



# Section Elders

## Islington's Belonging System

Mission Action Plan  
Expanding Our Welcoming & Belonging Strategies



Open Hearts  
Open Minds  
Open Doors

# Section Elders Are Important

- ❑ Every year approximately 200 individuals visit Islington United for the first-time for Sunday service.
- ❑ Research has shown that the guests' first visit to a Church has a large impact on whether they will return to attend Sunday service in the future and ultimately become part of our Faith Family.
- ❑ Islington has always done a great job at welcoming guests to our Church. The Islington Belonging System is intended to build on this excellent tradition and fill in the gaps to increase the likelihood that first-time guests not only feel welcomed, but are proactively helped to find their way in our Church.
- ❑ Typically our greeters are the first point of contact with our guests. However, once the guest enters the sanctuary and is seated there is a gap in our welcoming program. The role of the Section Elder is intended to fill this gap and represents an important component of our Belonging System.
- ❑ 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, brochures, Welcome Bag) to make first-time guests feel welcome, to help them make connections and to encourage them to attend in the future.
- ❑ 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).
- ❑ Sunday Morning Belonging System introduces the role of the **Section Elder**:
  - ❑ There will be eight Section Elders per service; Section Elders would have a special lanyard with their name identifying them as a Section Elder.
  - ❑ Each Section Elder will be responsible for all individuals sitting in approximately 3 to 4 pews on one side of the Sanctuary every week.
  - ❑ Section Elders will take note of guests, introduce themselves, welcome guests to Islington and encourage them to ask questions if needed.
  - ❑ Section Elders will also take note of changes in the attendance pattern of regular attendees as this may indicate a problem (e.g., health).

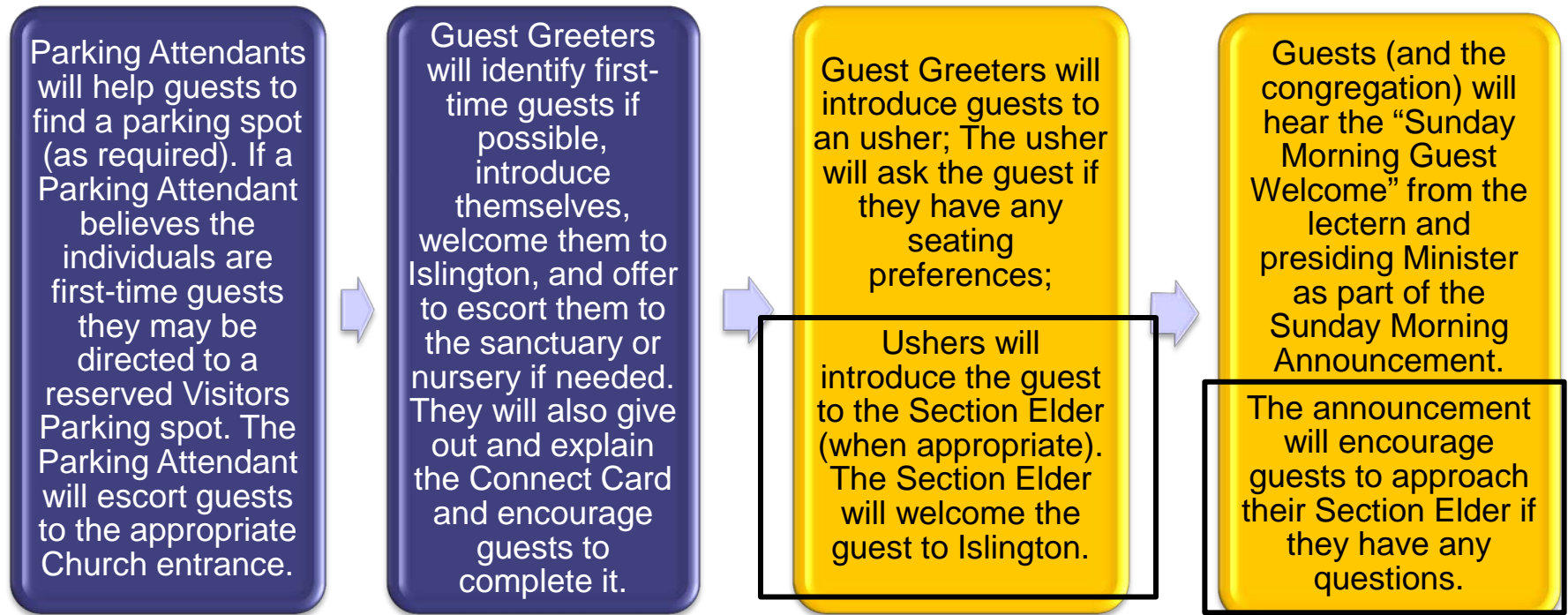
# Section Elders Play a Critical Role in the Sunday Morning Guest System

