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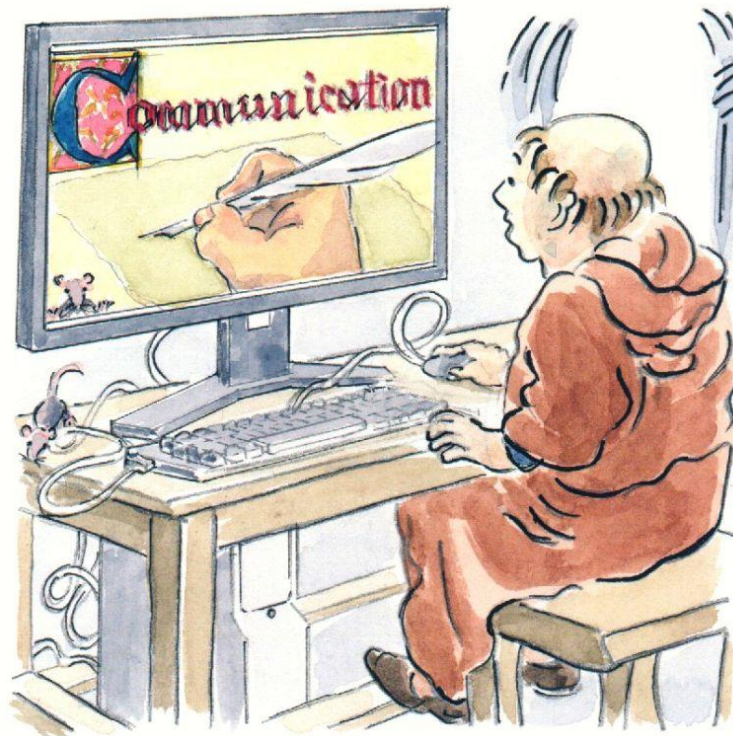
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# Welcome to our church!

*Dundonald - 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023*



***What would a visitor make of us?***

***Does everyone here feel at home?***

***God welcomes each one of us***

***The mystery worshipper pays a visit***

***Provide a 'carry-out'***

***Consider a 'Newcomers Team'***

***Always speak to strangers***

If you want to follow this morning on screen, go to the pdf of these notes at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News>

# 1: What would a visitor make of us?

Today is Sunday

- ★ Andy and Ali are in their mid-20s and have lived together locally for a couple of years. Andy is a mechanic at a local garage, Ali works in a Belfast Tesco's. They have no real church links, but with a baby due in a few weeks' time, they are thinking about getting married next year. They turn up this morning, reluctantly.
- ★ Brian and Barbara come on Sunday with their three children aged 12 to 16. They have just moved to this area from Coleraine and Brian is about to start as head of a large secondary school in Bangor. Barbara led the three music groups at their last, very lively, independent church. They are looking for a new spiritual home and yours is the third church they have tried in three weeks.
- ★ Colin is divorced and lives alone. He is in his late 30s. He hasn't been to church for two years but he arrives today with Chloe, his 7-year-old daughter. He is ten minutes late and the service is well under way. He is very shy and looks white, thin and worried.

For whichever characters you are allocated:

## 1 How might they be feeling as they approach / enter your church building?

## 2 What are their needs just now?

## 3 How would / should you seek to meet those needs:

before the service?	during the service?	after the service?

## 4 What do we learn from all these case studies about a welcoming attitude?

## 2: Does everyone here feel at home?

It's not just the visitors we need to consider

You are a church inspector working for the 'Good Church Guide'. Your job is to visit Sunday services and unobtrusively observe all that goes on. During today's visit you are overwhelmed by the love and care that the members of the church so very obviously have for God, and for each other.

Ignoring the welcome of any visitors for a moment, describe some of the features that gave you this impression:

- ★
- ★
- ★
- ★
- ★

**What might happen to make the following 'regular' attenders feel UNwelcome?**

A single mum (with a screaming baby) who comes once a month or so

A key church member's 16-year-old daughter, with the skimpiest 'skirt' you have ever seen, body piercings and hair dyed green – trailing well behind her parents

An elderly gentleman who has been a member all his life, whose wife died recently

A typical 7-year-old boy whose parents bring him along each week

## **3: God welcomes each one of us**

And it's some welcome too!

