

St. George's Episcopal Church

Usher Manual

Revised November 2012

## Introduction and Key Tasks

The role of the usher at St. George's is a simple one. We are there to enable the congregation to better experience the worship service by taking care of a few essential tasks in an unobtrusive and efficient manner. We are also there as a resource: we get people whatever they need (a seat, a program, directions to the bathroom, etc.) to better experience the service. If we accomplish this goal at any given service, we have succeeded, regardless of whether or not our performance has been elegant, or whether it even conforms to the provisions of this manual.

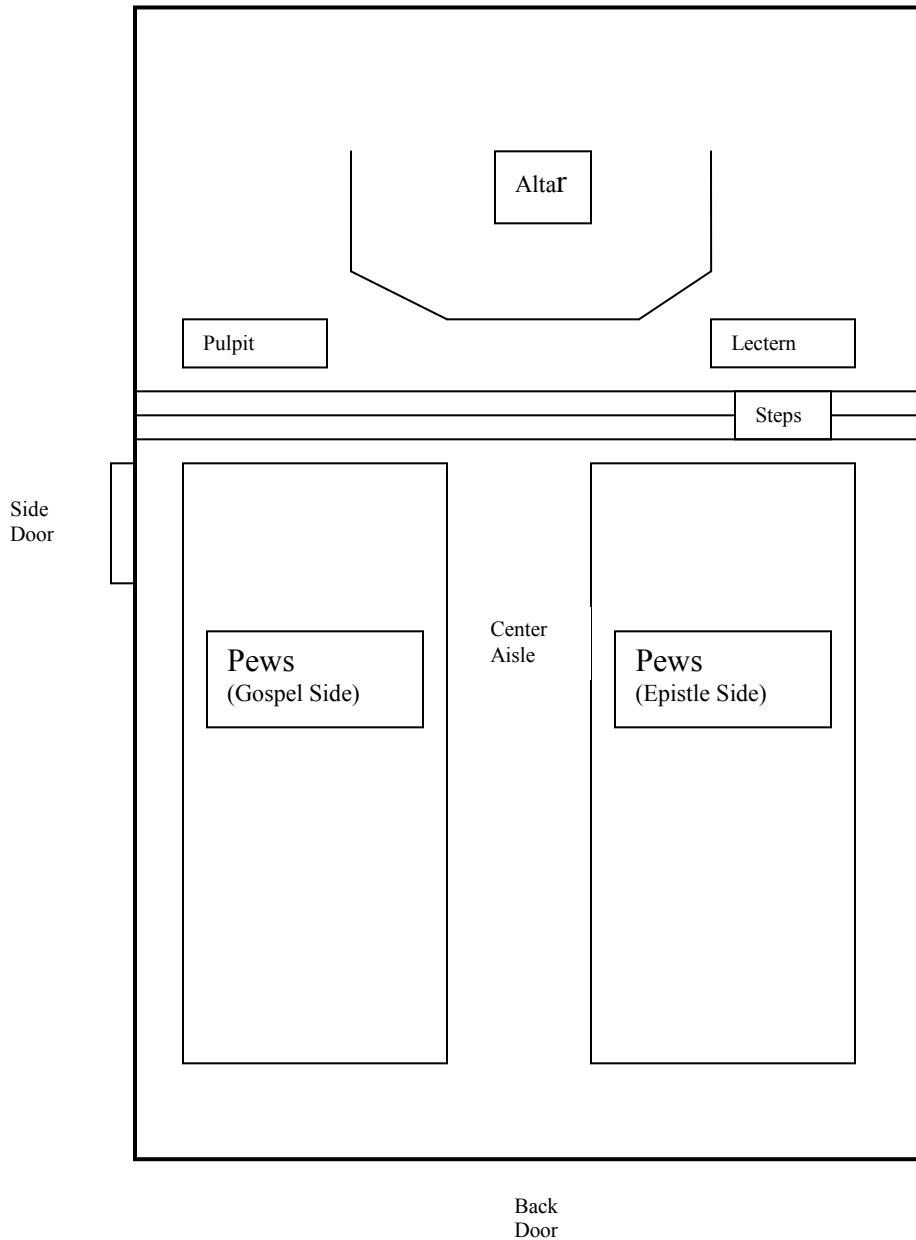
This manual generally will lay out the usher routine for the 10:30 service. Those serving as ushers at the 8:00 service or other services can make the appropriate adaptations, based on the number of people attending and any specific features of the service. Similarly, this manual will assume the presence of two ushers, though (hopefully) there will be four present at the larger services.

