



## **GROWING IN WELCOME**

**A workbook produced by  
The Mission Core Group  
Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway**

# Introduction

All congregations believe that they are 'friendly and good at welcoming people', and all congregations need to work harder at this aspect of their life! This workbook encourages each of us to look at the level of welcome we offer people who come to worship alongside us or who visit our churches, and to keep working at improving our ministry of hospitality.

In this workbook, the Mission Core Group offers a palette of resources which will help build a culture of welcome in our Diocese. The material is set out in five sections and can be used in a variety of ways. An individual congregation might choose to look at a particular section or sections at a Congregational Study Day or a series of evening sessions, or else might use some of the material to equip a Welcoming Team; alternatively charges in a Region might decide to work on the material together, running a Training Day using a compilation of all the material. Whatever route you choose to follow, we believe that you will find sufficient tools for the journey in these pages; signposts to further reading are offered at the end of each section should you wish to travel further.

We have deliberately not looked at 'welcoming *worship*' – that is a workbook in itself and one which we hope to offer in this coming year.

The Mission Core Group wishes to thank the Revd Dan Gafvert for his help in writing section 5.

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Sections marked with a flipchart sign are for group discussion.

Questions for discussion are in **bold**.

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## Section 1 Auditing ourselves

CarlsonChurch.com



WE DO NOT NEED TO GET SOMEONE IN TO HELP US WITH MARKETING OUR CHURCH AS WE ARE PERFECTLY ABLE TO DO IT OURSELVES

The first step in creating a culture of welcome in a congregation is to take a long, hard look at ourselves. Those of us who attend a church regularly become blind over time to the signals that the congregation gives out, and not just the implicit ones either! In a small charge in this diocese recently, not one person could recall what their notice-board looked like or even where it was situated. ‘Do we have one?’, said one member. ‘I have no need to look at it’, said another, ‘as I always know what’s happening’.

Noticeboards are often a good indicator of the level of a congregation’s attention to the art of welcome. And alas, all too many are badly sited, peeling, contain out-of-date contact details and service information expressed in arcane language. One, advertising its linked sister charge, omitted to give the latter’s address; ‘but we all know where it is’ was the reply! If we are to improve the level of welcome and integration we offer in our congregations, we need first to stand in others’ shoes and see ourselves as others see us, starting with the **exterior** of our premises. One of the best tools for doing this comes from a set of questionnaires in Bob Jackson’s course *Everybody Welcome*<sup>1</sup>, adapted slightly here for use in our contexts. The more members of a congregation that can engage in such an exercise, the better. The results have enabled many a charge to refocus their welcome strategies.

<sup>1</sup> *Everybody Welcome: The Course Where Everybody Helps Grow their Church* Bob Jackson Church House Publishing (2009)

Walk round your premises answering the following questions, preferably in pairs

QUESTIONS ABOUT EXTERIOR and ENTRANCE	Yes/Good 3	OK/ Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Is St X's location one people feel safe walking to?					
2. Is there a good, clear route from the car park and pavement?					
3. Is there good quality car parking, adequate for normal usage?					
4. Are the grounds well-kept?					
5. Is it obvious which door gets you into the building and is the signage clear?					
6. Is the church door easy to use at service times?					
7. Is the front door welcoming or forbidding?					
8. Is there good access for those who use wheelchairs and partially sighted people?					
9. Does the building provoke feelings of awe, wonder and a sense of God?					
10. Overall, how good is the experience of walking into church for the first time?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 30 =</b>

Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet

Some of the above may seem very basic, but travel around the Diocese and you will meet boarded-up windows which give the impression of a closed church, badly tended gardens signalling more than just a lack of care for the plant, and locked front doors on a Sunday morning with no instructions on how to get in – “oh, everyone knows we use the *back door*”.



**Pool the marks and the responses that have been jotted down, and decide what you need to work on and how you are going to tackle this. As with all planning, it is good to be very precise about this process, using SMART targets as outlined here:**

<b>Specific:</b>	be clear about the specific goals and who the plan is for	
<b>Measurable:</b>	agree how you will be able to measure progress, and what criteria you will use for that	
<b>Achievable:</b>	ensure that the goals are possible, but involve a bit of stretch	
<b>Resourced:</b>	or realistic; ensure that there are sufficient human and financial resources	
<b>Time-bound:</b>	be clear about the timing for starting, reviewing and completing the process	

Then, again in pairs, tackle the following questions about **publicity**. Notice-boards are indeed important – and in our context it is crucial that they advertise the SEC’s relationship to the Anglican Communion for those visiting/moving from other Provinces. But as important today is the quality of church *web-sites*. Bob Jackson says ‘most people today, if they are looking for a church, will browse the web’, so it is increasingly important that we pay attention to this aspect of outreach and publicity.

*I went to a Fresh Expressions-style church recently. A few months earlier we had appointed a young clergyman to plant a new church from scratch among young adults whose lives revolve around relationship networks rather than geographic locations. The evening began with a barbecue on the steps of the building, followed by an act of worship inside. I chatted over burnt sausages to one young man, who said it was his first time, ‘How did you hear about it?’ I asked. ‘On Facebook’, he replied. What new communications tools could effectively publicize your church? The early Church spread through using the cutting-edge communications technology of the day – the Roman road. What is the appropriate technology today for your church?<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *op cit* 1, 28

QUESTIONS ABOUT PUBLICITY	Yes/Good 3	OK/ Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Can St X's be found on the web?					
2. Is the website informative + regularly updated?					
3. Is it easy to find out service times without going to the notice-board?					
4. Is the notice-board attractively contemporary?					
5. Is the notice-board up-to-date and informative?					
6. Does St X's distribute a magazine round others than just its members?					
7. Does St X's circulate invitations to Christmas/ Easter services?					
8. Does it ever have positive coverage in local media?					
9. Does the church have a newcomers' pack?					
10. Does St X's have a DVD of people's faith stories to share?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 30 =</b>

**Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet**



Again, pool the marks and the responses that have been jotted down, and decide what you need to work on and how you are going to tackle this using the SMART process. Do you require help in setting up a web site? Is there someone in your Region who could assist with this? Has a neighbouring church recently revamped their publicity in any way – if so, what could you learn from their experience? Do you distribute information about your services to Hotels and Bed and Breakfasts, Tourist Offices and other local information hubs? <sup>3</sup>

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Thirdly, have a look at the **interior** of your church building, using the questions overleaf as before. When you are expecting visitors to your home, it is normal to tidy up a little before they arrive, warm the place up and make it comfortable, and perhaps prepare food or drink in readiness for your guests. Congregations should be no less intentional in their welcome. While in many cases it is impossible to change the architecture of the building, nevertheless we can make the most of what we have, making it a tidy, hospitable and sufficiently warm and well-lit place in which to choose to spend an hour and half or so. Just as the general appearance of your church's grounds can invite or discourage, conveying a sense of pride in and care for the premises (and thus subliminally for visitors too) - or the opposite - so can interiors welcome or ward off by their very appearance. Churches are often very hesitant to apply the principles of marketing to their lives believing that since Christianity is inherently good, it does not need to be promoted. But there is nothing evil in marketing; it is simply the process of presenting a product or service to the public in the best light.

*Buildings generate anxiety levels in people. A department store is trying all the time to make people feel good about being there - to lower the anxiety level. Anxiety levels are raised by:*

*uncertainty - where do I go, what do I do when I don't really know the house rules?*

*clutter - feeling hemmed in, having to avoid it, being afraid of knocking something.*

*feelings of not fitting in - I'm overdressed or underdressed for this environment, this is too posh or too down market for me.*

*smells, grot, litter, evidence of neglect, mystery, discomfort, dim lights, uneven floors, cold, lack of good signage or of provision for non-standard people - short-sighted, deaf, blind, short, tall, bad backs, weak bladders, English as second language etc. etc.*

*unfamiliarity - 'I've never been in a place like this before'.*

*staff who do not smile and do not offer to help.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> The General Synod Office produces high quality 'hotel cards' (price 10p) which can be printed with your own details; 'phone 0131 225 6357 to purchase these.

<sup>4</sup> *op cit* 1, 41



QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WORSHIP SPACE	Yes/Good 3	OK/ Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Is the church <u>lighting</u> good enough for reading?					
2. Is the church <u>heating</u> effective and will the visitor be comfortable?					
3. Is the church <u>seating</u> comfy and back-friendly?					
4. Are there clear signs for the toilets and are they adequate, well-maintained and accessible?					
5. Are the sound system and hearing-loop adequate and in good order?					
6. Are books, leaflets, sheets etc helpful and of good quality?					
7. Are minority groups and those with particular needs well provided for?					
8. Are the premises clean, tidy and uncluttered?					
9. Do the furniture and fittings draw you to God?					
10. Is the general feel of the place 'warm'?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 30 =</b>

**Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet**



Before moving on to the second session, do make sure you have addressed the following questions - *from the standpoint of a visitor*:

- **If you had just moved to the area, how would you know your church existed?**
- **How easily would you find your way into the building?**
- **How welcoming does the building feel? Would you want to bring your newborn/elderly parent/friends here?**

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If you really want to be clinical in your approach to this section, then why not adopt the Mystery Shopper approach, a way of checking that shops are doing all they can for the customer? The '**Mystery Worshipper**' idea applies that same concept to churches, enabling congregations to gain an outsider's view of their church<sup>5</sup>. If brave, you might approach another congregation to provide you with 'visitors', perhaps on a reciprocal basis, or else ask a non-churchgoing family member. One or two people should visit, depending on the size of the church. Visitors must go without being known by the church being visited. It is important that the clergy and congregation do not 'prepare' themselves for the visit as this would produce false results and make the exercise meaningless. After visiting, the mystery visitors send their form to the clergyperson for discussion with the Vestry; 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.

