

USHERING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

by Bill Scheidler

THE BIBLICAL BASIS

Every Believer has a calling into ministry in the Body of Christ. “Any act of Christian service which helps direct men and women into fellowship with Jesus Christ is a ministry.”

In the Old Testament Tabernacle of David (which is a type of the New Testament Church), there were four prominent ministries that functioned in relation to ministry in the house of God among the people of God. These ministries include ***the priests, the Levites, the singers and the porters (ushers)***. These four ministries are often mentioned together as if they were equally important (See: Ezra 2:42, 70; 7:7, 24, Nehemiah 7:1, 73; 10:28, 39).

The Ministry of Porters

The name ‘porter’ in the Hebrew means “a gatekeeper”. A word that is often associated with this ministry means “to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to”. While this ministry in the Old Testament was a “background-type” ministry, it was considered one of great importance for the service of the house of God. So important was this ministry that at times it was the leadership that was involved in this ministry (II Chronicles 23:4).

The ministry of the porter is described in detail in II Chronicles 9:19-32. It is here where we discover a great deal about this ministry. In relation to the Tabernacle:

- Porters were keepers of the door.
- Porters were 212 in number.
- Porters had to have a proper genealogy (in Christ).
- Porters had authority and oversight at the gates.
- Porters were stationed at all the doors (II Chronicles 8:14; 35:15).
- There were four chief porters.
- Porters were over the chambers (storehouses) and treasuries.
- Porters lived around the temple (proper life orientation).
- Porters opened things up every day.
- Porters had charge of the ministering vessels to bring them in and out.
- Porters were to oversee the vessels, instruments, flour, wine, oil and spices.
- Porters made the ointment.
- Porters were over the table of the Lord and prepared the Shewbread every Sabbath.

Other verses point out additional responsibilities:

- Porters were to make sure nothing unclean entered (II Chronicles 23:19).
- Porters were responsible for the gathering of money (II Chronicles 34:9; 31:14, II Kings 12:9-11; 22:4).
- Porters carried out the directives of the leadership (II Kings 23:4).

As can clearly be seen, the ministry of a porter was not a peripheral ministry. It was a very important one both in the Tabernacle of David (I Chronicles 15:18; 16:38, 42) and the temple of Solomon (Note: The temple of Solomon had 4,000 porters). History tells us that this was a position of some dignity and honor (II Kings 25:18).

There was much care and detail given to this ministry. There was an official division of the porters (I Chronicles 26:1-19). The porters had to be consecrated and separated like all the other ministries (Nehemiah 13:22).

In the New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus seems to have used His disciples occasionally in the function of ushers.

- They prepared the way for His coming at certain places.
- They introduced people to Him.
- They directed people to Him who came with different needs.
- They seated the people when Jesus so desired.
- They helped in the distribution of food to the multitudes.

The Importance of Ushers

There are four reasons why the ministry of ushering needs to have an important place in the local church.

1. The usher is often the first official representative of Jesus Christ seen by the people entering the building or auditorium.
2. The usher is able to minister to individuals.

Preachers, teachers and musicians minister to people in groups while ushers minister to people as individuals. A spirit-directed word of encouragement, reassurance or kindness may be the most significant ministry some people receive in their entire church attendance experience.

3. The usher is the only person whose functions cannot be replaced or omitted.
 - At times preaching may be omitted in an unusual move of the Spirit.
 - At times classes can be dismissed.
 - At times the choir may not sing.
 - BUT at all times the ushers must be on duty to maintain order in the assembly.
4. The usher is a forerunner.

It is his or her attitude that will play a big part in preparing the hearts of people for their whole experience in the House of the Lord.

The Qualities of a Good Usher

The ministries of greeters, ushers and lot attendants all fall into the category of servant ministries in the local church. However, the Bible makes it clear that all who serve in the House of the Lord need to reflect Christ's servant heart. There are specific, biblical qualities that God looks for in servant ministries.

Servant ministries must be of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and full of wisdom (Acts 6:1-3). In addition, servants in the house of the Lord were to be "serious, not deceitful...not in it for what they can get out of it. They must be reverent before the mystery of the faith, not using their position to try to run things" (I Tim. 3:8-11 – Message Bible).

There are also many practical characteristics of a good servant that will help a great deal in the performance of his or her duties. Good ushers will have or will work on some of the following:

- The ability to recall specific likes and dislikes of people.
- The alertness to detect and meet practical needs.
- The motivation to meet needs as quickly as possible.
- The desire to fulfill needs with disregard to weariness.
- The willingness to experience personal discomfort for the comfort of others.
- The steadfastness to complete a job once begun.

Good servants who function in these areas are a great asset to the Lord and to the local church. They can shape the atmosphere by their positive outlook. They can make the assembly time a joyful experience. They can make people feel safe, secure and at rest. They can make everyone feel welcome and a part of the family. They can be instrumental in edifying the body through order.

Ushering is not a secondary ministry and is very important. The attitude of the porters will be communicated to all the worshippers. This ministry can bring a great sense of fulfillment for the person involved (I Timothy 3:13).

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR USHERING

I. The Usher

- A. The usher must be fully persuaded of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- B. The usher must be someone who is attentive to the needs of others.
- C. The usher must be a person who manifests the fruit of the Spirit.
- D. The usher must be full of the law of love and kindness.
- E. The usher must be courteous and polite.
- F. The usher must be at ease and able to put others at ease.
- G. The usher must be aware of his or her personal appearance and hygiene.
 - 1. This involves personal cleanliness.
 - a. Deodorant
 - b. Mouthwash
 - 2. This involves general tidiness.
 - a. Hair groomed
 - b. Clean shaven or neatly trimmed (men)
 - c. Pressed clothing
 - d. Shined shoes
 - e. Appropriate dress
 - f. No chewing gum

II. The Usher's Responsibilities

The usher is responsible for...

- A. Making for a pleasant worship experience for all.
 - 1. This means being pleasant yourself.
 - a. Optimistic about the church
 - b. Proud to be an usher
 - c. Pleasant in conversation
 - d. Pleasant face (smiling)
 - e. Non-judgmental attitude
 - f. Supportive of each phase of the service
 - 2. This means being aware of what is going on around you.
 - a. Temperature
 - b. Ventilation

- c. Distractions
 - Babies crying
 - Restless children
 - Roaming children
 - Loud talking
 - d. Available seating
3. This means being aware of new people.
 - a. Greet them cordially
 - b. Introduce them to someone
 - c. Seat them near a regular attendee.
 4. This means being aware of important directions.
 - a. Know the location of facilities.
 - Nursery
 - Toilets
 - Heating, plumbing and electrical controls
 - Exits
 - Lost and found
 - First aid equipment
 - b. Know the schedule of activities (read bulletin before service).
 - Regular services
 - Special services
 - Children's church
 - Baptismal services
 - Communion services
 - Office hours
- B. Guarding the service from needless distractions.
1. Learn when to seat people.
 - a. During congregational singing (especially when standing)
 - b. Late comers who arrive when the sermon is being preached should be seated as inconspicuously as possible at the rear.
 - c. During announcements (usually)
 2. Learn when not to seat people.
 - a. During public prayer

- b. During the operation of the gifts (prophecy, song of the Lord, etc.)
 - c. During special music whether choir, orchestra or soloist
 - 3. Learn how to handle intruders.
 - a. Approach them with kindness but firmness.
 - b. Confront tactfully at the door if you are suspicious.
 - c. Watch for unruly activity.
 - d. Protect the platform.
- C. Assisting the pastor in maintaining an even flow in the meeting
 - 1. Assisting in the distribution of all materials
 - a. Visitor's Material
 - b. Special handouts
 - c. Communion
 - 2. Assisting in the gathering of the offerings
 - a. Holding or passing buckets
 - b. Directing people
- D. Being alert to emergency situations
 - 1. Physical sickness
 - 2. Fire (extinguishers)
 - 3. Power failure (emergency lighting)

III. Other Important Procedures

- A. All ushers should be on duty 20 minutes prior to Sunday Services, 10 minutes before midweek services.
- B. All ushers should carry a memo pad and pen in their pockets for notes regarding things that they observe that need additional attention.