

Layered Hospitality

Church leaders often talk about “radical hospitality”, but don’t really know what it looks like. Radical hospitality is layered, opulent, and pointed. Visitors and seekers should go through at least five layers of hospitality, both as they come to church, and as they leave church.

The Parking Lot

The first hospitality team appears in the parking lot (or on the sidewalk) at least 30 minutes before worship, rain or shine, cold weather and warm weather. Whenever possible, open the car door so the visitor and family can exit the vehicle. Smile; welcome; state the core message of the church; and tell them what a great time they will have because the theme of the day is _____. In churches with limited parking, these greeters might valet park the cars.

Front Doors, Side Doors, Rear Doors

Greeters are posted at every entrance to the building. In good weather, they might be outside on the porch or in the front yard. Smile; welcome, state the core message; point them in the direction they need to go or toward the Welcome Center. Greet them in a manner appropriate to their culture (handshake, bow, embrace or refrain from embracing, look them in the eyes or lower your eyes, whatever is right). Always be able to speak a few words in their own language.

Welcome Center

Staff a welcome center with volunteers. Give them brochures about the church and about special ministries if the visitor is over 45; give them a CD or DVD with a video of the church if they are between 30 and 45 or have children; give them a website address and call over a waiting volunteer to personally guide them into worship if they are under 30. Give away free toys to the kids, and some useful lifestyle enhancing gift for adults. Make sure it has the website, a phone number, and the core message.

Worship Center

The traditional greeters/ushers at the entrance to the sanctuary should do more than hand out paper. Smile with an appropriate cultural greeting. State the core message of the church. Point out something special as you give them the bulleting ... the sermon title, the sacrament, the children’s time, or maybe free coffee. Ask them to pray for a specific global outreach of the congregation. If the guest has a physical limitation or small children, call over a waiting escort to help them find a seat.

Refreshments

Train the servers to do more than serve. Always share the core message to a stranger. Always ask if there is anything particular they need that week that the church can provide ... and reach for a tablet to write it down. Always take time to personally greet anyone under 10 or over 65. Never talk to your close friends. The table decorations should be magnificent and colorful. The food should reflect your research into the mission field, and contain the absolute best examples of the preferred food groups of the major lifestyle segments.

When visitors leave the church, the same layers of hospitality should all be in place. Refreshment servers should be prepare a take home package of goodies; the ushers are still their to point the way to washrooms, nursery, and resources; the welcome center staff is still there to answer questions; the door greeters are there to say restate the core message and say goodbye; and the last thing the visitor should see in his or her rear view mirror is the parking team waving goodbye.

Yes, really shy visitors can avoid all this attention if they want to do so. More likely, they will choose which layer of hospitality matches their comfort zones. The last thing you want is to allow anyone to be unwelcomed. The welcome is incredibly enthusiastic and accepting; and it is impossible for any visitor or member to leave the grounds on Sunday morning without having memorized the core message of the church.