



**PARTNERS
IN THE GOSPEL**

Creating a Culture of Hospitality

“Working together to practice hospitality, especially towards those whose lives are most vulnerable, will make us better human beings, better disciples, and a more united Christian people.”

– Pope Francis

Overview

Hospitality, the openness to friends and strangers alike, is at the core of Partners in the Gospel. As parishes come together into parish families, how do we structure ourselves and our offerings in a way that ensures that our *culture* is welcoming and accessible to all? How do we avoid the trap of parishes within a family having approaches to hospitality that are misaligned? This guide provides parish family leaders with steps to take when considering what hospitality will look like in their new community.

Table of Contents

- First impressions count
- Welcoming ministers
- Parish family welcoming events
- Establishing a family-wide ministry

First impressions count

Before people enter a parish, they may call or visit the various parish offices. This is often their first impression of a parish family, and their experience will be greatly impacted by the way parishes align their offerings.

As a parish family, it is important to make sure parishioners receive equal levels of service no matter which parish they approach, whether by phone, online or a visit to the parish office:

1. Is someone there to respond? What about after office hours when some people are more likely to have time to contact the parish?
2. How will they be greeted? Is the person who answers welcoming and helpful? Can the person answering calls speak the main languages used across the parishes? Is someone available to welcome and guide those with different language needs?
3. Did they receive the information they were seeking, regardless of which parish they called? If not, is there a way for them to receive timely, helpful follow-up?

Digital hospitality

An often ignored (but increasingly important) facet of hospitality is *digital* hospitality. Do the digital platforms (e.g., website, email newsletter, social media, etc.) enhance the parish family's welcoming efforts? When someone lands on a website, can they find what they need? If not, is there a way to contact someone?

Here are a few questions to consider:

1. When someone visits the parish/parish family website or social media pages, how quickly can they find key information (Mass times, address, office phone number, registration instructions, event calendar, etc.)?
2. Is the information on the digital channels correct, up-to-date, and easy to read? Does information match across all communication channels in the parish family?
3. Do the digital offerings match the language and accessibility needs of the community? What are the community's unique communication and social media preferences?
4. If someone visits a digital platform for the parish, is there a way for them to quickly connect with an in-person offering or event?

By taking an intentional approach to digital hospitality, parish families meet people where they spend much of their time - online. This approach helps people transition from digital to physical engagement with the parish family. For more information and ideas, see the [Catholic Apostolate Center's Resources for Parishes on Social Media](#).

Welcoming spaces

As newcomers first enter a church, they form an impression that can deeply impact their future life at the parish. This can occur before they encounter any parishioners or staff members. The displays, take-home materials, and ease of access directly shape the way visitors experience parish life, and attention must be paid to making the parish a welcoming *space* in addition to a community of welcoming *people*.

Some helpful questions to determine whether parish spaces are welcoming include:

1. Is the parish accessible to everyone, especially those with mobility challenges?
2. Do the materials in the parishes meet the needs of all parishioners, including language and accessibility needs?
3. Is the space welcoming and inviting to people of all ages, including children, teens, and young adults?
4. When someone arrives for Mass, is it clear where they should go?
5. Are liturgy times and parish office hours clearly marked? Is the signage clear throughout the campus for first-time visitors?
6. If someone arrives with a need and finds the parish office empty, is it clear how to contact the correct person?

The goal is to provide a welcoming, engaging experience for everyone who enters the parish, which means authentically greeting those who arrive for Mass and other events. Establishing greeting points and making sure they are filled, typically by hospitality ministers, is an effective way to welcome everyone and ensure they feel like they belong.

Welcome expresses genuine interest, with an openness and a generosity of heart and spirit. It avoids any indication of ownership, control, or territory. Within a family of parishes, one parish may be larger or more

affluent. There are likely to be different cultural groups and language needs among the parishes in a family. An authentic sense of welcome and hospitality will avoid any condescension or sense that one group is the host and others are the guests.

Direct, one-to-one welcoming by a team of hospitality ministers is a very low-cost but high-impact way to make parishioners feel welcome. Consider creating a Family-wide Hospitality Ministry with current ministers who best understand the needs and abilities of the new community. For further guidance on establishing this ministry, see "[Establishing Family-Wide Hospitality Ministry.](#)"

Deacons as servants of community

Deacons serve a unique role in parish communities, especially during transitions. As ordained ministers, deacons have a three-fold ministerial responsibility of service to the Word, the Sacraments and Charity. This responsibility is lived out daily by deacons and will continue once parish families form. Deacons provide a stable, community-level clergy presence in a parish family, which makes their role particularly important during the first year of parish family life.

