



SWEET TUNES



PROCLAMATION

BREAD OF LIFE & FORGIVENESS



CONNECTION



WIDE OPEN WELCOME



HOT COFFEE & GOOD CONVERSATION



HOSPITALITY AUDIT:

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



THANKSGIVING



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INTRODUCTION



If you've ever been traveling, there's nothing like finding a place that feels a little like home, is there? A little kindness, someone making the extra effort for you - it all ends up feeling like a pretty special gift.

There's a reason spiritual folks are called "sojourners": the religious life is like a long trip. At its best, your church can be that place on someone's journey where, when they arrive, they encounter that kindness and extra effort that makes them feel a little more at home.

In our own homes, we make an extra effort to be sure people feel welcome when they visit: we may make special food, tidy up the living room, maybe even pull out the fancy dinner plates if we have them. These extra touches can make people feel vividly, tangibly welcomed and valued.



The same is true at church: some extra touches and careful intention can make people feel welcomed and valued. And so the question is: in our congregation, what touches and intention can widen and deepen our hospitality? What are we doing well? What can we improve? How can we become that place that feels a little like home to travelers along life's way?

HOW TO USE THIS AUDIT

The word "audit" comes from the Latin *audire*, "to hear" - and accordingly, at every step of the way, the most important thing will be to listen. In fact, one way to think about this audit is as a guided listening tour, both of your congregation and of your wider community.

Each "tool of the trade" is a different portal through which we can listen, and a different dimension of church life to consider, evaluate, adjust, and strengthen. One way to use this Hospitality Audit, then, is to prayerfully

and systematically work through the list of tools, from “Connection” all the way to “Thanksgiving.” Another way is to think of the list of tools like a menu, and select the specific tools you and your congregation would like to focus on.

Either way, however, the place to start is with scripture - specifically, one of the very first stories of human hospitality in the Bible, the story of Abraham and Sarah being visited by God (unbeknownst to them!).

One more thing, though, before we dive in: you’ve heard of the “Golden Rule,” no doubt, the principle of “doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.” But have you heard of the “Platinum Rule”? It’s only a little different than its golden counterpart, but in an important, provocative way: “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

In other words, try to do what they would want you to do, which might very well be different than what you would want if you were in their shoes. Like the Golden Rule, the Platinum Rule can be a thought-provoking, fruitful principle to keep in mind - and it just might help your church rethink hospitality from the ground up. We’ll be coming back to the Platinum Rule frequently as we move along.



And now, without further ado, here’s step one for your Hospitality Audit: the classic story of Abraham and Sarah unwittingly being visited by God (or by God and a couple of angels - it’s a mystery!).

GENESIS 18:1-14

God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three people standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on - since you have come to your servant.”

So they said, "Do as you have said."

And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

And he said, "There, in the tent."

Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a child." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"

The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

REFLECTION

As we move into this Hospitality Audit, there are at least three things worth highlighting about this classic story.

WHO'S HOSTING WHOM?

Abraham and Sarah are clearly playing host in the story, but the reader knows something they don't: that the "guest" is God, the host of all hosts! What's more, in the story's wider context, Abraham and Sarah are immigrants living in a tent, having left their home country behind; they are strangers in a strange land, strangers welcoming other strangers, sojourners welcoming other sojourners. God had called Abraham



and Sarah to leave their homeland and settle in a foreign place, and God tells them that their descendants, who would be as countless as the stars, would also be strangers in a strange land (Genesis 15:13).

And sure enough, after a famine drove those descendants to Egypt, where they were enslaved and eventually led into freedom by Moses, even still God counsels them to view themselves continually as “strangers and sojourners” - and accordingly, to remain humble and kind-hearted enough to extend hospitality to others. “You shall not oppress a sojourner,” the law given to Moses commands. “You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). The Israelites’ first-hand experience of vulnerability became the key to their welcome of others.

In these various ways, the storytellers encourage us not to think of ourselves only or even primarily as “hosts” - but rather as guests alongside guests, sojourners alongside sojourners along the way. After all, “our church” isn’t really “our church” - it’s God’s! The idea is to shift our thinking so that we picture our congregation as a kind of waystation for pilgrims - and ourselves as pilgrims, too.

ASK FIRST, GIVE SECOND

We can glimpse the Platinum Rule at work in this story when Abraham checks in with his guests before bringing them refreshments. He doesn’t presume that they will want what it occurs to him to offer them, and so he starts with a humble and hospitable proposal: “Let a little water... Let me bring a little bread...” Only after the three visitors respond, “Do as you have said,” do Abraham and Sarah set about preparing the welcome meal.



