



Ways to Be a Great Church GREETER

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Although I knew that God wanted me to go to church, I was terrified the first time I entered a local Presbyterian church. When I entered, there were two people there who greeted me: a lovely woman named Nancy and a man in black, wearing a white collar who introduced himself as Mike, the minister. Other than going to Sunday school a couple of times with my cousin when I was a child, church was a foreign place, and I doubted I should be there. But Nancy and Mike's words of welcome and acts of hospitality made me feel comfortable. Nancy even came up to me after the service and personally invited me to stay for coffee time... and I actually did!

– The Rev. Shelly Chandler, First & St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church,
Pictou, Nova Scotia

We've all heard stories like the one Shelly tells of being warmly welcomed. Unfortunately, we've probably also all heard stories of people having the opposite experience. By welcoming people well, greeters help prepare the way for whatever work God's wants to do in the lives of newcomers and regular churchgoers. Not everyone will become a Presbyterian minister like Shelly, but all people who walk through the doors of the church are beloved by God and have an important role to play in God's mission and ministry.

Greeters are a vital part of a church's ministry by ensuring that all who enter receive a warm greeting, the information they need to feel comfortable, and a friendly connection they can rely on before and after the service. As you strive to be the greeter that others remember as having warmly welcomed them into the church, here are some important things to keep in mind:

PRAY Greeters should pray together before people start arriving for the service. Ask for God's blessing and safekeeping for those who are on their way to church. Pray that God will send new people to worship, and that church will be a welcoming place for all. Invite God to open your eyes to opportunities to offer hospitality and to inspire your words and actions as you greet people.

WELCOME EVERYONE Everyone who comes through the door of the church should receive a friendly and warm greeting. Church regulars and newcomers alike need to be acknowledged and welcomed. No matter how someone looks or is dressed, they should be welcomed wholeheartedly.

BE ATTENTIVE Focus on greeting. It is tempting to start talking with friends or run to get a coffee in the kitchen, but a greeter's attention should always be on people coming through the doors. Your role is to offer a kind word of welcome and provide whatever information those coming in need to get settled and ready for the service. Learn to graciously and gently extract yourself from conversations or situations that distract from your role.

SMILE AND SPEAK WORDS OF WELCOME No one should pass through the doors of the church before a service without being warmly greeted. When you greet people, be sure to make eye contact and smile. “Hello” is a good place to start, but there are many things you can say to welcome those coming into your church: “Good Morning/Evening,” “Welcome,” “Glad you are here,” “How are you doing today?” “Can I assist you in finding a place to sit, the nursery, the washrooms, etc.?” Please keep in mind that some people need a moment to acclimatize before they are ready to receive the bulletin and enter conversation.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF When you greet someone you’ve not met before, be sure to introduce yourself. Avoid saying “Are you visiting?” because it unnecessarily labels them as outside of the church community. Instead say, “Hi, my name is _____. I don’t believe we’ve met yet. Is there anything I can assist you with?”

PROVIDE INFORMATION AND INVITATION Provide or point to the material churchgoers will need to follow the service, such as bulletins, hymn books, psalters. Be sure to invite newcomers to fellowship time after the service. It is as easy as saying, “We have coffee together after the service. Please join us” or “It would be great to chat further with you after the service. I’d be happy to show you where we meet for coffee.”

BE RESPONSIVE Be able to predict the needs of newcomers to your church. Are the washrooms particularly difficult to find? Is the elevator complicated to use? Where and when can they receive pastoral care or prayer if needed? Know how to answer the common questions with confidence. Be prepared to accompany newcomers as they find what they need in the building and connect with the resources and spiritual care they are seeking.

BE A GOOD PEOPLE-READER It is important to be friendly and helpful, but also to respect the preferences of those coming through the doors. Offer extra assistance for those who may need it (e.g., people who are elderly or have disabilities), but be sure to ask, “Is there any way I can help you?” before jumping in to help. Some people will want you to accompany them to the pew, others will not. Some will want to talk a lot, others will want to slip quietly into the sanctuary. Take your cue from the person you are greeting. Offer your assistance without being overbearing.

HELP PEOPLE FIND SEATS Be ready to usher people to available seats, especially if the service has already started or the church is quite full. Even when the church is not full, it can be awkward for newcomers to find seats. Don’t be afraid to ask congregants to slide into the middle of the row to allow space for others. If possible, seat newcomers with someone with whom they might have something in common and can help them follow the service, if necessary.

BE HOSPITABLE DURING AND AFTER THE SERVICE A greeter’s role doesn’t end when worship starts. Leave at least one greeter at the door to continue to welcome people. Keep an eye out for newcomers who may need something during the service. After the service, seek newcomers out to invite and accompany them to fellowship time. Make a point to introduce them to others in the congregation with whom they may share interests.