

Hospitality: (Per Webster): 1) the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers. 2) The quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, generous, and friendly way.

Hospitality refers to the relationship process between a guest and a host, and it also refers to the act or practice of being hospitable, that is, the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill.

Hospitality is about compensating/equalizing a total stranger with the host, making him feel protected and at the end of his hosting, guiding him to his next destination and so on.

Hospitality: It is the special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to open their homes willingly and offer lodging, food, and fellowship cheerfully to other people.

Before we go further, there are two important questions to ask:

- 1. What is hospitality?**
- 2. Why do we need to do it better?**

Concepts

- **Hospitality is not a program to bring people into the church. It is a culture of kindness;** an outcome of Christian love and the great commandment to love one another/ love your neighbor as yourself.
- **The culture of the church needs to be “welcoming place for everyone”,** as opposed to “long-standing private club”. **We must be inclusive**, not exclusive. (*“The Club” concept needs to go away.*) (*Not tolerance, not just acceptance, but welcome. Tolerance is negative; acceptance is neutral; welcome is positive.*)
- **Hospitality starts internally.** You can never extend hospitality; you can never build a ministry; you can NEVER GROW as a church, until you are nice to each other. YOU MUST EXTEND GRACE TO EACH OTHER. Only then can you extend it to others.
- **The church belongs to God, not us.** We should all be on equal footing.
- **Visitors have rights. Members have responsibilities.** It is a visitor’s right to be welcomed. It is a member’s responsibility to do so.
- **Hospitality is about relationships.** All of Christianity is about relationships.
- **Hospitality involves the beginning of a new relationship--** between the existing congregation and a visitor/ visitors. **Hospitality also includes the on-going relationship with those who show up repeatedly** (eg: regular visitors, members, staff). They need to feel welcome and wanted, too.

- **There are only “first encounters”.** Every encounter is a new encounter; a “first encounter”, even if we have seen that person once, twice, or a thousand times. (We are only guaranteed the immediate encounter. Past is gone; there may not be a future opportunity.)
- We may only ever see a person one time because of the circumstances of their visit. (Eg: visiting from out of state.) **We get one chance to minister to these people.** In one encounter, it is our job to plant Gospel seeds. We do not have to harvest-- only plant seeds. The Holy Spirit will arrange the watering, nurturing, and harvesting; maybe with us, maybe far away; this is irrelevant to the task at hand. **Our job is to plant seeds.**
- **Our first encounter will set the tone for all successive encounters** (should the person return).
- **Visitors come for 3 primary reasons:** 1) They are looking for a place to worship while they are visiting in the locale; 2) They are there for a specific event, eg: a baptism; 3) They are seeking a new church home. **All three need to be welcomed and ministered to with the same care and intensity.**

Making It Happen

Who

- **Hospitality ministry should not be the pastor’s job.** This should be done by lay persons who are gifted in hospitality and feel called to ministry. They should communicate with the pastor as they organize and conduct this ministry. Their data collection is exceedingly valuable to the pastor in his role.
- **Sunday morning hospitality should be done by a limited number of people.** This is especially important if the church is large and/or has multiple services. These individuals should be able to recognize visitors at a glance. They should also know how to encounter visitors appropriately, as mentioned above. Consistency is key! (*2 points: 1) Just because someone wants to do hospitality does not mean they are the right person for the job. 2) If you have a hospitality committee, it should be comprised of people who have the talent of hospitality. You do NOT want people with the gift of business administration steering Hospitality Ministry.*)
- **Hospitality Ministers need to display a confident attitude when encountering visitors.** This helps convey a message of sincere welcome. (A hesitant, anxious approach says, “Hi, I’m not sure what to do with you”. (*Not self-confidence. Confidence should come from an ENTHUSIASM to share what has been shared with us-- the Love of Christ.*))
- **Hospitality Ministers should like, and be comfortable with, children.** Children are the most precious treasure of parents. Acknowledging them is vital if you wish to validate visiting families.
- **When possible, have men serve in Hospitality Ministry.** This is especially important at the front door. This is for cultural reasons. A visiting

man will feel more comfortable being greeted by a man than by a woman. Men also feel more comfortable walking into a church if there are other men present. Having a man at the front door is key to this. Women, on the other hand, are not uncomfortable being greeted by either gender. Some women are very encouraged to see men serving in hospitality, as they see opportunities for welcoming and involvement for their husbands. (*Door attendants/greeters do not need to be hospitality-gifted, they need only be pleasant.*)

