



The Diocese of West Missouri

October 27, 2006

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

The diocesan Communications Committee is pleased to present “Doing the Word: Communications Resources for the Episcopal Diocese of West Missouri.”

The “Hospitality Handbook” you are receiving today is the first installment of what the committee hopes will be several handbooks designed to equip your saints for the work of communications ministry. It may seem that a welcoming guide is an odd product for our committee to undertake. But we chose to develop this handbook first because our congregations must be prepared to welcome guests before taking real steps to draw more people into our pews. Hospitality is the foundation of evangelism – sharing the Good News first and foremost by welcoming all as Christ.

In the months to come, we plan to provide a second resource: a parish communicators’ manual to help congregations engage local media and get their stories out to their communities. Other handbooks will follow. We will send them to you as updates to “Doing the Word” so you can add them to this binder. The manuals also will be available in PDF format on the diocesan website, www.diowestmo.org.

The committee welcomes your comments and suggestions. Blessings in your work as “doers of the Word”!

God’s peace,

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THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST MISSOURI

SECTION ONE HOSPITALITY HANDBOOK

How to Welcome Visitors to Your Church



This handbook was developed by your Diocesan Communications Committee as a resource to help your parish develop, review and refine the process you use to welcome visitors. It also contains ideas on how to communicate the benefits your parish offers and examples of how other parishes welcome visitors.

The content of this handbook was derived from various sources including welcoming guidelines published by the Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis, the Episcopal Diocese New York and the United Methodist Church. Specific sources are noted in the Resources section of this handbook.



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST MISSOURI HOSPITALITY HANDBOOK

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The Hospitality Handbook is brought to you by the Communications Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of West Missouri. Our goal is to help parishes grow their membership and more fully communicate the benefits and experiences of being an Episcopalian to their communities. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please forward any comments to the Rev. John Spicer at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 6401 Wornall Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64113; 816/523-1602; jrjohn@standrewkc.org. The 2006 Communications Committee also includes: the Rev. Sidney Breese, the Rev. Kenneth Chumbley, Angela Crawford, Clark Hampton, Mary Howe, the Rev. Lauren Lyon, the Ven. John McCann, Melinda Rhodes and Robert Schubert.

The Importance of Hospitality

What better way to journey together on the Road to Emmaus than to welcome the stranger over the threshold of our churches and into our common life? While there are many ways to welcome visitors and each church has its own style and customs, universally we can be most successful by approaching the ministry of hospitality through intentionality of process and purpose.

This handbook was developed as a resource to help your parish create, review and refine the process you use to welcome visitors. It also suggests how to communicate the benefits of your parish and offers examples of how other parishes welcome visitors. Turn to page 18 to read about how large and small, urban, suburban and rural churches in West Missouri practice hospitality. Our examples include St. Andrew's and St. Mary's in Kansas City, St. Alban's in Bolivar, St. Paul's in Lee's Summit, Grace Church in Liberty and Grace Church in Carthage.

We've designed this handbook as a practical guide that can be added to and easily shared with your hospitality team. You can download additional copies from the diocesan website at diowestmo.org. But, before we begin, let's consider who we are as Episcopalians.

Who We Are

We are members of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (sometimes referred to as ECUSA). We are a Christ-centered community committed to engaging the real world and affirming the value of each person. We are known as people who place a high value on reason and thoughtful debate about theological issues and social policy. We fill the middle ground between the Catholic and Protestant traditions as a sacramental church that stresses individual responsibility and decision-making. Worship services range from contemporary to traditional. Our churches are located in urban, suburban and rural settings.

The Episcopal Church is one of 38 autonomous provinces in the Anglican Communion, which includes nearly 80 million members in 164 countries. The head of the Anglican Communion is Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The head of the Episcopal Church is Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. Being led by bishops defines us as a church; Episcopal means "bishop" in Greek.

The Diocese of West Missouri was established in 1890 and is a community of 13,000 members in 50 congregations, a hospital, a day school, a college chaplaincy, a retirement community and a nursing center. The Right Rev. Barry Howe is the bishop of our diocese.



Questions for Reflection

These questions were developed by the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis and are important ones to consider before deciding how to best refine or improve the hospitality ministry in your parish.

- The two most common characteristics of growing churches are 1) mission and 2) the ability of church members to articulate their faith stories to each other and to the outside world. Have we defined our mission and do we practice it? Can our members articulate their faith to others?
- People are seeking affiliation – a way and a place to belong. How can your parish help that happen?
- Once guests are initially welcomed, most parishioners lose interest and essentially believe it is “the rector’s job” to encourage these guests to become fully-involved members. Is this true at your parish?
- Church hospitality experts say that 15 minutes prior to Sunday Eucharist your clergy should be at the door greeting guests and parishioners while your greeters should be out in the parking lot or on the street greeting people at their cars and offering them assistance. A radical idea?
- Research has shown that today’s church shoppers often aren’t interested in “joining” a particular church. They are more like “free agents” with no real commitments, even though they may be worshipping with you each week and serving on some of your committees and in other leadership roles. How do we communicate expectations and actually ask people to formally join us?
- Does your parish REALLY want to grow? Does it want to grow if that means growing with some people who may not be “like” the people in your parish right now? What if growth means having to change some old routines or habits?

Know Your Visitor

Visitors come in all sizes, shapes, ages, races and sexes, and we need to be prepared to welcome all.

CONSIDER THAT THE VISITOR...

- May be someone new to your community.
- May be someone seeking a spiritual home for himself/herself or for his/her family.
- May be someone from another faith tradition or with no faith background at all.
- May be someone who is Anglican and knows that the Episcopal Church is a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion.
- May be someone who is seeking God and wants to know if your church can help on that path.
- May be a family...a single parent with children... a teenager...a college student...or a senior citizen.
- May be anyone!

