

Leadership Skill Builders: Creating a Hospitality System

We've heard it hundreds of times: "We're such a friendly church." As has been written in other settings, we have never encountered a congregation that admitted they were not a friendly church. But just saying it is friendly does not make it so! The sad reality is that most congregations are friendly with those who already belong. Not so much for the guests.

A Hospitality System is just that: a system that provides intentional expressions of welcome, acceptance, love, caring, connections with believers, and a sense of belonging. A system is a set of interconnecting parts (activities, behaviors) that work together for a common goal.

The goal of a hospitality system is to extend to others the warm welcome that we have received through God's hospitality. We want people to walk away from their experience with us saying, "I think I could belong here."

How is your Hospitality System working? Remember, in the infamous words of management consultant guru W. Edwards Deming, **"Every system is perfectly designed to get the results that it does."**

As we enter into conversation about what a Hospitality System includes, it is important to remember that this system is also interconnected with other critical systems in the life and ministry of the local church. For example, one does not enter a Discipleship Pathway system without first being welcomed through hospitality. People from the community often become engaged in the life and ministry of the local congregation through the hospitality experienced through a community service team.

A hospitality system is bigger than just having greeters at the door or doing a welcome from the pulpit or even offering a cup of coffee. The following graphic provides insight into 4 very important dimensions of hospitality:



Each dimension communicates a system emphasis without which the entire system fails to exist in its optimal state. Each dimension is also interconnected and interdependent. For example, without the dimensions of invitation and incarnation there would be no one to be intentional about extending hospitality to. Without the interpersonal dimension, guests might experience the activity of being offered coffee but miss the important relational aspect of the gesture.

In the following exploration, each of these dimensions will be presented along with some guiding principles. A more complete presentation of best practices will be made in other **Leadership Skill Builder** units.

Interpersonal Hospitality

Interpersonal hospitality refers to the level and quality of relational connections within the congregation.

Guiding Principle:
God designed us to live together in deep community.

While we live in the most ‘connected’ time of history, with all our phones, computers, social media platforms and video conferencing, it is consistently pointed out that we are becoming more disengaged relationally. Just because we have hundreds of friends on Facebook doesn’t mean we have someone to turn to when life hits a bump in the road, someone with whom to share our struggles, doubts, and needs or to share life with as we gather over dinner, neighborhood cookouts, or backyard games.

Our churches sit uncomfortably empty while people sit at their kitchen tables bemoaning that they don’t have any real friends. People going through difficult times have no one to give them support. Newcomers to a community find it difficult to meet people, and neighbors pass each other by with only a nod of acknowledgment.

People are looking for relationships. The mission field is ripe for the harvest. So how can the church support the development of authentic, inclusive, and transformational relationships? After all, we are at the very center of our being, a relational faith. The prayer Jesus offered for us in John 17:20-23 captures this idea beautifully:



JOHN 17 REFLECTION

In John 17:20-23, Jesus offers this prayer for believers...

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of this interpersonal relationship dimension:

- Research shows that most people who come to a church (between 65-80 percent) come because a friend invited them.
- Gallup's research shows a clear correlation between the level of engagement of church members and having a close friend who is also involved.
- Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn state in their rule #22 (The Friendship Factor Rule): "Newcomers must have seven plus friends in the church within the first six months to become fully assimilated."
- People come to the church for a variety of reasons, but the reason that they stay is that friendships are built.

The Interpersonal Hospitality dimension focuses on how we can support this significant development in the local context of being the church.

Intentional Hospitality

Intentional Hospitality refers to the practices of members and the congregation in making relational connections with people they don't know.

Guiding Principle:

People who visit a church return and/or stay connected because they are engaged as friends and feel like they could fit in with this congregation.

