

Platform Decorum And Mediumship

BY THE REV. PAMELA K. WARD, NST

Editor's note: Recently *TNS* has received some questions about platform decorum, and noticed in the Church newsletters received that a couple of churches have had classes about decorum. With this in mind I felt it might be timely to combine and reprint this article written in the September and October 1988 issues of *TNS*, by the Rev. Pamela K. Ward, NST, who is now in the Spirit World.

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In the Spiritualist religion, as with all religions, there are differences in the various churches. This does not apply to the Philosophy but rather to the style of the church and therefore the service. Each church has its own needs and furnishings available. Some of our services are held in private homes while others have large sanctuaries. But we all have one goal in common—to have the best service possible.

In order to accomplish this, you may wish to hold a special class in Platform Decorum, and to make it even more interesting for the students, add Platform Mediumship for the second part of each session. The students get a lot out of the class and enjoy it too.

Plan the classes to study one area of platform work at each session. This gives enough time to cover the subject and have discussion about each one. Then go into the mediumship portion. You may work with psychometry of various objects, photographs and articles that the students bring in. You may want to blindfold one student and let him/her read for another, not knowing who he/she is reading for. Each student should then get a turn at working from the lectern. This will be the first time for many of them to address people from the platform and it is very good experience. It also relieves some of the tension before that first time to work at a service.

The information used is divided into the following sessions. Many of you will have different ideas and some of them will work better for you. Realize that the needs of each church must be considered. Some of this information would be useless to some and inadequate to others. You must keep in mind that flexibility is the key to making this class work for your church.



GENERAL APPEARANCE

Usually when people go to church they try to look their best. But we each have a different idea of what looks good for our service workers and time may see our workers trying less and less. Because of this, a dress code is usually suggested for those who are serving in the service.

The general preference is ladies in dresses and gentlemen in a jacket and tie. You will find that some churches with evening services may request long dresses for the ladies. A church with a raised platform may also require long dresses for obvious reasons. Some of our churches request wearing robes for their services.

When your church board sets a dress code, then it is your responsibility to adhere to the rule. It is also the responsibility of a church that requires a special dress code to inform all guest ministers, in advance, as to what is expected of them.

Your appearance is a reflection of your respect and reverence for Spiritualism. If you are serving the platform, you are representing your religion in a public manner.

Your church may have a different dress code for midweek services than for Sundays. Wednesday evening services are considered less formal in our church. While the dress code remains the same, students are given the opportunity to lecture and give spirit greetings. We maintain the same standards because we feel that people who attend a midweek service deserve as much from us as the Sunday guests.

It may be preferable for Ushers and Healers, even though they do not take a seat on the platform, to also follow the code. Our church is in the south and the hot weather makes for very uncomfortable healers. Again, conform to your needs.

No matter what the dress code may be, there are a few things that simply must be followed. Noisy jewelry such as bracelets or earrings have no place on the platform. Chewing gum is another complete "NO-NO". It is also suggested that you avoid slang words or phrases. It helps to not make a habit of using slang at all. It may slip out when you least want it to.

Ladies should wear make-up in good taste. Some of the lighting will completely

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wash out your features. But don't get carried away. Be yourself and use with good taste.

Gentlemen should make sure that their hair is neatly trimmed and combed. Jewelry is a nice touch for men. It gives a look of caring, and effort being made to look your best.

Men and women should wear colors that are pleasing to the eye. All colors are good. If it seems drab, brighten it up with a scarf or tie of a more exciting color. Stay away from a busy print in a large piece of cloth though. Too much excitement is difficult to look at for too long. Busy jackets and dresses should be avoided.

Most of all, stand straight and proud. Know you are there to do service for your church and Infinite Intelligence. Be reverent without being stiff. Complete this with a beautiful, caring "smile" and you have the proper appearance for a good Spiritualist service.

ORDER OF SERVICE

A guideline for the Order of Service is helpful and a simple form can be typed and then copied for the Platform Chairperson to follow. Other people involved in the service should know exactly what their jobs are, so nothing is left unfinished before the service begins. The following suggestions may be adapted to your service.

Pastor positions himself/herself near the entrance to greet the guests upon arrival.

Organist plays the prelude the last five to ten minutes before the service begins.

Ushers hand out programs and assist any who need help to be seated.

Platform workers enter and take their places on the platform.

Platform Chairperson leads the following:

Open the service with a welcome, and acknowledge any special visitors.

Congregation stands to sing the opening hymn and for the invocation, delivered by the platform chairperson or minister.

All are seated.

Open the Healing portion of the service by asking the congregation to join in the Healing Prayer. They are then lead into a healing meditation while soft music is played either on a recording or musical instrument. Those wanting the laying on of hands are told when to go to the healing area. Ushers help if needed and dim the lights if preferred.

