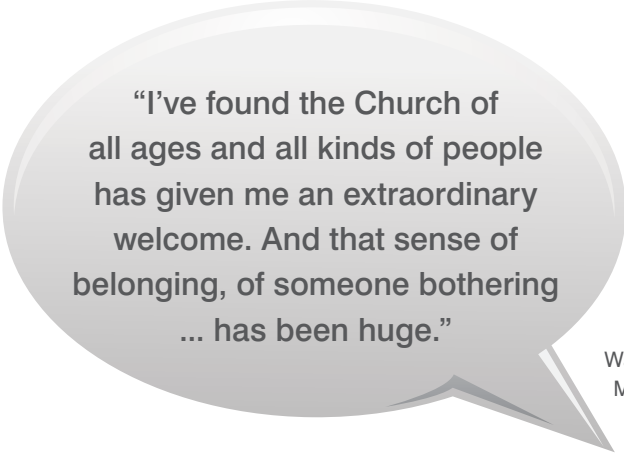




first impressions count

Deepening your church's culture of welcome

• FACILITATOR'S GUIDE •



“I’ve found the Church of all ages and all kinds of people has given me an extraordinary welcome. And that sense of belonging, of someone bothering ... has been huge.”

(The Revd Dr Mark Wakelin, President of the Methodist Conference, 2012/2013)

Introduction

The welcome someone receives in church has a huge impact on whether they stay. Many of us are in the Church because of the acceptance and inclusion we’ve felt when we entered it, and that we continued to feel as we’ve remained.

Welcome is also a deeply biblical theme, finding its roots in the compassion of God for the outsider, and illustrated vividly in Jesus’ own commitment to share a table with all – lawyers and sinners, religious leaders and tax collectors. Jesus’ contemporaries were quick to note – often with derision – the breadth and depth of the welcome he offered to others (Mark 2:16).

Welcome is rooted in God’s nature as Trinity. The welcome that Jesus offers in his ministry to and for others reflects the welcome that the Father offers to the world. The Spirit draws us into the welcoming life of God, shaping us to be like Jesus. Christians are called to welcome others as they have been welcomed.

First Impressions Count is a workshop designed to help churches reflect on the welcome that someone experiences when they first visit church. Although creating a positive first impression is only a part of welcome, it is nonetheless an important one, and research shows that those who do not receive a good first impression are unlikely to stay. On the other hand, leaving visitors with a positive first impression is a way of sharing the generous welcome of God with those who cross the threshold of our churches.

The **aim** of this workshop, then, is to enable churches to become more welcoming by raising awareness of the importance of initial impressions before, during and after a newcomer’s first contact.

Four **objectives** support this aim:

● to help participants reflect on the welcome communicated by the church building

● to help participants reflect on the need to create an environment where those who visit are warmly welcomed into the church community

● to help participants reflect on ways to welcome visitors who are unfamiliar with the culture of Church

● to signpost other resources that can help participants explore other aspects of welcome within the church.

The workshop was first developed by the Revd Bev Hollings, at the time District Evangelism Enabler in Leeds District, with the help of Vivien Morrissey, Training Officer in the Leeds District. The material was also edited by a working party made up of Ed Mackenzie (Evangelism, Spirituality and Discipleship Officer), Dr Jack Lawson (District Development Enabler & Evangelism Enabler, East Anglia District), Richard Armiger (Regional Training Officer, BEH and East Anglia District & District Development Enabler, BEH District) and Matthew Reed (Southampton District Development Enabler). A pilot followed in January 2013.

The workshop is designed to run for **2 hours 30 minutes** – including time for opening worship (**10 mins**) and coffee (**5 mins**) – and is divided into different parts:

Opening worship introduces the notion of welcome through an image of the crucifixion. (**10 mins**)

Session 1, ***Creating a welcoming building***, explores how the architectural and physical features of a church can communicate or fail to communicate welcome to visitors. Even before visitors enter a church space, reflecting on what it communicates is an important part of nurturing a positive first impression. (**45 mins**)

Session 2, ***Being a welcoming people***, focuses on the impression visitors receive when they meet people within the church, and encourages participants to identify with the anxieties of entering an unfamiliar setting. (**45 mins**)

Session 3, ***Welcoming through inclusion***, explores the cultural gaps that separate many within our society from the Church, and gives participants the chance to explore scenarios of inclusion. (**45 mins**)

If the workshop is delivered in one sitting, we would suggest a morning event followed by lunch. The sessions of the workshop, however, can also be delivered separately if that best suits the context (and could perhaps be run over separate evenings).

As well as providing instructions for facilitating the three sessions,¹ this guide includes a suggested approach to 'opening worship' as well as five appendices.

Appendix 1 offers 'guidance for facilitators', a checklist for helping to prepare for the event.

Appendix 2 lists the equipment and resources for running the training.

Appendix 3 is a guide to further reading that might inform the training, or for those wishing to explore other approaches to welcome.

Appendix 4 provides a suggested outline for a half-day session of *First Impressions Count*.

Appendix 5 provides alternative prayers for use during a *First Impressions Count* workshop, particularly if the workshop is split over more than one session.

We don't pretend that *First Impressions Count* covers all that there is to welcome – what course could? – but it is hoped that the workshop will help your church begin to reflect on the importance of creating a welcoming environment for those who cross its threshold.

¹A PowerPoint accompanies this facilitator's guide.

Opening worship (10 mins)



- Introduce yourself as the facilitator and explain the aim of the workshop, giving an overview of the three sessions.



SLIDES 1-2

- Point out toilets, emergency escape routes, any refreshments throughout, etc. (This will also illustrate good practice in this area.)
- Begin with a brief time of worship or opening prayer.



SLIDE 3

- The image of the crucifixion, taken from the Methodist Modern Art Collection, might be a useful catalyst for reflecting on how our welcome of others is rooted in God's welcome of us. Within the Christian tradition, the cross is an expression of God's sacrificial love, and God's love for us – demonstrated in the cross – leads us to love others (1 John 4:10-11). Just as God has welcomed us, so we too can welcome others. How you open a time of worship depends on the facilitator and the context – the possible use of this painting is just one suggestion.
- A suggested prayer for use:²



SLIDE 4

God of welcome,
who sends your Spirit into our hearts,
shape our lives to reflect your Son,
to welcome the outsider,
to greet the stranger,
and to seek the lost,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

- Encourage participants to welcome one another in twos, share names and ask where each person is from. If the workshop is held in a district setting, encourage participants to sit with people they don't know.
- Give out the participant's pack: overview of the day (note that one is provided as Appendix 4 – this gives some suggested timings, and can be adapted and printed out for the particular context), hospitality audits, action sheets, and the *Going further* handout.

²This prayer was originally written for *The Big Welcome* initiative, see www.thebigwelcome.org.

Session 1

Creating a welcoming building (45 mins)

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PHOTO: © TMCP

The **aim** of Session 1 is to help participants reflect on the welcome communicated by the church building.

Outline of Session 1

1. Hospitality audit 1
2. Your experience of welcome



SLIDE 5

1.1 Hospitality audit 1 (20 mins)

- Give out the first hospitality audit. Encourage those present to fill it in for their church. Participants then explain their responses to a neighbour, or – if from the same church – talk about the points where they have given different scores.



SLIDE 6

- Plenary: go through the audit, and encourage people to put hands up to indicate the various scores. Draw out the key points.
 - Don't feel the need to cover all points. You might wish to ask churches to reflect on their areas of good practice, as well as identifying areas for improvement.
 - Use your own experience of good and bad buildings. Some examples from others include:

A visiting preacher spent half an hour driving up and down a short road looking for a church, which was eventually discovered behind a row of shops, accessed via a narrow drive.

There's nothing worse than turning up for a concert advertised on the notice board for 'This Saturday' which happened three weeks ago!

- Illustrate good and bad examples from the PowerPoint (examples include untidy churchyards; unclear entrances; closed doors; bad signage).



SLIDES 7-10

- You might also share good examples of welcome leaflets during this point.

1.2 Your experience of welcome (25 mins)

- Break the gathering into small groups, and ask each one to discuss occasions when they were made to feel really welcome. What made them feel so welcome? Ask groups to recall times when they were made to feel unwelcome. Why was that?



SLIDE 11

Encourage groups to note the good and bad practices that emerged from the discussion on flipchart paper. Ideally move groups to sit around tables for this exercise. If space does not allow, then it may be best to get responses on A4 paper.

- Collect up the sheets as people return to the main seating area. Put the sheets up on the wall and draw out a few points.
 - Points may include provision for children, a friendly but not overpowering welcome, being introduced to others.
- Based on the audit and discussion, encourage participants to fill in the action sheet questions for Session 1.



SLIDE 12

Coffee Break: (5 mins) (Give people the opportunity to look at the sheets during the break.)

Session 2

Being a welcoming people (45 mins)

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The **aim** of Session 2 is to help participants to reflect on the need to create an environment where those who visit are warmly welcomed into the Church community.

Outline of Session 2

1. Hospitality audit 2
2. Imagining the experience of welcome



SLIDE 13

2.1 Hospitality audit 2 (20 mins)

- Show the Methodist video *What's Your Welcome?* as an illustration of key dimensions of welcome (a warm greeting, hospitality, acceptance, coming home) and a way of connecting to the last session.



SLIDE 14

- Give out the second hospitality audit. Encourage those present to fill it in for their church. Ask participants to explain their response to a neighbour, or – if from the same church – talk about the different points where they have given different scores.



SLIDE 15

- Plenary – go through the audit, and encourage people to put hands up to indicate the scores. Draw out the key points. Illustrate good and bad examples from the cartoon images on the PowerPoint. **(10 mins)**



SLIDES 16-19

- Don't feel the need to cover all points. You might wish to ask churches to reflect on their areas of good practice, as well as identifying areas for improvement.
- Some examples from others:

When a page number is given for the Bible reading people have been known to look it up in the hymn book, and vice versa.

Sharing the Peace can be a delicate time – complete bear hugs from strangers can be off-putting, strangely!

2.2 Imagining the experience of welcome (25 mins)

- Explain that you'd like to encourage people to imagine what it's like for people to come into church for the first time. Many people would not have been to a betting shop, and so imagining what it's like to go there can be a useful exercise. (NB This example has been shown to illustrate an unfamiliar place, and implies no judgement on those who have visited betting shops.)



SLIDE 20

- Ask those present to imagine that they've been given £3 with which they're to place a bet on a horse. How would they feel? What would they want to know? Write responses on a flipchart. When the sheet is full, try to draw parallels between the responses and how someone coming to church for the first time might feel.

If two people are facilitating, you can read out the suggestions below in the form of a skit – this can add a little humour into the session, and is an approach that worked brilliantly in the pilot for this course.

BETTING SHOP	CHURCH
Where is the betting shop?	Where is the church?
What time is it open?	What time does it start?
What do I do?	ditto
Will there be someone to show me what to do?	ditto
Do I need to take anything?	ditto
Will anyone see me going in?	Ditto – a real fear for some
Will I get better odds in a different shop?	What's the difference in all the churches – Methodist/Baptist/Anglican/Latter Day Saints...?
How long will it take? Do I have to stay until the race is over?	How long will it last? Do I have to stay until the end?
How do I collect my winnings?	<i>Difficult to draw a parallel – maybe 'will I get anything from it'</i>
Does it cost anything besides the bet?	What will it cost?
Will they all be men?	... women?
Will they stare at me?	ditto
What do I wear so I don't stand out?	ditto
Do I need to have tattoos to fit in?	Do I need to cover up any tattoos?
Where do I get a betting slip from/how do I fill it in?	Where do I get a hymn book?
Will there be a loo if need one?	ditto

- Encourage people to fill in the action sheet for the second session.

Session 3

Welcoming through inclusion (45 mins)

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The **aim** of Session 3 is to help participants reflect on ways to welcome visitors who are unfamiliar with the culture of Church.

Outline of Session 3

1. The culture gap
2. Creating inclusion in the church



SLIDE 21

3.1 The culture gap (20 mins)

- Explain that a cultural gap exists between the Church and people in today's society. This has huge implications for churches thinking about engaging their society.
- Ram Gidoomal is a multinational businessman with an East-African/Asian origin. His story illustrates an account of someone from another culture attending church for the first time. Play the three interview clips



SLIDES 22-24

The three clips cover Ram's experience of attending church for the first time, his reason for returning to church, and some key tips for churches seeking to engage with those from other cultures.

- Explain that changes in society mean that there is an increasingly wide gap between the experience of those in society and those in church. We are moving into a 'post-Christian' era where we cannot assume that people will be familiar with the church and its mores. This can be illustrated by changes:

- Sunday School attendance:



SLIDE 25

This chart shows the percentage of children attending Sunday School at various times in the last century. In 1900, 55% attended. By 1970 that percentage was 14% and by the year 2010 just 5.1%. This means that in a group of 100 school children only 5 will have any experience of attending church. Similarly of 50-60 year olds, only 14 in 100 will have that experience to look back on.

- Knowledge of the faith:



SLIDE 26

Knowledge of the Bible can no longer be taken for granted.

- Spirituality:



SLIDES 27-28

Research shows that people are increasingly identifying with 'spirituality' rather than religion.

For example, the TV show *Deal or No Deal* illustrates how people believe in charms and amulets to help them win the game, such as small Buddhas and crystals.

- Church attendance:



SLIDE 29

As Christians we need to ensure that people exploring faith who come to church have a good experience and are able to engage with the service.

3.2 Creating inclusion in the church (25 mins)



SLIDES 30-33

- Explain the importance of creating services which facilitate inclusion. You might choose to relate issues of inclusion to Methodist theology, including the belief that no-one is beyond the reach of God's love.
- Divide the group into groups of four to six, and give each group one of the scenarios to consider from the inclusion scenarios sheet.
- Encourage groups to feed back their thoughts and make any final points.

Possible points to make:

Scenario 1: *Treat them as you would anyone else. Remember that those who can't speak may have good levels of understanding. Talk to them and not just the carers. If appropriate (check with carers) visit them in their home (NB A CRB check is needed for a visitor). Sometimes small practical things make a huge difference.*

Scenario 2: *If printed notices are distributed, ensure there are enough copies for the visitors. If they would normally have a notice sheet at the Anglican church, collaborate and produce a joint sheet. Ensure clear instructions about standing, sitting, which books to use, etc.*

Scenario 3: *It is always appropriate to invite visitors to join in as much or little of the service as they feel able. This is especially so with those of other faiths. Assurance that it is OK to observe rather than to join in with words they are uncomfortable saying/singing can make a huge difference. During the service, avoid statements such as "We stand and declare our faith with the words of the creed". Instead, use something like: "I invite you to stand and declare your faith in the words of the creed".*

Scenario 4: *Suggestions could include visiting the youth club beforehand, explaining what will happen, perhaps finding information about favourite teams so that information can be passed to Revd P for illustrations in the service. In the service, ensure instructions are clear.*

- Encourage people to complete the action sheet and to consider how they will feed this back to their own church (or if only one church at the workshop, who will act on the points raised?). People can also complete the feedback sheets.



SLIDE 34

Closing Worship (5 mins)



- Conclude with worship and a closing prayer. You might choose to sing 'Let us build a house – all are welcome' (*Singing the Faith* 409). **(5 mins)**
- Give out and go through the *Further Resources* handout to signpost taking issues of welcome further.

Appendix 1

Guidance for facilitators



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It is particularly important in this session to model good practice. You may wish to consider the following:

- Choose a venue that is good for accessibility and comfort, or clearly demonstrate how to make good use of a poorer venue.
- Arrive early to set up the room and be ready to greet people.
- Try to recruit one or two 'hospitality volunteers' to help with welcoming and refreshments.
- Car parking – does this need an attendant? If there is limited parking, consider having someone to direct people to alternative parking.
- Ensure that the entrance to be used, the meeting room and toilets are clearly signed.
- Are the temperature and ventilation of the room suitable?
- Does the room layout enable everyone to see the screen?
- If a wheelchair user attends the session, what provision have you made for them?
- Are your handouts/materials available in large print?
- Is there a sound system/hearing loop and someone to operate them?
- Have spare paper and pens available.
- Use this as an opportunity to affirm those who are contributing to a welcoming church.
- When introducing the small group activities, remind participants of key ground rules: listen to one another, respect the right of each person to speak, and maintain confidentiality if personal information is shared.
- A flower arrangement makes a room look more welcoming.
- Having sweets/grapes available helps people to sustain concentration.
- Ensure that you keep to the publicised start and finish times.
- It can even be worth having some toys or at least colouring sheets for a Saturday session in case any children are brought to the session – even better arrange a crèche!

Although the overall message of the session is something churches need to take seriously, do include humour in the session, as the message can be conveyed in a light-hearted way.

Appendix 2

Equipment and resources needed

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Handouts

Participant's programme
(a 'template' is provided; this can be edited and printed to suit the local context)

Hospitality audits (2)

Scenarios

Action sheets

Going Further handout

Feedback sheet

Equipment

Projector

Screen

Computer

Speakers

Extension lead(s) and tape to secure to floor

Flipchart and pens

Spare pens/pencils for participants and paper for notes

Tea/coffee, etc

Optional

Examples of good welcome leaflets/packs

Flower arrangement

Sweets and/or grapes for the tables

Appendix 3

Recommended reading

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PHOTO: ©PHOTOS.COM

George Fisher and Bob Jackson, *Everybody Welcome: the course where everybody helps grow their church* (London, Church House Publishing, 2009)

A five-session course (90 minutes per session), which includes a leader's manual, member's manual, and DVD. The aim of the course is to help churches to grow through the quality of their welcome and engagement with others, and covers the initial impressions of the church through to helping newcomers belong to the church community. Sessions 1-4 are intended for the whole church, while session 5 is for those involved in a welcome team.

Alison Gilchrist, *Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Local Church* (Cambridge, Grove Booklets, 2004)

A helpful Grove Booklet that provides some pointers towards developing a culture of welcome in church. Gilchrist also provides a 'hospitality audit' and an 'in their shoes' exercise in the appendix, as well as signposting a Bible study on welcome on the Grove website.

Michael Harvey, with Rebecca Paveley, *Unlocking the Growth: you'll be amazed at your church's potential* (Oxford, Monarch Books, 2012)

Unlocking the Growth explores ways of encouraging church members to invite others to come to church. It includes material on why Christians don't invite their friends, 'twelve steps to become an inviting church', and 'turning failure into a friend'.

Patrick R Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: a public theology of worship and evangelism* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1992)

A broad study of congregational hospitality which links evangelism to the practice of worship.

Jack Lawson, *Gateways to God? Mission and evangelism audit*

This booklet explores ways in which churches and circuits can be 'gateways to God' rather than simply 'maps to Methodism'. It provides a series of questions for church and circuit audits, including 'who are we from the outsider's point of view?' and 'if our churches were businesses, would people know what our product is?' Available on the Methodist website, www.methodist.org.uk/media/865670/dd-gateways-to-god-0413.pdf.

Amy G Odgen, *And You Welcomed Me: a sourcebook on hospitality in the early Christianity* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2001)

An anthology of documents from late antique and the early medieval world that illustrate the Christian practice of hospitality.

Gordon Temple, with Lin Ball, *Enabling Church: a Bible-based resource towards the full inclusion of disabled people* (London, SPCK, 2012)

This book offers a variety of stories and resources to help churches move towards the fuller inclusion and involvement of disabled people.

***Growing in Welcome*, (a workbook produced by the Mission Core Group, Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway)**

This offers a variety of resources that seek to help a diocese build a culture of welcome. Available at md.glasgow.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/growing-in-welcome-workbook-january-2011.pdf.

Appendix 4

Suggested outline



[The following outline can be adapted for local use: please adjust the timings as necessary.]

First Impressions Count

Aim: To enable churches to become more welcoming by raising awareness of the importance of initial impressions before, during and after a newcomer's first contact.

Objectives: Exploring the newcomer's perspective on

- the external appearance of, and access to the building
- the initial greeting stage
- how inclusion in the service is facilitated
- the after-service fellowship and follow up.

Timing:

10.00 Introductions and opening worship

10:10 **Session 1:** Creating a welcoming building

10:55 Coffee break

11:00 **Session 2:** Being a welcoming people

11:45 **Session 3:** Welcoming through inclusion

12:30 Closing worship [optional]

Appendix 5

Alternative prayers

The following prayers have been taken from *Crossing the Chasm: The Methodist Prayer Handbook 2012/2013* (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing, 2012). These prayers provide an alternative to the suggested opening prayer, or – if the workshop is run over three sessions – possible prayers to use in each session.

God with us, Emmanuel;
you cross the chasm of time and space,
you break down walls of fear and prejudice,
you span the waters of chaos,
you come to us in love.

Sending God;
help us to cross the chasm of hurt
and painful memory,
help us to break down barriers that divide,
help us to bear your peace in a troubled world.
Send us in love,
go with us.

Amen.

(Ruth Gee, President Designate of the Methodist Conference, 2013/2014)

Bridgebuilder God,
as we look at the places where we live,
we are aware of many gaps that separate
the Church from the community.

Help us to span the gulf that divides
people from the Church
and to be the ones who draw the two sides
closer together.

Enable us, through word and action,
to link with one another,
and to be channels through which
your grace can flow.

We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ,
who crossed the greatest chasm of all,
by coming from heaven to earth to live among us.

Amen.

(Hilary Cheng, minister, Cambridge)

Loving, living God,
when we allow the sea of the world's indifference to
make your Church into an island,
forgive us and challenge us to risk pushing out into
the deep water.

When we close our minds to the questions of the
world and its people,
forgive us and challenge us to open ourselves
to the risk of vulnerable love
and the service of others.

When we are fearful, filled with doubt and uncertainty,
forgive us and, by your Spirit,
turn our eyes to you,
who reconcile all things to yourself
and call us to a ministry of reconciliation,
offering hope to a world in need.

In the name of Jesus, by whose healing love we are
made whole, we pray.

Amen.

(James Booth, Liverpool District Chair)

Lord Jesus, we marvel that you laid aside
the glory of heaven
to come to us.

We revel in your love and sacrifice.

Help us to respond by giving ourselves to you,
so that others may know you
and revel in your love for them.

May our sacrifices reflect your sacrifice;
our love reflect your love and
our lives be employed or laid aside for your glory.

Amen.

(Graham Thompson, East Anglia District Chair)