

Ministry Visions Altar Ministers Handbook



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Altar Ministry Handbook

General Introduction

An Altar Minister is responsible for assisting those individuals who respond to an altar call from the pulpit during scheduled services. The assistance rendered by the members of the Altar Ministry will be in several areas and will include:

- Salvation
- Baptism in Water
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- Deliverance
- Prayer for specific situations
- Follow up with those prayed for
- Being good ambassadors of Christ in the Sanctuary

This assistance will be given at the altar in front of the pulpit, in the Chapel/Prayer Room, or in the baptistery area or other venues as directed.

This handbook will serve the purpose of presenting procedures, policies, and requirements for the conduct of the Altar Ministry and the actions of the individual members of the ministry. The objective of this document is to convey the directions of the Pastors of your church to this Altar Ministry and to permit each member to serve those who respond to the altar call in a uniform manner.

Becoming an Altar Ministry Member

- **Becoming a M**
- **ember** - Those who have a calling to be a part of the Altar Ministry should complete a standard Ministry Application Form and submit it to the Altar Ministry Director or Assistant Director. Approval of membership in the ministry is granted by the Pastoral staff, generally the Director of Ministries.

In order to be considered for the Altar Ministry, the person must have completed the Church Higher Learning Classes as follows.

1. Membership Classes
2. Spiritual Maturity Classes
3. Ministry Responsibility Classes

Altar Ministry Preparation

- **Spiritual Preparation** – Altar Ministers are encouraged to maintain a close relationship with the Word, continue an active prayer life which helps us maintain an attitude of prayer, and to use discernment so that the Holy Spirit may lead each person when ministering to those who respond.
- **Individual Scriptural Preparation** – Each member of the Altar Ministry should be knowledgeable of the scriptural basis for the areas listed above: salvation, baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit, deliverance, and for specific and individual needs. Scriptural preparation will come from each of our individual study of the Word. It may be wise to study the Bible by topics likely to be encountered at the altar: marriage, divorce, financial issues, depression, children and so forth. Certain suggested topics and associated scriptures are attached as an annex to this guide.

Training Classes – Each member of the Altar Ministry will attend a basic Training Class that will train them how to assist those responding to an altar call. The class will consist of instruction on the four basics: salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, water baptism and deliverance. The class will also include basics of the Altar Ministry. The class will provide scriptural basis for each subject and provide these

scriptural references for personal study by the individual. The result of the class is that we all will know Livingway Church instructions on these critical areas of ministry.

Additional Training Classes will be offered during the year, and Altar Ministers are encouraged to attend. The classes are designed to aid members in various aspects of this ministry.

Attendance Is Important and You Always Have Support

- **Attendance** – Your church has an altar service at each scheduled service. It is incumbent upon every member of the Altar Ministry to make every faithful effort to attend all of these services so that sufficient members are present to offer ministry to those who respond. The number of people who respond at any given service may be great or small, but we should always have a sufficient number of Altar Ministers present to accommodate the situation. Attendance is also a part of our spiritual preparation because we experience praise and worship, hear the preaching of the Word and approach our ministry in prayer.
- **Support within the Ministry** – Each member of the Altar Ministry is encouraged to seek the support of other members, if and when necessary. We will have unity in our purpose to help others in all the defined ministry areas of responsibility. Some Altar Ministers may be versed in areas of service or discernment or scripture that will permit them to offer guidance to other members when they consider it necessary. Some members are senior in their service and may offer assistance to those more junior. It is always appropriate to know when to seek assistance of other members when a special situation may arise. We are all here for each other and ultimately here for the people who are in need of our assistance in ministry.

Altar Ministry Organization and Areas of Service

- **Altar Ministry Organization** – The Altar Ministry is organized with a Director as the ministry leader, two Altar Captains (at present), a Baptistery Captain and Baptistery Assistant. The Director will be responsible for the activities of the Altar Ministers during the altar calls. The Altar Captains will assist the Director with these responsibilities.
- **Areas of Assistance** – There are several areas that are available to the members of the Altar Ministry: ambassador, birthday greetings, benevolence and food ministry, Chapel/Prayer Room leader, events coordinator, and others to be named as they may become evident. You are encouraged to participate and indicate your desire to do so by contacting an Altar Ministry Director.