Welcoming the Visitor to Your Church

What does it mean to practice a ministry of hospitality? All churches want to welcome new people and increase membership. But it's also our call to welcome the stranger with no strings attached.

How do we practice this ministry? How do we make the visitor feel welcome? How do we define "welcoming" and "inviting" in a church setting? To be effective, we need to be very intentional about teaching and modeling our theology about how to share our community with anyone who shows up, whether it is for a day, a month or the rest of their lives. The entire church community must embrace the hospitality

mission and what it means to sincerely welcome people in Christ's name.

The following checklists have been prepared to help your parish develop, review and/or refine the process you use to welcome visitors. These checklists are guides to help you take an inventory of church grounds, visitor materials and the way strangers are welcomed. In short, we encourage you to put yourself in the shoes of the visitor and see how welcome you feel.

Take an Inventory of Hospitality Practices

As a first step, let's look at your current practices and procedures. If you work with a hospitality team, this is a good exercise to review with everyone on the team.

1. What is currently done to welcome the visitor?
2. Who is involved in the hospitality ministry?
3. What is said to the visitor? By whom?
4. What materials are provided to the visitor? Who gives them out? Where are they located or stored at the church?
5. How long has it been since the materials were updated or the practices reviewed?



Understand the Visitor's Point of View

As a first step, let's look at your current practices and procedures. If you work with a hospitality team, this is a good exercise to review with everyone on the team.

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Before the visitor walks through the door of your church, consider how and where people may hear about you.

1. How do visitors learn about your church?
There are many sources that can provide information about your church to the public, including the phone book, newspapers, church signs, Welcome Wagon, real estate agents, personal invitations, your website, mailings, special-event flyers, or listings in hotels.
 - Is your church listed in all these ways?
 - Where else can the church be listed?
 - Are you taking advantage of all the opportunities to spread your name?

2. How does the church "look and feel" to visitors?

First impressions are important, and how your church "looks" to visitors can have a tremendous impact on their interest in learning more about you.

- Are the church grounds pleasing to the eye? Lawn mowed, landscaping trimmed? Signs easy to read? Exterior of the church maintained? Snow shoveled and walkways cleared?
- When visitors try to enter the church, do they easily find the front door? Once inside, are signs effective in directing visitors to restrooms, childcare, Sunday school classes, the coffee/fellowship area and the worship space?
- Is the inside of the church and its classrooms clean? Are restrooms clean?
- Are plants and flowers fresh and well tended?
- Is the temperature inside the church comfortable?
- Is the church accessible to people with disabilities?
- Is there a water fountain readily available?
- Is the parking area easy to find? Are visitor parking places designated near the church entrance?
- Are the signs readable and in convenient locations?

Provide the Right Information

Typically, people seek specific information when they are interested in your church. Does your church convey the following information in its signage, phone messages, printed materials and website?

- Times of services
- Location of the church
- Sunday school classes and childcare offerings
- Parking
- Accessibility for people with disabilities
- Phone number
- Website
- Directions to the church
- Names and contact information of clergy and lay leaders
- Types of services (i.e., contemporary or traditional)

What Message Are You Delivering?

- **On your answering machine** – have you listened to your phone message lately? Is the information up to date? (Announcing Easter events in June isn't a good idea.) Are service times listed? Other pertinent information? Is an emergency number included? Can you understand the speaker?
- **In your advertisements** – do your ads include the basic information of service times, location, phone number and website?
- **In the phone book** – what else is listed besides the phone number?
- **On your signs/message boards** – are they located where people can see them, whether walking or driving? Is the printing large enough?
- **On your website** – do you have a website? Are directions to the church included on the website? Does your website answer the questions a visitor would ask?

Greet and Welcome the Visitor

Place yourself in the shoes of the visitor. Remember that it is everyone's job in the church to ensure newcomers and visitors are welcomed and made to feel comfortable. Note: This includes children. Does every member know how important it is to welcome children? They are baptized members of the church or may soon be, if their parents feel welcomed.



WHEN THE VISITOR WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR...

- Is there someone at the door who smiles, says 'Welcome' or 'Good Morning' and hands out a bulletin?
- Does the bulletin help the visitor follow the service? Is the bulletin easy to read and follow for someone who has never before experienced an Episcopal liturgy?
- Is the *Book of Common Prayer* available? Does the bulletin explain what the *Book of Common Prayer* is?
- Is the music posted? Is a hymnal available? Does the visitor know where the hymnal is?
- Is there information in the pews for the visitor? Is there a pen or pencil to fill out the visitor card?
- Do the ushers, greeters and congregants wear name tags?
- Does the service start on time?
- Is there a newcomer packet available for the visitor? What's in it?
- What do you say to make conversation and put the visitor at ease?

Greet and Welcome the Visitor *continued*

“ICE BREAKER” SUGGESTIONS . . .

- “Great to have you with us! What brings you here today?”
- “Is this your first time to be with us? Can I answer any questions for you?”
- “I hope you will join us for coffee after the service. Let’s get you a name tag.”

These types of friendly, open-ended questions can help you to initiate a conversation that can lead you to identifying your guest’s needs and fulfilling them.

FOR THE CHILDREN...

- Are there soft (noiseless) toys or coloring books for children?
- Is there childcare? How do people find out about it?
- What about Sunday school?
- Are the Sunday school/childcare rooms appropriate for children and inviting?
- Can visitors easily find the nursery and Sunday school rooms? Do the ushers know where these rooms are located and can they give clear directions? Even better, are ushers and greeters ready to take visitors to the nursery and Sunday school rooms?

DURING THE SERVICE...

- Does the visitor know what’s expected? (“Please sit anywhere you like” or “If your baby gets fussy, please don’t feel you have to leave—there’s a rocking chair in the back.”)
- Does the visitor know how your church exchanges the Peace? (Does the bulletin include information on how to exchange the Peace?)
- Do the clergy welcome visitors during announcements? Are visitors invited to share Communion or receive a blessing?
- Is there someone assigned to introduce the visitor to others and to help in case he/she is confused? (Juggling a bulletin, a hymnal and the *Book of Common Prayer* can be daunting.)
- Do you have a coffee hour? How does the visitor learn about it? Are there greeters to invite the visitor for coffee and conversation? *Do members talk to the visitor during coffee hour?*
- Do people invite the visitor to return for next week’s services or for special events?



