

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.

Mystery Guest Audit

Use this form to help another church identify its welcoming and hospitality strengths and limitations.
Please write an explanation after each item.

Needs
Improvement

Average

Great

Your experience the first 10 minutes of contact

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Remarks _____

Your impression received from the signage
(indoor/outdoor)

--	--	--

Remarks _____

Your impression received from greeters

--	--	--

Remarks _____

Your impression received from ushers

--	--	--

Remarks _____

Your experience from individual members

--	--	--

Remarks _____

Your experience during social time

--	--	--

Remarks _____

Your experience aided by helpful bulletin contents

--	--	--

Remarks _____

In your experience, people are warm and generous

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Remarks _____

If I were seeking a spiritual home, I'd choose this church.

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Remarks _____

Friendliness Audit

Sometimes we aren't even aware of how we view people, either positively or negatively. As a personal assessment of how welcoming you and your church already are, put an **O** by the descriptions that best convey the people you would like to attend your church, and put an **X** by the people you don't think would receive a warm welcome at your church.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female who is not fashionably dressed | <input type="checkbox"/> An overweight female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Single male under 30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate, well-educated person | <input type="checkbox"/> An interracial couple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person mentally handicapped | <input type="checkbox"/> Person who sings in a monotone voice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male with earring in one ear | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired persons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone especially talkative | <input type="checkbox"/> An overweight male |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lower-income male | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower-income female |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Older female | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A smoker | <input type="checkbox"/> Musician |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible reader | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person with cancer | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single male over 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> New Ager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single female over 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Political liberal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family on public assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> Teenager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed male | <input type="checkbox"/> Immigrant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person very quiet and meek | <input type="checkbox"/> Banker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family with crying baby at worship service | <input type="checkbox"/> Person with bad breath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African-American | <input type="checkbox"/> Older single male |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unmarried pregnant teenager | <input type="checkbox"/> Homosexual or lesbian couple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced female | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-English speaking person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Former felon | <input type="checkbox"/> Person with unkempt hair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handicapped person in wheelchair | <input type="checkbox"/> Political conservative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persons with hygiene problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Blended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple living together, not married | <input type="checkbox"/> Charismatic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A recovering alcoholic | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman who dresses provocatively |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Person testing HIV-positive | <input type="checkbox"/> Person who sings operatically |

Walk-through Assessment

Instructions: take a walk through your church building to see it through a newcomer's eyes.

How could the worship space be made more welcoming?

Is our church welcoming to people who have difficulty getting around, including disabled and elderly people?

Is it welcoming to families with children and youth and to the children and youth themselves?

What are the kinds of things that can be done immediately to make the space and the culture more welcoming?

What will take a little more time and planning?

What's Your WQ (Welcoming Quotient)?

1. **When I see new people at church, I:**
 - a. Avert my eyes so they don't think I'm staring at them.
 - b. Elbow the person next to me and point out the newcomers, so that person will acknowledge the new people.
 - c. Nod and smile to show the people that I recognize their presence.
 - d. Make a bee-line for them during the service or hospitality time to say hello, find out their names and introduce them to others.
2. **When new people start working at my office, I:**
 - a. Hope they enjoy working there more than I do.
 - b. Say hello when someone brings them around for introductions.
 - c. Send a note or e-mail to say hello and welcome.
 - d. Take a welcome gift to them when I introduce myself and all of my teammates.
3. **When people I don't know sit next to me on a bench or pew, I:**
 - a. Scoot away from them a little so we have more space between us.
 - b. Smile and say hi, then go back to what I'm doing.
 - c. Shake hands, introduce myself and ask about them.
 - d. Everything in "c" plus introduce them to others sitting nearby.
4. **When people stop by my home when it's a mess, I:**
 - a. Ignore the doorbell and hope they go away.
 - b. Speak to them through a crack in the door and try to wrap up the conversation quickly.
 - c. Join them to chat on the front porch and hope they don't look back inside as I close the door behind me.
 - d. Invite them inside, regardless of how the place looks, tossing things off a chair so they have a place to sit.
5. **When new people join a group I'm in, I:**
 - a. Hope they don't come sit next to me. I'm horrible at small talk.
 - b. Shake hands, say hi and sit back down.
 - c. Make it a point to sit next to them so I can get to know them better.
 - d. Call them in advance so I can introduce them to everyone else at their first meeting.

Just for fun . . .

Take this quiz to test your Welcoming Quotient, a measure of how welcoming you are in several aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers here, only your preferences for interacting with people. Use the scoring key at the end to assess your WQ.

6. When others look lost at church, I:

- a. Step into the nearest restroom or classroom, hoping they don't look to me for help.
- b. Grab a greeter or pastor and encourage her/him to help the people.
- c. Go up to them and point them in the right direction.
- d. Offer to escort the people where they need to go.

