

# The Sunday Mass Experience and Hospitality



Catholic Stewardship Consultants  
*Developing Stewardship in Catholic Parishes*



“And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’” — Matthew 25:40

# The Sunday Mass Experience and Hospitality

Hospitality—being friendly, welcoming and generous—is one of the pillars of a Stewardship Parish. One of the simplest ways that we can show others the love of God is by letting them know they are wanted, valuable and welcome. First and foremost, parishes today should be bastions of hospitality, so that those who enter may become engaged in the life of Christ's Church.

Each and every Sunday, we as Catholics have the opportunity to be Jesus to others. Nowhere is this more evident than when someone leaves their home to attend Sunday Mass at our parishes. Believe it or not, our practice of hospitality doesn't start when someone enters the Church doors—it starts before that. In turn, it continues until they leave the church campus. While our practices should focus on welcoming the stranger, an unintended side effect will be the welcoming of our own membership. It will show our parish members how to welcome the stranger, and give them ways to practice hospitality when they go out into the community.

As we come out on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice of hospitality will be more important than ever. Millions of Catholics across our country will be flocking back to their parishes, looking for the Lord in ways that, maybe, they never have before. In addition, many more who have been away from the Church will likely decide to come back. In times like this, when nothing seems to make sense, people readily turn back to Christ for meaning. What will their experience be when they return? Will they find a place of welcome—a place that truly is overjoyed at their return? Or, will it be the same place they left before—perhaps devoid of that special something they were hoping to find? Hospitality can ensure that all those who return truly find their Savior, Jesus Christ.

The following pages are a starting point for you to improve your hospitality practices at your parish—but hospitality efforts should certainly not end here. Work with your parish leadership to come up with additional ideas that your parish community can implement. As you proceed with these new hospitality efforts, stay focused on Christ's words in Matthew 25:35, "I was... a stranger and you welcomed me."

# Signage

- Signage approaching your parish must be easy to see. Often, visitors don't see the church signage or buildings until they are almost upon the church campus. So, consider placing some removable “sandwich board” signs on Saturday night/Sunday that clearly list the parish's name and approximate distance so that people know they're close to the church. (Ushers could be responsible to put up/take down these signs.) These signs should be placed along the main routes, and in all directions from which people may come to the church.
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- Directional signage is needed for parking lots. We would suggest at least three main types of parking to be designated—1. Handicap, 2. Visitor, and 3. Main Parking. You may also want to offer parking for families with small children/expectant mothers. (Do away with any “auctioned” parking spaces near the church building.)
  - Visitor Parking Space Signs—Your parish should create parking spaces designated for visitors. They should be closest to the church. We would suggest between 10-12 spaces.
  - Staff Parking—Do away with any and all staff parking signs. If your parish does have them, replace them with visitor signs.
  - Parking Lot Section Signs—If your parking lot is very large, consider adding parking lot section signs, similar to shopping malls and airports, to help people remember where they parked. This would be especially helpful in inclement weather.
  - Office Signs—Signs directing people to the parish office should be placed in prominent locations near the parking lot and church. This is especially necessary at parishes where the priests' residence is on the campus. In addition, signs should be posted to the church doors indicating that doors are locked when there are no events taking place in the church. This will help prevent visitors from pulling on locked doors, which can be frustrating. Finally, signs directing people to the church should be placed near the office. Many parishes have offices that appear to be part of the church.

# Parking Lot

- As effective as signage can be, it does not replace the impact of a smiling face from a parking lot committee member. Consider beginning a parking lot committee to assist visitors and parishioners with parking and entry to the church. The parking lot committee would not only be present before parish liturgies, but also at other major events and faith formation gatherings (if needed). This is essential hospitality.
- There are many great approaches to parking lot committees. But, the main focus should be on serving visitors. By focusing on the stranger, the member will be served. Here is a list of articles about parking lot committees, and some different variances, that you may find helpful:

