

hospitality how-to

by Rick Jordan, CBFNC Church Resources Coordinator

How are churches extending hospitality to those persons who are not in their church membership? I asked this question of several ministers who are called to this ministry. Their job titles are out-of-the-ordinary, as the goal of “embracing neighbors” does not fit traditional categories.



Cindy Hall
First, Sanford; Minister of Outreach and Activities

How do you encourage your church to extend hospitality in the community?

Cindy: We have over 2,000 visits each month to our Family Life Center. At each event, we give a devotion and prayer. We also have Bibles available, and we play music with a Christian message.



Meg Lacy
Emerywood, High Point; Minister of Spiritual Formation and Community Ministries

Meg: The Missions team supports our partnerships with West End Ministries, Northwood Elementary School, and an ESOL class. We developed community outreach events such as Fall Festival, Screen on the Green, and a community garden. Our Project Connect team empowers our members to create avenues for visitors to become integrated into our community life.



Ellen Price
Ardmore, Winston-Salem; Minister of Invitation and Hospitality

Ellen: We have annual emphases. This year, our initiative was to host a Summer Women’s Bible Study at Panera Bread. Members invited their non-churched friends for dinner and Bible study. By the first week, we had already outgrown the room at Panera. A diverse group of women attended, many of whom do not consider themselves church-goers.



Jeannie Troutman,
First, Wilmington; Minister of Engagement

Jeannie: We are in a two-year missional journey into our community called Love Does. Our areas of intentional focus are education, hunger, refugees, homelessness, and incarceration. We are spending approximately two months in each area by inviting our congregation to Pray, Learn, Do, and Reflect.



Tyler Ward
Forest Hills, Raleigh; Minister for Sharing Christ

Tyler: It’s crucial for capable church members to take the lead in helping guests navigate our community of faith. There are more people we should want to shower our love and concern on than just young families and the poor. Who else out there in our backyard needs to be impacted by the love of Christ?

How would you describe success?

Cindy: We have an outreach to young African-American men who love basketball and often counsel them about problems they face. This past May, I received a Mother’s Day card that they all signed.

Meg: One of our woman’s Bible study group heard that we were offering ESOL classes for elementary school parents, so they set up a rotation to provide refreshments and conversation partners.

Ellen: Success is evidenced by our conversations and our actions. We are successful when our congregation focuses less on the pew they sit in and more on the people who aren’t sitting in the pews.

Jeannie: We want our church to grow in numbers but growth without depth is not the goal. Success is encouraging people to come back until they see and understand God’s power, accept Jesus as savior, and commit to grow to be a devoted follower of Christ.

Tyler: Imagine a swinging door — it opens both ways. As long as I have “church people” going out and have “outsiders” coming in, I feel that I’m successful in my role.

What is the most difficult obstacle?

Cindy: Ministry is often messy. We have several people who make great advances and then fall back into old habits. The other obstacle is that not everyone thinks we should reach out to our community.

Meg: Trying to reshape the culture of a community from a mentality of “the church exists to serve me” to “the church exists to serve the world” is like chipping away at an iceberg. It’s slow work and you have to keep the long view in mind.

Ellen: People, by nature, enjoy the familiar. The most challenging part is helping people see that making time in their life for “the other” is not just welcoming them but allowing them into our circle of friends. Relationships are much more challenging and time-consuming than simply welcoming them.

Jeannie: Belonging means different things to different generations. For today’s generation, belonging means being in relationships. We are finding that success isn’t only defined by church attendance numbers.

Tyler: The most difficult obstacle is our own expectations. We expect too much, too soon, too many times. We need the flexibility to both succeed and fail. If churches knew how to create successful ministries, there’d only be one book for sale on the topic. Pray, experiment, fail, and keep on trying.