- **These Ministers of Hospitality should be very active and visible on Sunday morning.** The way they conduct themselves and encounter all persons, particularly guests, will set the tone for the rest of the congregation. They should interact with people as they enter and leave service. It is vital that they be as visible (or more so) than the pastor. (Mine is one of the first faces they see and the last hand they shake.) (*This, in no way, lessens the position or importance of the pastor; rather, it accentuates his role as spiritual leader.*)
- **These Ministers of Hospitality should have back-up help,** to “hand-off” guests to for tours, information, seating, etc, especially during busy times.

How:

- **Meet people where they are.** People come from all walks of life and spiritual experience. This is unimportant. Minister to them, just as they are. They are in your facility, coming to worship. That is **ALL** that matters. (*Do not ask, “Are you Lutheran?”-- that conveys a sense of “private club”.* **EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!**)
- **Show no preference or favoritism.** As visitors come to church, they come with certain anxieties: “What will it be like?” “Will people be nice?” “Will we fit in?” Allay these fears by being universally welcoming. Give the same care to the pony-tailed, tattooed, t-shirt and jean clad biker that you do to the well-suited businessman. **Jesus loves us all.** (**EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!**)
- **What works in secular society can apply to the church,** without compromising the Gospel. Barnes & Noble has an approach that has merit. 1) Comfortable setting. 2) Pleasant aromas and refreshments (fresh, hot, excellent coffee). 3) Something for everyone.
- **Set up your church so that it is “user-friendly” and “visitor-friendly”.** Good signage, lay-out maps with “you are here” etc.
- We need to identify visitors, approach, engage, greet, interact, and disengage from them in a matter of a few moments. **It is imperative that we welcome a visitor without overwhelming them.** (*A quick way to chase people out is to overwhelm them. There can be a fine line between welcoming and smothering. This is a very important reason to have a limited, experienced group of hospitality ministers.*)
- **Staff and lay persons in ministry should wear nametags.** This makes us easily identifiable so that a visitor knows who to go to if they have a question or a need. You should try to have as many congregants wearing nametags as

possible.

- **NEVER single out a visitor by any sort of tag, ribbon or pin.** Some churches do this. While well-meaning, it is intimidating. Welcome the guest, and then let them anonymously blend-in with the congregation so that they may worship without feeling like an alien. We are a “brotherhood of believers”, all belonging to God’s family, so do NOT single-out a visitor by a distinguishing feature that makes them feel like they do not belong to the family.
- **Guests need to be greeted/acknowledged multiple times to experience your welcoming spirit.** Guests are 1) greeted as they enter, 2) likely to be greeted by 1-5 people in the Narthex, 3) greeted by the greeters who distribute bulletins at the sanctuary doors, 4) greeted by at least one person in a near-by pew, 5) greeted by ministries coordinator as he opens service with announcements, 6) greeted by the pastor before he begins the liturgy, 7) greeted multiple times during sharing-of-the-peace, 8) greeted several times on the way out of the sanctuary and narthex, 9) greeted by one of the pastors at the door, 10) greeted by ministries coordinator in the breezeway. This is all done smoothly, without any artificial appearance, because there is a sincere culture of “Welcome”.
- **Encountering guests:**
 1. **Open the door for them.** Having a pleasant person serving as doorman is a very inviting gesture. A simple “Good morning” as the door is opened is a very warm gesture.
 2. **Purposeful encounter with them once they have entered the building.** This should be brief, friendly, informative, and individualized. “Good morning. I am _____. Is this your first time here?” Then point them to appropriate facilities, including restrooms, accessories for people with disabilities, the nursery for people with young children, etc. This should also include any instructions that will make their experience easier, plus an invitation to flag you down or approach you and others with questions or needs, and where they will find you should they have a need.
 3. **Provide them with a brochure/welcome pamphlet.** As a parting gesture before disengaging with a guest, provide them with a visitor’s packet. This packet should include a note of greeting, plus a statement of who the church is and what it believes. An encounter card that the guest fills out and gives to a greeter/staff member/places in the offering is also a good thing. Completed cards **MUST** be acknowledged by a “thank you for visiting” note from someone on staff.
 4. **Encourage them to sit wherever they would feel comfortable.** If they arrive late and the seating is tight, ask them to wait a moment, then go and arrange seating. Then escort them to the seating you arranged with a smile.
 5. **Following service, be available, but do not be pressing.**
 6. **Do not ask them if they liked the service.** They may still need to process what they encountered.

