They help create a great hospitality experience that your first time church visitor or long term member will have on a given day.

Church greeters play a role. Children's ministry leaders play a role. The worship band, preaching pastor, and other volunteers and staff all play different roles in helping your members and first time guests experience a church worship service.

Within this role, the various areas of responsibility will differ, depending on the level of formality and different duties that your ushers will have.

### Areas of responsibility for the role of church ushers

Generally, the ministry of church ushers focuses on the following areas of responsibilities (if they occur in your church):

- Assist in the seating members and visitors
- Provide care for the needs of the pastor during the service.
- Attend to the needs of the visiting speaker or guests of honor.
- Maintain the decorum of the service, according to the church's tradition.
- Watch for the safety of the congregation and acting as the line of first response to medical emergencies.
- Collect and perhaps counting the offering.
- Attend to **altar ministry** or response ministry as people respond to the sermon's invitation.

The specific duties of the ministry of church ushers will vary.

For some churches, the role of church usher will also include the role of security. They can be trained to be watchful and vigilant in when there is something of concern or emergencies.

You may choose to develop a more formal security team apart from the role of church ushers.

## **2. What is the difference between a church usher and a church greeter?**

Your church may or may not distinguish between the roles of church ushers and church greeters, but most churches will make a distinction in role and function.

I like to think of the ministry of church ushers as responsible for inside the sanctuary or auditorium, starting from the interior entry doors.

Church greeters focus their attention in the lobby areas or exterior entry doors.

Other than serving location, the difference between a church usher and church greeter is one of scope of roles.

Church greeters focus on guests and members in the lobby and can engage in meaningful small talk with guests and members.

Church greeters welcome, inform, and serve guests in the parking lot, sidewalks and at the entrance to our building.

The role of church ushers is more mechanical:

- such as maintaining order and decorum during the service,
- attending to pastor or visiting speakers,
- plus the traditional roles of helping with seating and collecting the offering.

While church ushers should practice all the same hospitality practices of church greeters, the roles and duties are different in how they contribute to the overall experience at the worship service. Is there difference between a church usher and a church greeter?

## **3. Are church ushers in the bible?**

We do not see a specific example of the ministry of church ushers in the Scriptures. After all, the church did not get established until the Day of Pentecost, and the descriptions of the assemblies that we find in Acts don't mention the word usher in particular.

However, In the Scriptures, the term 'door keeper' is used for one who would

- open the door to permit people to enter, or
- keep the door closed to keep people out.

We find in the Psalms where one writer talks about being a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord.

Psalms 84:10 says

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. (NIV)

Levites were doorkeepers to the ark (1 Chronicles 15:23-24 – NIV).

Berekiah and Elkanah were to be doorkeepers for the ark. Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah and Eliezer the priests were to blow trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-Edom and Jehiah were also to be doorkeepers for the ark.

We see more stories of doorkeepers in 2 Kings 7:10-11, where they communicated the news.

So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, “We went into the Aramean camp and no one was there—not a sound of anyone—only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were.”

The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace. In 2 Kings 11:4-9, we see door keepers whose duties were to guard the city gates, temple, and large buildings. They were in charge of admitting or rejecting visitors. In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of units of a hundred, the Carites and the guards and had them brought to him at the temple of the Lord. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath at the temple of the Lord. Then he showed them the king’s son.

He commanded them, saying, “This is what you are to do: You who are in the three companies that are going on duty on the Sabbath—a third of you guarding the royal palace, a third at the Sur Gate, and a third at the gate behind the guard, who take turns guarding the temple—and you who are in the other two companies that normally go off Sabbath duty are all to guard the temple for the king.

Station yourselves around the king, each of you with weapon in hand. Anyone who approaches your ranks is to be put to death. Stay close to the king wherever he goes.”

The commanders of units of a hundred did just as Jehoiada the priest ordered.

Each one took his men—those who were going on duty on the Sabbath and those who were going off duty—and came to Jehoiada the priest.

Though we don’t see the term “church usher” used in scripture, nor the practice of ushering as it is currently done in modern times, the idea of doorkeeper is a good biblical parallel to the work of the church usher: to control entry and exit, and to control the decorum of the sanctuary.

Derek Rishmawy writes:

*In many churches, ushers still capture the Levitical priests’ sense of solemn glory. As we enter our churches, many of us are greeted by their gracious, restrained smiles, inviting us in to enjoy the hospitality of the Lord’s house.*

*Even when people rush in late, filled with haste, anxiety, and (possibly) anger over the Sunday morning rush, a good usher will assure, with an air of self-effacing competence, that they will not be without a seat for long.*

*Much as our welcoming Lord makes space within his family for the broken, the hasty, and the sinful, a good usher will make space in the pews for all. (Source)*

Are church #ushers in the Bible? Click to Tweet

#### **4. The Duties of the Modern Church Usher**

If the role of a church usher *to help your first time guests, repeat visitors, and members experience the sacredness and joy of a worship service*, the specific duties of church ushers will vary church by church.

What duties you will give to your church ushers will depend on your practices. Some churches may have their church ushers do all of these things, or some of these activities.

Here is a quick but non-exhaustive list of church usher duties:

- collecting tithes and offerings
- keeping order at the entrance
- cleaning the seating area and entrance areas
- preparing the auditorium or sanctuary for the worship
- distributing bulletins or programs
- helping people to seat
- caring for the needs of the pastor and/or visiting speakers
- attendance counting
- preparing the table and elements for Mass, Communion, or the Lord's supper
- preparing the baptismal font for baptisms

The specific action steps for each of these duties will be different depending on the customs, practices, and physical layout of your sanctuary or worship space. You should review your action steps with your church ushers as part of your church usher training.

#### **Example of church usher duties at our current church**

For example, in the church where our family visits right now, there is the main sanctuary and two sections of overflow seating.

Ushers guide us to the currently open seating area with a smile and open posture as they point to where seating is open.

Each section has a section host to help our family quickly find open seats. During the worship service, I see this section host doing an attendance head count for that section.

When it is time for the offering, these church ushers pass the buckets down the rows of chairs. It is an informal and unsynchronized process. In some churches, the offering collection is much more formal, leaning towards synchronized precision similar to military formalities.

When the service is over, I see the section hosts, plus additional church usher volunteers reset the space for the next service.

They straighten the chairs, pickup any trash, and then put connection cards and pens and any other publicity back on each and every seat.

### **Example duties of church ushers I have experienced**

- Placing of tissue boxes at every seating row.
- Catching people chewing gum and asking them politely to get rid of it.
- Politely asking for the removal of hats on the men and boys.
- Placing blankets on women who “rest in the Spirit.”
- Keeping those dancing “under the power of the Spirit” safe from stumbling into chairs or other worshippers.
- Opening and closing of the sanctuary doors during times of permitted seating.

Ralph Wheeler writes:

Each Sunday, ushers are usually some of the first servants to arrive at the church house. They make sure things are in order and get into their positions to greet members and visitors. During the worship service, ushers safeguard the entrances, aisles, exits and financial offerings of the church. (Source)

### **5. How should church ushers dress for the role?**

How church ushers should dress is determined by the practice of your church.

The practice varies according to your church’s level of formality and tone of the service.

In the first church I served, there was no required uniform. Ushers were dressed in ordinary street clothes like the rest of the congregation. It was our practice to not have formal uniforms for ushers or greeters.

Other churches I have visited have chosen to be more formal: men and women would dress to a high level of professionalism. For example, men would be in coats and ties.

Other churches have simple rules towards uniformity so that guests can easily recognize them: Beige pants with a red shirt, as one example. In some churches ushers wear the same shirt which makes them a little more obvious in the crowd.

In some traditions, the ushers are much more formal, following these practices of dress and formality of which incites a level of beauty in it versus the casually dressed.

### **6. How to prepare yourself to serve as a church usher**

In some churches, the duty of a church usher has been reduced to taking on offering – it’s a mechanical task. But in churches where church ushering has risen to a level of formality, there is a role of personal preparation.

#### **a. Start your work as a church usher by preparing yourself for your sacred role, by prayer.**

You can pray similar things that a church greeter could pray

- Prayer for a Positive Attitude as a church usher
- A church usher prayer for personal holiness

- A general prayer for starting as a church usher

Prepare to serve in your role as a church usher with prayer.

**b. As you dress for your role, keep your personal hygiene in mind.**

You might chuckle at the idea, but it is a real problem for people. Read: “Your Church Greeter Stinks”

We all have a off day where we forgot some basic principle of hygiene. We might forget to use deodorant. I’m not talking about that accidental oversight. But we are addressing all sorts of smells that habitually follow a person:

- Too much cologne.
- Too much perfume.
- Smoke.
- Hand creams and lotions.
- Bad Breath.

