

## THE CHAPTER AS HOST

By Maureen Jais-Mick

Speaking as one who presents programs for a variety of chapter meetings and Guild gatherings each year, I have some observations to share regarding a chapter's responsibilities as host - what the chapter leadership should do when welcoming outsiders to its gatherings (an "outsider" is the evening's speaker, or any new or non-member who is attending).

After chapter representatives contact me to schedule a presentation, sometimes months will go by before I hear from them again. No letter of confirmation is sent. It is not uncommon for the brief, initial contact to have been made by telephone - with a promise of written confirmation that never arrives. Sometimes, I have no record of whom I talked with and no telephone number. Am I committed to them or not? Is it a chapter meeting, a musician-clergy dinner, or a panel discussion? Am I appearing alone or in tandem? Is it a dinner meeting, or do I eat before I arrive?

Some chapters promptly send letters of confirmation and also add my name and address to their mailing lists, so that I receive their newsletters several times before I arrive. This is a great help in familiarizing me with the chapters' activities.

I'm usually invited to speak about some aspect of professional concerns. I always inquire what specific issues the chapter would like to hear about and how long I should speak. Most often, the response is, "We don't care. Whatever you want to talk about. Talk as long as you like." Then, after the meeting, someone will complain, "But why didn't you mention . . . ?" Next day conversation between two members: "So how was the program? Much longer than usual. She spoke for almost an hour."

If I haven't heard from the chapter at least one week before the engagement, I always call to confirm, and to inquire about the number of handouts, samples, or whatever I should bring. If directions to the site haven't been sent, I request that information also. Frequently, it will not occur to the representative of the hosting chapter to inquire if I need newsprint, chalkboard, podium, etc. Sometimes the person with whom I speak volunteers to take care of those items for me. Other times the person promises to look into it, but is not sure what's available.

Arriving at a strange place to meet with unknown people is challenging. On more than one occasion, I've had to try all the doors in the church and education building before locating the correct one - the unmarked entrance all the locals knew about. Being an invited guest, I expect that someone will take the responsibility of introducing me to the folks present. Alas, I've spent many chapter "social" hours forcing my way into conversation groups, introducing myself, and trying to be collegial. At some chapter events, the friendliest folks are the catering staff.

I really appreciate name tags. I used to hope that chapters would use them. Now I request that they do. It's not just me, the outsider, who doesn't know everyone. Other chapter members will say to me, "Do you know the name of that woman in the red dress?" (Yes, she's the dean.)

Public speaking is easy. You wait until you're introduced and then start talking. One chapter presentation wouldn't have happened at all had I waited to be introduced. First, we had refreshments. Then someone from the chapter conducted a brief business meeting. Then someone else made announcements. Then we applauded the person who had provided the refreshments. Then there was silence, and I sat there wondering what was next. More silence. Finally, I cleared my throat and (thinking the next event had been delayed) said, "Would you like me to speak now?" A person to whom I had not been introduced (probably an officer) glared at me and said, "That's what we're waiting for."

When an event is over, it's customary to see one's guests to the door and bid them goodbye. It's also customary, if an honorarium or mileage reimbursement has been agreed upon, to pay your presenter or at least inquire about where payment should be sent. In some chapters it is apparently customary for the evening's special guest to wander around trying to find the treasurer or whoever is responsible for financial arrangements. Sometimes the chapter's steering or executive committee suddenly disappears into a business meeting and I'm left wondering to whom to officially bid adieu.

After the chapter members have departed and driven quickly home, and you, the presenter, have a several-hour drive or commute in front of you, it's especially nice to receive a handwritten thank-you note a few days later.

Things to remember:

- Confirm all arrangements (when, where, what) in writing immediately after speaking to your presenter or performer. Be specific about what you expect the person to do and for how long. Provide contact names and telephone numbers.
- Add the person to your newsletter mailing list for the year.
- Call one week before the event to confirm arrangements and to see what props may be needed for the presentation.
- Be sure the location of the event is clearly marked.
- Assign someone to host the presenter. This person's duties may include dinner before the event.
- Wear name tags at the meeting.
- Assign someone to introduce the presenter.
- Make sure the presenter has been paid or that arrangements for payment have been made.
- Bid the presenter farewell when she/he leaves.
- Follow up with a thank-you note.

Hosting is not an onerous task. Simply treat people as you would like to be treated.

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