The Intentional Hospitality dimension is all about the things we do to make guests feel welcome when they are with us and have them leave feeling like this is a place where they could fit in. Important to our conversation is the distinction between the language of visitor and guest:

- A visitor is someone who shows up unannounced and uninvited and whom we may or may not want to engage.
- A guest is someone we have invited and are looking forward to hosting and building a relationship with.

Intentional Hospitality is all about guest relations. A great way to consider how the church might treat guests is to look no further than the way any of us would treat guests to our home.

To start off, we would probably straighten things up, pick up the clutter, and vacuum the floors. If they are new to our home, we might provide directions for getting there. We would be clear about the type of gathering, so people could dress appropriately. We would provide seating areas for conversation and prepare some refreshments or even a meal.



We would make sure that everybody was introduced to each other. We might show people around the house or at least make sure they knew where the bathrooms were located. We would welcome them at the door and perhaps even in the driveway as they arrived.

All of this and more are part and parcel of what make up guest relations. In other **Leadership Skill Builder** units, a more thorough exploration of best practices related to intentional hospitality will be provided, making the distinction between *platform* and *beyond platform* activities, parking, name tags, connection center, refreshments and guest follow up.

Invitational Hospitality

Invitational Hospitality refers to the connections made through the congregation with people they don't know who are out in the community.

Guiding Principle:

The engagement of the church in the local community provides opportunities for people to discover God's love for them and become an expression of love to others.

Invitational Hospitality focuses on the support of the church given to the congregation to invite people beyond the church to discover authentic community, have needs met, and make an impact on the local community. This dimension directs attention to the activities we engage and the tools we use to demonstrate a presence in the local community beyond the visibility of the church building.

It is far-reaching in terms of scope including the following:

Standard Invitational Hospitality Practices



Attractional
Ministries

Ministries of
Engagement

Networking

Social Media

Servant
Evangelism

Marketing

THE BIG WIN *(of the Standard Practices)*

The Website!
Over 90% of 1st time
guests start their search
for a church by going to the
website!

Implicit in the expression of Invitational Hospitality is the witness of the church in welcoming people who are different (race, culture, socio-economic status, lifestyle, age, body art, etc.). The building of interpersonal relationships is key to this witness as is the inclusivity of our leadership and worshiping congregation.

Invitational Hospitality also encompasses how the church is known in the community for its expressions of care and welfare of the community along with its active participation in and support of community events.

Incarnational Hospitality

Incarnational Hospitality refers to the personal relationships built by members of the congregation with those beyond the church in order to be the presence of Christ in their lives and help them discover God's love for themselves.

Guiding Principle:

Wherever you go, there are people who need Jesus.

According to Bishop Bob Farr (along with Kay Kotan and Doug Anderson) in the book *Get Their Name...*

“...the average United Methodist member invites someone to come to worship once every thirty-eight years...”



~ From the book "Get Their Name" by Bob Farr, Doug Anderson, and Kay Kotan

When this statistic is coupled with the data that points out that 65-80% of persons who come to church for the first time come because someone invited them, it's not hard to see why our sanctuaries are 'uncomfortably empty'.

Incarnational Hospitality is focused on encouraging and equipping the congregation to build these life-giving relationships, share their stories, present their testimonies, and guide others to the abundant life offered through Jesus Christ when God opens the window of opportunity.

In the separate **Leadership Skill Builder** unit on Incarnational Hospitality, participants will learn how to share their stories and testimonies; use tools like the Acts 1:8 activity and mind-mapping to identify opportunities and be introduced to suggestions for making deeper connections.