Obviously it isn’t practical to always “ask first” in this way, but the principle is clear: checking in with someone before offering a particular sign of hospitality is itself hospitable, and can help make someone feel valued, respected, and welcome. And even in cases where it’s pretty clear that the answer will be “yes” (who wouldn’t want some bread and water after a long journey?), the act of asking is dignifying to the person being asked. It says, in effect, “I don’t want to presume; and you know best what you would like” (there’s the Platinum Rule!).

SURPRISE AND HONOR

Note that Abraham offers the visitors “bread and water” - but what he actually delivers steps things up a bit: “cakes” made of “choice flour” instead of ordinary bread, and “curds and milk” instead of water. It’s still very much in the spirit of what the three sojourners asked for, but at the same time it’s a little bit more - which has at least two effects worth thinking about.



First, an element of pleasant surprise. Imagine the visitors’ delight when, already looking forward to the promised “little water” and “little bread,” they’re presented with special cakes, milk, curds, and lamb.

And second, a signal of honor. In Abraham and Sarah’s cultural context, the foods they offer are reserved for special celebrations and special guests, tangible signs of respect and jubilation. The message isn’t just, “Welcome” - it’s “We’re so glad you’re here! Let’s celebrate!” Going an extra mile (or even an extra yard!) can have this honoring, dignifying, celebrative effect.

THE AUDIT

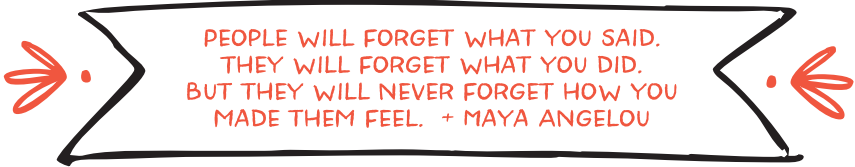
With all this in mind, then, how do you make sure no one feels looked over, uncomfortable, or unimportant when they visit your church? How do you make your congregation feel a little more like “home” for travelers journeying along the way? A little more dignifying, a little more jubilant, a little more like sojourners welcoming sojourners, a little more of a tangible, pleasant surprise? Here are a few ideas, suggestions, and questions to ask one another as you continue to expand and strengthen your wide open welcome.



All of this can be a little daunting: making just the right tweaks to make visitors feel welcome, especially when it may feel that church is working pretty well for you the way it is. But never fear! Giving our hospitality a makeover can have at least two big, bold benefits. First, Platinum Rule strategies can help us welcome sojourners with newfound sensitivity and style. And second, they can help us remember that we, too, “were

sojourners in the land of Egypt," not so much hosts as guests of the divine Host who welcomes, liberates, and loves us all.

What follows are nine "tools of the trade," areas of focus for your "listening tour" of how your congregation's hospitality is going, what's going well, and where you can improve. Again, there are two ways forward from here: systematically work through all the tools for a comprehensive tour, or zero in on a select few most in need of retooling.



CONNECTION

In many cases, a visitor's first experience of your church's hospitality happens online, days or weeks before they visit in person. Their journey begins with visiting your website to find your location, service times, children's programming, service opportunities, description of "what to expect," and so on, and then (fingers crossed!) they'll migrate over to social media to gauge your church's vibrancy, values, and overall vibe.

In other words, many guests will already have an opinion about your church and its hospitality (or lack thereof!) before they walk through your doors on Sunday morning.

Just like our physical spaces, our online spaces need to be continually, thoughtfully refreshed, refined, and revamped. Here's a brief set of key questions to ask about your church website:

1. Is it accurate and up to date? Any out-of-date sections that need to be removed or edited?
2. Is it lovely to look at? This isn't a side issue; it's a crucial one. A lovely website suggests a cared-for community who values beauty and delight. A plain, bland, and clunky website suggests... well, you get the idea!

3. Is it easy to navigate? Ask someone who's never been to your church to answer this one!
4. Does your church's website function well on mobile?
5. Do your church's Facebook or Instagram represent your community accurately and well? Identify three of your congregation's primary strengths; do those strengths come through on those social media channels?



A pastor or administrator or lay leader can ask and answer these questions, but a much better strategy is to pull together a small-but-mighty, diverse team of about 3-4 people to ask and answer them. And be sure to include at least one person who is relatively new (or brand new!) to your congregation.