At each service, the ushers are responsible for completing the following six key tasks:

- Task #1: Make sure everyone in the congregation has what they need to begin the service.
- Task #2: Count all the people in attendance and record the numbers on the Usher Form.
- Task #3: Get the elements (bread and wine) to the altar
- Task #4: Take up the collection, put the money in the cloth bag, and get the bag and the Usher Form up to the altar.
- Task #5: Direct the people out of their pews to receive Communion.
- Task #6: After the service, do a quick sweep through the pews to collect abandoned service leaflets and straighten up the books.

There are notes in the following pages elaborating on each task.

## Church Geography



This diagram shows the terms that will be used in this manual, just so we are all on the same page. “Gospel side” and “Epistle Side” are the traditional ways of designating the right and left sides of the church. The names refer to what you see when you are facing the altar on that side: the Pulpit (from which the Gospel is preached, and occasionally read) or the Lectern (from which the Epistles are read).

**Task #1: Make sure everyone in the congregation has what they need to begin the service.**

This task consists of passing out the service leaflets to the people as they enter. At the 10:30 service, you should have one person doing this at the back door, and one at the side door. It is best to have people in place doing this at least 10 minutes (preferably 15) before the service begins. If you are a bit late, you might want to walk around to the people who are already in church and make sure they have a leaflet.

If you are short-handed, you can stand at either the back or side door passing out leaflets, and leave a pile of leaflets at the other door. People are accustomed to looking for the leaflets on the tables behind the pews in the back, or perched on the corner of the rail in front of the first pew closest to the side door.

You will find the service leaflets in the back of the church. They are generally in a square plastic box or may be just piled on the table in back of the pews. If the leaflets aren't in the back of the church, they are probably still in the Volunteer office. Usually, we have more than enough of them, but occasionally we run short. If it looks like you are running out, start conserving them by handing out one leaflet for every two people.

Our congregation tends to arrive at the last minute. Typically, people will still be coming in both doors up until, and even during, the opening hymn. So, plan to stay in place until the end of the hymn. After the first hymn, most of the latecomers will enter through the back door, so someone should stay in back and be prepared to give them a leaflet.

It is not ordinarily necessary for the ushers to help people find seats, though it is helpful for the ushers to do this at the more crowded services (Christmas and Easter).

On occasion we will have a visitor or newcomer who uses a wheelchair and will not know where to go. There are basically three options for wheelchairs (and similar devices, like electric carts) in the church: There is a space in front of the first pew on the Epistle side, next to the piano, that can accommodate two or three wheelchairs. There are

some extra Prayer Books and Hymnals placed in that first pew for people using that space. There is also enough room in the side aisles to park a single wheelchair next to the end of a pew. Finally, there is plenty of space in the back of the church. We generally don't put wheelchairs in the center aisle, since that could interfere with the procession. The ushers should let the visitor know all of these options, and let them go wherever they feel most comfortable. The ushers should also tell the person that the clergy will bring them communion, if they want to receive.

We have some Prayer Books in large print format, in case anyone asks for them. These are stored on the bookshelves in the back of the church.

The usher name tags are in a box in one of the small bookshelves in the back of the church. Please use them along with your printed church name tag. Also at the back of the church is a large plastic storage box with a purple lid. It the "usher supplies" – it is stocked with a basic first aid kit, paper towels, Kleenex, etc.

If you arrive very early for the service, you can put up the hymn numbers on the four hymn-boards. The numbers are in a wooden box stored in the small bookcase in back.