Unlike priests, deacons were not asked to move as part of parish family formation, so they present a particular source of ordained stability for many communities across the archdiocese. Many parishioners will look to deacons during this transition. At the same time, pastors can lean on the deacons who are a stable presence and will support the process of moving towards one parish community. Their continued ministry will be important to remind parishioners that while things have changed and grief is normal, parish life will go on. Deacons can remind parishioners that the community they know and love has not gone away just because a parish family has formed.

Additionally, deacons will serve a key role in building community within parish families. Since deacons have lived in these communities before the formation of families, they have intimate knowledge of the people and cultures present. When pastors (especially those who are new to the community) and parish staff begin working to bridge gaps between communities, deacons can be a natural source of support for this bridge building and will have important insights to share about potential opportunities or pitfalls. during the community building process. Lastly, deacons should play a key role on consultative structures, while also utilizing their skills to effectively live out all three areas of their ministry.

Welcoming current ministers

For ministers already serving at our parishes, the thought of not being able to continue ministry in the same way may be disconcerting. To minimize this, be sure the creation of a shared ministry is not positioned as a win/lose situation and take proactive steps to actively welcome, engage, and thank existing ministers as part of this new way of being community.

As ministers engage with the parish family in this new way, be cognizant of those groups who are currently *not* involved or engaged and consider how this new shared ministry structure can better bring all voices to the table.

Identify, welcome, and thank volunteers

The first step is to identify existing volunteer ministers and determine opportunities for family-level involvement. By identifying the current volunteers in the parishes alongside the offerings that need support

from existing ministers, the pastoral leadership gain the ability to build natural cross-parish collaboration.

Schedule meetings with priests, ministry leaders and staff *at the family level* to gather in prayer, get to know each other, discuss shared vision for ministry, and celebrate what is going well. This will be especially important to reiterate to the multicultural communities in the family. Make sure that when planning these events, that they are accessible to everyone – including those who speak a language other than English. It will be important to express gratitude and thank people specifically for their time and talents.

Create processes for existing ministers

To support parish family volunteer ministers, consider processes that will inspire them to minister most effectively. Consider things like:

- The use of spaces: Can volunteers at one parish request to use the space at another for a welcoming event?
- Communication strategies: Who will keep volunteer ministers at one parish aware of events at the other parishes?
- Existing trainings/retreats: Can ministers from all parishes in a parish family join in a volunteer retreat rather than just at the parish level?

Beyond ensuring that ministers are well engaged, encourage the parish family to give all parishioners a similar level of care no matter which family parish they attend, reinforcing the culture of hospitality desired at parish families.

Parish family welcoming events

Social events and celebrations are important opportunities for parishioners and leaders to share what they love about their own parish, get to know one another, and begin thinking of themselves as one community. These events provide a unique opportunity for pastoral leadership to meet with their parishioners in a different setting. These events, tailored to the interests and needs (including language needs) of the community, will look different in each parish family. It is crucial that the pastor and parish leadership participate *across the parishes* as a visual representation of the relationship parish families have.

It is important that events are held regularly throughout the first year of the parish family's existence to continue to build community connections. Additionally, by hosting events over time, you have the opportunity for events to build upon one another to allow deepening trust across the parish family. A possible timeline for these types of events is:

- **By Month 3:** Host cross-family welcoming events at as many parish locations as possible *aimed at parishioners*. An extended list of potential options for family events is below, but consider things like a family ministry fair, a "tour" of all the sites over a weekend, or shared cultural celebrations. The important thing is that the entire family is welcome and encouraged to attend *as a parish family*.
- **By Month 6:** Host events specifically aimed at parish (and school) staff and leadership to get together. The important thing is to strengthen the relationships developing between parish and school staffs within the parish family. Consider things like a formal staff retreat or a "back-to-school blessing" for school leaders and parents.
- **By Month 9:** Engage in shared liturgical events across the parish family where possible. This can be as simple as encouraging parishioners to attend Holy Week services at a different location than they normally would, or as involved as hosting combined services for multiple parishes at central sites.

- **By Month 12:** Create a plan for family-wide hospitality ministry as described in the Establishing Family-Wide Hospitality Ministry section below.

