

# Welcome to our church!

## 1, Why does welcoming matter?

Whenever a new person turns up (or returns) to your church it's a big moment and, in one way or another, there is probably a 'story' behind them coming...

- Perhaps they've started to ask questions about God and are looking for answers (when this happens there is usually a big 'life event' somewhere in the background).
- Perhaps they are new in town, or..
- Perhaps they've been invited by a friend

In any of these scenarios they are **probably nervous** and there is probably quite a lot 'hanging' on this first visit.

A good welcome **and** a **welcoming environment** can make all the difference. To achieve this there are usually two components -

- i. A great welcome team
- ii. A welcoming church

**Question** – Why is being welcoming an important of our lives as Christians?

## 2, What is a welcome team?

A good welcome team...

- Looks out for new (or newish) people
- Greets peoples, remember their names and connects to them on future visits
- Takes responsibility for creating a welcoming environment.
- Follows them up over the coming weeks (*informally* – by looking out for them on following Sunday or, in some churches, *formally*, perhaps by sending out a welcome email, a welcome pack or inviting them to a welcome event).

Being a good *welcomer* is just like being a **good host** at a party or social event – good hosts want everyone to feel comfortable & cared for, to answer any questions and provide any help so that the visitor has a really positive time

How a welcome team operates will vary from place to place but it can include..

- Praying before the service
- Setting up banners & checking the environment is pleasant
- Greeting people on the door or running a welcome table
- Helping people find a seat, or showing a family to the kidswork
- Chatting with people before the service and introducing them to others
- Explaining what's on that morning
- Following people up after the service.



**Question** – Imagine you’ve started a new job or joined a new club & have been invited to a party or event. What would you be **nervous** about? What would help you relax & **feel welcome**?

### 3, Who can be on a welcome team?

Welcoming people well is a bit of a skill but is within the reach of all of us. **Great welcomers** are..

- Enthusiastic
- Care about new people
- Thoughtful (but don’t over do it)
- Inclusive and reach out to everyone (not just the people most like them!)
- Work as part of a team

The best welcome teams are made up of a mix of people – they can involve young and old people. By having a mix it sends a message that *this is the sort of church where all sorts of people can find a home.*

**But what about the churches which don’t have much of a mix of people?** Don’t worry – that’s absolutely fine! The key thing is that we are **warm, kind and affirming.**

Bishop Sandy Millar noted – *‘People come to church for lots of reasons but stay for one – they make friends’*

**Question** - What are some of the other things that make for a good welcome or for a good welcome? And, what are the things that might be off putting or unhelpful?

### 4, Creating a welcoming environment

Creating the right environment matters. Whilst we can’t re-order the building over night, we can pick up rubbish from the steps, tidy the welcome desk/stand, and turn the lights and heating on and perhaps even have some nice background music.

For families with babies we can help people up the steps, we can hold a door for an older person, carry a big or even just smile – all of this makes a difference.

**Question** – Think about your church entrance – what sort of impression of the church does it make? What are the simple things we could do that the people from our area might find helpful if they turned up next Sunday?

#### Some things to watch...

- Don’t be so preoccupied with doing welcome ‘jobs’ that you ignore the guests – give them your attention. Where possible any jobs should be finished 20 minutes before the service
- New people normally arrive early – be ready to welcome them. If they are by themselves invite them to a good seat and introduce them to someone else.
- Have a polo!( Especially if you’ve been out for a curry the previous evening!)
- Review your notice sheet/booklets etc. Tatty materials give the impression that the church doesn’t care very much about its congregation
- Be willing to refresh your entrance area. Get rid of old newsletters, out of date photos
- Materials like *Why Jesus* (a booklet that explains the Christian faith in ‘ordinary’ English) or a contemporary edition of one of the gospels can be really useful to give to a visitor, especially if they are new to church.
- Don’t get absorbed in conversations with the existing congregation (they already have lots of people to talk to – our visitors don’t!).
- Be gracious! If a visitor is nervous they might be apprehensive or not be very chatty – try to think the best
- Be prayerful.

## 5, Activities for a welcome team training session

### 1, Ice breakers

- **A great welcome.** Think of restaurants, cafes, a hotel or an event you've been to. Where have you been welcomed really well? What makes the difference between a positive and a negative experience? Discuss in 2's and feedback to the group
- **What impression?** Using p.2 of the guide from Diocese of Sheffield ask the group what impression these notice boards/etc would give a visitor? What are the physical things that create a positive impression and are helpful for a guest?

### 2, Exploring some scenarios

Listed below are a series of different people who might turn up at your church next Sunday! Split the group up and give each pair/group a scenario to discuss together and then feedback their thoughts to the whole group.

Imagine...

- How would the person feel about coming to church?
- What the bible would say about how we should treat this person?
- What does it look like to welcome this person really well?
- What would our church naturally do well? What would it need help to do?

*Artan* is a young man from Iran who has been in the country a few months. He grew up in a Muslim family but is keen to find out about Christianity. He has never been to church. He speaks basic English, works in a Barbers and has an extensive collection of tatoos down his right arm. He deeply misses his family but cannot go home.

*Louise* hasn't been to church since her divorce 20 years ago. She sometimes says she 'was never a very good Christian'. She smokes and swears a bit whenever she is nervous. She has 3 kids, a wicked sense of humour and cares deeply about social justice.

*Martin* is an autistic, single 30 year old man who lives with his dad and has recently moved into the area. He is geeky, kind, eager to serve, loves history but struggles with new people and places. He has grown up in church.

*Bella and Angus* are two local teenagers from the local 6<sup>th</sup> form college who are grieving the death of a friend and are coming to church for the first time ever looking for answers and to pray.

*Big John* is the noisy, rugby playing taxi driver husband to Anna. Many of Anna's friends have prayed for John for years. He has finally agreed to come to church this Sunday for his daughter's confirmation.

*Malc* is a 70-something Geordie bloke and recently bereaved. Church was his wife's 'thing' but he is coming next Sunday because it mattered to her and because he's lonely. Coming is not easy on lots of levels.

### Further resources

- The *Diocese of Sheffield* have produced a brilliant guide to welcoming people to church which you can download here: [https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/UserFiles/File/Parish\\_Support/Welcome\\_event/4\\_Mark\\_Cockayne.pdf](https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/UserFiles/File/Parish_Support/Welcome_event/4_Mark_Cockayne.pdf)
- *Grow Church* have produced a article covering their '**top 7 tips**' to being a welcoming church here at: <https://growchurch.net/welcome-team-5-common-sense-church-greeting-tips>
- 'Everybody Welcome' is a 6 week DVD based course written by *Bob Jackson* which works well for welcome teams or housegroups. Find out more at: [www.chpublishing.co.uk/features/everybody-welcome](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/features/everybody-welcome)