7. When I'm expecting guests at my home, I:

- a. Shake the dust off the "Welcome" mat and haul it down from the attic.
- b. Write myself a reminder to check the toilet seats to be sure they're down.
- c. Clean the place from top to bottom, change the sheets in the guest room, lay out fresh towels in the guest bath, and turn on the outside lights.
- d. Do everything in "c" plus bathe the kids and the pets.

Scoring Key:

	SCORE:
Every "a" = 1	1. ____
Every "b" = 2	2. ____
Every "c" = 3	3. ____
Every "d" = 4	4. ____
	5. ____
	6. ____
	7. ____

 **Total**

What your score means:

- 7-13:** Welcoming might not come naturally to you, maybe because you're introverted or don't have to use those skills much. You're trying to raise your awareness of how others respond to you and how you interact with them.
- 14-20:** Welcoming comes fairly easy to you. You try to be friendly to people and let others know you're interested in them.
- 21-28:** Welcoming is high on your priority list. You look for ways to make others feel at home and try to raise the awareness of those around you so they become more welcoming, too.

INVITING PRACTICE SHEET

Remember the advice of 1 Peter 3:15b-c:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.
—NIV

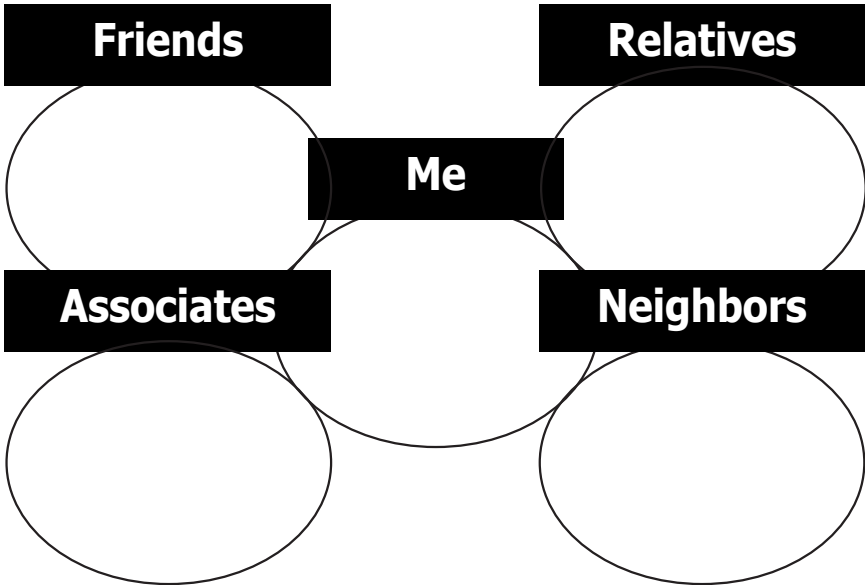
It helps to practice in advance what you might say when someone asks you about your faith. Remember that the encounter may lead to an opportunity to invite someone to experience God through your church. To prepare, choose a partner and work through this practice sheet.

**When was the last time you invited someone to accompany you to an activity?
It does not have to be a church activity.**

Did the person go with you?

What did you say to get the person to go (or what didn't you say that might have made him or her stay home)?

The people with whom you would be most likely to have these conversations are friends, relatives, associates and neighbors. To make that easy to remember, think "FRAN." Take a moment to write down the names of people in your life who reflect FRAN:



SMALL GROUP PROSPECT LIST

Most successful small groups build around affinity (or common interest) rather than geography, but both have better potential to succeed if built around existing relationships. Below is a brief start-up worksheet for building a prospect list for a successful small group to shepherd your congregation's Rethink Church and Welcoming Ministry. As the coach or leader of this small group, you could ask:

1. Are you interested in helping to start a small group?
2. Will you commit one hour each week to help make this group successful?
3. Do you know three other people who could join with us in the future?

As you and three others, and their three add up, you build a prospect list of 13 in no time!

		Me		
		My Three		
		1.	Their Three	
			1.	
			2.	
			3.	
		2.		
			1.	
			2.	
			3.	
		3.		
			1.	
			2.	
			3.	

50

Ways to Build Strength Welcoming New People

Recognize Hospitality as a Ministry

- Teach that hospitality is at the core of the Gospel.
- Teach your congregation to honor Christ in everyone and that God seeks to be in relationship with ALL persons.

Make a Good First Impression

- Convey a clear invitation and a statement of welcome in all communications directed at the external community -- advertisements, banners, flyers, website, etc.
- Know that 40% of visitors make up their mind about a church before they even see the pastor, according to Barna Research. Within two minutes of the beginning of a service visitors have formed an opinion about whether the congregation is friendly.
- Care for your building and grounds as a way of honoring your attendees and honoring God. A well-cared-for building demonstrates a commitment to excellence and communicates that what the church does is important.
- Have clear exterior and interior signage that guides a visitor everywhere he or she needs to go.
- Reserve special parking places for visitors. Encourage church members and staff to park off-site or in more remote spaces. If parking lot congestion is an issue, recruit volunteer parking attendants.
- Make your nursery clean, safe, sanitary, well-equipped, and visually appealing to children and their parents. Use a space that is easy to find and convenient to the sanctuary. Make sure your nursery workers and procedures inspire confidence on the part of parents.
- Make sure your restrooms are neat and clean.

