

The Basics

Entering a Church for the first time can be a daunting experience. First impressions can make all the difference in the world. The message that your Church



building and community sends out is crucial if together you are to build a welcoming Church. No one returns to a place where they feel uncomfortable, alienated or an outsider. They do return again and again if they feel warmth, acceptance, involvement and love.

Scripture



To offer and provide a warm welcome is something we see repeatedly in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ was friend to all irrespective of appearance,

background, race and colour. He invites us to welcome the stranger as if we were welcoming Him (Matthew 25:35-40).

'Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness.'

Blessed Mother Teresa



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What next?

CASE is here to help you put some of the ideas in this leaflet into practice. We would be delighted to help with consultation or training in any way your parish or deanery requests, drawing in diocesan and other local advisors wherever possible. Related resources can also be found on our website: www.caseresources.org.uk

Maybe you could direct a non-Catholic enquirer to: www.life4seekers.co.uk

For additional resources and enquiries, please fill in and return the reply slip below.

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**Catholic
Agency to
Support
Evangelisation**

Forming A Welcoming Community for ...



Colour illustration by Elizabeth Wang, *Christ Amongst His People*
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... Everyone!

***Jesus said, 'Anyone who
welcomes you welcomes Me;
and anyone who welcomes Me
welcomes the One who sent Me.'***

Mt 10:40

Prayer

The starting point for forming a welcoming group must be prayer. As a fruit of prayer the right people will be inspired to offer themselves for this ministry, and they in turn in a special way will be given the grace to welcome people as Christ would.

Begin by inviting your parish to pray for this initiative and invite parishioners to reflect on whether or not God is calling them to become personally involved.



Welcome



A group of people willing to serve as welcomeers should arrange a time to meet to initially assess their parish welcome.

This sharing of observations and ideas should lead to the formulation of a plan, with the group committing to agreed action points. Priorities too may need to be established. For basic principles for planning in a general parish context, please see:

www.caseresources.org.uk/resources_planning

'Never doubt that a small group of committed people has the power to change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'

Margaret Mead

Talking and Listening

These are fundamental skills for welcomeers. It is important that people serving in this way are able to introduce themselves in a friendly way, can initiate conversation, but also are willing to listen to others. The use of open questions can be helpful; these start with words like **How? What? Why? Who? Where? When?**



Culture

It is very important to have some understanding of the different journeys that people take to faith. Research suggests that for most people, whether they have experience of other Christian Churches or not, it is a gradual process. This highlights the importance of weekly providing an open and welcoming



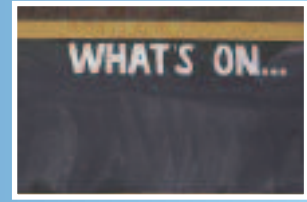
Church so as to help foster the building of relationships. Christian friends and community life are the main factors for a large proportion of people coming to faith.

In Their Shoes

The most successful evangelists are those who are able to put themselves in the shoes of those with whom they are trying to engage. As Catholics we can not expect someone who is not a member of our community to understand our symbols, language, signs and traditions. Welcomeers must have this at the forefront of their minds when meeting first time visitors.

The Building

Another role for a welcoming group is to ensure that the building looks welcoming to a visitor outside worship times. Notices both outside and inside the Church could stress that all are welcome here to find quiet and explore, whatever their faith or none. A visitors' book can be provided, inviting comments. If there are significant ethnic minorities in the area, or the likelihood of foreign tourists, notices could be put up in other languages also. A free gift such as a bookmark or booklet can add to the sense of welcome.



Consider: what does the outside of your building say to a visitor?



Training and Resources



© www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk

There are a number of resources available to parishes to assist them in the setting up of a welcoming group.

Everybody's Welcome is a collaborative initiative,

coordinated within dioceses, focussed on parishes, nourished by the development of nationally available resources. A cross section of resources can be found at:

www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk

The Diocese of Portsmouth also offers *The Ministry of Welcome: A Training Resource for Parishes*. Both of these are to be recommended to parishes considering setting up a welcoming group.