#### **Guidelines for Mystery Visitors:**

- a. Look through the questions first to make sure you know what you are looking for. Questions are available on <http://www.everybodywelcome.org.uk/>
- 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 is a bit of a give-away!
- e. Try to make sure you look at things like toilets.
- f. Loiter at the back (around the notice-board or bookstall) as these are good places to find out if people will come and talk to you.
- g. Stick around at the end to give people a chance to make your acquaintance and invite you to coffee.
- 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, simply put n/a 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

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<sup>5</sup> This has been done by 'Ship of Fools' for several years. See <http://www.ship-of-fools.com/>

## Further reading

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### ***Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry***

Andrew Weeks Alban Institute Publication (1992)

Chapter 1 'Imaginative marketing; signs, property and communications', a short summary of good practice covering the areas discussed in the previous section

### ***Getting Noticed – using notice-boards creatively.***

A two-page checklist from 'Divine Inspiration', an organisation (funded by English Heritage and the Diocese of Coventry) which encourages those who are stewards of church buildings to look creatively at how they welcome and support visitors

<http://www.divine-inspiration.org.uk/assets/resources/11/Getting%20Noticed%20.pdf?1284046980>

### ***Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Local Church***

Alison Gilchrist Grove Books (2004) Ev. 66

Alternative hospitality audit pps 24-25

### ***Everybody Welcome: The Course Where Everybody Helps Grow their Church***

Bob Jackson Church House Publishing (2009)

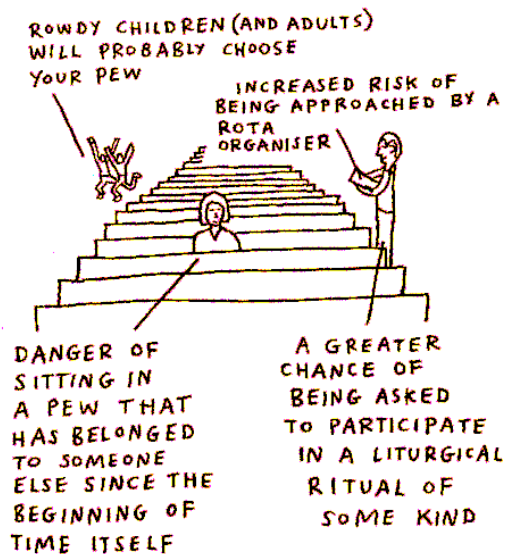
Session 1 '*Discover: making the church more visible*' and Session 2 '*The premises: making them more inviting*'

## Section 2 Refreshing our practice

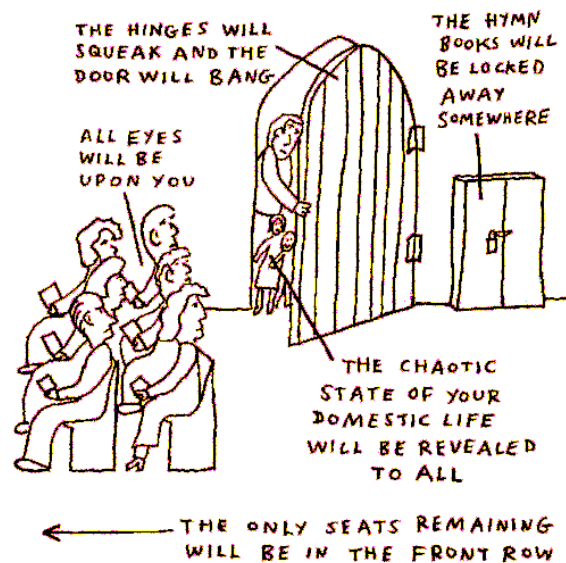
*Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive ... A community which refuses to welcome – whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors – is dying spiritually. Jean Vanier Community and Growth*

# ARRIVING AT CHURCH

## THE PERILS OF ARRIVING AT CHURCH TOO EARLY:



## THE DANGERS OF ARRIVING AT CHURCH TOO LATE:



CartoonChurch.com

We looked in the last section at how badly-maintained premises can create feelings of anxiety in those who visit, and this goes for churches as much as shops. But shopping today is the culturally easier pursuit. Simply entering a church for the first time, even if its exterior is in mint condition and all the signs shout 'you are welcome here', can be anxiety-creating.

*When approaching a new church, most people will be apprehensive - how will they be received and what will happen if they do not understand the "rules?" If you don't believe this, test it by attending a church radically different from your own, or go to a synagogue or a mosque. Unless you are absolutely impervious, you will feel uneasy. I often feel awkward when I visit new churches even in my own denomination. So put yourself in the place of that wary newcomer and learn to recognize that every sign, direction, and document a newcomer encounters can be either a confusing barrier or a tension-reducing invitation.<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Weeks *Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry* Alban Institute (1992) 1-2

It is all too easy, in Alison Gilchrist's words, to forget the 'gut-wrenching fear of that first journey over the threshold'<sup>7</sup>. One way of becoming aware of the feelings that new church-goers experience is to go to an organisation that has its own 'culture' - norms and language, established rules of behaviour, social expectations and shared understanding - such as an exclusive restaurant, a bookmakers or a hobby club.

One of the simplest ways of easing people's initial passage over the threshold is by having some advance information about church-going *on your church's web-site*. Two congregations in particular have done this to great effect: Holy Trinity Stirling has a lengthy but very helpful section on its website entitled 'New To Church?' which deals with what to expect on arriving, what to wear, and explanation of the service, the church year and vestments, all written in a very accessible style, as does St Mary's Cathedral Glasgow:

### **You'll be welcome**

We cordially invite you to worship with us and we'll do everything we can to make you welcome. The person on the door and the people handing out the books will greet you and will be only too pleased to answer any questions you may have about the service. There may be other newcomers in church, as we're used to meeting new people.

When you visit us, you'll be our respected and welcome guest. You'll not be singled out in an embarrassing way, or asked to stand before the congregation or made to come forward. You'll simply be worshipping God along with the rest of us. Note that you don't have to bring a Bible with you.

If you don't yet feel ready to participate in one of our services, you can simply come in to watch and listen to what happens. Just tell the person on the door or the people handing out the books that you only want to sit and watch. If you read this whole page, nothing will come as a surprise. Once you've come one or twice, you may feel that you'd like to join in with the rest of the congregation

<http://www.holytrinitystirling.org/newtochurch.htm>

### **First time?**

Most people first come to the 10.30 am service which is held every Sunday morning or to Evensong which takes place through the year at 6.30 pm. If you come to one of these services, the first person you are likely to meet is likely to be one of those responsible for leading the service. Members of the clergy usually greet people at the door of the church. Once you come inside, someone who will welcome you and give you a service sheet. Everything that you need is in this leaflet – hymns, music and prayers are all gathered together. Find a seat anywhere in the main body of the church – no seats are reserved. If you want a Bible during the service, there are copies at the ends of the pews. We use the New Revised Standard Version. There is flat access into the church for those in wheelchairs. There is also an accessible toilet on the same level, which is located through the door on the left behind the organ console near the front of the church.

<http://www.thecathedral.org.uk/2007/12/26/auditions/>

<sup>7</sup> Alison Gilchrist *Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Local Church* Grove Books Ev. 66

## Varieties of welcome

The Cathedral states that its policy is that 'no seats are reserved', and has worked to ensure that this is understood by *all* the congregation. Being welcoming is the job of *everyone* in the congregation, not just those deputed to be on Sidesperson duty that day. Visitors may indeed receive a wonderful welcome at the door, but that can all too easily be squashed by the behaviour of individuals within the congregation, as this compilation of experiences published in *The Church Times* details<sup>8</sup>.

*My late husband was a youth leader. At the start of a thanksgiving service for the work that the youngsters had done in recovering a crashed wartime plane from the hills, he was told by the incumbent: "You must go to the back of church: you are not wearing a tie." He went to the back, walked out through the door, and never went back to that church.*

*I once went alone to a parish church in Suffolk. I was in plenty of time, and found myself a place near the back in an empty pew. After a short time, a person told me, in an abrupt manner, that I could not sit there. I meekly moved and squeezed myself at the end of a fairly full pew (by now the church was filling up), earning a suspicious glance from my neighbour. Had it been my very first visit to a church, it could well have been my last.*

*I was preaching about making the church welcoming to all people. At one point, I talked about how God loves the sound of children in church, and that we need to allow them to be children rather than expect them to behave like adults. During coffee after the service, a mother told me that, as I was saying these words, a person in front of her turned round and told her five-year-old son: "Shut up!"*



**Recall for yourself an occasion when you were made to feel really welcome on visiting a church for the first time. What made you feel so welcome?**

**Recall a time when you were not made to feel welcome by a congregation. Why was that?**

**Share these experiences within your group, and flip-chart the good and bad practices that emerge from the discussion, keeping the notes for later reference.**

<sup>8</sup> *The Church Times* "Going to church? Wear your thickest skin" Issue 7451 25 November, 2005 pps 12-13

In *Mission-Shaped Parish*, Tim Sledge remarks that “welcome is an attitude throughout the church. Welcome is what happens after you have said ‘hello’”<sup>9</sup>. But there are varying degrees of, and motivations for, welcome. Study the following typology of welcome:

- 1 Some churches consider themselves welcoming because everyone who is currently ‘in’ the church feels at home there. Such churches have not stopped to see how things look from ‘outside’ existing membership. Becoming part of a church can prove daunting, so potential newcomers conclude that they are not wanted there. That may well be the case.
- 2 Other churches do welcome some newcomers, but within a narrow band. These churches want more people like us, but have subtle and effective ways of freezing out anyone who looks, dresses, or sounds different from us.
- 3 There are churches that talk a good talk about welcome. ‘Newcomers are warmly invited to join us for coffee afterwards’ says the vicar in the notices. But in practice they are not. Regular church members huddle in their own groups while visitors are left to fend for themselves.
- 4 Then there are churches that give a real verbal welcome. You will be greeted at the door, shown to a seat, even introduced to one or two members of the church who will say, genuinely, ‘hello, its nice to see you’. The problem here is that no one seems to know what to say after they have said ‘hello’. Real welcome is what happens after we have said ‘hello’.
- 5 A further group of churches does welcome newcomers not only to the services, but also to church activities, but the welcome is to be part of the audience. We would like more people to buy things at the bring-and-buy, more to hear our choir sing at the annual festival, but that is really as far as we want newcomers to enter the church.
- 6 Finally there are the churches that incorporate newcomers. This is a costly task for it means making others part of our life, allowing the warmth of the friendships we enjoy to be taken, broken open, blessed and given to others with whom the only thing we may feel we have in common is our faith in Christ. These churches are willing to let others participate in the life of the church. They do so joyfully aware that that major changes will inevitably be required.<sup>10</sup>

**Where do you think a newcomer would place your congregation on this scale of 1 - 6?**



**To help achieve some objectivity in this, look back at the good and bad practices you noted on page 14. Which good practices do you use? Add more if they spring to mind. And which not so good? Likewise add more if they spring to mind. Chart these up on**

**the flipchart in two columns. Does that help you to see where you lie in this typology?**

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge *Mission-Shaped Parish; traditional church in a changing context* CHP (2006), 37

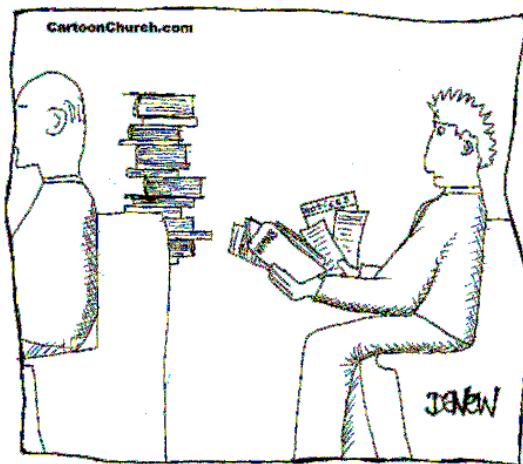
<sup>10</sup> Robert Warren *The Healthy Churches Handbook* Church House Publishing (2004) 40-41

Maybe there are things you need to improve ..... so let's look at how you might approach these.

