



# Welcome Table Attendants

## Islington's Belonging Strategy

Mission Action Plan  
Expanding Our Welcoming & Belonging Strategies



Open Hearts  
Open Minds  
Open Doors

# Welcome Table Attendants Make Connections

- ❑ 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. The Welcome Table is an important way for guests to connect with Islington.
- ❑ Welcome Table Attendants are members of our congregation who have the mission to help those new to our Church to feel welcomed and to learn more about the resources and opportunities available at Islington.
- ❑ Welcome Table Attendants 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 (brochures, Welcome Bags) 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).
- ❑ While Parking Attendants, Greeter and Ushers may be the first points-of-contact for guests on a Sunday morning, Welcome Table Attendants will often be first to have an opportunity for a more in-depth discussion with guests where they can provide more information concerning the diversity of programs and activities in our Church which extent well beyond our Sunday morning services.
- ❑ Therefore, in addition to making guests feel welcomed, the Welcome Table Attendants can offer insights and guidance concerning the resources and opportunities available within Islington that may encourage guests to become more involved in the life of our Church.

# 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 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 Welcome Table Attendants is defined by our Belonging System Compass:

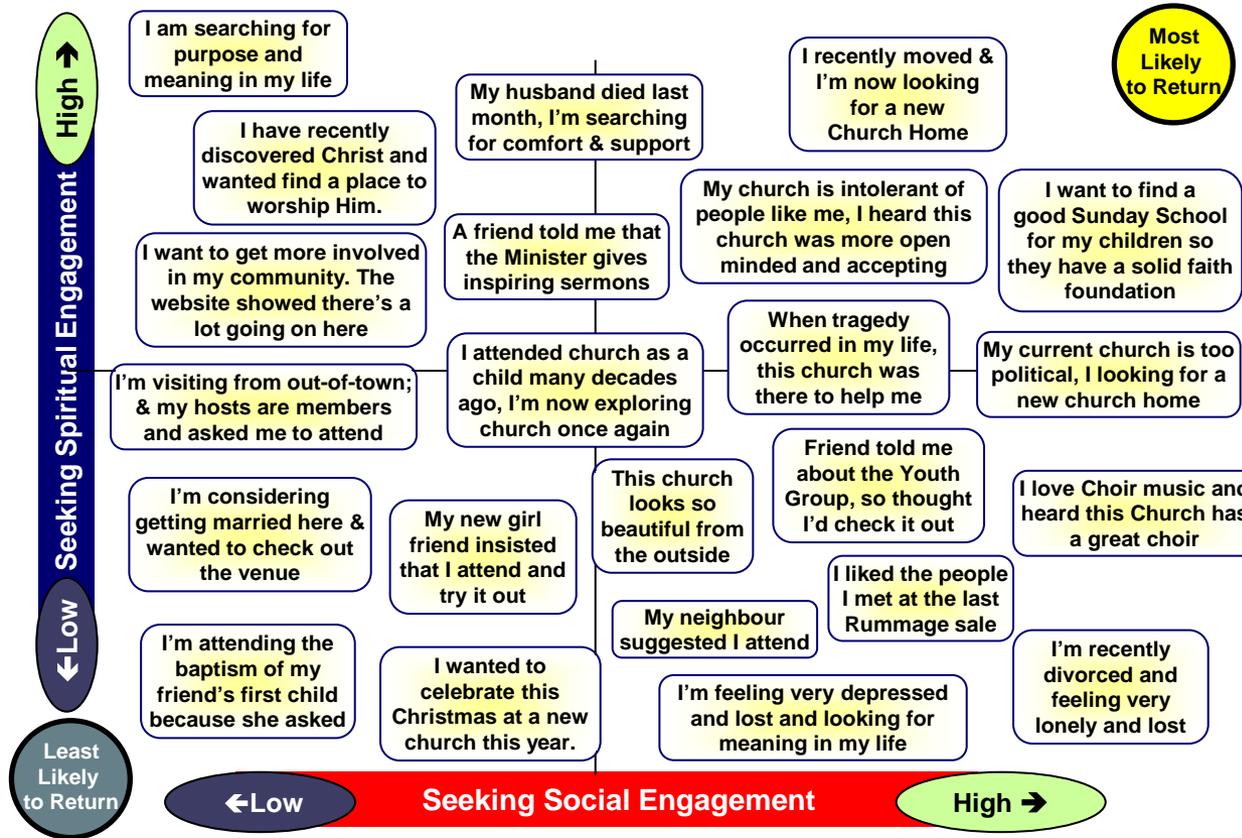
- ❑ Welcome guests to our Church and make them feel at home;
- ❑ Provide useful information and answer questions to help our guests learn more about Islington and its many activities and programs
- ❑ Provide guidance as to which activities and programs may be of interest to them;
- ❑ Connect our guests to others (e.g., Ministers, Ambassadors) to help them make additional connections in our Church or to address specific needs.

