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Welcoming

Joe Kormos

A person who comes into a Christian church for the first time should feel out of place. He should feel this community engages in practices so important they take time to learn. The best thing we can do for “seekers” is to create an environment where newcomers feel they are missing something vital, that one has to be inculcated into this, and that it’s a discipline.”

ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN

Welcome?

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Welcoming Practices Video

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Discussion Questions

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1. Why is good hospitality important in our/any parish?

Discussion Questions

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2. What are the key points of learning in Part B (coffee hour)

Discussion Questions

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3. Throughout the video what assumptions did people make about the Miller family? Which of these were inaccurate?

Discussion Questions

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4. What other instances of not-so-great hospitality could have been described in the video?



Discussion Questions (cont'd)

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5. How should we engage guests at coffee hour? What are some good and less good opening questions?

One guest spoke warmly of having a “*completely sincere, spontaneous, genuine and serious conversation*” with someone after a visit to an Orthodox Church.

What conversational approaches can we learn to generate more of those?

Discussion Questions (cont'd)

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6. The questions asked by the Millers were simple. What are real questions that non-Orthodox guests may have? How can we be better prepared to answer them?
7. Why is being able to answer serious questions of guests important? If we respond “I don’t know, go ask the priest”, what message does that send?

Discussion Questions (cont'd)

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8. The best way to improve at hospitality (or anything) is practice. What can we, as a parish and as persons, do to increase the flow of guests and inquirers in our parish?

Mystery Worshipper Highlights

(Lowlights)

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- “...like being in the Russian section of heaven”
- “There's a lot of Pantocrator and not too much carpenter. For me, this church brings out Christ's divine nature more strongly than his human nature.”
- “...service book and bulletin dwelt on exclusiveness of Orthodox Christianity too much to make other Christians feel comfortable.”
- “Being grilled by the priest. I'm happy to be identified as a goat to be kept separated from the sheep, but in guarding the integrity of communion, Father should lighten up.”
- “service was hardly visitor friendly. I spent first half flipping around the service book”

Mystery Worshipper Highlights

(Lowlights)

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- "...impossible to determine the exact point at which the service had actually begun..."
- "This is apparently a church that does not expect outsiders ... not worried that strangers will show up and be confused".
- "When I arrived, there were about 10 to 15 people... continued to drift in for an additional 30 minutes! Was I at church or the train station?"
- "people were standing around talking in (ethnic language). I learned that a smile and "hello" apparently mean "I'm not one of you; ignore me" in _____."
- "I hung around at back looking lost... no one spoke to me. People looked at me and quickly averted their gaze."

Ethnic Statements about Visiting Orthodox Churches

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- Why it is more important to be ethnic than Christian?
- very difficult at first to not be "ethnic" in a very ethnic church. People were mostly very kind & accepting but I was obviously "different".
- The feeling that it was an ethnic club we could never really belong to because our last name has only one syllable
- Nobody would really talk to me because I was not Russian.
- The ethnic tradition seemed (and at times still seems) too tightly entwined with the Faith, and that was something I could not accept, given that Orthodoxy was supposed to be universal.
- The difficulty of breaking into a highly ethnic parish where everyone is related. However, our current parish has been great and is pan-Orthodox. Pan-Orthodox parishes are much easier, in my opinion, to break into.
- Ethnic jingoism; propensity to continue to argue over whose village was better in Macedonia (by people who never lived there), indifference to doctrinal issues on the part of "ethnics", not exactly a welcome but more of a toleration of me.

Desired vs. Actual Experiences

Improving First Time Experiences

NY NJ
Diocesan
Assembly

Actual

- What are the experiences of:
 - ▣ A non – Orthodox inquirer?
 - ▣ Orthodox, but new to parish

Desired

- What experiences do you want to convey to first time guests?
- What do you want them to say/feel afterward?

Opening Our Doors

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- What are the experiences of a non – Orthodox visitor to our parish?
 - ▣ What might they find odd, unusual or disorienting?
 - ▣ What would they find illuminating, enlivening and distinctive?
- What might they find if they were Orthodox?
- Which of these disorienting qualities are clearly Orthodox
 - ▣ Part of who we are and what we do? They may need explanation but need not change. Perhaps they should even be strengthened or emphasized.
 - ▣ Have we unwittingly adopted American church models for the sake of “looking American” and perhaps as a result lost important qualities of being Orthodox?
 - ▣ Might these qualities be highly valued by persons seriously looking for a new church home?
- Which potentially disorienting qualities are not particularly Orthodox
 - ▣ Perhaps a false inheritance from past traditions or by-products of previous parish insularity?