- Crossing the threshold is, as we've noted, incredibly difficult for a newcomer. Church doors can be very imposing. So it is not enough simply to have Welcomers *inside* the building, ready to hand out books in the narthex or the nave. Instead have two people with name badges (preferably one of each gender) available for half an hour before the service to stand by the entrance/s to welcome people – and do ensure that they do just that! Again this may sound banal, but the reality is that often those so delegated get involved in folding service/notice sheets, organizing hymn book or chatting so effusively to those whom they know that newcomers meet a circle of backs or feel that their arrival is intruding on something important.
  
- Greet the unfamiliar person with something like “Hello, welcome to St Mary’s. I’m Anne. I don’t believe we’ve met”. Never ask “Are you new?” If they are not, you have unnecessarily insulted them and made them and yourself uncomfortable. If they are, you have just emphasized their newness, instead of helping them to move past it. You might go on to ask, “Do you live in the neighbourhood?” Their answer will help distinguish between the one-time visitor and the local searcher.
  
- Make sure that Welcomers have large print Liturgies to hand for the visually impaired, knowledge of what is happening with any children during that Sunday’s service so that new children can be invited to join it, an understanding of the loop system, a collection of Gift Aid envelopes and copies of any musical Mass setting. (The latter is often forgotten, but it can be very excluding having to stand as a silent onlooker while a congregation sings a setting with great gusto).
  
- If possible, organise things so that one Welcomer is always free to escort the visitor/newcomer to a seat or at least introduce them to a member of the congregation. That person can then offer to escort them at the end of the service to wherever coffee is served. But remember that being too effusive in one’s welcome can be overwhelming for the first-timer, who is probably feeling a little diffident and unsure of herself/himself. Meet visitors where they are, not where you are; many people approach a church without a fully articulated reason for doing so.
  
- Include a welcome on the front of the weekly notice-sheet. Address a spoken welcome at the spoken notices *to* the visitors directly and in the second person, “We are glad you are here today...” Talk *to* visitors not *about* visitors. Don’t say, “We want to welcome our visitors today”; say instead, “To those of you who are visiting today, I/we want you to know that you are welcome...”.



- Ensure that the person leading worship announces the time, location and directions to coffee time and specifically invites newcomers to participate, if possible before the Blessing and Dismissal. Extend a similar invitation to communion.
- Ensure that directions or notices during worship do not assume insider knowledge – ‘you can get your tickets for the Autumn Fayre from (unidentified) Margaret during coffee hour’ is not a helpful direction – and do avoid making ‘in-jokes’
- Reinforce the message regularly with the congregation that welcome is what we *all* do, not just the Welcome Team, so that they are always aware of newcomers’ needs and ready to help find a place in a book for someone sitting beside them if necessary.



“and then we’ll use the back of the yellow sheet, section 2 of the red card and the supplement at the back of the blue book...”

Giving visitors a plethora of books, sheets and extra handouts on arrival is likely to cause anxiety and confusion. Many congregations now produce a service sheet that reproduces the order of the Liturgy and details the hymns and the readings, so as to help people follow the order that worship will take more easily, while others produce seasonal Liturgy booklets – see the Cathedral’s insert on page 13. If such resources are produced on recycled paper, then this is not such an extravagant habit as it may seem.

### Effective follow-up

Welcoming newcomers well at church on a Sunday is one thing, but work must then be done to make them feel that their visit was important to the congregation; that they mattered. And for this it is essential to obtain *names and addresses*. One way of doing this is to have a Visitors’ Book open at the back of church into which people can place their names and addresses – but signing this is more likely to happen if someone points this out and invites them to do so. Other congregations have pew cards that visitors can fill out and place in the offering plate, as on the next page. Once again, few visitors will take the initiative to do this unless they are specifically invited to do so. Do check for unintended bias in your visitors’ cards; e.g. ‘we welcome you and your family’. Consciously screen all your material for this kind of bias and stick to inclusive language.

We extend a warm welcome to St Agatha's today and very much hope that you enjoy worshipping with us, whether you are visiting or looking for a spiritual home here on Tiree. We hope also that in St Agatha's you find something of the peace and love and glory of God. If you are with us for a communion service, you are welcome to receive communion – all are welcome at the table of the Lord; He is the host and we His guests. However, if you do not wish to receive Communion, you are welcome to come forward for a blessing – just bow your head at the altar rail.

If you are with us for a Sunday 10.45 am service, there is always coffee, tea and a chance to chat afterwards in the hall, so please stay if you have time.



All of us at St Agatha's hope that you will want to worship with us again and perhaps consider making St Agatha's your spiritual home, so please do fill in the following details so that we can keep in touch with you.

Name

.....

Address

.....

Postcode ..... Telephone number ..... E-mail .....

If you would like a visit from one of the leadership team, please tick the box

St Agatha's is part of the SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles. To read about the history of the Scottish Episcopal Church and learn about its beliefs and structures, visit [www.scottishepiscopal.com](http://www.scottishepiscopal.com). The Scottish Episcopal Church is part of the world-wide Anglican Communion



LEVEL ACCESS to the church is available for prams and wheelchairs and for any who need it – just follow the signs from the main entrance.



FOR THOSE WITH HEARING DIFFICULTIES we have a loop system in both the church and hall – simply switch hearing aids to 'T'.



LARGE PRINT copies of the service books are available for those who wish them.

The worst thing to do is to gain names and addresses of visitors and then do nothing with them. The best follow-up is a personal home visit. This visit should not be a formal call, where you try to gain access into people's homes and talk for an hour, but a brief chat in the doorway, perhaps delivering some token of friendship from the church. The primary concern of the visitor should be to thank people for visiting the church and invite them to ask any questions they might have.

Knocking on a stranger's door without anything to deliver can be frightening. But delivering a new-member pack or a parish magazine makes this easier. As to the timing of this visit, research has shown that when follow-up visits are made within 24 hours of the church visit, 70% of visitors return the following Sunday. The response declines from this optimal point, dropping to 30% when home visits are made two weeks after the initial church visit. It seems that visitors to church leave the worship service still undecided about any future participation, but that a follow-up visit soon afterwards can tip the balance: 'Yes, this really is a warm, friendly congregation and I'd like to go again.' Numerous studies in the field of church growth underline the fact that the primary reason people join a congregation is to do with the quality of the friendship and relationships offered therein; "and when people drop out of church, the reason most often given is not personal conflict in theology - it is that 'I did not feel a sense of belonging; I did not feel needed, wanted or loved'."<sup>11</sup>

"Who should do the initial visit?" will have to be worked out by your congregation. There is proven value in having a team of lay people to do this visit, so giving out the message that "the people in this congregation care about newcomers". But your norm may be that the clergy make the first visit.

Attracting newcomers and keeping track of them only addresses half of the issue; the other is how to incorporate them as participant members, or 'get them glued in' to the life of the congregation. Church growth literature tells us that people need 'places to land' when they join a church, activities and groups in which they can contribute their unique gifts, skills and other abilities, so that they become new disciples, not simply new 'members' whose sole purpose is to shore up the existing institution.

One of the most powerful means of integrating members is to allow them to share in the power. But be careful; don't do it unless you mean it.. Sharing power means accepting and respecting individual differences. "That's not the way we do things around here." "We've always done it this way." "We tried that once, and it didn't work." Do these phrases sound familiar? If so, ask whether your church is concerned more with preserving the status-quo or in growing as a community of faith dedicated to mission?

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<sup>11</sup> *The Inviting Church; A Study in New Member Assimilation* Roy Oswald and Speed Leas Alban ((1993), 58

Another warning: *'if you let too many new people in, the place will never feel the same again. For many individuals and institutions, change is negative and threatening; for others, it is positive and growth sustaining. Many congregations say they want to grow, but they are simply seeking more people to share the work, not more spirits to share and expand the ministry. The real challenge is not simply in attracting newcomers, it is in making room for them in the community. Experience has shown that if visitors are not accepted and supported, they will feel devalued and will leave, probably sooner than later.'*<sup>12</sup>

**Remember, new members need three things:** *'new friends, an opportunity to contribute, and a sense of identification with the new congregation, seeing connections between their personal gifts and the specific needs of the new community'*<sup>13</sup>. If these are not provided in the weeks following their initial visit, then you will find your back door is as open as your front.



### Identifying, following up and incorporating newcomers. Questions to ponder.

1. Describe what will happen next Sunday to a person who appears at the door as a newcomer. Do you have a system for the **identification of newcomers** and keeping a list of them? What is that system? Who is in charge of it? Is there anything that needs changing/initiating?
2. What is the **ethos of this congregation** and how do we communicate that to newcomers?
3. Do we have a system of **follow-up**? Think about who in your congregation would be good at doing this. What kind of training will they need? Who will co-ordinate the work that these visitors do?
4. What is our system for finding out what newcomers are interested in, and then getting them connected to those areas/likeminded people – **incorporation** into the life of the charge? Does our social programme take account of the needs of newcomers?
5. What process do we need to help newcomers rethink, revise, and recommit themselves to **deepening discipleship** and deeper membership periodically after their initial commitment? What provision do we make for the ongoing nurture of newcomers to enable their growth in faith (and that of others)?

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Weeks *Welcome; Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry* Alban (1992) xx

<sup>13</sup> Arin Rothauge *All Doors Open* Alban Institute (2002), 9

**Hospitality: (i) to all**

Making provision for people with particular needs is not a matter of offering 'optional extras' for a minority, but rather an outworking of the core value of being hospitable and welcoming.

