



Church Ambassadors

Islington's Belonging Strategy

Mission Action Plan
Expanding Our Welcoming & Belonging Strategies



Open Hearts
Open Minds
Open Doors

Ambassadors Build Pathways to Belonging

- ❑ Every year approximately 200 individuals visit Islington United Church for the first-time for Sunday morning service.
- ❑ Research has shown that guests' who make at least one connection on their first visit to a Church are much more likely to attend service in the future. To help guests make connections Islington's Belonging System introduces a new role within our Church known as the "Church Ambassador".
- ❑ Church Ambassadors are members of our congregation who have the mission to help those new to our Church to make connections, and eventually, to become fully engaged in the life of our Church family.
- ❑ Church Ambassadors therefore play a crucial role in our Belonging System which builds on our excellent tradition of welcoming guests to our Church.
- ❑ The Belonging System is part of the Mission Action Plan program commissioned by Church Council to help Islington continue to grow. It is based on best practices from many churches who have evolved their welcoming strategies to make guests feel more at home when they visit.

Sunday Morning Belonging System

- ❑ Islington's Sunday Morning Belonging System is an integrated network of six teams (Parking Attendants, Greeters, Ushers, Section Elders, Welcome Table Attendants, **Church Ambassadors**) with special training and tools (e.g., Connect Cards, Welcome kits, brochures) to make first-time guests feel welcome, to help them make connections, to encourage them to attend in the future and to help them find their place within our Church family.
- ❑ The Sunday Morning Belonging System introduces 3 new teams (Section Elders, Parking Attendants, **Church Ambassadors**) and refines the role of 3 existing Sunday morning teams (Greeters, Ushers, Welcome Table Attendants).
- ❑ While Parking Attendants, Greeter and Ushers may be the first points-of-contact for Guests on a Sunday Morning, Church Ambassadors seek to establish a longer-term connection with guests that in some instances may last several months or even years.
- ❑ Church Ambassadors extend genuine care and friendship to those new to our Church, getting to know them better and offering guidance concerning the many resources and opportunities available within Islington.

The Sunday Morning Belonging System

There are twelve components in our Sunday Morning Belonging System

Long Term/
Seasonal
Preparation

Sunday
Morning
Preparation

Parking
Attendants
(New)

Guest Greeters
(New Role)
& Greeters

Ushers

Section
Elders
(New)

Worship
Service Guest
Greetings

Connect Cards
(New/Revised) &
New Pew
Material

After-Service
Greeters
(New Role for our
Guest Greeters
and Greeters)

Islington's
Welcome
Table Attendants

Church
Ambassadors
(New)

Minister's
Next Day Email/
First Month
Follow-Up Letter

Sunday Morning First-Time Guest Experience Before the Service Begins

The first seven minutes of a guest's first visit are crucial!

Parking Attendants will help guests to find a parking spot (as required). If a Parking Attendant believes the individuals are first-time guests they may be directed to a reserved Visitors Parking spot. The Parking Attendant will escort guests to the appropriate Church entrance.



Guest Greeters will identify first-time guests if possible, introduce themselves, welcome them to Islington, and offer to escort them to the sanctuary or nursery if needed. They will also give out and explain the Connect Card and encourage guests to complete it.



Guest Greeters will introduce guests to an usher; The usher will ask the guest if they have any seating preferences;

Ushers will introduce the guest to the Section Elder (when appropriate). The Section Elder will welcome the guest to Islington.



Guests (and the congregation) will hear the "Sunday Morning Guest Welcome" from the lectern and presiding Minister as part of the Sunday Morning Announcement. The announcement will encourage guests to approach their Section Elder if they have any questions.

Note: Not all guests will experience all activities.

Sunday Morning Guest Experience

After the Service and Beyond

Guests who make even one connection are much more likely to return.

The Guest Greeter or Section Elder will invite guests to attend our Coffee Hour and if they agree, escort them to SEH, point out the Welcome Table and/or introduce them to a **Church Ambassador** or a Minister.



