

## Church Etiquette

Etiquette is defined as “**the customary rules for conduct or behavior in polite society.**” Church etiquette is the customary rules for conduct and behavior in a church of God. It falls into several broad categories:

### Honoring the Sanctuary

Our Lord said, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*” (Matthew 18:20)

- Pulpit - Only the minister or invited speakers are allowed to speak from the center pulpit. Only the minister, or persons authorized by the minister should ever be in the pulpit. Children should be taught at young ages that this is a sacred spot and can never be used as a play area.
- Communion Table - The Communion table is used for one of two holy sacraments (ceremonies or rites) of the United Methodist Church. Ministers and others who are in charge of the Communion service are the only persons permitted to use it. Personal items should never be placed on the Communion table.
- Maintaining Silence Before God - During the service, the congregation is expected to actively participate in worship. However, God’s house is a place for reverence and worship, not loud and idle conversations (between each other or on cell phones). Turn off cell phones and any other electronics. If you have a situation that requires you to keep your electronic device on, turn it on silent or vibrate and answer it outside if needed.
- Church Bibles and Hymnals - Bibles and Hymnals that are placed in pews are to be treated with care and respect. They should not be written on or used to dispose of gum. The bindings should be cared for; the spines of Bibles and Hymnals should be protected. They are the property of the church and should not be taken home by parishioners. Parishioners should let the church leadership know if Bibles and Hymnals are in need of repair.
- Treatment of the Pews - Pews are the benches that we sit in on Sundays and for other church services. We should treat them respectfully.
- Language that Honors God - Part of your commitment to God is to use language that honors God. Swearing in the sanctuary or any other part of the church is forbidden.
- Enter and Exit as Directed - Typically, you are not supposed to enter or leave the sanctuary during prayers, the reading of the Scripture or the sermon. You are also to remain in church until the closing *benediction* (final prayer of the service) has been said. There will be times when a person really needs to leave the sanctuary. When this occurs, please do so as discreetly as possible, with the least amount of disruption to the service and the least amount of distraction to your fellow brothers and sisters who are worshipping. The same holds true for re-entering the sanctuary. If you must leave the sanctuary during church service, do not pass in front of the pulpit.

The following times are usually good if one has to leave or re-enter the sanctuary:

- During a hymn.
- During the collection of the offerings.

If at all possible, a person **should not** leave or re-enter the sanctuary:

- During the opening of the worship service.

- During the reading of God's Holy Word.
- During a prayer.
- During the sermon.
- During the opening liturgy prior to the Lord's Supper.

There are, of course, a number of exceptions to all of the above.

- No Food, Beverages or Chewing Gum in the Sanctuary - This is another way of respecting the sanctity of God's house. Use of these items is too casual in church and runs the risk of ruining church property and wasting tithes made to God on repairs that would not otherwise be necessary. While the chewing gum rule is sometimes broken, its use should be kept to a minimum, and it should always be disposed of properly (not under pews, in Bibles or on other church property).

### **Honoring the Lord's Supper**

- Keeling at the communion rail – It is proper to kneel at the communion rail in reverence to the Lord for what He is about to give to us. For physical and medical reasons, some people cannot kneel for communion. The Lord certainly understands and so do we.
- Receiving the bread – Receive the bread (the host) by lifting up both hands and cupping them wide enough so the pastor can easily place the host on your hands. Do not take the host from the pastor's hand unless she/he offers the host to you.
- Receiving the cup – Receive the cup from the pastor. Only take the cup from the communion tray if it is offered to you.
- Remaining in church after receiving the Lord's Supper – It is improper to receive the Lord's Supper and then walk out of church! Would you eat a meal in a person's home and walk out of the house after eating the last bite without giving thanks for what you have received? We realize that some people may have to leave the divine service early to go to work. At the very least, please return from receiving the Lord's Supper and have a prayer of thanks in the pew before leaving.

### **Honoring the Church Building**

- Cleanliness is Next to Godliness - Be certain to keep the church clean as a way to honor God. After church classes or church meals, make certain that all chairs and tables are where they are supposed to be, and throw away all paper in trash bins. Clean up after yourself in the bathroom and cooperate with any other rules of the church sanitation staff.
- Eat Only Where It Is Allowed - Follow the church rules for eating in the church building.
- Keep the Outside of the Church Building Neat and Clean - The outside of the church reflects the inside of the church. Make certain that trash is picked up, that flowerbeds are tended, and that nothing unsightly mars the look of God's house.
- Treat Christian Symbols with Respect - Crosses and other Christian symbols around the church building are to be looked at, honored, and respected. We should not use them for other than their intended purposes.

Ultimately, we might mess up some of the above. But I think if we did, God would say the same thing we say at our house when somebody spills something: "No big deal." Because it's not about receiving the bread properly or leaving church early to get to work, it's about Christ.