



# love & care

There is a strong emphasis in the New Testament on unity, mutual love and care within the Christian fellowship. It's worth studying the reasons why welcoming is so important, and why welcoming means much more than just a smile at the front door of church...

**read Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 John 3:14-18; and Romans 12:9-17.**



## why welcoming is essential

1. Welcoming points people to the gospel. Our God is a welcoming God, and when we welcome people warmly and lovingly, we demonstrate God's love, and point them to Jesus.
2. When anyone goes into a new and unfamiliar situation, they feel anxious. Visitors to the church are in an unfamiliar setting, which may make them feel nervous.
3. People often visit churches around significant times in life - when they: move to a new community; change marital status; have a new baby; have a close friend or loved one die; are ill; change job or face unemployment. At such times, people are receptive to new ideas and new commitments. But if they are not welcomed properly the first time they may not try again.
4. Many people are searching for meaning in life. They return to old values including church. Studies show that a person's original denomination is no longer a significant factor in why they choose a church. The more significant factors are warmth and friendliness, relevance and style.
5. Churches grow if they have a good system for welcoming people and helping them to feel included. There are many people in our community recovering from broken relationships, divorce, separation and/or family breakdown. There are many sole parents. These people are looking for family and community. The welcoming church will attract them.

## welcoming traps

No, this isn't about setting traps to snare people! This is about the traps churches fall into in not properly welcoming people. Congregations can fall into **two traps** in their thinking about welcoming:

### 1) thinking it's *only* the minister's job

"That's why we pay him isn't it?" WRONG. Sometimes it's impossible for the minister to meet every new person - we need to be strategic about who we think it's essential for him to meet. As welcomers we should be the ones meeting newcomers and going out of our way to introduce them to the minister.

### 2) thinking it's *everybody's* job

"Organising welcoming is artificial isn't it?" WRONG. It is true that welcoming should be natural. And it is fantastic if everyone makes newcomers feel welcome. However jobs that are "everybody's" tend to be left to everybody else. So they don't get done. To be effective, welcoming must be organised and structured.

## the pathway in

Welcoming doesn't happen in a vacuum. It stands in the middle of a process. It's an ongoing process that takes people from being outside the congregation to being active members within it:



## people feel they **belong** when they have:

- developed two or more significant relationships with other people or families in the church
- a role through which they feel they are contributing
- become involved in some area of the church's ministry
- a sense of ownership and membership of the congregation.

# strategic welcoming

There are lots of ways that welcoming could be organised. The approach below has been refined over the last few years and is working well at present. Don't be put off by the structured nature of this approach. In the end it comes down to effective communication. By all members of the team working with a common understanding of how we're approaching things, it minimises the chances of people 'slipping through the cracks'. Communication and teamwork go hand in hand. A warm welcome on Sunday is a great start. Communication that enables effective follow-up during the following week is even better. Always keep in mind the 'pathway into church' (on the previous page).

## 1 sunday welcoming: opening the front door

### the people

#### front door welcomers

- 2 or 3 people are needed
- try to arrive 45 mins early so you can help fold service sheets and welcome everyone.
- it's really important to keep your focus on new people. Sometimes it's hard not to chat with friends, but you need to stay freed up to greet new people. Your friends will understand.
- introduce yourself. Sometimes saying your name invites them to do the same.
- give them a Bible, service-sheet, a **newcomers info sheet** and pen
- there are other arrangements specific to your service that need to be communicated. For example, morning tea/supper after the service (or during a break); arrangements for crèche and children's programs.



#### ushers

- a male and female who 'float' inside the doors to the hall, free to greet new people
- introduce yourself to the most appropriate people (e.g. of similar age, same sex)
- point out to visitors where they could sit. If it seems appropriate, go and sit with them
- if someone who was on the front door is going to sit with the visitor, fill in for them
- during the break is a good opportunity to have a quick chat with a visitor (if you're sitting next to one, stay with them, get to know them, wait for someone to come over with the newsletter mailing list. If you're not sitting next to someone, go over to a person on their own – a visitor or someone who doesn't come very often, somebody who's on the outer fringe of our church family).