7. **“Thank you for worshipping with us. I hope to see you again.”** (*This says it all. Nothing more needed.*)

Additional Thoughts:

1. **Is your facility easy to navigate? Is there GOOD signage?**
2. **Do you have a visitor brochure that states who the church is, what beliefs it espouses, and what its mission is?**
3. **Is your church service easy to follow, or do you need to know “the formula”?**

(Reference the bulletin, flip to liturgy-page-whatever in the green book for part of the liturgy, then flip to hymn-page-whatever in the green book to sing, then re-reference the bulletin and flip to liturgy-page-whatever, then re-reference the bulletin and flip to the Celebrate insert for the scripture readings, and so on, and so forth.) This is a great intimidator to visitors.

Simplify: Put EVERY aspect of the service in the bulletin. Liturgy, creeds, hymn lyrics, etc. No awkward feeling - a play-by-play guide for everyone. (The hymnal is TOO cumbersome for people to use, especially if they are taking care of young children.) Yes, this makes the bulletin larger and uses more paper, but it eliminates confusion for the visitor. It also gives them something tangible to take home as a pleasant reminder of their worship experience. A low-tech, low-cost, and VERY effective way to make your church friendlier.

Bulletins should also explain the church's position on Communion and any other tips to help the visitor through their first worship experience.

Announcements should NOT be in the worship bulletin. They should be handed out separately.

4. **Technology:** Use it to make the church experience easier, but it should not interfere with worship or other activity. Websites can be a vital link for people, as can e-mail. Websites are a great way for people to find you. We have had several people come to St. Luke after contacting us through our website. E-mail is relatively low-tech, and can be a great way for people to keep up with things, especially if they have been away.

Introductory DVDs: These are a nice thing to send along with visitors. They can be done as slide-shows of still photos and power-point clips, or as video.

5. **Names are important!** Ask people their names. Try to use their name when speaking with them. It is especially nice if you can call them by name as they

leave. (Write it down after the initial encounter and refer to it before they reach the receiving line.) Do not be ashamed if you forget. "I'm sorry. Your name escapes me. Please refresh my memory." This says that they are important enough for you to embarrass yourself. THAT IS A HIGH VALUE!!!

6. **Appearance:** Middle of the road. Well-groomed. Simple, tidy, tasteful. Men: shirt and tie--lose the coat. Suits and jackets are intimidating to some guests--they may think they are under-dressed. A person in shirt and tie is accessible/approachable to everyone, regardless of how they are attired.

Welcoming People with Disabilities

--Kellee Rumbough

People with disabilities are regular people who have a body part or parts that work differently. They still have feelings, needs, strengths, and gifts.

Always assume that people with disabilities are competent. Never talk down or try to use a “go between” person to talk with a person with a disability.

Language is vital when talking with a person with a disability. Use empowering and positive language (People First Language). People First Language always puts the person first and the disability last. For example, “he has Down’s Syndrome” INSTEAD of “he’s a Down’s baby”. Additional examples are on the handout on People First Language.

We are all here to learn and **the best people to teach us are people with disabilities and their families and friends.** Be yourself.

Some thoughts on welcoming people with disabilities:

1. **Be slow to judge** – Sometimes a disability is not an obvious physical disability and we may believe that the child or person is just ill-behaved. We will never know or understand a person’s situation if we have already judged them on their appearance or behavior. Listening and learning is the only way to understand and appreciate a person’s situation.
2. **Be quick to love** – your love will show through your smile, your touch, your voice.
3. **Be eager to learn** – if you have a question about a disability, look it up or ask someone.

