

Mystery Worshipping: An Introduction

1. Many people are familiar with the idea of a 'mystery shopper'. It is a way of checking that shops are doing all they ought to do for the customer. The 'mystery worshipper' idea applies that same concept to churches. This has been done by 'Ship of Fools' for several years. See <http://www.ship-of-fools.com/>. Christian Research also used this as part of their Telford Resources Exhibition in 2008 and now offer this on a commercial basis – see <http://www.christian-research.org.uk/> Mystery Worshipper exercise is seen as an integral part of the Everybody Welcome package so that churches have an 'outsider's view of their church..
2. We recommend that you approach another church to provide you with 'visitors'. This may be a reciprocal arrangement. Some denominations or Dioceses may develop teams of people to do this – as Lichfield Diocese has: <http://www.lichfield.anglican.org/chadnet/mystery-worshipper>
3. Practicalities:
 - a. Visitors must go without being known by the church being visited. Therefore it is best to 'pair' with a church a few miles away which does not have natural links with the church being visited.
 - b. It is important to decide which service it is appropriate to visit (or there may be more than one) and request visitors for that. It is enough to give the time rather than agree on a specific date. It is important that the Minister does not 'prepare' his congregation as this would produce false results and make the exercise meaningless.
 - c. One or two people should visit, depending partly on the size of the church.
 - d. After visiting they send their forms to the Minister of the church. It is not for general publication. Those asked to be visitors must agree to confidentiality, as no trust can develop if the results are gossiped.
 - e. We recommend that after 6-12 months another visit is arranged to see if improvements have been made (probably by the same person but it may be someone different?)
4. Guidelines for visitors:
 - a. Look through the questions first to make sure you know what you are looking for.
 - b. Arrive a bit before the service starts but not too early (5-10 minutes is about right).
 - c. Try to remain unknown. If people ask, say you are just visiting the area.
 - d. Don't have the form visible, marking off the points on a clipboard, or people will know you are not 'normal'.
 - e. Try to make sure you look at things like toilets.
 - f. Loiter at the back (around the noticeboard or bookstall) as these are good places to find out if people will come to you.
 - g. Stick around at the end to give people a chance to make your acquaintance.
 - h. Fill in the form as soon as you get to the car unless you have a brilliant memory.
 - i. If a question was impossible to answer, please put N/A (not applicable) in the comment column with a comment if appropriate and leave the rest blank.
 - j. It can be helpful to have an affirming comment as a summary paragraph as we are seeking to encourage the churches.