There are twelve components in our Sunday Morning Belonging System



# Sunday Morning First-Time Guest Experience Before the Service Begins

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



**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 or Section Elder 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 Cards<sup>1</sup> 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 Section Elders is defined by our Belonging System Compass:

- ❑ Welcome guests to our Church and make them feel at home;
- ❑ Provide guidance and direction (as required) to help guests during and after the service;
- ❑ Provide useful information and answer questions to help our guests feel “in-the-know”;
- ❑ Connect our guests to others (e.g., Guest Greeters, Ushers, Ministers, Church Ambassadors) to help them make connections in our Church.

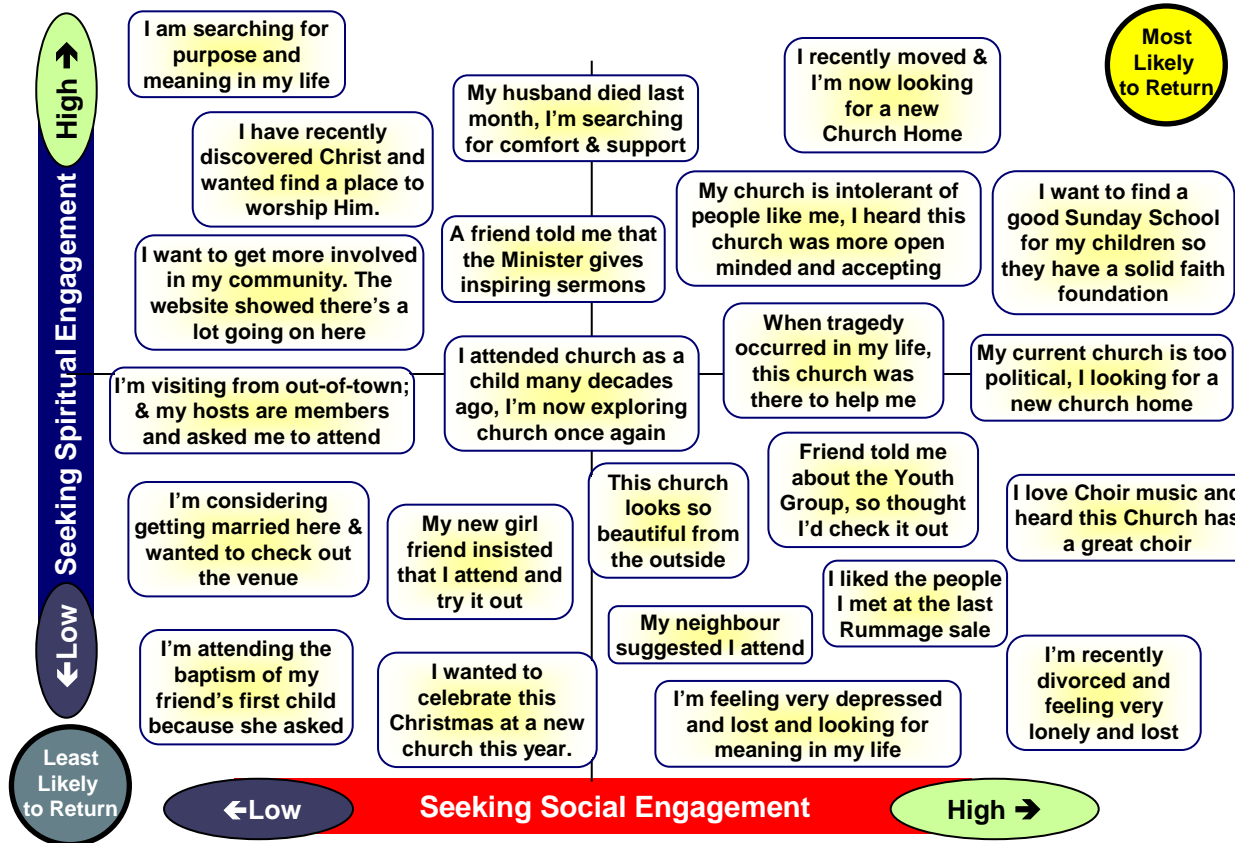
# Attributes of a Good Section Elder

- ❑ Regularly attends Sunday Morning service
- ❑ Knowledgeable about Islington United
- ❑ At least somewhat familiar with those who sit in their section of the Sanctuary
- ❑ Friendly – likes people
- ❑ 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
- ❑ Good communicator
- ❑ Comfortable with people they do not know
- ❑ Has a sense of mission and recognizes the importance of making guests and regular attendees feel at home at Islington.



