

Spotlight on Crestwood

Ushers Do More than Hand Out Bulletins

Each Sunday we are greeted in the sanctuary by a smiling person who hands us a bulletin and says "good morning." Recently someone suggested the ushers be spotlighted, but I wondered if I could find enough to make an article. Was I ever wrong! I had no idea what all they did. I couldn't keep up as I tried to shadow the three women on duty one Sunday.

I got the idea that theirs was a complicated job when I was shown a three-page list of things to do for each service. And it's not just what to do, but how specifically to do them. Here are a few - in my own words, obviously.



- Communion trays are to be filled – there are instructions about just where to place them.
- Place two hymnals on the ministers' chairs.
- Make sure glasses of water are placed for each of the pastors.
- Check the Christ Candle to make sure there is enough oil. (Oil is kept behind the ministers' chairs.) All these years, I had not known that it was called the Christ Candle, nor had I wondered how it burned.
- Make sure the little step by the Christ Candle is moved out far enough for the young acolytes to reach up, but be back far enough to allow for the length of the brass lighter.
- Check the amount of candle in the candlesticks on the Communion table. (Did you know there are real candles hidden under the thick white candle-stick looking items at the front?)
- Arrange the hymnals and Bibles in the pews in order of "Hymnal, Bible, Hymnal" with lettering on front showing.
- Find the four offering plates and place them in the narthex.
- Check in the four serving deacons as they arrive. If any are missing, run around and find another to take their place.
- Check in the acolyte and explain the procedures. Find their robe in the cabinet in the choir room. If the acolyte is not there, quickly find another child. The acolyte helping the day I watched asked what happens if the flame goes out as they are walking. Turns out Kory has a lighter with him to save the day in that event.
- Light the candlesticks on the Communion Table.
- I should add, brushing crumbs off the communion table from the first service was also accomplished.

There are more – many more – details to take care of, but I will stop listing here. Each detail made me think of more questions. Have you ever thought about the bread used during communion? Kory picks up the loaves at the grocery store whenever he notices them on sale. They are kept in the freezer in the kitchen behind the chancel. As he arrives before most everyone else, he usually thaws the bread to be used in both services and puts it in place.

With all these details to care for, funny things (funny to some people) do happen. One Sunday when Kory was gone, the bread was forgotten. There was a great deal of anguish about how to handle the situation as the service had already started. The ushers ran to get bread from the kitchen but couldn't figure out how to get it to the front without disrupting the service. Finally, it was sent in with the second row of deacons who were doing the offering, and the loaf was surreptitiously placed on the table with few people noticing.

Another time the ushers erupted in giggles when they realized the bread was still frozen. I'm not sure how the ministers dealt with that. Incidentally, the bread is thawed by placing it in the microwave for 20 seconds. (There are detailed instructions for everything!)

I sat on the back row during the service, my head frequently swiveling as doors opened or closed and the ushers made other things happen. The three have complicated and multi-faceted things to do during the first hymn, invitation to share, communion, and closing hymn. It is impossible to write it all down in a short article. One of the ushers even bounces up at the end of the sermon and heads to the children's wing to tell the Bridge group it is time to join the church for communion. There is a swirl of activity I never see from my quiet seat nearer the front. The ushers are responsible for counting the number of people in the service. With all the coming and going, that can be difficult.

The ushering group sends out appreciative kudos to Scott Wallace who recently fixed the speaker that lets those in the chancel hear what is happening in the sanctuary. It had been broken for quite a while which made their jobs even more difficult. Now they can hear—not just see—the things that give them cues what to do next.

And their job doesn't stop when the service is over. The ushers get busy picking trash and bulletins from the pews, straightening hymnals, tearing out attendance sheets from the red pads and giving them to Kory, wiping up any spilled juice.

Candles have to be blown out, the light in the cross turned off, doors closed in the back if left open. Items used in the service have to be replaced in their designated location until next week when it starts all over.

Who are these people who accomplish the magic that makes our services meaningful? Sice Shanklin is the key person in charge at the more complex 10:45 service. But now she is recovering on medical leave so her role is being skillfully filled by Annetta Carter. The week I spied on them, Bettye Burns and Janet Clark were on duty with Annetta. I understand they are always in need of volunteer ushers if this hasn't discouraged or intimidated you too much. They use something called Signup Genius to volunteer. I don't know how to do that, but if you can figure out how to get on, you surely are qualified to be an usher.

And then there is the 8:30 service. John Royse has directed the ushers there for over twenty years! He is faithfully assisted by Tony Shartle and Doug Damm, who show up every week. Occasionally they are helped by young teen Carter Wallace, who is quite useful, I'm told. Their duties aren't quite as detailed as the 10:45 service but just as important. They get communion plates filled and ready, take care of the water and hymnals for ministers, check all the aisles for readiness, clean up after the first service to make sure things are ready for the second one. There is more, of course, but you get the idea.

The lesson here is that we shouldn't take the little things for granted. Valuable time pieces have intricate but hidden working parts. So do the ushers have hidden works at each of our services. They keep things moving like clockwork for us. As Kory said, "The worship services wouldn't happen if not for the hard work of our ushers! I'm so thankful for them."

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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