

Faith and Society Files: Getting ready for the Big Welcome

The Big Welcome is a simple idea to encourage Christians to invite someone they know to something they love. It's about making people feel really welcome in any church activity. Many churches hold a special BIG Welcome service and each year and this leaflet gives suggestions of how to give a Big Welcome.

THE BIG

WELCOME

GETTING READY FOR THE BIG WELCOME

Inviting one person we know to something we love and giving them a warm welcome

A survey from the Social Integration Commission found that churches and other places of worship are more successful than any other social setting at creating a sense of community, well ahead of weddings and the like, and social events in pubs and clubs.

Matthew Taylor, Chair of the Social Integration Commission says, "Our research shows that, contrary to perceived wisdom, activities such as attending a place of worship can bring people from all sorts of backgrounds together.

The BIG Welcome is a simple idea to encourage Christians to share God's love as they play a part in building their community.



This church initiative is about making people feel really welcome in any church activity. We are encouraging churches to be creative about what they invite people to - a meal, a concert, a quiz night, a coffee morning, men's breakfast, toddler group or even a church service.

Please take up the challenge, and invite someone you know to something you love and plan ways of offering a warm welcome to those who do not usually come to church.

Take up the challenge, and begin to plan ways to offer a warm welcome and on-going support to those who do not usually come to church.

THE BIG WELCOME

Offering a BIG Welcome



1 Invite

Probably the most important aspect of the Big Welcome is that you need to invite someone! Nobody can respond if they are not invited, so now is the time to begin praying for God to show you who to invite and prepare the ground. Remember that Tearfund research¹ indicates that three million people would come to church if invited. Your neighbour or friend could be one of these.

Some interesting facts:

- Many people believe you need a ticket to go to church (where is the box office????!!)
- Some believe church is only open to members.
- Some believe they can only go if invited.

¹ *Churchgoing in the UK* report (2007) available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf

2 Website

What does your website look like? Have you got one? 60% of people who move home find their new church on the internet. If you have not got one you are missing a lot of people. Also many people who are invited to church would 'research' the church on the web before attending.

- What does your website communicate?
- Who is it aimed at? Church members or people who do not belong yet?
- Is it well designed and look professional etc or does it look tacky and 'thrown together'?
- Does it look like the church is serious about its website?
- Are there pictures of 'a church' or your church? Photographs of people provide a psychological 'connection' for a visitor to the website and make the church seem more relevant and less daunting.
- Have you got an e-mail address for contact from the website? Is it checked and monitored?
- How is the content written? Is it full of Christian jargon? Is it merely a list of facts or a welcoming, inclusive piece of writing?
- Does it help people to know what to expect if coming to church?

If your church has not got a website, we would strongly recommend getting one. You can either build your own, or a good easy starting place for a professional-looking website is www.churchinsight.com





WE DO NOT NEED TO GET SOMEONE IN TO HELP US WITH MARKETING OUR CHURCH AS WE ARE PERFECTLY ABLE TO DO IT OURSELVES

3 Notice boards

There is nothing worse than an out-of-date notice board, or one that does not look cared for. Both the inside and outside publicity should look good, be in-date and be relevant to the reader.

- What do they communicate?
- Who are they designed for?
- Are they appropriate in their design for the target audience?
- Are they full of Christian jargon?
- Are they too 'cheesy'?
- Do they meet the needs of their audience?
- Do they convey the 'life' of the church?

Our first experience of the Big Welcome (in 2012) was very positive and we saw several new people come to church that day. Our youth pastor invited his non-Christian Mum to the church and she came for the first time in ages and left saying she could not get over how normal we were. She was so encouraged that she persuaded his father to come the following evening to our harvest supper, which in turn brought him to a men's breakfast. Again his comment was that we truly were 'normal' and that this has stunned him! They may have a long way to go and their journey of faith may just be beginning, but it is such a privilege to see them start the journey.

