



Setting up a Newcomers Team

TN14 Training Notes series: Management

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For most people attending a service or event at a strange church can be a daunting experience, especially for those who are unused to Christian worship. What would they find at *your* church?

What most people remember after attending a strange church for the first time is not usually the form of service or the teaching, but whether they felt at home or not. In any case, if people are tense they are unlikely to take anything in. If they have been helped to relax, things can be very different.

Yet many regular church-goers seem to be strangely unable to talk to newcomers in a natural way. Hence the concept of a 'Newcomers Team' (some churches call them 'Welcome Teams'). This is a group of people whose sole task is to spot the newcomers and the visitors and put them at ease.

This is not an easy task: some newcomers may not want to talk. If you insist they do, great damage can be done! In larger churches you may find the supposed newcomer has been a member for longer than you have been.

Here are key principles, from many years of helping churches improve their welcome, on how to set up an effective Newcomers Team.

Principles

1 **Keep the team small and give it a specific responsibility**

This is specialised work requiring people with a passion for it. It cannot be done well by different home groups or any system that involves a rota. It needs the same people on week by week – so last week's (or, more likely, last month's) newcomer is recognised and welcomed by name this week. Better to have a team of five dedicated people (not stewards) who make it their priority than to share it round a larger number.

2 **Appoint one overall leader and select members by ability and enthusiasm, with a mix of ages and backgrounds**

At this level of commitment one person needs to feel the ultimate responsibility to ensure the team works well. Team members then need to be chosen because they have the right gifts: an ability to start a conversation with strangers without making it forced is one requirement. This is not the kind of team where you accept anyone who offers. Try to ensure there is a mix of people on it, and a balance of genders.

3 **Keep the team low-profile and do not upstage your other welcomers**

It is probably best if the church is hardly aware of who is on the team. If members appear as official office-holders (eg. with badges), the newcomer is hardly going to feel that this is a natural welcome. If you have a team of stewards, you do not want them to feel that their work is unimportant or that they are now second division. The two teams need to work in harmony.

4 **Support the team by training, encouragement and prayer**

The team need to learn to work together well. A termly get-together for some practical training, to pray, to share news of people and to support each other is recommended. But the whole congregation needs to be aware that this is vital work for the health of the Church (not just your church).

The team's task

- **To be committed to this work on a weekly basis as far as is possible**

It really needs that level of commitment and availability. This is not a rota but a team of specialists. Not everyone in the team can manage every week of course, but it is the same overall team on duty each time.

- **To spot newcomers/visitors and put them at ease before the service begins**

But not to threaten them in any way. Watch their body language and back off if you sense they want to be left alone. Note that the work starts before the service begins – not when it is over. So at least some team members need to arrive early.

- **To get alongside them afterwards and, where possible, introduce them to others**

The team will need training in how to get alongside strangers without threatening them. Bringing other church members into the conversation can be a brilliant way of letting the newcomer meet several people – but choose the church members with care! To meet the Minister may be appropriate in some cases.

- **To remember names and faces of all who come again**

When a newcomer arrives at church for the second time, to be greeted by name is powerful. It is not so easy for those who come regularly but infrequently (such as every Christmas!). Writing down names of people met each week (see point below) and having a quick team debrief can help.

- **To hand out appropriate print, and to recommend follow-up if helpful**

It creates a good impression to be able to hand over an attractive welcome leaflet and to point to your church's website. Try to find a next link in the chain if the visitor appears interested – but nothing on finance at this stage unless they ask!

- **To keep good records each week and pass on information to Minister/staff**

It is worth keeping a weekly log of who attended so you can spot who is coming regularly – but do this very carefully. Note also any special needs: someone who needs transport to church or a visit.

- **To include visitors brought by regular members of the congregation in the above**

The people who can get completely ignored are friends or family of church members. Yet most people like this are delighted when they are recognised each time they come. This is another reason to have a dedicated team on duty.

- **To move newcomers on to the next step**

The team need to be aware of someone who is starting to come regularly and help them integrate into the life of the church. This might be through a newcomers' event or course, or to an appropriate small group. A home visit from either the Minister or a member of the Newcomers Team may be appropriate.

- **To champion the cause of welcome to the church and to work themselves out of a job!**

The ideal church needs no Newcomers Team. But, here on earth, we have to approximate. The worst state to get to is for the congregation not to approach any newcomers, knowing it is someone else's responsibility. So an aim must be for the team to become redundant, even if they never get to this point.

