



Ushers

Islington's Belonging System

Mission Action Plan
Expanding Our Welcoming & Belonging Strategies



Open Hearts
Open Minds
Open Doors

Ushers Are Important

- ❑ Every year approximately 200 individuals visit Islington United for the first-time for Sunday service.
- ❑ Research has shown that the first seven minutes of the guests' first visit to a Church has a large impact on whether they will return to attend Sunday service in the future.
- ❑ Greeters and ushers are typically the first point of contact with our guests and therefore play a critical role in shaping the first-time guest experience.
- ❑ Our Ushers have done an amazing job at making everyone feel welcome at Sunday service.
- ❑ The Islington Belonging System is intended to build on this excellent tradition to help Ushers better understand how they can increase the likelihood that first-time guests not only feel welcomed, but also to build pathways for them to belong in 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 Station 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).
- ❑ In addition to their current role and responsibilities the Sunday Morning Belonging System refines the role of the Ushers as follows:
 - ❑ Ushers will serve as an extension and backup of Guest Greeters and participate in welcoming guests to Sunday Morning service. As such, Ushers will receive similar training on how to welcome guests
 - ❑ Ushers may give guests a Connect Card and ask them to complete it (if this has not already been done by a Guest Greeter)
 - ❑ Ushers will ask the guest if they have any preference where they would like to sit. Where possible, Ushers will introduce the guest to the Section Elder.

Greeters Play a Critical Role in the Sunday Morning Guest 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 every member of the Belonging Team is defined by our Belonging System Compass:

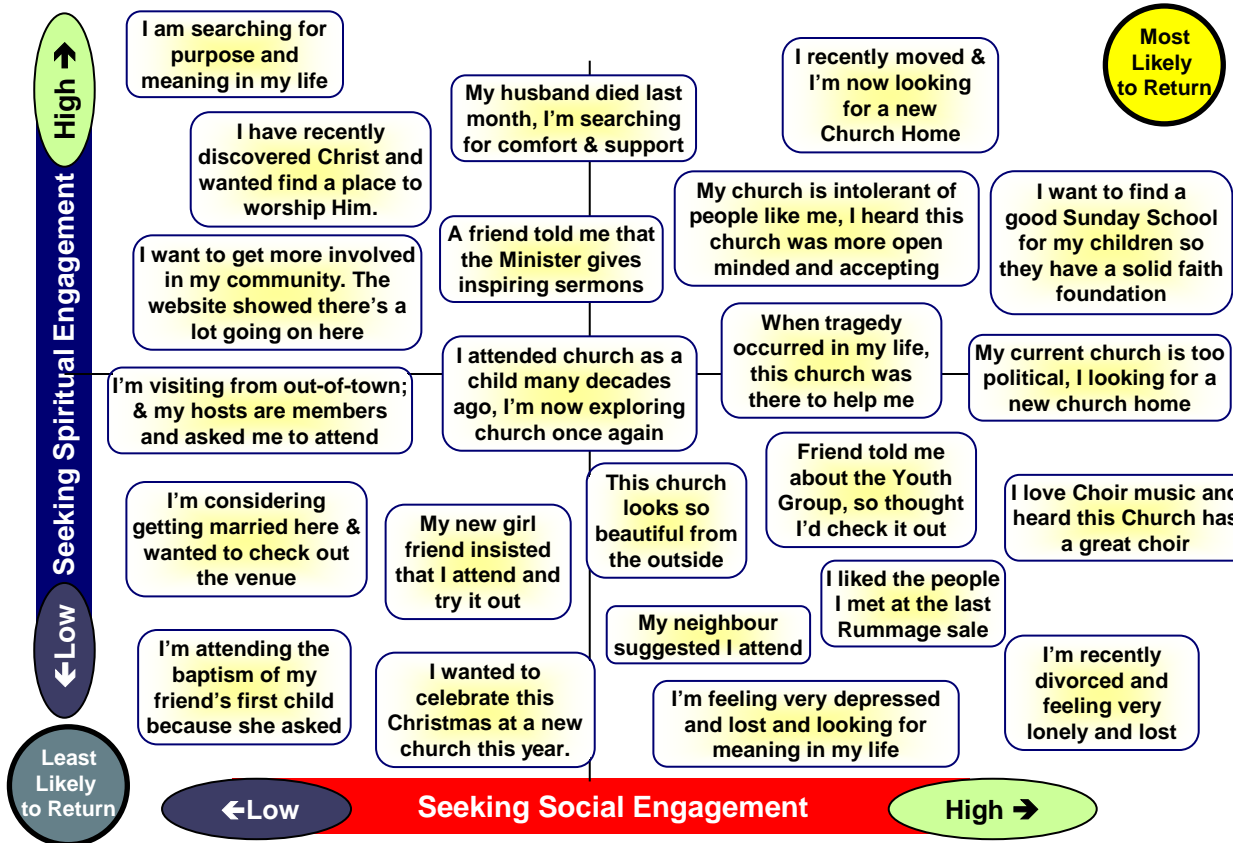
- ❑ Welcome guests to our Church and make them feel at home;
- ❑ Provide guidance and direction (as required) to help guests before, during and after the service;
- ❑ Provide useful information and answer questions to help our guests;
- ❑ Connect our guests to others (e.g., Guest Greeters, Section Elders,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

