

A companion to Peter Corney's popular book *The Gospel and the Growing Church*, *The Welcoming Church* deals with two key ideas:

- how to open your 'front doors' wider,
- how to close your 'back doors'.

Six studies, sample materials, practical programs and suggested resources make this a most useful tool for every church.



The welcome we give to those who come to our churches for the first time is a vital aspect of any church which takes evangelism seriously. This is an intensely practical little book designed to help congregations see themselves through the eyes of newcomers and so to be genuinely welcoming.

Keith Rayner, Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of Australia

Peter Corney has a gift for building a congregation with vision and vitality and writes from experience. If you want a catalyst to discover ways to unfold new people into your church, this is the book for you.

John Reid, Bishop of South Sydney

Peter Corney has been the vicar of St Hilary's Kew for 16 years where he heads a ministry team of six full time and six part time staff. Weekly attendance averages 800 with over 1,500 people involved in the various programs.

The church runs a counselling centre and a very effective youth and student ministry, and also has a highly developed welcoming and incorporating system. He was responsible for setting up the diploma of youth ministry course at Ridley College.

THE WELCOMING CHURCH



*HOW TO WELCOME
NEWCOMERS IN THE
LOCAL CHURCH*

by *PETER CORNEY*

THE WELCOMING CHURCH

*How to welcome newcomers
in the local church*

by PETER CORNEY

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INTRODUCTION

YOU get only one chance to make a first impression! The initial impact your congregation makes on newcomers is crucial. The warmth and friendliness of your welcome or lack of it will be one of the main factors in whether or not they return.

We all have our own personal horror stories of unfriendly churches. I like the one about the very conservative middle aged solicitor who was a regular attender but didn't like 'innovations'.

When the 'passing of the peace' was first introduced he turned to the person next to him, who happened to be a visitor and said, "I've come to church to worship God, not be friendly". I trust God was more friendly to him than he was to his neighbour! It is a pity that this man had been a member of his church for so long without understanding and experiencing real community.

This is a work book. It is designed for groups as well as individuals. It is an ideal resource book for a small task force which wants to develop a more effective welcoming structure in their church. It could also be used by all the small groups in a church to raise people's awareness about the importance of welcoming new people and helping them to be - and feel - included. A vestry or parish council could work through it over a weekend conference.

These studies deal with two key ideas. How to open your 'front doors' wider and how to close your 'back doors'. Welcoming is about making people feel at home. Once there, we have to make sure they've joined the family. May our gracious and welcoming God bless you as you welcome others.

Peter Corney
Epiphany 1992

HOW TO USE THESE STUDIES

There are six studies. Each study has two sections:

- An input section
- Questions and exercises for group discussion.

Groups should allow approximately 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours for each study. The best method would be as follows:

- Everyone should have their own book and read the study beforehand,

- Start each study with the leader reviewing the 'input section' by summarising its key points (15 mins),
- Then follow the instructions for each of the 'exercises' that follow the studies (3/4 - 1 hour).

If there are more than six people in the group, divide up into smaller groups for the exercise and discussion section.

Note

If these studies are being done by a large group of parishioners or a vestry or parish council it is very important that at the end of the process a small working group is formed. This group should become responsible for action on the ideas developed out of this process. It could even be helpful to tell people right at the beginning that this is what will happen, so they do not feel that the ideas and impetus will be lost.

Why Welcoming is Essential

STUDY

Input

There are at least six reasons why welcoming is so important today.

(1) It is a sign that points people to the gospel. Our God is a welcoming God. When we warmly and lovingly welcome people we demonstrate God's love and point them to Jesus.

(2) Anyone going into a new and unfamiliar situation feels anxious and needs to be put at ease. Remember how you felt the last time you went to a function and didn't know anyone? Visitors coming to your church are in a very unfamiliar setting. They may be nervous and anxious.

(3) Today's society is highly mobile. Seventeen per cent of Australians move every year; 39 per cent move every five years.¹ In 1991 St Hilary's, Kew surveyed 500 regular attenders, and discovered that 51 per cent had lived at their present home for five years or less. These highly mobile people are looking for friendship and community when they move to a new place.

There are several points in people's life experience when they are very receptive to new ideas and new commitments. A change of suburb or city is one.