Gently bring the congregation out of meditation and acknowledge those who worked as healing ministers.

Recitation of the Declaration of Principles.

Stand for the Hymn selected as suitable for the subject of the lecture.

Introduction of Speaker, kept short with acknowledgement of credentials.

Speaker: Topic to be inspiring and include guidance, knowledge, love and

reverence, kept within the time limit.

Platform Chairperson must watch the time. At the conclusion of the lecture, *very briefly* thank the speaker.

Announce the love offering and have the Ushers come forward. A blessing prayer may be given before or after the offering is taken.

Announcements: keep them short, there are usually many of them. Committee Chairpersons should go to the person in charge (Pastor-Program Chairperson) so the announcements can be prearranged.

All stand for the hymn, selected to build vibrations for the message portion.

Introduce the message minister(s) in order of appearance.

Message Minister: Short spirit greetings for the time allowed.

Platform Chairperson: Congregation to stand for the closing hymn and the benediction (delivered either by the Platform Chairperson or the Pastor, which should be determined prior to coming to platform).

Speaker and Message Minister: may go to the exit door during the closing hymn to greet the congregation as they leave the sanctuary.

Fellowship if offered.

PLATFORM CHAIRPERSON

Many times the Platform Chairperson and the Pastor are one in the same. But even if they are not, these are the two people who must arrive early. They are responsible for seeing that many things are taken care of and that the needs of the congregation are met. It is very helpful to have a list of the duties of the Platform Chairperson. Some of the items on this list may include: Flowers, Hymn selections, Announcements, Speaker, Message Ministers, Drinking water for Platform workers, Selection of Ushers, Healing Ministers, and Healing Water and paper towels.

Some of these jobs may be lined up by a special committee. It is always good to make sure that all your workers have remembered to be there and have not had a last minute emergency.

Know your order of service and make small changes if you like. A variety can be a nice change and can work to help raise the vibrations.

The Platform Chairperson sets the pace for the entire service. It is a very important job. Do all you can to keep the vibrations as pleasing as possible with reverence. Flowers and singing always raise the vibrations, but a smile can do more than all the rest together. Don't look like someone made you do this against your wishes. Be honored to be there and show it with your expression.

Watch for special occasions to do something different for the day, i.e. hymns, prayers, announcements, etc. However, announcing personal birthdays and anniversaries, unless it is a

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very special one, should be avoided. Realize that it can go into a lot of time and may be difficult to keep up with. It could cause hurt feelings if someone is forgotten.

The Invocation and Benediction should be kept to a moderate length. We have all witnessed prayers that seemed longer than the lecture. It is always better when prayers are inspirational. Try to include a request for guidance for the service workers.

The introduction to the Healing Meditation should be as smooth and relaxing as possible. It is not the time to stumble over words or try some new idea without thinking it out. Be practical though. You don't want to get so pre-planned that Spirit is unable to work with you.

Watch the clock to tell workers if they are going over-time. Some churches record all the sermons given at the services on cassette tapes. It is important that the sermon ends before the tape so the closing remarks are included. Message ministers may be in a deep attunement and need to be told when their time is up. A nice way to do this is to say, "Just time for one more, please."

Realize your responsibility for correcting any conflict of philosophy given by the other workers. Because of this one point, it is good to have the more experienced church workers for the Platform Chairperson's position.

Do all you can to assist the other workers and see to their needs before they are even aware they need them. If you make your co-workers and the congregation feel welcomed and that you are pleased they came, you have done your job well.

In order to have well organized and informative services, we need well trained platform workers. A Platform Decorum and Mediumship class is very helpful. We cannot expect our services to present Spiritualism in the best light without an order to follow.

The first part of the classes will let our workers know what is expected of them. The second part of each class could then be devoted to mediumship with emphasis on public messages delivered from the platform.

HEALING MINISTERS

This class is not intended to teach all about Spiritual Healing. It is impossible to do in only one class. Much more time is required, and a complete course in healing should be offered at another time with encouragement to take the Morris Pratt Course.

Healing Ministers should go to the healing room or area before the service. Although it is normally taken care of by the Platform or Healing Chairperson, it is a good idea to check on water and paper towels, healing stools/chairs, music, etc. Vibrations in the healing room or area are important. Keep conversation to a minimum.

Don't forget to wash your hands *before* you begin healing. We all come in contact

with a lot of different objects and people before a service. Different odors can collect on our hands and they may be offensive to the sitters.

Everyone who works in the service should be careful not to over perfume themselves, but this is most important to a Healing Minister. Some people are allergic to perfumes and others who have respiratory problems may find it difficult to breathe.