If the guest prefers not to attend Coffee Hour, the Guest Greeter would escort the guests to either the Sun Rise Room or the nursery (to pick up their children) or to an exit and, where possible, introduce them to a Minister or **Church Ambassador**.



Completed Connect Cards¹ will be deposited in the Church Office locked mail slot. Grace will forward the guest emails from the Connect Cards to Mark on Monday morning. Mark will send a personal email welcoming the guest to Islington.



The guest may receive a handwritten letter after one month; They may be offered complimentary concert/event tickets. Guests may also be paired with a gender, age & lifecycle-stage appropriate **Church Ambassador**.

1- Guests who complete the Connect Card will be asked if they wish to receive the Church weekly email. If so, they will be added to our email list.

The Belonging System Compass



The role of Church Ambassadors is defined by our Belonging System Compass:

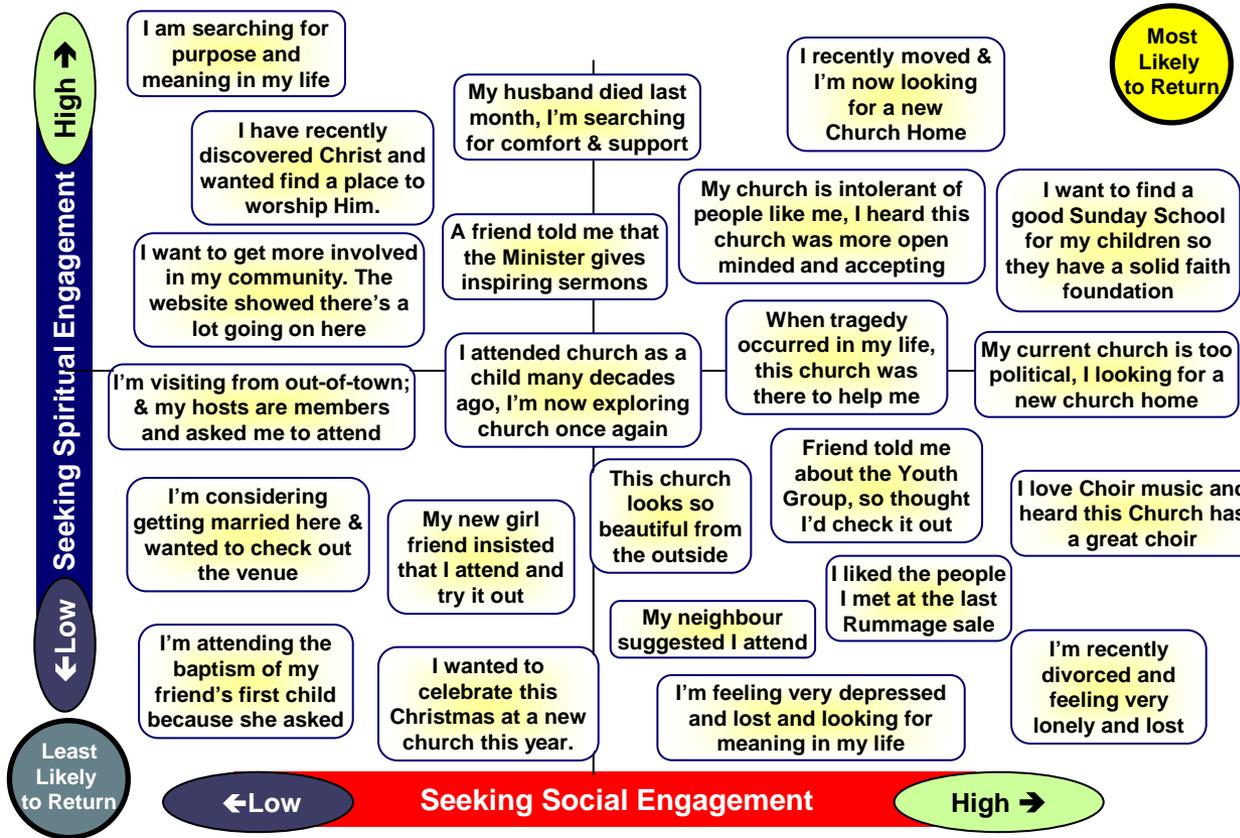
- ❑ Welcome guests to our Church and make them feel at home during their first visit and during subsequent visits;
- ❑ Provide guidance and support to help guests feel they belong during the first few months at Islington;
- ❑ Pro-actively provide information about our Church and answer questions to help our guests learn about our Church;
- ❑ Connect guests with others in the Church, proactively invite them to Church events and, in time, encourage them to consider joining Church groups to help them become engaged in the life of Islington.

