



Welcoming

A Bondi Anglican Church workshop

Equipping Workshops are designed to be done either in groups or 1:1. They are focussed, brief, practical and designed to help the congregations and ministry teams of Bondi Anglican Parish.

Ideally, the material will be distributed days before the face to face workshop. This allows time for all participants to read and go through the activities most effectively. At the workshop, participants work through this paper with a leader, sharing responses on the written content and to the specific questions, with a focus on ministry skills, next actions and a prayerful response. Workshops take just under an hour.

Note to Welcoming Workshop leaders.

Before taking someone through this workshop, review the two core workshops: 'the equipping church' and 'every member ministry'. This 'welcoming ministry' paper helps equip people who want to join the welcoming team, but is great for everyone in our church to go through, as we build and grow a welcoming culture.

Introduction

Welcoming newer people into the church is a key ministry. It is the main process along the pathway to being connected and engaged with us. Making people feel warmly accepted and loved as they first come among our church family is a clear way of displaying the love and compassion of Jesus.

We all need to remember that a newcomer at church is in a foreign environment, and most people are nervous in that context. That nervousness escalates when nobody talks to you or cares about you during your entire stay. Both research and our own experience tells us that newcomers who do not feel welcome will not return.

What message about church are newcomers at our gatherings left with?

Effective welcoming has to be planned. We need to make sure we are loving our newcomers and letting them know it. Anyone who comes among the family of believers should feel deeply loved from the front, but through the words and actions of the people around them.

From the initial “hello” to the conversations before and after church to the ongoing contact, we need to be showing generous grace to all people who come through our doors.

While bad welcoming equals feeling unwelcome, good welcoming can mean the start of a relationship that brings praise to God through Jesus Christ.

Initial discussion.

Can you recall a positive experience of being welcomed at church? What was done or said that was so helpful? What do you find most difficult or most enjoyable about welcoming newcomers?

Questions:

Why is it so important to welcome people into church?

Why do we sometimes not welcome people when they walk into church?

When was the last time you went to an event, it might have been church, where you didn't really know anyone else. How were you welcomed?

When was the last time you went to an event where you were not welcomed, how did you feel? What was the likelihood that you would come back?

Welcoming and the Gospel

While there are practical reasons that we welcome, like we want people to come back and not appear rude, there are also **theological** reasons that we welcome people?

When we welcome, what are we aiming to do?

What is one thing you can do better at welcoming someone today?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

Above all, what should we do to each other?

How does love cover over sins?

What do welcoming and follow-up have to do with faithfully administering God's grace?

How can we as welcomers be better at loving others deeply? (be specific- e.g. we could hand out welcome gifts with a church brochure.)

What are some practical things we can do so that 'in all things' God is 'praised through Jesus Christ' by our welcoming?

There is a strong emphasis in the New Testament on unity, mutual love and care within Christian congregations. It's worth studying the reasons why welcoming is so important, and why welcoming means much more than just a smile at the front door of church. Read the following verses and discuss how they apply to welcoming Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 John 3:14-18; Romans 12:9-17.

Why welcoming matters so much.

1. Welcoming points people to the gospel. Our God is a generous and welcoming God, and when we welcome people warmly and lovingly, we demonstrate God's love, and point them to Jesus.
2. People can be anxious. In a new and unfamiliar situation people feel anxious. Visitors to the church are in an unfamiliar setting. Good welcoming helps minimise anxiety.
3. People often visit churches around significant times in life; when they: move to a new community; change marital status; have a new baby; have a close friend or loved one die; are ill; change job or face unemployment. At such times, people are receptive to new ideas and new commitments. But if they are not welcomed properly the first time they will often not try again.
4. Many people are searching for meaning in life. They return to old values including church. Studies show that denominational affiliation is no longer a significant factor in why Australians choose a church. The more significant factors are how warmly they feel welcomed and the friendliness of people they meet on their first visit, relevance and style of teaching.
5. Churches have healthy growth if they have a good system for welcoming and helping new people feel included. There are many people in our community recovering from broken relationships, divorce, separation and/or family breakdown. There are many people looking for a sense of community and being a part of a group that is kind and generous. Our welcoming church will attract them, and point them to our great God.

Some pitfalls to avoid when welcoming:**1) Thinking it's a church staff job.**

It is unsustainable, unhealthy and impossible for church staff to always meet, greet and welcome every new person. That's why we need a team of church members who are prepared to meet and welcome newcomers. Part of that will be introducing them to the church staff when possible.

2) Thinking it's everybody's job.

It is true that welcoming should be natural. If everyone makes newcomers feel welcome that is brilliant. However jobs that are assumed to be done by everybody tend to be left to everybody else. As a result they don't get done effectively. To be effective, welcoming must be organised, structured and done by a dedicated team.

The pathway

Welcoming happens along the pathway that takes people from being outside the congregation to being actively engaged members within it:

There are lots of ways that our welcoming team can proceed.

If all members of the welcoming team work together, it minimises the chances of people 'slipping through the cracks'. Communication and teamwork go hand in hand. Obviously, ensuring everyone gets a warm welcome at our gatherings are a great start. Communication that enables effective follow-up in the next few days is even better.

People are more likely to feel they belong in a congregation when they have some basic points of connection:

- they have developed two or more relationships with people or families in the church.
- they see a role they can have to contribute to the congregation.
- are actively invited to be involved in some area of ministry.
- they have a sense of ownership and membership of the congregation.

Before you arrive, have in your mind the specific aim of welcoming at least one new person. Pray about this. Plan some ways of striking up conversations with a new person. Some plans to invite them to a meal or an upcoming event.

The welcoming Process

Public Awareness

We want people in our area to be aware of our church and where we meet. This happens through a number of ways (e.g. through our webpage and social media, noticing our building, letterbox drops or through people passing on information and an invitation verbally). We want our members to actively invite others to Bondi Anglican church as a place to encounter God. Everyone turns up for the first time because they have become aware that we are here.

Front door

2 or 3 people are on front door point.

Arrive 30 mins early so you can help do the jobs that need to get done before church and and welcome everyone who comes.

it's really important to keep your focus on newer people. Sometimes it's hard not to chat exclusively with friends, but you need to stay freed up to greet new people. Your friends will understand.

introduce yourself. Saying your name invites them to do the same back.

give them a Bible, service-sheet, a newcomers info sheet and pen

there are other arrangements specific to your service that need to be communicated. For example, morning tea/supper after the service (or during a break); arrangements for crèche and kids church.

Ushers

Male and female on point just inside the entrance doors, free to greet new people.

They introduce themselves to people as they come in.

They point out to visitors where they can sit. If it seems appropriate, sit them next to regulars or go and sit with them yourself at start of church.

if someone who was on the front door is going to sit with the visitor, get another usher to fill in for them.

during the break is a good opportunity to have a quick chat with a visitor (if you're sitting next to one, stay with them, get to know them, wait for someone to come over with the contact card. If you're not sitting next to someone, go over to a person on their own a visitor or someone who doesn't come very often, somebody who's on the outer fringe of our church family).

The tools

Contact Slip (CS)

Every newcomer needs to be approached: Stranger or friend, family, in town or out of town, visiting or looking to stay. All newcomers should expect to be approached to fill in a Contact Slip because it's been announced by the service leader. The break is the best chance to ask a visitor to add their details or immediately after the service.

A strategy needs to be in place so that the CS person is able to approach all newcomers and isn't caught up in conversation with one person. People aren't offended if you say things like "Sorry, but I've just got to catch another couple of people, we might get to catch up after the service".

Contact Slips are filled out by everyone. Without this the follow-up team mightn't know if a person is new or how to care for them. Contact slips are most useful if they provide as much information as possible.

Regulars list

It's easy to lose touch of to let people who are "regulars" slip through the cracks. Checking the regulars list helps stop this from happening and Parish Council will ensure this happens at each congregation.

Morning tea and supper/dinner

Look after visitors. This may mean spending the entire time with them:

- introduce them to others.
- ask if they want to find out about the church and its ministries.
- let the minister know about them (& Youth Group Leaders, etc as appropriate)
- invite them back to church, fill in IS & pass on their details [Contact slip]
- look out for them next week. Remind Small Group leaders to do the same

Look after regulars. We want them to meet together and hear God's word.

- keep an eye out for people on the fringe of the church family. Think about how to help them to feel connected (part of God's family).
- keep an eye out for people who've never really connected with people from church (other than the few people they knew when they arrived). An example of this could be a group from another church background, who keep to themselves.
- please try not to show favouritism. Jesus treats all people with the same love and commitment. Some time's it's hard but important for us to do the same, whether it's somebody you find a bit 'weird' or somebody who you think is a bit more attractive.

The Back door

- apart from making somebody feel loved and welcomed into God's family, effective welcoming leads to effective follow up.
- at a follow up meeting, people involved in follow up ministry sit down and review the information provided by the welcomers (contact slips, attendance lists).

- from here the appropriate action is taken according to the person's situation (e.g. a letter written by the minister; sent a newsletter; linked to a small group; met with 1:1 to go through the gospel; or contacted by a member of the congregation).

How is our welcoming team going at loving each other deeply? (be specific – how are you going to make sure the front door, follow up slips, attendance is covered, who does what etc)...

Here are some other factors to consider in Welcoming:

The 36-hour principle

When church members make contact with a first-time visitor within 36 hours, 85% of them will return to church the next Sunday. When the contact is delayed 72 hours, only 60% return, when delayed five to seven days, 15% return (Corney, The Welcoming Church, p.21).

If it is the minister that makes the first visit, all the percentages are cut in half. The visitor either feels that this is merely a duty the minister is performing or is threatened by such a quick visit. If the visit is made by a “normal” member of the congregation, the person being visited will feel cared for by the community.

Our Buildings Speak

The first thing people see is our building. It says a lot about us. Here is what people will remember:

General appearance: Is the building and gathering space neat, clean and well presented? Is the building cared for and attractive? Is the entrance doorway and foyer clear and inviting? There should not be any broken cracked or unclean elements.

Lighting: Can people see what is going on? Is it warm and inviting or dim and gloomy?

Sound: The music that people hear as they walk in the door can have a big effect on how welcome they feel.

Seating: There should be at least 18 inches between people if you're using chairs and 21 inches between people if you're using pews. If you use moveable seats, set them up so people can see some of each other's faces. It will dramatically improve how people respond to the service. Always set up less chairs than you need. It's encouraging to your people when additional chairs must be brought in as people arrive. On the other hand, it's very discouraging to worship in a service when surrounded by empty chairs.

Temperature: Being too cold can be a distraction, being too warm makes it hard to concentrate. 23 C is apparently the ideal temperature, but err on the side of being too cool.

Kids ministry space: it needs to be safe and clean and look friendly.

Clean toilets: Visitors may forget the sermon but the memory of a dirty toilet has a big negative impact. People come to big conclusions by the presentation and cleanliness of toilets.

How to Have a Conversation

How might you welcome someone without speaking to them? What hesitations do you have about initiating a conversation with someone you don't know? There are three parts to a conversation: The beginning, the middle and the end.

The Beginning:

What makes beginning a conversation hard?

There are three things you can talk about in the beginning: them, you and the situation you are in.

Them: You can ask questions about what they do through the week, what they like to do.

You: You can talk about what you do, what you like, etc.

The situation: You can talk about church, what they liked, what they didn't like.

What are some good ways to start a conversation?

The Middle:

Some conversations just flow and work. Some are hard work. The key to keeping a conversation going is open questions rather than closed questions. Closed questions are questions can be answered with "yes" or "no". Sometimes they can be used to clarify things about a person, but not so good for having a whole conversation.

For Example:

"Do you live around Bondi?" "Do you surf?"

Try having a conversation with someone only using only closed questions.

Open questions cannot be answered by yes or no. They usually start with "What, where, how, why, when". What do you like doing in your spare time? Where do you live? How did you find the talk? Why do you like Bondi? When was the last time you went to church?

1. Initially we talk about facts that could be known by anyone Here we are talking about one's name, occupation, hometown, interests, etc.
2. At the intermediate level, the information that is given is about things that are not always shared with everyone. It is somewhat personal but not secret information. It might include opinions on things.
3. At the central level, things that are shared are more personal and intimate. These usually include feelings, hopes beliefs and values.

Never moving through this process means that relationships remain superficial. Moving through the process too quickly can come across as a bit intense and invasive!

The End

Finally there is the end of the conversation. This can be awkward because you need to round up a conversation without the person feeling like they are being fobbed off. Here are some suggestions as to how you can finalise a conversation; Pray with them.

Introduce them to someone else.

Make a plan to meet them again- and exchange details.