Be Intentional about Saying Hello and Good Bye

- Station greeters at all entrances, in classroom areas, and in the parking lot or entry walks, if appropriate.
 - Identify your greeters and ushers with a special badge or name tag so visitors who need information can easily identify them.
 - Encourage friendly, out-going persons with the gift of "hospitality" to serve as greeters and ushers. Don't expect that just anyone can do these jobs well. Provide regular training that helps them see the church through a visitor's eyes.
 - Escort newcomers to the nursery, classrooms, coffee hour, etc. Don't just point the way or give directions.
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- Adopt the “rule of three,” which says members will not talk to other members in the first three minutes following the service – typically how long it takes guests to exit.
- Enact the “circle of ten” rule – that each member will greet anyone, member or guest, who comes within ten feet of them.
- Say, “I don’t think we’ve met before ...” if you are not sure if the person next to you is a member or a visitor.
- Ask outgoing church members to sit in the pews where visitors most commonly sit, often near the entrance or in the back.
- Post someone at every exit to shake hands and thank people for coming. Ask worship participants (readers, music leaders, liturgists, etc..) to do this since their faces will be familiar.

Help Newcomers Feel at Home in Worship

- Accept and encourage casual attire.
 - Do not ask visitors to stand and identify themselves. Seventy percent of new attendees feel negatively about being recognized. However, they do expect people to be friendly and welcoming.
 - Provide nametags for the whole congregation and develop the habit of wearing them. Form a “tag team” to organize and promote name tag use.
 - Review your church bulletin and other printed material to make sure information is not “insider oriented.” Avoid church jargon and assuming that people understand the context.
 - Make sure your order of worship is easy for a visitor to follow. Include written or verbal explanations of what is going on and why. Print the words to all prayers, songs, and responses.
 - Sing at least one hymn each Sunday that is well known outside the church, such as “Amazing Grace,” “Joyful Joyful,” or “Morning Has Broken.”
 - Include a welcome to visitors in the open words before the service. Make sure the person speaking identifies him or herself. It is best for the pastor to issue this welcome.
 - Remember that visitors sometimes arrive a few minutes late. Don’t front load all the information directed at them.
 - Place information about your church’s ministries where a visitor can easily find it – preferably in the pew, or a clearly marked location near the entry points used by visitors. Don’t expect them to go someplace else to find it.
 - Prepare Visitors Packets to be handed out by greeters with information about your church programs.
 - Give visitors with small children a small activity packet (with crayons, pipe cleaners, stickers, etc.) as they enter worship.
 - Avoid all talk about money with visitors.
 - Keep the discussion of “family business” to a minimum in the services. Limit announcements.
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Follow up with your Visitors

- Get the names and addresses of first-time visitors. Some churches use visitors' cards, but asking ALL worshippers to record attendance makes it more likely visitors will sign. Visitors don't want to be singled out.
- Make a special effort to remember visitors' names and call them by name.
- Make at least one follow-up contact with first-time visitors within 24 to 36 hours of their visit – a letter from the pastor, a phone call, a hand-written note, an email message. Many churches deliver a gift, such as freshly baked cookies or a church coffee mug, to visitors' homes. The purpose is to communicate friendliness, not get a membership commitment.
- Develop a system or data base for keeping track of visitors, their contact information, and the frequency of visits. A mailing list of persons who have visited in the past is one of your best marketing tools.
- Don't overlook visitors who come to the church for the first time for an event other than worship.
- Once someone has attended three times, they should be invited to join the church with a pastoral visit and/or an invitation to take part in an inquirers or new member class.
- Encourage visitors to get connected with activities and groups, even if they are not ready to join.

Be More Inviting

- Hold an Open House Sunday at least once a year.
- Organize a "bring-a-friend" Sunday at least once a year.
- Extend extra hospitality during back-to-school time, Christmas and Easter, when persons are most likely to consider visiting a church.
- Start a personal invitation ministry. Three out of four people attend a church for the first time because they were invited. Yet less than half of church members say they have invited someone in the last year.
- Provide training to members on how to invite others to church.
- Print special invitations to Christmas Eve services that people can deliver to friends.
- Plan special events – concerts, lectures, etc. -- that appeal to those outside the church and that members feel comfortable inviting someone to.
- Have special recognition Sundays for scout groups, preschool families, or other community groups meeting in your church to encourage them to attend worship.

Become More Aware of Visitors and their Concerns

- Gather feedback on how visitors respond to your church through surveys, focus groups, or interviews.
 - Conduct a "welcome audit" annually.
 - Provide training on welcoming at least once a year.
 - Send your welcome team to visit other churches and report back on how they experienced their reception.
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Some Additional Resources

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