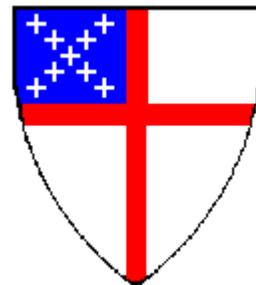


Our signs say:

The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!



Let's check:

How Welcoming is Your Congregation? Really?

Most congregations consider themselves friendly. Usually members of congregations are very friendly towards one another. The following checklist isn't about that. The concern behind this checklist is hospitality toward the stranger and first-time worshiper. The check-list is based on several check-lists available on line, particularly the ones on the websites of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia. The check-list is also based on the experience of yours truly, several of my colleagues among the clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, and others in several Episcopal congregations of various sizes across the USA. It is intended to provide a starting point for parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego who wish to review and improve their ministry of hospitality, who wish to enhance the quality of their welcome to the stranger and first time worshiper. The check-list is anchored in common sense more than anything else. No rocket science is involved. Anyone who wants to welcome people more effectively can certainly do so. Continuous quality improvement is worth and requires some effort. Get your team together – the Hospitality Committee, the heads of several ministries in your congregation (all ministries to children and youth, greeters, ushers, clergy, etc.), and whoever else can take part. It is a good idea to have people of several ages involved and it would certainly be a great idea to include some newer members for their very valuable, fresh perspectives. Then make honest, constructive use of the following questions. If you develop other questions, please offer them for possible inclusion in the next edition of this check-list.

After compiling your answers to the following questions, identify the items most in need of being addressed first. Prioritize the rest. A time line with target dates and persons responsible for coordinating specific improvements is a good idea. If any of the questions don't seem to apply to your congregation, move on to questions that are relevant in your circumstance. When you have gone through the entire check-list and time line, it would be a good idea to begin all over again. Continuous quality improvement requires continuous evaluation and effort.

God bless you in the ministry of hospitality, especially to the stranger and to the first-time worshiper. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it,” (Hebrews 13:2).

Faithfully in Christ,
The Rev. Frederick W. Thayer, Rector
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Poway, CA
fthayer@stbartschurch.org

Welcome and Hospitality Check-List

*In response to each question, circle the appropriate number, one through five. The scale is:
1 – completely unacceptable; 2 – poor; 3 – adequate; 4 – good; 5 – excellent*

Before the first visit

- 1 2 3 4 5 Are members of your congregation encouraged to invite friends and members of their family to church? Are they equipped with brochures, flyers, and/or other items to give to those they invite? Do they offer to provide a ride to and/or to accompany those they invite?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is the receptionist and/or voice mail message at your church friendly and does it include worship times or access to worship times?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does your church have a website? Is it up to date? Does it indicate clearly the street address, worship times, special worship times (Christmas, Easter, etc.), current activities, a phone number, an e-mail address, and a link to a map and directions? Are the photographs on your website more about people than buildings?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does your church use social media (Facebook, Twitter, a blog, ...) to engage parishioners and their friends in the life of your congregation? Does the information posted there give a positive and accurate image of your church?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do special activities of your congregation get reported regularly in the local paper, hard copy or on line?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you attempt to raise public awareness about the life and activities of your congregation through advertising, specific member invitations, special events?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does your church have clear, visible, easy to read, signage on the grounds and pointing toward the church from strategic locations at some distance from the grounds? Can someone driving a car easily read the name of your church and your service times? Is your signage, as well as your telephone book or other publically visible information correct? Is a logo and a consistent font or typeface used? (Yellow Pages and newspaper advertising are less effective now with the widespread use of the internet but, if you have it, is it large enough and good enough to be noticed and viewed positively? Would funds spent on the yellow pages and newspapers be better spent elsewhere – on your website, for example?)