Encourage Repeat Visitors

Now that the visitor has come to your church, it's important to make sure that he/she wants to come back. The following checklists offer suggestions about how to encourage repeat visitors, as well as a few reminders of why visitors DON'T return.

TO HELP THE VISITOR RETURN...

- Does the visitor receive a call or personal visit from clergy? From lay leaders?
- Does the church sponsor special events to make the visitor feel welcome, such as a Welcoming Dinner or Welcoming Sunday?
- Who is responsible for welcoming the visitor? Is there a Welcoming Committee? What role do the clergy, vestry and wardens play?
- What welcoming materials are available?
- Is there training for greeters/ushers?
- Does the website provide information on volunteer activities and upcoming events?
- Do members remember that visitors have visited before and welcome them as such?
- Do members invite visitors to join in an event or activity at the church?

These are the most common reasons visitors have given for not returning to a church.

REASONS VISITORS DON'T RETURN...

- I couldn't find a place to park.
- The people weren't friendly.
- I couldn't follow the service.
- Childcare was lacking or didn't exist.
- Church was boring.
- I didn't like the way the place looked – too much stuff all around.
- I couldn't sing the music.
- I didn't know what to do and there was no one to ask.
- The service started late.
- I wasn't invited back.
- It looked like it was all cliques.
- No one talked to me.
- I was asked if I was willing to pledge and give money, but I wasn't asked about myself.
- I was passed over at the Peace.
- I was desperately "over-welcomed" — they were thrilled to death to have another body that could potentially warm a pew and fill out a pledge card.
- The place was dirty, including the restrooms.
- I felt like an idiot during coffee hour because I was standing alone with no one saying hello or chatting.
- "We got the distinct impression we didn't belong here" (from a family of color with several children).
- No one ever made the follow-up call that was promised.

Examples of Welcoming Tools

When someone visits your home, no doubt you greet him or her with a smile, pleasant conversation and a cup of coffee. Consider the visitor to your church as a visitor in your home. You want the person to feel welcome, to participate and to return. You want him or her to feel at home.

Having visitor information readily available is one way to make visitors feel welcome. Whether you provide a Welcome Packet at church or present it to the newcomer during a follow-up home visit, it's good to let the visitor know what the church is all about and that you are interested in him or her. As you prepare or evaluate existing welcome practices, here are some ideas to think about.

The Welcome Packet

Welcome Packets can be any size or shape, any design or format. The information can be included in one large booklet, individual sheets or a series of pamphlets. It can be presented in a folder, an envelope or as a book. Just be certain the information is up to date, easy to read, and covers the important points that a visitor wants or needs to know.

What is included in a Welcome Packet is up to you. There can be a lot of information or just an overview. Here are some items you may want to consider including in your Welcome Packet:

- List of clergy, staff and lay leadership, and how to contact them (phone and email)
- List of Sunday and weekly services with appropriate details (music, healing service, etc.)
- Most recent Sunday bulletin and church newsletter (if you have a mission statement, make sure it is included on these printed pieces)
- A history of the church and a photo
- Groups within the church that the visitor might want to join (ECW, Men's Group, choir)
- Educational offerings and opportunities (Bible Study, discussion groups)
- Information for children (Sunday school, childcare, vacation Bible school, available toys, etc.)
- Groups that meet at the church (AA, Al-Anon, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts)
- Details on upcoming special events

- How to get involved and how to volunteer
- How to join the church
- How to request prayer and notify clergy of pastoral issues
- A map of the church showing the physical layout
- A reply card so people can request more information
- Coffee hour – what is it? Where is it?
- Opportunities for outreach through or at the church
- Website information
- Accessibility information
- How to receive the sacraments
- Glossary of key terms (quick and brief) – here are some ideas:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anglican | <input type="checkbox"/> Confirmation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baptism | <input type="checkbox"/> Deacon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bishop | <input type="checkbox"/> Episcopal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Book of Common Prayer</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Hymnal |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Priest |

What NOT to Include in Your Welcome Packet?

A pledge card!

Tips for Engaging Newcomers

Contributed by Grace Church, Carthage

Reproduce this handy guide and distribute it to all your members. Suggest they bring it with them each Sunday!

A MEMBER'S GUIDE TO WELCOMING VISITORS

- Adopt the “rule of three” – that members will only talk to guests, not other members, in the first three minutes following the service. That is typically how long it takes guests to exit. It’s hard to be friendly to someone who just left.
- Enact the “circle of 10” rule – that each member will greet anyone, member or guest, who comes within 10 feet of them. Remember, newcomers are looking for a friendly and welcoming place.
- Don’t be shy about talking about your faith or the wonderful ministry done at your church. Newcomers are looking for a place to grow spiritually.
- Introduce yourself:
 - “Hello my name is _____. Welcome to _____ Church!”
 - “Hello. My name is _____, and your face is a new one to me.” (Reach out to shake hands when saying this.) This is a great way to avoid embarrassing yourself if the person you’re greeting is a lifetime member who comes twice a year.
 - “Hello my name is _____. It’s a pleasure to meet you. Can I help you find anything here at _____ Church?”
- Ask if they need help with the *Book of Common Prayer*.
- After the service, introduce newcomers to others.
- Have a newcomer’s event at a home or the church. Invite two to three current members to attend also. Have everyone bring something, even if it’s paper cups and plates. This will increase the probability of attendance. As a group, give everyone an opportunity to share previous church experiences. Ask how they heard about your church and what brought them here.

