Ushers Safety Responsibilities and Safe Offertory Collection – Best Practice to Consider

Volunteerism is critical to the Church. And it is an integral part of our Religious and Community Services. Changes, growth, safety and security are synonyms for developing and improving processes and procedures, including those that we have done routinely throughout the years. Changes in procedures always affect individual comfort zones, but also stabilize and enhance routines.

One of the latest changes in the Archdiocese/Diocease is the Tamper Evident Bag Process, which will help implement a standard system throughout the Archdiocese/Diocease. Standardization of this process will help to better protect the gracious donations received from our parishioners.

Usher Safe Practice

Ushers at Mass have responsibilities beyond following the Tamper Evident Bag procedures. There are other issues to take care of before, during and after the Mass and offertory collection.

The 12 Most Common Practices you should be prepared for:

1. Be familiar with the church campus, meeting rooms and other buildings.
2. Know how to assist parishioners calmly to the exits in the event of an emergency.
3. Be prepared to assist people with gait (walking) disabilities before, during and after Mass.
4. Watch for spills, debris or items on the floor that can cause a slip/trip/fall hazard.
5. Look for security issues inside and outside the building.
6. Recognize and identify people that may be present, but not necessarily to worship.
7. Be prepared to contact and intervene with uncommon situations.
8. Know the locations of emergency equipment and nearest phone.
9. Inspect the telephone equipment to ensure it is operable to make calls.
10. Be prepared to respond to emergencies with purpose and controlled demeanor (Prepare, Coordinate and Practice – know how to respond before an event occurs).
11. Doors to access offices must remain locked during Mass. Exit doors should be locked from the inside but allowed to open outward.
12. Understand who’s in the audience to determine who has medical and security background to assist if needed. Discuss the issues with those that are routinely present in Church.
Offertory Collection
Let’s review the Tamper Evident Bag Process.

Preparation of Tamper Proof Bag Use
• Plastic bag supply should be available and can only be accessed by the ushers and the bookkeeper/head cash counter.
• Bags should be labeled by the bookkeeper/head cash counter.
• The bag numbers will be recorded on the control log.
• The designated person for the event is responsible for obtaining the bags and control log before the mass/event.

Collecting funds
• After the collection, the designated persons (more than one) of the mass/event will empty the collection into the numbered Tamper Evident Plastic Bag; date and signed by designated persons.
• The Tamper Evident Plastic Bag must be closed and sealed to ensure contents are properly secured. Any spoiled bag should be kept and included in the substitute bag. The paper strip must be signed and attached to the control log. The designated persons will compare the bag vs. the control log serial numbers and the control log will be signed by the designated persons/ushers.
• After the event/service the designated persons/ushers will put original control log and the sealed Tamper Evident Plastic Bags in the safe or locked secured area.
• The Tamper Evident Bags, once sealed will be put into the safe or other locked and secured area by the designated person/ushers.
• If the collection is brought to the altar with the gifts in the offertory procession, the entire collection must be sealed as previously described.
• Immediately upon the Pastor exit at the conclusion of Mass, two ushers must retrieve the bag and put it into the safe or other locked and secured area.

Counting Funds
• The Parish business manager/bookkeeper and one member of the cash-counting team will retrieve the bags from the safe/secured area. Before opening, the numbers on the bags must be compared to the numbers on the control sheet and strip liners by the money-counting team members. The money-counting team will open the bags with a pair of scissors and will sign off on the control log. If any discrepancy noted, the counting team will contact the Finance Chair, and give the control log to an appropriate designee, who’s independent from cash-counting and recordkeeping functions.
• All cash (currency/coins) and checks must be included in the deposit and should not be used for any other purpose. The money-counting team is to prepare the deposit, place all funds and the deposit slip in a sealed Tamper Evident Bag for transportation to the bank.

