



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
**DIOCESE OF
ST ALBANS**

MINISTRY OF WELCOME

A basic first course on the introduction to making our Churches more welcoming.

This course is designed to be led by anyone who is confident enough to stand up in front of a group.

Background

So what is Welcome and why have you been tasked to lead it?

A General Synod motion in July 2008, basically said that Churches should be more open and welcoming. Originally called Church Tourism, St Albans Dioceses changed the name to Ministry of Welcome last year. At the time of writing this (May 2012) St Albans Diocese has 2 Ministry of Welcome Officers and a number of Deanery representatives who help to spread the word. The Welcome Officers report to the Board for Church and Society and their dedicated web-pages can be found under the sub heading of Mission on the www.stalbans.anglican.org site.

Between January & March 2011 the two officers undertook a mystery shopper survey of Churches in the Diocese, to ascertain how welcoming Churches in our Diocese really are.

The results were very disappointing as you will see from this first course.

Aim of the Course

The aim of this course is to give you a basic foundation on which to build your own Ministry of Welcome team(s). The course is completely standalone and suitable for an hour long session after the main Sunday service, or as an initial discussion session for a PCC away day.

A number of Churches have already included the topic of welcome in their MAP plans.

There are a number of additional resources available including a well designed Welcome course publication designed and published by the Church House Publishing entitled Everybody Welcome and other resources to be found on the Internet. However as previously stated, this document will give a good grounding for an introduction to the subject, which can be expanded later if required.

The course is written as if you are presenting to a number of Churches, if you are presenting to your own congregation then you may need to adjust the context.

As a caveat to this course, it has been written by a layman for a layman. I am not a professional course writer or deliverer, so please amend or improvise if feels right to do so.

This work probably should be copywrite but as it is not please feel free to use it as needed.

Sharon Cooper

Ministry of Welcome Officer, Diocese of St Albans

May 2012.

Introduction

This course has been prepared on the assumption that the person delivering it has no experience in this field. If you are a confident presenter please skip over the basics and accept my apologies for this.

If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, admit this and make a note to find out the answer and let the enquirer know.

Pre- Course Preparation

To run this course you will need:

1. Printed copy of the course.
2. Decision on who to invite and how (notice in pew sheet, personal invitation etc.)
3. Suitable day and time advertised in advance, (it is good to say: for example- refreshments from 10:30, course starts at 10:45 so that people can get a drink and be settled for a prompt start rather than having people drifting in and you then not knowing when to begin).
4. Suitably welcoming room, chairs, refreshments (hot and cold drinks and nibbles/biscuits etc.) In thinking about how welcoming the room is, review the decor, warmth, lighting etc; if your first impressions are not good, consider an alternative venue.
5. Paper and pens.
6. Course attendees.

I would recommend that you take time to read through this course in advance of the meeting so that you are familiar with the content. This will also give you some idea of how long the session should last, building in time for discussion and questions. It will also give you a feel for how the activities should be run - group or individually and how much feedback you request. I have tried to indicate when you, as course leader say things, this will become apparent in a run through.

You might like to highlight the things you don't say as most of the course is you speaking.

Please feel free to add or omit anything as you wish, it is your course for your people.

Course content

1. Greet people and make refreshments available, if you are going to do group introductions (see point 2) let them know in advance that this will happen.
2. If you do not know everyone, introduce yourself and, if appropriate, get everyone to introduce themselves, where they are from and why they have come.
3. Give an outline of what the session will entail, explaining that there will be activities/ involvement and include your proposed finish time.
4. There will be some activities that will require written participation (may be in groups/ individual - course presenter to decide). The sheets will be collected in and may be used to develop future plans/ courses.
5. The outline will be something like this: -What is Welcome?
6. Different facets of welcome - building, visitors, service attendees - discussions, questions and scenarios.
7. Recap
8. Next steps
9. End - it is important if you say it is 1 hour long or will finish at 11:30, then you must keep to this timescale. You can always park discussions/questions and reconvene at a mutually convenient time. As presenter you must manage the allocated time carefully.

The Course

Firstly explain what the Ministry of Welcome is about.

A General Synod motion by the Church of England in July 2008, basically said that Churches should be more open and welcoming. The Synod called for all Dioceses to create opportunities to celebrate the rich history of our Church buildings and make them more accessible.

St Albans has two Ministry of Welcome Officers and in 2011 they undertook a mystery shopper survey of Churches in the Diocese, to ascertain how welcoming our Churches really are.

Their findings were very disappointing and we will see some examples of why this was during this session.

First question: *ask the group - "So to get you straight to work- What is Welcome"?*

Encourage participation, there is no right or wrong answer.

A definition of welcome : To salute with kindness, as a newcomer; to receive and entertain hospitably and cheerfully; as, to welcome a visitor; to welcome a new idea.

Activity 1:

Depending on the numbers on the course you might want to split them into groups of 3 or 4 or do it individually. Give out pens and paper and ask them to write Activity 1 on the paper and then pose the following question:

"Think about a time when you've felt welcome and then a time when you didn't feel welcomed.

Where was it, why was it good/ bad, what would you change. It doesn't need to be Church related".

If the groups look blank give them some examples to start with eg: New school, new Church/ New job/ Friends for dinner/weekend etc)

Give 10 minutes, perhaps walk around and see how they are doing, then ask for feedback. Discuss the feedback if suitable.

Collect in the sheets.

Course leader says :

Welcome can touch on 3 key areas in church life:

The building: thinking about accessibility for all, signage, grounds, the actual premises

Visitors: these come in two main groups: Those who are visiting outside of normal church services, (consider- is the building open, or can it be opened) and those who are visiting, perhaps for the first time as part of a pre advertised service. And,

Seekers: those who are coming to a service, perhaps for the second, third or fourth time or who have started to come regularly.

We will elaborate on this later.

Question 2: *thinking about your Church specifically, and not requiring an answer at the moment... I would like to pose this question to each one of you....are we good at welcome?*

Pause for a moment then say:

FACT: A recent survey by C of E found that 92% who came to Church for 1st time didn't go back...(# welcome course run by St Albans Diocese, March 2011).

Our Christian ethos is to be hospitable. The book of Hebrews talks of welcoming angels ...Hebrews 13:2 " Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"

so if we do fall short of this, why do we fail?

Put yourself into the position of a new person, what would you want from your visit to make you come back?

Have you ever gone to an exercise class or pub on your own, how did you feel beforehand? Scared, worried, anxious - would you fit in, know what to do, wear the right things etc....

It can feel really uncomfortable walking through a church door if you have never done it before. It can be even worse if you are on your own.

FACT: You have 5 seconds to make a good impression

But welcome is Not just a greeting.... Anyone can say hello, it's what else happens that matters.

FACT: Following the Diocese's local survey of 12 Churches on a Sunday morning (Spring 2011) , only 2 gave a welcome worthy of note. In the other 10 the secret shoppers would not have returned. For example, being told to move pews, not being spoken too, ignored during the peace and at the end of the service etc....

So welcome is Not just a greeting....

No, it starts much earlier than that:

Is your Web-site: up to date?...do you have one? Can you tell how many 'hits' you receive, what about social media...Facebook, twitter etc. these are the communication channels of the future.

Publicity: Do you use the same logo / font/ strapline/mission statement throughout all Church material.

Car Parking – clearly signposted if not readily apparent?

Churchyard/grounds - well kept.

Access for the mobility & visually impaired.

If the Church is locked, is there a clear sign indicating where a key could be obtained from easily.

The secret shopper survey found several churches locked with no sign if how to gain access, one where, when the keyholder was rung she said she was busy defrosting the fridge, could they ring back later! At another Church they were told that they could come and get the key but upon enquiring, the keyholder was 5 miles away. This would have meant a 20 mile round trip to get inside a Church for a few minutes to pray or whatever they wanted to do.

Note, Church Insurers: Ecclesiastical welcome churches, seeking advice and then being open. They will give free advice on the best way to do this whilst protecting the building and valuables.

Signage: affirming not negative – do not walk on the grass...Do not run..Do not..Do not.....

Entrance by the south porch..."sorry which way is south....I don't have a compass!"... better to have a sign saying Entrance this way..., or for example, Disabled access this way and have an arrow. If you cannot help but have a Do Not then make sure it is polite e.g. 'Please do not go beyond this point"

Notice boards – advertising correct service times - no rusty drawing pins, faded posters showing out of date events.

Porch – clean/tidy/ door open or ajar if possible? Signs for toilets, notice that there are refreshments after service.

Then when you get inside here are some best practice pointers:

Inside – is the church warm/ clean/tidy/ do the lights work? Who directs you where to sit?

And who do you sit with?

The welcomer must judge from the age and number of newcomer(s) where it is best to invite them to sit: children need to be able to see what is going on, toddlers near a play area, so parents are not embarrassed at taking them there mid service. Single people may feel more comfortable in a side aisle where they will not be so prominent and noticed by everyone.

Take a newcomer to a pew where you know someone will welcome them/ be aware of them following the service in the book and help them if they lose their place, or if they seem not sure what happens next.

This person will also encourage them to go up for communion or a blessing if it is a Eucharistic service. Often newcomers will say no but it shows that you are trying to include them and that this part of the service is not just for regular members of this particular church.

This person should also share the peace with the newcomer first.

....'my pew.' this is often a big issue and VERY off putting... The course writer was told of an example in one church of a new couple, who had come for the first time and had been told at the door when they asked..."no problem sit anywhere you like". They sat down and, just before the service started were tapped on the shoulder, a regular said - "you are sat in my pew....I will sit somewhere else this week but if you come again please don't sit here".....True story..... And yes it does happen too frequently. Would you go back there? The course writer would not have.

Health & Safety: Does the Church have a Health & Safety Advisor (it can be a voluntary member of the congregation) if not, you need one. Ecclesiastical Insurers have some good information on their site.(www.ecclesiastical.com) The PCC should be endorsing an annual H & S inspection.

During the service – is the service booklet clear and easy to follow...hymns/ responses/ when to sit & stand clearly explained. Does the person leading the service give regular instruction , e.g we are now on page 3 and we say together:....

Does the sound system work properly.

Do you cater for all age welcome –e.g For toddlers and children:,toy bags (regularly checked, updated and cleaned) colouring sheets/ smiley stickers/ place to have 'timeout'. Squash / juice served at end of service with the tea and coffee.

For the elderly: working hearing loop, large print service and hymn books, option to sit rather than kneel and permission to sit if standing for too long.

For the mobility, visually or mentally impaired, greeters who can direct them to the best place to sit and can advise / assist/ notify the Priest if it is a service with a Eucharist and the elements will need to be brought to the person in their pew.

Sharing the Peace..... This can be very daunting for a first-timer. Either to be hugged by someone you don't know or feeling awkward as everyone else mingles around and ignores you, Or as happened in one church asked to hold hands with the person next to you –intimidating for the shy first timer. Can your church agree the best way to share the Peace?

Taking the collection on an open plate –Why? an open plate shows up the person who didn't come prepared...giving should be between us and God not showing the person next to you how much (or little) you have to give. Collection bags are better.

After the service.....everyone should try to invoke the 3 minute rule ...3 minutes to speak to someone you do not know...invite people to coffee & stay with them or introduce to someone else.

Often people scurry off to find friends or clear up ignoring the visitor – in 3 of the 12 Churches surveyed the secret shoppers were ignored in the coffee queue even when they tried to engage in conversation.