Altar Ministry and the Pastor's Sermon

- **Be Attentive and Diligent** – The sermon is the key because the sermon content is the reason that most people respond to the altar. Altar Ministers are encouraged to pay very close attention to the sermon and note the key points that may be the basis for a person's needs and for your prayer for the responder.
- **Make note of Scriptures and Text** - Be prepared to offer scriptures to the responder that the Pastor referenced in his sermon. Write down the scriptures so that the exact text may be provided if the situation dictates.

Conduct of the Altar Call

- **Altar Ministers to be Alert to the Call** – Altar Ministers should be particularly attentive to the specifics of the altar call issued by the Pastor.

The Pastor, for example, may issue a call specifically for salvation, for baptism or for some specific circumstance. Members should know the specifics of the Pastor's invitation.

- **Those who Respond will approach the Altar** – It is the specific desire of the Pastors that members of the Altar Ministry immediately move forward to stand behind each person who responds. It is desirable that each person who responds should have an Altar Minister member behind them as soon as possible when they arrive at the altar. Do not wait; move quickly to the altar.
- **Respond to Directors** – There are times when the Director or Altar Captain may gesture to a member of the ministry to come forward to be with one who responds. This circumstance requires that the Altar Minister be aware of this possibility by being observant. Altar calls are large in some cases, and individual members may not see where they may be needed. All Altar Ministers should be aware of the needs at the altar, so they should not hesitate to gesture to the Directors, Altar Captains, or even other ministry members, to help when appropriate.
- **Gender Sensitivity** – Whenever possible, men should minister to men and women to women. Altar Ministers standing behind responders should observe this courtesy. There may be occasions when there is a question of gender. In this case, continue ministering to the person so as to avoid any embarrassment. If a gender mistake is made, the Altar Minister may want to focus on the issue of salvation.
- **Age Sensitivity** - Where possible, we urge the young people in the Altar Ministry to minister to people close to their age. This is not to preclude any member of any age ministering to any responder of any age; however, we may be more effective if age sensitivity is observed.

- **Pray for Discernment** - It is appropriate for you to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in determining how to pray for the person you stand behind and wait for the Pastor to approach and minister to the person.
- **Children with the Responder** - Children come forward with parents sometimes because there is no one to watch them in the seating area. Children may be a distraction for the person responding, so the Altar Minister may want to motion to a Director for assistance. In this case, we have people designated to help with children. There are also times when the adult brings the child forward for prayer, so we must be sensitive to the situation.
- **Adults with the Responder** – There are occasions when an adult brings another adult to the altar or when an adult accompanies an adult to the altar. The Altar Minister will gently suggest that they be the one to pray with the person since the church designates Altar Ministers to assist those who respond. This can be a delicate situation, so each case must be handled with care and diplomacy.
- **Large Altar Calls** – Many times there are very large numbers of people that respond to the altar calls, and sometimes the numbers exceed the number of members of the Altar Ministry. In these cases, Altar Ministers are urged to go to another person as they complete their prayers with the one they are with. There may also be times when it is necessary to pray for more than one person at a time. We call this grouping for prayer. The Altar Director and or Captains will assist with this process. We will also use choir members to assist people and also selected people from the congregation. Altar Ministers are asked to stay aware of the situation as much as possible to help accommodate large numbers of people at the altar.

Ministering to Those Who Respond

- **Wait For the Pastor** – Altar Ministers should wait behind the person until the Pastor has the opportunity to personally lay hands on and minister to the responder. We must remember that the Pastor has a special anointing and that the Words he delivers also have the anointing. The responder normally comes forward to have the Pastor lay hands upon him or her.
- **As the Pastor Approaches** – The Altar Minister will discreetly step back a short distance as the Pastor moves to the proximity of the responder so that the ushers may move in behind the person in order to catch him/her if they are overcome by the Holy Spirit.
- **Pastor's Discernment** – The Pastor has the discernment to know how he will minister and to whom. Ushers are keenly aware of whom the Pastor has ministered to and to whom he has not. They will discreetly inform the Pastor of anyone he may not have prayed with. If the person you are with has not had personal contact with the Pastor, inform an usher or gesture to an Altar Captain, and they will in turn gesture or tell the Pastor about that person. It is not appropriate for the Altar Minister to take the responder directly to the Pastor.
- **Ministering to the Responder** - After the Pastor has ministered to the person, the Altar Minister is to move in front of the person to minister to them. At this time, members should be confident that the Holy Spirit is with them and that they will be led to offer the person the prayer they need. Remember there is no one way or set way to pray for someone. Each member must have confidence that God will hear his/her prayer. The Altar Minister may want to give their name to the responder. There are times when you may want to ask if you may pray for a specific need; then there are times when it may be correct to pray more general prayers. This must be

left up to the individual Altar Minister. There may be displays of emotion as the Holy Spirit moves, so it is always correct to yield to the Holy Spirit and wait for the right time to pray or speak to the person. There are some who respond that have never experienced the Holy Spirit. Members must be keen to this situation and act accordingly.

