OP-ART BEN SCHOTT

Usher Signals

Ushers perform a central ministry in churches of all denominations. They welcome, seat and assist congregants, helping to create an environment conducive to worship. Often following in the footsteps of their parents, ushers are guided by Psalm 84:10:

I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness

Many ushers communicate during services using a sequence of hand signals called the "National Silent Uniform System."

Devised by George T. Grier in the 1940s, these signals have gradually evolved. And they are still taught to hundreds of volunteers each year by the National United Church Ushers Association of America, which, this week, holds its 95th convention. Below are the (simplified) central elements of some of the N.U.C.U.A.A. hand signals.

SERVICE POSITION

This "mark of distinction" is adopted by ushers upon entering the sanctuary. It is the default ushering position from which other signals start.





GREETING SIGNAL

Visitors are welcomed with a warm smile and an open hand.



ATTENTION SIGNAL

This alerts other ushers that a signal is about to be communicated.



PRAYER POSITION





USHERS TO TAKE THEIR STATIONS









AISLE USHER SIGNS

Aisle ushers sign requests to the usher in charge:



Relief



Programs



Envelopes



Fans

DOORKEEPER SIGNS

Bending an arm through the partially closed door, the doorkeeper signals why those outside must wait before entering the sanctuary:

Scripture

Prayer



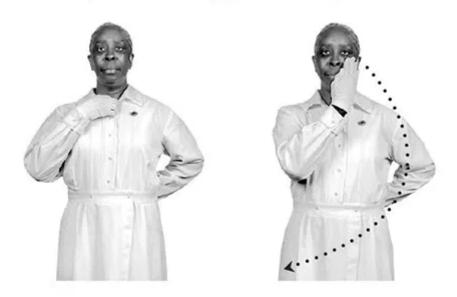
Other



AVAILABLE SEATS

The usher in charge asks all the aisle ushers

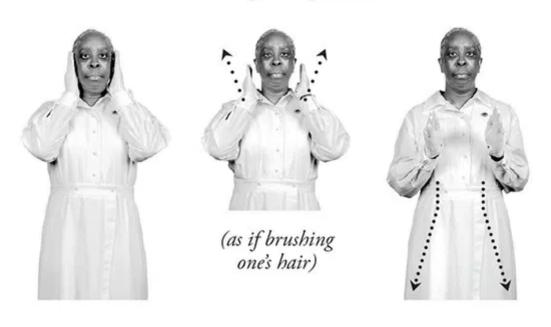
to signal how many free seats they have:



The aisle ushers respond with the number:

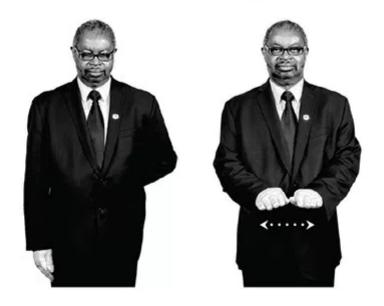


DISTRESS SIGNAL Used to signal a problem.



COMMENCE THE OFFERING

The usher in charge signals the offering with a nod and a slight spreading of the hands.



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Ben Schott is a contributing columnist for The New York Times and the author, most recently, of "Schottenfreude: German Words for the Human Condition."