**Task #2: Count all the people in attendance and record the numbers on the Usher Form.**

In the box with the usher pins stored in the small bookshelf on the Epistle side of the back door, you will find a stack of Usher Forms. These forms are used to record the count for each service. At the beginning of the service, fill out the top part of the form (date, service, etc.). If we are running low on forms, please let the Usher Coordinator know. Extra forms are also stored in the Volunteer office near the mailboxes.

As the procession forms up, you should count the Altar Party (the priests, LEMs, and acolytes – basically everyone who is in the procession who is not a member of the choir) and the Choir. It is easiest to do this at the beginning of the service, so you can count them as they go down the aisle. You can do it later, but you will have to guesstimate the number for the choir, since there are hard to see once they get behind the screen. When counting the Choir, don't forget to count the organist, who won't be in the procession. Enter the Choir and Altar Party numbers in the appropriate slots.

During the readings, count the members of the congregation in the pews. Enter the numbers (Gospel side, Epistle side) in the spaces provided on the form. Count everyone in the pews (regardless of age). The best way to do this is to walk up the side aisle during the hymn and then count as you walk toward the back of the church. If you are a little late in counting, and the kids are starting to leave for Kids Gospel Time, don't forget to count them as they leave.

Finally, the count should include the children who are in the nursery. Nearly all of these children come from families that sit on the Gospel side of the church. So, I typically "inflate" the Gospel side count by about 5% or so to account for the nursery kids. For example, if the count is 70, I would add another four. If you are familiar enough with the families sitting in the church to add children that you know are in the nursery, that's fine too.

Record the Gospel and Epistle side counts on the form. During the sermon and prayers, if there are any latecomers, add them to the form as well. If anyone leaves the service, you don't have to subtract them. At the Passing of the Peace, or at any other time prior to the collection, complete

the Usher Form by totaling up the numbers and entering them in the appropriate place.

Counting people may seem like a trivial detail, but it is actually very important to the church. This is the official count for the service, which is entered into the parish records, and forms the basis for our annual report to the Diocese and the national church. The number of delegates we are allowed to send to the Diocesan Council is based on these statistics. It is important that the counts be as accurate as possible.

**Task #3: Get the elements (bread and wine) to the altar**

**Task #4: Take up the collection, put the money in the cloth bag, and get the bag and the Usher Form up to the altar.**

Tasks 3 and 4 are both part of the Offertory (or Collection) process. How you do this will depend on how many people you have available. You have the option (but are not required) to recruit two people from the congregation to take up the elements (Task 3). However, the ushers can always do this themselves. If you do choose to recruit people to be Element Bearers, try not to always pick the same people (that is, the people who sit near the back of the church). Children are often rather enthusiastic about getting involved in this Task. If you want to ask them, make sure they are big enough to handle the elements (the wine flask is somewhat heavy). A parent-child combination often works well here.

At the Passing of the Peace, the ushers and Element Bearers (if any) should assemble in the back of the church. The bread and wine are on a small table on the Gospel side of the back door. The bread is usually on a covered silver plate. Take the lid off the plate and leave it on the table (the Altar Guild will pick it up there after the service).

After the announcements, the priest will say one of the “Offertory Sentences” (like “Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord”). At this point, the choir will start to sing an anthem and the altar party will start to prepare the altar. As soon the priest has spoken the offertory sentence, the Element Bearers, one carrying the bread and one the wine, should start down the aisle. Don’t wait around, sometimes the choir’s anthem is short and you will want to be finished with the collection. [If there are any ushers who are not also serving as element bearers, they should follow the element bearers down the aisle, but stop at the bottom of the first steps. That is, they should stop before going up any steps.]

The element bearers should walk all the way up to the altar, without stopping, and hand the bread and wine to the person preparing the altar. After doing this they should turn and walk back down the steps. If the



element bearers are not also ushers, they can now return to their seats. Task 3 is complete.