*I am a wheelchair user, and am a little inconvenient to "place" in church. Sometimes, behind pillars is the usual venue. The worst experience I had was one Sunday when the building was filled with congregation and included baptismal parties. On my arrival, the "greeter" looked at me in horror: "Oh dear, I don't know where we're going to put you!" I offered to go home if the building was that full. "Yes, that might be best." Consequently, I "put" myself in my car, and left the church to those who fitted into it more conveniently.*

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICULAR NEEDS	Yes/Good 3	OK/Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Is provision made for those who are deaf or hard of hearing?					
2. ...for wheelchair users?					
3. ...for elderly people unsteady on their feet?					
4. ...for dealing with distressed people or difficult behaviours?					
5. ...for food allergies, including at the Eucharist?					
6. ...for those with alcohol issues, including at the Eucharist?					
7. ...for partially sighted or blind people?					
8. ...for poor readers?					
9. ...for those for whom English is a second language?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 27 =</b>

**Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet**

### Hospitality: (ii) after the service

Many congregations now offer coffee or tea after the main Sunday service, and this is possible even for those churches which lack kitchen or toilet facilities on their premises; in the latter, a rota of members bring flasks of tea/coffee and serve these at the back of church. However served, such a facility allows newcomers the chance - potentially - to chat informally to other worshippers. However as Alison Gilchrist remarks, coffee time after the service is often *'an exclusive club where the outsider never catches sight of a friendly face approaching to say hello. So after a solitary shuffle in the corner until they lose heart, they make a bid for the door never to be seen again'*.<sup>14</sup>



Do ensure that newcomers are invited and escorted to coffee time by those sitting near them. All too often, congregational members get involved with conversations with their friends at the end of worship and fail to follow up on the welcome they proffered at the outset.

Do ensure that no-one is ever left standing on their own at coffee

time, that closed circles don't form or that a newcomer has to be the one to take the initiative in introducing themselves; it takes a very extrovert person to be able to break into a circle of backs and announce his/her name. Encourage regulars to seek out and talk to strangers before their friends. 'Provide coffee hour hosts who watch for someone who needs a little conversation and introducing round the room. This role (is) as important as that of greeters at the church door'.<sup>15</sup>

Some congregations offer regular Sunday lunches, in homes of members, to cultivate friendships; others serve soup-and-sandwich lunches directly after the Sunday service either in the church building itself or in the hall, using this time to get to know one another and any newcomers better.

**Again, in pairs, address the questions on the next page**

It took me six weeks before I discovered that the congregation went down the road to a nearby hall for coffee together after the service; I just thought they were heading home. No invitation was ever made.

<sup>14</sup> Alison Gilchrist *Creating a Culture of Welcome* Grove Booklet Ev 66 (2004), 4

<sup>15</sup> Arlin Rothauge *All Doors Open* Alban Institute (2002), 8

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOSPITALITY	Yes/Good 3	OK/ Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Are the refreshments easy to reach and obvious?					
2. Is the Hall /social space attractive and well cared for?					
3. Is the kitchen clean and hygienic?					
4. Does the refreshment system flow well or have long queues?					
5. Are the refreshments free as in a home rather than a donation being asked for?					
6. Are the refreshments appetizing and attractive rather than cheap and nasty?					
7. Are children offered good and appropriate refreshments?					
8. Do children have good facilities and play options during coffee time?					
9. Does it look like health and safety issues have be addressed?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 27 =</b>

**Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet**



Before moving on the next session, ensure that you have collated your responses to the questions on

- page 19 (welcome and integration)
- page 20 (special needs provision)
- page 22 (hospitality after the service)

and made clear plans about what needs to be changed in the light of your deliberations.

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### Further reading

#### ***Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry***

Andrew Weeks Alban Institute Publication (1992)

Chapter 4 'Tracking and Involving newcomers' - systems and tools for effective newcomer tracking and visiting

#### ***Everybody Welcome: The Course Where Everybody Helps Grow their Church***

Bob Jackson Church House Publishing (2009)

Session 4 '*Belonging to the church community*' in particular

'Community Life' pps 87- 89 and 'Christian Nurture – growing in faith' pps 89- 93

#### ***Welcoming the Visitor: A Guide for Congregations***

Susy Miller Episcopal Church in the USA downloadable resource. 6 pages.

[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/GW\\_Welcoming.pdf](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/GW_Welcoming.pdf)

#### ***All Doors Open. Congregational Strategies for Comprehensive Evangelism and Outreach.***

Arlin Rothauge Alban Institute (2002)

Downloadable 38-page pamphlet about welcome and integration strategies. Written in a manner consonant with the theology underpinning the MYCMI phase of Mission 21.

[www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org)



## Section 3 Equipping a Welcoming Team

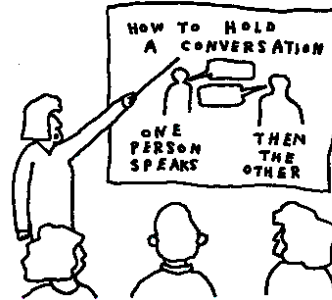
*Welcomers are our front line troops, welcoming God's guests*  
 Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry Andrew Weeks

# THE WELCOMERS

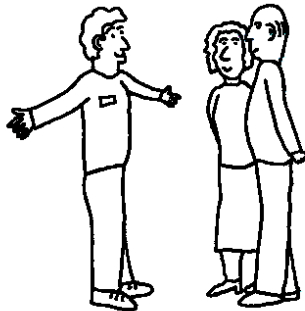
IT IS THE  
JOB OF THE  
WELCOMERS  
TO BE  
WELCOMING  
AND WEAR  
A BADGE



THEY ARE  
GIVEN  
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IN THE  
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NEWCOMERS  
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A WELCOMER  
WILL BE  
SUMMONED  
TO DEAL  
WITH THE  
SITUATION



THERE IS  
A ROTA  
SO THAT  
THE SAME  
PEOPLE  
DO NOT  
HAVE TO BE  
WELCOMING  
EVERY WEEK



CartoonChurch.com

While we have stressed repeatedly in the preceding two sessions that every member of a congregation should be welcoming at all times to newcomers and visitors, nevertheless it is good practice to train certain people whose *particular* service is as part of a Welcoming Team, to assist and enable the whole congregation in the process of welcome. Bob Jackson writes:

*A Welcome Team is a safety net to notice and catch the ones who aren't naturally welcomed; they've developed a bit of know-how in making people feel at ease and getting their contact details; and they provide the continuity of keeping an eye on the new people as they integrate into the congregation.<sup>16</sup>*

The key concept of a Welcome Team is that it aims to welcome people not just at the point of arrival but into membership of the church family. Recall Tim Sledge's comment: "welcome is an attitude throughout the church. Welcome is what happens *after* you have said 'hello'"<sup>17</sup>. So the responsibility of Welcome Team members is to be the route into the heart and hospitality of the church so that newcomers feel they matter and that they belong.

<sup>16</sup> *op cit* 1, 114

<sup>17</sup> Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge *Mission-Shaped Parish; traditional church in a changing context* CHP (2006), 37

Much of the literature on this topic is geared towards pastoral or programme-sized congregations, as it is assumed that small congregations do not need to organize their welcome as that will happen naturally and informally; “we *all* look out for newcomers”, they say blithely. However this is a mistaken belief; even small churches (i.e. those under 30 on a Sunday) need to be intentional about this particular ministry, and roster people to do the task each week. The author recently went to a church with less than 15 at Sunday worship and was neither greeted nor given a hymn book, as everyone seemed to think that someone else was doing the job!

**An effective Welcoming Team** requires a group of people who will work before, during, and after each service. It is preferable that the Welcomers are not also the people giving out the hymnbooks and notice-sheets, being free to focus totally on the needs of visitors. However, having two Teams – Welcomers and Sidespeople - on duty on any one Sunday demands too much of small congregations, so more often than not, the jobs are doubled up.

**If you are setting up a Team**, then the kind of qualities you are looking for in people are as follows:

- knowledge of the congregation (so that they know who is an old-timer).
- pastoral awareness and sensitivity; the capacity to know when to speak and when to keep silent.
- people skills; an ability to initiate and sustain conversation; someone who is naturally outgoing, sociable and relaxed.
- commitment and reliability. And not someone who has so many other tasks that s/he is constantly being bombarded about/distracted by them on Sundays and so drawn away from ‘being present to’ the newcomer.
- variety. Attempt to include as many different personalities as possible in your Welcoming Team. If it is comprised of only middle-aged males in suits, you will send a very definite signal. Depending on your church size, attempt to provide Welcomers in teams of two, with each partner as different as possible in age, gender, style, and length of membership. This will increase the chances that one of the team members will have something in common with the visitor.
- leadership. It is important to have one person to co-ordinate the Team, who will gather the members together on occasion through the year for ongoing training and mutual support, and organise the rotas.

**Identity badges** detailing the Welcomer’s role and name can be very useful for a Welcome Team. A badge can seem impersonal, but in an age where people are increasingly suspicious, it can be reassuring for the newcomer, who will be able to spot you easily at coffee afterwards, and also gives confidence to the Team member.

### **Responsibilities of a Welcome Team member**

**Before the service**, arrive at least thirty minutes before the service . Find a quiet place and pray with the others on the Team; this will reinforce your ministry of welcome and remind you of your purpose. Be organized and ready; check your surroundings. Tidy up the visitors' table and any information leaflets, check that any welcome sign has been placed outside the Church and that you are wearing your badge..

**As people arrive**, greet them. If you have a number of welcomers, do not intimidate the visitor by bunching around them effusively. No one likes to be approached by a crowd of strangers. And try to avoid getting into long conversations with your friends. After greeting (and giving books), suggest where they might like to sit, suggesting the rear of small churches, or halfway in larger ones, as they will still be close enough to feel a sense of participation, but be behind enough members to be able to copy whatever standing, sitting, or kneeling takes place. Make them feel at home. Explain where the toilets are and anything about the service you think they might need to know. Or else introduce them to a member of the congregation who can be alongside/near them during the service. *Taking them to their seat* is a courteous act, and is what supermarket assistants now do if you ask which aisle a certain product is in.

**When the service has begun**, wait until a few minutes before sitting down yourself to greet anyone who arrives late. During the service, be sensitive to the needs of anyone who is new and watch in case they leave early. If so, check if they are all right but do not intrude on their privacy.

**At the end of the service**, befriend any new people and take them for refreshments. Sensitively try to obtain contact details. Make a note of their name somewhere so you do not forget it. Try to introduce them to others whom you think they might get on with. Keep an eye on them in case those you have introduced them to leave them on their own. Ensure they have any relevant information or invitations either to next week's service, social events or nurture course. If you have got their contact details, pass them on to the Welcome Team Co-ordinator (who may arrange a home visit - see page 19).

**The following week**, even if you are not on duty, keep an eye out for them and welcome them, trying to introduce them either to the same person as last week, or to someone new. In the weeks that follow, try to make sure that they are invited to any social events/nurture course/specific events to welcome newcomers – offer to pick them up and take them, or arrange to meet them and go together - and that they are followed up by you or someone else if they do not appear on Sundays. If a newcomer does not make any significant personal friendships in the church in their first few weeks, they are unlikely to stay.