Facilities

- 1 2 3 4 5 Is the exterior of your church, including the landscaping, well-maintained and attractive (including clean windows), giving the impression that members care deeply about their place of worship and Christian formation?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have designated, prime parking spaces for guests located near the front doors of your building?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is there designated parking close to the building reserved for the handicapped?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the sidewalks, entrance, and interior spaces of the church easy to navigate for persons in wheelchairs or with other mobility concerns?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is it easy to tell by your exterior signage which entrance to use for your worship space, church office, Sunday school, evening programs, nursery, parish hall, etc.?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is it easy to tell by your interior signage which way to proceed within your buildings to restrooms, classrooms, the nursery, etc.?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are all rooms in the church clearly marked? Are there clear directional signs to restrooms, nursery, parish hall and classrooms within your building(s)?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the restrooms clean? Without rust or unpleasant odors? Do you have soap, towels, lotion and tissues available in each one?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have adequate lighting in the hallways, classrooms, narthex, nave, etc.? Is there adequate lighting at night in parking areas and entrance areas?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are your public spaces uncluttered? Have old bulletins and out-of-date church brochures been discarded? Are collection boxes (food to the needy, etc.) neat and well-marked? Are seldom used items stored out of sight? Are there any eyesores to which members have become so accustomed they no longer see them?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are all rooms clean and free from mildew or other odors? Has painting, floor cleaning and other maintenance been kept up to date?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are there tissues readily available in the pews/seats in the nave?

Nursery and Children

- 1 2 3 4 5 Do ushers and greeters welcome children warmly and proactively offer information about Sunday School, Nursery, or other child-focused ministries?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are there inviting and appropriate ways for children to be engaged during worship – age-appropriate bulletins, activity bags, a children’s message, and/or worship roles such as serving as acolytes, readers, ushers, and greeters?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is information about what is provided for children, including a nursery, provided in the bulletin or in the pews/seats?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the locations of the nursery and other child-spaces clearly marked?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is the nursery located near the worship space?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do mature, capable, and warm persons staff the nursery? If applicable, are they credentialed and have they passed a background check?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are children in the nursery registered, and is their safety assured? Is there a system in place for summoning a parent from elsewhere on campus when needed?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the rooms for infants, toddlers and children attractive, clean, well lit, odor free?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are toys, furnishings, equipment and bedding clean and in good order?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is your church up to date in all Safe Church practices and training?

Worship

- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have designated greeters (besides ushers) who are trained to welcome and help guests – and encourage them to sign a guest-book or complete a guest card? If you do, are your ushers also friendly and helpful? Do your ushers guide people to a pew/chair? Do your ushers distribute bulletins and other material reliably? If your ushers are tasked with counting the number present, do they so unobtrusively and accurately? Are your ushers ready to assist those in need during a service, such as guiding a parent with a crying baby to the nursery or a changing area?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have an understandable and first-time worshiper friendly bulletin that helps guests participate in your worship?

- 1 2 3 4 5 Do the clergy have opportunities to greet guests before they enter and are seated?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are page numbers and location of music or prayer book material announced regularly?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does a member of the clergy or a designated layperson welcome guests early in the service?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you welcome guests without singling them out, making them stand, or creating awkwardness for them? (Don't forget that a high percentage of visitors are introverts.)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is there an opportunity for regular attendees to introduce themselves to people they do not recognize?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you issue an invitation to receive communion so that guests know they are welcome and know how to participate?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is your worship bright, vibrant, and well-paced?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is your music, whatever style, done well? Are first-time worshippers able to participate in congregational singing?
- 1 2 3 4 5 If you use musical settings for portions of the service, is the music readily available to guests?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you use unique actions in your liturgy that may help long-time members feel included but which do not make sense to first-time worshipers?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do all readers speak clearly and at a pace that allows them to be understood? The acoustics of your building are a factor to take into account when considering this question.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are all the liturgical leaders (acolytes, lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, clergy, etc.) well prepared for their roles?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do the sermons generally have "take away" applications relevant to people?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do the sermon and announcements avoid technical, coded, and idiosyncratic jargon?