And extra points if your church's website has a page specifically for newcomers, answering frequently asked questions about parking, attire, children's church, and other things folks might want to know about your community.

As the Platinum Rule attests, we could use some help from people like our potential guests, whose aesthetic or questions or assumptions might be different than ours. So consider asking friends and colleagues who don't go to your church to look at the website and offer feedback to help you get it even closer to what your guests might find helpful. Ask young people and seniors, people who represent the different cultures you want to welcome, and whoever else you want to give a taste of home on their sojourn.



SWEET TUNES

Have you ever noticed that the music we play at a party or gathering has the power to signal who the party is for? Music, in all its beauty and diversity, can provide the same opportunity for your church - it can be a part of how and who you welcome.

1. As people walk into your worship space, is there music playing in the background? What does the music tell them about your church's culture? What kind of music might put them at ease?

2. What does the cultural style of your church's music say about who you're seeking to be in relationship with? (Praise, gospel, hymns, folk, punk, jazz, etc.)
3. Sometimes the songs we sing during worship remind us of the past or of people we love, and we don't always listen intently to the words. But people who don't have those same memories may be listening to the words in order to understand the people and the cultural context they're visiting a little better. Do the songs you sing in worship reflect who you are and what you believe? Do they offer an entry point for people who aren't already a part of your church community?
4. Try polling your congregation to find out their favorite hymns and songs, and then use the resulting list in two complementary ways. First, incorporate those favorites into worship regularly (you can even have fun with how you "reveal" the top ten!). And second, invite the congregation (and/or a worship committee) to ask thoughtful questions about the list: What's missing from it? How can we broaden and diversify it? How can we deepen its connections to the surrounding community?

A NOTE ABOUT MUSICAL GENRES

True hospitality never pits different styles and/or traditions of music against one another. Every church community (like every sojourner along the way!) needs an eclectic, broad range of musical genres and tones to help capture and express the eclectic, broad range of human emotion and experience: grief, joy, celebration, confession, awe, lament, triumph, and so on. Being open to different styles of music is essentially equivalent to being open to different people with different life experiences.



BREAD OF LIFE & FORGIVENESS

People visit churches for lots of different reasons: they're seeking community, they're dealing with hardship at home, they have gifts to

offer, they love ritual, they need forgiveness, their hearts are full of gratitude, they love theology, they're hanging by a thread, they're just curious - the list goes on. Thanks be to God, gathering around a table to eat and drink together - that is, to share Communion, the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, the Holy Sacrament - has the power to speak to all of these experiences and more. Because it's done differently from church to church, however, Communion can also be anxiety-producing for visitors who don't quite know what to expect.

1. Since the breaking of bread and pouring out of the cup is different in every community, does your church poetically and concisely explain (in the bulletin, on the screen, and/or in spoken words) exactly how it will happen? Are there clear instructions about how to come forward, how the elements are passed, when to eat or drink, and so on?
2. Is there a clear explanation for how to avoid consuming alcohol, and/or a clear statement that the rite is alcohol-free?
3. Do you have gluten-free elements? If so, do the people setting up communion know how to avoid cross-contamination?
4. Do you have particular practices in place for people with limited mobility?
5. Is it clear who can take Communion and why, and what alternatives are available for people who are not allowed to take it?
6. Alternately, if your church welcomes people to the table who have been left out in other communities, it can be a gift to hear that Jesus welcomes people of all genders, all orientations, all marital statuses, etc. Does your invitation to the table explicitly include the breadth of people who are often excluded? If so, make that wide open welcome known!
7. If your church uses intinction, do you have an alternative in place (for example, small single-serving cups) to protect people with immune deficiency issues? If so, how do you share this information so people know they can safely participate if they choose to?
8. If disability inclusion is part of your church's commitment, is the table from which communion is served fully accessible?





TASTY TREATS, HOT COFFEE & GOOD CONVERSATION

At least one pastor has been known to say “our budget includes the GOOD coffee - fair trade but also really tasty - because we treat coffee hour as our chance to be good stewards and good hosts.” Having both a “good steward” and “good host” mindset about social time after worship has the potential to create an extraordinary experience for visitors (and avoid the awkward conversation / no conversation / bad coffee experience they might be dreading from past experiences at other churches).

The same goes for tea and other beverages, of course! And the same goes for the treats as well. Are there gifted bakers or chefs in your congregation who can donate (or be paid!) to provide superlative snacks? Is there a local bakery that has “the best in town” treats? For many churches, this is our moment - remembering Abraham and Sarah - to offer a twenty-first century version of “choice cakes, curds, and milk” rather than a “little bread” and a “little water.”

