

Hospitality 101: Inviting, Greeting & Incorporating

Inviting New People

The most important inviting work comes long before Sunday morning.

Define a clear mission, style and purpose: People need to see a clear statement or set of words or images that help to differentiate between you and the ten other churches within a one-mile radius.

Deploy effective, appropriate means for communicating your vision:

1. clear, attractive signage in front of and near the church;
2. web site and e-mail list, regularly updated;
3. fliers, postcards, business cards, perhaps produced by an affordable, high-quality online print house;
4. print, radio and TV ads, including public access and college media
5. social media ads – it's more bang for your buck.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. – Hebrews 13:2

Whatever you do, be sure the materials are composed and designed by people who know what works and that they include all the basics anyone would need to get to your door or find your web site. Not sure what's good? Look around and see what resonates for you; then feel free to borrow and cobble until you come up with your own unique look and feel.

Talk to people. People don't usually come to church because they saw a great sign or heard a radio ad. More than 85% of newcomers attend because a church member invited them. Even churches that invest in ads say they're seed-planters, so that when people get a personal invitation, they're already curious.

Greeting New People

Inviting congregations know first impressions count. They imagine the pathway someone travels into the church, and make it as smooth and pleasant as possible:

Outside: Clear signage and a well-kept exterior. No grounds staff? Rally the volunteer troops a few times a year to tend their common home.

At the door: Station a greeter at the open door and every door that might be used, eyes and energy directed out (and not at a stack of paper or to a buddy on the side), to offer a warm, genuine, non-cloying welcome to all who enter.

Inside the door: Help people who need some assistance with worship or with seating. Consider nametags for members and newcomers, available when they walk inside. Set up a kiosk or welcome table where people can pick up an attractive and compelling set of materials geared toward newcomers.

Go beyond pew cards or church histories. Make welcome brochures that tell stories of the church's life and ministry. Offer videos and online materials people can use to get familiar with worship before they arrive. Set out a visitors' card, clipboard, book, pew sheet or even a tablet to capture visitor info and interests.

Inside the sanctuary: Everyone should be a greeter. Encourage members to slide into the pew to make room for newbies. Everyone can watch for new faces and be ready to help struggling visitors to navigate the building and worship.

During the worship: Think through your worship and consider whether someone completely new to your tradition would be able to keep pace and participate fully. If not (or even if it seems clear to you), consider full worship booklets, including the entire worship service, music, and even biblical texts.

Alternately, consider seasonal worship booklets with changing weekly inserts. Tending the environment? Projectors and screens aren't just hip; they facilitate full participation by young and old, experienced and new.

Getting around the church: Greeters and other members should be prepared to escort newcomers to Sunday School, forums, restrooms, etc. Gregory Jacobs, Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Newark, calls this the “the ministry of shepherds”—connecting new people and guiding them around.

After-church fellowship: Coffee hour, breakfast between services, brunch after church—whatever you serve and whenever you serve it, make sure you have plenty, and that it's good. Have a Hospitality Team serving with a smile.

Encourage clergy to connect with newcomers, not just church leaders eager to do business. Lay leaders should also look for new faces or people who appear alone and awkward *before* they link with their closer friends. Offer a church tour and introduction, to help people get oriented and establish personal connections.

In a large parish? Not sure if you “should” know someone? There's no harm in approaching and introducing yourself – some oldtimers may still be new to you.

Incorporating New People

When the newcomer leaves, the work isn't over.

Follow-up contacts: A lay visitor or clergy person should make a follow-up call or send an e-mail or a card, and suggest a One-to-One to share stories and answer questions. It's not a hard-sell on membership; just listen and connect.

Follow-up groups: New people need a variety of entry points to find their way inside. Seasonal newcomers' gatherings, Alpha courses, regularly scheduled small groups, easy-to-access volunteer opportunities, inquirers' classes to learn about the tradition, the community and membership—all these are great ways to create space for people to explore and test their calling into community.

Hospitality 101 Worksheet

For each category, rate your church 1-5

1 = Strongly agree (We're all over it and could even help others!)

2 = Agree (We've done this, but could do it better.)

3 = Neutral (We could do this, but haven't yet tried.)

4 = Disagree (We need a lot of help here.)

5 = Strongly disagree (It's not even on our radar; where would we begin?)

Our Church Has ...

_____ a clear mission, style and purpose

_____ clear, attractive signage leading to and in front of the church

_____ an outdoor, clearly marked entrance to the sanctuary

_____ an outdoor, clearly marked entrance to the church hall

_____ an outdoor, clearly marked entrance to the church offices

_____ an attractive and well-tended web site

_____ an active e-mail list that is regularly updated

_____ attractive paper communications, including fliers, postcards, business cards

_____ print, radio and/or television advertising

Our Greeters/Newcomer Ministers ...

_____ are a thoroughly trained team

_____ are stationed at each available door

_____ maintain a visible station with welcome booklets/packs, videos and DVDs, etc.

_____ escort people to bathrooms and post-worship activities

_____ have a process for gathering newcomer info (visitors' card, clipboard/book, pew sheet, iPad)

Our Hospitality Team ...

_____ provides food for a memorable gathering after worship

_____ sees itself as true "hosts" who watch to welcome newcomers and others on the margins

Our Members ...

_____ talk to people in their lives and invite them to church

_____ see themselves as greeters and pay attention to newcomers

_____ wear nametags and assist newcomers with getting settled

_____ will scoot into the pew as soon as they sit down, to make room for late and newcomers

_____ respect that the priest/minister should pay attention to newcomers after worship

Our Worship ...

- is designed with both long-time church members AND newcomers, children, families, teens and different cultural groups in mind (as appropriate for your context)*
- is lively, grounded and tuned to the gospel AND to the issues in real people's lives*
- encourages active participation by providing all the information people need in one place:*
 - a full worship booklet with music, worship responses, biblical texts*
 - a seasonal worship booklet with weekly inserts including biblical texts*
 - a projector that displays words and music for all participatory elements*

During Follow-up, we ...

- offer a tour or other activity to help newcomers get familiar*
 - enter all names into a newcomer database that includes pertinent, public details*
 - pray for all who visit the church*
 - send an email or call newcomers (done by lay visitor or priest/minister)*
 - invite people who visit 3 times to share a One-to-One Meeting or lunch*
 - offer to make a house-visit (if culturally appropriate)*
 - host seasonal newcomer gatherings*
 - welcome people into low-commitment small groups*
 - offer access to simple volunteer opportunities*
 - establish other ways to engage people (describe below)*
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*Use the results to celebrate where you're doing well (1 and 2)
and to identify places for further investment and learning (3 through 5).
A well-rounded, vital church should pay attention to all the areas listed.*