FACT: People who make 7 significant relationships during their first 3 visits are more likely to stay.

Activity 2: *having heard the above areas of best practice, which is no means comprehensive, in your groups or individually jot down your impressions of what has been said so far, what has leapt out at you, and if nothing has why do you think that is? Write Activity 2 on the sheet.*

Give 10 minutes - include a refreshment break if applicable, perhaps walk around and see how they are doing. Get verbal feedback and collect in sheets.

Question, *again an answer is not needed unless you wish to give one...*

Could you explain why you come to your Church?

Anyone like to answer that?

The course leader says:

Who in your Church is good at this – if there are people, give them the role. They will be excellent ambassadors at services including baptisms, school parents, social events etc where there may be un-churched visitors.

FACT: during the survey only once did the secret shoppers get invited to coffee with someone.

Is there somewhere designated and signed – where someone can sit quietly if that's what they want to do.

Follow-up: is there a card that the person can fill in to find out about future services/events-mailing list or request a personal visit.

Is there an explanation about the different services and activities that take place each week.

Ensure that there are pew sheets/ notices to take home and encourage people to do so.

Other areas to think about –

Opening your Church during the week

in 2009 only 43% of Churches in the St Albans Diocese were open during daylight hours other than for services St Albans ranked really low -13th out of 14 diocese checked (Chichester was the highest at 81% open).

FACT: Church insurers welcome Churches opening and are happy to give free advice.

If you are on a walkers route could you offer a dog water bowl in the porch.

Church Guides

In 2009 very few Churches in the Diocese had any guides for visitors: Building/history/Christian faith/ Children.

What are your guides like??

Could you update your guides, or if you don't have any should you write them? When you visit other Churches what are you looking for - history guide, something to entertain the children. Perhaps get copies of guides from other Churches in your Deanery or area to assist with this review.

What about other faiths, should you explain what the pulpit, font and altar etc. are for? In a guide or on signs around the Church? (this might help other Christians as well as other faiths!)

Would you worry if someone of another faith used your building as sacred space, and if so what could you do to alleviate this worry? (No correct answer here perhaps something to ponder and talk about it with other Christians outside of this course).

Seekers

What about those who have been coming for a few weeks but are still on the periphery. Can you offer a short ' introduction to St Saviours' evening to meet others and find out more about what goes on – home groups etc, with a light supper, or run an Alpha/ Christian Explorers type course. Do you have anything for teenagers and those in their or 30s for example.

TIMINGS

Course leader: Check your timings at this point, either begin to close down or have another activity.

Activity 3 - *think about your congregation(s) list the main groups and the provisions you have for them both in service types and groups/social events. What else could you or should you be doing. 10 minutes and feedback, again perhaps walk around and see how they are doing*

For example: *Do you have home groups, school visits, midweek services etc.*

Course leader says:

Recap

To recap we have looked at the building, and visitors who come at service times and those who come just because the church is unlocked and thought about those who are beginning their journeys, who we called seekers.

I hope that you have found this useful and that it has either reassured you that you are doing the right things or given you food for thought.

Next steps

The Course leader then asks:

You now need to make a decision on what you want to do next. Do you want to run a formal welcome yourselves using a professional course like the Church House publishing course www.everybodywelcome.org.uk

Should more people be encouraged to attend this or a similar course?

Could you run a Parish or Deanery initiative on welcome.

Would it be useful to get a copy of what everyone put on the activity sheets?

If so do you have their contact details??.

The Course leader finishes:

And to end a **FINAL FACT:** A recent survey by C of E found that 92% who came to church for 1st time didn't go back...

Let us not be a Church like that...

Thank everyone for attending.

After the Course

Be pleased with yourself that it has gone so well.

Tidy room.

If you agreed to circulate activity sheets ensure that you do this.

If you have agreed to find out things and let people know, please do so.

Take a few minutes to reflect what went well and what could be improved upon for the future.