<https://thomrainer.com/2016/03/ten-commandments-church-parking-lots>

<http://chucklawless.com/2017/07/11-responsibilities-for-parking-lot-greeters/>

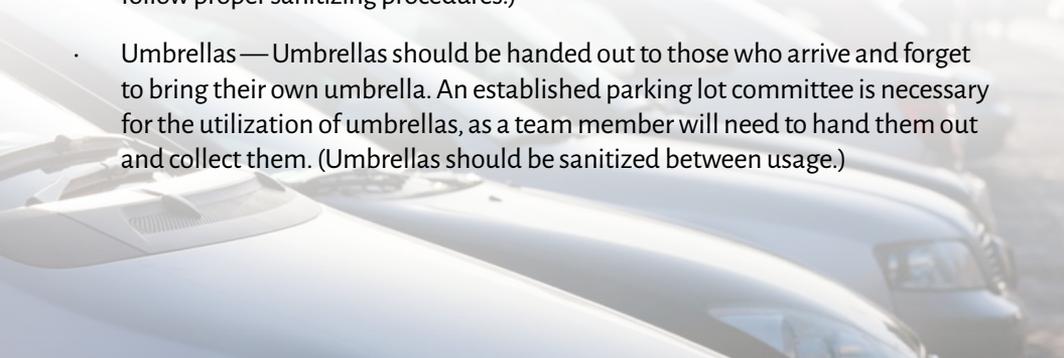
<https://thomrainer.com/2013/09/three-hopefully-helpful-hints-about-church-parking-lots/>

<https://unseminary.com/5-ways-your-parking-lot-might-be-holding-back-the-redemptive-potential-of-your-church/>

<https://www.worshipfacilities.com/facilities/church-etiquette-parking-lots>

*Consider investing in two important parking lot tools:*

- Passenger golf carts — If you have a large parking lot, passenger golf carts can be extremely helpful. While the carts can be a significant investment, it will be a great help to those who need it, especially in inclement weather. (Depending on the COVID-19 regulations recommended by your [arch]diocese, remember to follow proper sanitizing procedures.)
- Umbrellas — Umbrellas should be handed out to those who arrive and forget to bring their own umbrella. An established parking lot committee is necessary for the utilization of umbrellas, as a team member will need to hand them out and collect them. (Umbrellas should be sanitized between usage.)



## Greeters

A greeters' ministry is not simply a group of people with nametags that all say "hello." The greeters must be trained in the art of seeing Jesus in each person who enters the church. Hospitality in our parishes should not mean being nice to those who look, act, walk and talk like us. It should be focused first on the stranger. Prepare your greeting team to truly carry out this idea. Finally, greeters—while practicing social distancing—should be stationed at every entrance, not just the main entrance.

## Welcome Desk

*Parishes with larger gathering spaces adjacent to the sanctuary:*

- If your parish does not currently have a welcome desk, invest in one. It doesn't have to be fancy. A simple folding table with a tabletop sign will be sufficient. Keep in mind that social distancing may require you to have a wide berth around the table. Be creative in how you keep visitors from coming too close to the table.
- Ensure that the welcome desk is staffed at every Mass and that the attendant is easily identifiable. This can be done with a vest with the parish logo on it, or even just a name tag. Since welcome desks are normally in the gathering space where people are congregating, it can be hard to identify the attendant without proper identification.
- Free the desk of all clutter that may make the attendant unapproachable. Place brochures and other handouts in other prominent places throughout your gathering space.
- The welcome desk should be equipped to take contact information for visitors or update contact information for existing members.

*Parishes without larger gathering spaces adjacent to the sanctuary (consider the above suggestions):*

- Set up a welcome desk outside when weather is reasonably comfortable. While you may not be able to set up year-round, it is better than not doing anything.
- Set up your welcome desk in an adjacent building. Have a member of the hospitality team stationed at the exits who can invite/direct strangers to the welcome desk.



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# Church Seating

Develop a plan for seating in the sanctuary. This relates to the need for the congregation to practice hospitality. In most parishes, people take the end seats, necessitating others to squeeze by them, or take up seats further back, leaving many empty seats in the middle and to the front. Additionally, most people leave a significant gap between their families and the next. (This will be dependent on the social distancing measures in place when churches can gather again.) This causes needed seating to be unavailable to those who may be running late, necessitating an uncomfortable walk to the front of the church during the liturgy — many people may simply leave than be subjected to that embarrassment. Here are some ideas to encourage hospitality practices in regards to seating:

- Make announcements before Mass for several weeks, if not months, encouraging parishioners to slide to the middle to make room at the edges for those who come late or families with small children who may need to take them out during Mass.
- Besides those who may be handicap, direct all attendees to enter rows from the outside and move towards the middle of the church when seating. Again, this will need to be announced from the pulpit so regular attendees will learn how to enter the aisles.
- Preach regularly about hospitality, and its relationship to making seating available to the stranger and latecomer.
- Include articles in your parish newsletters, bulletins and website about how to sit in the church.
- As you develop your plan for seating, consider those with health/age issues and families with small children. Ensure their needs are met.