Potential social events for a parish family:

- **Cultural celebrations**
If parishes within the parish family have unique cultural celebrations (e.g., Our Lady of Guadalupe, Simbang Gabi, Lunar New Year), consider inviting the other parishes in the parish family to these celebrations. This is a great chance to collectively celebrate the unique cultures and histories present in the family.
- **Ministry fair**
Use this as an opportunity to educate people about the ministries across the parish family. For each weekend of a month, ask one parish to host a “ministry fair” to provide information about active ministry opportunities across the family - including both shared ministries and parish-specific ministries - and how to participate.
- **Parish volunteer gatherings**
Invite the volunteers from each of the parish ministries to come together for faith sharing and a meal. This gives parish leadership the chance to recognize the hard work of volunteers in their unique ministries, while also making it clear that volunteers are now part of a larger team.
- **Parish family tour**
Set one month as the “family tour” month. Ask people to attend Mass at a parish they don’t usually attend and invite the hosting parish to share their history and what they love about their parish. After Mass, invite all visitors to an actual tour of the parish campus, giving them the opportunity to learn about the ins-and-outs of parish life.
- **Parish Picnic/Barbecue**
Host parish family picnics or barbecues at each of the sites and invite all parishioners to attend. Have representatives from each parish serve in some role at each event. Alternatively, one event could be offered at a neutral public place or even off campus.
- **Back-to-school blessing**
Invite all the children from a parish family to come to a special event for a blessing before the start of the new school year. This could also be multiple events across parishes. Some parishes may wish to ask kids to fill their backpack with donations for the food bank as part of a blessing of the backpack.

Establishing Family-Wide Hospitality Ministry

During the first year of implementation, a parish family should create a plan for family-wide hospitality ministry to support hospitality needs across all parishes. The goal is to integrate and align the hospitality ministries that already exist, such as greeters or coffee and donut servers, filling in gaps where needed.

The purpose of this work is to create a *plan* for providing hospitality and welcoming ministry across the family, not necessarily a new *team*. Make use of the existing ministers and teams, but if no group exists to specifically support hospitality ministry, consider creating one. The key is to ensure the parish family is approaching hospitality in a way that makes sense for the unique communities, while clearly articulating who is responsible for supporting these efforts. By looking at hospitality ministry collectively, parish families

can ensure a consistent welcoming culture across the parish family while supporting each parish in their unique efforts.

As a leadership team, be sure to model welcoming behaviors and encourage others to do the same.

For help creating a parish family-level Hospitality Ministry from scratch, please review the following resources about aligning, combining, and/or expanding hospitality ministries across each of the parishes in a family.

See Appendix for additional resources:

- [Guidelines for Ministers of Hospitality](#)
- [Developing a Group Charter](#)
- [Sample Hospitality Ministry Charter](#)
- [Hospitality Ministry Team Recruitment](#)



Guidelines for Hospitality Ministers

Adapted from resources provided by the Diocese of St. Petersburg

Introduction

When bringing parish families together, it is important to provide opportunities for parishioners to use their gifts. A hospitality minister is someone equipped specifically for welcoming people to the parish and for nurturing a welcoming culture. This minister may be managing existing hospitality efforts or may be part of a new family Hospitality Ministry team. The following guidance provides an overview of how to form a parish family Hospitality Ministry team, as ideas for how to reimagine current offerings, and best practices for recruiting and supporting those in these front-line hospitality roles.

Hospitality ministers: Who are they?

Those who desire to serve as a hospitality minister are active and faithful members of the Church, who have a deep love for the assembly and feel called to welcome them. They are comfortable meeting and greeting others and welcoming people in a way that makes them feel at home. These qualities are a blessing, especially to the stranger in our midst. Hospitality ministers are also knowledgeable about their parish and engaged with the parish family, so that they can serve as a source of information for people interested in learning more about the faith community or specific ministries.

Invitation to ministry

The pastor plays an essential role inviting people to be hospitality ministers. Through his direct invitation, and his reiteration of the importance of welcoming within the parish family, it will be clear to those considering this ministry just how important their service is – and clear to those in the community just how serious parish family leadership is about creating an authentic culture of hospitality.

Consider inviting parishioners of all ages, including mature adolescents and young adults, to serve in this role as appropriate. Thought should also be given to the makeup of the community, the languages spoken, and any particular needs that members have to ensure hospitality ministers reflect the community.

Procedures before the liturgy

- Greet and welcome the faithful at each entrance as they gather for worship. Avoid congregating in one area of the church or speaking with fellow ministers to the exclusion of those attending Mass.
- Assist with the seating of the assembly before the liturgy begins.

