



**WELCOME**

# **SEEING GUESTS WELCOMED AND INTEGRATED**

**CHURCH PRACTICES SERIES**

MAY 2023



## WELCOME

Over the last few years serving as GTA Regional Director in the Western Ontario District, it became clear that there were some common challenges facing church leaders in the Greater Toronto Area.

As a result, we decided to develop The Church Practices Series to assist our leaders in addressing these challenges in their unique context.

In the following few pages, you will find links to interviews with those with an academic perspective on these challenges and those who have personally worked to address them. In addition, you will find links to resources and a curated summary of what we have seen in our research.

We hope this package helps spark conversation as we work together to see our region impacted for God.

Joel Spiridigliozzi with Jonathan Gallo



GTA Region



## INTEGRATION

Each week people walk into new churches in their community. Sometimes it is because they are new to the neighbourhood and looking for a church to belong to. Sometimes there is a crisis in their life, and they are on the search for God. Sometimes it's simply because they have been invited to a special event such as a baby dedication, baptism, Christmas, Easter, or community celebration. Whatever the reason, we need to be prepared and think about how to serve those who visit our churches.

## HOSPITALITY

*"...seek to show hospitality" Romans 12:13*

The cornerstone of welcoming new people into our church is hospitality. While some people are naturally hospitable, it is a behavior and attitude that can be learned. We see several passages of scripture that encourage us to grow in our ability to be hospitable (Leviticus 19:33-34; Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:2). We can grow in hospitality in our churches by growing in hospitality with our homes. Hospitality asks the question, "how can I make others feel welcome, included, and special?" Hospitality is concerned with creating an environment that is refreshing and enjoyable to others – not simply for ourselves.

## SECRET SHOPPER

When you visit a new church for the first time, you're often very aware of what it feels like to be there. However, when we get used to our own environment, we forget what it might be like to be a visitor in the church we lead. Sometimes we assume everyone who comes knows where to go and what to do when they arrive.

A great exercise is to invite people from the community or friends you trust to act as "secret shoppers" at your church. Invite them to attend your church and offer you an honest evaluation of their impressions. While it might be challenging to hear honest feedback, this can provide you with a wealth of information and learning about how to make your church welcoming to those who God sends through the doors.

Here are some areas to consider when becoming a welcoming and hospitable church.

## PARKING

Is there clear signage about where the main entrances of the church are and where to park? What are the challenges presented to drivers who come to the church? Are there offsite, underground, or adjacent parking lots they need to be aware of? How does paid parking work? Are certain areas designated for visitors, pastors, seniors, or those who need accessible parking? How does that feel to a newcomer? Are they able to drop off, or does everyone need to walk? Is there anyone in the parking lot to help provide directions?

## ENTRANCE(S)

Are the entrances to your church easy to find? What are the impressions that a visitor might have first walked in? Does the person welcoming reflect the type of church you hope to grow? Are people overwhelmed by too many greeters? Do too few ignore people? Is the reception cold or warm and welcoming?

## THE LOBBY

Is there adequate signage to help visitors understand where to go? Can one find the restrooms, the welcome desk, the auditorium, coffee, or where they can check in their kids? How does the lobby smell? Is the entrance cluttered or clean?

## KIDS MINISTRIES

Are visitors left to figure out what to do with their kids, or can someone help them with that? Are greeters and ushers on the lookout for people who need help? Is there a designated area for the kid's check-in? How do visitors sign up for their kids? Does the kid's check-in area help visitors feel safe and secure about where they will leave their kids, or is it full of questions? Is there a staffed nursery or a place for mothers to feed their babies? Does it have a live feed of the church service?

## RESTROOMS

How do the restrooms look and smell? Are they adequately stocked with supplies? Are there emergency feminine products, mints, mouthwash, and deodorant? Is there someone assigned to check in on the restrooms during your services to ensure they are clean? What is your plan in the case of a restroom overflow emergency?

## WELCOME DESK

Is there a clear area where people can go for information and assistance, whether they are newcomers or regularly attend church? Is your welcome room stocked with newcomer gifts, pamphlets on church ministries, and ways to sign up for classes, events, and more? Some churches like to build large welcome desks, and others like stand-up tables that remove barriers between those helping and those asking for information.

Using iPads that connect to your church software is a helpful way to get people to sign up for events, give tithes and offerings, and connect with new groups and classes. In addition, some church software offers a mobile version where newcomers can text information to you or fill out a form on their device.