THE HOSPITALITY GAME

Start a little healthy competition among your parishioners—see who can be the most welcoming member of your church! The goal is to earn points by doing the following activities with newcomers at Coffee Hour. (And a few laughs never hurt anybody.)

- Introduce a visitor to the rector 10 points
- Introduce a visitor to the bishop, if present 10 points
- Introduce a visitor to the deacon 10 points
- Introduce a visitor to the senior warden 20 points
- Introduce a visitor to your spouse 100 points
- Introduce a visitor to friends 20 points each
- Talk to a visitor’s children/grandchildren 500 points
- Guide a visitor to his/her child’s Sunday school room 500 points
- Get a visitor to the Common Room for coffee 500 points
- Ask a visitor if he/she would like to receive the newsletter 50 points
- Hand a visitor a newsletter 150 points
- Gather a completed visitor’s form 1,000 points
- Show a visitor around the church 3,000 points
- Ask a visitor something about him/her 3,000 pts each
- Talk about the opportunities to grow spiritually in this church 3,000 points
- Complain about the rector -2,000 points
- Complain about the bishop -2,000 points
- Complain about the deacon -2,000 points
- Criticize another denomination -3,000 points
- Lament the impending death of the Episcopal Church -5,000 points
- Talk to your friends and ignore newcomers -10,000 points

Sample Greeter Guidelines

Contributed by St. Andrew's, Kansas City

Thank you so much for being part of the Greeter ministry. This is one of the most significant ministries we provide because greeters are the people most likely to be remembered by visitors when they leave this place. As a greeter, your face is nothing less than the face of the Body of Christ. When visitors go home and reflect on their experience, they will remember the liturgy, the sermon, and the music; but their strongest impression will be of the people they met here. And they will remember the people of this church based on how they remember **you**. It's a great responsibility that greeters take on, but it's also a great honor to bear the face of Christ to the people who come our way.

Because we bear the face of Christ, the welcome we offer must be authentic. As greeters, we can't just give people a smile, a handshake, and a nametag. Our task is to make people feel the love of God and feel truly welcomed into God's family. It's a tall order – how can we do it? Here are some general tips (see the Greeter Checklist for more information):

- **PRAY.** The most important thing you can do to prepare to be an effective greeter is to ask God to bless your ministry.
- **BE ASSERTIVE.** Our habit at church is to look for people we know and talk with them before the liturgy. But for greeters, it's vital to be on the lookout for people you don't recognize. Seek out visitors, and take the risk of making a mistake by introducing yourself and asking their names. Sometimes, people will inform you that they've been attending this church for years now. Don't let it bother you; just apologize and introduce yourself – then keep looking for visitors.
- **SPEAK IN A WELCOMING WAY.** Don't ask people whether they're "new here." If the answer is "no," they might be annoyed; and if the answer is "yes," they will feel even more like outsiders than they already do. Instead, when you don't recognize people, simply welcome them, introduce yourself, and say that you don't think you've met them before. . . .
- **BE ATTENTIVE.** When you greet visitors, think about what needs they might have. If they're a young family, ask if they'd like to be taken to the Sunday school rooms. If it's cold and they're wearing coats, take them to the coat rack. Imagine what you would need if you were walking into this church for the first time.
- **TAKE PEOPLE WHERE THEY NEED TO GO.** We may know our way around the church so well that the building seems easy to navigate. But to a visitor, finding a room can be very difficult. So when someone is looking for a Sunday school room or the restroom, take a couple of minutes to walk with them to show them where to go. The personal attention will go a long, long way toward making visitors feel welcome.

Sample Greeter Guidelines *continued*

- **ENGAGE PEOPLE IN CONVERSATION.** When you're talking with visitors, don't just limit yourself to pleasantries and comments about the weather. Ask them about the topic they know the most about: themselves and their lives. This helps them feel a connection to you (and therefore the church), and it lets them know that people here care about them.
- **USE SIMPLE TERMINOLOGY.** We use a lot of code language in the Episcopal Church. If you're speaking to a visitor, don't say, "Go through the narthex and turn right to find the undercroft." Instead, use everyday language like "entryway" and "basement." Feeling ignorant doesn't help a visitor feel welcome.
- **SERVE BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE LITURGY.** We think about greeting as something that happens as people arrive. But it's just as important to talk with visitors after the service. This is a good time to ask them about their experience of worship and to answer any questions they have. *It's also vital to invite them to coffee hour so they can meet other parishioners.*
- **INTRODUCE PEOPLE TO OTHERS.** Once you've had a chance to engage a visitor in conversation, don't let the welcome stop there. Find other members who are outgoing and friendly, and introduce the visitor to them.
- **CONSIDER YOURSELF "ON DUTY" EVERY SUNDAY.** As a greeter, you won't always be scheduled to serve. But in a sense, greeters need to be on duty every Sunday, always looking for people to welcome. It's especially meaningful to a visitor to be greeted by someone who doesn't "have to" do it.
- **FIND A REPLACEMENT WHEN YOU CAN'T SERVE.** If you can't serve on a Sunday when you're scheduled, please arrange with someone else to take your place. In addition, please notify the greeter captain for the month about the change.
- **SERVE WITH JOY!**

Sample Greeter Checklist

Contributed by St. Andrew's, Kansas City

- PRAY before you serve, asking God to bless your ministry and to empower you for it.
- Arrive 30 minutes before the service begins, and review the greeter checklist.
- Put on your personalized greeter badge.
- Welcome all people heartily and encourage them to make nametags, keeping a look-out for those who are new.
- When guests need directions, take them where they need to go. But try to ensure that another greeter is at the welcome table so others won't be missed.
- Give visitors a Guest Communication Card. Ask them to fill it out as they wait for the service to begin and then put it in the collection plate.
- Be prepared to direct families to the proper places for nursery care, Sunday school, or children's chapel. Also, tell families about the worship bags for kids and encourage them to take one.
- Invite guests to stay for coffee hour after worship.
- Remain at your greeting post until the liturgy has been going on for 5 or 10 minutes.
- After the service, introduce guests to others, including clergy.
- Tell guests about other groups and activities at the church, and invite them to whatever seems most appropriate. Offer them brochures about different ministry areas.
- **SERVE WITH JOY!**



Event Ideas

Hospitality is how we show kindness and acceptance to everyone—guests and members alike. So far, we've focused on the basics in welcoming visitors to our churches on Sunday mornings. This section offers ideas about how to generate additional interest in your church proactively through special events.

A FEW WORDS ON PROMOTING EVENTS

Remember to create excitement and promote your event by outlining your plans to the congregation. Write articles about the event in the newsletter and update your website. Make announcements in the bulletin and during worship. Ask the priest to include hospitality concepts in his/her sermons. Hang banners. Include an invitation to your event on your recorded phone message. Develop flyers and ask each member to post them in establishments where they do business. Place ads and send news releases to your local media, including television stations.

PLAN EVENTS IN ADVANCE AND INVITE PEOPLE

Plan any event at least a month in advance and create a list of invitees. Give each church member (include children and youth) five invitations, and ask them to write a personal note in each and return them for the church to mail. A list of invitees should be created and posted so members can become familiar with the names before the event. Invitations should be sent two weeks in advance. It is crucial that every member of your congregation be prepared to invite and receive newcomers into a relationship with Christ through your church.

Examples of Events

1. COMMUNITY WORSHIP SERVICES

Plan special worship services to reach out to others in the community. Consider structuring services around issues and themes that are important to your community. Announce the events with door hangers, invitations and perhaps even personal letters to the community.

2. DIVERSITY SERVICES

If your congregation is ethnically diverse, celebrate that gift! Invite members to dress in indigenous attire, to pray in their own languages, to introduce songs or hymns from other cultures, or to educate the congregation about religious traditions in other cultures.

3. EIGHT OUT OF FOUR

For a small-group activity, have your welcoming team organize a night out for groups of eight people, including at least two newcomers. Designate hosts to choose the first activity (dinner, sporting event, concert). Invite sign-ups and ensure that newcomers are included. Each group goes out four times; rotate hosting duties and activity choices among members.

4. SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

Stage a comedy dinner show using church talent. Include a tour of the facilities and make sure each newcomer is introduced to at least five other people.

5. GREET AND MEET

Plan social opportunities (for example, a "Church Cafe" between Sunday school and worship with refreshments and a host/hostess to introduce newcomers to members). Offer tours of the facilities, and allow teachers to give a quick description of classes and study material.

Event Ideas *continued*

6. SERVE THE SERVANTS

Invite and recognize volunteers from the community (police officers, hospital workers, firefighters, etc.) and their families. Alert your newspaper of your recognition of these special people.

7. EDUCATION SUNDAY

Honor public- and private-school teachers, administrators, bus drivers and other school employees, along with your church's daycare staff and teachers, as well as their families, during a worship service.

8. CARNIVAL/CRAFT FAIRS

Include church information and an informed greeter during fall fairs, carnivals and garage sales to which the community is invited. Promote your church's outreach activities, introduce new ones and provide newcomers with opportunities to get involved.

9. COMMUNITY EVENTS

Host community events such as charity runs or festival booths, and enter floats in local parades.

10. PARENTS' NIGHT OUT

Ask the youth group to host (with adult supervision) childcare evenings at the church.

11. SPORTING EVENTS

Consider volleyball and golf tournaments or a church-wide bowling night, and invite friends to join a team. Serve refreshments at the church.

12. SUPPORT GROUPS

Attract both members and non-members by hosting a support group led by professionals donating their services. Consider including a social hour.

13. ARTISAN DAY

Display the works of artists (woodworkers, sculptors, craftspersons) in the foyer/vestibule, or invite the public to view members' collections of dolls, quilts, written works, trains, etc., and meet the congregation. Provide information about the church and a tour of the facilities.

14. WELCOMING WEEKENDS

Invite guests and/or newcomers to a Friday night (free) dinner with contemporary music and introductions (don't forget name badges). Begin Saturday with breakfast and a mini-Bible study and conduct theme-specific discussion groups, special children's sessions, a picnic lunch with a storyteller or arrange for devotional or special music. Have members agree to pick up guests and bring them to Sunday's worship service and introduce them during the service.



What Other Parishes Are Doing

One of the best ways to learn and improve is through the examples of others. A cross section of West Missouri parishes agreed to share their approaches to hospitality. Examples follow:

Small Urban Parish **St. Mary's, Kansas City**

The Rev. Lauren Lyon, rector
1307 Holmes Road
Kansas City, MO 64106
816/942-0975
www.stmaryskcmo.org



When a newcomer arrives at St. Mary's, that person is greeted before the service by one of the clergy and asked to fill out a visitor card. We ask them to tear off the top of the card, which has information about the church and service times, and return the bottom part with their name, address, etc., to one of the clergy or put it in the offering plate. They also get a copy of our parish brochure that has general information about the church.

At the end of the service, a member of the congregation is asked by the priest to greet the newcomer and invite him/her to coffee hour. The member takes responsibility for introducing the newcomer to several more members and ensures that the newcomer is not left alone.

Clergy check to make sure that the newcomer has someone to talk to at coffee hour.

Usually a member of the congregation who knows the history of the building will offer the newcomer a tour of the nave. After they've had a chance to get refreshments and talk to a few people, they start the tour.

The newcomer receives a handwritten note from the rector during the week after their first visit. The note includes the rector's business card, an invitation to phone with questions and expresses the hope that the visitor will return. If there are any upcoming events for which we have printed materials, the newcomer gets a copy of these along with the note.

When newcomers return on a later Sunday, we make the effort to remember names and continue to make them feel welcome.

