

TIPS FOR USHERS AND GREETERS

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS MINISTRIES

ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

The following tips have been compiled for ushers and greeters to have a greater understanding of how to assist parishioners and visitors with disabilities.

Persons who are blind or with low vision

- Prearrange a tour of the church with the opportunity to feel and touch the layout of the Church.
- Identify yourself and your role at the Mass.
- Ask the person how you can be of assistance i.e. “Do you prefer to take my arm or elbow?” Describe the scene for the person.
- Walk on the opposite side of a service animal.
- Do not touch a service animal.
- Provide specific cues to the person when guiding him/her to the seat i.e. “There is a small step coming up in about three feet.”
- With permission, guide the person’s hand to the back of the chair or pew when getting ready to be seated.
- Inform a person who regularly attends the church of any physical changes i.e. extra chairs placed behind the pews, plants/decorations near a walkway.
- Offer large print or Braille bulletins, hymnals, songbooks, etc.
- Establish before Mass if the person would like a Eucharistic minister come to them.

Persons with mobility challenges

- Ask about a preferred seating location.
- For a person using a wheelchair, speak directly to them not only to the person accompanying them.
- Only touch a person’s wheelchair with permission.
- Try to be eye level with a person using a wheelchair.
- Ask permission to offer help; do not be offended if the person says “no”.
- Never pat a person’s head or back of their wheelchair.
- If a person has difficulty walking long distances, offer a place to rest before ushering them to a seat.

Persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities

- Greet the person in an age appropriate way.
- Rephrase information if it seems the person did not understand.
- Offer the person program books, hymnals, etc.
- Ask the person to repeat themselves if you did not understand; do not nod if you did not understand.
- Wait for the person to finish speaking, then restate what you heard to make sure you understand.
- Let the person finish what they are trying to say.
- If necessary suggest another way to communicate such as, “Can you show me?” or “Write it down for me.”

Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Establish with the person if they prefer to use sign language, speaking, writing, or a combination of methods to communicate.
- Wave your hand in front of the person or lightly tap their shoulder to get their attention.
- If a person use a hearing aid, speak in clear sentences, move closer to the person to be understood, and look directly at the person.
- When speaking through a sign language interpreter, look and speak directly to the person who is Deaf; do not speak to the interpreter. Speak to the interpreter and the person who is Deaf in a conversational tone of voice- Speaking loud does not help!
- Offer assisted listening devices i.e. hearing loop if available.
- If there is sign language interpretation available, ensure there is reserved seating in front of the interpreter.

Other tips

- If a child or adult is experiencing challenging behavior during the Mass, ask the caregiver how you can help.
- Consider having a designated quiet area for children and adults to go to i.e. a child with Autism can easily become overstimulated but a few minutes in a quiet area can help them to return to Mass.
- Children and adults can express joy in ways that may be different from others i.e. hand flapping, jumping up and down, etc. Welcome the diversity!
- Greet the family with a loved one with special needs in a joyful and sincere way; others will follow your example.
- Include people with disabilities in a meaningful way at Mass.
- Additional resources available. Please visit the Department of Special Needs Ministries website: <http://adw.org/specialneeds/> or call 301-853-4560, 301-200-5430 VP.



Archdiocese of Washington
Department of Special Needs Ministries

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