4 Do we make people feel welcome?

- Does our church look welcoming or is it designed to keep people out? You may wish to watch a video on Youtube² and see what issues arise from this. This amusing video considers what Starbucks coffee shops would be like if they used the same approach to marketing and welcome that is used by some churches. Often simple things like cut grass, updated notice boards, good signage (so people know where to find toilets etc) show that a church is welcoming. The worst experience for a visitor is insecurity. To know what it feels like to be a visitor in your church, go to somewhere unfamiliar, such as a betting shop or hospital, and share your experiences of not knowing what to do or how to behave.
- Do we welcome visitors and regulars as they arrive, or are we too busy talking with our friends? A warm genuine welcome is worth a lot. If someone comes on their own, or a group comes for the first time, introduce them to someone who could talk with them. Make sure they know where things are, including the children's group (if appropriate), the toilets and where coffee is served afterwards.
- Is the building warm and well lit? And clean?!!! There is nothing worse than a feeling that the place where you are meeting is not loved and 'will do' is the defining attitude. Are the toilets clean, smelling nice and well stocked with clean towels etc?
- Can newcomers understand what's going on in the service? (or long-standing attenders for the matter!) Is it full of jargon? Do people know which book to use, or when to stand and sit? People are nervous; do not exasperate it by making them uncomfortable by having to guess what is going on.

2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7_dZTrjw9I

5 Are we family friendly?

- Do we encourage people of ALL ages to take part in the service?
- Do we help young people develop leadership skills?
- What practical support do we offer for the needs of parents, the infirm etc?
- How do we reach out to the community? Could we do more?

6 Are we needs friendly?³

- Can we make the service/sermon more easily understood?
- Do we have PA/audio equipment? Does it need upgrading?
- Do we have a loop system? Does it work?
- How can we help people with hearing loss and visual impairment?

7 Playing the host

- Welcoming signs should start in the car park if you have one.
- Toilets should be well signed.
- Welcomers should wear name badges.

³ Advice is available from the Through the Roof website www.throughtheroof.org

8 The role of the stewards

- Greeters or bouncers? Making people welcome is more than just a greeting.
- Showing people to seats. Do you have enough stewards for the Big Welcome day?
- Making sure people know what to expect.

9 The style of service

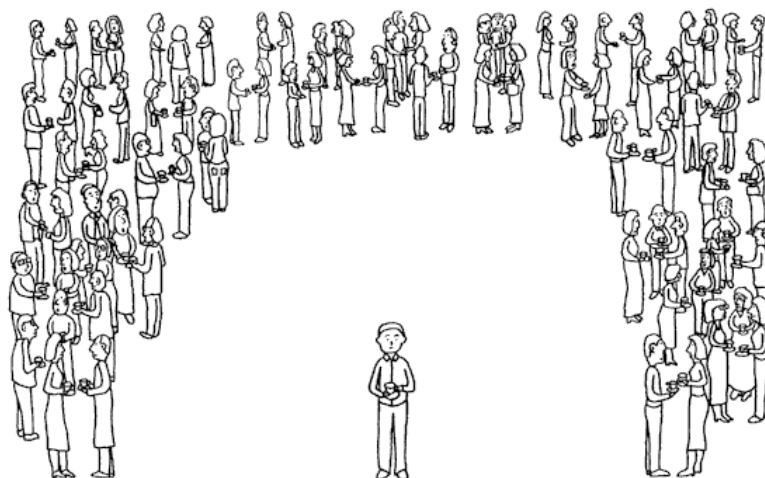
- Is it accessible to new people who have no understanding or experience of Christianity?
- Is the message relevant and understandable?
- Is the music well led and known by the majority of the congregation?
- Is it welcoming and not condemning?

10 The quality of coffee (and cups)

- In our current 'coffee shop culture' people have come to value high quality, freshly made coffee when they go out. Good fresh and instant coffee which are fairly traded are now available.
- Even good instant coffee served from an insulated jug can seem more appetising!
- Good biscuits and or cakes that look like they are fresh and well-presented.

AFTER-SERVICE COFFEE

THIS IS THE TIME WHEN NEWCOMERS CAN GET TO KNOW THE CONGREGATION



CartoonChurch.com

11 Travel with people

- If you have invited someone, meet them and arrive with them. That will take a lot of the fear and worry from them about arriving alone and meeting people they do not know.
- Stay with them. Do not abandon them to talk with your other friends.
- Have a meal together afterwards. It will give opportunities for discussion, and people to ask questions about what they experienced.