Discuss the responsibilities on the list on page 27 and consider whether they would work for your congregation. If not, what do you need to do differently? Who might it be good to involve? If you already have a Welcome Team, evaluate their practice using this grid.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WELCOME TEAM	Yes/Good 3	OK/Satisfactory 2	Could be better 1	No/Poor 0	Total Points
1. Do welcomers greet people outside or by the initial door?					
2. Do they appear smiling, confident and attentive?					
3. Do they have good ID?					
4. Do they have a reasonably small bundle of items to hand over?					
5. Do they ever escort people to seats?					
6. Do they introduce people to regular members initially <u>and</u> at coffee?					
7. Do they adjust to the mood of different people arriving?					
8. Do they know the congregation well enough to know whom to pass newcomers on to?					
9. Do they represent all ages and types of people at that service?					
					<b>SCORE OUT OF 27 =</b>

Jot down any ideas for improvements on the reverse of this sheet



Before moving on to the next section, make sure you have established how you are going to form (or improve your existing) Welcome Team. Section 5 of Bob Jackson's *Everybody Welcome: The Course Where Everybody Helps Grow their Church* is devoted to the training of Welcome Team members, and a copy is available from the

Mission and Ministry Library in the Diocesan Office. Use of the 'Listening' sections of the Pastoral Care course might be a useful training resource.

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### Further reading

***Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry***

Andrew Weeks Alban Institute Publication (1992)

Chapter 2 'The ministry of greeting'- preparation and procedure

***Everybody Welcome: The Course Where Everybody Helps Grow their Church***

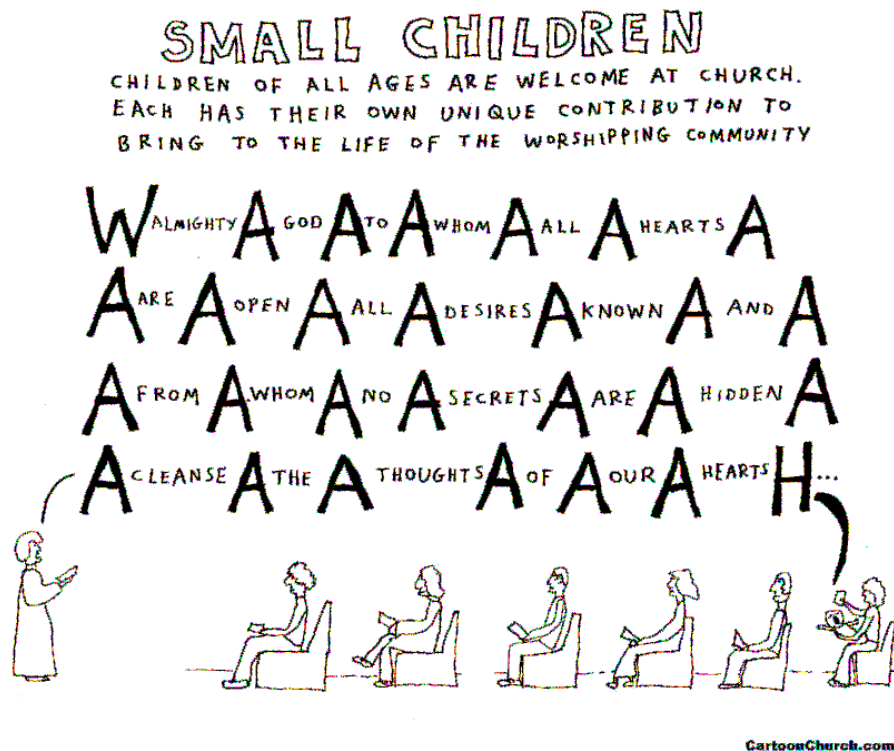
Bob Jackson Church House Publishing (2009)

Session 5 'Training a Welcome Team'

St Paul's and St George's Edinburgh

The Welcome Team's main aim is to help people, new and old, to connect with and feel valued and at home in the P's & G's church family. The team has an obvious "front of house" role from week to week in welcoming on arrival and guiding people to seats, but also has perhaps less visible roles in the one to one connections and interactions with people before and after services week to week, and in trying to encourage and champion the permeation of a culture of welcome throughout the whole church family. The team aims to show God's love and care for all people in small but tangible and practical ways, and is part of the "Loving People" strand of the strategy. Communication in terms of knowing about what is happening in the church – or at least connecting people with someone who does - is a key part of the Welcome Team's role.

## Section 4 Preparing to welcome children



One of the most frequent laments of congregations is “we have no children”, the reason given being either to do with the local demographic or the (perceived) greater magnetism of another church’s youth operation in the area. But scratch a little further and very often something else becomes apparent: an underlying lack of desire to change the *status quo* to accommodate children and their parents. Rona Orme in her recent book *Rural Children, Rural Church* put this starkly when she wrote:

*“The real battle for children being part of the church is not about finding workers to lead children’s groups or establishing more accessible worship. It is about changing the hearts and minds of long-term Christians who wish to maintain the present traditions to a point where they lose sight of the Church’s mission among the youngest and most vulnerable generation.”<sup>18</sup>*

Research has shown that congregations that have begun to have some success in work with children, their parents and young adults are those which have

- accepted the need for change
- been willing to put the needs of the children and their families before the needs and preferences of the rest of the congregation
- been willing to set up alternative worship services alongside the usual pattern, or to accept radical change to their services
- been willing to be generous with their resources, human and financial

<sup>18</sup> Rona Orme *Rural Children, Rural Church* CHP (2007), xi

If there is one theme that runs through this list it is that of 'dying to live', of 'giving something away' in order that new birth and growth may occur. Mission-Shaped Church put it like this

*If it is the nature of God's love to undertake (such) sacrifice, it must be also the nature of his Church. The Church is most true to itself when it gives itself up, in current cultural form, to be reformed among those who do not know God's Son. In each new context the Church must die to live.*<sup>19</sup>

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### Discuss the following questions

- 1. Do we genuinely welcome children as fellow disciples with much to give as well as to receive?**
- 2. Are we prepared to take risks with our time, property, worship and finances in order for children to hear the gospel?**
- 3. Are we prepared to change something we hold dear in order to welcome children, or are we prepared to accommodate them only in a manner, time or place that suits us?**

*Only then* list the other barriers – to do with space/property, the demography, personnel, finance etc – that may be hindering the development of your welcome to children.

- 4. If we genuinely have the will to engage in children's ministry (ie we have answered questions 1-3 in the affirmative), then what do we need to do about these other practical hindrances to enable this ministry to come to fruition?**
- 

Much has been written in recent years about how to 'do church' for children in new and exciting ways, concentrating on events rather than weekly classes and so on; here we simply refer you to those publications (see end of chapter). The intention of the following section is rather to suggest ways in which *traditional* forms of church might reinvigorate their welcome to, and work with, children, and direct you to materials that may sustain that work.

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<sup>19</sup> *Mission-Shaped Church* CHP 2004, 89

**1. Ensure** that your congregation is up-to-date with the SEC's Policy Statement and Code of Good Practice and Guidelines concerning the welfare of children and young people in the Church:

*The SEC recognises the special status of children and young people. Because of their vulnerability, children and young people will be awarded special protection. They are to be respected in their own right, created and loved by God. We therefore commit ourselves to take all steps within our power to keep children and young people safe from physical, sexual and emotional harm. Policy Statement General Synod (June 1998)*

Vestries should have adopted, minuted and implemented this statement and ensured that the Code of Good Practice is properly implemented by appointing an individual to act as Child Protection Co-ordinator. Even if there are currently no children attending church, *you need to have such a person in place* and ideally also two further volunteer crèche leaders/Sunday School leaders in readiness, all of whom have undergone the necessary Enhanced Disclosure Checks. (The Co-ordinator will have access to the application forms for 'new workers with children and young people, both voluntary and paid' and the forms for 'occasional volunteer helpers with children and young people').<sup>20</sup>

**2. Ensure** that the congregation is aware that the aims declared in the Policy Statement are the responsibility of *all* adult members of the Church and not just those who work directly with children and young people. The Vestry should bring the Statement and the identity of the Child Protection Co-ordinator to the notice of all members of the church, and all those who have access to children/young people should be informed of opportunities for further training to help them implement the Policy

**3. Identify** and set aside an area within the worshipping space for crèche-aged children, (preferably with a sight-line to the front of the church so that children can see the 'action') which has soft carpeting and a basket of various age-appropriate quiet toys and books. Make this area as attractive as you can; brightly coloured rugs and small chairs are available very cheaply from places like IKEA .

**4. Recognize** children as fellow disciples of Christ with something to give to the Church as well as to receive. This mind-set change has implications for everything that a church does. Sunday worship is for the entire Christian family. It is not a case of 'allowing them' (the children) to come in to *our* service, but of two parts of the congregation coming together after their own nurture, or Ministry of the Word. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that when the family of God gathers around the altar it is incomplete unless the children are present. It also means seeing that the church building is accessible to children by having a ramp and space for buggies, low chairs where appropriate, and the needs of children being included when discussing any changes to buildings.

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<sup>20</sup> For more information see *Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Church. Child Protection Handbook* . This and details of the Policy are available from the Child Protection Assistant Officer DaphneA@scotland.angican.org





**Keep in touch** with those children (and their families) who have been baptised in your congregation - but whom you have not seen in church since - by sending a card on the anniversary of Baptism; the Mothers' Union sells cards for this very purpose. Several congregations find that less active members delight in taking on such a task, keeping the list up-to-date and sending cards (and in some cases this has expanded beyond baptismal anniversaries to wedding anniversaries.)

Many churches decide to stop doing so after the child is five years old, particularly if the family has not



been seen back in church. To stop then is illogical, for that is just the age when a child may really appreciate the arrival of a special card. Until that age, the card is mainly for the parents. Churches serious about building relationships with children and their families will continue to send baptism anniversary cards until the child has become adult or even until the church loses contact with them.

Invite children who have been baptised in your church, and their parents, to an all-age Mothering Sunday Service. Grove Books have published a useful little booklet with ideas for such worship: Grove Book W 185 E. Coley (2005), also available as an e-book. Why not combine it with the activity morning described below?



### **Starting From Nothing**

Underriver had up to 45 children living in the village but there were rarely any children in church and the Sunday School had closed down. Then the PCC decided to hold an activity morning in the village hall on the Saturday before Mothering Sunday to link with a special family service the following day. Every child (5-11 years) was sent a personalised invitation. 30 children attended. Activities included cake-making, parachute games, a treasure hunt in the church and making banners and cards for the next morning. 18 children with their parents came to the following Sunday service.

*from Seeds in Holy Ground. A Workbook for Rural Churches ACORA (2005)*

**Sunday School reviewed:** You may be wishing to provide ongoing nurture for the children in your midst by running some form of Sunday School, but wondering how on earth to do this when some weeks there may be only one child in the congregation, or harder still, three whose ages range from four to twelve. The best resource to help you with this is Margaret Withers's booklet *Where Two or Three.....Help and Advice for Churches with Few or No Children*, produced by Church House Publishing price £4.99, (2004).