## SERVICES

How does the person attending feel as a newcomer? Ignored, singled out, embarrassed, or welcome? Do they know how to take the next step and learn more about you? What are the barriers that prevent people from connecting with you? Announcement time is a great way to present a general welcome to all newcomers to the church and invite them to fill out a paper welcome card or text a number to fill out a digital welcome card.

*“If you’re new today, we want to welcome you to our church! Thanks for being with us. In the setback infant of you, you can find a connect card. If you could take a moment and fill it out and bring it to our welcome desk, we’d love to meet you after service and hear your story. We promise we aren’t going to spam you, but we want to say thank you and have a gift for you.”*

If you offer a benediction at the end of service, you can also mention that and help people know what their next step could be. It might take some work to figure this out in your context. Here’s a sample.

*“Thanks for being with us today. We pray for you to feel the presence of Jesus and take steps toward Him each day. If today was the day you decided to follow Jesus for the first time, we’d love to know about it. We want to give you a Bible and meet you. And if you are visiting, a special welcome to you as well. We would love you to stick around and meet you in the lobby as the welcome desk... (benediction)”*

## CONNECT CARD

A simply designed connect card is a great way to collect information from your church and from newcomers at the same time. When creating a connect card, you need to balance the amount of information you would like to collect along with the options you are offering to those filling out the card. We have provided samples of connect cards in our resources.

## THE NEXT STEP

What is your intentional process for helping a newcomer discover more about the church and see if it's a community they want to connect with? Are there barriers for them to get involved? Is it easy to understand where to get information? Is it easy to know where to get involved next? We often think that offering an extensive menu lets people choose what to do next. However, a simple list is memorable and easy to follow: Attend a Welcome Lunch, Join a Group, or Volunteer

## FOLLOW UP

Follow-up is a balance of welcoming people but not feeling overwhelmed because you are desperate for them to join the church. Follow-up should include one of the following: a call, an email, a text message, a handwritten postcard, or a letter in the mail and a gift to say thank you. In addition, if you notice that a person has visited several times over a period of time, you can invite them to join your next newcomer's lunch. We have included a sample letter in our resources that can be used for visitor follow up.

## FIRST TIME GIFT

There are several ideas for first-time gifts. The purpose is to simply say thank you and for people to know that you authentically appreciate them. Some offer tangible gifts that can be immediately used, such as cookies, chocolate bars, mugs, travel mugs, t-shirts, pens, etc. Others choose to send a gift that can be sent with a follow-up message in a letter/email/text along with a gift card (including a digital gift card) for coffee, pizza, or fuel.

Promotional Products - [4imprint.ca](http://4imprint.ca) ; [staplespromo.ca](http://staplespromo.ca)  
Send eGift Cards - [Giftcards.ca](http://Giftcards.ca), [TimHortons.ca](http://TimHortons.ca), [Starbucks.ca](http://Starbucks.ca)

## SOFTWARE

Suppose your church uses people software like Planning Center, Church Community Builder, or ACS. In that case, there are often built-in processes that you can use to help track and automate follow-up with emails, letters,



and texting. These programs are invaluable to help you track those who first come to the church and indicate so by 1) checking in their kids for the first time, 2) filling out a connection card or 3) giving to the offering. These markers can be used to track where people are at as they relate to your church.

## NEWCOMERS LUNCH

Those who have attended over a period of time can be invited to a newcomers event. A simple lunch after Sunday morning services, with kids invited, where people can get to know about the history of the church, the vision, what you believe, meet the staff, and be invited to join a group or serve can be accomplished in an hour with plenty of time for conversation, answering questions, and more. We have included in our resources a sample PowerPoint presentation that can be customized for your churches newcomer lunch.

## CONNECTION

Connecting people in relationships with others in your church is the key to helping them choose to join your church. This is a challenging endeavor, but it is essential to learn how to do it. While it might be easy to get a person to have a simple conversation in your lobby, genuine connection happens when people connect outside of Sunday services. As leaders, we can build environments where people can connect with others with similar life stages, backgrounds, passions, and more. Church-wide, demographic-based events (women, men, young adults, young married couples, etc.). Disciple-making groups, classes, serving teams, etc. Social gatherings, outreach initiatives, etc.

*Have a story or experience that you would like to share? Section meetings are a perfect place to debrief. We would also love to hear from you and help pass on what you have learned.*

