

Creating your Congregation's Welcome Strategy

This worksheet is to give your members, and specifically your greeter team, ideas on how you can improve a guest's experience in your congregation by creating your congregation's customized welcome strategy.

Our goal for any welcome strategy is embedded in our Vision statement:

To create a church in which people feel at home, and inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life.

All aspects of your welcome strategy should focus on creating a church where people feel at home, whether that is assessing and changing how the space in the church is used and how people move through it, or by the friendly smile that someone receives when they walk in the door.

For a more educated and sincere review of your congregation, we suggest that you invite a friend, someone who has not been to your congregation, to come to church and give their honest feedback about their experience as a guest. If this is not possible, then try walking through your church as if you were there for the first time to identify items of improvement.

Assessing your church building

The building is the first thing a guest sees when they come to church, so it has a big impact on their first impressions of your congregation and can play a bigger role in their experience than you might expect.

- **Is the entry of the church easy to find?** Some congregations are located inside office parks or buildings, which might make it hard for a guest to find your church even after they have pulled into the parking lot. This issue can be easily fixed with signs or by placing greeters in spots where a guest might ask for directions.
- **Are the bathrooms easy to find?** In some congregations, the bathrooms are located downstairs or are not in sight of the front door. If the bathrooms are hard to find, tell the main greeter to always share with guests where the bathroom is located when they first walk in or have clear signs that direct them.
- **Are the bathrooms clean and maintained?** It's helpful if a member could check the bathrooms every week before people start to arrive to make sure that there is extra toilet paper in each stall, enough soap and hand towels, and that the bathrooms are generally clean. Especially for guests, this can help avoid any awkward moments for them.
- **Is the building in generally good shape?** For the moment, let's not include major renovations like carpet replacement, etc. in this review. There are small things that are easy and affordable to fix. This can include things like making sure the bulletin board is up to date, replacing burned out lightbulbs and making sure the church is bright enough for people to see well, tightening screws on any loose fixtures (i.e. do all the toilet stall latches work correctly), etc. These things can easily be overlooked by members who are used to seeing them in their current state, but may be quickly noticed by guests.
- **Does your church have a coffee area?** This can be a wonderful way for guests to informally meet people before or after service. For first time guests, be sure they know where the coffee is located. If you take payment or donations for your coffee, perhaps give new guests a certificate for a free coffee. Analyze the flow of your coffee bar – is it obvious where the cups, sugar, and creamer are? Is the area too congested and maybe needs some more space? Where should people go after they have their coffee? Is there space to mingle? Or are their tables and/or chairs provided? If you do not have a café or coffee area, your fellowship area could be utilized for a small coffee hour after service. Consider the

space that you do have available – could you put up a small table with coffee and donuts after service? If this idea doesn't work for you congregation, explore the other ways to make guests feel at home.

- **Does your congregation have a welcome center?** If the space between your entrance door and sanctuary door is small, a welcome center is not necessary. If there is a welcome center, consider these questions when figuring out the best way to utilize it. Is your welcome center designed for someone to walk up to and just browse? Or should there be a person standing behind it? Do you have enough volunteers to staff the center? What should the role of that person be? What materials can be available for distribution there (Guest booklet, extra hymnals, extra Bibles, etc.)? Will you use your welcome center to collect contact information from first time guests? Are there materials available to do this? If your church does not have a welcome center, consider what space you have available. Do you have a bulletin board where you could post announcements or congregational information? Could you put up a stand for Guest booklets and information? Perhaps your ushers could hand out Guest booklets, hymnals, and Bibles when necessary.
 - **Guest booklets:** One way to make the most of your Guest booklets is to personalize the interior flap with your congregation's information. There is a template available on Minister Companion here: <http://www.ministercompanion.org/en/mission/greeter-resources-menu.html>
- **Consider the logistics of your sanctuary:** is the entry to your sanctuary easy to find? Are there ushers available to help people find seating? Are the ushers aware of the options your congregation has for children so they can let guests know (Tiny Seeds, mother's rooms, etc.)? Do you have enough hymnals and Bibles available for guests? Ushers should have Guest booklets on hand to distribute to first time guests and review the service order with them.
- **Consider your Children's Ministry:** It is important to make guests aware of the opportunities that your congregation has for children. Do you have a Tiny Seeds program, Sunday School classes, a mother's room, and/or children's area? Be sure to let parents or families with children know about these resources at the appropriate time. (For example: if a family comes in at 10:15am and Sunday School was at 9:00am, it may be more appropriate to let them know about it after service, as an available option for their next visit.)