So, besides great things to snack and sip, what are the ingredients of a successful coffee hour? Here are some questions and ideas:

TASTY TREATS & HOT COFFEE

1. If snacks are purchased at a store, is there a process for plating them nicely rather than serving them out of plastic containers?
2. If your church has a garden, can there be a few sprigs of whatever is growing there arranged as a “centerpiece” on the serving table?
3. Could your church provide environmentally-friendly to-go containers for visitors (or regular attendees) to take home any extra food?
4. With our growing awareness of dietary needs, is there a plan to have snack options for vegetarians, gluten-free folks, diabetics, etc.? Could someone prepare a list of appropriate snacks in these categories for people to consider as they prepare for coffee hour?

GOOD CONVERSATION

1. Good conversation isn't limited to coffee hour - it can start before worship even begins! Is there anyone at your church, or a small team, who can take on the task of simply welcoming newcomers, answering any questions they might have, and striking up a conversation with them after worship that might make them feel more inclined to stick around to chat?
2. Has your congregation been invited to think of the church as a place that prioritizes hospitality, so that people understand this as part of their congregational culture - caring for each other, and also treating each person who visits with the care they might extend a visitor in their own home?
3. Are there ways in which your church can make sure a visitor gets to connect with a few different people, rather than only talking to one person (or no-one) before, during, or after worship?
4. Is there a plan or system in place to invite folks to leave their email or address so that a pastor or lay leader might follow up with a thank you note?

STARTER QUESTIONS

Have your "welcome folks/greeters" try these starter questions as they navigate milling in the sanctuary before and after worship, or over muffins during fellowship time:

- My name is XYZ - what's your name?
- What keeps you busy during the week?
- How did you find this church?
- Do you know anyone who attends this church?
- How long have you been in the area?
- (After an interest or expertise arises in the conversation) Have you met [name of a person in the congregation that shares the interest or expertise]?



NAME TAG OPPORTUNITY

Consider making or purchasing name tags that are explicitly designed to give the person the option of indicating their gender pronouns. This is another great Platinum Rule opportunity that can honor guests and also honor members of your church. By normalizing that we get to be identified the way we choose, we create space for everyone to get the gift of saying "this is who I am," whether it matches people's assumptions or not.



PROCLAMATION

Scripture makes it crystal clear that God loves to visit God's people. God breaks into our lives bearing blessing, forgiveness, love, grace, and transformation - and sometimes that breaking into the world happens through sermons. And the beautiful thing about a sermon that has been prayed over, written, and delivered with visitors in mind is that it will almost always resonate with longtime members of the church as well.

1. Before preaching on a story in scripture, have you explained a little bit about the characters that appear in it, or the larger context or storyline, so that if someone is new to the Bible, they will still understand what's going on?
2. Do you explain even basic theological terms (grace, salvation, blessing, and so on) so people can learn a little bit more about what you're talking about?
3. It's great for a sermon to talk about congregational life sometimes. However, if a sermon is focused on the congregation, is there also a tie-in to other parts of people's lives as well - so newcomers won't feel like outsiders looking in?
4. Is the sound system hospitable for people with different hearing abilities? In some contexts, it may be appropriate (at least occasionally) to include an ASL interpreter for the sermon, or indeed for the service. ASL is such a beautiful language - you may find that hearing people, too, find it enhances their understanding and enjoyment!



TENDERNESS

It's hard to know for sure, of course, why someone is visiting your church, but sometimes it's because they are facing a challenge in life and could use support. And the same is true for people in church we've known for years! For all of us, there are times when we're making our way through trials and tribulations, and practicing tenderness with visitors can help us better practice tenderness with longtime "regulars" as well. If folks walk away from worship knowing deep down in their bones that they've just visited a place of comfort, compassion, vulnerability, tenderness, and joy - well, then the Gospel has been both proclaimed and embodied in that place.

1. If someone shares a challenge they're facing, are you comfortable with listening more than fixing?
2. Have your lay leaders and clergy had the opportunity to practice active listening (and ask open, honest questions) that allows people to share and feel genuinely heard and seen?
3. Are you comfortable sharing support and solidarity in ways that keep the visitor center stage, rather than shifting the spotlight over to your trials or advice?

A JOYFUL HEART

We could all use a little extra joy in our lives! Worship is often referred to as a "celebration," and when a visitor gets to experience a glimpse of joy, that's a real gift.

