

THE PARABLE OF THE USHERS*

Uttered by the Bishop of Bergenfield

It came to pass on a certain Sunday morning that some people were sent of God to attend a church. Because of its imposing structure and friendly exterior they selected South Church.

Mr. and Mrs. Early arrived at 10:50. There was one usher on hand. (There should have been four at 10:45.) This one usher was very busy in small talk with some friends and never noticed the new arrivals, who stood for a moment, slipped into the last pew and hoped they were in the right place.

Mr. and Mrs. Ontime and a child arrived at 10:57. There were now two ushers - but they were both at the same door discussing the television show of the night before. One of them rushed over to the arrivals. He dropped bulletins into their outstretched hands and retreated to resume his conversation. Mr. and Mrs. Ontime looked at each other, then looked about confusedly and finally selected a pew toward the rear of the east or west side.

10:59 - The church was now fairly well filled but there were good seats toward the front. Three ushers were present, but one door was still unattended. At this point Mrs. Newcomer arrived. Without a smile or a word of greeting an usher stiff-armed her with a bulletin and then stood there like a statue. Mrs. Newcomer stood on tiptoe and looked over the heads of the congregation to see where there was a seat available. Finally, timidly, she moved down an aisle, hoping not to attract too much attention.

11:05 - And Mr. Late arrived in a flurry of haste. Four ushers were now covering the doors - each with his eyes glued to the hymn book. Mr. Late walked down an aisle and slipped into a seat without a bulletin.

Now it came to pass that because some ushers of South Church did not come on time, did not seat people, (especially strangers) did not smile a welcome and often did not notify the chairman when they could not serve, the strangers formed unkind opinions of South Church which were somewhat modified by the orderliness with which the offering was received.

It further came to pass that after the service these people went back to their homes and talked over the back fence and by telephone. They said the church was beautiful, the service was nice, the choir was good, the sermon was tolerable, but they preferred a church that had ushers that ushered. And thus it was that they went not anymore to South Church.

LET HIM THAT USHERS REALLY USH.

*This parable was written and distributed by Fred H. Wirth, minister of Old South Church, Bergenfield, New Jersey.