
The Church of Refuge Charter – a user guide.

What is a charter?

A charter is a public promise or commitment that the CORE church makes to young people. It is a communicating of the values and aims that a CORE church already has. How will the church of refuge implement these values? What can a young person expect of a particular CORE church? A charter will briefly answer these questions.

Why a charter?

This is a good question. Is it not enough to talk about the CORE values in the leadership team? Surely it will be evident to a young person that the church of refuge cares for them?

There are several good reasons for having a charter:

1. A charter is an articulation of the values that the church of refuge holds. It is not enough that a CORE church cares about its young people. The young people need to know that the church cares for them. This will of course be evident to young people, who have grown up in the local church and have experienced the care of the church through the years. However, young people in transition won't have that benefit. In these cases first impressions are important.

In the case of a student, for example, we know that if he/she is not integrated into the church within the first few weeks, then the student is very likely to fall away from the church. What will that young person meet when he or she nervously finds their way for the first time to a new church, after moving into a new area and starting a new chapter in their life? Or, what will meet a visiting young person that has come along for the first time with a regular attendee; or, the young person that for some reason has taken a break from the church but suddenly decides to pop in one day?

A charter is an articulation of the values that the church of refuge holds. When a young person comes to the church for the first time, they can immediately see that this is a church which has thought through a number of issues and is intentional about serving and ministering to young people.

2. Having a charter reminds the church of what it is aiming for. Many churches have a vague vision, some none at all. A charter helps the church to understand what it is aiming to do on a very practical level. A charter will help all church members to understand the vision of CORE, not just the leadership team.

3. The charter is a basis for evaluation. A church of refuge will be regularly evaluating its progress and whether it can meet the needs of young people more effectively. A charter will form the basis of evaluation. Have we managed what we have promised? Young people are able to hold the church accountable. This is a motivational factor for getting things done. It makes the church transparent and honest. Young people respect this.

What will the charter be like?

1. Unique. The charter will be unique to your church of refuge. The leadership team will need to decide what can be committed to.
2. Not overambitious. Don't promise too much. Make sure that what is promised in the charter is achievable in reality.
3. Dynamic. The charter can be changed at an evaluation and vision meeting which will happen annually.
4. Specific. A charter will not be vague. Those that we serve need to read about tangible initiatives that are for them.

Please explain the sample charter.

Let's make this perfectly clear. The sample charter is just that: a sample. Your local church is under no obligation to follow this charter because church of refuge recognizes that God has made every church fellowship unique. Church of refuge is not a "one size fits all" package.

Having made that clear we can now look at the thoughts that went into the sample charter.

1. *You will be greeted in a comfortable and non-threatening way.*

There is a difference between a warm welcome and an overwhelming welcome. We don't need to overdo things by hugging someone we have never met, or by making them stand up in the church or by asking them who they are related to. But by shaking them by the hand and asking them if they have been before, and by pointing out where the church auditorium is and the toilets and where they can hang their coat, we show that we are happy to see them, and we relax them by giving them an oversight of what is what.

2. *There will be a well run and resourced Sabbath School class which is relevant to your age group and which will be discussing issues you are interested in.*

Sabbath school has the potential to be very post-modern, if only we could get away from proof-texting and text book answers. Young people are looking for authentic and honest conversation about the issues that matter to them. Many miss, what they call, a thinking climate in the church (Valuegenesis youth survey, 2007). Many Sabbath Schools fall, unfortunately, a long way short of this, and people have been voting with their feet. So, point two is a challenge to the church to reclaim Sabbath School from the routine and make it real.

3. *Our worship service will be made with young people in mind. We will do that by involving young people in the planning and running of our worship service.*

Church of Refuge is not pushing any particular style of worship, but what we do want to see is meaningful worship. Thought through, prayed through, and worked through.

And this is more than about music and scripture readings. It is also a commitment to allow young people and their concerns to inform sermon themes and titles. We recommend that these be publicized in advance because when we publicize a good title we give our young people another reason to be a part of Sabbath fellowship.

A church of refuge will also be open to worship as defined by young people, and the diversity and creativity they bring. In all of this we want to involve young people in worship planning and leading.

4. *Our church is an inclusive church. We will therefore listen to and respect your theological thoughts and questions. This is a church where we believe we can learn from each other.*

Valuegenesis, a survey of Adventist young people in Europe, showed clearly that, while young people experienced church as being generally warm and friendly, they experience relatively little room to ask questions or talk about theological ideas. The church was experienced as closed, even patronizing at times. A church of refuge, then, is a church which recognizes that every generation needs to rediscover Jesus for themselves, and re-answer the great questions of doctrine which spring forth from a desire to know Jesus more. A church of refuge will intentionally make room for this to happen.

5. *This is a church which will regularly seek your thoughts and advice in conjunction with the mission and vision of the church. We welcome positive input from young people. Further, we will encourage, though without pressure, ownership of that vision and its implementation.*

A church of refuge is determined not to engage in tokenism when it comes to youth representation. A CORE church will trust its young people enough to help define the vision and mission of the church. But more than this, the church of refuge will allow young leaders the autonomy, freedom, and

resources to own the vision and its implementation. This means that a CORE church will be open to fresh missional initiatives, even if they sound strange to older ears. Such initiatives do not need to replace existing initiatives, but rather compliment what is already going on, as old and young work together, equal and complimentary partners in the development of the mission and vision of the church.

6. *Because our church is a church which cares passionately for young people, you can expect to be prayed for on a regular basis.*

The archbishop, William Temple, once wrote: "To pray is to change". A church of refuge recognizes that it is a church that is engaging in cross-generational mission. People in the church of refuge will sometimes need to set aside personal preferences for the sake of the mission of the church and in order to try to understand the culture in which they are operating.

A church which is praying actively and specifically for its young people will find this process easier as they invite God to led and influence the culture, members and leadership of the church. By including this in the charter, we are letting our young people know that we are serious about them and our desire for the church to be a place where they can meet Jesus.

7. *You can expect regular opportunities for social togetherness. Many of these activities will take place in our dedicated youth room.*

The details of what is going on for young people can be listed in the charter leaflet (sample on website). But by mentioning it in the charter, young people know that we care about their fellowship opportunities and are working with them. As the sentence indicates, this can involve social opportunities both in the church building and out and about.

What is the charter leaflet?

The charter leaflet can be loaded down from www.churchofrefuge.eu in a Word document format which means that it is easy for CORE churches to adapt and translate. The information in the leaflet will most likely be on the website of the church. But we believe that it is important to be able to place relevant information into the hands of a young person who is visiting the church for the first time. This will:

- a) Relax a young person by giving them an oversight of what the church is about and who the leaders of the church are.
- b) Give them something to look at and do, if they are feeling nervous about being in a new place.

The leaflet gives them the following useful information:

1. Tells them that this is a church which is for them, as it is a CORE church.
2. Tells them who the leaders of the church are and how to contact them.
3. Gives them the web address of the church
4. Gives them an oversight of what is happening in the church throughout the week and when these things are happening.
5. Tells them what they can expect of this particular church of refuge (charter).

Conclusion

The charter and the charter leaflet is something that every individual church of refuge will need to take time to adjust and make it their own. This is very important, in order to reflect the specific and unique character of your church. Remember CORE is not a package; it is a set of applicable values. So, the next steps are these:

- a) Allocate time for making a charter and leaflet at the next church board meeting.
- b) Run the draft by the youth leaders and regular young people. Give them the opportunity for serious input.
- c) Make a sustainable plan for meeting the ambitions in the charter and the leaflet.
- d) Print it and train the welcome team in how to give use it and make it available.