- **The Four Basics** – Remember that we are to be particularly aware that the responder may need to be led to salvation, receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized in water, and in some cases, need deliverance.
 - 1) We always should ask if salvation is an issue (unless we know the person and know that he/she is saved) and be prepared to lead the responder to salvation. If the person wants salvation at the altar, it is appropriate to gesture to an Altar Ministry Director or Captain, who will inform the Pastor. It may be that the Pastor would return to that person at the altar and lead them to Christ.
 - 2) If a responder wishes to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, you should gesture to an Altar Captain or Director as there are senior ministers and even ordained ministers that come forward to assist. This does not mean that you cannot lead the person yourself; rather, it just gives you the option of notifying the Altar Ministry Director or Captain, who can call on the Pastor or an ordained minister.
 - 3) If the responder desires water baptism, then call upon an Altar Ministry Director or Captain for assistance. The Pastor may want to inform the congregation about this decision, and then you will escort the person to the baptistery and help coordinate this activity.
 - 4) Deliverance circumstances require special consideration. If a person requests deliverance or you suspect that this is the issue, call upon the

Altar Ministry Director or Captain who will call upon the Pastor or an ordained minister if possible to handle these situation. There are always exceptions to these guidelines because there are so many special situations. The key is to always use very good judgment and to ask others for assistance any time there is a question as to the appropriate actions.

- **Listen Carefully** - There are many who respond that will speak freely about their special needs. We should be prepared to offer our effective prayers to them for that situation and offer scriptures if possible. The appendix to this guide has a list of suggested scriptures for the Altar Minister to study and use when appropriate.

Chapel/Prayer Room

- **Offer the Chapel/Prayer Room** – When possible, you should offer to escort the responder to the Chapel/Prayer Room for prayer and privacy. Please note that the offer of the Chapel/Prayer Room is an invitation and not an opportunity to coerce someone to the prayer room. The offer should include indicating that the setting will be more comfortable for them and should provide an atmosphere for you to become familiar with their needs in a more intimate way. This Chapel/Prayer Room is a place where you may point out scriptures from the Bible, offer literature on various subjects, which is available in the prayer room, and to fill out the forms about their response. We should also consider the possibility of emphasizing points of the Pastor's sermon at this time if appropriate. Filling out of forms should be done with consideration of the person so that we do not make an administrative atmosphere out of a spiritual atmosphere. We must be aware that in the prayer room the person may then wish to receive salvation, baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit, or deliverance. Altar Ministers should be prepared for this in the Chapel/Prayer Room. It is still appropriate to ask for

assistance if you think you should. You may ask for assistance by asking an Altar Ministry Director or Captain.

- **Chapel/Prayer Room Conduct** – We should limit our time with the responder to approximately ten minutes. If more time is required and additional issues are to be addressed, then we will direct that person to contact the church office in the next few days. If there is anything out of the ordinary or an uncomfortable situation arises, summon assistance at that time. Do not wait! Altar Ministers do not provide monetary assistance, offers of transportation, offers of shelter, or other material items or services. These requirements will be directed to the church office. Be prepared with the church phone number, hours of operation, and address so that you may pass this on if necessary.
- **Chapel/Prayer Room Paperwork** – As stated, paperwork is secondary to spiritual work. The individual and the church both benefit from the completion of the Report Forms, which includes the opportunity for the person to indicate if they would like a follow-up call from the person ministering to them. Paperwork specifics will be covered in a separate section.
- **Short Form** – There may be times when taking a responder to the prayer room is not feasible due to several reasons. We would still want to record salvations and baptisms in the Holy Spirit even if we do not take the responder to the prayer room so there are short forms at the front pew that we may use. If we decide to use the short form, simply direct the person to sit down on the center front pew and there the information may be collected. You may ask a director or captain to assist if you deem necessary.
- **Counseling** - Altar Ministers are aware that there are differences between prayer and counseling. If it seems that a person may need counseling, we

are to direct them to the church office at a later time. We should direct our efforts toward the positive aspects of prayer, the power of the Scriptures and thus avoid personal advice.

