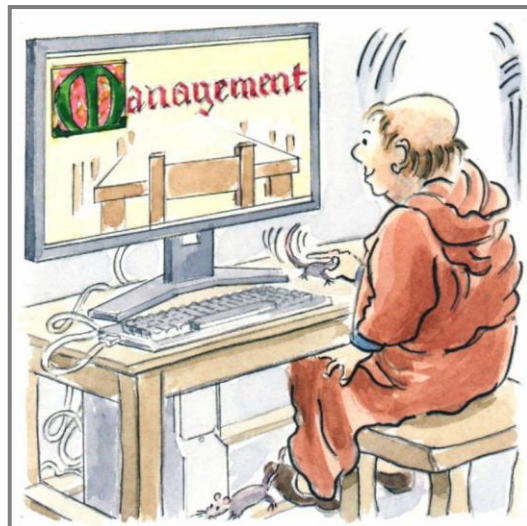


How to become a welcoming church

A DIY training aid



W6 Workshops series: Management

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This material for the leader/enabler takes the form of a DIY workshop for any church's welcomers, Newcomers Team or even the whole congregation.

Its aim is to encourage a visitor-friendly mindset from a biblical perspective with opportunities for enjoyable exercises to put this into practice. It is, in essence, a write-up of my own training on this topic over many years.


Explanation for leaders and enablers

This material can be used by individuals but it is really designed for a church group with a leader/enabler, preferably someone who is not part of the host church and so not linked to particular people or viewpoints. It can be run over three hours with a 20 minute break.

You may want to adapt what is presented in print here so that it better fits your local context. This write-up gives you a structure and a possible text to work from.

You are welcome to rework all this for a local event with some reasonable variation and without copyright restriction, other than to acknowledge source, please, and point to my website.

There are a number of practical exercises to take part in throughout. In a training event these form a vital part of the learning process and one of them (see below) is particularly important even if it puts people on the spot and so has to be introduced with some measure of sensitivity. The whole event should prove to be great fun!


There are also eight handout sheets for everyone to use covering headings and these exercises. These come at points in this material marked with this symbol  and a handout reference.

The material here is based on a number of Training Notes on this website and these are clearly referenced so that you can check those out to give a fuller picture if required.

1: What would a visitor make of us?

Some of the other DIY Workshops on this website have input for the leader and a range of exercises. This one is *built* on exercises (other than sections 3 & 5) with these notes providing some idea of what you may expect to come out of feedback from the groups.

This first exercise is best done in groups of about three people where they are sitting. It takes the form of three case studies of different people visiting your Sunday morning service for the first time. It needs a careful introduction with the use of Handout 1 for everyone. Allocate *just one* of the three case studies to each group and give them ten minutes to complete the first three handout boxes. Then spend 20 minutes asking the groups to suggest what they were coming up with for each question in turn.

Here, first, are the case studies as described on the handout.  **Handout 1**

Andy and Ali

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 nearby 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, somewhat reluctantly.

Brian and Barbara

Brian and Barbara come one Sunday with their three children aged 12 to 16. They have just moved to this area from 100 miles away and Brian is about to start as head of a large secondary school in your town. 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

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.

Groups are then asked to discuss the headings on the handout and fill in the boxes for whichever characters they are allocated. If you have nine or so people present, there will be one group for each case study. If more than nine, you may have two or more groups looking at each case study.

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

Our three case studies will be feeling very different from each other. We cannot be sure but all may be feeling nervous (even frightened), curious, visible. Suggest groups go for one-word answers. Andy and Ali may be unaware of what

a church service at your church is like. They may be expecting the building to be full of strange, old people dressed in Sunday best. They may feel very out of place. One of them may be resentful that the other suggested they come.

Brian and Barbara may be somewhat critical and wanting to see if the church measures up to the standard of their previous one. Or they may be anxious to find a home for their teenagers where they will find support and good teaching.

Colin begs all sorts of questions but may well be scared off if any are asked. But of course you will only know what you see in him (so you will not know about the divorce).