Assessing your Greeters

For this document, we separate the role of Greeter and Usher; the first being the person(s) at your entry way, who welcomes people into your church, and the second being the person(s) who stands near the entry to the sanctuary who welcomes people into the service, helps them find seats, and hands out bulletins if they are available. Depending on your congregation size and the layout of your church building, you may need to customize these roles. Some of the suggestions in this section will depend on how many volunteers are involved in your welcome strategy. Even if you only have one or two greeters, you can still try to find some creative solutions to these suggestions.

Characteristics of a Greeter or Usher

- Adult (it may be difficult for children to answer questions)
- Happy and excited to be there
- Not easily distracted and stay dedicated to their responsibility, stay attentive
- Find it easy to strike up conversations with strangers
- Knowledgeable about service structure, basic beliefs, building
- Spiritual gifts: Hospitality, Encouragement, Creative Communication, Evangelism, Helps, Shepherding
- Characteristics: friendly, outgoing, helpful, extrovert, authentic

Please use the one-page Greeter and Usher descriptions for teaching and training your volunteers for these roles.

Here are some additional items to consider:

- Is there a greeter at the front door to welcome guests into the building? This is most likely the first person that a guest will interact with at your congregation and so it is important to have someone right at the front of the church to guide them and help them feel welcome and comfortable in a new place. We recommend that every congregation have at least one greeter by the front door.
- Is your main greeter also the person who hands out notices/bulletins? If the greeter is busy passing out a notice to all the members, then this leaves little time for them to converse with any guests. It is probably more effective if your ushers, that stand at the sanctuary door, hand out bulletins.
- Do your greeters only talk with people they know? For obvious reasons, this is problematic if a guest comes to church and the greeter isn't willing to engage them.
- Are there ushers at the doors of the sanctuary? These volunteers can be helpful if guests are unsure of where to sit for the service, if they need a hymnal, or even if they just have general questions about the flow of the service.
- Are there members in the sanctuary before service begins? Ideally, ushers should seat guests near members if possible. These members can engage the guest before and after the service is over so that relationships can start to build.
- Are there greeters and ushers in place after the service has begun? Sometimes guests come in late and if all of the greeters and ushers have left their posts and have gone in to service, then they are on their own to figure out how to navigate your church. We suggest keeping an usher in place for the first 10 minutes of the divine service and to then remain aware during the entire service.
- Can children be greeters? A greeter is not just a person who opens a door. They have to be approachable and be able to have a conversation with people they both know and don't know. If a child has these qualities, then it is possible for them to be a greeter. We would suggest that if a child is a greeter, then they are paired with an adult in their greeting responsibilities.

Assessing the Greeter's Message

Examples of key phrases to use:

- Welcome! My name is _____.
- We are happy to see you.
- Thank you for coming.
- I don't think we've met before. I'm _____.
- I'm so glad you came today. Is there any way I can help you?
- Worship will begin in _____ minutes.
- Let me introduce you to _____ who can show you where (the bathrooms are, where Sunday School takes place, help you find a seat, our welcome desk it, etc.)
- Be sure to greet everyone – people you know and people you don't know.
- The greeting and welcome are the most important, not getting them to fill out a form...
- Greeters should stay by the door for the first 10 minutes into service in case someone comes in late.

Examples of what NOT to say:

- Are you new?
- Where have you been for the past two years?
- Did you lose our address?
- Is this your first time at church?
- What's your last name?
- Who are you?
- I've never see you before?

Follow Up Assessment

If you decide to have a system in place that will follow up with any guests after they leave the church, then you must actually follow through with it. Don't ask for their contact information if you don't have a plan to do anything with it. If you have a Welcome Center, tell your main greeter to point the guest toward the Welcome Center where they give their contact information. This may be through a response card that they fill out or a conversation that the Greeter has with the guest.

A good follow-up with a guest is something that shows you appreciate them and gives them a "next step" that isn't a big commitment. This could be to send a message or make a call to invite the guest to a small group or an upcoming community event that the congregation is participating in.

The important aspect of the follow-up is that it starts to build a relationship between the guest and the church members.