

How to use the Welcoming Parish Assessment

The assessment provided offers parish leadership some concrete, practical criteria and descriptions of how a welcoming parish looks and “feels.” It is meant to be used to assess and to educate. The statements offer ideas and possibilities for hospitality that may be unfamiliar to many. The assessment is divided into various sections representing major ministries of the parish.

Here are some ways to use the assessment in your parish:

- As a parish staff, use the assessment to identify areas of strength, areas that require improvement, and new ideas or efforts to be implemented.
- Ask the ministry leaders to complete the section for their particular ministry. Gather the ministry leaders to discuss what the parish does well and where there is room for improvement. Make a plan for improvement.
- If your parish has an established Evangelization Team or Hospitality Team, have the members complete the assessment. Use it, in close communication with ministry leaders and parish staff, as a basis for coordinating all parish welcoming and hospitality efforts.
- Invite parishioners to complete the assessment by including the assessment or portions of it, in the parish bulletin or create an online survey through *surveymonkey*. The results can be used to show the parish staff and ministry leaders the degree to which the parish is considered welcoming, as well as to challenge parishioners to consider their role in creating a welcoming and hospitable environment.

Regardless of the method you use, the important thing is to create conversation among parish leadership around the items contained in the assessment. Moreover, it is important to use these items both to affirm what is already going on in the parish and the ways that the parish already welcomes visitors, newcomers and long-time parishioners, and as a tool for planning how to make the parish a more welcoming, inviting community.

Once You Have Completed the Assessment

1. As the assessment is completed, celebrate what your parish does well.
2. Share the assessment results among parish leadership as well as parish members.
3. Collect feedback from both groups with suggestions for possible next steps.
4. Analyse and prioritize areas that require attention.
5. Make a comprehensive plan listing some “do-able” strategies for each area requiring attention.
6. Share the plan with all members of the parish.
7. Implement the plan.
8. Evaluate the efforts regularly.

The Welcoming Parish

We all know what it feels like to be welcomed at a gathering of friends and family. Many times, however, Catholic parishes don't apply the same thoughtful attention to detail as we would if we were planning a party at home. And feeling a sense of welcome is so important in our experience of Church. Welcoming and hospitality are cornerstones in the foundation of Church. They communicate to us in tangible ways who God is in this place and how Christ reaches out to us in love and reconciliation. Indeed welcome is often the first "sacrament" we encounter in our affiliation with a parish.

Rate your parish efforts according to the following scale:

4 = Always 3 = Sometimes 2 = Seldom 1 = Never 0 = I don't know

Physical Plant

Our parish:

1. _____ has a sign clearly displaying the parish name.
2. _____ has a well maintained and inviting exterior.
3. _____ has clearly marked parking spaces and entrances to Church property.
4. _____ provides friendly parking lot attendants on occasions when parking is crowded or when many visitors are expected.
5. _____ has clearly marked buildings, doors, meeting rooms and offices.
6. _____ has walkways and stairs that are well lit and free from leaves and other debris.
7. _____ has clearly marked restrooms and/or otherwise provides this information to those gathered.
8. _____ ensures that meeting spaces are a comfortable temperature.
9. _____ ensures that seating is accessible, appropriately spaced and comfortable for worship and meetings.
10. _____ is accessible to individuals with disabilities, including adequate seating and access to gathering spaces.

Comments:

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Communication

Our parish:

1. _____ Mass times and times of other regular events are clearly and accurately posted.
2. _____ office has a courteous person answering the phone.
3. _____ phone recording is accurate and user-friendly.
4. _____ website is regularly updated and easy to navigate.
5. _____ website includes a map of the physical grounds.
6. _____ registration materials and other forms are sensitive to household situations.
7. _____ bulletin, flyers and other informational material has a warm, welcoming format and tone.
8. _____ responds to requests for information in a respectful and timely fashion.
9. _____ provides visitors with welcome and parish information in the pews or other accessible locations during holidays, holy days, weddings and funerals.
10. _____ avoids using abbreviations, acronyms and other terms that are not commonly familiar.

Comments:

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Parish Staff

Our parish staff members:

1. _____ are welcoming and friendly.
2. _____ are known by name and face to the parish community.
3. _____ are available, accessible and willing to help.
4. _____ welcome phone calls and questions.
5. _____ extend hospitality and welcome to all people and encourage the parish community to do the same.
6. _____ demonstrate respect for the dignity of each person.

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Welcome and Invitation

Our parish:

1. _____ warmly welcomes guests, visitors and all parishioners to worship, celebration of the Sacraments and other gatherings.
2. _____ has a team of ministers who greet people as they enter for worship.
3. _____ has a greeter present for meetings and other gatherings.
4. _____ provides name tags at gatherings. People are called by name.
5. _____ is sensitive to and representative of the cultural, social and racial diversity among parishioners.
6. _____ provides assistance to individuals with special needs, the elderly and young families.
7. _____ has a group of parishioners trained to invite people who are no longer Catholics to reconsider their relationship to the Church and active practice of the faith.
8. _____ provides opportunities for those who are new to the parish to become engaged in ministries and welcomes new people to ministries.
9. _____ provides appropriate refreshments at meetings and gatherings.
10. _____ fosters a sense of hospitality among all parishioners.
11. _____ recognises new members in the bulletin.
12. _____ regularly schedules welcome events for new members, neighbours, inactive Catholics, and those returning to the Church.
13. _____ is a place where all feel welcome.