We are moving in the direction of having a parishioner act as the official greeter every Sunday. We are managing to do it about two to three Sundays out of four. The clergy take the leading role in greeting newcomers right now.

Large Metropolitan Parish

St. Andrew's, Kansas City

The Rev. Fred Mann, rector
The Rev. John Spicer, assistant rector
6401 Wornall Terrace
Kansas City, MO 64113
816/523-1602
www.standrewkc.org

St. Andrew's has tried to improve its ministry of hospitality and welcome significantly in the last couple of years, and it is still a work in progress. However, at this point in the congregation's life, these are the highlights of our welcoming ministry:

Before each Sunday liturgy, at least two greeters take their stations at a table by the door off the parking lot. On warm mornings, the greeters set up the welcome table just outside the door. They greet everyone who comes and ask everyone (existing parishioners and guests) to fill out nametags. We have opted to use disposable nametags for two reasons: We don't have to keep track of members' nametags from week to week, and (more important) both members and guests are placed on the same level of status. No one appears to be more part of the "in-crowd" than anyone else. We have had overwhelming success in getting members to use the disposable nametags consistently. They often say that the nametags are just as necessary for them as for guests and newcomers.

For more detailed information on St. Andrew's greeter ministry, see the *Welcoming Tools*, pg. 12, for sample Greeters' Guidelines and a Greeters' Checklist.

At the welcome table, we have available our Guest Communication Card and the parish overview brochure, as well as individual brochures describing the church's various ministry areas, such as music, youth, children, outreach, groups, etc. The Guest Communication Card also is in each pew rack along with a separate prayer-request card.

At the beginning of each liturgy, the presider welcomes everyone, especially guests, asking them to complete a Guest Communication Card and leave it in the offering plate.

After the liturgy, the ushers take the completed cards and leave them in a box in the entryway for the Mug Ministry volunteers (see below).

After the liturgy, the greeters try to locate guests and introduce them to the clergy. Then the greeters take the guests to coffee hour and introduce them to gregarious parishioners.

On Sunday afternoon, guests who completed cards that morning receive a visit from a Mug Ministry volunteer. The volunteer delivers a gift bag that includes a St. Andrew's coffee mug, a parish overview brochure, a small loaf of banana bread, a coupon for the church gift shop, a prayer card/bookmark, a St. Andrew's pen and a hand-written note from one of the clergy. If the guest is at home, the volunteer delivers the bag and chats at the door, but only briefly. If the guest is not at home, the volunteer leaves the bag on the doorstep. Later in the week following the visit, the guest receives a phone call and/or email from one of the clergy.

Each fall and spring, the guests from the past few months are invited to "Episcopal 101," an eight-week program designed to present how the Episcopal Church approaches key aspects of the faith (e.g., Scripture, theology, Church history, Jesus, the sacraments, etc.) The series uses parts of the book and DVD program *Living Faith* by N.T. Wright, as well as other resources. Each session includes dinner, a video, table discussions and Compline.

About three to four times a year, guests from the past several months are invited to a newcomers' party at a parishioner's home. It's a chance for fellowship and (very brief) presentations from the clergy and key ministry leaders.



Large Rural Parish

Grace Church, Carthage

The Rev. Steven Wilson, rector
820 Howard Street, PO Box 596
Carthage, MO 64836
417-358-4631
gracechcar@sbcglobal.net
www.gracecarthage.org

At Grace Church, we don't use high-pressure tactics with visitors. Instead, we try to share the hospitality that is at the root of the Gospel. We share our faith and our passion for ministry. We invite them to join us on our journey with Christ, a journey begun when we heard Jesus say, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (NRSV MT 4:19) At Grace, we ask, "Do Newcomers find a Welcome Mat or Members-Only Sign?"

Our goal at Grace Church is to provide a welcoming environment for those who seek a community of faith. This welcoming environment includes physical space, a culture of hospitality and a genuine interest in building up the Body of Christ. The information bulleted below provides an important background for our ministry of welcome.



According to research:

- 40% of visitors make up their mind about a church before they even see the pastor.
- Visitors form an opinion about whether a congregation is friendly within the first two minutes of a service.
- 70% of new attendees feel negatively about being publicly identified within a service (i.e., "visitors please stand").
- 100% of all visitors want people to be friendly and welcoming.
- Three out of four people attend a church for the first time because they were invited.
- Less than half of church members say they have invited someone in the last year.

Our facility is accessible

- Well-maintained buildings and grounds are distinctive and inviting.
- Ample parking is available, with parking for people with disabilities near the accessible entrance.
- Members are encouraged to leave some parking near the church for newcomers.
- Inside the facility, all areas are connected.
- Members are encouraged not to growl at someone who sits in "their pew."
- Signs designate spaces and provide information. (We're working toward making all signage in Spanish as well as English.)

Christian education spaces are attractive and developmentally appropriate

- Children and youth education spaces are decorated with colorful world themes celebrating diverse cultures and adding excitement.
- The Godly Play curriculum for younger children combines fun, activity-based learning with hospitality.

Large Rural Parish *continued*

Grace Church, Carthage

- Parents feel welcome in a church where their children are happy and having a good time.
- Youth classrooms are age-appropriate and provide for a casual style of learning.
- All classrooms are well-staffed by energetic and positive people.
- All classroom doors provide visual access to the rooms at all times.
- The Youth Group facility is attractive, with different spaces for worship, study, fellowship and fun within a single Great Room.
- The nursery is staffed according to diocesan guidelines in an attractive setting with age-appropriate activities and easy visual access for parents.
- Newcomers are routinely shown the facilities and encouraged to visit.
- Adult education is provided in the Common Room with easy access to the nursery and all other areas.
- Special observances, such as the Blessing of the Animals, provide opportunities to invite someone new to church.
- Brochures are available in English and Spanish at the parking-lot entrance.
- A guest book is provided in the church foyer to gather information for follow up.
- Visitor information cards are provided in pew racks to be placed in the offering plate.
- Ushers greet visitors; give them bulletins and activity sheets for children; and assist with seating, worship materials and questions.
- Newcomers often arrive a little late, so announcements take place after the Peace.
- Announcements include a welcome of newcomers, an invitation to the social time after the service and an invitation for all baptized believers to participate in Eucharist.
- Casual attire is accepted.
- Many members assist visitors with using the prayer book, hymnal and bulletin.