Procedures during the liturgy

Hospitality ministers are part of the worshipping community and should participate fully in the music,

responses, and prayers. At times, however, the special duties may limit his or her ability to participate. Yet, every effort should be made to be models of participation. During the liturgy, ministers of hospitality should assist with the following:

- Welcoming and seating of latecomers as quickly and discreetly as possible.
- Collect the offerings of the people. Both the faithful and the offerings are to be treated with utmost dignity and reverence. The faithful should be given adequate time to deposit their gifts during the collection.
- Assist those who will be taking up the gifts in the procession for the Preparation of the Gifts.
- Direct the communion procession in an orderly manner.
- Be aware of the placement of first aid supplies and an emergency telephone if the need should arise.
 - Consider offering ministers the opportunity to receive CPR/AED training and any other training that could prepare them in case of emergencies.
 - Make use of archdiocesan resources and guidance in this area when possible, including the training on [Navigating Mental Health Interruptions at Mass](#).
- When appropriate, use hospitality ministers to take Mass counts following the pastor's homily.

Procedures following the liturgy

Hospitality ministers distribute the parish bulletins and any other pertinent materials at the conclusion of the liturgy. They are available to assist those with special needs. Finally, they can assist in preparing the worship space for the next liturgy, making sure it is well organized and inviting.

Training and installation

Individual parish families can develop periodic training sessions to assist and reacquaint hospitality ministers with all aspects of their service. Having appropriate knowledge and training will help ministers function effectively and bring confidence and joy to their experience. These trainings also allow the pastor and pastoral leadership an opportunity to reengage with new and active ministers who support this welcoming work.



Developing A Hospitality Ministry Charter

Introduction

The purpose of a Hospitality Ministry Charter is to align the vision of the pastor, parish leadership, and hospitality ministers to the unique needs of a parish family in a way that makes the best use of the skills and resources in the community. Developing a charter should occur before the creation of the hospitality ministry plan, as it will set the groundwork for how the parish family will approach Hospitality Ministry collectively and who is responsible for what elements.

The elements in this charter can be applied to other ministries.

Creating a Charter

The Hospitality Ministry Charter incorporates several key components developed through dialogue with the team leader, team members, and the pastor. Key elements of the charter are:

- **Vision:** What does the team do? What does the team stand for, and what does the team hope to accomplish? How can the parish family benefit specifically from this ministry?
- **Anticipated outcomes:** What are the results the team must accomplish to be successful? SMART goals (Strategic, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) are helpful because they are statements that describe the desired results the team is expected to accomplish within a specific time.
- **Operating guidelines:** Operating guidelines outline how the team will function: Are there formal meetings? If so, how often do they take place, and how should they be run? Do ministers meet at the parish-family level or parish by parish? What are the decision-making policies and what would be the problem-solving process as well as the rules governing conflict resolution? Do any parishes in the family have unique responsibilities for Hospitality Ministry (e.g., serving as the primary site for a specific language community)?
- **Norms and ground rules:** What are guiding principles or rules that govern interpersonal conduct among members? How people should treat each other and how information should be shared? Who takes note and where are they stored?

- **Team roles and collective/individual responsibilities:** What are the responsibilities of an individual on the team? What are the collective responsibilities shared by every team member? Are responsibilities held by the entire team, and every member is equally and personally responsible for accomplishing them? Or do specific individuals have special responsibilities because of his or her particular expertise and interest?

See below for a sample Hospitality Ministry Charter and guidance on recruiting and training for Hospitality Ministers in a family-level ministry.



Sample Hospitality Ministry Charter

Parish Family: _____

Date: _____

Vision

Hospitality Ministry will cultivate a parish family that is welcoming and supportive to everyone. We aim to build a more vibrant, engaged, and welcoming community.

Anticipated Outcomes

We will help establish a welcoming culture where long-time parishioners and newcomers of all ages and backgrounds feel at home when they come to Mass or other parish events.

Our team members will fill essential roles, such as greeters and ushers at Mass, coffee hour servers and welcome desk attendees after Mass.

We will:

- develop and coordinate community events to provide opportunities for people to meet each other and gather in fellowship.
- assist with communication between the parish and parishioners as needed (e.g., through website maintenance, phone trees, etc.).
- help ensure that all parishioners feel welcome at and informed about each parish in the family.