Lessons do not need to follow the didactic format of yesteryear. One of the most effective forms of Christian nurture and spiritual development is that of *Godly Play*, a non-coercive way of encouraging children to grow in faith through wondering questions and open-ended response. It is a variation of the Montessori method of education, developed in the United States by Episcopalian priest, author and teacher Dr Jerome Berryman.

A Godly Play 'lesson' adopts the established pattern of Christian worship. It begins with **welcome** and **gathering**; each participant is greeted at the door, and then individual and collective preparation occurs as everyone settles in a circle round the storyteller, sharing news and quietening down in expectation of the day's presentation. Next, **God's word** in the form of a story is presented as something to which a special kind of attention is paid by both adults and children alike - a mysterious gift rather than as narrative entertainment or platform for a teaching point. Time follows for **collective response** as the group of children and adults wonder together about the many meanings and resonances for them in the presentation. Then time is allowed for **individual response** and further discovery of meaning as the children each choose for themselves ways to work/play using a wide variety of art and craft materials, or the story materials themselves 'in their own way'. Typically this personal time ends with re-forming in community, and a **feast** (of juice and biscuits) is shared together to mark this period. The session ends with a word and or gesture of personal **blessing** for each child as they both leave behind and take with them something of their experiences.

Several congregations across Scotland are already using this method to nurture their younger members spiritually. It is a good method for a multigenerational group such as is often found in small congregations. For more information go to <http://www.godlyplay.org.uk/>

There is an active training group in Scotland, 'Godly Play Scotland', and trainings are organised here in the west from time to time. The Diocesan Children's Ministry Network can also assist you in setting up or training Godly Play leaders.

### **Making connections**

Many congregations say that they have 'no existing links with children' and that it is 'impossible to encourage young families to come to church', but in reality it is a very rare church that has absolutely no such links at all. Scratch beneath the surface and connections emerge; a Grandmother helps a neighbour out once a week by acting as an unofficial childminder to her young son whom she takes to a Mother's and Toddlers' group; someone mentions that she acts as a Brown Owl in a nearby Brownie Pack; someone else's daughter teaches recorder at a local primary school ..... these are all connections that have surfaced in discussion within charges that said they had 'no possible way of connecting with children'. (For more help with 'making connections', see the 'Audit of Children and the Community' in *Where Are The Children? Evangelism Beyond Sunday Morning* Margaret Withers Bible Reading Fellowship (2005) 54-55).

So what could they have done to capitalise on those links? Perhaps invited the recorder consort to play at an Advent/Christmas Carol or Christingle service one year. Or offered to host the annual Thinking Day service in the church. Or organised a Bouncy Castle morning in the church grounds for the Mothers' and Toddlers' group. Or offered the church hall for a fundraising coffee morning for any of the three 'agencies', Toddler Group, Brownies, Primary School. With imagination, the list is endless.

**Making connections (i) seeing the Occasional Offices as missionary opportunities:** Children are often present at Baptisms, Weddings and, less often, Funerals. It may be a rare, or even first, visit to church for a service. The welcome and experience they receive may have far-reaching consequences. Some churches may feel that there is little point in reaching out to visiting children whom they will probably never see again, but others are happy to sow seeds that other churches may be privileged to reap.

If a child comes with her parents to a Baptism, this may be the first time she has entered a church. The service can be a deeply excluding experience: a strange building with a strange ceremony in unfamiliar language. It is vital for worship leaders to be inclusive in their speaking and to name the children if close family are named in the prayers. It is equally important to offer the same welcome and facilities as would be on hand on Sunday mornings. Children can be invited to stand near to the font so they can see what is happening and to hold the lighted candle if old enough. If the service was a good experience that makes them feel positive about the Church, they may ask their parents to let them return or to go to another church near their homes.

Provide an activity sheet about baptism or marriage, with things to do such as a word search, a relevant picture to colour in, a memory verse, and so on. Once these have been created, fresh copies can be produced for each occasion. Make sure that there are plentiful supplies of colouring pens that work for older children, and thick crayons for the youngest, at the back of the church. Provide an activity bag, which could include sheets to colour, and relevant books, such as My Baptism Book, or the Baptism Cube

*Ash Church is a medieval building with minimal facilities, but there are a number of weddings, which invariably include young children. As part of the welcome before the arrival of the bride (as well as the usual notices about confetti and collections), the Rector says that the policy is that nobody takes children out of Ash Church. If they make a noise, he speaks louder! Then he indicates that toys and books are available, and invites the children to use them. This simple notice has the effect of relaxing the parents, ensuring that the children are welcomed as members of the gathering on a par with the adults and providing for their needs should they become restless. It does not prevent children being taken out of church, but sends a positive message about encouraging them to remain for the service and feel at home.*

*adapted from Mission–Shaped Children; Moving Towards a Child-centred Church*

Provide a reflective space for children to withdraw to during the service. Make sure that it is pointed out in any welcoming remarks. Beanbags or large cushions are good for children of all sizes, but their carer might prefer a proper chair if they are dressed for a family celebration. Provide a range of Bible picture books and storybooks for all ages. Soft toys to cuddle would also be a good idea, but avoid anything that will make a noise as it is played with or dropped. These toys should be as new, clean and attractive as possible.

If you have a Church Hall, seek to develop relationships with the groups that use it. The majority of leaders welcome links with the church. When you have built up a relationship, you will know the best way forward. It may be by offering a tiny service at the parent and toddler group or pre-school or inviting them to a Crib Service on Christmas Eve. With uniformed organizations, the approach is similar. With groups that have less obvious entrées, it is a case of making it known that the church is available at times of need and inviting the groups to take part in church events, giving a dancing display or a karate demonstration, for example.

### **Making connections (ii) connecting with a local school**

The benefits of inviting a class from a local school to your church are immeasurable. It has been proven that **many children subsequently bring their families to visit the churches they had visited with their classmates**, knowing that they would be welcomed warmly. Could you invite a class to come for a lesson - it doesn't just have to be about RE as the list on page 40 makes clear - or offer to let them hold their Carol Service there? One of the most imaginative ways of connecting with a local school seen by the writer was that of a congregation inviting the local Primary 7 Leavers to come to a ceremony in their church building – a significant time of transition or 'rite of passage' in a child's life (especially in rural areas where the next stage of education will mean probably mean the teenager being less rooted in the local community). Each child had decorated a stone with their Christian names and laid them by the font; these children were then prayed for by the congregation in subsequent weeks.

Divine Inspiration offers the following guidelines when thinking about inviting a class to your church:



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*Inviting school children into our church buildings to share our story is a positive move. Younger people, who may not have hands-on experience of heritage buildings before, will often be overwhelmed by the 'wow factor' that your church can offer, and a school visit can be a rewarding exercise for everyone involved – children, teachers, helpers, parents and church volunteers.. Our church buildings offer huge potential to schools in terms of resources and space. Teachers like the idea of 'Learning outside the Classroom' and offering their pupils a different teaching environment. In the present economy, making trips to places of interest on the doorstep can seem like a good option. The most expensive costs associated with school trips tend to be travel and entrance fees, both of which can be taken out of the equation if the school making the visit is only a walking distance away and the church doesn't make a charge for entry!*

### **Working out your 'offer'**

Ask yourselves some simple questions:

- Do we have a nominated person in our congregation – who may or may not have experience in dealing with young children but who is CRB cleared – who is willing to act as a facilitator between church and school?
- What stories have we got to share with young people?

- *Is it our building or our churchyard that may be most useful and valuable to a teacher as a learning resource?*
- *How many children can we safely accommodate at a time?*
- *Is our Health and Safety Policy and CRB Policy easy to share electronically? Do we know and understand these documents and what they mean?*

### ***Making the Offer***

*Once you have these things down on paper you can make an approach to your local school. They may already make regular visits to your building and the children may already be familiar with the church, the clergy and the way you do things, but if this 'relationship' doesn't exist invite the teachers into the building so they can see for themselves the potential that you have for sharing your space and resources.*

*Teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2 – that's Infant and Junior in old money! – will plan their classroom activity well in advance, so don't expect a visit to take place immediately. Have ideas ready for a teacher to look at to get the ball rolling. If you spend some time looking at your building with fresh eyes you'll see all kinds of possibilities. Teachers will see opportunities also so this is where your partnership working really begins. Teachers will be looking for 'cross curricular' value in what ever they decide to deliver, so building data collection, for example, into activities will add value to whatever they decide to focus on.*

### ***Preparing for the visit***

*Make sure that the building is tidy, safe and warm, and that you are clear about agreed protocol for dealing with emergencies on site. The school will almost certainly provide all the required assistance in terms of staff and supervision of the children. Be ready to allow the children freedom to explore by removing anything that could be accidentally damaged.*

*Welcome the children and introduce, in simple terms, the story of the church and some of its history. Make sure that the person who does this is engaging and isn't tempted to use too many dates, especially if the children are very young. Don't presume that a child will be interested in the things you are interested in! Many will not have visited a church before and will have no clue, unless they have had preparation in the classroom, about your building and what it's for. Make sure that you know how much the children have been told about their visit to your church beforehand. You could also offer to visit the children in their classroom beforehand to answer any questions they or their teacher might have about their visit to your church.*

## Ideas for Learning

<b>Geography and Mapping</b>	<i>Your church's place in the landscape, its local history and the built environment around it.</i>
<b>Maths</b>	<i>The memorials inside and outside the building will give a teacher plenty of opportunities to explore maths topics using dates and ages.</i>
<b>History</b>	<i>Encourage the children to be church detectives, following clues, noticing the symbol and observing the use of materials and styles of architecture. Preparation of timelines can be an activity to illustrate this.</i>
<b>Citizenship</b>	<i>Simple activities for very young children based on caring for old and precious things e.g. cleaning brasses or dusting. Older children may debate why the church building is such an important place to the community, why it is still functioning as a place of worship and what it means to those who worship.</i>
<b>IT</b>	<i>Developing a map or trail for visitors to use. Collecting data and turning this, through the use of computer software, into a useful tool for navigation or a record of the history of the church.</i>
<b>Creative Writing</b>	<i>Allowing the children to explore the sensory elements of your building, what it feels like, smells like, how the light works in the church in the stained glass, the feel of the materials. Churches can be catalysts for emotional responses.</i>
<b>Story Telling</b>	<i>Exploring the stories in the stones and memorials. What kinds of people worshipped here? The important and the ordinary, the rich and the poor. How did the war affect the community? Are there any interesting events that are recorded in church?</i>
<b>Art and Design</b>	<i>The use of patterns and shapes in the building and in the furnishings. How is design linked to function. If you were designing a church now what might you do differently!</i>
<b>Science and Data Collection</b>	<i>Your churchyard has a diversity of wildlife to explore and collate. The churchyard species could be mapped and the details turned into a resource for visitors to use.</i>



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Before you move onto the last session, ask yourselves these questions:

- Do we have contact with children beyond Sunday morning and what more might be done to engage with them?
- Is there a way in which we could offer more or adapt our present services in order to engage with children, while maintaining our traditions?
- Are our special services/Occasional Offices seen as opportunities for mission?
- Is the church building the best place for all our services? Would another venue serve different people?
- Has this section identified any gaps in our ministry among children? What do we now plan to do differently? List those plans here.

