



How to ...

Provide a great welcome

Why should we want to make our churches welcoming and hospitable?

Anyone attending church should be made to feel welcome, not just by the clergy but by every member of every church. Anybody who comes as a stranger is in need of a friendly face to welcome him or her. God's people should be that face, "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25v35). As Christians, we are called to "show hospitality to strangers" (Hebrews 13v1, Romans 12v13).

There are lots of books and resources dedicated to the topic and it will be impossible to cover all of that in one of these guides. What is included below are a few key considerations and lots of ideas and links to resources which will help you to take this further.

This guide will look briefly at:

- Invitation – helping people discover that your church exists and what it might be like.
- Initial contact – helping people find their way around and first impressions.
- Integration – helping people feel looked after, cared for and wanting to return.

Invitation

Most people looking for a new church to visit will start the process with a web search. If you have one, make sure that your website has a friendly tone; language should be welcoming and friendly. Information should be easy to find and up to date. Spend some time researching other church websites (some examples below) through the eyes of a potential newcomer and consider what you like and don't like, what's helpful and what invites you to find out more, then apply what you have learnt to your own website.

www.bristol.anglican.org/invitation

www.allhallowsbow.org.uk

www.standrewschurch.org.uk

www.stnicholasbathamton.org.uk

If you produce leaflets or flyers to advertise your services or activities remember who you are writing for and what key information it is that you are trying to communicate. Be concise and write in plain language that people will understand, avoiding any jargon or 'buzz' words.

Initial Contact

People never get a second chance at a first impression. Neither do churches. Think about what happens at the church door. As people arrive, who is there to meet them? Do they know where to go next? What are they given to read? How many people do they get to meet? How do they know where to sit? Will they know what to expect? Do they know what activities are on offer for their children? Will they know where the loos are? Etc.. If you have a large building, or an odd layout, you may want to consider signage or providing information on your service sheet.

Blog by Richard Underwood: <http://bit.ly/1Q2UV0d>

Ship Of Fools; Mystery Worshipper, stories of welcome: <http://bit.ly/1Wng2So>

Integration

Make space after your service for church members to engage with newcomers. Many churches serve coffee after their services and it is a good idea to make this clear to people during the service, inviting them to stay for coffee. Serve the best coffee you can afford, the generosity of our hospitality says so much about how much we care about people. There are companies who are set up to support churches with providing coffee in an affordable, ethical ways (see links below). Perhaps think about offering homemade cakes or biscuits on occasion.

Encourage church members to make a particular effort to chat to and engage newcomers. This needs careful attention, many churches describe themselves as friendly and what they mean is that members are friendly with each other; research shows that they are unlikely to be friendly to strangers.

<http://www.ministrymatters.com/search/?t=a&q=coffee>

<http://www.kingdomcoffee.co.uk/>

<http://www.indigovalley.co.uk/>

Further resources:

- Opening your church building – advice and guidance provided by Ecclesiastical Insurance Group and the Church of England.
<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/opening-up-your-church-building>
- Everybody Welcome – produced by Church House Publishing, Everybody Welcome is a complete course for all church members to transform your church by improving your approach to newcomers.
<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/category/christian-books/evangelism-and-mission-1396>
- Safe and Welcome – this is the Diocese of Bristol’s in-house scheme which enables churches to achieve a recognised standard of welcome and integration for all into their worshipping life.
<http://www.bristol.anglican.org/parish-resources/safeguarding/safe-and-welcome/>
- Grove Evangelism Series – booklet 66 “Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Local Church” is a practical guide to reviewing your church’s welcome.
<https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/evangelism>

Written by: Katheryn Caithness, Personal Assistant to the Diocesan Secretary, member of St Matthew’s Church, Kingsdown.