- 1 2 3 4 5 Do services start on time?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does the service begin and end in a strong, inspirational, seasonally appropriate way?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does the way your congregation passes the peace unintentionally shun newcomers?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the format and the instructions in your bulletins and worship services clear to guests? Are they understandable for someone who is not an Episcopalian and may not have any church background at all?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are large print bulletins available?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are audio amplification devices available and reliable?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are announcements brief and to the point?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have mints available for persons who experience coughing or a dry throat during worship?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have hand sanitizer and tissues available in or near the pews/seats?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is the worship space clean, comfortable and inviting? Does it smell nice? Are the wood and metal items all polished?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is the temperature appropriate? Are the light bulbs working? Are window sills, ceiling fan blades and other horizontal surfaces free of dust?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the Prayer Books, hymnals, and other items readily available and neat?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are there forms for feedback available in the pews/seats, such as visitor cards?

General Hospitality

- 1 2 3 4 5 Does your church have a coffee hour or other social activity after the service?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do your members engage guests, invite them to coffee or to other social activities after the service, introduce them to other members, and include them in conversations?

- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have a workable procedure for getting the names and addresses of first-time guests? Are you able to solicit this information both at worship and fellowship?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Is there a system for following up with first-time guests? Do clergy and laity both have roles?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Does your follow-up system include responding to guests within 24 to 48 hours of their attendance? Do you make “porch visits” and leave a small gift at their homes (cookies, bread, devotional booklet, flowers, mug, ...) send a letter, send an e-mail, telephone? What follow-up might be most appropriate and effective in your community? Are laypersons, as well as clergy, involved in your follow-up?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have an information table or area with current newsletters, attractive brochures and other information on congregational life located in the main entryway and in the parish hall space?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are the bulletin boards current? (Visitors are more likely than members to read the bulletin boards.)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are extra copies of class materials and Bibles in the classrooms? Are teachers prepared and trained to welcome guests?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have a name tag system that is current and utilized?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Are there classes, groups or special events held regularly for newcomers?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you have a system in place to follow up with newcomers when they return after their initial visit? Do you have a system to shepherd newcomers until they become active in the church? Do you recognize and welcome new members with appropriate rite and ceremony at worship services periodically?
- 1 2 3 4 5 Do you interview people who have recently visited your church and ask them for feedback, including those who came only once as well as those who have continued to come? Do you ask how people found out about the congregation and what their initial experiences were like?

Tally Your Results

Determine Your Congregations Welcoming and Hospitality Task Priorities

List your 1s in the left-hand column. Next, list your 2s. Use an additional piece of paper if necessary. Beside each designate an owner – the person to be responsible for assuring that the situation is ameliorated, working with all appropriate individuals, groups, committees, etc. List target dates in the right-hand column and establish a system for regular follow-up and accountability to assure the timely implementation of the practices which will increase and enhance your congregation's ministry of hospitality to the stranger and the first-time worshiper. At regular intervals, quarterly in the first year and no less than annually thereafter, repeat this survey. The ministry of hospitality is so vital, that continuous review must be undertaken and continuous quality improvement must be pursued. When there are no more 1s and 2s, work on improving your 3s. When there are no more 3's, work on improving your 4s ...

Task

Owner

Target Date

An Additional Way to Assess Your Congregation's Hospitality

Have members of your vestry and/or others visit and worship at several churches, including Episcopal congregations, in your area. Then have the away team brainstorm about and report what was observed. This will facilitate seeing your congregation with new eyes. Then, incorporate good ideas from other congregations into your congregation's ministry of hospitality, adapting them as necessary and/or desirable.

A Few Tips for Greeters

Greet everyone. Appear to enjoy greeting people. Smile. Shake hands, as appropriate. Make eye contact. Don't ask: "are you new?" Don't ask: "is this your first time here?" Do say: "I don't think I've met you yet. I'm [N.N]." If someone is new, show them where the restrooms are, show them where childcare or Sunday school or whatever is needed is located. Introduce guests to an usher so they will get a bulletin and be shown to a seat in the nave. Be welcoming; do not be overwhelming. Speak in a conversational tone.