

Guidelines for Welcoming (wondercafe.ca)

Greeting

- Smile and greet guests to church. Welcoming requires attention and sensitivity. Often it will quickly be obvious how much interaction a newcomer is comfortable with. Let them take the lead.
- Let the guest know who you are and that you are glad to meet them. Whether they are first-time visitors or have been worshipping at your church for a while, a personal greeting is a good way to get to know others better.
- Inviting guests on their first visit to join the choir, social justice committee, youth group, or UCW is not usually a good idea. Give them a chance to discover all the great programs your church offers in their own time.

Starting a Conversation

- Remember to give the newcomer your full attention when starting a conversation—at this moment the focus is not yourself or your church.
- Be an active listener!
- Ask questions that encourage the newcomer to share something about themselves. Use open-ended questions, such as, “Have you had a good summer?”, “Are you originally from this area?”, “Do you have any questions about our church?”. Allow guests to respond at their own comfort level, without feeling pressured.
- A huge part of communication is non-verbal. Watch for non-verbal cues, such as looking at one’s watch, tone of voice, nervous laughter, or foot tapping. This can give you clues as to how to proceed with conversation.
- Be aware of your own non-verbal communication. Don’t react to people differently depending on style of dress or ethnicity. Welcome all people alike. Don’t make assumptions about those of a different ethnicity, such as that they are new to the country.
- Don’t be afraid to participate in small talk—it offers people an entry point into deeper conversation.
- Allow for silence—it can be a creative moment. Don’t feel you have to keep talking.
- If it becomes obvious a guest doesn’t want to engage in a lengthy conversation, don’t pressure them. Instead, watch for another occasion to chat with them, perhaps the next Sunday or if you happen to meet them outside of church

Getting to Know Each Other

- Be aware of guests who are standing alone or looking lost. Offer to help them find what they are looking for. Giving a newcomer a quick general orientation to your church building can go a long way in helping them feel comfortable and welcomed.
- After chatting with the newcomers a bit, offer to introduce them to others in the congregation you think they may have something in common with—similar ages, geographical roots, children, hobbies, etc.
- Ask guests if they would like to sign the guest register. If your congregation has an information packet for guests, ask if they would like one.
- Let them know that your church is always open to them and they are welcome to return any time they please.
- Try not to call attention to guests and point out that they're new without their permission.
- Don't smother guests. Newcomers should feel welcomed, but not "interrogated."
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes or seeming awkward when approaching a guest. It's completely normal to feel this way when approaching somebody you haven't met yet.
- It's best not to give a hug to a guest upon meeting them, even if that is the normal way you greet each other in your church. Give guests time to show their own comfort level with physical greetings, including handshakes.

Following Up

- Jot some notes down following a conversation with a guest. Notes on a guest's name, hometown, work, and reason for visiting can really help during a second meeting.
- If it seems a guest might return, offer to look for him or her next week. If you're not available ask one of the other greeters to look out for this guest.
- Encourage other church members to speak to newcomers, visitors, or guests. Offer them this list of tips.
- If the guest offers their personal contact information, let them know the person's name in the church from whom they will receive a call or email. Do not pass on a guest's contact information to anyone except the person designated to follow up with newcomers.
- When following up with a note, clearly indicate that the note is coming from your church on the envelope or in subject line of the email. Many people do not open mail if they don't know who sent it to them.
- Don't let things drop. If you don't have an answer to a question or you don't have information about a church program, let the guest know that you will find out and get back to them. Be sure to follow up.

Are We Welcoming to Children? (wondercafe.ca)

Below are just some of the qualities of congregations that are welcoming to children. Are there more points you would add?

A congregation that welcomes children is one that:

- Greets children, seeks their comfort, and helps them make sense of an unfamiliar setting and unfamiliar activities.
- Provides materials and instructions to assist children in participating in the worship service and in knowing what to do during the service and afterwards.
- Engages children with teaching and activities that point toward God and provides opportunities to come close to God.
- Allows children to participate in all aspects of community life according to their gifts, abilities, and interests.
- Seeks to establish healthy long-term relationships between adults and children of the congregation.
- Uses a variety of symbols, liturgical colours, art, music, and readings that help children experience the Christian tradition as well as learn more about it.
- Offers opportunities for children to do something meaningful both in the congregation and in the surrounding community.
- Provides a safe place for children and their parents to ask questions and share concerns.
- Connects stories of the faith tradition with experiences of daily life.
- Has child-friendly architecture, including coat racks, washrooms, and super-clean facilities.
- Introduces each new child to his or her church school leader. Introduce a new family to a family with children of a similar age.
- Invites parents to accompany their children to church school on their first visit.
- Gives parents a tour so they'll know where their children are and where to meet them after church school.
- Offers rocking chairs in the sanctuary for nursing mothers and parents with fussing babies.
- Adds signing to the liturgy and music.
- Invites members of all ages to share their own faith stories.

Am I Welcoming? (wondercafe.ca)

This is a fun quiz that will help you understand your welcoming style. Knowing your comfort level in various welcoming ministry situations can help you focus on the areas you are stronger at and develop areas that might need work. Use the scoring key at the end to determine your skills and interest in welcoming newcomers to your church.

1. When I walk into a room at a gathering or party, I:

- a) Keep my head down and find a quiet corner or seat.
- b) Look for someone I know and move in beside them.
- c) Announce my arrival and exclaim, "It's sure good to see everyone."
- d) Work the room, shaking hands, introducing myself and making jokes.

2. When I am a newcomer or visitor in a situation, I:

- a) Try to make myself as small as possible and hope that no one notices me.
- b) Avoid the people who look like they might try to get to know me or welcome me.
- c) Welcome a friendly introduction and ask if somebody would like to show me around.
- d) Introduce myself to as many people as possible, offering as much information about myself as they seem interested in.

3. When people I don't know sit next to me at church, I:

- a) Put my head down and try not to make eye contact.
- b) Glance in their direction giving a little smile.
- c) Wait to see if they return another week and then introduce myself.
- d) Introduce myself, share information about myself and my family, invite the person to coffee time with me following the service.

4. When newcomers arrive at our church, I:

- a) Quickly look for someone I know so that I won't have to talk to them.
- b) Find a greeter or usher and alert them.
- c) Wait to see if the person comes in my direction and then tentatively introduce myself and move on.
- d) Go out of my way to welcome them, introduce myself, and offer information about our church, our programs, and our minister.

5. If I am asked to be a greeter at church, I:

- a) Flat out refuse, listing all of my shortcomings.
- b) Carefully consider what this would mean for me and inquire about courses for greeters.
- c) Gratefully receive the greeters package, go home to study up, and come the next Sunday prepared for the task.
- d) Rejoice that my gift of hospitality has finally been recognized and ask to begin this very Sunday.

6. When speaking with a guest or newcomer to my church, I:

- a) Mumble an apology and quickly duck into a corner.
- b) Look around for a talkative member who I can wave over to join us.
- c) Ask open-ended questions and listen as carefully as I can.
- d) Watch their body language, try to make them as comfortable as possible, and invite them to look for me next week to chat again.

Scoring Key:

Every "a" = 1, Every "b" = 2, Every "c" = 3, Every "d" = 4

If your score totalled:

6-11: Welcoming isn't something that you intentionally focus on. This might be a time to develop your skills in this area by connecting with people for whom welcoming others comes easily and learning from them.

12-18: You have some natural gifts for making others feel welcome. With more practice and experience you could easily build on these gifts and learn new skills.

19-24: Helping others feel welcomed is a big part of your personality. It may be time for you to reach out to others in your church and teach them some of your skills. This will help make your congregation's welcoming ministry more effective.