A handout from the *Through the Roof Ministries* is included for additional information.

Situations to think about

- **Visitor juggling Green Book and bulletin.**
- **Young Family with infant and toddler.**
- **Returning visitors.**
- **College students.**
- **Multiple visitors at the same time.**
- **Visitors for baptisms/first communion, etc.**
- **Vacationers.**
- **Intermittent church goers.**

Articles Regarding Hospitality

The Great Commission; Reaching Out

A very nice young lady recently told me of her search for a new church home. She has been looking for some time, and finally ended up at St. Luke. She had initially resisted coming to St. Luke because she was avoiding the traditional coldness associated with so many Lutheran churches. (I had resisted coming to St. Luke for the same reason; had vowed I would never step foot in a Lutheran church again; now look at me. God has a sense of humor. Anyway--.) This young lady was pleasantly surprised to find that St. Luke was different. This was very nice to hear. What was saddening to hear was how long it took her to find a church that was welcoming. Her search had taken her to many places, but none of them really reached out to her. She had even told a pastor at one church that she was looking for a new church home, to which he responded, "That's nice", and then he walked away. Talk about a cold reception. If this is the way that churches greet visitors, it is no wonder that they do not grow.

Congregations are dwindling and churches are dying. This is a sad truth, whether we wish to admit it or not. Why is it happening? Because churches have failed to keep up with a changing society. Their defensive arguments: "We have never done it that way before", "The church does not need to change", "If people want God, then they need to find Him the right way" (translated "our way"). Essentially, they are saying that they are going to sit tight and wait for people to come to them, and, if people do show up, those new people better take the church as it is and try to fit in, because the church is not about to change to accommodate them. I am not exaggerating. Large numbers of church-people think this way, and some actually verbalize these statements. An even larger part of church congregants are apathetic about new people--- they have no concern one way or the other. Hostility and apathy; certainly not what Jesus had in mind when he gave all disciples The Great Commission.

The Great Commission is about reaching out to people in the love of Christ. It means that we extend grace to all people. Whether on a mission trip, at our workplace, or at the front door of the church, The Great Commission is our command to love, serve, reach out to, and welcome all people, just as if we were doing it to Jesus, himself. It is our directive to share the gift of God with everyone we can. To do this, we must be intentional; it does not happen accidentally. It also means that we must reach people where they are, not where we are. That means going out to them. That also means doing things differently than we have done them before. Old ways will not reach a society in transition. The Gospel never changes, but how we present it must keep up with a changing world. Sound difficult? It does not have to be. We need to be sincere and committed; in our desire to be obedient to Christ, and in our desire to reach others for Him. How can we do this? By following the commandments that Jesus gave us. If we do that, the rest comes easier than you may think. "Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another. Serve each other." If we do these things, people will want to share what we have. Why? Because the love of Christ, sincerely lived and expressed, is irresistible.

In Christian Love--

--Mike McCay

Making Them Welcome

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.-- Hebrews 13:2

Extend hospitality to strangers.--Romans 12:13b

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.--Romans 15:7

Church is to be a place that opens its arms to all people, extending grace through every encounter. That should begin at the very first moment when a visitor walks through our doors. A warm, sincere greeting, accompanied by intentional introductions, is a vital part of extending welcome to others. The exchange of names is an important gesture, and being able to call others by name is very reassuring to a newcomer. Toward this goal, we have name badges available for our staff and our parishioners. We want to provide visitors with many opportunities to interact, and the name badges are an open invitation to do so. It is so much easier to approach someone and ask a question if you can use their name.

Having said all of this, I make a request of our parishioners. Please continue in your hospitality, and please wear your name badges. (If you need one, let me know.) They may be a slight nuisance to wear, but they are a huge benefit to helping the visitor and the newcomer to feel welcome.

With a big smile to all----

In Christian Love--
--Mike McCay

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” Jesus--Matthew 25:35b

What Church Is All About

I have heard many philosophies about what church should be. “It should be reverent.” “It should be worshipful.” “It should be a time of praise.” “It should be a time of spiritual instruction.” This list could go on without end. There are many ideas about what church should be. I agree with many of these ideas, but I really think it is so much simpler than all of this. After thinking about this, and studying scripture on the topic, I have come to this conclusion: Church is all about relationships.

