

PLANNING GUIDE

Radical Hospitality

Hospitality is an important aspect of every congregation. However, while many churches claim to be friendly and hospitable to visitors, most churches are unaware of how a visitor really experiences a congregation for the first time. Unlike members who know how to navigate the facility, visitors usually struggle to find their way and are often excluded or ignored by members who are already a part of the church.

The First 10 Minutes

Surveys show that visitors will judge a church within the first ten minutes of their visit, and the clock starts counting the second they arrive at the property. Initially, visitors will notice how easy or challenging it is to find the church and how to enter the parking lot. From there, they observe how easy it is to find parking and to make their way to the building, noticing the condition of the property and facility. Upon entering the building, if they can find the appropriate entrance, they will notice how quickly they are greeted and what it takes to find where they want to go. Finally, before worship starts, they will experience how others greet them and how they feel about the sanctuary, worship bulletin and/or program they are attending.

How To Evaluate Your Hospitality

Just like a restaurant or hotel that evaluates its customer service, churches should consider the following questions:

- How easy is it for visitors to find the church?
- Is there appropriate and adequate signage?
- What are the first things that a visitor will see when they enter the property or facility?
- Is parking convenient and clearly marked?
- Where is the primary entrance of the church?
- How are visitors greeted when they arrive and when they enter the sanctuary?

- What items are eyesores and what insider information about the facility is a visitor lacking?

In some cases, churches should hire an anonymous person to visit the church (also called a “mystery shopper”) to record and share their experience with the congregation’s leaders. Additionally, members can use a camera or video recorder to document how a person may experience visiting the church for the first time, using the camera as a lens to see what members often ignore or take for granted.

Biblical Hospitality

Throughout the Bible, scripture documents the radical hospitality of Hebrews and Christians who serve others based on their faith. In the Old Testament, there are many stories about welcoming strangers and providing for their needs. Similarly, the New Testament also talks about serving others and how the early church worked to provide assistance to those in need.

This biblical concept of hospitality is often forgotten in our churches. However, by taking a few steps, churches can welcome their visitors like guests to a five-star restaurant or premium hotel. Some simple examples include:



- Welcoming visitors as they enter and offering to sit with them during the church service
- Giving them a tour of the church building and helping them navigate around the facility
- Inviting them to the social hour after worship or lunch after service
- Listening to what interested them about the church and asking them about what they are looking for from a church community

By taking these initial steps, churches can help visitors feel welcome and initiate deeper connections that encourage visitors to return. For more information about radical hospitality, visit the resources below and contact Disciples Church Extension Fund at 800-274-1883, info@disciplescef.org, www.disciplescef.org

Additional Resources:

Starbucks parody video about visiting church
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7_dZTjw9I

Blog posts:

- What does your worship bulletin say to visitors?
- Your website's first impression
- The face of church – administrative staff
- Church site selection – location is king
- Top five places visitors go in your building
- How do you market your church?
- Does your sanctuary feel empty or full?
- The sacred walk – your church's curb appeal
- Five reasons to tear down your church sign
- Is your church facility welcoming?
- Five must-know facts about first-time guests