Likes and Dislikes

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LIKED:

- Nothing special during service; treated no differently
- Greeted individually after the service by people
- Information about parish readily available
- Received thank you note from priest/greeter that week
- Coffee Hour!

DISLIKED:

- Priest/layman visited their home that week
- Asked to wear a name tag at the service
- Asked to I.D. themselves, as a guest/visitor, during service
- Small gift brought to home as a thank-you for visiting

Evangelism That Works
George Barna

Opening Our Doors

The Parish Conversation

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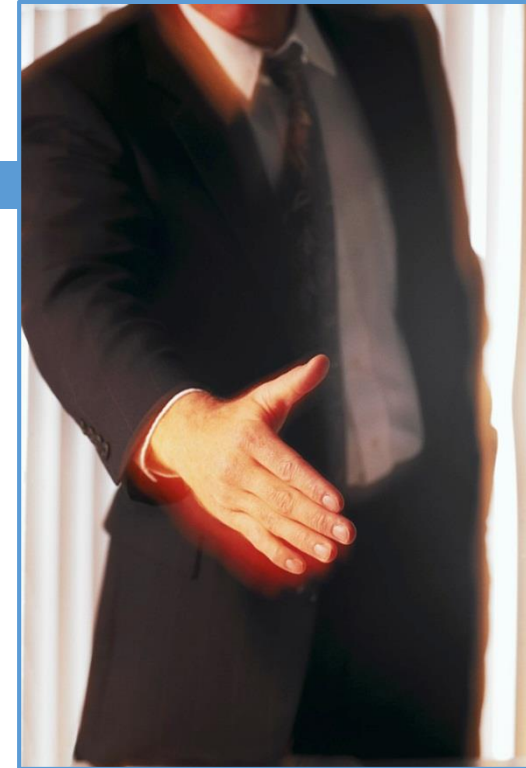
- How many new persons showed up at our parish in the last (e.g.) 6 months?
 - ▣ More or less than the previous six month period?
- How many returned?
 - ▣ Why? Why not?
- What, in your opinion, (or theirs if you know it) were they looking for?
 - ▣ Did they find it?
 - ▣ How would they evaluate that?

Eight Traits of Greeters

Establishing a Greeters Ministry

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- Recruit those w/ gifts of hospitality, evangelism
- Take this ministry seriously!
NOT just a fill-in position
- Do NOT assume everyone can do this well
- Engaging smiler!
- Hospitable, warm, friendly
- Diligent, faithful
- Good listener
- Sincere, genuine
- Helpful



Source: <http://www.thehardygroup.org>

Other Pre-Greeting Experiences

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- Phone
 - ▣ Answer machine up to date?
 - ▣ Speak to a live person?
 - ▣ Pleasant answer
 - ▣ Are questions treated as “work interruptions” or opportunities to exercise servant leadership
- E-mails
 - ▣ responded to promptly?

Some Tips...

It's more than a handshake!

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DO:

- Smile! Look like you like people
- Fresh breath
- Initiate! Make eye contact, shake a hand, welcome
- Offer a bulletin, free literature
- Show them where the restrooms are
- Offer help to light a candle

DON'T:

- Ask "Are you new?"
- Ask "Is this your first time?"
- Ask "Are you Antigreessian?"
- Ask for contact info right away



Listening

Personal Tools

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- Actually DO IT!
- NOT -- planning next statement
- Repeat back what was said in your mind
- Observe body language
 - ▣ Theirs AND Yours



Listening is Important!

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- → Should be ****OBVIOUS**** that
- your visitor isn't happy with his HIS church
- because that's what drove him to visit YOUR church!
- He'd like to talk about it, so...
- Concentrate on what he is saying, thinking, and feeling
- Do not give them YOUR advice, YOUR experiences or YOUR thoughts and feelings (it's not about you!)
- Don't drive him away by taking over the conversation and preaching "Orthodoxy"

The Liturgy After the Liturgy

The “common work of the people”, Part 2

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- Get them to coffee hour... or bookstore... or talking with the priest
- Get into a “substantive conversation”
Avoid Orthodox arrogance
- Everybody’s job! – “Will you join me”