What are their needs just now?

All need to be put at ease as far as is possible. Andy and Ali need to feel acceptance. Brian and Barbara need to find a new home – but may also need reassurance and love as their friends are 100 miles away. They may also welcome space rather than being smothered because they look as though they are just what your church needs.

Colin needs love, empathy, real care for his daughter. He needs a fellow parent, perhaps a man, to talk with him. He may need a considerable amount of practical help.

How might you seek to meet those needs

(a) before the service?

(b) during the service?

(c) after the service?

Look for practical ideas from the groups.

What do you learn from all these case studies about a welcoming attitude?

Take this question plenary when you have had the report-backs on the first three boxes. Make the point that everyone has different needs and there is no one size-fits-all when it comes to welcome.

The key is to consider likely needs and put yourself in their shoes. It is everyone's responsibility to serve visitors and the implications in eternity are vast.

2: Does everyone here feel at home?

But welcome is not just for visitors. Are we proving to be a welcoming church to those who come each week, who also have needs? This subject needs to be seen in a broader view than just newcomers – because they will see how we welcome each other.

Now distribute Handout 2 which start with the following text:  **Handout 2**

'Imagine you are a visitor to your church and at a Sunday service 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 *you* receive as a visitor, describe some of the features that gave you this impression.'

You might ask for ideas from everyone together rather than work in groups to give some variety here. Ensure the answers are very practical. Ask if visitors would see such things at your church and if not, why not.

Then move on to the next group of case studies, probably best done in groups of three as with the previous exercise. Again give each group just one of the case studies to tackle.

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

This is clearly a how-not-to exercise. This method has been chosen because it can be a more powerful teaching method than listing the 'right' answers and, in any case, is more fun to do!

Again, ten minutes will be fine and then talk each case study back in turn. There are four this time.

What these examples illustrate is the need for church members to care for each other. The mum with a screaming baby may be a single parent who is having great difficulty in coping with life. The teenage daughter is perhaps simply being herself in a foreign church culture or making a statement to her parents' conservative friends.

The elderly gentleman may well merge into the background but needs loving care and understanding ears. The seven year old may need to be noticed but might benefit from other kids of this age being around.

Underline the point that visitors will see how regular members behave towards each other and may well be able to feel an attitude where people genuinely care for each other. So we cannot divorce welcome of newcomers from our behaviour of welcome to everyone.

It is also worth noting that newcomers may spot faked worship, lack of engagement with the teaching, and a general lack of passion for God and his work. They will note, however, an overall attitude of love and care for everyone.

So, to summarise: we have now had two sessions each led by an exercise. It would be worth summing up where you have got to by this point. The whole may have taken about an hour. There now follows some eye-opening Bible teaching.


EXERCISE 1 *Handout 1*

This is the exercise on the previous page on how to welcome three different groups of people. It is carried out in groups of three.

EXERCISE 2 *Handout 2*

This is the exercise on this page on the welcome of regular members of the congregation in plenary and then in groups.

3: God welcomes each one of us

We have had two sessions based around exercises. Now for the one session of Bible input from the leader/enabler (plus discussion groups) as a deliberate contrast. This needs Handout 3 to enable everyone to take notes. Here is an outline of how this session might run. Take it quite slowly because you want everyone to ponder on the lessons that are coming out from the well-known parable of the Lost Son.  Handout 3

The people Jesus welcomed

Start with Luke 15:1,2. Jesus was accused of welcoming the wrong people! That was the reason for the three 'lost' parables that follow, including the parable of the Lost Son. What might we be accused of in our welcome? There is another 'How-not-do' case study in these verses but who got it wrong?

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

The third 'lost' parable is of the Lost Son. But what a welcome the son had on his return! Elaborate on this from Luke 15:17-, especially vv 20-. The father's behaviour would have shocked Jesus' listeners. He is making a particularly strong point about its exuberance.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, ponder on the welcome *you* have been given on coming into God's kingdom – it is as exuberant as this!