All strong smells are a hindrance to your guests and members when serving as a church usher. Many people cannot tolerate strong odors due to allergic reactions. Colognes and perfumes will make my eyes itch.

Here is what I share when I speak of cologne, perfumes and hand creams:

- If I can smell you from 10 feet – that’s too much.
- If your smell stays with me after a hug – that’s too much.
- If I still smell you after you have left the room, that’s too much.

When one who wears too much cologne or perfume, it lingers on after a handshake. If you gave a hug of greeting, is the smell transferred to others clothing. Do you have to change seats if someone is within 5 feet of you because your eyes begin to water or your throat begins to itch?

Even though, someone may be a visitor and not a volunteer, imagine your visitor being repelled by an overly smelly greeter. One cannot successfully fill the role of church usher when visitors and members are bothered by smells that are unnecessary. Therefore you must, surrender personal habits for the sake of not accidentally driving visitors away.

**c. Welcome guests and members as you help them be seated.**

A church usher is part of the hospitality system at your church. A church usher is one of the faces of the experience. As such, a church usher can adapt these same church hospitality tips that I’ve written for church greeters. Remember, the duties of a church usher are more than a handshake and seating help.

1. Smile.
2. Fresh breath.
3. Make eye contact
4. Take initiative and greet.
5. Don’t ask “Are you new?”
6. Don’t ask “Is this your first time?”

7. Offer a bulletin if your church uses them.
8. Personal warmth — look like you enjoy welcoming people.
9. Say “I don’t think I’ve met you yet, I’m {insert your name here}”
10. If they are new, offer to show them where the restrooms are and offer information about childcare if necessary.

Check out the video version of these ten tips:

### **e. Be a team player – helpful servant**

The role of a church usher is to help your first time guests, repeat visitors, and members experience the sacredness and joy of a worship service. A church usher is part of the larger team that serves in church hospitality experience.

As a team player, you can keep these 6 hospitality goals in mind. The ushers and greeter ministry, all work together in the system of creating a wonderful welcome experience for your church visitors, members, and guests.

## **7. Provide training for church ushers**

Church ushering ministries that have thought through their procedures and trained their church users in “how we do things” leave a tremendously positive first impression on their guests.

Yes, the appearance of competent organization helps your visitors feel less anxious about how to “go with the flow” because the friendly church usher is there to guide.

Your church should provide regular training for your church usher teams.

Training gives your church the opportunity for preparing church ushers to serve at the highest level: with confidence and competence. (Learn 13 more ways to cast that welcome vision)

Host a regular series of vision casting meetings with your hospitality team, always including church ushers at least 3 times a year.

In such meetings, you’ll have

- an easy on-ramp for new volunteers,
- a place to provide practical tips for all volunteers,
- a place to refresh the vision for an awesome welcome, and
- a place to layout your expectations of the work that you expect your volunteers to give.

Since church ushers are generally responsible for collecting the offering, maintaining decorum, and managing crowds, the specific procedures they will follow will be somewhat unique to the physical layout of your auditorium or church sanctuary.

The mechanics of how your church does things “decently and in order” will be different depending on the level of formality and tradition.

Here is an example of a level of formality that requires training so that every church usher knows what is expected of them:

You may want to consider some of these ideas as you prepare for training of church ushers:

- What are the physical action steps required to collect the offering?
- Will the church ushers march in unison to established sections to pass the bucket?
- How will the ushers deliver the communion elements to the people in pews?
- How will the ushers guide people from pew to the table to receive communion?
- What will you say to church latecomers who want to be seated?

A simple action plans like this requires attention and training.

Not all new volunteers will know your church's protocols on how the offering is collected or the different ways of communion serving. Not all of your church usher volunteers will know how to detect first time church visitors.