If the element bearers are ushers, they should go back to the bottom of the steps (where the other ushers, if there are any, are also waiting). The ushers should stand in a line facing the altar. At this point, an acolyte should approach them with a stack of plates. If the acolyte isn't there, he or she is probably standing somewhere behind the pulpit wondering what to do. If this is the case, make eye contact with the acolyte and/or point at the stack of plates.

Each usher should take one plate from the acolyte. If there are only two ushers, this should leave the acolyte holding two extra plates, which the acolyte should take back (you may need to quietly remind him or her to do this). When everyone has a plate, turn around and start to take up the collection.

If you have only two ushers, you should take up the collection from the center aisle, with one usher taking each side. If you have four ushers, two go down the middle aisle, and one goes down each of the side aisles.

If you have only two ushers, you may have to reach into the pews to allow everyone to put their money in the plate. Occasionally, you may need to pass the plate down the pew to accomplish this. Sometimes people (especially visitors) may keep passing the plate along. That's fine too, just keep things moving.

When taking up the collection, keep in mind that many people in the congregation will not be putting anything in the plate. Given the variety of options available for paying pledges (online payments, automatic deductions, monthly or quarterly payments, etc.), the traditional envelope in the plate method is not necessary the default option.

Be prepared to keep things moving. Sometimes the choir sings a long anthem, sometimes it is surprisingly short. It is best to get the collection done as quickly as possible.

When you have finished taking up the collection, transfer everything (all of the envelopes, loose money, the Usher Form, and anything else in the plates) into one of the cloth bags. You will find a pile of the bags in the

small bookshelf where the Usher Book is located. Some of these bags may have the name of a service written on them – ignore that. Any of the bags will do.

Once the money is in the bag, close the bag up with its drawstring. Put the collection plates in a stack and put the bag in one of the plates. You can leave the other three plates in the back of the church. The Altar Guild will collect them after the service.

At the 10:30 service, there is usually a “presentation hymn” – be sure to check for this in the service leaflet. When the congregation starts singing the presentation hymn, one usher should take the plate with the bag in it and walk directly up the aisle, all the way to the altar. If there is no presentation hymn at the service, just take up the plate once the anthem is finished (the congregation will stand when they see you walking up the aisle). At the altar, hand the plate to the person standing there (should be the presiding priest by now, or still the assistant that set the altar). Then turn around and walk to the back of the church by the side aisle. Task 4 is now complete.

## **Task #5: Direct the people out of their pews to receive Communion.**

At the end of the Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer, the priest will break the bread and say: "The Gifts of God for the People of God..." (or other words, depending on the service). The altar party will start to make the altar area ready for Communion. You will notice the acolytes closing the "gates" in the communion rail, and arranging the pads that people kneel on at the rail.

At this point, the ushers should walk directly up the aisle and stand at the front of the first pews. The "first pew" is in a different place on either side of the church – on the Epistle side, the first pew is further back, since the piano takes up the space formerly occupied by several pews.

At the 10:30 service, the choir and altar party take communion first. Let the choir members get to the communion rail before you start letting members of the congregation out of their pews. When there is a full choir, the choir will fill up nearly the entire communion rail. If there is room left, start letting members of the congregation out of their pews. You may notice members of the choir hanging back from the communion rail. They are generally waiting to join family members at the communion rail later. If there is no choir, or a very small choir/altar party, you will need to start getting people to the rail sooner than if there is a full choir.

You should start directing members of the congregation toward the communion rail as soon as the choir is in place. You do this by stepping backwards, moving from pew to pew. Once the people in the pew see you move past their pew, that is their signal to get up and move into the aisle. If the people in the pew do not move, it may mean they do not wish to receive communion. In that case, let out the next pew.

The goal here is to keep a steady stream of people moving up to receive communion. It is OK for people to have to stand in line for a bit at the front of the church, waiting for space to open up on the communion rail. What we are trying to avoid is to have the clergy waiting for people at the communion rail. Keep in mind that it takes some time for people to walk up the aisle, so don't wait until you see open space in front to let

them out of their pews. By the time the people reach the front of the church, there will be room.

