



How one couple has found welcoming whilst moving round Australia

"...frankly it is a mystery why people return if our experience means anything. Over a six month period, visiting a different church each sunday, there have been very few churches we would want to return to. If it wasn't because we have a deep faith, and have a desire for community, we would have left the

church years ago. It is not that people have been unkind. It is more they have been indifferent. Rarely have we found churches welcoming or inviting and if one does stay for a cuppa, the majority of the time you are simply a wall flower....."

Yet if you were to ask most congregations, they would say they are very welcoming. Sadly they are in denial. What they mean by this, is they feel comfortable greeting the regulars. So long as a visitor is given a cuppa and a cheap biscuit they feel their task has ended. It is almost an attitude of 'well they know where we are if they want to come'.

THE TRAGEDY IS THAT THIS COUPLE IS NOT ALONE WITH THIS EXPERIENCE. Week by week Anglican churches shoot themselves in the foot with their indifference towards welcoming visitors with a view of encouraging them to return.

The following examples could be handed out one sunday for comment and maybe visitors could be asked to fill them in and send back in a stamped, self addressed envelope.

- Questionnaire for sunday visitors to fill in - You might be shocked by their response
- Questionnaire for regular parishioners as to their impressions of where the parish is re welcoming

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING SUNDAY VISITORS

BASIC SUGGESTIONS FOR NURTURE OF NEW WORSHIPPERS

• *On the sunday (as people enter church)*

1. Have a special welcoming trolley built (If you have room) where newcomers can see you are serious about welcoming
2. Sidespersons/welcomers to greet people with a smile, thank them for coming. Show an interest in their being there
3. Mention about the cuppa that follows the service and say you hope they can join the parishioners
4. Name tags are an essential tool (Every regular parishioner should have one firstly) Visitors could be given a temporary one
5. As well as service material, visitors should be handed a parish promotional folder
6. Encourage them to give you their name and address details for a welcome letter mail out
7. A nice offer would also be for a parishioner to sit with the newcomers so they don't get lost in the service. It is important to remember that it may be some considerable time since they were last there.

• *On the sunday (as people leave church)*

1. Invite them to attend the cuppa and express disappointment if they have to leave there and then.
2. During the cuppa make sure that newcomers are made to feel welcome.
3. Enquire of basic information about them without prying
4. Make sure they are shared around other parishioners
5. Ensure the cuppa is something a little above a packet of sweet assorted. It takes no effort for parishioners rostered for cuppa duty to make a few sandwiches or a cake etc to go with the biscuits. (Under no circumstances put a dish for cuppa donations. If we are that desperate we should just close the doors)
6. It does not leave a good impression if visitors have to make their own cuppa or feel they have to wash up their cups.

• *In week following visit of a local worshipper*

1. They could receive a letter of welcome from the Parish Priest with a Church History added or some other church literature, that is well produced (Obtaining their name and address on the sunday makes this possible)
2. They receive a visit from the New Parishioners coordinator or deputy within 48 hours
3. This visit is purely a welcome & enquiring about their interests to see where they may be encouraged to join in on later on
4. No pressure is put on them to join anything, but options are offered

• *About 3 weeks following the visit*

Priest visits family about 3 weeks after lay visit, and will suggest during this visit linking in with a small group - Pointing out the care network, resources etc

• **About 6-8 weeks following the visit**

1. New members could be invited to a home for a cuppa (Normally 8-9pm) - This only happens once as a group.
2. At this meeting, a number of parishioners are also invited [Ones who have been asked to take onboard the responsibility of encouraging this family over the next 12 months]
3. A video of life in the parish or audio-visual (10 minutes) is shown that gives an outline of what the parish has to offer
4. Some of the special points of interest would be stressed - These would have been assessed by the original visit of the Lay visitor some weeks previous
5. Supper should be something special, like cheese and biscuits or some other foods that make the visitors feel special. Maybe even borrowing a cappuccino machine to really show off your effort..From then on, the real work starts.....

PARISH/DEANERY OFFER

Parishes interested in an offer to help train parishioners in how to be an effective welcoming parish, could ask about our special 'welcoming' seminar. This either runs over a two part day with a meal in between or there is an edited version of 3 hours. - Maybe this could be organised as a deanery exercise.

The seminars are minimal in cost (mainly accommodation and travel where relevant). If they happen over a weekend, the sunday can be used to put into practice what has been learnt and an address given on the biblical importance of this ministry.

This special offer is made because a parish without an effective welcoming strategy is simply marking time and NOT an outreach vehicle for Christ.

If interested, contact the Rev'd Max Bowers in Melbourne on 03 9974 1994 or email frmax@grassroots.com.au
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