# 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?

**Section Elders 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

- ❑ A Guest Greeter or Usher may introduce a guest to the Section Elder. But they may not always be able to identify guests when they first arrive at Church. Therefore, Section Elders should be alert to the possibility that someone is a guest even they have not been introduced by a Guest Greeter or Usher.
- ❑ Here are a few signs that individuals may be new to Islington:
  - ❑ You don't recognize them
  - ❑ They do not have an Islington nametag
  - ❑ They look lost or hesitant
  - ❑ They look uncomfortable or nervous
  - ❑ They appear uncertain when to stand or sit during service, where the hymn books are, what the difference is between Voice United and More Voices, what to do during communion, etc.
  - ❑ They ask questions of those sitting next to them in the pew
  - ❑ They seem uncertain what to do after the service ends

# Greeting First-Time Guests

- ❑ Unless otherwise indicated by a Guest Greeter or Usher the Section Elder should not presume it is an individual's first visit to Islington.
- ❑ For example, do not say:
  - ✗ “Is this your first-time at Islington?” or “Are you new here?”  
(Awkward if they are first-time guests – even more awkward if they aren't)
  - ✗ “I am your Section Elder and...” [Let the lanyard indicate that you are a Section Elder; Section Elders will also be introduced during the Sunday Morning announcements or by the preceding Minister]
- ❑ Rather say something like this:
  - ☺ “Good morning! I'm \_\_\_\_\_. I don't believe we've met.”
  - ☺ “Good morning. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm here to help if you have any questions.” [Let your lanyard indicate that you are a Section Elder]
  - ☺ “Hello. I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Is there anything I can help you with?”
- ❑ It is important that the Section Elder is genuine and friendly, but leave it up to the individuals as to how much they wish to interact – some will prefer not too and that's fine.

# Section Elders Need to Be Knowledgeable

- ❑ To help first-time guests feel at home at Islington, it is important that Section Elders are generally knowledgeable about our Church.
- ❑ Section Elders 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.
  - ❑ Where first aid stations are and what to do in the event first aid is required
  - ❑ The names of our Ministers and their roles in the Church
  - ❑ The names of our Church Ambassadors
  - ❑ Any changes occurring in the near future concerning Sunday service times

# Section Elders Make Connections

- ❑ *Research has shown that guests who connect with at least one person in the church are significantly more likely to attend in the future.*
- ❑ There are several ways Section Elders can help first-time guests to connect:
  - ❖ Before the service introduce yourself (including children)
  - ❖ After the service, invite the Guest to Coffee Hour, introduce them to a minister or a Church Ambassador or escort them to the Welcome Table.
  - ❖ If the guests prefers to leave after the service (and most will) walk them to the door, thank them for attending service and invite them to come again. (Some may not be comfortable with this – adjust as needed - do not be pushy)
  - ❖ Ask them to complete our Connect Card if they have not already done so.

# Connect Cards

- ❑ Connect Card is 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.

*Open Hearts Open Minds Open Doors*

Please place your completed card in the offering plate.

- ❑ While the Connect Card is primarily the responsibility of the Guest Greeter, Section Elders should be aware of this important tool & where appropriate, encourage guests to complete it. The following request/explanation is given when asking a guest to complete the Connect Card: "This is our Connect Card. It will allow our Senior Minister to know that you were here today. He may contact you sometime next week to get to know you a little better. Once you have completed the card, please put it in the offering plate".
- ❑ Completion of the Connect Card is totally optional. Many (in fact most) will not complete the card and that's okay. The Minister will encourage people to place their Connect Card in the offering basket before the collection is taken.

# Changes in Sunday Morning Attendance

- ❑ Section Elders are regular attendees at Sunday Morning service. Therefore they may be the first to observe that there is someone who regularly attends Sunday Morning service has been absent for several weeks (i.e., 4 or more weeks) without an apparent explanation.
- ❑ If this is the case, the Section Elder should do the following:
  - ❑ If they are friends, call them to determine if they are okay
  - ❑ Report the change in attendance to a Minister, a Church Council Member or a Church Ambassador
- ❑ There are many innocent reasons why there may be a change in attendance at Sunday Morning service (e.g., travel, change in job responsibilities, moved)
- ❑ But there may also be reasons which may require pastoral care (illness, job loss, marital problems) or reflect a loss of connection with Islington (disagreement with a new church policy or another church member) which could benefit from contact from a Minister or Islington's Re-connect Team.
- ❑ Islington is a Faith Family and the Section Elder plays a critical role to help us stay connected.