

Inform the Community/Church Shoppers about Our Church

How can we talk to strangers in the community or church shoppers about our church?

Common thoughts/perceptions

Many people believe that all Lutheran (or even all Christian) churches are the same. The reality is that most denominations no longer hold to Biblical inerrancy, allowing a variety of false teachings.

What are people looking for in a church? Answers vary, but commonly include such things as beliefs and doctrines, connection with other God-loving people, something for the whole family, music program, worship style, and so on. Berea will never provide everything that everyone may desire, but we need to remember (and encourage others) that faithfulness to Scripture is first and foremost. Other considerations are trivial by comparison and faithfulness to the word of God should always be the start of our approach.

A word of caution: While it can be helpful to know of common thoughts and perceptions, one should be careful neither to generalize nor to make assumptions about people's pre-conceived notions in our dealings with them.

The Truth according to Scripture

Matthew 28:19 tells us to **"Go and make disciples of all nations."** Although we certainly participate in this activity through formal mission programs, we can and should share the Gospel also as individuals. The Bible gives numerous examples of personal and individual outreach. After Jesus called Philip to be one of the disciples, Philip went back to his friend, Nathanael, and invited him to, **"Come and see."** (John 1:46). Throughout the Gospels there are numerous accounts of people, healed and forgiven by Jesus, who subsequently told others what God had done for them, e.g. the Samaritan woman (John 4:39), the deaf and mute man (Mark 7:36), and the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:20).

What we believe and teach

Berea Lutheran Church believes and teaches the Word of God (the Bible) in its truth and purity. Namely,

- God the Father created man holy and without sin.
- After Creation, man disobeyed God. This sin earned man eternal punishment in hell.
- God loved man so much, that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to this world to keep the whole Law of God for us, to suffer, and to die for our sins. Jesus did this so that whoever believes on Him as their Savior from sin, will have eternal life in heaven.
- God the Holy Spirit uses this Good News (Gospel) of Jesus Christ to cause us to believe.

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Suggestions on application

God gives a variety of opportunities to talk to others about our faith and our church. We don't always know when it might come up in conversation. A simple question from any of our friends, relatives, acquaintances, and/or neighbors about our church, our faith, or our behavior or choices is an opportunity to inform them about who we are and what we believe. One should not underestimate the importance of maintaining a Godly lifestyle in all that we do – people will take notice. Wearing religious, school-branded, or church-branded clothing may open the door to questions about who you are.

1 Peter 3:15 encourages us **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."** The more you study the Word, the better equipped you will be to share it with others. But you don't need to be a theologian to share your faith. If you get stumped answering "What do you believe?" how about reciting the Apostles' Creed? Of course there will be times when you don't have a good answer at the ready. In such cases, you can offer to study it, or point them to other sound Biblical resources such as may be found in Berea and CLC literature or websites. The CLC-maintained website www.whatdoesthebiblesay.org provides answers from Scripture to many commonly-asked religious questions.

There are a variety of witnessing styles that are applicable for these situations. A testimonial (personal) style is very appropriate when talking to church shoppers and

strangers about our church – this is exactly what many church shoppers want to hear. Let them know why you go to your church, what you love about it, and why you would recommend it. A testimonial style of evangelism lets people know how God works in our lives and is our chance to tell others what God has done for us. The personal touch allows one to share our faith and information about our church in a friendly and welcoming way, without appearing confrontational or too “in-your-face”. Try to understand what the needs and interests of the church shopper are. Ask questions. If they mention having left another church, ask why. With this information, you may be able to tailor your response.

Another approach is using an invitational style. Feel free to invite friends, relatives, acquaintances, and/or neighbors to church. Try to be specific. A casual “You should come sometime” is likely to be ignored, just like those polite invitations that are frequently given in social settings but usually not given or taken too seriously. A more direct “Would you like to come with me this Sunday at 8:45 ...” shows sincerity and actually solicits a response.

If you are uncomfortable inviting someone to a “random” service, consider one of the many special events or services that might provide the “excuse” for inviting them. Christmas, Easter, and VBS are commonly used as occasions to invite others. Or you could invite someone to a baptism, graduation, confirmation, tour choir, or Christmas carol sing. Or invite them to Bible class on a topic they might have an interest in. Other “non-religious” activities such as potlucks, sporting events, carnivals, etc. may be a good way to introduce others to our church and to other members in a friendly and casual way.

What if they accept the invitation? Don’t drop the ball! Help prepare them. Offer a ride or directions, let them know what to wear, what to expect, etc. Do the normal things that any good host would do when inviting a guest, including introductions to others in the congregation.

Developing relationships with people in the community will connect us with people who need Jesus and who need a church. In Christian love, we can reach out to them and help them learn the good news of salvation. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our connections with others to share our faith and reach out to those people in need of a church family and in need of Jesus.