We help newcomers feel at home in worship

- Different worship styles with different times are available each week to appeal to a variety of seekers. A choral Mass at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday does not work for everyone.
 - ❑ 7 a.m. Mondays and Tuesdays: Morning Prayer.
 - ❑ 6 p.m. Wednesdays: Informal Family Style Eucharist followed by a meal, children's and youth groups, and adult Bible study.
 - ❑ 2 p.m. Thursdays: Eucharist at St. Luke's Nursing Center attended by residents and visitors.
 - ❑ 10 a.m. Fridays: Eucharist with Healing.
 - ❑ 5 p.m. Saturdays: Casual Eucharist (mainly active adults and some families).
 - ❑ 8 a.m. Sundays: Rite I said Eucharist.
 - ❑ 9:15 a.m. Sundays: Christian education for all ages.
 - ❑ 10:30 a.m. Sundays: Rite II choral Eucharist.
 - ❑ Noon Sundays: Eucharist in Spanish with congregational singing.
- Sermons are biblically based and address the essentials of the Christian faith and discipleship in the world of today. Seekers are seeking *relevant* spiritual growth.
- At the Peace, many members invite newcomers to come to Coffee Hour.
- Ushers assist in traffic flow during communion.
- At the end of service, worshippers exit to the street or into the Common Room.
- The rector is at main entrance to greet worshippers as they exit to the street.
- Some welcoming parishioners greet visitors who exit to the Common Room, invite them for refreshments, answer questions, offer a tour and make introductions to the clergy and other members of the parish.

Large Rural Parish *continued*

Grace Church, Carthage

We follow up with visitors

- Contact is made within the next week to express friendliness.
- The newsletter is sent if the newcomer is open to it.
- Parishioners look for newcomers at future events to continue offering hospitality.
- Contact is made about events related to an interest expressed by a newcomer.
- Newcomer events are held periodically in which newcomers are invited to meet with the rector and a few members for refreshments and conversation.
- Hispanic newcomers are contacted by Father Valdez.

We provide hospitality education for parishioners

- Several times a year, the question is asked in adult Christian education, “How many of you were born into the Episcopal Church.” Usually only two or three hands are raised. The point is made that our church is good at attracting newcomers.
- Within adult education, members are encouraged to show hospitality to newcomers. Specific ways are discussed.
- Members are encouraged to invite people to church.
- Members are encouraged to share their faith journeys inside and outside church.



Suburban Parish

St. Paul's, Lee's Summit

The Rev. Mark McGuire, vicar
416 Southeast Grand
Lee's Summit, MO 64063
816/524-3651
www.saintpauls-lsmo.com

St. Paul's Church is a small church by any measure. Our principal worship space seats 105 people "comfortably close." This means that visitors are readily identifiable to the congregation and our ushers. This size also has a tendency to give a comfortable, family-like appeal to visitors, thus lowering any anxiety the visitor might have concerning invasion of personal space.

Ushers are our first team to deal with visitors. With a little training and a little common sense, they pick up on the sensitivities of the visitor. Ushers greet warmly without being overbearing or aggressive, and they are observant for any assistance that might be necessary.

Though we don't have them in place yet, we are working on forming a cross-generational committee of greeters who will discreetly observe the visitors to key in on any difficulties they might have dealing with issues of prayer book or hymnal. These committee members would assist the visitor with the service.

The vicar tries to further break the ice with an initial greeting before the opening acclamation. In the greeting, the congregation is instructed as to where to look for the start of the service.



The next major opportunity we have to really "greet" the visitor is during the Peace. Here the entire congregation leaves the pews and greets all in attendance. This is easily accomplished in a small church such as St. Paul's. Larger churches, no doubt, would find this more daunting. At the Peace, the vicar not only passes the peace, but also engages visitors in a short conversation. We welcome them, ask non-intrusive questions such as where they are from, and affirm how delighted we are to have them worship with us. We further request that they sign our guest book, so we can formally acknowledge their presence with a letter. The letter also contains a brief history of St. Paul's Church and some of the opportunities for service that we offer. Finally, we encourage the visitors to join us for coffee and refreshments following the service.

This same conversation is repeated in a shortened form at our time of announcements, which occurs before the dismissal. By this time our greeters will personally invite—and hopefully escort—the visitor to join them in our social hour following the service.

Mid-Sized Suburban Parish

Grace Church, Liberty

The Rev. Susan McCann, rector
520 South 291 Highway
Liberty, Missouri 64068
816/781-6262
www.graceepiscopal-liberty.org

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."

Matthew 25:35c

Welcoming the stranger to Grace Church is always a work in progress, one that calls for continual evaluation and refinement. What we offer here is not a perfected model but some steps we are taking as we seek to offer the radically welcoming and inclusive love of Christ.

1. We work hard on our website to make it a reflection of who we are as a congregation as well as an avenue of welcome for seekers. We update it frequently to ensure that the information is current.

2. Just as one would prepare one's home for guests, we try to make sure our "home" is ready.

- The church grounds are well maintained and litter free.
- The parking lot is swept. Three spaces are clearly reserved and marked for guests. Spaces are also clearly reserved and marked for people with disabilities.
- The main entrance is accessible to people with disabilities.
- When all exterior signs are in place, members and visitors will see clearly marked doors – the entrance to the Worship Space, the Children's Center and the Office.
- Interior signs will clearly invite and direct people to the various spaces within the building.
- All interior spaces of the church are clean and free of clutter – floors are polished, windows clean, surfaces dusted.
- The nave is ready for worship. The chair racks that hold the *Book of Common Prayer* and hymnals are orderly, free of last week's service leaflets, papers, etc.