Depositing Funds
• The money-counting team should give a copy of the deposit slip to the appropriate designee.
• A member of the cash-counting team and an additional representative (other than someone from the cash counting team) will immediately take the deposit to the bank. Deposit trip times and dates to the bank should be purposely altered as to not establish a routine.
• Upon returning from the bank, the validated deposit slip is to be given to the appropriate designee to compare to the copy given by the money-counting team. If the slips agree, the appropriate designee will sign off the control log. If the slips do not agree, the appropriate designee should contact the Finance Chair. The control log and validated deposit should then be given to the Parish business manager/bookkeeper for filing.

Monitoring
• The Parish Finance Council should monitor and periodically review the procedures followed by the Parish for the Tamper Evident Bags.

The safety of the people is a result of following best practices in all areas of responsibility, and this one is not an exception. This can only be achieved as most of the successful challenges are obtained, working as a team, one team, following the leaders advice to become the leader’s and lay ministers of the future.
Ushers/Greeters Utilization

- Ushers may or may not be utilized as security personnel. The decision on this comes down to church philosophy, personnel, and specific needs.

- In any case, ushers, greeters, and welcome ministry personnel should be utilized as the first line of safety and security during services.

- Ushers, greeters, and welcome ministry personnel should receive basic training in: Security profiling, security “alerts”, basic First Aid response, crowd management and evacuation in case of emergencies, and basic safety observance.

- If the ushers are not used as security personnel, they should be trained to operate as a unit with the security team.

- If possible, it is advisable to have as many ushers as possible undergo security team basic training.
Parking Enforcement

I- Regular Church Services
   A- During regular services the main concern is that cars that not park where they are violating fire codes. Notifications should be placed on the cars/trucks advising them they are in violation of fire codes.
   B- In severe cases, an announcement may be necessary in the service directing the person(s) to move their vehicle.

II- Special Events
   A- During special events, the use of orange cones is very helpful in preventing the public from blocking areas of entry or egress.
   B- It is essential that you have identifiable staff in the parking lots directing the public to areas that they may or may not park.

III- Illegally Parked Cars (Long Term)
   A- It is an increasing problem that people are storing their vehicles on church property. In most cases these are not church members.
   B- The problems with allowing this are numerous. Here are a few:
      1- Liability due to storing an illegal, unlicensed, or inoperable vehicle.
      2- Unsightly appearance of stored vehicles even if they are legal.
      3- You are setting a precedent.
      4- The vehicle could have been used in felonious activity.
      5- Allowing this may result in increased campus activity by vagrants.
   C- See the attached form that is used by our church to help combat these problems.
**General Safety Preparedness**

*Individual Safety on Campus*

- Lock doors that are not in use regularly.
- Electro-magnetic door locks with buzzers on weekday entrance doors should be utilized.
- There is safety in numbers, don’t become isolated on campus after hours.
- Develop an active awareness of what is going on around you and potential security problems.
- Alarm codes and keys should have restricted access. Only those requiring access to individual buildings should be given access.
- If you are on campus after hours, carry an impact weapon and OC spray. Be trained in the use of both.

**Setting and Enforcing Safety Policies**

- **The church and campus should have a set of well defined safety rules with signage, which should include—but not limited to:**
  
  1. Illegal parking areas (fire lanes, etc.)
  2. Clear delineation of prohibited activities—
     - (skating, bicycle riding, skateboarding, smoking)
  3. Emergency evacuation plans/schematics
  4. Dangerous chemicals
  5. Dangerous electrical areas

- Clear signage also needs to be posted for:
  
  1. First Aid kits/ medical “crash kits” or ADD devices
  2. Fire Extinguishers
  3. Exits

- Mailroom safety

Refer to the following pages which is a copy of the Guidelines for mailrooms which was issued by the Bakersfield Fire Department. Even if you do not have a regular mailroom, any staff that are involved in opening, handling, or transporting mail, should be aware of the dangers presented by terrorists via the mail.
I-Duties and Preparation for Service

You are the first impression that a newcomer will have of your church. The job of ushers is to help make worshippers feel comfortable in the worship setting. Normally if people do not feel welcome at a church they will not come back. You are the first line in dealing with non-members.

You also have an important job in making regular members feel welcome and valued. Each member is a great asset that each church wants to keep.

