

Be stewards of Christ's invitation to worship

On the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2016, Brian Costa reported that roughly 2.2 million Americans age six and older played golf for the first time in 2015. With so many people trying the sport, the 15,000 golf courses in America should be crowded. But the opposite is true — the sport is in yet another year of decline. Why? Because golf cannot retain even a slight majority of the beginners it attracts each year.

What are the obstacles that prevent people who try golf from becoming regular golfers?

Comfort. Golf has many unspoken rules of etiquette that make it seem like a game for “insiders,” so that the new player feels uncomfortable and unable to overcome that sickening feeling of being an outsider.

Competence. Golf does not have a “bunny hill,” so the first-



time player is often sharing the same fairway as the club pro. Therefore, each divot and each slice is on display for every experienced player to witness and judge.

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The old timers may, in fact, be very understanding and patient, wanting only to welcome the new player. But many new players never get a chance to know this because they are so uncomfortable that they don't return.

I wonder how our congregations compare to a golf course when it comes to newcomers. Yes, our liturgy has many spoken and unspoken traditions and rituals, but so does the coffee fellowship time. Who is allowed to sit where? When is it appropriate to introduce yourself, or is that too forward? What is the right amount to put in the “freewill” offering? If you think the liturgy is hard to get used to, imagine what all the expectations outside the sanctuary pose to a newcomer.

How can we make outsiders feel like insiders and how can we offer a “bunny hill” to those just exploring the church?



The congregation's website and social media can certainly be used to invite visitors and set a welcoming tone by clearly posting the worship times and locations, and even posting information about what to wear and what to do if the children fuss.

We can also offer “bunny hills,” like family events, community events, neighborhood events, preschools, and senior ministries that invite visitors without the stress of the Sunday morning gauntlet. We can offer greeters, coffee hosts, clear signage, visitor parking, and more to help visitors to the church feel more comfortable.

Stewardship is not just about our financial resources; we are also stewards of Christ's invitation to worship and serve. This also is a steward's work that we should take seriously.

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