Taming Difficult Behaviors

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| Insensitive Behavior | Unfortunate Implication | A better approach...? |
|---|---|---|
| "Are you <i>Antigreessian</i> ?" (or insert favorite ethnic offender) | This place is closed to you | "We're a multi-ethnic parish" |
| "You're in MY seat!" | We have rules here & we don't share them! | <i>There is no better approach; don't say this</i> |
| "Why are you here?" | "You don't look 'right'"; "We've actually never had a visitor." | "Did you find us through our website?" |
| "I don't know, ask Father" (in response to any serious question) | "We're not serious about our faith... we're just here for the coffee" | "That's a very good question. We teach...(or) My understanding is..." |
| "Would you like to buy..." Fund raising appeals | "we expect others to pay for our church budget" or "Things are desperate here." | <i>There is no better approach; don't say this</i> |
| "Our people" | "... are not YOU" | "You'd love it here, it's easy to get to know everyone!" |
| Correcting ... "don't do that" | | <i>There is no better approach; don't do this</i> |
| Introducing guests/ask to raise hands | "We're a well oiled recruiting machine" | "We'd like to extend a warm welcome to all our guests today" |
| Orthodox arrogance | "I'm Orthodox and you're wrong" | <i>There is no better approach; don't say this</i> |
| Ethnic food emphasis | "We'll keep reminding you that you're –well - different" | "Please try some of this, it's my grandmother's recipe" |
| Glaring at children | "Its only the beginning ... wait 'til you get to know us!" | <i>There is no better approach; don't do this</i> |

Tips

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- ❑ Parish is (hopefully) not a closed entity
- ❑ Visitors show up anytime – be prepared
- ❑ Gift of greeting >> empathy; don't overwhelm
- ❑ Many have no religious experience –help with expectations
- ❑ Gather, without pressure, a reaction from each visitor. Don't act on every comment.
- ❑ Some qualities that we might expect are unattractive to outsiders may in fact be very attractive. And vice versa.



What is it like to be a visitor?
Think of yourself in a Buddhist temple.

Tips

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- Intro your self/others
- Smile
- Take initiative—greet someone
- Avoid –are you new?; first time?
- Offer bulletin
- Personal warmth; joyful
- Avoid asking guests to identify themselves
- Info about restrooms
- Affinity intros
- Candle desk
- If they fill out contact form... contact them
- Unless glaringly wrong ... no don'ts during service
- Be careful with overly personal questions
- Be prepared for questions
- website

Greeter Support Needs

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- ❑ Bulletin
- ❑ Service books
- ❑ Literature rack
- ❑ Guest book/guest card
- ❑ Music
- ❑ Parish Brochure/Info
- ❑ Signs (rest rooms)
- ❑ Emergency Numbers
- ❑ Spills
- ❑ Wheelchair

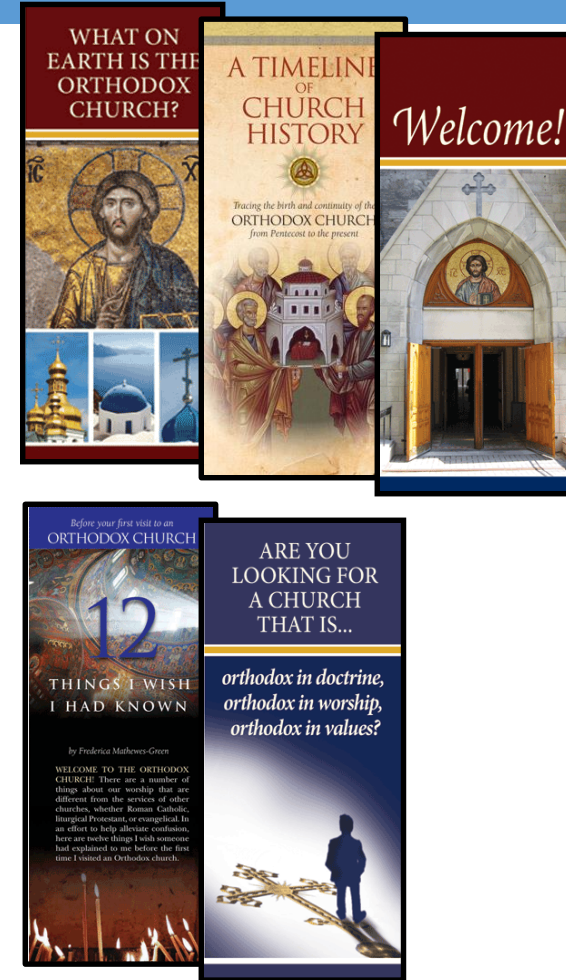


“Be Prepared”

Skills / Tools

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- Welcome Kit
- Business card /fridge magnet with church name, address & phone
- Professionally-printed tri-fold or booklet on the parish
- Brochures
- Latest newsletter
- Icon



Welcome Material; Follow Up Card

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THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

7/16/2019