Encourage welcomers/greeters to use warm, positive affirmations that spread a little joy on Sunday morning. Try something like:

"So glad you're here this morning..."

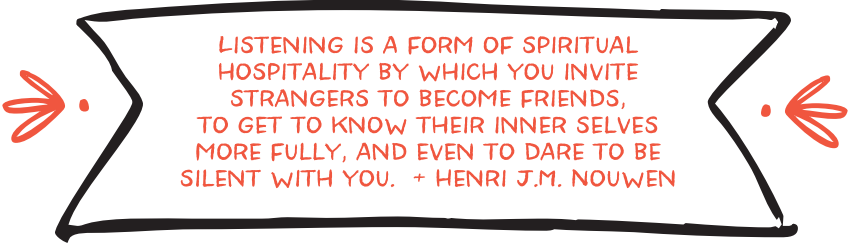
"What an amazing outfit..."

"What a lovely color on you..."

"I was hoping I'd get to meet someone new today!"



4. Are there people (deacons, elders, clergy) designated to provide support and care for people who might like to share if something in the service opens a door, stirs a memory, or touches a sensitive wound? Is it clear to the congregation (and to visitors) how they can connect with the folks so designated?



SEEING GOD IN EVERYONE

It can be a brave act to attend worship, especially for people who are not always welcomed in all spaces. To visit a church and feel valued can feel pretty special - provided the hospitality is genuine, confident, and grounded, not driven by a desperate desire for new members. This kind of authentic welcome is a beautiful blessing we can share, just like our spiritual ancestors Abraham and Sarah did with the three strangers who happened by their tent.

1. Does your church believe that we encounter God in everyone? What would taking this idea seriously look like in your community - that in every visitor we meet, we're also meeting Jesus?
2. Where in your worship service can you name and reinforce the value that at your church you recognize God's image in everyone present, including both longtime worshippers and first-time worshippers? Imagine: "I see each one of you as a child of God, a creature made in the image of God. And I see all of us together, including those of you here for the first time and those of you here for the thousandth time, all of us together, as the Body of Christ..."

3. Visitors may come in many different shapes and sizes, colors and circumstances. Is your church ready to welcome God's diversity across all of those dimensions? For example, how will you make someone feel like you see God in them when they don't present in a traditionally gendered way? How will you provide welcome to a parent with children who are not used to sitting quietly in church, and yet are not comfortable with going to a children's program with strangers? How will you provide support to someone with disabilities, including disabilities that might create noise during worship?
4. If you were visiting a church for the first time, what might a greeter say to you that would make you feel as if they saw you as special, without it feeling overwhelming or overbearing or a little too intense? How might some of those phrases be shared with the whole church community?

It's helpful to have the whole congregation think through these questions, not just the leadership, greeters, or church staff. It's good for a church to have thought through how it lives out its theology in practical ways with visitors even before these kinds of situations arise. And it allows for the church to have an important theological conversation in the process! Tackling these questions as a whole community might help to avoid a member unintentionally undoing your church's hard work of hospitality because, for example, they grew up believing that it's helpful to tell a child to be quiet during worship, even a visiting child who doesn't know or can't practice "the rules."

Remember the Golden Rule - and also the Platinum Rule!



THE GOOD BOOK

The scriptures have been offering comfort, encouragement, and challenge to people for thousands of years. And sometimes those very words don't make a lot of sense when we lack the tools we need to understand and interpret them. This is true for visitors and lifelong members alike!

1. Before reading a scriptural passage, do you introduce it in a poetic and concise way that might help people understand when and why it was written, as well as the context of the story or psalm or proverb or letter?
2. Do you use a translation of the Bible that's accessible and clear to your community?
3. If you stand during the reading of the Gospel, can you offer a little explanation as to why this is important - so someone who hasn't had that experience can understand?
4. If there are words your congregation says after the scripture, do you make sure your visitor knows those words are coming up?
5. Do you model and normalize the idea that the Bible is a kind of library or gymnasium, that we all have a library card or gym membership - and that scripture therefore invites a lifetime of study and exercise? This approach simultaneously a) invites patience and engagement, demystifying the idea that the Bible is only for experts; and b) normalizes the experience of not understanding a particular passage at first, reframing it as an opportunity for learning and developing insight and agility.