Besides the mechanics of task completion that are unique to the church, here are some possible themes for a church usher training. Pick one or more:

- What it means to part of the usher team
- Greeting and seating people
- Serving Communion
- Collecting the Offering
- Altar Call or Sermon response procedures
- Catching people who fall or start dancing "in the Spirit."
- Hospitality Receptions after the service
- Serving guest speakers.
- Procedures in medical emergencies
- Three Body language tips to detect first time visitors
- What not to do, how to make a bad impression, and what not to say.
- Go over ideas of what to say and ways to show respect.
- Hand signals for church ushers (see this pinned New York Times infographic from the National United Church Ushers Association of America)



# Responsibilities and Duties of a Church Usher

*by Erika Winston*

## Related Articles

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- 1 How to Be a Good Church Usher
- 2 What Are the Duties of a Head Usher in a Church?
- 3 What Are the Duties of Ushers and Greeters in Church?
- 4 Duties of Baptist Deacons

As an usher, you are often the first person to see visitors and members as they arrive at the church. You may perform a variety of duties, depending on the individual rules and guidelines within your church. While some church ushers are responsible for church offerings, others are limited to greeting church members as they arrive. Whatever the level of responsibility, ushers serve as a representative of the church.

## Greeting Worshipers

Church ushers direct traffic in the church. When visitors arrive, they tell them when they can enter the sanctuary to avoid interrupting a service. Their most important job may be to keep track of available seats and guide attendees to them. This is an essential function when the church is full.

## Promoting Fellowship

Ushers encourage fellowship among churchgoers, providing information about the church to visitors and extending an invitation to join. They may recommend ministries for members to join and introduce new members to established ones, promoting unity and fellowship within the congregation. Ushers also pass along prayer requests from congregation members to church leaders.

## Collecting the Offering

In some congregations, ushers collect the money offerings. They may pass the collection plates throughout the congregation, or stand at the front of the church with the collection container until the offering is complete. After the service, they may count the money collected or serve as witnesses while someone else counts. As custodians of church money, honesty and integrity are important characteristics.

## Maintaining Peace

Even churches need peacemakers sometimes. Ushers ensure that all visitors have an opportunity to hear and enjoy the sermon without distractions. They may ask a disruptive visitor to step outside of the sanctuary or direct a mother with a crying child to a special area for babies. Ushers observe the congregation for any potential problems. If the church is overheated, they turn on the air conditioner and pass out fans. They also stay alert for medical emergencies and act accordingly when they occur.

## Preparing the Church

Ushers often prepare the church for services and special events, ensuring that ample bibles and hymnals are available for the congregation's use. For special events, ushers may rope off reserved seats or parking spaces. After services, ushers walk the pews to pick up trash. They also return bibles and hymnals to their proper locations.

# Usher Signals

Ushers perform a central ministry in churches of all denominations. They welcome, seat and assist congregants, helping to create an environment conducive to worship. Often following in the footsteps of their parents, ushers are guided by Psalm 84:10:

*I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God,  
than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*

Many ushers communicate during services using a sequence of hand signals called the "National Silent Uniform System." Devised by George T. Grier in the 1940s, these signals have gradually evolved. And they are still taught to hundreds of volunteers each year by the National United Church Ushers Association of America, which, this week, holds its 93rd convention. Below are the (simplified) central elements of some of the N.U.C.U.A.A. hand signals.

## SERVICE POSITION

*This "mark of distinction" is adopted by ushers upon entering the sanctuary. It is the default ushering position from which other signals start.*



## GREETING SIGNAL

*Visitors are welcomed with a warm smile and an open hand.*



## ATTENTION SIGNAL

*This alerts other ushers that a signal is about to be communicated.*



## PRAYER POSITION



## USHERS TO TAKE THEIR STATIONS



## AISLE USHER SIGNS

*Aisle ushers sign requests to the usher in charge:*



*Relief*



*Programs*



*Envelopes*



*Fans*

## DOORKEEPER SIGNS

*Bending an arm through the partially closed door, the doorkeeper signals why those outside must wait before entering the sanctuary:*



*Prayer*



*Scripture*



*Other*

## AVAILABLE SEATS

*The usher in charge asks all the aisle ushers to signal how many free seats they have:*



*The aisle ushers respond with the number:*



*1*



*2*



*3*



*>3*



*0*

## DISTRESS SIGNAL

*Used to signal a problem.*



*(as if brushing one's hair)*



## COMMENCE THE OFFERING

*The usher in charge signals the offering with a nod and a slight spreading of the hands.*



With thanks to Filmore F. Gregory, Immediate Past National President, N.U.C.U.A.A., and Lillie A. Grant, New York State Chairman, George T. Grier School of Ushering.

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