



Open House Preparation

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The People of the United Methodist Church.

Welcoming Congregations

How well does our church welcome people? Is the welcome little more than an initial encounter, or does the lifestyle of our church bring new people into Christian community, disciple them and send them out?

Welcoming has everything to do with how we make people feel. For an example, if possible, watch the Igniting Ministry video “A Tale of 2 Churches”. Would you return to a church where you are warmly welcomed or hardly welcomed? The warm one, of course.

Do we make people feel glad they’re here? Do we engage people in an open, welcoming but not overbearing way? Do we make it easy to know what we often take for granted (where to sit, what to sing, what to say, etc.)? Do new people get introduced, or do they have to fend for themselves in finding conversation? Are there ways for a newcomer to engage in spiritual growth? Are we a “tough nut to crack” or open and caring?

If the answers to these questions are negative, the newcomer will look elsewhere— if they continue to look at all. But if the answers are positive, the atmosphere sings out, “Yes, we are interested in you. Our hearts, minds and doors are always open to you.” The message is clear.

The pitfall for many churches is that we think we are friendly because we are friendly *to each other*. In developing a welcoming ministry, we must begin to see ourselves as others do. Is the visitor welcomed? Is the newer person included in our conversation? Are we open?

These questions are for all of us to answer. When invitation, welcome and discipleship are assigned to a committee, sometimes the rest of the congregation assumes it is the job of those few people. Welcoming is not the job of any one committee, or position in the church. We need everyone’s hands and hearts!

How can you help in the welcoming? Creating a welcoming and hospitable climate begins at the curb and continues into the heart of the congregation. The ministry of welcoming is not the responsibility of a few people or a committee. It is the responsibility of the entire church family. In a welcoming, “Open Doors”, the following “bare minimums” are firmly in place.

Welcoming Congregations

What can you do to make sure these things happen here?

1. **Greeters** have the special ability to make sure everyone feels welcome and appreciated. They are the front line for welcoming God’s guests. They ask, “How can I serve you?” They may engage a newcomer in conversation, and help introduce them to people within the congregation.
2. **Ushers** make sure guests and members are seated comfortable and to their liking and needs. Because of their tasks of bulletins, seating, and other duties, it is preferable that greeters and ushers be different people, so that both duties are performed well.
3. **The entire Congregation** engages people they don’t know*— or don’t know well— in conversation, even if those people are members. It’s as simple as, “Hi, my name is _____. I don’t think we’ve met. What’s your name?” (NOTE: Be sure to engage them with more than a nod and a “good morning”. Make the effort to really connect with the person you are talking to— be interested in them!)
4. **The pastor or worship leadership** creates a worship atmosphere that exudes excitement of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They make it a point to greet newcomers after the service.

*Did you know that people often decide within the first 10 minutes of being in a new church whether or not they will return?

Use these 2 Rules of Thumb:

Circle of 10 (10 foot rule): Any time you are talking to people, especially at the beginning of worship, look around you in a circle that goes out from you in 10 feet in any direction. Speak first to the person you know the least in that circle, especially if that person is a newcomer. Use #3 above if you’re not sure what to say or do. Whatever you do, don’t say nothing at all— your silence would be heard louder than anything else!

Rule of 3 (3 minute rule): Immediately following the conclusion of worship, seek out the visitors and newcomers in church. Do not speak to anyone you know for at least 3 minutes. Why? Because the people visiting will not stay for you to finish a conversation between you and someone else. If you wish to speak to others you know well, wait until after you’ve spoken with the visitor and the others you do not know well.

Other things for our church to consider: Having **greeters stationed** in the parking lot or at the curb, along with ones at the doors to the church... doing the Igniting Ministry “Welcoming Congregation Award” Checklist to ensure your church is welcoming... Use **NAMETAGS** for everyone (because the visitor- and even the average church member- does not know *everyone*)... Have a mystery guest do a “welcome audit”...