Attributes of a Good Usher

- ❑ Reliable, will serve when asked; will arrive on time or request a replacement if necessary (as ushers do already do today)
- ❑ Willing to serve as an usher on a rotational basis once every 6 weeks
- ❑ 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
- ❑ Has a sense of mission and recognizes that the usher's role is important.

Sunday Morning Guests: The Big Assumption

We know that people come to Islington on 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?

Ushers 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?

Welcoming 101 – The Greeting

- ❑ Make eye contact
- ❑ Smile
- ❑ Heart-to-heart open posture
- ❑ Be relaxed, joyful and respectful - move in an easy and unhurried manner
- ❑ Extend your hand to offer a hand shake but let the person take your hand (Note: Some will not want to shake your hand and that's okay)
- ❑ Firm grip but not a bone-crunching grip or limp-grip
- ❑ Do not rush the handshake
- ❑ Don't be too enthusiastic or overly friendly (e.g., don't hug a Guest)
- ❑ Try to use more than one greeting - say more than "Hello", "Good morning" or "Beautiful Day" - try phrases such as "We're glad you are here this morning", "Welcome to Sunday service", "Nice to see you here today"
- ❑ Greet both adults and children
- ❑ Be attentive – listen and look for cues of any needs
- ❑ Be attentive to cues that suggest the individuals may be first-time guests

Recognizing First-Time Guest

- ❑ It's not always possible to recognize a first-time guest, but here are a few signs that individuals may be new to our Church:
 - ❑ You don't recognize them
 - ❑ They do not have an Islington nametag
 - ❑ They look lost or hesitant
 - ❑ They appear uncertain of where to go
 - ❑ They look for signage
 - ❑ They ask questions
 - ❑ They stand alone
 - ❑ They look uncomfortable or nervous
 - ❑ They seem to be going in the wrong direction for the service

Greeting first-time Guests

- ❑ Be genuine and friendly; do not presume it is their first visit or draw attention to the fact that it is their first visit.
- ❑ For example, do not say:
 - x “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)
 - x “Since this is your first visit...”
 - x “You look lost”, “Are you confused?”, “What do you need?”
- ❑ Rather say something like this:
 - ☺ “Good morning! I’m _____. I don't believe we've met.”
 - ☺ “Hello. I’m _____. Is there anything I can help you with?”
 - ☺ “Good morning. My name is _____. Is there anywhere in particular you would like to sit this morning?”
- ❑ It is important to introduce yourself, but leave it up to the individuals as to whether they introduce themselves – some will prefer not to and that’s fine.

Ushers Need to Be Knowledgeable

- ❑ To help first-time guests to find their way around our Church it is important that Ushers are knowledgeable about our Church. Ushers 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.
 - ❑ How to assist those with physical handicaps (handicap ramps, church elevator, where to get hearing assisted devices, where to get large print bulletins, etc.)
 - ❑ 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 other greeters and ushers they are serving with this Sunday
 - ❑ The names of our Church Ambassadors
 - ❑ Any changes occurring in near future concerning Sunday service times

Usher 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 Ushers can help first-time guests to connect:
 - ❖ Introduce yourself to the guest and welcome them to Islington
 - ❖ Introduce the guest to the Section Elder or a Church Ambassador
 - ❖ If they have not already been given a Connect Card by a Guest Greeter, give them our Connect Card and ask them to complete it (before service). (Note: Ushers serve as a backup for Guest Greeters.)

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.

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Please place your completed card in the offering plate.

- ❑ While the Connect Card is primarily the responsibility of the Guest Greeter, an Usher may also provide a Connect Card and encourage the guest 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.