

# Assisting Ministers: Enlisting, Training, and Learning from the Diversity of Gifts

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God of majesty, whom saints delight to worship in heaven and on earth: Bless the ministry of those who serve your people, that we may know the joy of your presence and may worship to the glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (adapted, *Occasional Services*)

To serve God by serving his people is the lovely keeping of the Law. Called to love the world, the Church gathers each Lord's Day and Holy Day and as often in addition as desired, to hear again the community's story which proclaims God's victory over evil and the grave through the dying and rising of our Lord Jesus. For over fifteen hundred years the liturgy has been the context for the telling of and our participation in this story; it has been the microcosmic arena in which God's action on our behalf is demonstrated and proclaimed as well as the vehicle for setting before us the "greater things" we are called to do. This liturgy is work, the people's work!

Liturgical worship recognizes God for who he is and what he has done and continues to do among and through his people. Education, evangelism, stewardship, fellowship, social concerns are all rooted and reflected in liturgical action, but they are not of themselves the totality of that action. An evangelism filmstrip which pre-empts a part of the liturgy may derail the proclamation of election and promise and sending forth. The community story of the Church is more than parish program. And preparing to lead the assembly is more than writing a good sermon, choosing a few hymns the folks like to sing, and making sure all the announcements are made. Liturgy that serves both Church and world requires the investment of time, people, and resources.

One of the tasks of the ordained ministry is the preparation, organization, and supervision of liturgical action so that it both serves the people of God and enables them to serve in God's world. Part of this task includes

enlisting and training members of Christ's body to become the liturgical servants to the servants of God. This too is work—work which needs to be done for the sake of the people. The danger is that leaders will tire, despair, and “go the easy route” of solo leading. The old aphorism, “If you want something done right, do it yourself,” is a prescription for disaster for the worship of the Christian community.

That the Church may know the joy of the Lord's presence, pastors and parishes undertake the task of multiplying the roles and tasks of assisting ministers. We qualify and enlist, train and instruct, rehearse and coordinate—for the sake of the assembly.

Within the assembly of even the smallest parish there are persons who can function in some of the roles of assisting ministers:

- Communion Assistant
- Acolyte
- Altar Guild Member
- Lector
- Usher
- Greeter
- Breadbaker
- Wine Provider
- Cantor
- (Choir Member)
- (Instrumentalist)

For each serving ministry there should be a set of qualifications. Chief among these are regular attendance at worship, participation in the Holy Communion, and a life sanctified by prayer. Servers should also project an attitude of reverence—a sense of awe and mystery and wonder at the privilege of serving the God who is present and who sanctifies all of life. Such reverence is reflected in the way we act, in the respect we have for the furniture and fixtures of our devotion, in the concern we evidence for those who serve with us in the assembly. Whether serving or being served, the conduct of the Assisting Minister should reflect devotion to our Lord. Those who do not meet these qualifications ought not be considered. The role of the Assisting Minister is too important to be used as a device for reaching out to involve the non-involved.

In addition to qualifications, each serving ministry needs a detailed job description which will comfortably assist servers in fulfilling their role and task. Liturgy trainers frequently need to review and revise such job descriptions with both novice and veteran servers. (The job descriptions for Assisting Ministers at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, Indiana, are available from the church.)

Weekly training and rehearsal of Assisting Ministers will enable them to perform their functions in such a way that they facilitate worship without

drawing undue attention to themselves. Perhaps the most significant of their tasks is that of creating a hospitable environment in which a serendipitous moment of discovery and breakthrough can occur for worship leaders and the gathered assembly.

For all who offer themselves in your name, we give thanks, O God. Give them the joy of service and constant care and guidance. Help us all to be both willing servants and thankful recipients of ministry, that your name be glorified, your people live in peace, and your will be done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (adapted, *Occasional Services*)

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