

The Bishop Speaks

A Welcoming Church

Introduction – While camping in Ontario my son and I went to worship one summer Sunday morning in a church that was unknown to us. We were met at the door by a smiling man who welcomed us introduced himself and gave us the bulletin and books we needed. During the service my son (10 years old) picked up a card in the book slot in front of the pew. There was a puzzle on it which he did. During service we were told of tea and coffee after service. After service we were approached by a parishioner who talked to us a few minutes. When we left the church we had enjoyed our stay. We felt welcomed.

When people come into your church often what decides if they return or not is if they feel welcomed when they go. This is especially true if they are coming for the first time. In the fall time people who have moved into your area may very likely be looking for a place to worship or simply a place to meet new people. If they come to your church, would they feel welcomed? The rest of this paper suggests some things to consider that will affect people who come to worship.

Physical Appearance – A church building that is kept in good shape is more welcoming than one where there are obviously repairs that need to be done. On the outside of the Church, is the side in good repair? Is there painting or staining that needs to be done. If anything is made of wood then very likely painting or staining is needed every 2 years or so. What about the windows? Are there cracks in them or have any been broken and boarded over? Most people do not want to come to a church where the building is run down.

Are the grounds looking like it is cared for? Is the grass cut and trimmed? Are there flowers? Are there old vehicles, sleds, or snow mobiles on the property that take away from the appearance? The physical appearance of the Church and grounds can say "We care for our church and therefore we care for you". Or it can say we neglect the church and we will neglect you as well. What does your church say?

Cleanliness – No one wants to come to a dirty church. Are the rooms cluttered with things not put away or not used? Are cupboards needed to put things away? Are the kitchen and other rooms clean? Are the Church floors clean? I have learned that there are many in churches that never seem to throw anything out. Even if they do not use it people want to keep it.

I have entered churches with bales of clothing in the entrance ways. These can not only be unsightly but dangerous and a fire hazard. Clothing for sale is great and a needed ministry in many communities. Nevertheless they should not be stored in entrance rooms.

Are the books neat and in order? Are the books in good repair? It is very proper to burn old, damaged or other books including bibles that cannot be used or are unsightly. When new persons come to a dirty church then there is a strong possibility that they will not return.

Meeters and Greeters – These are people who meet worshippers as they come into the church. Their main purpose is to welcome them to worship and to make sure they have everything they need to worship. They would give out bulletins, hymn books and anything else used in service. It can be frustrating to sit down and realize that you do not have everything you need to worship. This can distract from the service.

A second reason for Meeters and Greeters is to identify and help those who might need assistance. This might be new comers, handicapped, or anyone else with questions. They would also let the minister know about newcomers so he might make a point to talk with them, or about any other issue that the minister should be aware of. Friendly meeters and greeters can make the difference between someone coming back or going elsewhere.

Information Card – This is a card that simply allows people to give their information to the church. There would be space for name, address, telephone, and email. Some churches have information that might be helpful to new comers such as directions to the bathroom. As I said before,

one church I attended had a little puzzle on it that kept my son busy and he took it home with him.

Contacting New Comers or Absentees – As newcomers come to church and leave their information they should be contacted within a few days to welcome them and to learn if the church can be of assistance. One parish had information brochures that they gave out when they made contact. This gave a reason to visit. This contact can be done by the minister or by people appointed and trained to do so. It has been proven that when volunteers visit there is a more likely chance they will return to church than if the minister did the contact.

Welcoming Service – Many churches have a welcoming service to welcome newcomers and those who have been away for the summer. This takes place in September and is often followed by a parish meal of some sort. During this time information is made available regarding time and nature of services, Sunday School, Bible Studies, ACW, and any other group in the church. In some, time is given in the service or after for people to speak about each of the groups.

A welcoming Church is one in which people feel comfortable. It is a church where people will want to attend. It is a church that will grow. If we want people to hear the Gospel, to hear of the great love of Jesus, then we must make every effort to make people feel welcomed and want to stay. When a stranger or a newcomer goes to your church, does he or she feel welcomed?