Attributes of a Church Ambassador

- ❑ Willing to make a connection with someone new to our Church and keep in contact with this person for the first few months (where possible and when appropriate) when the opportunity arises
- ❑ Understands that the need to serve as an Ambassador for someone new to our Church is difficult to predict and may occur at any time
- ❑ Has strong social skills (e.g., genuine, good conversationalist, comfortable with people they do not know)
- ❑ Friendly and approachable – likes people and is generally liked by people
- ❑ Has a good understanding of our Church activities, events and programs
- ❑ Accepting, tolerant, respectful and non-judgmental
- ❑ Comfortable with all walks of life and all age groups
- ❑ Kind and empathetic to the needs of others
- ❑ Perceptive - able to discern needs quickly, attentive to body language
- ❑ Has a sense of mission and believes helping people to belong to our Church is an important part of our Christian ministry

Sunday Morning Guests: The Big Assumption

We know that people come to Islington for Sunday morning service for a variety of reasons and that not everyone is searching for a Church Home.



But Islington's Belonging System begins with the assumption that **ALL First-Time Guests** are seeking spiritual & social engagement (of course we quickly adjust if this does not appear to be the case).

What Does It Feel Like to visit a new church for the first-time?

Ambassadors Need To be Empathetic

- ❑ While people who visit our Church will differ, for some it will be a stressful experience. The following are common questions or concerns people sometime have when they visit a church for the first-time:
 - ❑ Have I dressed appropriately for Sunday service? What will happen if not?
 - ❑ Where are the washrooms? Where do I hang my coat? What about my wet boots?
 - ❑ Where is the service being held? Is there more than one service?
 - ❑ Where do I take my child? Do I take my child there before service or during service? Who will look after my child? Can I keep my child with me?
 - ❑ Do they have a program for my child? Will my child like the other kids in the program? Will my child be accepted? Will my child enjoy the program?
 - ❑ Who attends this Church? Will I be accepted? Will there be people like me?
 - ❑ Are the people here friendly? Tolerant? Formal or easy-going? Super religious?
 - ❑ Will they accept me – I don't know very much about religion, the Bible, Christ...
 - ❑ How long is the service? What happens during the service?
 - ❑ Where should I sit? Is there any place I shouldn't sit?
 - ❑ Will I be expected to speak in front of a crowd? Sing? Take communion? etc.
 - ❑ How will I know when to stand or sit during the service?
 - ❑ Will I be expected to make a donation? How much should I give?

Recognizing First-Time Guest

- ❑ In most, but not all instances, a Church Ambassador will be introduced to a First-Time Guest by a Minister, Guest Greeter, Usher, Section Elder or Welcome Table Attendant (i.e., a member of a Belonging Team).
- ❑ This is your cue that a Belonging Team member has identified that a person is new to our Church and that your role as a Church Ambassador may be needed.
- ❑ Belonging Team members are encouraged to match first-time guests with Church Ambassadors they believe they will have something in common with (e.g., same age, same stage of life, similar circumstances) but this may not always be possible.
- ❑ As a Church Ambassador, you may also recognize a first-time guest by the following:
 - ❑ You don't recognize them; They do not have a name tag
 - ❑ They look uncomfortable, nervous, unsure of what to do during service
 - ❑ They are standing alone after church or during coffee hour
 - ❑ They visit the Welcome Table
 - ❑ They ask questions

