



Hospitality 101: Inviting, Greeting and 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 printhouse;
4. print, radio and TV ads, including public access and college media, which give more bang for your buck

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 turns you on; 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. The successful Vineyard Churches have advertisements all over [including my favorite church ad: "Free Coffee (offer good Sundays only)"]. Church leaders say the ads are just seed-planters, so that when people get a personal invitation from a Vineyard member, the newcomers are already curious about this community of Christians.

Greeting New People

Inviting congregations know the first impression is everything. So they literally imagine the pathway someone travels into the church, and try to make it as smooth and pleasant as possible:

Outside: There's clear signage and a well-kept exterior. If you don't have the staff to handle it, rally the volunteer troops a few times a year to tend their common home.

At the door: A greeter is stationed at the open door—at every door that might be used—eyes and energy directed out (and not at a stack of paper or to a buddy standing on the side), to offer a warm, genuine, non-cloying welcome to all who enter. Churches desperately need signs of life, even on a Sunday morning.

Inside the door: This is the time to help people if the worship gathering needs some explaining, or if visitors need assistance getting to their seats. Consider nametags for members and newcomers, available when they walk inside. It's easier than you think to 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 the 25-year-old church history pamphlet to welcome booklets and packs, videos and DVDs, and online materials people can use to familiarize themselves with the worship before they ever arrive. And don't forget set out a visitors' card or clipboard or book or pew sheet or even a laptop—whatever it takes to capture necessary visitor information and interests for future contact.

Inside the sanctuary: A genuinely inviting parish depends on more than a team of greeters. Everyone takes this ministry seriously. Members should be encouraged to slide into the pew to make room for a stranger. They should also be on the lookout for new faces and be ready to help struggling visitors to find their way through the liturgy.

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 weekly inserts. They may consume a lot of prep hours and trees, but they're an invaluable resource for the inviting congregation. Barring that, remember that projectors and screens are more than hip; they can facilitate full participation by everyone in the body.

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”—literally, connecting with new people and guiding them around the church.

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 quality. If possible, have a Hospitality Team ready to serve with a smile.

Encourage clergy to spend this time connecting with newcomers, not just doing parish business with members. Lay leaders should also keep looking around for new faces or people who appear alone and awkward *before* they link with their closer friends.

This also applies to large parishes where many faces may appear new; what is the harm in intentionally approaching and introducing yourself to fellow parishioners who are, for all intents, strangers? And if you can offer a church tour and introduction, that's a great way to help people get oriented to the space and establish personal contact with a church leader.

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-on-one get-together to share stories and answer questions. This isn't the time for the hard-sell, but just a time to listen and cement the connection.

Follow-up groups: New people need a variety of entry points to find their way inside a congregation. Seasonal newcomers' gatherings, 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 even 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 (4 or 5)
and to identify places for further investment and learning (1 through 3).
A well-rounded, vital and missional church should pay attention to all the areas listed.***