This is our motivation. We are not here to get people to come to church, or to show British politeness, or to be on a rota. We cannot be great welcomers until we have understood the welcome already afforded *to us!* Ponder this every time you come to church.

There are three points we can make.

1: Our welcome is part of our offering back to God

See Romans 15:7 where 'accept' is the same word as 'welcome'. We worship God partly by accepting each other and that includes the visitor too, whoever they may be.

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

Jesus had compassion on *all* in need. We must avoid selecting people like us (Read James 2:1-4

as the one piece of NT advice specifically on our role). So this is a pastoral ministry

3: Our welcome needs the Holy Spirit's help to reach out to our world

We may be frightened of evangelism but in welcome ministry the people have taken the initiative and come to us! Today people often need to *belong* before they *believe* so our work is critically vital.

People often find that they remember the welcome they received (or did not receive!) on their first visit to a new church, when they forget the worship and the teaching.

But it needs to be appropriate for the visitor in question – and so needs God's guidance to say the right thing at the right time.

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

First, explain that 'welcome team' should mean the whole congregation but in a narrower sense includes stewards, welcomers, coffee makers, etc. Questions to put:

- Do the team pray together before going on duty?
- Do the church pray for welcomers?
- Do you receive regular training (like today)?
- Are welcomers selected because they can be seen to have a special gift?
- Is each welcomer's job to be a role model for the rest of the congregation?
- Are we taking this subject seriously enough?

Now break into groups of two or three to say what has struck you from this view of welcoming as central to the gospel, and what changes you might need to make to show that you had taken that view on board.

It is probably best not to feed back on that but to let it drift into a refreshment break.


EXERCISE 3 *Handout 3*

This enables people to take notes of the Bible input session and discuss the final question.

4: The Good Welcome Guide rep arrives

This assumes that the representative from the 'Good Church Welcome Guide' pays a visit to your church. (This is not as far-fetched as you might think – one Christian group used to do this very thing and then publish their findings on their website, without clearance.) If you want a more detailed test than the short one that follows, use Training Notes TN109, *A test for your church's welcome*, on this website. That has 20 tests covering (five tests each) Congregation, Surroundings, Service, Systems.

In this cut-down version here are nine tests. Which ones would your church score well at, and which ones need some attention and thought? These tests pick up on what has been covered in this workshop to date. You need Handout 4 so that everyone has the list.

Work in small groups. There are notes for the leader below marked #.  **Handout 4**

How much do the congregation appear to love God, and each other? (See Exercise 2 above)

faces / genuine enthusiasm / clearly attentive / buzz of excitement / eye contact / involvement / care for each other / conversations over coffee

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

spoken to by several different people / offered ground coffee and home-made eats without charge / invited back to homes for lunch

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

screens or books / explanation from the service leader / minimal strange church terms or in-crowd code

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

obvious care taken / floral display / clear directions / clean and tidy loos / care for the disabled and children

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

contemporary design / up-to-date website / use of photos / newcomers' pack or leaflet for visitors

HANDOUT 5

This supports the input on take-away literature which is covered on the next page

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

clear directions / adequate parking / helpful stewarding / stewards offer to take to seat / clear where to go or what to do

EXERCISE 4 *Handout 4*

This is the exercise on the nine tests given here though you are welcome to add other tests from the Training Notes. The handout has some dotted lines by each test which can be used to show a score out of ten if you decide to use this as a scoring exercise.

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

staying on over coffee / all visitors welcomed by several people / people talking about the sermon

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

visits if appropriate from members / email or text welcome / contact details gathered in an appropriate way

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

you need to ask them!

HANDOUT 6

This supports the input on a Newcomers' Team which is covered on the next page.

5: Two ideas to enhance welcome

This is an input session that only needs 20 minutes or so to run through the following points. Those on a printed take-away can be given out to everyone as Handout 5. Those on setting up a Newcomers' Team can be given out as Handout 6.

A take-away leaflet Handout 5

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.