## Ushers

Like greeters, ushers are critical front-line hospitality ministers. Their importance cannot be understated. But you must ask yourself, are your ushers there to be seen or to serve? Hopefully, it is the latter. In addition to their normal liturgical duties, here are some ideas for a more hospitable usher ministry:

- Be sure that your ushers are easily identifiable. Perhaps they have suit coats that match. Or, they could all wear the same color golf shirt.
- Encourage ushers to walk through the church before Mass, inviting parishioners to move towards the center of the church to make room at the outside edges.
- Ensure that ushers are active in seating after Mass begins, from the outside of the aisles during Mass. Too many parishes have ushers that simply observe, but do not engage.

# Order of Worship

In most Catholic Churches, we assume that all who have entered the doors understand the order of worship. This practice ignores non-Catholics or those who have been away from the faith for many years. We miss a great opportunity to make other feel welcome when we don't recognize this issue. Here are some ideas to make the stranger feel welcome, as well as provide direction to our active members:

## *Churches without Screens:*

- Create a Sunday order of worship that is handed out before each Mass. It can be very detailed, with every song, prayer and reading listed. Or, it can be very simple with the order of worship listed and page numbers that correspond to the parish missalettes.

## *Churches with Screens:*

- Consider using the screens for the order of worship, as long as they do not distract or take away from the liturgy. Ensure that the on-screen displays look professional, and that graphics are of top quality. If quality imagery is not available, keep the screens blank with text only. Ensure that your "Order of Worship Screen" team is well trained and has tested all equipment and slides before Mass begins.
- If your church building is conducive to overhead screens, consider utilizing them for scrolling announcements before Mass. This will alleviate the need to make some announcements during Mass. In addition, it will provide information to those people who may choose to leave early.



*Conclusion:*

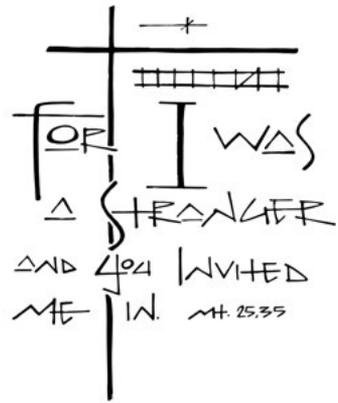
## Stewardship & Hospitality as a Way of Life

As the unprecedented changes to the Church in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic continue, the bottom line is that we — as the leaders of our parishes — must be willing and ready to adjust the way we do things. We must be prepared to welcome our fellow Catholics back home, and must especially find ways to evangelize and minister to all who walk through our doors. To say the least, this will be challenging. Some dioceses will still suspend public Masses and events for the time being. And some dioceses are beginning to lift some restrictions. But even in cases where public Masses and other activities are allowed to resume, there will still be extensive social distancing protocols in place. So, how do we connect with our parish family and make everyone feel welcome during these challenging times?

Many leaders in the Catholic Church, including Bishop Robert Barron, are expecting a resurgence of faith. For those Catholics who are already active, they are expected to be energized and ready to become more active than ever before. And for the fallen-away and lost Catholics, they are expected to start coming back to the Church as they turn back to Christ for a fresh start in the aftermath of this crisis. That is why, more than ever before, parish leaders must step up and guide these people as they begin or renew their journey of faith.

At the heart of this initiative, hospitality is critical. We must make everyone feel welcome, needed, and wanted. Every parish — starting at the top with the pastor, and on to the other clergy, parish staff, ministry leaders, and the faithful in the pews — must embrace this spirit of hospitality and evangelization, and must find ways to ensure that those who do come back to the Church never want to turn away again.

We may never again have a chance like this to help people come home into the arms of Christ. By living out our calling as Christian stewards — with a focus on the pillar of hospitality — we will all emerge from this dark time as a community of faith that is stronger than ever.



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Catholic Stewardship Consultants (CSC) is a Christ-centered consulting firm that provides customized stewardship services to Catholic parishes. We believe that the ultimate mission of the Church is to bring people into a living relationship with God and each other, through Jesus Christ. And we believe that the message of stewardship is essential in furthering that mission.

CSC works with parishes to establish a stewardship spirituality, beginning with current leaders. CSC helps educate parishioners, and then invite them to make commitments of time, talent, and treasure. The result is that parishioners are drawn into parish life and increase their financial giving. But the most important result is that parishioners grow closer to Jesus as they become better stewards.

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