# Attributes of a Good Attendant

- ❑ Reliable, will serve when asked; will arrive on time; or request a replacement if necessary
- ❑ Willing to serve as a Welcome Table Attendant for one service on a rotational basis once every 4 weeks
- ❑ Has a good understanding of the materials available in the Visitor's Welcome Bag and on the Welcome Table concerning the many groups, programs and activities available at Islington United Church
- ❑ 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 it is important to help guests learn more about our Ministers, groups, programs and activities

# 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?

**Attendants 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 guest will approach the Welcome Table to seek out (specific) information concerning our Church or to obtain the Welcome Gift Bag. In other instances, you may be introduced to the First-Time Guest by a Minister, Guest Greeter, Usher, Section Elder or Church Ambassador (i.e., a member of a Belonging Team).
- ❑ However, you may also recognize a first-time guest while serving at the Welcome Table by the following:
  - ❑ You don't recognize them
  - ❑ They do not have a name tag
  - ❑ They are standing alone after church or during coffee hour
  - ❑ They seem to asking others questions about the Church
- ❑ If you see someone you believe may be new to our Church do not hesitate to pro-actively approach them and introduce yourself to the person or couple. Remember to introduce yourself to everyone, including children.

# Genuine Conversations

- ❑ When first introduced to a guest be genuine, calm and friendly - do not focus on the fact that this is their first visit to Islington (unless they introduce the subject). Rather, simply ask how you can help them.
- ❑ 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:
  - ❑ Be relaxed, joyful and respectful - move in an easy and unhurried manner
  - ❑ Make eye contact - but do not stare at the individual continuously as this makes people nervous
  - ❑ Extend your hand to offer a hand shake but let the person take your hand. Have a 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)
  - ❑ 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
  - ❑ 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
  - ❑ 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 and thank them for coming to service
  - ❑ 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

# Answering Guest's Questions

- In most instances, guests will ask questions about the Church and its programs. How you response cannot be scripted. However, the following are some guidelines that may help you respond to questions from guests:
  - Don't overload the guest with information about our Church. Try to keep to the general facts and let them guide you as to the amount of information they require. Avoid using church terminology (e.g., narthex, fellowship, faith formation, etc.)
  - Be positive about our Ministers, activities, programs and events - but do not exaggerate or "over-sell" our Church - be genuine and honest in your responses
  - When asking questions, 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?")
  - If appropriate, ask them how they learned about Islington or what brought them to Islington this morning – this can be a good way to you learn about what programs and activities they may be interest in
  - Offer to connect them with someone in the Church (e.g., a Minister) if they express needs that you cannot meet (e.g., pastoral care, more on the Children's program). This will require you to obtain their contact information. If so, use the Connect Card to obtain this information
  - Indicate ways that they can learn more about our Church and its events and programs (e.g., Islington's website, Facebook page, *A Place for You* brochure)

# Attendants Need to Be Knowledgeable

- ❑ Welcome Table Attendants are often the best way for guests to learn about Islington. Therefore it is very important that Attendants are knowledgeable about our the many activities, programs, services and events.
- ❑ Welcome Table Attendants should have a good understanding of the following:
  - ❑ The names of our Ministers and their roles in the Church;
  - ❑ Any changes occurring in the near future concerning Sunday service times;
  - ❑ Any special services in the next few weeks (especially at Christmas and Easter);
  - ❑ Any upcoming special events (e.g., concerts) or opportunities for social fellowship;
  - ❑ Our many programs (we have over 60) and the “*A Place for You*” brochure;
  - ❑ The layout of our Church including all entrances and exits, locations of washrooms, the Sanctuary, Chapel, Nursery/Toddler room; Discovery Quest; Reception Room, Ministers’ Offices & Church Office.
- ❑ Considerable information about our programs, activities and Ministers can be found on our Church website. Welcome Table Attendants 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 and will be available at the Welcoming Table.
- ❑ 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):



- ❑ While normally a Guest Greeter would request that first-time guests complete a Connect Card, as a Welcome Table Attendant you should also be aware of this important tool.
- ❑ During your conversation (and where appropriate), you should ask whether the guest has completed a Connect Card. If not, ask if they would mind completing the card now and explain that "...our Connect Card allows 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." If a guest completes the card and gives it to you, you should deposit it in the locked Church Office through the mail slot. Of course, completing the card is totally optional.