

# RETHINK WELCOME

Does your welcome extend beyond the doors of your church? Does church only happen on Sundays? We can no longer wait for the unchurched to find us. We must prepare to receive others where they are and help them feel accepted through authentic caring and kindness that anticipates their needs. Our neighborhoods are not just down the street, but around the world. Seekers will find welcome messages on our social networks, aired on our media and carried by our missionaries. Welcoming others is just part of who we are as Christians, a gift we offer to others with no strings attached. Together we can open hearts, open minds and open doors because we are the people of The United Methodist Church.

## WHAT IS WELCOMING CERTIFICATION?

The Welcoming Certification program celebrates and recognizes the efforts of local congregations that actively and intentionally prepare to welcome newcomers; and in doing so, create a lasting impression and identity. When churches attain Welcoming Certification, they receive a wooden plaque recognizing the congregation's efforts and gain a special designation in the Find-a-Church database, [www.find-a-church.org](http://www.find-a-church.org).

In the first eight years of the ministry, more than 750 churches fulfilled the first year of certification requirements and significant numbers of churches have finished years 2, 3 and 4. The enclosed worksheets suggest tasks and activities for churches to accomplish as they strive to become welcoming-certified each year. The basic worksheet provides many options, and each successive worksheet builds upon the basics to help transform a church's welcoming lifestyle in the course of four years. Churches that successfully complete requirements for all four years will become welcoming models that demonstrate how churches are living our promise of opening hearts, minds and doors.

For more information and to view a list of certified churches, go to [www.welcoming.rethinkchurch.org](http://www.welcoming.rethinkchurch.org).

## WHOM ARE WE TRYING TO REACH, ANYWAY?

Advertising messages and resource materials are designed to help churches reach out and connect with unchurched seekers. The definitions below may help better define that audience for you and your church.

### UNCHURCHED

Persons who have not attended a church activity, other than a wedding or funeral, in the past six months; who may not be seeking spiritual fulfillment anywhere outside the church.

### SEEKER

Persons who are not currently involved in a congregation; are actively seeking spiritual fulfillment; are open to a message of hope and possibly willing to engage in activities that make a difference in the world.

# WELCOMING DEFINITIONS AND TIPS

First impressions are lasting ones. People make up their minds about your church within the first ten minutes of contact. Long before the preacher preaches, people most often will have decided if they plan to return. These ideas and definitions may help your church make a life-changing impression on those who are new to your congregation.

## TWO TIPS FOR THE WHOLE CONGREGATION TO DO EACH SUNDAY:

**CIRCLE OF 10:** Greet anyone, member or guest, who comes within ten feet of you. Make a special effort to greet the people you don't already know within your Circle of 10.

**RULE OF THREE:** Try not to talk to other members for the first three minutes after the service. Talk only to those you don't know and to people that you know are guests. It takes guests about three minutes to exit the church after worship so it's important to make sure someone has made contact with them before they leave.

## SOME EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE YOU WILL ESPECIALLY WANT TO WELCOME:

Remember that welcoming is a lifestyle that extends well beyond shaking hands at the door of the Sanctuary on Sunday. As your church grows a more welcoming lifestyle, you will probably want to design different ministries and follow-up activities for these and other groups of people.

### VISITORS

Visitors are people who attend a worship service or event at a church but are not likely to be regularly connected to the congregation (they live out of town, they have another church home, etc.). Remember, welcoming is not about growing your church, so visitors deserve special attention even if you never see them again.

### GUESTS

Guests are people who attend worship or another event, perhaps at the personal invitation of someone from the church, who may reasonably be expected to return and get involved in the congregation. Those treated as "honored guests" are likely to return.

### NEWCOMERS

Newcomers are people who are relatively new to a congregation—not yet members; no longer first-time guests; interested in connecting with the church and its members. Newcomers are trying to find a way into the life and ministries of your church, so it's important to remove barriers and serve their needs.

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