3. Trained greeters welcome members and visitors each Sunday. As visitors approach the building, the doors are opened for them, they are welcomed and given a service leaflet. They are invited to sign the guest book, which asks for name, address and email address.

4. After the service, visitors are invited to the Parish Hall for a festive coffee hour. A member of the church accompanies them to the Parish Hall and introduces them to others, especially those who might share similar interests. Visitors are invited to join others for the Adult Education Forum, which meets in the Parish Hall.



Mid-Sized Suburban Parish *continued*

Grace Church, Liberty

5. Information about the Episcopal Church and about Grace Church is available, including the congregation's vision statement, the schedule for adult education for the year, information on our First Wednesday series, and information about Sonshine Academy, our children's education program.
6. A goodie bag containing home-baked cookies, a Grace Church cookbook and information about the church is delivered to each guest. The bag is left at the door with no attempt to talk with the guest.
7. On Monday, the rector writes to each visitor, either by email or snail mail.
8. During the week, one lay member of the church writes to the guest, and another phones to offer welcome and to answer questions.
9. Sometime during the week the rector also calls.
10. A new step for us in the welcoming process is a monthly Sunday brunch at the home of the rector, which provides an opportunity for people who have visited Grace that month to meet with the rector and a small group of lay leaders to get better acquainted. This is a primarily a social time that also offers an opportunity to talk more about life in this particular parish and answer questions.
11. An instructed Eucharist is offered twice a year to help people become more comfortable with the liturgy.
12. After welcoming, the next step is incorporating people into the life of this community of faith. This is done primarily by inviting people to join one of the small groups and by inviting them to participate in ministry opportunities.

THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

- The children's education center, while modest in size, is child-friendly, with bright and welcoming colors, open spaces and lots of light, both natural and artificial.
- Windows have been cut into all doors so there are no dark or hidden places.
- Teachers are ready for guests. In fact they expect guests and have adequate materials for visitors. Young children have a buddy welcoming system.
- A parent sign-in and sign-out system helps to ensure safety for all the children and helps parents know that Grace is committed to the safety of their children.
- Visiting families are introduced to the teachers.

Small Rural Parish

St. Alban's, Bolivar

The Rev. Cathy Cox, vicar
201 South Killingsworth
Bolivar, MO 65613
417/777-2233
www.stalbansozarks.org

We are a small church, and all we really do is to make ourselves as widely known as possible. We participate actively in the Ministerial Alliance; we are very involved with Salvation Army's food bank and make monthly financial contributions to them as well, and with all other social service/church-connected activities in town.

When visitors come to St. Alban's, they are immediately recognized as new. They are invited to sit with the members, and are given a bag of information and other little things. They are then introduced to others after church (NEVER during church—we do not embarrass people in that way) and usually invited out to lunch (since many of our members go out for lunch after services this is easy to accommodate). Then, we make sure someone calls them the day after the service (not clergy), and they get a note from the vicar during that week.

We make it a point to not overwhelm people. We send them the newsletter and other information immediately. But if they are not interested, we try to see what they are really looking for and send them to that other pastor or church. We do NOT pretend to be all things to all people, but try to help people find a church home that suits their needs. Other pastors in the area do the same thing. For example, one of our best new members came from the Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor, who thought a visitor was too liberal for that church and suggested she attend the Episcopal Church.



We use worship booklets instead of the prayer book and provide a full bulletin as well. We mix regular hymns from the hymnal with some shorter praise choruses, especially during communion so people do not have to try to hold a hymnal. We find the mixing of musical styles appeals to new people as well.

We are relaxed in our approach to worship. If mistakes happen even during the liturgy, we laugh and continue, which we believe makes our service less threatening for people who have never been to one like ours.

We are a small rural church where people are very outgoing, friendly and busy doing things, which also appeals to newcomers because they can easily find ways to participate. We invite newcomers to read the lessons as soon as possible, if they are interested, because this commits them to coming, gives them visibility and allows them to make an important contribution immediately.

Resources

PUBLICATIONS

The West Missouri Spirit

Publisher: The Right Rev. Barry R. Howe

Editor: Melinda D. Rhodes

Phone: 816/471-6161, Ext. 15, or 800/471-6160

Fax: 816/471-0379

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P.O. Box 413227, Kansas City, MO 64141

Published monthly except in August and January by the Episcopal Diocese of West Missouri.

Submission deadline: 20th day of the month.

BOOKS

A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises (The Giving Project Series) by Michele Hershberger, Herald Press 1999.

Church Growth and the Power of Evangelism: Ideas That Work by Howard Hanchey, Cowley 1990. Pages 143-164 (Chapter 6: "Helping Newcomers Find a Home: The Ministry of Hospitality").

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality As a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl, Wm. B. Erdman Publishing Co. 1999.

Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way Of Love by Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt, Paraclete Press 2002.

Welcome! Tools & Techniques for New Member Ministry by Andrew D. Weeks, Alban Institute 1992.

Widening the Welcome of Your Church: Biblical Hospitality & the Vital Congregation (Andrew Center Growth & Vitality Series) by Fred Bernhard, 1996.

WEBSITES

www.episcopalchurch.org

The website for the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

www.diocesen.org/index.cfm?Action+Programs.CongregationalDevelopment

See "Welcoming the Visitor to Your Church" under "Related Info" (from the Episcopal Diocese of New York).

www.indydio.org/evangelism

The website for the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis.

<http://smallepiscopalchurch.blogspot.com>

This space is intended for those with an interest in small-membership churches (defined as those with an average Sunday attendance of 70 people or less). It is a place to share stories of vitality, hope, vision, challenge and prayer.

www.ignitingministry.org

The United Methodist Church offers ideas and tools for reaching and sharing faith with newcomers.