



# 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?**

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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.

These notes are available at [www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes](http://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes) then TN14. They cover one aspect of a possible event for churches on welcoming at Sunday services. For a sample job description for a Newcomers Team, see the end of Article A6, *Job descriptions*. See also Article A31, *Helping people back to church* and Training Notes TN83, *The service isn't over yet*, and TN86, *Customer care for churches?*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running a training event on welcoming and/or integrating newcomers for your church.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN14 under Management.

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