Guests: First Introductions

- ❑ As an Ambassador, you are most likely to connect with guests when you are introduced by a member of one of the Belonging Teams.
- ❑ When first introduced to a guest be genuine, calm and friendly - do not draw attention to the fact that it is their first visit unless they introduce the subject.
- ❑ A genuine conversation with a guest cannot be scripted. However, the following are some guidelines that may help you engage with guests:
 - ❑ Introduce yourself to the person or couple (but do not say you are a Church Ambassador). Remember to introduce yourself to everyone, including children.
 - ❑ Talk about something you have in common. For example, you have just attended the service so that may be a natural starting point. Try to include everyone in the conversation where possible. Do not ignore children or they will get bored quickly.
 - ❑ It is okay to offer a compliment, but be genuine but do not be overly friendly.
 - ❑ Humour is always an excellent ice-breaker – but genuine humour relevant to the circumstances (i.e., don't start telling jokes).
 - ❑ Be sensitive to the guest's body-cues that they feel uncomfortable or want to leave. If this seems to be the case, end the conversation quickly and politely.
 - ❑ Remember their name(s) (and their children's names). Also try to remember the conversation you had – this will be important next time you meet.

Guests: Genuine Conversations

- ❑ Everyone has their own approach to conversations - no one style is best; The best approach for you is the one you are most comfortable with.
- ❑ But here are a few additional tips that might help:
 - ❑ Make eye contact - but do not stare at the individual continuously as this makes people nervous; Darting-eyes and fast movements also make people feel uncomfortable.
 - ❑ Ask open-ended questions (e.g., don't say "Did you enjoy the service today?" but rather "What did you think about our service today?").
 - ❑ Look for areas of commonality – similar likes, similar circumstances (e.g., children), similar attitudes - these can be good subjects for a more meaningful conversation
 - ❑ Be an active listener – both in terms of body-language and in conversation; Show genuine interest in what they are saying; Ask for clarifications if needed but don't pry
 - ❑ Make the conversation an exchange – not an interview; While you should try to keep the focus on the guest it is important to share common experiences you have had; But don't over-share, too much detail concerning a negative event as this can make guests feel uncomfortable.
 - ❑ Repeat the person's first name from time to time during the conversation - but do so with restraint; Help them remember your name by wearing your Islington nametag
 - ❑ If appropriate, ask them how they learned about Islington or what brought them to Islington this morning – this can be a good start to a discussion about our Church
 - ❑ Do NOT "over-sell" our Church. But be ready to respond to questions about our Church when asked; Also indicate ways that they can learn more about our Church and its programs (e.g., Islington's website, *A Place for You* brochure, the Welcome Table).

Guests: Ending the First Conversation

- ❑ Church Ambassadors have the mission of helping those new to our Church to make connections and eventually become fully engaged in our Church family. Therefore, where appropriate, you should end the first conversation in a manner that indicates you are (can be) there for them:
 - ❑ Thank them for attending service this morning and express that hope that they will be able to attend Sunday morning service in the future;
 - ❑ Tell them about any upcoming Church activities (e.g., concerts, special services) that you think they may be interested in;
 - ❑ Encourage them to complete a Connect Card (if they haven't already done so);
 - ❑ Offer to send them information about a specific activity, group and so forth that they have expressed interest in by email;
 - ❑ Offer to call them or email them about upcoming events if they are interested;

...or, if the above just doesn't seem appropriate (and it often will), just let them know that it was a pleasure to have meet them and you hope they can come to service again.

- ❑ More often than not, the next time you will meet the individuals is the next time they attend Sunday morning service. So it is important to remember their name(s), their children's names and, most importantly, your conversation.

