

Welcoming Guests Well by Michelle Erickson

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“You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” It is said that within the first seven to seventeen seconds of meeting someone, they begin to form an opinion about us. Are there things we can do to remove distractions and help a guest feel comfortable long enough so they can envision themselves belonging to – wanting to be a part of -- the church, or see themselves and their family worshipping here?

Is it time to reassess your welcome ministry?

1. Start by attending each of your services with the mindset of a first time guest. Ask a few other people to do the same.
2. Record everything that comes to mind; physical observations as well as spiritual.
3. Begin in the parking lot and continue paying attention through the coffee time at the end of the service. In addition to the questions in “Checklist for Welcoming Guests Well,” below, ask:
 - Do we clearly communicate the options parents have for their children?
 - Is it clear how a guest would take the first step toward joining our ministry?
 - Is it easy for someone to communicate with us about a need or question?
 - Do the volunteers understand and carry out their duties?

When you have finished assessing the welcome ministry, brainstorm with your staff different ways you can initiate change. The following are nine of our best practices. They are easy to integrate and virtually cost free.

1. Divide your welcoming committee into teams such as parking lot greeters, courtyard/door greeters, welcome center greeters, after service coffee greeters, and ushers.
2. Each team has a specific task to carry out Sunday morning.
3. Training on a quarterly basis is vital to a successful ministry. It also allows new members to get connected to the church by joining one of these ministries.
4. Greeters are relational. They welcome everyone, offer directions, answer questions, escort guests to children’s praise or the nursery, and keep a lookout for anyone who appears lost or confused.
5. Ushers are task orientated. They pass out bulletins and Bibles, escort people to open sections for seating, assist during offering or communion, and set out extra chairs as needed.
6. Consider using a particular colored shirt for greeters and ushers with your church logo. During worship, when guests are welcomed, encourage them to seek out someone

wearing the shirt if they have questions.

7. Have a tear-off section in the bulletin a guest can use to give their information or ask questions. This is a non-threatening way for a guest to choose when they are ready to become involved.
8. Encourage both greeters and ushers when 'off duty' to continue being part of the team by welcoming guests.
9. Share this philosophy with other ministries in the church, encouraging them to think of guests.

Attention to even the smallest detail tells people that we as a church are committed to connecting people to Jesus. A considerable amount of our staff's time is spent planning and preparing for worship on Sunday. The music, sermon, flow of the worship service, and announcements are discussed in detail. Monday morning we 'debrief' and take a critical look at Sunday services through the eyes of guests. We strive to remove obstacles that may prevent a guest from feeling welcome, keeping in mind what Elbert Einstein said: "Not everything that counts can be counted." ■

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Checklist for Welcoming Guests Well

Exterior and Approaches

- Do well kept and visible signs identify your church as guests approach it?
- Is landscaping well kept and attractive?
- Are parking lot entrances and exits clearly identified?
- Do you have clearly identified guest parking?
- Do signs help guests find the sanctuary, restrooms, classrooms, offices, etc.?
- Are all the doors at your main entrances unlocked?
- How accessible are your buildings?

Interior

- Is your facility well lighted?
- Are walls (including bulletin boards), floors and ceilings neat, clean and without blemish?
- Are windows and window coverings clean and without blemish?
- Are bathrooms clearly identified, neat and clean?
- Is the nursery/child care facility easily accessible, neat and clean? Is it well staffed by trained personnel?

- Is there signage to help guests find their way once inside?
- How comfortable are the seats/pews?
- Is the sanctuary a comfortable temperature?
- How is your sound system?