Baptism Procedures

- **Baptizers** - There are several men that are authorized to perform water baptism. They position themselves in the baptistery at each service in anticipation that there will be those who wish to be baptized in water.

- **Baptistery Captain** – A senior Altar Minister will serve as the Baptistery Captain. The Baptistery Captain will be provided with a Baptistery Assistant. This person will be responsible for all activities pertaining to the Baptistery area. Certain tasks that this person will supervise are:
 1. The physical condition of the baptistery
 2. The condition and temperature of the water
 3. The availability and cleanliness of robes
 4. The availability of forms and certificates
 5. The orderly conduct of the activities in the baptistery
 6. The expeditious conduct of baptism
 7. The communication with the altar area as to the number and progress of the baptism process
 8. The coordination with Altar Ministers in the baptistery

The Baptistery Captain will be the authority regarding special needs to include the physical condition of an individual requesting baptism. We are to avoid any embarrassing situation by proper handling and communication. The Baptistery Captain will arrive at a time appropriate prior to each service so that we may insure the operational condition of

this most important area. Most importantly is that a spiritual atmosphere befitting this service be maintained.

- **Altar Ministers and Baptism** - The Altar Minister ministering to those who desire to be baptized will escort them to the baptistery, assist with dressing rooms, towels and dryers, and other requirements of the individual as may be necessary. They also fill out forms and fill out or assist in the filling out of baptismal certificates. At present, each member should be trained in the baptismal procedures so they will be able to effectively minister to the responders as they are baptized. There are members in the baptistery as well as the Baptistery Captain to assist you in learning these procedures. Each Altar Minister must be sensitive to the nature of this activity both spiritually and the physical. The Altar Minister should be certain that the person's modesty is protected as they offer personal assistance. Altar Ministers should also be aware of the responsibility for the security of personal belongings.
- **The 16 Rule** - Persons under sixteen will require a parent or guardian to approve of them being baptized in water. There is a form that is filled out indicating the approval of the adult.
- **Babies** – The church does not baptize babies as there is no scriptural basis for this procedure.

The Report Forms

- **Knowledge of Ministry Procedures** – Altar Ministry members should be aware that there are certain administrative procedures that will be followed that involve the collection of information from those who respond.
- **Filling out the Report Form** – When we take someone to the Chapel/Prayer Room, we will complete the Report Form, which contains

information such as name, address, phone number, and other pertinent information, which is self-explanatory. As stated previously, the completion of any paperwork in the Chapel/Prayer Room is secondary to the spiritual work and discretion should be observed. Fill out the forms only with permission. The Report Form will be filled out on those people who are baptized also. After leaving the prayer room or baptistery, turn in the white and yellow copies to an Altar Ministry Director. These forms are used to collect data for a monthly report required by the Pastor's office.

Follow-up by Altar Ministers

- **Ask Permission to Follow-Up** – As you fill out the Report Form in the prayer room or in the baptistery, you should ask if the person would like a follow-up call for additional prayer on the telephone. If they do, then you will retain the pink copy of the Report Form that has the contact information.
- **Record Key Points** – Write down the on the form the substance of your conversation and any other pertinent information about your visit so your follow-up may have continuity with your original visit.
- **Calling the Responder** – Make every good faith effort to contact the person. Make no more than three attempts so that it does not seem that we are trying too hard to make the contact. Be sure not to reveal your telephone number, address, or any other personal information because at this point we may not know a lot about this person. If you do make contact, you should offer prayer, scriptural assistance, encouragement, and the invitation to return to Livingway on a regular basis. If there is any unusual conversation or requests made that are beyond your capability, have the person contact the church office. Be sure to always be up to date on what is happening at the church so you may inform the person of the correct ministry to contact.

Make a detailed notation of contact and content of the contact, or the fact that you did not make contact, on the pink copy of the Report Form.

- **Turn in a Copy of the Form** – When completed, a copy of the Report Form should be turned into a Director of the Altar Ministry. These are kept on file in the church office.

Growing the Ministry

- **Your Church is Growing** – We all know the great plans for the growth of your Church. In this last year, the ministry has grown by some measure from the level of the previous year. Considering that our sanctuary seats over xxxx people, and desiring to offer the same level of service as presently offered, means that the Altar Ministry will need a minimum of xxx people. Altar Ministers are encouraged to bring the names of prospective members to the attention of the Altar Ministry Director. Keep in mind that many in the ministry serve in other capacities, such as ushers, choir members, and in other ministries. All of us must contribute in every way we can.

Notes:

