

Hospitality Assessment

Congregational hospitality is somewhat difficult to define. Hospitality is not what members think of their own church - almost everyone thinks their own church is friendly. That's because they already know people there and it already feels like home. Hospitality (or the lack of it) is what is sensed and felt by newcomers. It is sort of like the climate in a congregation. Some churches feel warm and caring and some don't. What do newcomers experience when they come to your church on Sunday morning? That is hospitality. First impressions matter a great deal. The impression your congregation makes will often determine whether someone returns again. Studies show that some people have made up their mind whether to return again in their first ten minutes on your property, sometimes before the worship service even begins. Ideally, the best people to ask about hospitality are first time worship attenders. We urge you to take time to periodically interview them. Once someone begins to attend regularly and join a congregation, they begin to lose the perspective of a first time attender.

Because of the difficulty of interviewing first time attenders and getting honest answers, this Hospitality Assessment has been designed to help congregational leaders take an honest look at their congregation's hospitality. While not every item will apply to your congregation, these questions point toward issues that promote hospitality. Some members may not see the need to be intentional about hospitality. Keep in mind that hospitality is *aimed* at welcoming the newcomer, not the member, who may see some items as unnecessary. It is helpful to have at least ten people prepare written answers in advance and then come together to discuss their views.

- 1.) Do you have several greeters of all ages that open doors and welcome people as they enter the church building or worship center? Do you station greeters outdoors weather permitting?
- 2.) Do you have the pastor or lay leaders greeting people as they leave worship?
- 3.) Do you use name tags for all members to help people connect names and faces?
- 4.) Do you have a time for fellowship following the service? Coffee and other refreshments available in a nearby, easy to find, gathering space hosted by church members will help people feel comfortable.
- 5.) Do you have a time during the worship service where people can greet one another, introduce themselves to one another, and share the peace of the Lord?
- 6.) Do you encourage members to seek out unfamiliar faces before and after service? Consider a *three minute rule* - where members take the first three minutes after worship to chat with at least one person they do not know. Encourage leaders to limit the amount of time they spend with other members to enable more mingling and visiting with those they aren't as familiar with. Pastors and other leaders should not conduct church business on Sunday morning, keep your conversations aimed at greeting newcomers.
- 7.) Once a member meets someone new, do they introduce them to other members?
- 8.) Are newcomers approached by more than one or two members or just the pastor on a Sunday morning? Have you considered having people do so as their specific ministry?
- 9.) Is there a place where newcomers can pick up information about your congregation, such

as a an information table. Can they easily find a copy of your most recent newsletter? Are flyers, posters, and brochures available so newcomers can learn about different ministry opportunities?

10.) Is the order of the worship service easy to follow, or must people flip between several resources? Do you announce when to stand or sit, and where you are in the service using page numbers whether in the bulletin, a hymnal, or the Lutheran Book of Worship?

11.) Do members seek out newcomers and sit with them during worship to assist them in following the service?

- 12.) Do you have clearly marked signs for people to find the coat room, bathrooms, church office, nursery, Sunday School area, and other areas of the building?
- 13.) Do you make follow up visits or phone calls to first time worshipers? Do you send a handwritten note or personal letter to first time worshipers thanking them for worshiping with you?
- 14.) Do your ushers help people find a seat, especially if they arrive late or the worship center is crowded. Do they provide clear direction for the worship service, especially for communion?
- 15.) Do you send your newsletter to a wider range of people in the community than just the members of the congregation?
- 16.) Does your newsletter and your bulletin have a specific contact person for each ministry activity and program including a phone number that people can call to get more information?
- 17.) Have you considered a response form in your bulletin where people can sign up for or get additional information about upcoming events without having to locate a posted sign up sheet?
- 18.) Does your bulletin explain parts of your service; such as please feel free to join us in singing; those who are able may stand; please be seated; those who are baptized and believe that Christ is present may come forward to receive the bread and the wine, children who have not received instruction for communion may come forward for a blessing?
- 19.) Have you considered having your entire service printed in the bulletin?
- 20.) Do you use local papers or cable access channels that provide free advertising to help promote your events? Do you specifically state that newcomers are welcome?
- 21.) Do your pastor, musicians, and worship leaders convey excitement about leading worship?
- 22.) Is there wide latitude in style of dress for the people in worship? Are casual dress styles and differing physical appearances accepted by members for members and newcomers?
- 23.) Are you in touch with your immediate community to the point that you are aware of the demographics, needs, and social climate? Do you address the cultural style of your community in the music and preaching?
- 24.) Are you intentional about using written and verbal communication welcoming newcomers to worship without singling them out? Do not call for newcomers to stand up and stand out - they want to blend in.
- 25.) Do you have someone who visits new residents in the community who can provide information about the nearest emergency room or hospital, library, hardware stores, police station, and city hall. Do you invite new residents to worship if they don't already have a church home? Will you direct them to a church of a different denomination if they have a religious preference? A map with this information can be a helpful resource.

26.) Is the lighting bright and attractive in your worship space? Do you have a good sound system used in worship so even those with hearing loss can hear the service clearly?

Consider using *The Telling Congregation: Assessing Your Congregation's Communication Evangelism* and *How Your Congregation Can Become a More Hospitable Community* available through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.