

7

Being 'Church'

7. Church is a welcoming community - part 1

Introduction

There will be two studies on this topic of church being a welcoming community. This study is not concerned with a formal 'system' of welcoming at church. Instead we are going to focus on our attitudes and actions as individuals.

Key idea

What did you think was the most important point made in the sermon on this topic?

The Bible's Message: read Luke 15:11-31

1. The parable of 'the Prodigal Son' in Luke 15:11-31 is well known. Why did Jesus tell this parable and for whose benefit? (hint: see Lk 15:1-2)
2. How does the parable show us that God is a 'welcoming' God?

Living the message today

1. Read 1 Peter 1:22, Rom 12:10, 1 Thes 2:8 and then discuss this question; "Is there a cost to being a welcoming Christian community?"
2. It may seem difficult to pay this cost as an individual, but what difference would it make if you were just one person of a larger group committed to being a welcoming community? Are you willing to pay *this* cost?
3. As a group, try to identify how you felt the last time you went to a function where you didn't know anyone. Record your answers on a board or piece of paper.
4. Try to think of things other people could have done to put you more at ease at that function (no more than 5 mins). Record your answers.
5. Now apply your observations and comments to welcoming new people at church. Identify four practical things you could do to improve your personal welcoming and suggest how you could make it happen

Homework for next week:

1. Talk to some newer members of our church and ask them about their experience of being welcomed. Ask them:
 - (a) what they found most helpful and most difficult when they first came,
 - (b) what things they think could be improved about our welcoming.
2. Take some time to fill in your evaluation of welcoming at the Sunday church gathering that you attend most often (see attached).

Where do you think welcoming starts and where does it end?

Complete the sentence: You really know you've been welcomed when...

Welcome Checklist.	Answer: Yes or No / not relevant to us	We are doing pretty well	We could do better	We need to do better
We are easy to find: good signs and directions				
Our notice board is attractive, interesting and well organised				
It has helpful information for the newcomer				
We advertise in the local community				
We are well-known in the local community for certain activities				
The church grounds and buildings look attractive and inviting				
We have access for disabled persons and prams				
The church foyer or entrance is clean and attractive, bulletin boards are tidy, flowers and attractive posters are displayed				
Parking is easy, accessible and signposted				
We have a welcome kit				
There is a welcome kit placed in an obvious place with relevant information for a newcomer or enquirer				
We have Welcomers assigned for Sundays who are separate from Ushers				
The Welcomers have had some training and are coordinated in what they do				
Regular attenders, including children, have nametags				
There is a general welcome to visitors and newcomers in the service				
We have 'welcome cards' for visitors and newcomers to fill in and these are actively promoted and used.				
We provide tea and coffee and a time of fellowship after the service.				

Welcome Checklist.	Answer: Yes or No / not relevant to us	We are doing pretty well	We could do better	We need to do better
We have a follow-up system for new people: letter, visit, newcomers evenings or lunches, a new members group.				
We have people assigned to help newcomers create friendship links over a period of six months				
We have a welcoming system for children and special people assigned to it. This is linked to the Childrens Church.				
We have a way for new members to become known among the wider church.				
We welcome into fellowship new people who have become regular in some formalised way.				
We have a small group system through which new people can become involved in the life of the church.				
We have a conscious and deliberate plan for discovering new people's gifts and involving them in some area of ministry.				
We are careful to include single people or single parents.				
We organise all age activities from time to time such as picnics, bush dances, family camps etc for people of all ages to enjoy themselves together.				
We regularly evaluate our services and activities and ask how outsider friendly' they are.				
We keep records of all people who visit or attend on a newcomers list so they can be followed up. This is reviewed every six months.				