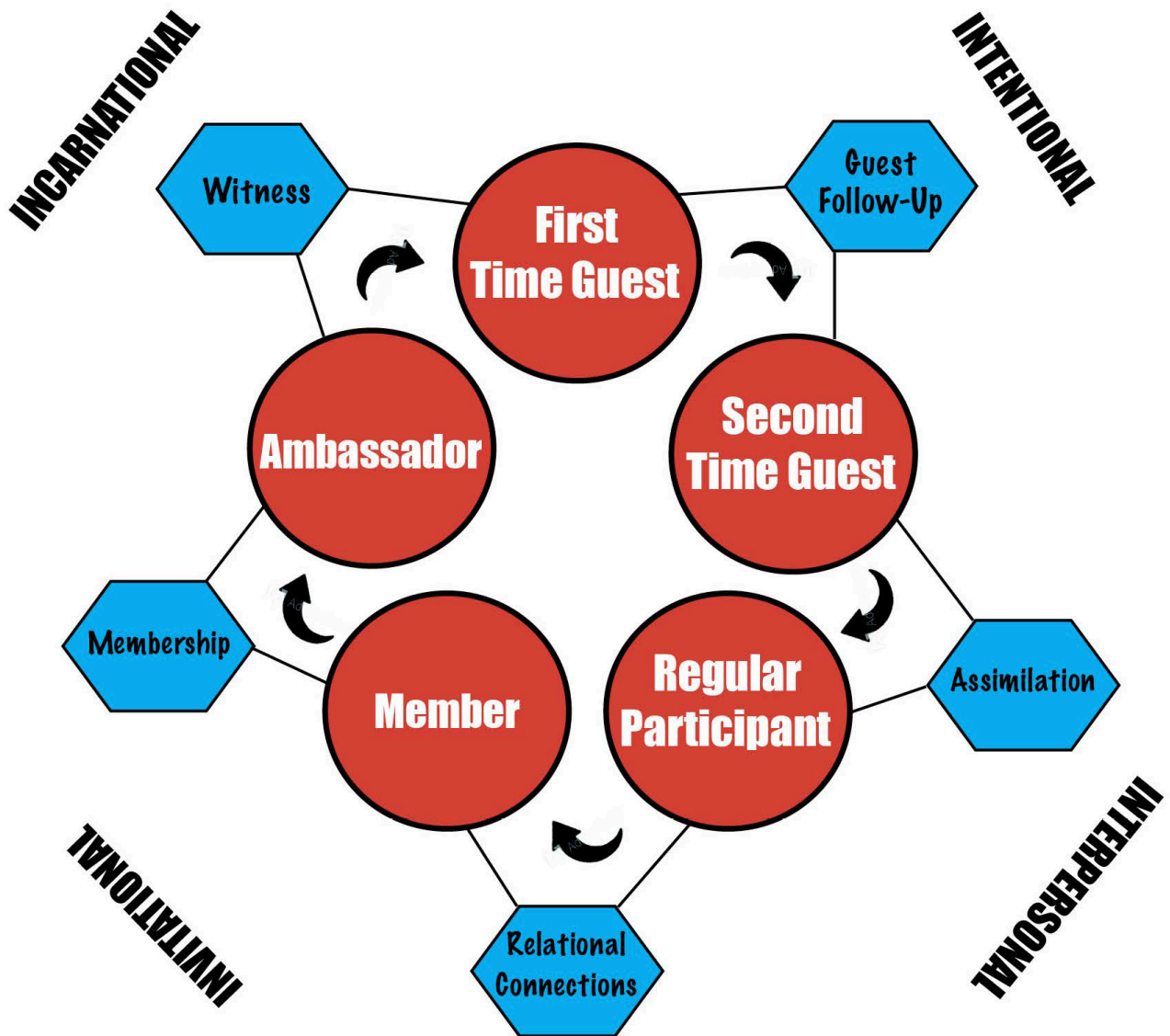


Team Exploration of the Topic:

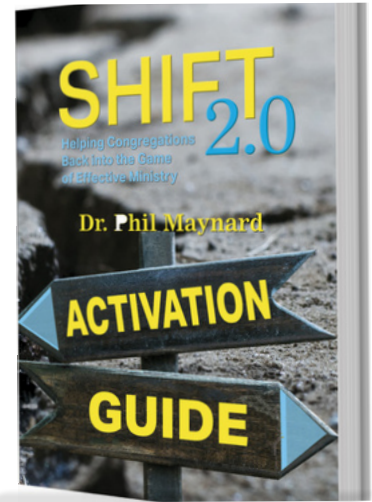
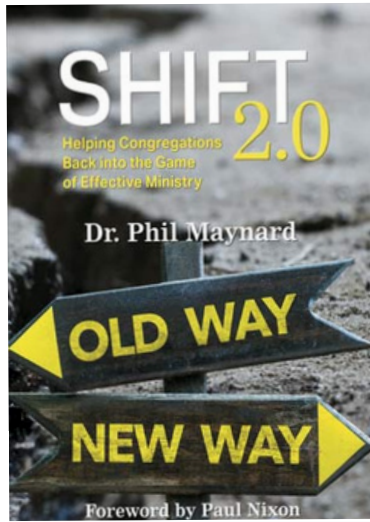
- How would you describe the Hospitality System that you currently have in place (if any organized Hospitality System)? Is it working in the way you intend? What new ideas (or old ideas about which you haven't thought in a while) stuck out to you as you reviewed this unit?
- Discuss the concept of differentiating between “visitors” and “guests.” How can this reframing of how we think about the people who join us change how we treat those people? In which category would you say your church currently places people who come through your doors? What kinds of things would change if you changed your thinking about their status?
- The principles of Invitational Hospitality as shared in this unit include the importance of the local church's reputation in the surrounding community as not only a welcoming place, but as an active agent known “expressions of care and welfare for the community as well as its active participation in and support of community events.” What would you say your reputation is in the greater community? How do you demonstrate these expressions of Invitational Hospitality? Can you think of obvious opportunities you may have missed in the past?
- Working with the Hospitality Skills template included with the unit, build two versions of the work sheet, one which describes your current realistic hospitality situation and one in which you imagine an optimized version of hospitality in your context.

Leadership Skill Builder: Hospitality System Template/Guide

For each of the 'blue' boxes, identify how your congregation practices hospitality. What do you do particularly well? Where are the gaps?



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REAL DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY	I attend worship regularly and set aside time daily for personal worship.	I am drawn to the story of God's love and am beginning to explore the scriptures for myself.	I give some when I attend worship.	I am called not only to receive, but also to offer God's gracious acceptance to others.
	I have accepted the call to be a follower of Jesus Christ and am committed to being part of the church, becoming like Jesus, and serving others.	I experiment with serving in different areas as I discover my gifts, talents, and passions.	I attend worship when a friend invites me, it is convenient, or I feel a need.	I am developing a daily practice of prayer, scripture and devotional reading, opening myself to God.
	I am exploring new spiritual disciplines and experiencing a greater level of intimacy with God.	I intentionally seek to build relationships with unchurched people in order to share God's love.	I am partnering with God to help others grow in openness and obedience to Christ.	I am often amazed at the way some disciples are selflessly serving others and I want to make a difference as well.
	I am giving more and giving more regularly.	I honor God in the ways I work, play and engage others in relationships.	I am curiously drawn to Christians who graciously accept me as if I belong with them already.	I am daily seeking to apply the teachings of scripture to my own life.
	I join Jesus in mission to others using my God-given gifts, talents and passion.	I am titling and consciously reordering my life to free up more resources to honor God and bless others.	I am taking responsibility for my own growth through the daily practice of spiritual disciplines.	I attend worship regularly, but I am growing to realize that I must attend to God every day.
	I seek to relate to others both in the church and beyond in ways that reflect God's hospitality to me.	I understand more about Jesus teaching through Bible study classes and my own reading.	I know Christ invites me to join him in serving others and I'm discovering how God has gifted me to do this.	I am titling and reordering how I spend the other 90%.

discipleshipsurvey.com

readiness360.org

SOME GREAT RESOURCES

to support your hospitality

www.emc3coaching.com/store

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