THANKSGIVING

Once someone has visited your church, the hospitable next steps are clear:

THANK THEM FOR COMING

A handwritten note is best if possible - and a handwritten note on striking, beautiful stationary or a lovely card is another opportunity to pleasantly surprise and honor the visitor - again, in the spirit of Abraham and Sarah's "choice cakes, curds, and milk." Moreover, instead of a nondescript "thank you" card, try a card featuring a thought provoking theological idea. After all, the card is another opportunity to put your

best foot forward, thanking them and at the same time giving them a gift they might put up on their fridge or bulletin board over their desk at home.

OFFER A LOW-PRESSURE, ACCESSIBLE INVITATION

Design a regular, ongoing, fun, and upbeat event you can invite newcomers to attend as a kind of next step in getting to know the congregation. This will vary from church to church, but a great option for a new visitor might be “Pizza with the Pastor,” “Muffins with the Minister,” “Coffee with Clergy,” and so on.

It’s almost always a challenge to get guests to move from a big room (Sunday worship) to a small room (an ongoing class or small group), but these “Pie with the Pastor”-type events can help bridge this gap by opening a door to a non-intimidating, non-committal next step. You can even host an online equivalent for folks who would find an online session even more convenient or inviting.



SURVEYS AND SECRET SHOPPERS

THREE FINAL STRATEGIES

First, using the “tools of trade” in this Hospitality Audit, build a tailor-made survey for your congregation (using Survey Monkey or some similar online tool). In each area, develop questions that help surface where your church’s strengths and growing edges are when it comes to hospitality. Even the very act of designing the survey will be revealing and thought-provoking - and the responses will be, too. Gather the pieces of feedback that are common to multiple responses (the pieces - positive or negative - from only one or two people are typically “outliers”; focusing on the repeated responses typically makes most sense), and then tackle the questions: How do we build upon what’s working? How do we improve what isn’t?

Second, convene (online or in person) a select group of the most recent 5-10 people who’ve become members or regular attendees of your

congregation. Ahead of time, send them a version of the hospitality survey mentioned above, and then spend the meeting discussing it - all with an ear toward listening for their collective wisdom about what's working and what can be improved (and how to improve it!) when it comes to your church's hospitality.

And third, imagine inviting the perspective of a few outsiders, secret shoppers of sorts, in the form of insightful friends from a different church, or from no church at all, who are discerning, observant, articulate critics who won't mind sharing honest feedback.

Invite them to attend a worship service incognito. Questions for them to answer could include:

1. What was positive and what was negative about how you were greeted when you arrived?
2. How did the pre-worship time feel? Was it relaxing, awkward, stressful, or something else entirely?
3. How many people welcomed you? Was that a good number? How did they first engage you?
4. What questions did worship raise for you as a visitor? What was clear? What was confusing? What was welcoming? What wasn't?
5. Were you personally invited to come for social time after worship? If so, did you feel well attended to, over attended to, or left to your own devices? Were things laid out in appealing ways?
6. Would you come back? If so, why? If not, why not?

This strategy can also be turned around: arrange for your greeters or members of your worship committee to attend other churches and answer these same six questions. You'll definitely learn a lot about your own church's habits and some best practices (and also some not-so-best practices!) in the process.



CONCLUSION

All of us want to be congregations of welcome, following Abraham and Sarah's lead, offering an experience of "home" and putting the Platinum Rule to good use. And if we've been a part of a worshipping community for a while, it can be easy to forget what it's like to be a new and vulnerable visitor - not to mention the fact that we're all visitors and sojourners every time we arrive!

Using this Hospitality Audit thoughtfully over time, and bringing others into the process with us, can help us all become "beginners" again - or, rather, remind us that when it comes to hospitality, each one of us is always and forever a beginner. We're children of God in the image of God, sojourners traveling together on life's way by God's grace, guests welcomed by the One who calls us to welcome one another.

But wait a minute - is this really possible? A community that genuinely, tangibly welcomes all, from first time visitors to longtime friends? Where everyone feels at home, and at the same time feels challenged to grow and participate and help realize the ongoing work of hospitality, of listening and honor and care and celebration? A place where golden and platinum rules are alive and well?

Such an audacious aspiration, wonderful as it may seem if it were possible, might make us smile - even chuckle to ourselves in disbelief.

And just as in the old story of Abraham and Sarah, the visitors have a ready reply: "Why do you laugh? Is anything too wonderful for God?"



TRULY I TELL YOU, JUST AS YOU DID IT
TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE
WHO ARE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY,
YOU DID IT TO ME. + MATTHEW 25:40