The Church is the body of Christ. This is our collective relationship to Him. We come together as a people, sharing one faith, one belief. This is our relationship to one another. We go out to live and serve in this community, as emissaries of Jesus. This is our relationship to others, extending His love to a needy world.

Jesus said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*--Mt 22: 37-40. Did you catch that last sentence? Jesus said that all of the scriptures were summed up in these two commandments. Talk about a concise answer! Theologians expound upon this topic for hours, using thousands of words, but not Jesus. He sums up all of Christianity in three sentences.

Notice, also, that these two commandments are purely about relationships. First, loving God, then, loving other people. Jesus point is, if you live by these two principles, you are accomplishing all that is truly necessary. You cannot worship or serve God if you do not love Him. For that matter, you cannot worship or serve God if you do not love people. These principles apply to **all** of Christian living.

In Christian Love--
--Mike McCay

Our Focus

Growth. Everyone is talking about church growth. The concept of growth is exciting, however, it is NOT our focus, and numbers must NEVER figure into what we do or where we go. Let me explain.

Growth is a positive side effect that spins-off from the true focus of the church: ministry. Worshipping God is the core of our Christian experience. Ministry is the active expression of our love and worship of God. If we are to worship God, we must minister to other people. People of all ages, colors, and backgrounds. We must minister to their needs for love, acceptance, belonging, spiritual growth and instruction, encouragement, meaningful worship, and spiritual renewal.

Sometimes, we must start even simpler; food, clothes, housing. Regardless of the need, if we minister in the way that Christ calls **all of us** to minister, then we will reach people for Jesus. Those reached, and the church, will be blessed. For a scriptural reference, see Matthew 25: 34-40. For a visible example, just look around you.

When the church reaches out in the name of Jesus Christ and meets the needs of people, the church grows. We do not need to focus on growth; we need to focus on worship and ministry.

In Christian Love--
--Mike McCay

Love In Action

“Love your neighbor.” Jesus gave this to us as a commandment and as a way of life. The reason is more than just to be nice. The reason is to share His gospel. Loving people is a pre-requisite to ministering the word of God to people. He set the example by loving us. He accepts us, does not judge us, and He meets our needs. That is how He ministered when He walked the dusty roads of Palestine, and it is how He ministers today. Today, however, He does much of His ministry through us. We are His hands. We are His smile. It is up to us to accept, withhold judgment, and meet needs.

How do we meet needs? We do so as they become evident to us. We may see them or hear of them. You do not have to look far. We live in a world full of people with needs. Many people just need a kind person to listen patiently. Many need reassurance. So many are lonely, and just need a friendly person to be accepting and welcoming. Some need more tangible assistance. They may need a ride to the doctor. They may need clothes or food. They may need repairs on their home. So many people. So many needs. **SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE LOVE OF GOD!!!**

I was recently talking to a person from another congregation about ministry in the community. They were asking what kinds of ministries we do at St. Luke. As I shared the list of ministries and what they do, this person replied that they do many of those things for their members. **FOR THEIR MEMBERS.** I asked if they do them for the community at large. The response was, “We take care of our people. We can’t do everything.” It was difficult to restrain myself (you all know how reserved I am). Though I agreed that we cannot do everything, I was emphatic that we can do what is placed in front of us. The repetitive response was, “We take care of our own”.

“We take care of our own”. What a sad commentary on the church. This attitude is the reason that so many churches fail in the mission of the Gospel and die. They shrivel up into a petrified remnant of what they should be. They may persist in existence, but they do not thrive, because they do not reach out to people. We cannot be satisfied with “taking care of our own”. We must be challenged to take care of the lost sheep. We do so by exercising the love of God and the word of the Gospel in a real, hands-on fashion. Everyone can do this! Each of us has an area of giftedness, and we can all use those gifts to reach people. No, we cannot do everything, but we can make a difference where we are. One person at a time.

In Christian Love--
--Mike McCay