

ABOUT TOURS AND SITE VISITS

a supplemental process guide to

A Place of Encounter: *Renewing Worship Spaces, 2004*

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and to

The Place Where We Worship: *a Worship and Liturgical Resources teaching module
produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2010*

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Visiting churches is always fun. It can be a highlight of a committee process. But the valuable time spent on a site visit (or several) should be used wisely to help the group build their skill at seeing their own space with objective eyes. This web worksheet for group leaders expands on the supplemental resources in **A Place of Encounter**, pages 89-90 that say:

One activity that is mentioned in several [architectural renewal] process guides, and which can involve the whole assembly is touring and visiting other spaces. Because of the acquired sense of sacredness we have about our own spaces, it is hard to evaluate them objectively. By first teaching criteria for evaluation and then going out and looking at other spaces the assembly learns to use and apply those skills to their own space. Visits and tours also allow us opportunity to learn about the faith of our neighbor and the diversity of our faith. It builds community, is enjoyable. People usually love to talk about their church building, their congregation, and often their faith. Select spaces of your own denomination as well as others. Compare baptismal theology, for example based on spaces. Select what in your mind are good and bad examples of worship spaces. Use care when critiquing others spaces based on our values. Sometimes that discussion is best left until we return to our own building. Don't neglect this important opportunity.

Before the visit:

Schedule the visit when your group can be alone in the site. If time allows, or an in-depth understanding is important, consider a second or concurrent visit when you can observe the local community using their space.

Request that any introduction or interpretation by the host congregation representative (if any) happen later in the visit; also request some discussion time alone without a local representative present at the end of the visit.

Tell your group to begin their observations at the street corner.

At the visit:

Remember – the purpose of the visit is to exercise your skill at seeing theology and faith-practice in architecture, and to practice applying the criteria for evaluation you've learned. Direct your group to proceed as follows:

First, experience the space as a new comer with no orientation or introduction.

Note perceptions, your assumptions, and things the architecture or owner must assume.

Experience the space with relatively no talking. Listen to the space. Walk around, take notes, and remember your perceptions and assumptions.

After a period of moving around the space in silence, begin to confer quietly with others in the group, still moving around and observing.

Ask others about things you don't understand; share insights you have; test your evaluations.

Next, gather together in the space for reflection/ discussion.

The host might be introduced or offer their tour guidance at this point.

Thank the host and ask for some time alone as a group without the local representative present (so you can talk freely without fear of critical comments offending the local representative).

Discuss perceptions.

What principles (theological understandings or assumptions) from your tradition apply, don't apply?

What principles (theological understandings or assumptions) from the owner's tradition apply?

What works? What doesn't? What deeper insight would you have if you were to see the local community using the space?

How would you evaluate the space based on your newly learned criteria tools? Soon you'll have to do this in your own space. Practice this skill here.

After the visit:

Send a thank you note or gift.

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