

CGGC eNews: How friendly is your church to outsiders?—Part 2

Practical steps to take to show welcome to outsiders

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Last week I touched on the fact that perhaps we misspeak when we say “we know how to do church, but we don’t know how to do the kingdom.” While it’s certainly true that we often put more effort and focus on church worship services and activities than carrying out a kingdom agenda, I’m not convinced we always demonstrate a high level of skill in “doing church,” particularly when it comes to welcoming those outside our church family.



Jesus had a wonderful ability of welcoming outsiders! I think that’s a key to kingdom-living: being able to relate to and show welcome to those outside our Christian faith.

Jesus created an environment where outsiders felt welcomed, to the point where they would regularly approach Him. Are outsiders coming to your church? If outsiders would come to your church, how welcome would they really feel (remember, every church thinks it’s the most friendly church around, but it’s probably not). While I still believe the future will require us to become much more skilled at meeting outsiders on their own turf (we have to be sent), the fact remains that outsiders do still come to our church “turf” and perhaps we could do a better job of creating an welcoming environment.

While this list isn’t all-encompassing by any stretch of the imagination, here are some places to start if you want to create an environment that welcomes outsiders.

1. **An attractive, informative and up-to-date church website.** I know this will come as a surprise to some, but the internet wasn’t just a fad. It’s changed the way we communicate, function and live. Think about how you live and utilize the internet today? Would you send your kid to a college that didn’t have a website? Do you ever check out a new restaurant online before you actually go there to try the cuisine? Think of all the ways in which online-presence is typically your first introduction to a product, service, business or organization. People will check out your webpage long before they actually visit your church. If you don’t have a website, you need to get one!

If you still have the same website that your junior high techno-nerd set up in the late 1990’s, it’s probably not helpful in welcoming outsiders.

Attractive – I know beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but if your site looks like 1998 it probably isn’t doing you any favors. Have someone under the age of 30 give you some feedback as to what you could do to improve your online image.

Informative – Does your website actually tell an outsider anything helpful? I’m shocked at the number of times I have to search and search to find the service times of a local church or a physical address or directions. Make sure it’s informative – where do you meet, when do you meet, how should a person dress, what should they expect from a typical gathering at your church? Have an outsider take a look at your website and give some feedback as to what kind of information might be helpful in your online presence.

Up-to-date – If you still have the calendar or schedule up for 2009, your website probably isn’t helping you create an environment that’s welcoming or inviting to outsiders. Is your site updated regularly?

**** Here's some bonus information: We can help you with this! The CGGC has templates available for your website and offers hosting for your website too! If you don't know where to start or just need some helping making it happen, Michael Martin in the CGGC Office in Findlay can assist you! Email him today at comptech@cggc.org**

2. **Clear signage and direction on the physical campus.** If an outsider chose to visit your Sunday worship service, how easy would it be for him or her to actually get into your building or find the worship space? You and everyone else who attends your church knows that the parking lot next door, that belongs to the accounting office, is available for Sunday morning parking; but the outsiders don't know this and the sign on the lot says "unauthorized parking will be towed at their own expense". How do you get the word out that it's okay to park there? Hint: this would be great info to include on a website or utilize portable signs for Sunday morning.

Your church building may have 10 doors around the exterior of the church. You've attended there for 20 years and you know it's the red door in the back of the building, but how would an outsider know that? Are the entrances clearly marked or do you have folks that are stationed to help folks find the "right door" into the building?

This also goes for restrooms, nurseries, kids' ministry areas – you may know where those are, but how easy is it for those who have never set foot in your building to find these important areas without a lot of hassle? A little bit of signage, or some hospitable helpers sure go a long way to make sure first-time guests have an easier and less anxious experience.

3. **Take time to explain what you may assume everyone in attendance already knows.** As you walk through your worship experience, do you assume that everyone knows the routine or do you approach things with the idea that there may be new folks who are unfamiliar with your customs? A word of explanation can go a long way toward creating a welcoming environment. Do you take the time to explain that the kids in grades K-5th are going to be dismissed for Junior Church after the offering with instructions for the parents or do you just assume everyone here knows this is how we do it? Do explain things like the Lord's Table or the offering or the greeting time or do you just assume that everyone knows what's going on here?
4. **Do you create an environment that make outsiders feel welcomed in a warm and inviting manner?** This one touches on a lot of little things that can make a big difference. Are people greeted warmly when they enter your facility or do they feel like they are interrupting someone else's family reunion? When they enter your worship space, what's the feel of the room? Is it cold and deathly quiet or is there an energy of expectation in the air (some good background music may go a long way in helping create the right feel). Is the physical space cluttered or in need of repair (again, we grow used to these kind of things and just accept them as normal, but outsiders see with a different set of eyes). How often do you remind or train your people to be sure to greet others or introduce themselves to others whom they may not recognize or know? Again, lots of little things here that can make a big difference.

These are just a few of the things I've noticed over several years of travelling to lots of congregations where I've been the outsider.

What have I missed? What other things should a congregation be paying attention to in order to create an environment that welcomes outsiders? I'd love to hear your insights and experiences.

Christ's Peace,

Lance