In the mechanics of ushering, you will guide others by handing out church news and bulletins, give directions to the restrooms and nurseries, collecting the offering, greeting members and visitors, assisting with communions, and assisting with any emergencies. Ushers and greeters are vital to the smooth functioning of any church body.
Duties

Each congregation will have duties that vary from other congregations. The following is a list of duties that need to be considered for any church that desires trained and efficient ushers and greeters.

- Greet members and newcomers as they arrive with a smile, genuine concern, and warmth.
- Immediately after the service is concluded pick up all papers, bulletins, or debris from the seats and between the isles.
- Assist latecomers in finding a seat and/or taking their children to children’s area or nursery.
- Take special care to ensure that all congregants, especially the elderly and the handicapped are seated comfortably with a minimum of disruption to the service. Be aware of the special seating areas and make sure they are utilized appropriately.
- Assist with the communion as needed.
- Make sure that bulletins/programs are available for any who come in to the worship area. In some churches greeters may hand out bulletins or programs as congregants come in. Even if the ushers do not have the primary duty of handing out the bulletins/programs, there are often congregants who are seated without bulletins/programs or who come in later.
- Collect the offering(s) as assigned by the head usher.
- During the offering try to think 2 or 3 rows ahead and anticipate when and where the offering baskets will arrive in order to facilitate their movement. Attempt to minimize time delays during the offering period. If one person writing a check holds you up, offer to pick their offering up after the service.
- Make sure registration forms are available and are retrieved (according to the practices of the church).
- Offering security is a necessity. Have a transport team take your offering to the secure area (safe, etc.). This should consist of at least two people, preferably three. If the money must be transported to other buildings, the transport route should be scrutinized and if necessary, an outside person should check the area prior to the team’s transporting of the offering.
• Familiarize yourself with the church campus and the location of the Sunday school classes, meeting rooms, nursery, and the children's area. In larger churches, it may be necessary to carry a map in order to direct newcomers.
• Be prepared to contact and intervene in situations where there is disruption or distraction during the service (crying babies, children and youth misbehaving, loud or disruptive adults).

**Emergencies**

• During emergencies, the head usher should know the locations of any medically trained congregants in attendance.
• The ushers should know the locations of all fire extinguishers, First Aid kits; electrical shut offs, and main gas valve shut off. If possible, a majority of ushers should be Red Cross certified for First Aid and CPR.
• The head usher should have a cell phone for any emergencies and all ushers should know the location of the nearest phones in case of a catastrophic incident, cell phones will not be operable.

**Preparation for Service**

• Wear an easy to read name badge.
• You should be neat and well groomed.
• Pay attention to your clothing. Appear professional and don’t wear jeans, shorts, shower sandals, or immodest clothing.
• You should be at church at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the service.
• Review the bulletin for special events and the time slot for receiving the offering(s) and plan accordingly before a service begins.
• Make it a practice of using your initiative whenever the head ushers are not available.
• Maintain a positive approach to all congregants and accept that some will be trying.
• Say a prayer for the service and for your effectiveness as an ambassador our Lord.
Church Medical Emergencies

As civilians you are protected from litigation if you perform CPR. You should never do anything beyond what is called for using common sense. You never administer medications in any form. You only perform "common sense" care.

*If someone is having a seizure, you should prevent anyone from sticking objects in their mouth and pad the area around their head if at all possible. You will call 911 immediately while the person continues to seize unhindered. If the patient is hypoglycemic you can ask the companion/family member if the person has an oral glucose solution on hand or glucagon. If they do have the medication and a family member wants to administer it – then they may do so.*
Disaster Training Walk-Through on Main Church Buildings

All ushers, greeters, and security personnel should include a disaster walk-through in their training regimen. These are some of the areas that should be covered (if applicable).

I. Identify Location(s) of:

A. Gas supply valve(s) - The main valve and a shut-off wrench should be painted a bright color. The wrench should be attached by a hardened chain and lock.