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### Further reading

*Not Just Sunday; Setting up and Running Mid-week Clubs for Children* Margaret Withers CHP (2002)

*Where are the Children? Evangelism Beyond Sunday Morning* Margaret Withers Bible Reading Fellowship (2005)

*Rural Children, Rural Church; Mission opportunities in the Countryside* Rona Orme CHP (2007)

*Mission-Shaped Children; Moving Towards a Child-Centred Church* Margaret Withers CHP (2006) especially Chapter 5

*Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* Rebecca Nye CHP (2009)

### School visits

Writing a risk assessment for your church – tips from the Health and Safety Executive

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/fivesteps.htm>

*Be a Church Detective: A Young Person's Guide to Old Churches* Clive Fewins and Taffy Davies Canterbury (2005)

## Section 5 Encouraging visitors on a spiritual journey



### THE CHURCH KITCHEN

CartoonChurch.com

Our ancient churches are for us a part of the Gospel message. They demonstrate the faithfulness of previous generations, they make theological statements in their very architecture, they offer a chance of interpreting the faith anew in our own time. We suggest that every (Vestry) looks with fresh hope at their own church buildings with the question: "What does our church say to those who come to, and through, its door?" So wrote the Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas in 1990, and it is a sentiment no less applicable north of the Border. Churches are places that people choose to visit

- as part of a day out or a holiday
- as part of a local or family history quest
- out of historical or architectural interest
- on an unpremeditated basis, a spur-or-the-moment decision when in the vicinity

Some estimates by tourist organisations indicate that more people visit churches than all other tourist attractions put together; churches, after all, are "signposts of our heritage, points where you can touch history, as well as places of visual and spiritual significance".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 'Welcome, worship and tourism', Andrew Duff in *God's Own Country* Rural Strategy Team C of S (2007), 1

In this final section, we look at the work of welcome that your church *building* offers, and ways of working with those assets so that visitors become seekers and tourists, pilgrims. Our church buildings are visible signs of God's living presence in the heart of our communities, and what is found within those open doors should speak loudly and clearly of God's love for all, beguiling people to want to know more about the community who worships therein and the God they serve.

**Finding the church in the first place:** visitors/tourists first have to know about and *find* your church.



Once again you need to ask the same kind of questions you asked in the first section about publicity:

- **how are our service times advertised? In the local press? Are the service times displayed in the local B and B's and hotels?**
  - **is the church answer-phone message welcoming, audible and up-to-date?**
  - **is the church web-site current?**
  - **does the church have a not-too-dilapidated Episcopal Church sign up in a visible position?**
  - **is there a municipal signpost/street sign?**
  - **is the notice-board outside attractive and tidy?**
  - **can you read it in the dark?**
  - **are the contact details and service times displayed correct and up-to-date?**
  - **is it clear how to get into the church?**
  - **is it accessible for all comers?**
- 

If you have a Tourist Information Centre near you, take advantage of the services they offer - for free. Provide them with a supply of fliers about your church. The best size for display in standard leaflet racks is  $\frac{1}{3}$  x A4. Alternatively, supply them with a nicely designed poster which contains all the information a visitor would need to know, e.g. opening times, features of interest, location. It is a good idea to laminate this poster so it remains on show in good condition throughout the season. If you get to know the staff well, they will then be more likely to suggest a visit to your church when people ask them what there is to see and do in the area. Give them a copy of your parish magazine and also service details for each month. Visitors do ask for church service information when they visit Tourist Information Centres.

It is also worth considering putting fliers into any places in your locality where visitors are likely to see them: e.g. Bed and Breakfast providers, hotels and guest houses, accommodation providers, caravan sites, pubs, post offices, tea rooms, craft shops, etc. In the experience of the author (who has spent a great deal of time in B and Bs across Scotland), details of SEC services are often missing from the pile of information leaflets available in such establishments.

### **To be or not to be – open?**

Churches were built for worship and to give glory to God. It is thus hard to justify a locked church. The Diocese of Carlisle states:

*we should always be prepared to be fully accessible in sharing our faith, our worship, and our beautiful church buildings. Developing a ministry of welcome is a positive way of enacting the Parable of the Sower. An open church can provide the fertile soil into which good seed can be sown. It is God who will reap the harvest, but can we help Him in the task?<sup>23</sup>*

The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group states in its 'Guidance Notes on Church Security' that a church should be left open during the day. It is now recognised, and proven statistically, that an open church is safer than one that is closed. The presence of legitimate visitors does deter any criminal intent.



- **Is your church building open to the public at times other than Sunday worship?**
- **If not, can you think of specific times when it might be opened during the week – especially perhaps in the summer months?**
- **If security is an issue, can you think of ways of enabling it to be manned while open? Perhaps whilst people are in for cleaning duties, or for one morning a week.**
- **Look objectively at your church building. What could be easily stolen? Have you a photograph and detailed description of your valuable items? Are they marked so that the police can return it to you if they recover them?**

*The Places of Worship Security Manual* referenced at the end of this section is a useful resource, written as it is by a former police officer who now serves as a Cathedral Verger. 'National Churchwatch' is a multi-faith organisation which is dedicated to reducing crime in places of worship by offering specialised [www.nationalchurchwatch.com](http://www.nationalchurchwatch.com) Divine Inspiration offers a downloadable resource on safety and security issues: *Toolkit 3: Opening your Church with Confidence* (see references at end of section).

<sup>23</sup> *Offering a Ministry of Welcome in Your Church: Toolkit of resources and best practice* Diocese of Carlisle (2006), 13

## Advertising

If you *do* decide to open your church to visitors, then think of how to advertise the fact. Place an A-board outside the church detailing the opening times or whenever the church is open - like the one shown here outside St Magnus Lerwick; these are eye-catching and easily transportable. Or else hang a high-quality banner made of weatherproof material on your railings if the church building has a frontage along a roadside. And have an *open door* – ‘*an open door into a church looks welcoming and may intrigue passers-by to investigate*’.<sup>24</sup> The little church of St Bride’s Onich on the north side of Ballachulish Bridge is well known for having an open door and attracting many visitors as a result.



## The journey of discovery (i): first impressions

In a survey of 100 individuals conducted by Professor Myra Shackley, (Centre for Tourism and Visitor Management Nottingham Trent University), the ten most important factors affecting visitors to church buildings were as follows:

welcome (54%)	smell (18%)
holiness (24%)	architecture (15%)
church loved and used (23%)	music (14%)
notice boards and information (23%)	flowers (12%)
temperature (21%)	light (12%)



**Using all your senses, share what first impressions you reckon a visitor would receive on entering your church. Be honest.**

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Duff ‘Welcome, Worship and Tourism’ in *God’s own Country A practical resource for rural churches* Rural Strategy Team Church of Scotland, (2007) 3

The Revd Dan Gafvert offers the following lists of good and bad practice:

#### **Good Practice**

'Open' or 'Welcome' signs at the gate  
'Welcome' on entrance door or in the porch  
Flowers in the porch – can be very simple  
Well-presented, easily visible, welcome literature and guides  
Sensor lighting as door opens  
Quiet music playing - very much a matter of taste  
Means of making a free cup of tea/coffee  
'Thank you for visiting' on the exit door  
'Peace be with you' (or similar) on back of an external notice board  
Dog bowl of water outside the door

#### **Bad Practice**

Closed church with no indication of how to gain access  
Lots of 'keep off' / 'do not' signs in church  
Dark, dingy and dusty building  
Old and faded literature / notices  
'Welcome' signs lost in a welter of parish notices  
Too many 'Welcome' notices are fussy and lack integrity  
Visitors' literature lost among magazines and vestry minutes  
Leaflets, specifically for visitors, which contain church jargon words  
Noisily talkative stewards or clergy or church members  
Too pushy stewards  
Instant requests for money immediately inside the door.

The important point, he maintains, is that the church is seen to be expecting visitors and has put some thought and effort into making them feel wanted and welcome.

Pay attention to lighting, for instance. Entering a dark, gloomy church interior is not going to be very welcoming. If your church does not have good natural daylight, then some sort of lighting needs to be considered, perhaps on time switches or using low power or long-life bulbs. At one church, a light is activated on entry into the building, within the glazed internal porch. This is connected to a time switch and goes out after about a minute. On entering the main body of the church, a small spotlight is positioned to light up the "Welcome" table. From the point of view of security, it has been proved beyond doubt that a lit church deters people with questionable intents. For a visitor to enter a church with some lighting provision is both reassuring and welcoming.

Providing water - or even refreshments if feasible - for visitors is always a welcoming sign, as the two case studies in the following text boxes demonstrate

At the end of 2001 and beginning of 2002 St Magnus Shetland undertook the Foundation Phase of the Mission 21 programme '*Making your church more inviting*'. Two of the resultant goals were 'outreach' and 'welcome'.

Members of the Co-ordinating Group had noted that one Tour Company arranged walking tours around Lerwick that included St Magnus Church. Could the church be more welcoming to the tour participants and offer refreshments in the church hall? This was put to the owner of the company and in May 2004 'Teas at St Magnus' was born. A welcome sign was displayed outside the church and a further sign on the inside door welcoming visitors in many languages.

For the last 4 years, from the beginning of May to the end of September, on one morning each week, volunteers from St Magnus Church have enjoyed welcoming visitors to both church and hall and providing warm drinks along with home bakes. Chatting with the walkers relaxing in the hall after their walk is always enjoyable for all concerned and on many occasions informative. In 2007 alone St Magnus welcomed many visitors from 22 nations in addition to local residents.

Although hospitality is provided free of charge, recipients have been generous in contributing to the donation boxes in church and hall and to the ongoing fundraising to facilitate very necessary major repairs to the 144 year old church building. St Magnus prides itself in providing a warm welcome to visitors from near and far.

*Country Way in Rural Britain Winter 2008 Issue 47*

Specially welcome in the recent hot weather has been the thoughtfulness of St Peters, Parwich, in Derby diocese. For some months now, the church has been making free bottles of water available to visitors. A few bottles are always left on a table at the back and visitors are invited to take one. But they are also invited, if they wish, to make a donation towards the work of Pump Aid, which provides wells for villages in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. According to the visitors book, those helping themselves to the water have been very appreciative. Nearly all of them have left a donation in thanks.