If you have four ushers, two of them should let people out of the pews, while the other two stay at the front of the church and direct people to the communion rail. Generally (at the 10:30 service), there will be two teams distributing communion, with each team working from the center of the rail back toward the far ends, and so on. The people should fill in the rail from the center, working back toward the sides. Most people will do this naturally based on what they see the people ahead of them doing, but some may need a little direction. Despite this, pay attention to what the clergy is doing. If there is only one priest distributing communion, the pattern will be different. Often, visiting clergy (or even our own clergy) don't follow the established patterns. The goal is to just get the people flowing to the right place.

The ushers should stay on the lookout for people who may need some assistance getting up the steps to the communion rail. If there are just two ushers and you are letting people out of the pews, you may need to leave your post to go up to the front of the church to help someone. This is OK; people will find their way out of their pews on their own until you return. If there are four ushers, the one "directing traffic" in the front of the church can help people up the steps.

In most of the 10:30 services, there are fewer people on the Epistle side than on the Gospel side. If you still have a long line on the Gospel side after the Epistle side has already gone to communion, the ushers should direct people from the Gospel side line to fill in the communion rail on the Epistle side.

The ushers take communion after the congregation. Just join the end of the line of people receiving. After the ushers have received communion, the clergy will bring leave the altar area and take communion to anyone who can't come up to the communion rail. This typically includes people in wheelchairs or with other mobility issues. The clergy will look around for these people, and will usually ask the ushers where they are. During the service, you should take note of any such people in the congregation, and make sure that the clergy know where they are. You can do this by telling

the clergy after you receive communion, or by standing in the vicinity of the person until the clergy start moving that direction.

After communion, the ushers can return to their seats or the back of the church.

**Task #6: After the service, do a quick sweep through the pews to collect abandoned service leaflets and straighten up the books.**

After the end of the service, the ushers should do a quick “sweep” of the pews. Collect any abandoned service leaflets, or other papers. However, do not remove the evangelism/newcomer materials that are placed in the middle of the racks on the pews that hold the Hymnals and Prayer Books. As you go, it’s also nice to straighten up the Hymnals and Prayer Books, and make sure that they are properly stored.

The collected paper items go in the recycling box that you will find on the Epistle side of the back door. If you are ushering at the 10:30 service on Sunday, you should also put all the leftover service leaflets in the recycling box as well (since they will not be needed for a later service). It’s a good idea to just set the recycling box on one of the tables at the end of the service. Most people will just put their service leaflets in the recycling box on their way out.

If you discover any lost items in the pews, and cannot identify their owner, there is a lost and found box in the cabinet in the entryway outside the side door. This lost and found is mostly items of clothing. Anything more valuable (keys, cell phones, wallet, etc.), I would suggest leaving with the clergy so that it can be kept in the office until someone claims it.

Finally, after the service, continue to be attentive to the needs of visitors and newcomers. As a person who was more visible during the service, you are a natural choice for a visitor or newcomer who needs information or direction.

# Summary Chart of Usher Tasks

## Usher Tasks

- Put on your nametag and usher tag
  - Put up hymn numbers (if needed)
  - Pass out service leaflets and welcome visitors
  - Recruit people to take up the bread and wine
  - Count members of choir and altar party and fill out Usher Form
  - Count members of the congregation and record on the Usher Form
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- Take Bread and Wine to the Altar or arrange for others to do this.
  - Receive plates from the acolyte and take up the collection.
  - Place collection and Usher Form in the cloth bag, place bag in the plate, and carry it to the altar.
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- Direct congregation from their pews to receive communion
  - Check pews, remove papers, straighten up books
  - Take down hymn numbers
  - Return usher tags to box

## Order of Service

### Opening Hymn/Procession

### Readings/Psalm

### Gradual Hymn

### Gospel Sermon Prayers of the People Passing of the Peace Announcements

### Offertory

### Presentation Hymn

### Great Thanksgiving

### Communion

### Closing Hymn