

## Assisting Ministers' Advisory as of February 5, 2006

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this important position. In our church we affirm the priesthood of all believers, and we recognize in each other the call to ministry. Yet not everyone is comfortable standing before the congregation and leading a psalm or a prayer, and even those who have a talent for it may need the support and encouragement of their peers and pastors. In that spirit, here are some suggestions for discharging this responsibility in accord with the best practices that your colleagues have been able to determine.

1. Preparation. At some time during the week before the Sunday you have agreed to serve, contact Minister of Music Tim Strand, 612-331-5598, x. 14. Ask whether he has any special plans for this Sunday. Will there be a kyrie? A baptism? Should I prepare to chant a psalm? We adhere to the principle that you do NOT have to sing if you are uncomfortable doing so. Tim is a professional who can and gladly will take over singing duties. He will also work with you during the week to help you become familiar with the material. (Also, Administrator Craig Wiester will e-mail you a copy of the worship bulletin as soon as he has it ready.) Whatever you decide, the important thing is to be ready, confident and cheerful on Sunday morning.
2. Writing the prayer. There are several resources available to you: The lessons and Gospel (noted in the bulletin the week before, or available at the ELCA online); the basic prayer template for this week from "Sundays and Seasons," which Tim can provide; the list of special prayer concerns (who's sick, who's celebrating a marriage, who's in mourning, graduating, moving, etc.). Please note:
  - a) The lessons and Gospel need not necessarily figure into your prayer, but it is a good idea to read them before you write it. You may see opportunities for thematic unity, something we prize in worship.
  - b) Again, the template is a great resource when you need one, but you don't have to use it.
  - c) The prayer concerns are one of the few norms that you should be sure to observe. When a person has been identified by the staff, or has contacted the staff to request inclusion in the prayer, it can be a body blow to be left out. Be sure also to include anyone you personally know about, even if the staff hasn't identified him or her; you are the eyes and ears of the church.
  - d) Resist the temptation, though, to make announcements in the prayer. God already knows that Joe Johnson is in Methodist Hospital recovering from hip surgery. We simply pray for Joe Johnson, possibly asking for God's healing strength on his behalf. This also respects parishioners' privacy.
  - e) People are disappointed when we omit an opportunity for a personal petition. A good way is this: "... as well as those we name before you now, aloud or in our hearts." Then give people a good three or four seconds to do so.
  - f) It's a very good idea to make some reference to current events. As long as we're at war, it's appropriate to pray for the welfare of our men and women in uniform and for their safe return. Any time the week's news contains events that might prompt a Christian person to seek God's comfort, we

should be alert to the opportunity. Floods, hurricanes, fires in the neighborhood, impeachment, deaths of public leaders: all are topics to include. We should strive never to be partisan but always to be topical. We never want a suggestion of politics, beyond the broad-brush kind; we might acknowledge that war is a failure to live according to God's will for us, and beg forgiveness, but we should stop short of praying that God will help us depose the president who got us into this war. (For example.)

- g) All of this having been said, please bear in mind that we must be brief. Our research has shown that some in our congregation place a high value on worship being finished in an hour or less. We won't always make that goal. But it does prompt our pastors to strive to cut their sermons from 15 minutes to 10 or 11. We do not respect their effort when we eat up those minutes that they've saved with prayers that go on and on. A good structure for a prayer is four brief petitions, loosely defined as Creation (the season, the world, bounty, the big picture); Theme (some way in which the prayer relates to the day's texts); Topicality (current events), and Concerns (those we name before you). It's a good idea to have your text laid on the table where the presiding minister can see it and know when you're finished.
3. On Sunday morning, please arrive at least a half hour before the first service. Check in with the pastors for any last-minute instructions or prayer concerns. Read through the bulletin and look for anything denoted with an "A" – that's you. If you haven't served as assisting minister before, please check with the pastors about getting a robe that fits you. (Important note: The robe is forgiving of wardrobe eccentricities, but not of shoes; and during the summer, you can't count on having a robe at all. A little decorum is called for.)
  4. Usually you will lead the procession, carrying the cross. Hold it high. Wait to begin until the first verse of the processional hymn. Walk at a deliberate pace. When you arrive at the altar, pause briefly in reverence; then turn left and carry the cross to its stand beside the pulpit. Then go join the pastors.
  5. Do you have to wave your arms around? No. We're all over the map on this, so it would be good if we all agreed on a rationale for what we're doing when we extend our arms, and how. For now, think of it this way: When you are addressing the congregation – saying, for example, "Let us pray" – you are embracing them. It looks natural if you open your arms to them as if expecting several of them to run forward and hug you (don't worry, they won't). But then, when the prayer actually starts, you are addressing God, and lifting up our prayers. So it's appropriate then to raise your hands toward the ceiling. But **MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY OF THIS** is that you feel comfortable. If it is more natural to fold your hands in front of you, feel free to do that.
  6. During the offering, help to set the table, carrying the elements to the presiding minister for placement on the altar. Make sure you know ahead of time what you're serving. Usually it is bread. Be at the presider's side during the eucharistic liturgy, ready to commune the servers and acolytes. First, you and the presiding minister commune each other; then you move expeditiously along the line of servers, distributing bread. When you get to the end of that line, move immediately with your

bread to the head of the altar rail. Know in advance where you are going – left or right? Strive to be flexible, ready to react to whatever need may arise.

7. When you've finished communing everyone on your side of the altar rail, look around for opportunities to be helpful: Is there someone who's mobility-impaired out in the sanctuary? The pastors will know. If not, help clear the table, returning elements to the alcove.
8. During the recessional hymn, watch the pastors for your cue to go get the cross and recess. Generally it's during the last verse. Proceed as you would during a gospel procession (not covered here because it's season-specific): walk down the aisle to the point where the floor begins to slant upward, and then three steps more. Stop and turn. Wait for the pastor to finish the benediction, then deliver the sending message as printed in the bulletin (but learn it beforehand; you'll have no free hands to hold the bulletin).

Thank you for your attention to these specific directions. Here is one more, nonspecific direction: Show some joy. Praise the Lord. This is a wonderful gift, to be able to bring your energy and enthusiasm to worship and see it rub off on other people. We are happy to be here, in this beautiful sanctuary, among this community of believers, at the side of our dedicated and inspiring pastors, and we are confident in our salvation through our faith in Jesus Christ. So our leadership in worship should be just that: happy and confident. Rejoice!