This is a good time to remind our workers of local laws that affect Spiritual Healing. Spiritual Healers do not diagnose or prescribe. It is often suggested that contact not be made with the physical body below the shoulders, except for holding the hands. Be careful not to massage. The hands must be lifted when moving from one position to another where contact is allowed.

Prayers should be silent. Elaborate displays, motions and emotions are discouraged. Take time for proper attunement. Remember, God is the ultimate source of healing, you are the channel. Proper attunement is necessary for good results. Achieve peace and quiet. Ask your healing guides for direction and assistance.

Have confidence that healing will occur. Be positive in your thinking. See the person well and in harmony with Natural Law.

Never let a recipient think that Spiritual Healing should take the place of medical healing. Let them know they work best together.

At the close of the healing session, give your sitter some sign that the healing has come to an end. It can be a phrase such as, "God go with you" or "God bless you." It should be short and spoken softly so you do not disturb the other healers. Give a prayer of thanks to Infinite Intelligence and your healing guides.

Leave the healing area clean and neat for the next session. This can be done before you leave the room or area or after the service.

Being a Healing Minister is a very responsible position. Treat it and the sitters with respect. Be reverent in your conduct.

THE SERMON

Your appearance and presentation will have a lot to do with the receptivity of the content of your speech. Refer to the section on General Appearance.

Presentation is very important. A good sermon can be lost with poor presentation. It is generally accepted that experienced speakers use few or no notes at all. I must say though, some of the best sermons I have heard were read completely.

Some people receive their best inspiration in writing. If you work best this way, make sure to prepare your material in advance. Then go over it aloud several

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times so you know it well enough to get a nice flow to the words.

A good way to deliver a sermon and not lose continuity of subjects is to write key words or topics on an index card. Then you can go from one idea to the next without stumbling or searching for the next idea. Remember, don't play with the notes.

There are many inspirational speakers in our churches. Some are good, many are not. Be fair to Spirit, the congregation and yourself. Try several each way, then ask a few people who are at liberty to give you their opinion. There is nothing wrong in relying on your own knowledge. This is also of God.

A member of the congregation told me recently that she always shuddered when the speaker began his/her sermon, "While on the way here this morning, I was deciding on the subject for today's service." The Boy Scouts of America have a great motto, "Be Prepared."

Know your subject so you can present it with confidence. Be enthusiastic about it and then show your enthusiasm with hand gestures and volume of speech. A monotonous voice is hard to concentrate on after the first five minutes.

Be aware of the time limit of the sermon you are to deliver. If you use a prepared sermon, go over it, shorten or lengthen it to fit the time given. If you work inspirationally, ask your guides to keep you within the time allowed. But, remember, you are in charge. It is your responsibility to serve in the manner that has been agreed upon.

Select a subject that is educational, uplifting, inspiring and has something to do with Spiritualism and Infinite Intelligence. We have all heard sermons that never mention Spirit, Spiritualism or God. While these sermons were of a self-help nature, the church is a place to also be reminded of the God within us and our brothers and sisters.

At the end of the sermon, give a brief summary of the ideas you would like remembered. These will probably be remembered best.

MESSAGE MINISTER

Many of our guests visit our churches for the first time for a spirit message. It is important then for the message ministers to do a good job in their delivery and to prove that part of our philosophy which pertains to the continuity of life.

Know your time limit and order of working if there is more than one medium to serve at the service. You should know this *before* you enter the sanctuary.

A hymn will usually precede the Spirit Greetings. This is a perfect time for good attunement. You may also want to say a silent prayer. Attunement and prayer are preferably done before you take your place at the lectern.

Realize that you are there for Spirit and be happy to do it. Spirit communication is a beau-

tiful experience and should be reflected in your facial expressions. We have all seen mediums working who look like they do not want to be there. If you didn't want to be a public medium, don't accept the appointment. If you do want it, make it from the heart and enjoy it. Smile, love and be happy.

If you are there for Spirit, then it follows that spirit identification is important. I recently heard a medium who gave spirit identity to one out of eight messages delivered. If the message is from a spirit entity, that entity deserves to be identified to the sitter. Isn't the purpose of spirit communication to prove the continued existence and individuality after the change called death? It is lazy and careless mediumship that does not include spirit identification.

Keep your messages short. Remember, Spirit Greetings are just that, greetings, not readings.

The content of the messages should be, of course, what you receive from Spirit. But deliver the message in a positive way. Nothing sounds and feels worse than one negative message after another. Be careful of your wording, there is always a nice way to say something or a positive side to see. *Don't color the message.*

Be careful with personal information that is delivered in public. Not everything has to be said for the concept to get across.