12 Gifts and follow-up

- Give something they could keep to remember the experience.
- Invite them back, and be as welcoming a second time.
- Use special events to invite people to such as Carol services, Christmas events etc.
- Offer a follow-up discussion group using resources such as:

Table Talk

– a creative way for people to begin to have meaningful conversations about the important questions in life. Table

Talk is available on a number of themes, including Table Talk for friends, blokes, Easter, Messy (all age) moments – with further packs in development. Find out more at: www.table-talk.org



Puzzling Questions

– a six-week course that gives you an opportunity to explore some of life's deeper questions. As you journey through the course with others interested in reflecting on life's conundrums, you will have an opportunity to consider what you think and talk that through with others. Find out more at: www.puzzlingquestions.org.uk



Alpha Course

– an introduction to the Christian faith which has already attracted 19 million people in 169 countries around the world. Courses typically include food, a short talk about the Christian faith, and an opportunity to engage in conversation. There's no pressure, no follow-up and no charge to participants. Find out more at: www.alpha.org



Christianity Explored

– an introductory course which gives people time and space to think through who Jesus is and why it matters. Find out more at: www.christianityexplored.org



13 Introduce them to others

- The more people that a visitor gets to know the more at home they will feel.

14 Keep it up next week!

- Make sure that next Sunday doesn't feel like the BIG Letdown! Get into the habit of offering a warm welcome **every** week.

One of the strengths of The BIG Welcome is that everyone in the church has played a part in it and we will benefit from having done outreach together. I am sure it has built our faith and expectation.
Church which took part in 2012

What next?

There's no need to stick to one day in the year to offer people a BIG Welcome! Why not plan a BIG Welcome family fun day, a BIG Welcome at Harvest, a BIG Welcome at Christmas – the possibilities are endless! Perhaps use a church meeting to pray and plan creatively for other BIG Welcome events to which you can invite friends and members of the local community.

The BIG Welcome was a positive message to communicate. We put on extra cakes and coffee afterwards (encouraging our people to bake and bring a cake along) and many people stayed on for up to an hour after our service, still chatting.
Feedback from a church in 2012

Top Ten Tips for Welcome

Mark Hope-Urwin is the Director of Hospitality and Welcome at Birmingham Cathedral and believes that a culture of welcome should pervade the church. He suggests that "Creating a good impression is the responsibility of everyone."

To watch a film about Mark's Top Ten Tips for Welcome see:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od1-x13DMn4

- 1 Don't let people struggle to find you
- 2 Make sure what you offer is relevant
- 3 Know why you go to church
- 4 Hospitality is your duty
- 5 Know how well your church is doing
- 6 Don't accept second best
- 7 Know what is expected of you
- 8 Know the difference between 'greeting' and 'welcome'
- 9 Apply the McCullough three minute rule
- 10 Decide what needs to be done.



THE WELCOMERS

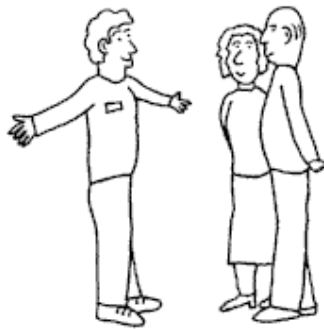
IT IS THE JOB OF THE WELCOMERS TO BE WELCOMING AND WEAR A BADGE



THEY ARE GIVEN IN-DEPTH TRAINING TO EQUIP THEM FOR THIS ROLE



IN THE EVENT OF ANY NEWCOMERS ATTENDING A SERVICE A WELCOMER WILL BE SUMMONED TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION



THERE IS A ROTA SO THAT THE SAME PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO BE WELCOMING EVERY WEEK



CartoonChurch.com

For further help see

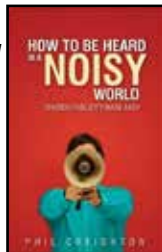
How to Be Heard in a Noisy World *Church Publicity Made Easy*

Author: Phil Creighton

Publisher: Authentic Lifestyle (2006)

ISBN: 1 85078 716 6

RRP: £8.99



Everybody welcome

A series of resources to transform your church by improving your approach to newcomers. In five teaching sessions, it will help you review your attitudes to newcomers, learn new approaches and identify areas of improvement and change.

Everybody Welcome Leaders' Manual

Authors: Bob Jackson and George Fisher

Publisher: Church House Publishing (2009)

ISBN: 978 0 71514 190 8

RRP: £14.99

Everybody Welcome Members' Manual

ISBN: 9 780 71514 219 6

RRP: £3.99

Everybody Welcome DVD

ISBN: 9 780 71514 191 5

RRP: £24.99