*The Church Times 7482, 4th August 2006*

### **Enriching the visitor experience**

Many visitors are interested in finding out about the church and its environs. A friendly steward certainly helps, perhaps offering a leaflet guide and then leaving the visitor to look around, and ready to answer questions if approached.

Start with a simple free leaflet welcoming visitors to the church, summarising its key points of interest and emphasising that this is a living Christian community. In time, prepare a short inexpensive guide to the church and its history. Make sure it is well presented and interesting to the uninitiated. By using a floor plan, you can help those who may not have been into a church before to understand the lay-out and the terms used to describe areas in the church - like Nave and Chancel - but keep it simple. Don't complicate it unnecessarily with too much text. You can use a numbering system on a floor-plan and this will encourage visitors to move around in your space rather than lurking just inside the door.

*Divine Inspiration* offers a very useful downloadable guide to writing such leaflets '*Toolkit 2:Producing Better Resources for Visitors to your Church*' (see references at end of section)

### **The journey of discovery (ii): helping tourists become pilgrims**

It is right that we should seek to impress and inspire visitors with the fascinating history and beautiful architecture of our churches, but is also important that we should seek to engage them in the faith for which those churches were built. Dan writes: '*When a regular worshipper enters a church building, it feels sacred instantly because it is associated with personal memories of worship and prayer and significant spiritual moments. This will not be so for many visitors. Some churches are particularly blessed in their setting, architecture and artefacts; even the most secular of tourists are likely to experience these as 'special' places, producing a sense of awe and wonder and peace.*



#### **Ask yourselves**

- **How does our church building differ from other ancient and beautiful places? In what ways does it offer an explicitly spiritual experience?**
  - **How might we convey that even more immediately to visitors?**
-



Dan offers the following lists of good and bad practice:

### Good Practice

A simple prayer at the door, clearly displayed

Quietness and simplicity

A quiet chapel/corner with icons, candles or carvings as a focus

Easily visible and attractive prayer cards/leaflets, books of meditations, bibles – in pews and significant spots.

Candles available to light, with appropriate prayers nearby.

Prayer request books, boards or trees, with an explanation of how the prayers will be included in the church's worship.

Leaflet describing a reflective prayer walk around the church

Prayer pools in which a pebble can be immersed as a sign of God's forgiveness

### Bad Practice

Tatty prayer hidden among notices at the entrance

Too much noise and rushing around by 'regulars'

Clutter of old furniture, papers and tools

Quiet chapel which is bleak and unattractive and lacking a focus

Prayer cards mixed up with gift-aid envelopes on pews

Candle stands covered with old grease

Quiet place, candle stand and prayer requests in different parts of the church. They are more helpful when near each other

No pens or paper by the Prayer Board

And he concludes: 'quietness, rich symbolism and appropriate well-thought out words are the best helps to prayer and spiritual reflection, for believer and unbeliever alike'.

Cathedrals find that candle-stands are used continually every day by those wishing to stop awhile and pray. Many provide prayer cards



which enable people to leave a petition and also to take a prayer away with them for their own use – as here from Ely Cathedral. It is easy to make similar ones for your own context.

## ELY CATHEDRAL



If there is someone or something you would **like us to pray for** in the Cathedral, please write your request on the tear off slip below and place it on the board. Prayers will normally be offered at Evensong. Please write only the first or Christian names of any people you mention by name.

### A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we commit ourselves, those who are dear to us, and all who are in need to your care this day. Guard us, guide us and keep us in your love, which you show us in Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*Please take this portion with you*

### Examples of good practice from the Scottish Episcopal Church

Even the smallest of churches can help tourists become pilgrims. If you are daunted by the prospect, then take heart from the experience of little All Saints, Inveraray, in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles. A tiny congregation, which sees only a handful of congregants gathered for worship on those Sundays when they meet, but gathered in a building that also sees thousands of visitors per year walking through it because it has a world famous belltower and working bells. So little All Saints asked itself; how can we connect with these tourists and help them to become pilgrims? They thought about their strengths – they didn't let their numbers dismay them, nor the fact that those who attend worship do not live locally, but focussed on the fact that they are a *praying community*, and so hit upon the idea of setting up a Prayer Tree in the church. Lay Chaplain Stella Collyer tells the story:

*'We put the tree on a pedestal alongside the church information table, provided a basket of old-style luggage labels and invited visitors to leave a prayer request hanging on the tree. One morning each week, we held a specific Prayer Request service, when all new prayers would be prayed. To our surprise, the idea blossomed, our tree sprouting labels; 400 the first year and increasing steadily ever since. Last season we had so many labels that the tree began to collapse. We stripped them off, placing them in a basket on the altar. The tree soon began filling again, until we had just six labels left from a box of 1,000'.*

*Country Way Winter 2008*



A similar Prayer Tree was created by the little congregation of St Moluag on the Isle of Lewis (below left).



Other mechanisms for encouraging tourists to pray include Post-It notes stuck on a board or prayer cards which can be placed in a sealed box. Whichever method you use, do make sure that a notice tells people when and how these prayers will be prayed; this encourages people to 'tune in' at that particular time, something which the All Saints experience shows has proved to be a

source of healing. It is also good to have a custom-made 'prayer for visitors' displayed publicly, with a message stating that the congregation regularly prays this for all visitors.

## The journey of discovery (iii): ways of showing that the building is home to a living Christian community

### Good Practice

Well-kept churchyard  
 Well ordered and up-to-date notice boards  
 Photos of Vestry members, congregational events  
 Well-presented displays of current children's work  
 Children's corner which is attractive and looks well-used  
 Parish magazines which are not just about 'church' events  
 Mission Statement on display  
 Publicity for varied kinds of social events, church and community  
 Opportunities for the congregation to learn more about their faith  
 Information about charities / voluntary organisations / 'help' / agencies  
 Signs of working with other churches and the local community  
 Up-to-date displays about Mission links  
 Fair Trade displays  
 Loose-leaf ring binders recording recent flower festivals, exhibitions, details of charities supported.



Ask the congregation what they believe about God and the church. Print the results artistically and imaginatively and display on a board near the font – ***'This is our faith'***

Create displays at Christmas / Easter about the meaning of these Festivals

Display signs beside the font, pulpit, altar etc. describing their purpose, without using technical religious language – add good photographs

*Diocese of Newcastle*

### Bad Practice

Yellowing notices curling at the edges, one on top of the other  
 Old photographs  
 No evidence that anything happens except Sunday Services  
 Children's Corner with decade-old books  
 No evidence of connections with the surrounding community  
 No evidence of concern for the needs of the wider world

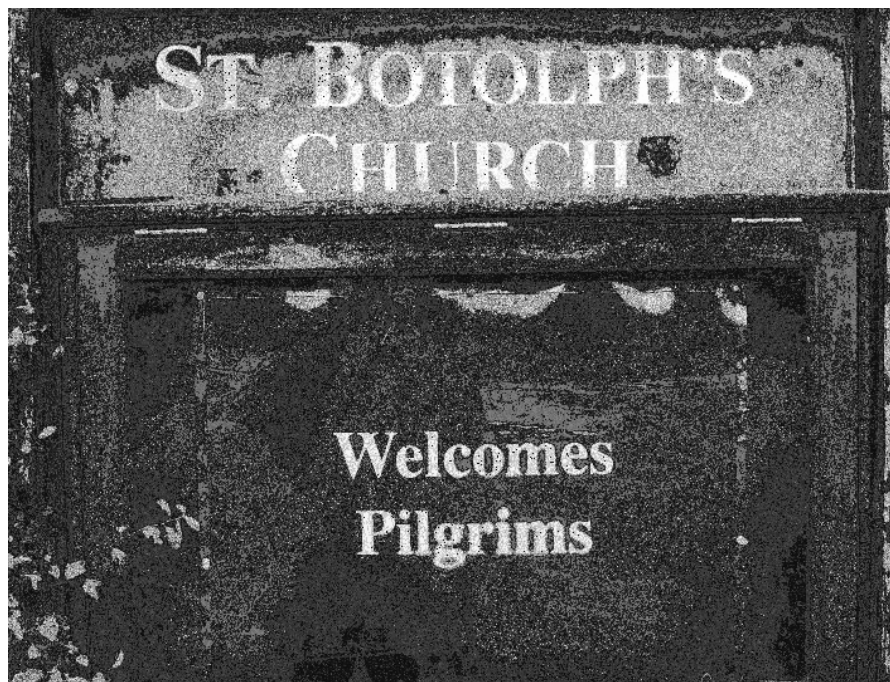
**Every church can convey three important messages to those who visit it**

- (i) The people of this place are glad you are here. This place is for you.
- (ii) This is not just a beautiful old building,. It is a *sacred* space; however you may understand that word 'sacred'.
- (iii) This church is alive, loved and used regularly by people who are committed to following the way of Christ



**Before finishing, ask yourselves if you have done all you can to ensure your church conveys those three messages:**

- **Would visitors feel they are welcome?**
- **Would strangers sense that your church is a well-loved place of special significance?**
- **Does it say something understandable about faith to someone largely ignorant of Christianity?**
- **What do you need to do now to make the experience as enriching as possible for future visitors?**



## Further reading

(i) Useful websites and downloadable resources

***Offering a Ministry of Welcome in Your Church. Toolkit of resources and best practice for churches in the Diocese of Carlisle***

Carlisle Diocese (2006)

<http://www.carlisediocese.org.uk/support/tourism>

***Divine Inspiration's toolkit***

<http://www.divine-inspiration.org.uk/resources/toolkit>

Diocese of Coventry

A series of seven worksheets encompassing all aspects of opening churches to the public

***You are Welcome***

<http://www.stdavidsdiocese.org.uk/tourism/resources/>

Diocese of St David's toolkit

***The Churches Tourism Association***

<http://www.churchestourismassociation.info/>

Resources available for download from their Document Library, 'Resources for Churches' section

***Sacred Scotland***

<http://www.sacredscotland.org.uk/>

The website of Scotland's Churches Scheme.

(ii) Books

***God's own Country A practical resource for rural churches***

Rural Strategy Team Church of Scotland, (2007)

***Rural Visitors. A parish workbook for welcoming visitors to the country church*** Leslie Francis and Jeremy Martineau ACORA Publishing (2001)

***Safe and Sound? A Guide to Church Security*** Church House Publishing for the Council for the Care of Churches (1996)

***Places of Worship Security Manual*** Nick Tolson Berkswell Publishing Co Ltd (2002)

***Open for You*** Paul Bond Canterbury Press Norwich (2006)

***The Church Explorer's Handbook. A guide to looking at churches and their contents*** Clive Fewins Canterbury Press Norwich (2005)

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