

Invitation and Welcome for Mission



INVITATION AND WELCOME FOR MISSION

This booklet is designed to help you think about how your church can flourish by creating a 'culture of invitation and welcome'. It is based on lived wisdom that we have seen and experienced along the way as well as research conducted by colleagues. We hope you find it useful for practical suggestions, sparking conversation at your PCCs and a chance to 'step back' and see yourselves from the outside in.

A culture of invitation requires two things:

1. **Going out, meeting people where they are, and inviting people to meet with Jesus in some way.**
2. **Making sure that your church is welcoming to someone if they come for the first time.**

These are just as true for the real world and for the online world.

When we talk about making our churches more welcoming, we often first think of the building – and that is certainly part of it. However, as a people, we have a role to play in being welcoming: and that begins with growing a faithful expectation that people will come to our worship services who have never been before – they will come because we have invited them!

Maybe if you reflect on your own journey into a church community you may see some welcoming characteristics:

- **Someone invited you**
- **Someone smiled at you and spoke to you**
- **Someone sat with you and helped you orientate yourself**
- **Someone invited you to a social event**
- **Someone asked you to a Bible Study or small group**
- **Someone invited you for a meal**
- **Someone introduced you to other people in the community**
- **You began to feel 'at home' and integrated into the community**

Coming to something or somewhere new is not easy, even if we try and make it as welcoming and easy as possible. You may have experienced this yourself: perhaps you can recall a time when you attended a new gym class or had to arrive at an appointment in a building you had never been to before. Maybe you weren't sure where the building was, or where the room is that you needed to be in. Perhaps you logged into an online meeting on unfamiliar technology with people you don't know. Perhaps coming to church for the first time is like someone going to the bookmakers for the first time – it looks strange, feels strange, there are numbers on the wall that relate to something you don't understand, and you are not entirely sure what you are meant to do – and you can't see inside before you open the door. There is no time for mental preparation. This is perhaps just as true in online worship as well as physical church; joining a zoom meeting for the first time can be daunting!

LIVING GOD'S LOVE - 4 KEY VALUES

- **Generosity**
- **Joy**
- **Imagination**
- **Courage**



A good welcome by a church requires all four of these values in bucket loads. We have to be imaginative in how we reach out, create a culture of invitation, and prepare to welcome in. Our welcome must be full of joy, just as the father had in welcoming home the prodigal son. The hospitality of welcome needs both generosity and courage as we seek to put the needs of those who aren't yet regular members of the congregation above our own preferences and desires. We also need courage in welcoming those who may be different from us – in age, in socio-economic background, ethnicity, abilities, and much more. We need the generosity of heart to remember that we have something to learn about God from newcomers, just as much as they have something to learn from us. When we take this to heart, it is easier to be joyful, and see change as an adventure. We are going to have our ideas about God expanded, and see God in new ways. We are going to meet new people of

all ages and backgrounds, and see God in them. This can be wonderful, not scary.

The following is a 'tick-box exercise'. A good welcome is much more than this, but this tool is designed to be something that can be a conversation starter in a PCC meeting. If you spend 15 minutes going through this list and coming to an agreement, you may be able to identify some needs in your church. Why not take the pressing needs first, and create a 'working group' to tackle them one at a time?

It is also good to remember that a good welcome is only the start of the journey; assimilation and integration into the family of the church are just as important. Helping newcomers become regulars is a discipleship journey; and it is a journey from attending church to serving the church. Nurturing healthy relationships between newcomers and core members is key to this as is inviting (when appropriate) new people to take part in various ministries. How do we help all people to be involved and contribute, and not have a clique at the centre that newcomers feel excluded from? If you would like to consider this key aspect of welcome, the Flourishing Churches team can help you think it through.

	AN URGENT NEED	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Welcome starts before people cross your threshold. Do you have a website, social media presence, an up to date page on 'A Church Near You'? Most people's first port of call for a church will be a Google search. What is your church's internet presence like; have you looked at your analytics?				
Invest in an A-board sign or banner to put at the end of your path telling people when the church is open. Even if people don't come in, it tells those passing that the church is open and welcoming. Do people know that your church is open and are they welcomed in; to some extent even if no people are around to do so?				
Once new people arrive, our churchyards, signage, and buildings say a lot about us. If we are overly-familiar with them, we may not notice what it is that they are saying. Are the notices on your notice board up to date? Are the times of your services displayed correctly and clearly?				
What is the experience for a child, or for an adult bringing small children? Is there a place to put a pram? A place to change nappies? A place where children can move around during the service but still see and hear what's happening? Does your church expect children to be "seen and not heard"? Are there child-friendly snacks afterwards? What can you see around the building, and during worship, from a child's-eye level?				
Personal contact is the single largest factor in a good welcome. Remember not to be over-bearing with new people, but do train all your congregation to SEE (take notice of new people), SMILE (reflect the kindness of God), and say HELLO (make a connection). Are all members of your congregation aware of the need to be welcoming?				
Always be ready to welcome new people. We ought to always expect new people rather than be surprised by them! Create a welcome pack. This could be anything from a carefully written letter of welcome that includes all your activities, to an A5 folder with all your flyers and events inside. Does your church have information and welcome pack to hand to visitors?				
Have a 'Welcome card'. This is a postcard that allows people to give you their contact information. Once you have asked for it, be ready to do something with it! Be sure to email or phone people who have given you information as a follow up to the welcome they received on the day. Do you have a way of collecting details of people who want to be kept in touch with?				

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Help the congregation to invite people. Create invitation cards with dates, times and car parking information for special services such as Remembrance Sunday, Christmas Eve Crib services, Harvest Thanksgiving and the like. A week or two before the event, during the intercessions, ask people to think of a person they will invite along, and pray for them. Teach church goers that piece of informal, invitation liturgy: 'I am going to this, I have heard it will be good, would you like to come with me?' Are church members good at inviting others to events?				
Life events (baptisms, weddings, and funerals) play a key part in our welcome. You will need to devise a slightly different welcome strategy for these services, as they may not happen on a Sunday, your normal congregation and welcomers might not be around, and there will be a larger proportion of people who don't normally attend church there. See www.churchsupporthub.org for inspiration and www.lifeeventsdiary.org for a free online resource to help you store the dates of events so that you can send anniversary cards and the like. Is your church good at welcoming people who come for occasional offices?				
Don't just invite people back, invite them on a journey! They may be happy sitting quietly at the back for weeks (or longer), but they may welcome an invite to a nurture course, a welcome meal, to be given the opportunity to serve practically in the church, or something else. Do you have something else other than a Sunday morning that you can invite new people to? Do you regularly invite them?				
Jesus spent a lot of time visiting people. If new people come to your church on three occasions, why not visit them at their home (Jesus loved to meet people where they were comfortable at the place they called home), or arrange to meet them in a local coffee shop? You may need to develop your pastoral team to achieve this, if you haven't already. Do you visit people who are new to your church?				
Consider running a course on welcome for your regular church members so that together we can learn that welcome is not just the job of whoever is on the rota that week. Could your church benefit from some welcome training?				
Is there a culture of invitation in other programmes your church runs, such as Toddler Group or lunch club? Are the leaders of those programmes encouraged to make known what's happening on Sundays and invite people to give it a try?				
The Church of England is committed to diversity as one of its major goals. Any church welcome needs to take consider how it welcomes people of diverse ages and varying abilities. Is your church welcoming to all people?				