### the tools

#### connect cards

- every newcomer needs to be approached: non-Christian or Christian, stranger or friend, family, in town or out of town, visiting or looking to stay. **REMEMBER:** welcoming is part of a process.
- all newcomers expect to be approached to fill out a connect card, because it's been announced by the service leader. Welcomers need to arrange a **strategy** for EVERY newcomer to be approached
- the break is the best chance to ask a visitor to fill out the card OR immediately after the service.
- a strategy needs to be in place so that the connect card person is able to approach all newcomers and isn't caught up in conversation with one person. People aren't offended if you say things like "Sorry, but I've just got to catch another couple of people, we might get to catch up later".



#### follow-up slips

- filled out for EVERY newcomer whether they've filled out a connect card or not (but if they have, just use reverse of card). Without this the follow-up team mightn't know if a person's attended let alone how to care for them.
- follow-up slips are most useful if they provide as much information as possible. For example if you don't get a newcomer's name try writing a helpful description. Make the most of every opportunity!

#### attendance list

- with the huge number of people who come along to church from time to time it's easy to lose touch, to let people slip through the cracks. Filling out the attendance list helps stop this from happening.
- It's best to try and be discreet when filling this out. Viewed out of the context of a bigger picture of caring for people, it may be a stumbling block.

# for discussion

Can you recall a positive experience of being welcomed at church? What was done or said that was so helpful?

What do you find most difficult or most enjoyable about welcoming newcomers?



## 2 morning tea connecting the person

Look after **visitors**. This may mean spending the entire time with them:

- introduce them to others (especially appropriate Growth Group leaders)
- ask if they want to find out about the church and its ministries
- let the minister know about them (& Youth Group Leaders, etc as appropriate)
- invite them back & pass on their details [follow-up slip]
- look out for them next week. Remind Growth Group leaders to do the same

Look after **regulars**. We want them to meet together and hear God's word.

- keep an eye out for people on the fringe of the church family. Think about how to help them to feel connected (part of God's family).
- keep an eye out for people who've never really connected with people from church (or other than the few people they knew when they arrived). An example of this could be a group from another church background, who keep to themselves.
- please try not to show favouritism. Jesus treats all people with the same love and commitment. Some time's it's hard but important for us to do the same, whether it's somebody you find a bit 'weird' or somebody who you think is a 'super Christian' who has their life together.

## 3 follow up closing the back door

- apart from making somebody feel loved and welcomed into God's family, effective welcoming leads to effective follow up
- at a follow up meeting each week, people involved in follow up ministry sit down and review the information provided by the Sunday welcomers (follow-up slips, attendance lists).
- from here the appropriate action is taken according to the person's situation (e.g. a letter written by the minister; sent a newsletter; linked to a growth group; met with to go through the gospel; or contacted by a member of the congregation).

**how's your welcoming team going at, above all, loving each other deeply?** (be specific – how are you going to make sure the front door, follow up slips, attendance is covered, who does what etc)...

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## the 36-hour principle...

Research has shown that when lay people visit the home of a first-time visitor within 36 hours, 85% of them will return to church the next Sunday. When the visit is delayed 72 hours, only 60% return, when delayed five to seven days, 15% return (*Anglican Digest*, Pentecost Edition, 1988 in Corney, *The Welcoming Church*, p.21).

If it is the minister that makes the first visit, all the percentages are cut in half. The visitor either feels that this is merely a duty the minister is performing or is threatened by such a quick visit. If the visit is made by lay people, the person will feel cared for by the community.

Clearly, welcoming needs to be responsive, and needs to be developed as a team approach!

## for further reading

"the welcoming church"  
by Peter Corney



## checklist

Effective follow up relies on information being passed on from welcomers to the follow up team.

The summary/checklist helps to ensure this happens.

One of the welcomers should be designated to fill this out after each service.

There is a copy enclosed, along with a newsletter mailing list and a follow up slip.