B. Electrical supply breakers - Demonstrate how the main breakers are shut off.

C. Emergency lighting

D. Fire alarms

E. Fire extinguishers

F. Water supply sources outside the building - This should include hose locations

G. Nearest “hard wired” phone - Cell phones will not be serviceable during a catastrophic event

H. Medical supplies and First Aid kits

I. Blankets and other disaster supplies

II. Evacuation Routes and Means of Egress:

A. Identify any special problems with evacuation of balconies
   1. Prevent jumping from balcony areas
   2. Move congregants back to areas that are structurally strong
III-Ushers/Greeters/Security—General Guidelines

A- In times of a disaster, ushers need to:

1- Control Panic!
2- Remain calm—attempt to keep those around you calm
3- Do not increase injuries due to poor decisions, inaction, or lack of planning
4- Cell phone availability essential—but also include easy access to “hard wired” phones in your planning
5- Ascertain where those with disabilities are located—Leaders should assign personnel to expedite their egress
6- Once congregants are outside—they should not be allowed to re-enter.
7- Fight fires only if they are small and you are not by yourself
B- Explosion and/or fire
1- Know when and how to use extinguishers
2- Ascertain the location of the fire or explosion
3- Know the plan for evacuating away from the fire
4- Evacuation movement should be directed by a designated leader (Head of Security or Head Usher)

C- Earthquakes
1- Keep congregants inside- make every attempt to keep them from running outside
2- Direct congregants to strong points in the structure or under pews or heavy furniture
3- In balcony areas keep congregants away from the railings- back toward the stronger areas- under pews
4- Direct evacuation out of the building- away from any large glass or unstable areas or structures.
5- Direction of egress must be determined depending on damage
6- Avoid windows, mirrors, hanging objects, fireplaces, and tall-unsecured furniture
7- Be prepared for aftershocks
8- Once shocks are over proceed to outdoor areas that are safe from power lines and falling objects
9- Discourage driving if at all possible
10- Security personnel (or other assigned personnel) should proceed to the main gas shutoff valve

D- Response to firearm attacks
1- Get congregants down on the floor, under pews, etc. and direct them to crawl from there
2- Try to prevent congregants from running wildly and presenting their backs
3- Designated security personnel should get off a call to 911 as soon as possible
4- With pre-planning, you should have security personnel in position to intervene
Basic Management Strategy

1- Speak with a reassuring, low, and appropriate tone.
2- State that you are there to assist them.
3- Show empathy (recognizing to persons distress, fear, etc.)
4- Be an active listener (silence, reflective comments repeating what they have said, clarifications (attempts to clarify and understand what they are saying).
5- Ask diversionary reality questions (Where do you live? Where are your children? How many do you have?)
6- Ask questions that pose simple choices (Can I call someone for you?)
7- Be courteous, concerned, and serious.
8- Don’t be condescending, agitated, nervous, embarrassed, or sarcastic.
9- Use meaningful eye contact (directly at person, focus on the face)
10-As much as possible assume a non-threatening body posture
11- Sit or stand near the person at a slight angle.
12-Do not touch person unless all other non-physical tactics are exhausted or immediate intervention is called for.
13-Encourage the person to go out of the congested area so you can better talk to them.
14-Telling someone to “calm down” is generally ineffective (a better alternative might be to have him or her go out with you and sit down with you).
Intervention Strategy

Alerts (profiling)
A- Someone changes behavior as you approach.
B- Person is walking, standing, or sitting with a hidden immobile hand.
C- Person matches/parallels your or someone else’s movements.
D- Someone attempts to “bait” you and provoke a response.
E- Two or more people moving or acting in concert/flanking you or others.
F- Carrying inappropriate looking packages or objects into sanctuary or sitting it down around or outside the church buildings.
G- If the movements, behavior, or objects with the person makes you curious – do not ignore the feeling, follow up and make appropriate notification and stay "on" the person.

General Cues to Look For:

A- Red, flushed face
B- Unnecessarily loud voice
C- Hyperventilation or rapid breathing
D- Shaking, twitching hands or clenched fists
E- Rigid body
F- Fixed stare
G- Hesitation to respond or move as directed
H- Nausea
I- Inappropriate Crying or tears
J- Any combination of the above