



Toolkit 2:

Producing Better Resources for Visitors to your Church

Any visitor to your church will be making that visit for a variety of reasons. They might be a regular church 'crawler' with prior knowledge of what to expect, or someone for whom 'Church' and churches are a complete mystery. In fact they may never have made a visit to a church building before. You can't make assumptions about those who come to explore and share your buildings - but you **can** be ready for them.

Some people will just want to enjoy the peace and tranquillity that your church can offer but others will be thirsty for facts and be needing a little help.

Before you start get a team together of people who understand and enjoy your church's heritage and who appreciate the importance of welcoming visitors to your church. Think about the kinds of people who generally come to your church and how you currently welcome them. You might like to look at the first part of our Toolkit 'Ten Top Tips for Welcoming Visitors to your Church' to get you started. The next step is to look at how you interpret your history and heritage. How do you currently do this and how might it be improved? Does it look tired or out of date? Could it do with revamping or updating? How might you do this?

None of this should cost excessive amounts of money. It is not necessary to produce glossy, heavyweight books in order to share your story. It is very simple these days to produce impressive looking material on a personal computer as long as you follow some simple rules.

The following should help you to make good decisions.

Do some research

You may already be using a booklet or guide. If so, this may have been written some time ago. You could try this out on an unsuspecting visitor to your church. Ask them what they think of it – tell them they can be as honest as they like!

Don't be too long-winded

Visitors may only need a side of A4 to help them to navigate themselves around your church. It is important not to overwhelm the visitor with too much information. Keep it snappy and they will be have a less stressful time. It can be a good approach to identify ten noteworthy aspects of your church that deserve attention and concentrate on those.

Don't overdo the dates

Dates can be dull so don't use them too much. Using general terms like 'Norman' or 'Medieval' or 'post Reformation' is better but make sure you quantify this. Using a simple time-line along the bottom of a page can help to put history into a context for those who aren't history scholars.

Do use simple terms

Don't assume that visitors will understand ecclesiastical or architectural language. Most haven't got a clue what a 'misericord' was for or where to find a flying buttress. If you have to refer to things like this you need to explain the term you have used. Remember also that some visitors may not know what the font is used for or why the altar is such an important part of Christian celebration - these are things that you may be taking for granted.

Don't be too high-brow

Always imagine that you are telling a lively story rather than giving a lecture to your visitors. If your written material is boring they'll switch off. Try to explain the church history by making connections with the social history that was taking place in your community at the time. People of all abilities enjoy and can relate to pictures so use good quality images to help them to interpret your building and to highlight significant features.

Do anticipate questions

By taking some time to be objective about your church you can anticipate some queries that visitors might have. If you have an unusual symbol carved in the stonework or stained glass with puzzling imagery be sure to explain it in layman's terms. Use images if necessary where interesting objects or features are difficult to see.

Do use a floor-plan

By using a footprint map you can help those who may not have been into a church before to understand the lay-out and the terms we use to describe areas in our church, like the Nave or the Chancel, but keep it very simple. Don't complicate it unnecessarily with too much text. You can use a numbering system on a floor-plan and this will encourage visitors to move around in your space rather than lurking just inside the door.

Do be inclusive

Remember that the average reading age in this country is 12 years. Also be aware that people who visit will have different levels of understanding and could be intimidated by difficult language.

Do be consistent

Make sure that all material you produce uses the same font, the same colours and the same in-house style. This can also be carried through to any notice-board based material or signage you use in the building.

Do think about the children

To have some material specifically for children is a good idea. It doesn't need to be complicated. A simple I-Spy sheet or a Treasure Hunt is good. This could also be used when children come to your church for weddings or baptisms. Remember that children really enjoy stories so you could use a character from history from your church to relate an event through their eyes.

If you would like help or support with any of the issues highlighted here please contact Divine Inspiration on 024 7652 1346 or by e-mail on helen.mcgowan@divine-inspiration.org.uk.

The full Toolkit can be downloaded from the Ambassador page of the website

Go to www.divine-inspiration.org.uk for more information and advice to help you improve your church's welcome to visitors.

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