### **The people Jesus welcomed**

### **The enthusiasm of God's welcome to each one of us**

#### **1 Our welcome is part of our offering back to God**

#### **2 Our welcome shows Christ's love and care to all in need**

#### **3 Our welcome needs the Holy Spirit's help to reach out to the world**

**So, if welcome is so central to the gospel, what does this tell us about our 'welcome team'?**

## 4: The mystery worshipper pays a visit

Everyone in the congregation is giving a message

Score  
0-10

1 How much do the congregation seem to love God, and each other? .....

2 How well do people recognise strangers and offer hospitality at church / at home? .....

3 How well can a non-churchgoer follow the service/sermon without embarrassment?.....

4 What message do your buildings (in and out), signboards and grounds give? .....

5 What impression do your website, welcome leaflet/pack and notice-sheet offer? .....

6 How easy is it for any stranger to park, find their way in, and take a seat? .....

7 Are the congregation clearly reluctant to have to go home after the service? .....

8 Are all visitors followed up in an appropriate way by a church member? .....

9 How culturally at home would an ordinary newcomer aged 35 feel? .....

## 5: Provide a ‘carry-out’

Something in print to take home

It is well worth having anything from a simple take-away leaflet to a printed pack of materials or booklet, something to put into people’s hands.

### Principles

- ★ However simple, it should look really good: colourful, visual and attractive, not a slip of photocopied paper
- ★ If you want to describe your church, don’t start with activities or the building – try who you are or why you exist
- ★ Make it people-centred – that makes it interesting (so photos are important)
- ★ Include some one or two sentence commendations from members of the congregation (range of ages and types) – with their photographs
- ★ Avoid any Christian or church jargon of any kind (ask someone who is not a Christian to vet it for you)
- ★ Promote your website, social media platforms, email address and other contact details
- ★ Include a minimum of basic information: services, times, etc.
- ★ You might want to include a return slip or postcard
- ★ You might want to have a simple leaflet for first-timers and (for larger churches perhaps) a more detailed pack for people expressing interest in membership
- ★ Ensure it is all right up-to-date (as is the website)
- ★ It may not be of high importance to you, but visitors want to know about facilities for children, parking, loos, length of service, what to wear, what to expect

### Resources from my website to help you further

*Go to the Resources section of the website*

#### Articles

- |     |                               |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| A21 | The use of print in outreach  |
| A31 | Helping people back to church |

#### Training Notes

- |       |                                  |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| TN14  | Setting up a Newcomers Team      |
| TN44  | The message of your buildings    |
| TN83  | The service isn’t over yet       |
| TN86  | Customer care for churches?      |
| TN107 | A church policy on hospitality   |
| TN109 | A test for your church’s welcome |
| TN134 | Integrate your newcomers         |
| TN137 | The message of your people       |
| TN146 | Be hospitable!                   |

## 6: Consider a ‘Newcomers Team’

Someone needs to feel responsible

Churches benefit from a small, dedicated team of those who ensure that no visitor or newcomer falls through the net.

### Principles

- ★ Keep the team small and give it a specific responsibility (no rota if possible)
- ★ Appoint one overall leader and select members by gift/ability and enthusiasm, with a mix of ages and backgrounds
- ★ Keep the team low-profile and do not upstage your other welcomers
- ★ Support the team by training, encouragement and prayer
- ★ Have a specialist sub-team to make contact with parents who drop children off

### Their task

- 1 To be committed to this work on a weekly basis
- 2 To spot newcomers/visitors and put them at ease before the service begins
- 3 To get alongside them afterwards and, where possible, introduce them to others
- 4 To remember names and faces for all who come again, whenever that may be
- 5 To hand out appropriate print, and to recommend follow-up whenever helpful
- 6 To keep good records each week and pass on information to clergy/staff
- 7 To include visitors brought by regular members of the congregation in the above
- 8 To champion the cause of welcome to the church; to work themselves out of a job!

## 7: Always speak to strangers

But do it in the right way

### Words to use

### Words to avoid

### Principles to follow

### Errors to avoid

### Key lessons to learn