There is much more to a welcome ministry than just this but setting up such a team is an important feature of becoming an outward-looking and welcoming church. On the next page there is a sample 'role description' for such a team taken from Article A6 on this site. The final page has a sample 'volunteer agreement' for such a team from Article A8.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN14. They cover one aspect of a possible event for churches on welcoming at Sunday services. See also Article A31, *Helping people back to church*, plus Training Notes TN83, *The service isn't over yet*, TN86, *Customer care for churches?*, TN109, *A test for your church's welcome*, and TN134, *Integrate your newcomers*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN14 under Management.

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Sample 'role description' *(from Article A6 on this website)***CHRIST CHURCH, CHRISTMINSTER****Member of the Newcomers Team**

Responsible to the team leader and then to the Outreach Group

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Why do we have this team?

- To ensure that every Sunday newcomer or visitor receives a genuine but appropriate welcome to put them at ease and make them glad they came.
- To be the first point of personal friendship and pastoral care if they return, up until the point where they join a Christ Church group of any kind.
- The aim is *not* to be the sole welcomers, but to encourage the whole congregation to look out for and welcome strangers as we seek to become a truly caring church.

Who do we relate to?

- We are each responsible to the Newcomers' Team Leader, who is accountable to the church's Outreach Group.
- We are a small but dedicated team who rely on each other and work closely together.
- We complement the work of the Church Wardens* and the Stewarding Team who have a separate but related role in ensuring the smooth operation of all church services.
- We aim to pass people on to leaders within the small groups network, and so liaise closely with the Small Groups Co-ordinator.

What are our main responsibilities?

- To look out for visitors at Sunday services, to put them at ease in whatever seems an appropriate way (realising that this will be different for each person), to give information about the church if required, to give them a welcome leaflet, and to introduce them to leaders and others if this seems wise.
- To remember names and faces, so that people are recognised and welcomed personally on a second or subsequent visit. This includes occasional visitors and relatives of church members.
- To tell the team leader about any such contacts so that an accurate weekly record can be kept.
- To pray for the team's work.
- To encourage other church members to notice and talk to newcomers.

* or denominational equivalent

Sample 'volunteer agreement' *from Article A8 on this website***CHRIST CHURCH, CHRISTMINSTER****Member of the Newcomers Team****What do we expect of you?**

- 1 To be on duty whenever you are at church on Sunday (there is no rota), if possible being present 15 minutes before the service begins and staying to talk to newcomers and visitors afterwards. Your first responsibility is to newcomers, even when your friends want to talk to you.
- 2 To make it a priority to attend termly team meetings for training and sharing news, and the occasional Sunday lunches for newcomers.
- 3 To commit yourself to the team for one year in the first instance, and to review this with the team leader at the end of this time.
- 4 To be regularly on duty (present at church at least two to three times a month on average), able to talk to strangers in a natural way, to be very sensitive in how you do this so that no one feels put under any pressure, to remember names and faces, and to be knowledgeable about the church so that you can answer questions confidently.
- 5 To be careful about giving wrong impressions if talking to people of the opposite gender if on their own, and although not to be too formal, never to be over-familiar in any inappropriate way. You should be fully aware of the contents of our Safeguarding Policy.
- 6 To share our vision for being Jesus Christ to every person you meet, helping people to move one more step forward in their knowledge and experience of him.

What can you expect of us?

- 1 This is an unusual team that works behind the scenes and is not officially listed, so you will be expected to do this work without the public recognition that we seek to give to other teams. However, the church will pray for the team (without naming individual members) through our monthly prayer leaflet and occasional intercessions in services.
- 2 The Minister and leadership recognise the vital importance of your work and want to encourage you in every way they can. So, for example, one PCC member / Elder (etc.) each year is asked to take specific responsibility for the team and to represent you on the Council / Eldership. This year Peter Piper acts as this link, and he will check how things are going with you from time to time. He will also present a report from your team at least once during the year.
- 3 The church has a training budget and is happy to pay fees for selected training events or to purchase resources that your team leader feels would help you all.
- 4 Once a year your team leader will speak to you about your involvement on this team and ask whether you wish to continue or whether there are other tasks within the church which might help you to move on in practical discipleship.
- 5 If changes in personal circumstances mean that you wish to come off the team, either for just a few weeks or permanently, we quite understand this and will do all we can to support you.

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