

“Noisy Narthex?”

Dear Antwort Mann,

I really don't want to complain, but there are times when I can't concentrate on the Service because I'm distracted by the noise of conversation taking place in the narthex. I know the ushers and elders do important and helpful work, but shouldn't they be taking part in worship too, instead of socializing in the narthex?

Signed,

“Rattled”

Dear “Rattled,”

You are right that the ushers and elders do important work. They make sure people are welcomed when they arrive, offer a hand to those who may need assistance, and take care to see that people are given the bulletins so they can take part in the Divine Service. They also make sure that the sermon is recorded so it can be uploaded to the church's website and played on the radio. The work of the ushers and elders helps things run more smoothly for those who come to church.

But you are also right that they, too, are to be worshippers. Being an elder or usher doesn't exempt one from the need to hear God's Word, confess his sins and receive the absolution, and to lift his voice in praise to the One who has redeemed him from sin, death, and devil. While necessity may dictate that an usher or elder be “on the move” during the Service to greet latecomers or make recordings, there is no necessity to be idly chatting with each other in the narthex.

With the architecture of many churches, the narthex is separate from the nave, so it is very easy for those who remain in the narthex during the Service to lose focus (the same thing can happen to those sitting in the balcony, as well). They hear what's going on, but they can become detached from it, and end up in conversations best left for another time and place. It's almost like the “Mary-Martha Syndrome,” i.e. they become so involved in the doing of being an usher or elder (Martha) that they forget they are also to be involved “in the one thing needful,” which is to hear and receive from Jesus His Word and Gifts (Mary).

Der Antwort Mann suggests that your ushers and elders, except for those times they absolutely need to be in the narthex doing their work, be inside the nave or the doorways to the nave instead during the Divine Service. Sure, they may have to be positioned in the back, in case something comes up that they need to address, but the temptation to chat with each other during the Service is minimized; the congregants aren't distracted or angered by the noise coming from the narthex; and the elders and ushers can fully receive that which Christ desires to give them.

“I was glad when they said unto me; Let us go into the house
of the Lord” Psalm 122:1

Best regards,

Der Antwort Mann