

THE WELCOMING CHURCH a workshop for 'welcomers'

1) Why welcome & why 'Welcomers'?

The local church exists because of the 'welcome' God has extended to each of us in Jesus.

By definition, therefore, the local church ought to be known as a welcoming place. This means that **all members** of our congregations have an obligation to be welcoming toward visitors and newcomers.

However, we do have a **special ministry role** for those whom we call 'Welcomers'. These people occupy an important place in the ministry of our church, and perform a particularly important task.

Apart from handing out material necessary for church services and notices they represent to everyone who walks in the door the **'face' of St George's**. This is an important role given that most visitors & newcomers will form first impressions of our church within the first few minutes of walking into the building. If we want people to come back, and to become 'members', we need to welcome them well.

2) What is it that 'Welcomers' do?

With these things in mind 'Welcomers' will typically undertake the following tasks:

1. Arrive at church **at least 20-30 minutes early** to set things up. These tasks will vary according to the particular congregation but they will ordinarily include:

- preparing, where relevant, any notice sheets, flyers, books and service sheets ready for handing out;
- tidying up if the entrance to the building needs it;
- prayer.

2. Maintain a **presence in the foyer/lobby** area just inside the entrance.

3. **Smile and greet** everyone who walks in the door, looking out for visitors & newcomers in particular.

n.b. There is not much more off-putting than the welcome team deep in conversation with each other and either missing a visitor or handing them a notice sheet without really acknowledging that they are new and may not know what is going on!

4. If time permits, try to **engage** visitors & newcomers in conversation.

Tips for engaging people in conversation:

→ Introduce yourself, offer a handshake, find out their name, and make sure you remember it! It really makes a difference to someone if you call them by their name later on.

→ Be yourself and show some interest in the person you are welcoming.

→ Ask if they have been to St George's before.

→ Ask if they are visiting as a 'one off' (perhaps they're in the area on holiday) or if they are looking for a church.

→ **Offer them a welcome pack and briefly explain its contents. # needs re-doing by me buyt there are term cards and !**

→ Depending on their familiarity with church you might want to explain what will happen during the church service (ie. we'll sing, read the Bible, hear a talk from the Bible, pray, on screen/in books/sheets etc).

→ If they have children, let them know that there are Children's groups that go out during the service and that they are welcome to go up with them or stay in the service, whatever they are comfortable with.

** It may be that some people will prefer to keep a 'low profile' and don't want to engage in conversation. If that's the case they will make it obvious. Don't labour the conversation! Simply say something like 'You are very welcome here at St George's, if you do have any questions, please do feel free to ask us.', and then let them have 'space' to do their own thing.*

5. Direct or **offer guidance** about where to sit.

→ Let them know that they are welcome to sit anywhere and then **offer to take them** into church and preferably introduce them by name to someone who is already seated (think about who is good at welcoming inside the church, don't necessarily pick the nearest person!)

6. When church begins at least one 'Welcomer' should **remain in the 'foyer'** area to welcome those who arrive late - people always do, especially new people and visitors who feel very awkward when no one is there to give help. Around 10-15 minutes should be sufficient time - Yes this means you will miss the first hymn, but as a welcomer, you are still engaging God in worship - remember Romans 12v1 - your whole life offered to God is 'true and proper worship'.

7. During the final hymn, if children's groups are going on, either delegate, or go upstairs to let the Children's leaders know that the service is coming to an end then come back to the lobby area and be available to answer questions.

8. After the formal part of church has finished try to **have another conversation** with each visitor or newcomer you welcomed at the beginning. You could do this by introducing them to someone else in the congregation. Try and gauge if they are looking for fellowship over and above on Sunday and be willing to invite them to morning tea, coffee out or even supper (as appropriate). At the very least make sure that you say goodbye. Try and remember their name - write it down for next time!

3) What else do 'Welcomers' need to know?

- 'Welcomers' will be rotated on from week to week. Make sure you **check the rotors** so that you know when you will be welcoming and please arrange to swap and notify the office if you cannot make it - do not expect the office to organise swaps.

- 'Welcomers' will most often be rotated on in pairs, although we may try to have more when there are events going on, e.g. baptisms, carols, etc..

You should, therefore, **think of yourself as 'a team'**, and try to welcome together where possible. For this reason make sure you pray together before hand so that you rely on God's Spirit to help you, and not on your own efforts, hence arrive 20-30 minutes before the service begins.

- When welcoming **give priority to visitors & new-comers**, and then to regulars whom you don't know very well. Don't allow yourself to get tied up in conversation with people you already know well. Save this for a later time! Its Ok to tell a regular member of the congregation that you'll talk to them after the service has finished as your on welcome duty - they should understand.

- Familiarise yourself with the contents of the **Welcome Pack (once complete)**. We have some 'welcome cards' available as well and be aware of other relevant fliers that tell people what's going on. (these are available).

4) Welcoming beyond Sunday

Welcome extends to our whole lives. It is not without reason that Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2v7-8 speaks of delighting in sharing not only the gospel, but their own lives.

New people look for community. You may have been here 30 years, even longer. You may have established friends, but part of being a welcoming church is inviting people into our homes, to build trust, to share burdens - this is why being part of a home group matters a lot.

Consider joining one if you are not in one so that you can invite people along to your group - certainly be aware of the groups that do take place and, if possible, invite them and tell them you will meet them to bring them in for the first few times so that they are not a second time stepping into a place alone and unsure of what goes on or not knowing anyone.

This is hard work and requires commitment, but we are all in the role of Christ, making and growing disciples.

Examination of Conscience for a Member of St George's

Do you want to grow in discipleship (i.e. how you live for Jesus)

Do you want the church to grow numerically and spiritually?

Am I a welcoming person?

Is there room in my life for others or am I too busy?

Do I extend the welcoming gesture, the warm smile?

Do I hear with my heart as well as with my head?

Do I go out of my way even when it is not convenient to do so?

Do I try to use inclusive language whenever possible?

Do I work on my own spiritual development?

Am I open to full, conscious participation at worship and in parish activities?

Do I make an effort to encounter Jesus Christ in the people with whom I work and worship?

Am I willing to invite a neighbour or friend to an event at church, why, why not?

Statistically, the majority of people who come to faith in Jesus, come over a period of time rather than at one dramatic moment. How does this challenge you with respect to welcome?

Name a person who was instrumental in bringing you to faith. How did this happen?

What particular aspect of parish life kept you coming back when you first came to church?

If you came to faith through a sudden experience:

What sort of event was it?

Where did you have this experience?

What made you respond to the experience by coming to church?

If you came to faith gradually:

What were a few of the significant moments?

What part did churchgoing play in the development of your faith?