

## **Becoming a Welcoming Church with special reference to Crossroads Classic**

### **Preamble**

Welcoming new people to our meetings expresses our commitment to proclaiming Christ and to loving others in costly ways. It requires care and attention to communicate “You’re actually welcome here” to new people, and it’s a message that can become confused or contradicted through the smallest and most peripheral details—an in-joke, a dimly lit entry-way. More, our church is more than a building, it’s a gathering of people. A welcomed newcomer will discover ways into our community life that ‘fit’, and find that the deeper they go, the stronger the message: “You have a place here, with us, under the gospel.”

We’ve gotta think like a newcomer, like an outsider, like a stranger to all that we do, in order to welcome well. We’ve gotta walk the steps they walk, from their car, back to their car, to get into their experience and begin breaking-down the barriers to our church, to our gospel proclamation.

### **“Welcome” from a Distance**

We have little control over the initial impressions that someone forms about our church before they actually come along. But we convey warmth, instill confidence, and our ‘flavour’ through our web presence. The admin assistants, staff, and other content-makers contribute to the sense that, “These guys actually want me to visit their church, I understand how to, and they seem to keep their info up-to-date. If I turn up, it’ll be at the right place, time, and group for me.”

**Action:** Keep the website up to date, and easily navigable for newcomers.

### **“Welcome” from the First Handshake**

It’s a miserable, rainy night. You’re pumped to go to church, of course—you’re a regular, but gosh you’d better get a park right outside. It’d suck to have to walk 50 metres in the rain. Yes, it would.

**Action:** Is there a parking space right outside? Leave it. Pack an umbrella.

Calling all Welcomers—those rostered on—you have a spectacular opportunity: no one else gets to be the very first human-contact with our church. It's you. Do you really believe the gospel is for all? Now's a very practical way to display that conviction.

The warm handshake. The generous smile. Waiting out in the cold to open the door for them. Gently guide the newcomer so they know what to actually do next: ask them if they've been before, put a welcome-card in their hands, tell them when we normally commence our meeting, explain to them where people normally loiter before that, take an interest—are they local, traveling, friends with someone here—tell them if they still have time for a cuppa, introduce them and their to someone from the Sunday School.

**Action:** Welcomers, treat 'em like they're your family, your guest.

**Action:** Produce a 'welcome-card'.

**Action:** Rename 'Ushers' to 'Welcome Team'

You've just sat down in the auditorium. You got the firm handshake and the bubbly 'hi'. But now you've forgotten what they said about creche. A simple slide deck cycling through—before the meeting starts—moves you from feeling, "Crap! Why didn't I pay more attention", to, "Oh yeah, that's right: creche starts mid-service. I remember." You relax.

**Action:** Produce a slide-deck to cover some of the basics: how the meeting works and avenues 'in' to this church community.

The last notes of the last song are still reverberating around the guitars. Now, what did they say about that New Partners thingy? Ah, I dunno. Next time, I guess.

**Action:** Display the church calendar immediately following the meeting. Times, dates, locations.

### **"Welcome" from the Front**

The MC and Preacher bear the primary influence in conveying welcome. But let's move beyond, "Please come back next week", to, "If you come back next week, we'll be getting into [such-and-such] together. Should be a great time of [whatever]".

**Action:** MC and preacher concentrate on selling the 'return visit' in terms of what it offers to the returning-newcomer.

The song slides didn't update before the verse started. The singer looked like he was in pain. The Bible reader mumbled the reference. Every person up-the-front contributes to singing the tune, "You're Welcome Here", or, "We Hope you Feel Uncomfortable".

**Action:** Whatever you do, with excellence.

### **"Welcome" among the Pews**

"...Anyway, I gotta go grab my kids from creche. Nice to meet you." Most of us 'get' how to be welcoming once we get started. But how you part-ways is important. If you show someone a next step, they might just take it—"Hey, we talked about smallgroups, can I introduce you to the leader-guy on my way to grabbing my kids from creche?", or perhaps just, "Hey, I gotta grab my kids from creche, but I'm dying for a cup of tea—would you like to come with me and we'll grab one in a sec?"

**Action:** Cultivate the habit of asking, "Who does this newbie need to meet?", or, "What am I doing that I can personally invite them to?"

Not every newcomer wants a big, in-depth chat, which is great, 'cause not every person at church feels up to the task! Sit next to newcomers in church. If you're not a talker you can just engage in some basic small talk at the end of the service, introduce them to someone else and then escape. But they will feel like a loser if they are left sitting all by themselves throughout the service.

**Action:** Reread Ministry of the Pew. There's nothing better on the subject.

### **"Welcome Back... John, isn't it?!"**

Occasionally, you'll get the chance to welcome a second-time-newbie: they've come back. I reckon most of us wish we were better at remembering names, faces, issues in life. Here's one method: build prayer for newcomers into your life. Pray for them by name, on the day you met them, regarding what you do know of them. We all wish we were more consistent in prayer, right? So get your prayer reinforcing your welcoming. Of course, prayer also amounts to a recognition of this critical principle: our welcoming doesn't make the gospel effective for salvation. Prayer for people is even more important than firm handshakes and thoughtful networking.

**Action:** Pray for newcomers, by name, on the day you met them.

If you chatted to a newcomer one Sunday and now they've returned to church, then you're their special friend—at least for this phase of their entry into church. The process of becoming part of the church community will be made much nicer if every single person they speak to on a Sunday isn't someone they're meeting for the first time. In time they will make other friends and you won't have to act as their special friend anymore, but you should take that role seriously for now.

**Action:** Commit to being among the first to greet that newcomer who has just come back for their second visit to church.

### **Welcoming from Ministry Teams and Staff**

We already have a habit of the staff seeking out the newcomers and formally following them up through the week. Let's keep that rolling. How can we keep newcomers on our radar? As well as prayer, and a good process, staff need to lead the way in devoting some meeting-time to talking about newcomers: Who was new? Did we follow them up? Actually? Have those newcomers come back? Disappeared? Give it meeting space.

But here's the thing: newcomers aren't just staff's concern. Kids Ministry welcomes new families. Mums' Group welcomes new mums. Let's build into our leadership meetings a bias-to-newcomers. "That new kid struggled in Sunday School, how do you reckon we could have done things differently?"

**Action:** Ministry Teams and Staff can set a high priority on welcoming newcomers simply by committing to talk about them, regularly.

### **Resources**

*Ministry of the Pew*, Col Marshall, an MTS training paper.

*Ministry of Welcoming*, Rick Lewers, an MTS training paper.