Receptive periods:

- Moving to a new community
- A change in marital status
- A new baby
- Death of a loved one or close friend
- Illness or hospitalisation
- Change in job or unemployment

If these people are not welcomed properly the first time they may not try again anywhere. You get only one chance to make a first impression.

¹ Kaldor - "who goes where? Who doesn't care?"

(4) Many of the Baby Boomers who are disillusioned with the results of the 'me generation' are revisiting old values, and that includes the Church. But this group is not very concerned about denomination. Studies show that a person's original denomination is no longer a significant factor in why they choose a church. The more significant factors are warmth and friendliness, cultural relevance and 'style'. Is the worship celebratory and life-affirming? Does it provide groups and services for the whole family, youth and children? Remember this is the supermarket generation used to shopping around.

(5) Churches grow if they have good systems for welcoming people and helping them to be and feel included. Such churches are usually very 'outsider oriented'. They are always asking themselves questions like, 'What does it feel like to come here if you've never been before?', or 'How can we make what we do and say more accessible to the non-churched person?'

(6) Many people are recovering from broken relationships, divorce, separation and or other family breakdown. There are many solo parents. Many of these people are looking for family and community. They are looking for a 'home'. The welcoming church will find many of these people.

Most of the New Testament images for the church are communal or community ones: the family, the flock, the household, the nation, the body. Even architectural ones like the building, or agricultural ones like the vine and the branches, emphasise the interdependence between the various parts. The strong emphasis in the New Testament on unity, mutual love and care within the Christian fellowship reinforces this picture of community.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6, 1 John 3:14-18, Galatians 6:10, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:9-17. The example of the early church in Acts shows very clearly how seriously they regarded their fellowship and community, (Acts 2: 42-47, 4:32-35); "And day by day the Lord added to their number..." (Acts 2:47 NIV).

People are desperately looking for community. As they discover Christian fellowships that are caring, loving, open and welcome they will want to belong. In belonging many will find Jesus who says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28 NIV).



People are looking for community

Questions and Exercises for Group Work

1. Ask each person in turn to identify how they felt the last time they went to a function where they didn't know anyone. Write the answers on a board or overhead projector (10 mins).

There may be one or two people in the group who enjoy these situations and go out of their way to introduce themselves, but most people do not.

2. Ask each person to think of things other people could have done to put them more at ease (10 mins).

3. Now apply this to welcoming new people at church. Identify four practical things you could do to improve your welcoming and suggest how you could make it happen (30 mins).

4. Read 1 Peter 1:22, Rom 12:10, 1 Thes 2:8 and then discuss this question "Is there a cost to being a welcoming Christian community?"

Be Like your Father - a Biblical Basis for Welcoming



Input

A careful study of the Bible enables us to have a true understanding of God's character. When we begin to meditate on what he is like and how he acts, and begin to try and be like him, that will really affect the way we think and act and live towards others.

The Bible makes it very clear that God loved us so much that he took the initiative, at great cost to himself, to rescue us and draw us back to himself.

The following passages make this very clear:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV).

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8 NIV).

God moved towards us, he didn't wait for us to move! His loving initiative towards us should be reflected in the way we regard others.

Many churches now sing the song 'Father Welcomes' at baptisms. Written by the Australian poet Robin Mann it can be found in Ring of Praise (AIO Press) and Praise for all Seasons (Acorn). The chorus expresses well the idea we find throughout Scripture that God longs to welcome us back into friendship with himself and into his family, the people of God.

"Father welcomes all his children

To his family through his Son.

Father giving his salvation

Life forever has been won."

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 we find the father waiting for the son to return. When he sees him coming in the distance the father runs out to meet him. Some people have called this the parable of 'the

Waiting Father' rather than 'the Prodigal Son'. Among the many things this parable teaches, it shows us very clearly the forgiving and welcoming heart of God.

The aim of this study is to examine some passages of scripture that call us to be a welcoming and hospitable people like our heavenly father.



Be like your Father in heaven!

Questions and Exercises for Group Work

Divide into groups of two or three and give each small group two of the Bible passages listed below.