Some mediums seem to be totally unaware of anything they are doing while giving messages. It seems as though some of the frills that they wear distract or bother them once they are attuned to spirit. This applies to jewelry, pocket change and even shoes! Please discourage student mediums from doing a mini-strip at the lectern.

Speaking of pocket change and jewelry, it should be noted that these items can become a "toy to play with" along with anything else that may be on the lectern. This is very distracting for the congregation and gives a very poor image of our workers. Can you imagine a fine speaker being preoccupied with a paper clip, or even worse, a rubber band?

Try not to point at the person you want to give a greeting to. It is better to identify them by the color they are wearing or the seat or row they occupy.

Lastly, stand straight and proud with respect for the congregation and Spirit. Keep behind or close to the lectern. Speak up nice and loud, even if the message is for someone sitting close to you. If the rest of those present cannot hear you, they will find things to discuss among themselves and this can be most distracting for everyone, especially you.

Many of the first-time visitors come to our services with preconceived ideas that are erroneous. They should leave the service feeling inspired and respectful of Spiritualism.

There are many people involved in a

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Decisions

and



Balance

The complete life brings a balance to the individual; a balance of body, mind and spirit manifest in all situations. This is a part of the science of Spiritualism in bringing a scientific principle to bear on a spiritual matter.

To enjoy a complete life, we have recognized our need to earn a material living, to provide a proper home for ourselves and our family, to supply food for the table, and, when unencumbered by too much materialism, a recognition of our need for spiritual enlightenment and growth. As an obvious recognition of our needs, we have identified food and shelter, but when these are pursued without any recognition of spiritual matters, they leave a life flat and uninspired.

Spiritualism teaches as a Religion, Philosophy and Science, balance in all things: body, soul/mind, and spirit. There is a time for work, a time for play, a time for sleep. All cycles in human behavior have a balance.

The balance of the individual is in taking care of the body through proper food and exercise to bring a clear mind and virtue to the soul. Let us recognize that each is an individual, and an over emphasis on a slim, sleek body brings to the mind an imperfect focus, the same as a complete lack of care for the body does. The Source of Life created the tall and the short, the slim and the fat. Therefore, a true recognition of each individual is also necessary. As we strive to be

the best we can be, we must also recognize the God part in others.

Filling the mind with all manner of education brings a balance of understanding on many subjects. Keeping an open mind to other's beliefs and ideas is necessary for soul growth. In life, all things must balance, for that is Natural Law.

Spiritualism recognizes that human spiritual growth is a quest, a progressive journey, an evolution and challenge throughout a lifetime. Therefore, no perfection is possible, and therefore, no judgement can be applied. Jesus once said to a mob: "He who is without sin, cast the first stone." Could we do better than to adopt such an open, loving concept to our brothers and sisters in life?

If we are aware of life's possibilities, each waking hour contains the possibilities for growth and understanding, physically, materially, as well as spiritually. Each of us is programmed with the seed of potentiality; we have the capacity to be what we wish to be, through our own effort and will. Let's make each day the first day of the rest of our lives!

Spiritually speaking, we can look for the understanding of spirit and the message for our own soul. We can handle all of life's opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities and yes, even its discouragements, for we understand the Natural Law of Balance.

To know the power of Spirit within, is to know the power of the Spirit of God. We can do that which we wish to do; be all that which we wish to be. The responsibility for this understanding is within ourselves.

To bring balance to our life, we must believe "I can" rather than "I can't"; there is never an "I can't" in balance. It is more a matter of trying to succeed, grow, then we evolve.

There are really only four choices of decisions we have to make on all aspects and challenges of life: 1. I will, 2. I won't, 3. Maybe, I'll think about it, 4. I change my mind. There is really only a choice of two reasons for your decision. They are "I want to" or "I don't want to." No excuses, no justifications are necessary. It is enough to want to or not want to. You are now making decisions for your own life; you are empowering your own decision-making capabilities.

Let's be sensitive to the needs of the fellow travelers on this path of understanding. Can we help a fellow creature with a kind word or deed and in so doing, help them to understand the meaning of balance? Can we open avenues of growth to all we meet, so their path can be made smooth and their burden lighter?

When we understand Spirit's message to all humanity, we can no longer turn our back on need and suffering. Let's all be born again to spirit understanding!



PLATFORM DECORUM AND MEDIUMSHIP *(Continued from previous page.)*



service and each one must do his/her part well. A really good service looks like a well rehearsed ballet where everyone knows the steps and performs them at the proper time.

It is our responsibility, each one of us, to create the image we can be proud of. We want our churches and religion to grow. We want our membership to increase. People will return if they see knowledgeable and loving people enjoying the truth of Spiritualism. ♥