You may be high tech with your own church app but on a first visit you need to give the visitor something in print that they can take home and leave on a coffee table. By all means include a QR code to link to your website where fuller information can be given.

Just because the large church up the road has a full booklet, there is no need to think that something complicated is called for. It could just be a colour printed sheet with a welcome and introduction. See Article A21 for more detail.

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 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.
- Include something about membership (but not about finance at this stage).
- Ensure it is all up-to-date (website too).
- 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.

A Newcomers Team Handout 6

Churches benefit from a small, dedicated team of those who ensure that no visitor or newcomer falls through the net. This is a specialist team distinct from any stewards team you already have.

You can read up more detail on Training Notes TN14, *Setting up a Newcomers' Team*.

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.
- Do not fail to give a personal welcome to children and young people rather than ignoring them.

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 Ministers/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!

6: Always speak to strangers Handout 7

This is the climax of the workshop. My experience is that almost everyone is up for this by this stage, but it has needed the previous material to prepare them. There is a let-out in how this is planned so no one needs to feel forced into anything they do not want to do.

Get everyone into groups of three and explain one of the three is to be the Visitor, one is to be the Welcomer, and the third is there to be the Observer to report back to the other two on what they notice happened. Explain that if anyone is nervous about playing a part they may opt to be the Observer. If there is a group of two, no Observer. If a group of four, play as two twos.

First exercise

The Visitor can play themselves but needs to have a made-up reason for visiting this church today. They may be looking for a new church, or have just moved into the area, or having their banns read or just coming out of curiosity.

The Welcomer plays themselves. It is the end of the service and the Welcomer has spotted the Visitor and starts a conversation with them. The Observer just watches. Allow half a minute for the Visitor to think about the reason why they have come and start the conversation.. Everyone may prefer to stand up and find a space in which to do this.

Everyone then gets going. But you stop them after no more than half a minute to ask the Observer in each group to say what they noticed about the opening words the Welcomer used.

Then you ask everyone to list on Handout 7 what are good words to use and words to avoid. You may find it helpful to have someone writing these on a flipchart. People can write examples in to Handout sheet 7. Note: At this stage you are only interested in the opening words.

Words to use

Good examples would be "Hi – I'm glad to meet you. My name is John" "Hello, forgive me if I am wrong but I don't think we've met before." "Hi. I'm John."

Words to avoid

"What's your name?" "Hi, who are you?" "Hello, I've not seen you here before." "Hi – why have you come today?" "Did you find the service as dull as I did?"

Second exercise

Now get everyone back in their groups of three and say people can swap the roles round if they like so the Observer can, if they want, play either Welcomer or Visitor this time. Same scenario but this time let the conversation run for at least

two minutes but probably no more than three. The Observer reports back to the other two in their group.

Now, plenary, ask people to suggest some principles to follow and errors to avoid. You are hoping that the following will come out but do add to the lists they produce. Encourage them to add all this to their Handout sheet.

Principles to follow

- Use open questions to keep the conversation going (those that do not allow the answer "Yes" or "No").
- Put yourself in the wrong rather than them – so "I don't think we've met before" allows them to say "Yes, we have!".
- Give your name first and they will usually give you theirs without being asked for it.
- Take them for coffee and introduce them to other people.
- Watch your body language: don't stand too close.

Errors to avoid

- Judging them in any way.
- Assuming too much (that a couple are married, for example).
- Failing to listen to their replies.
- Being over-tactile.
- Blocking their way of escape.

Key lessons to learn

To close the session first repeat the final threesome of Visitor, Welcomer and Observer one more time (changing roles round). Then use the box for Key lessons to ask what people have learned from the whole event. Use a flipchart to record these but encourage people to write them on the handout sheet. Then bring the whole event to a suitable conclusion.

Here is a link to the **hand-out sheets**. You will find them in the Author's Notes section of the synopsis page for Workshop W6.

**Handout 8****Resources from the 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!

This training aid is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/DIY-Workshops-index> then W6. See also a range of other Articles and Training Notes listed in the text.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File W6 under Management.

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