Ambassadors Are Longer-Term Guides

- ❑ While Guest Greeters and Ushers will help first-time guests find their way around our Church, Church Ambassadors help first-time guests find their way into the social and spiritual life of our Church Family. This will usually take time.
- ❑ The most likely occasions for future meetings with guests you have spoken with are future Sunday morning services; but you may also see them at special Church events, Church concerts or even somewhere in the community. As an Ambassador, you should capitalize on all opportunities for future contact with a guest you have spoken with.
- ❑ If you obtain contact information from a guest (e.g., email), either directly or through the Connect Card, you may wish to proactively contact them about an upcoming event at the Church (and even attend the event with them).
- ❑ In time, if it is appropriate, you may invite individuals you have established a rapport with to consider joining one of our many church groups or to volunteer for a special church activity (e.g., rummage sale, church decorating, etc).
- ❑ Of course, how your relationships with guests evolve will vary considerably depending on the individuals in question and their circumstances.

Other Roles for Church Ambassadors

- ❑ In addition to their role on Sunday Morning, Church Ambassadors may also be asked to help those new to our Church under different circumstances:
- ❑ **New Members:** Ambassadors may play an important role with those who become members of our Church to help them integrate into our Church family. This may include attending a New Members reception or other new member events to establishing a relationship with a new member.
- ❑ **Baptisms:** Ambassadors may visit the Baptismal Seminar to help parents feel welcomed in our Church; They may also send notes to these parents inviting them to Church events and activities appropriate for young parents.
- ❑ **Marriages:** Ambassadors may visit the Marriage Preparation course to introduce themselves to couples preparing for marriage; They may also send notes to recently married couples inviting them to Church events and activities that may be appropriate for them.
- ❑ **Funerals and Memorial Services:** Ambassadors may send notes to persons who have recently experienced a loss to provide information about our pastoral care and support services as well as our bereavement support group.

Ambassadors Need to Be Knowledgeable

- ❑ To help first-time guests find their way around our Church and become involved in the activities of our Church it is important that Ambassadors are knowledgeable about our Church, its activities and its programs.
- ❑ Ambassadors should have a good understanding of the following:
 - ❑ The layout of our Church including all entrances and exits, locations of washrooms, and where to hang coats/place boots;
 - ❑ The location of the Sanctuary, Chapel, Nursery/Toddler room; Discovery Quest; Reception Room, Ministers' Offices & Church Office;
 - ❑ The names of our Ministers and their roles in the Church;
 - ❑ Any special services, special events or opportunities for social fellowship which may be upcoming in the near future;
 - ❑ Our many programs (we have over 60);
 - ❑ Any changes occurring in the near future concerning Sunday service times.
- ❑ Considerable information about our programs, activities and Ministers can be found on our website. Ambassadors may also wish to arrange for a tour of our Church home if they are not familiar with the location and layout of the Church.

Connect Cards

- ❑ Connect Cards are an important way for us to connect with first-time guests.
- ❑ The Connect Card is a simple form which only asks for the person's name, email and phone number (they may also request to receive our weekly e-newsletter):



*Thank you for worshipping with us today.
Please provide us with the following information
so we can get to know you better.*

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Please register me for Islington's e-newsletter

All information provided on this card is strictly confidential and will only be used by our Church Office and Ministers to better serve you.

Please place your completed card in the offering plate. *Open Hearts Open Minds Open Doors*

- ❑ While normally a Guest Greeter would request that first-time guests complete a Connect Card, Church Ambassadors should also be aware of this important communication tool.
- ❑ As an Ambassador, you may discover during the course of your conversation that the guest did not complete a Connect Card (but would be willing to do so now). Connect Cards will be available at the Welcoming Table as well as all exits from the sanctuary. If a guest completes the card and gives it to you, you should deposit it in the locked Church Office through the mail slot. All Connect Cards received will be processed by the Church staff and the Ministerial Team.