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Worship and Celebration of the Sacraments

Our parish:

1. _____ invites people to participate in the Liturgy.
2. _____ welcomes individuals of diverse age and background to serve in liturgical roles and ministries.
3. _____ ensures that all song sheets, music and other worship aids are distributed and/or easily accessible.
4. _____ is accommodating and welcoming for those with small children. The availability of a nursery/childcare, a “cry room” and/or Children’s Liturgy of the Word is clearly expressed.
5. _____ is accommodating and welcoming to those with physical limitations.
6. _____ reaches out to those who have not been attending Mass.
7. _____ reaches out to those who have been absent from Mass due to illness or other reasons
8. _____ provides written instructions, non-verbal cues or explanation of Mass parts that are new or unfamiliar, especially for those who are not regular worshipers.
9. _____ is welcoming to non-Catholic relatives and friends who gather for funerals, weddings, baptisms and other Sacraments.
10. _____ has ushers who are trained to help worshipers locate appropriate available seating, handle emergencies and provide information.
11. _____ offers the celebration of Sacraments at times convenient for the members of the community.
12. _____ has current information about the celebration of the Sacraments, including any special procedures, readily available and easily accessible.
13. _____ provides opportunities for those gathered for Mass and the celebration of other Sacraments to build community – coffee and biscuits, ‘Nametag Sunday’, etc.

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know Pastoral Care and Outreach

Our Parish:

1. ____ has people who reach out to families when a loved one has died to help them plan the funeral liturgy.
2. ____ provides a meal for the families and friends of the deceased after the funeral liturgy.
3. ____ has persons trained to respond and be available to parishioners going through the grief process.
4. ____ prays for parishioners who have died.
5. ____ has people trained to respond to parishioners who find themselves in personal and/or family crisis.
6. ____ has a system in place to refer parishioners and/or families for professional counselling.
7. ____ has a team of people who regularly visit the sick and home bound in the name of the community.
8. ____ has a team of people who bring the Eucharist to the sick and homebound.
9. ____ has a ministry to prepare couples for marriage.
10. ____ has regular opportunities for couples to enrich their marriage.
11. ____ has a healing ministry to those who are going through or have gone through divorce.
12. ____ has opportunities for parents and expectant parents to improve their parenting skills.
13. ____ offers support groups for parishioners undergoing significant life transitions, e.g. those experiencing job loss, care givers for the elderly, parents, widows/widows.
14. ____ devotes a portion of its annual budget to helping the poor and marginalized.

15. _____ has an organised ministry to identify those in the community with specific needs and respond in ways that are helpful.

16. _____ has in place a means to help parishioners discover their gifts and talents and to exercise them within the community.

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Education/Formation Ministry

Our parish:

1. _____ has Jesus Christ at the centre and growing in intimacy with him is the primary objective of education.
2. _____ strives to offer spiritual opportunities that generate interest and enthusiasm, resulting in both formation and transformation of the participants.
3. _____ creates a safe environment for people to get to know each other and freely share about their relationship with God and others.
4. _____ encourages individuals to deepen their understanding of themselves as disciples.
5. _____ provides opportunities for individuals of all ages to deepen their knowledge of Scripture and Church teaching.
6. _____ encourages and assists individuals to connecting their faith and life at home and in the marketplace.
7. _____ creates awareness, makes available and supports various models and opportunities for faith formation including:

_____ Bulletin inserts	_____ Web-based resources and webinars
_____ Home study materials	_____ Online courses
_____ Audio-visual resources	_____ Social networking
_____ Bible study groups	_____ Print media (books, magazines, etc.)
_____ Small Christian communities	_____ Other
8. _____ schedules educational opportunities that are sensitive to and affirming of family life and the role of parents.
9. _____ schedules educational opportunities that are considerate of time restraints and family needs.
10. _____ provides educational opportunities that are intergenerational.
11. _____ provides childcare when appropriate.

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RCIA and Sacramental Preparation

Our parish:

1. _____ provides opportunities for participants to share their faith.
2. _____ encourages participants to ask questions.
3. _____ has ministers and leaders who respond to questions and provide explanations with respect and in a language that is appropriate and comprehensible, without insulting or embarrassing individuals.
4. _____ introduces candidates, catechumens and others preparing for reception of the Sacraments to the community through the parish bulletin, website or at Mass.
5. _____ offers regular prayers for those preparing for the reception of any Sacraments.
6. _____ offers signs of support and words of encouragement for candidates, catechumens and others preparing for reception of all Sacraments.
7. _____ responds with sensitivity to individuals who are divorced, separated or single parents.
8. _____ is welcoming to non-Catholic parents who are involved in Sacramental preparation.
9. _____ responds with care, compassion and hospitality to those preparing for Sacraments after being away from the Church.
10. _____ provides opportunities for those who have received the Sacraments to continue to be engaged in parish life.

Comments: