



Newsletter #5

Refocus the Welcoming Lens of Your Church

Welcome to this month's Hope25 newsletter. We now have a [step-by-step overview page](#) of the monthly letters that you can use for discussion and planning in your parish Hope25 working group or parish council meetings.

When we have been part of a church community for a long time, we feel as if we belong. There is a place for us, and we know what to expect, how things happen, how to behave, and where things are. This is good, and it is as it should be. Every now and then, however, it is a good idea for us to step back and try and see through the lens of a newcomer. Just how welcoming are we for someone who is not familiar with church, liturgy, our buildings or our culture?

One thing is certain: God will continue to bring people into his church. More and more, these people will have no church background and likely do not share our Christian faith. How can we, as stewards of God's house, help to facilitate the movement from feeling like an alien to becoming part of God's family?

For someone who has no church experience, I think our primary responsibility is to help to lower their anxiety. It takes a great deal of courage to turn up to church for the first time, so it is good that we do whatever we can to help everyone feel as comfortable as possible. This process needs to begin even before they arrive.

Most visitors will check you out first on your parish website. This is a good place to start. Website front page pictures of smiling people, sharing life and faith is going to be far more attractive than those of an empty church building. Other website questions to consider:

- Is it user-friendly? Is it up to date?
- Are service times easily found?
- Does it reflect the new life and hope in Christ we are offering?
- Is our location clear and linked to provide directions?
- Can they 'check out' a sermon or recorded service so that they know what to expect?

How can we lower anxiety for people when they arrive? Clear and up-to-date signage is important. Parking access, obvious entry points and someone waiting outside the door to meet them. The information we provide and what we hand them at the door is worth considering. Too many books and forms can heighten anxiety. Grumpy greeters who take no personal interest in newcomers is probably not the image we need to be going for. Having a designated person to make a genuine connection whilst respecting personal space requires

discernment and sensitivity. Guiding them into the worship space, and seating them with another member who can be there for them to assist them with what and how things take place during the service are helpful aims.

Encouraging newcomers to stay for fellowship is important. Finding out a little bit about them without interrogation can bring out some points of commonality with current members, to whom they can be introduced. Hospitality for the unchurched generations may mean rethinking some of our norms. Good coffee, with alternative milk for allergies, needs to be a given. This is just what they are used to in our modern 'café' culture. Knowing how and when to ask about follow up can be a bit tricky, but is worth the effort. Sometimes, a member's phone number or email (with an invitation to contact if they would like to meet up during the week for coffee) is preferable to a guest being asked to provide their personal details on a first visit.

Welcoming newcomers into Christ's family can be a fine balancing act. Sometimes we will get it right, other times not. The important thing is that we keep trying and keep improving. If we can keep three key things in mind, we can't go far wrong. **Firstly**, church members come to worship with an expectation that they are there as hosts and not guests. **Secondly**, we approach newcomers with the intention to provide for them, not get something from them. **Thirdly**, we keep trying to look at every aspect of our church with fresh eyes and from the perspective of those God is calling to join us.

How has your church refocused your welcoming lens? What have you tried that works? Please share with us.

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Hope25 Parish Working Group Meeting Notes:

When was the last time you visited a new church for the first time? How does it feel?

What welcoming practices do you find most helpful?

How can we accommodate diverse needs in welcoming? e.g., extroverts and introverts.

For further discussion, watch the [5-minute video on welcoming on the Hope25 Youtube](#).