

HOSPITALITY



At every level, the parish needs to promote hospitality – to evangelize those in the community who don't know Christ, to welcome new members, and to tie existing members more strongly to the parish community.

The Bible is filled with admonitions for Christians to exercise hospitality. Romans 12:13 clearly instructs us to "always be eager to practice hospitality." Every believer should be hospitable, and a great place to demonstrate hospitality is at church.

Hospitality at the parish level means parishioners taking ownership of making others welcome. Parishioners should see themselves as responsible for greeting and guiding strangers, for initiating small talk and for making an effort to welcome returning newcomers.

For people to hear the message of Stewardship as a way of life - as living as Christ's Disciples, and to hear that message in greater depth, we must make our churches places where people want to come and, after coming, want to stay.

We know there are many and sometimes very complex reasons why Catholics become inactive. But many continue to stay away only because they have not been invited to return. Sadly, they sometimes feel that the parish community does not even miss them.

What can we do to create a culture of hospitality and welcome? How can we make a concerted effort to reach out to our brothers and sisters who no longer actively participate in their faith?

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I. BUILDING COMMUNITY AMONG ACTIVE PARISHIONERS

Building a sense of community among the parishioners is a critical aspect of parish life. A parish goal should be that its parishioners feel like the parish is 'family' to them. What does family, especially extended family, regularly do? They occasionally gather to celebrate. They remember each other's special days. And they spend time with each other. Families also give support during difficult times and congratulate each other on accomplishments.

There is a strong connection between Hospitality and Stewardship participation within a parish. Studies have clearly shown that the stronger the connection parishioners feel with their parish, the more likely they will give generously of their time, talent, and treasure.

A. Remembering Parishioners' Special Days

Send cards from the parish on the anniversary of weddings, baptisms or other sacraments. Announce 'significant' wedding anniversaries in the bulletin - (25th, 50th, etc.) Announce baptisms, First Reconciliations, First Eucharists, Confirmations, and Weddings in the bulletin and/or parish newsletter. Find additional suggestions at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

B. After Mass Hospitality

There is a correlation between our hospitality and the willingness of our parishioners to be engaged in the parish. Coffee and donuts after Sunday morning Mass, lemonade & cookies after evening Mass, and other ideas can be found at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

C. Regular Social Events

Community-building happens when people come together to have fun and celebrate their common bond to the parish. Good examples of parish social events include parish picnics, open houses, and much more are offered at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

D. Regularly Mailed Info about Upcoming Parish Events

Since no one is at Mass in your church every weekend, info about important parish activities should be sent to all registered households by regular mail. A flyer listing upcoming parish activities at 3 crucial times each year is important. They are before the Advent and Christmas seasons, just before the Lent and Easter seasons, and just before Labor Day, as folks begin to focus on after-summer routines. Include Mass times with any changes and all upcoming events with date, place and time. Find suggestions at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

WELCOMING NEW PARISHIONERS

Potential new parishioners need to be integrated into the parish as soon as they are identified. We must sincerely welcome visitors, provide them with as much information as we can about the parish and make it clear to them that the parish is at their service. We must see this evangelization as a vital part of our discipleship to Christ.

A. Welcome New Parishioners

It is important to recognize those who are new to your parish, to make it more likely people will welcome them and engage them. Find out more at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

B. New Parishioner Orientation Sessions

Becoming part of a new community can be a challenge for any new parishioner. Providing an "Orientation Session" for new parishioners to distribute basic information about the parish and to allow new parishioners to get to know others in a social setting is vital to helping newcomers become part of the parish community. Find out more at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See 'The Four Pillars – Hospitality.'

II. MAKING IT EASY FOR VISITORS AND NEWCOMERS

We need to make it as easy as possible for newcomers and visitors to come to our parish. We can help remove one of the most common “hurdles” that keep people from visiting our parishes – namely, not knowing where we are or how to get there! Once we extend our invitation, we can then ensure that our guests will feel sincerely welcomed.

A. Helping people find their way into your Church

Parishes need to examine if it is easy to find:

- Directions to the church.
- Where to park.
- Finding the entrance to the church.

For suggestions how to help people find their way to your church, visit:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See ‘The Four Pillars – Hospitality.’

B. Greeters at the Door

Hospitality in the church should include greeters at the door of your church for Mass. You can find information regarding greeters, including a sample template of Greeter Instructions at:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See ‘The Four Pillars – Hospitality.’

C. Welcoming Table

Set up a “Welcome to Newcomers” table in the vestibule of the church before and after Mass as often as possible. Make sure that volunteers at the table understand their duties. Visit:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See ‘The Four Pillars – Hospitality.’

D. Welcoming Card or Letter

A small card or a letter acknowledging a sincere welcome of their visit, which also includes basic information about the parish, will help visitors and newcomers feel appreciated. For more information and template instructions, visit:

www.seattlearch.org/sp See ‘The Four Pillars – Hospitality.’

E. Welcome Mailings

Invite people who have recently moved into your parish boundary to Mass at your church. This is a great way not only to welcome, but to evangelize. Addresses of these new households are available from the post office. Direct mail companies are another source, which provide the research and mailing labels. These businesses may be located in the phone book or on the web. Or, for assistance in locating a direct mail company, contact the Parish Stewardship Office at ParishStewardship@SeattleArch.org.

III. WELCOMING BACK INACTIVE CATHOLICS

Then he told them,

“Go into the world and proclaim the good news to all creation.”

Mark 16:15

As baptized Catholics, we are called to invite others to become members of our faith community. This call to evangelization is one of our most important duties as Christian Stewards and Disciples of Christ. And how much more compelling is this call to reach the world with God’s good news of love and salvation than when we are seeking to bring back to the faith our own Catholic brothers and sisters who have drifted from the Church.

We are all aware of some of the reasons that Catholics may leave, and even reject the Church. In the saddest cases, it’s no exaggeration to say that these brothers and sisters in Christ are greatly in need of prayer and healing. Other Catholics simply drift away for a variety of reasons, but feel compelled to return for such sacraments as weddings, baptisms and funerals. Many of these drifting Catholics enjoy visiting our parishes for Easter and Christmas Masses. In every case, as the body of Christ, we need to be proactive in our efforts to reach out to all of fellow Catholic brothers and sisters and invite them to be active members in our faith communities.

There are many programs designed to guide us in inviting inactive Catholics to return to the practice of their faith. These range from individual courses to full parish, and even archdiocesan sponsored programs. Consider learning more about how your parish might answer the call to evangelization by incorporating some of these programs. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association (PNCEA) are good sources of information.

USCCB:

usccb.org/evangelization/reconciliation.shtml#landings

PNCEA:

pncea.org

Hospitality should permeate the entire community, with parishioners welcoming one another and being conscious of the presence of newcomers, visitors and the infrequent attendees. When an open and welcoming spirit permeates parish life, parishioners themselves more readily extend that hospitality to family members, neighbors, co-workers who no longer practice their faith and others outside the parish. Making every effort to intentionally reach out and evangelize is part of our mission as Disciples of Christ.