Operating Guidelines

- We will meet _____ (*monthly, quarterly, twice yearly*) as a parish-family Hospitality Ministry team to discuss and plan upcoming activities. Each parish's hospitality ministers will meet regularly to discuss local-level needs.
- We will collectively make decisions, with the goal of cultivating a parish culture that is warm and welcoming to all. Decisions will be reached by consensus or vote once team members have presented their input. Conflicts will be resolved by vote, with a simple majority deciding what we recommend to the pastor.
- Training is required for all new hospitality ministers, and it will be offered _____ (*monthly, quarterly, as needed*).

Norms and Ground Rules

- The schedule for greeters, ushers, welcome desk volunteers, and coffee hour servers will be provided by _____ (name of scheduler or scheduling program) and will be sent each _____ (week, every two weeks, month) by email/SignUp Genius/ParishStaq/etc.
- If a team member is scheduled for a date that does not work, it is their responsibility to switch with another team member or find a substitute.
- Communication about meetings, events, and meeting minutes will be shared with all team members via email/ParishStaq.

Roles

The Hospitality Ministry team includes: *(tailor descriptions as needed)*

- **Collective Roles:**
 - **Greeters** (at Mass and events): Welcome people at doors or in gathering spaces, making sure they feel welcome and know where to go.
 - **Ushers:** Welcome and help seat latecomers, if needed; assist with collections, be a point person during Mass for any issues that arise.
 - **Welcome/Information Desk:** Maintain a presence at a designated location, be available for questions and help newcomers register or access different ministries.
 - **Coffee and Donuts Servers:** Prepare coffee, tea, and other beverages for service after Mass. If applicable, assure that donuts or other food items are picked up and available. Often this is handled in partnership with school volunteers. (For example: This weekend hosted by 6th grade!)
 - **Welcoming Committee:** Welcome new parishioners and families by answering questions and introducing new people to others in the community. May include a variety of activities like delivery of welcome bags/baskets and invitations to welcoming events.
 - **Phone Tree Volunteers:** Take lists of parishioners to call. This can be for simple check-ins, especially to the homebound, or to communicate information to people in a way that would be more effective than email.
 - **Digital Tool Manager(s):** A person or group of 2-3 people who can make changes and updates to the parish website/social media pages under the leadership of a staff member. This role helps to ensure a welcoming digital environment.
 - **Event Hosts:** Plan and coordinate community events to welcome parishioners and newcomers. Works to provide opportunities for everyone to gather.

○ **Other Roles by Activity:**

- _____ (fill in role)
- _____ (fill in role)

● **Individual Roles:**

- Team Leader(s): _____ (fill in name)
- Notetaker: _____ (fill in name)

- Other specified roles as needed in your parish family:
 - _____ (fill in title and name)
 - _____ (fill in title and name)



Hospitality Ministry Team Recruitment

A Hospitality Ministry team should be comprised of people of various ages and backgrounds and should be representative of the whole parish family. Be intentional about inviting people of all backgrounds who can share in the planning of events and provide perspective about the needs of everyone in the community. When developing a Hospitality Ministry Team, adapt the roles to the needs of the community. For instance, if a parish has a Communications staff person responsible for the website and social media accounts, do not assign a volunteer to this work.

| Role | Skills | Whom to Consider |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Greeters (Mass and events) | Friendly demeanor, outgoing personality, ability to stay calm and assist as needed | Active older teenagers and young adults; key community leaders; people who can speak the languages of those in the community. |
| Ushers | Same as greeters, plus ability to stand and move about parish easily | (see above) |
| Welcome/Info Desk Staff | Same as greeters, plus solid knowledge of parish and parish family | Seasoned parishioners who are familiar with ministry activities and contact people; ideal "starter" role for people who are not yet ready to commit to larger parish roles (ex. Parish Council); Good role to keep those "retiring" from larger parish roles engaged. |
| Coffee and Donuts Servers | Punctual, organized, friendly | Good role for teams, families, or groups of friends to do together. |
| Welcoming Committee | Approachable, outgoing people, comfortable with technology | A good mix of seasoned and new parishioners. This is a good role for new Catholics. |
| Phone Tree Volunteer | Friendly demeanor, comfortable talking on the phone | Those who are fluent in the languages spoken. Older generations may be more comfortable with phone conversations than young adults or teens. This is a great role for retirees. |
| Digital Tool Manager(s) | Comfortable with technology | Person or 2-3 people with a technical background who can work with communication staff |
| Event Hosts | Same as greeters, plus punctual, organized | Those who like to plan parties, set up decorations, etc. Good role for people who often host dinners or events at their home. Greeters and others from this team can step in to help with events. |