Leviticus 19:33-34 Luke 15:1-7

Luke 14:12-14

Hebrews 13:2

Psalms 23

Mark 9:36-37

Matthew 11:28-29 1 Peter 4:8-10

Matthew 25:31-46 Titus 1:5-9 (note v8)

Romans 12:9-16 Acts 28:30-31

As they study the passages, each group should answer these questions:

(1) What does the passage tell us about God's character and how we ought to act?

(2) Is there a command or exhortation in this passage that applies to welcoming?

(3) How can we apply this teaching practically in the way our church welcomes others?

• Each small group should then write a short three line definition of Christian hospitality (30 mins).

Ask the groups to report their findings, which should be recorded on a board or overhead projector (10 mins).

• At the end of this session you could teach and sing 'Be Like Your Father in Heaven Above' (in *Cry Hosanna*, Hodder and Stoughton, or 'Father Welcomes' (*Ring of Praise*, AIO Press, or Praise for All Seasons, Acorn Press).

Homework

Each person should complete the check list on page 15. This will form the basis for our next study.

3 STUDY

How Open are Your 'Doors'?

Input

How welcoming is your church? How easy is it to find and join? What temperature is your fellowship thermostat set on: warm, cool or freezing?

The purpose of this study is to discover how you can improve your ability to welcome new people and involve them in the life of your church.

Remember a warm welcome is only the first stage. People must also be included in the life of your church community, which involves building relationships and helping people exercise their gifts.

The 'doors of entry' into your congregation are not just the front doors of Sunday services. They can include groups and activities such as youth groups, Sunday school, young mothers' groups, unemployed support, sport and home fellowship meetings. The regular members themselves are also doors of entry! Where all of these groups involve regular worshipping members they can be very effective 'doors of entry'. Not everyone will enter the congregation first by the worship door.

The location and appearance of buildings is important. You may not be able to do much about these, but you can improve their appearance, grounds and signs.

Do they say 'Welcome'? When we created a link building between our church and hall a few years ago, we designed it very deliberately for its welcoming and fellowship use. The foyer is like a lobby, it has an open fireplace to give a sense of warmth and welcome (very important in Melbourne!). The walls are glass. From outside you can see people inside chatting and milling around. This opens onto a carpeted area where tea and coffee can be served from a nearby kitchen. It has made an enormous difference to our fellowship after services.

In the end the reason we will work at making our churches more welcoming places is because we passionately desire that people will come to know Jesus.

Read 1 John 1:1-4 and ask yourself this question:

'What are the motives of the writer for sharing this information with his readers?'

The following checklist should have been completed before you came for this study. Please turn now to the group exercise.

Checklist

| Yes/No | We could do better | We need to do better | Not Relevant To us |
|--------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|--------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|

We are easy to find: good road signs and directions.

Our notice board is attractive and freshly painted.

It has helpful information for a newcomer.

We advertise in the local community.

The church grounds and buildings look attractive and inviting.

We have access for disabled persons.

The church foyer or entrance is clean and attractive, bulletin boards are tidy, flowers and attractive posters are displayed.

THE WELCOMING

Yes/No We could do better We need to do better Not Relevant To us

We have a welcome kit.

There is a welcome kit placed in an obvious place with relevant information for a newcomer or enquirer.

We have 'welcomers' assigned for Sundays who are separate from sidespersons or ushers.

The newcomers have had at least some training.

Regular attenders, including children, have name tags.

There is a general welcome to visitors and newcomers in the service.

We have 'welcome cards' for visitors and newcomers to fill in and these are actively promoted and used.

We provide tea and coffee and a time for fellowship after the service.

We have a follow-up system for new people: letter, visit, newcomers' evenings or lunches, a new members' group.

CHURCH

Yes/No We could do better We need to do better Not Relevant To us

We have people assigned to help new people create friendship links over a period of six months.

During the 'passing of the peace' we encourage people to introduce themselves to people they don't know.

We have a welcoming system for children and special people assigned to it. This is linked to the Sunday school.

We have a board for new members' photos.

We welcome into fellowship new people who have become regular in a formal way in services every two months.

We have a small group system through which new people can become involved in the life of the church.

We have a conscious and deliberate plan for discovering new people's gifts and involving them in some area of ministry.

We are careful not to exclude single people by focusing all our activities around families.

| Yes/No | We could do better | We need to do better | Not Relevant to us |
|--------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | | | |

We organise all age activities from time to time such as picnics, bush dances, family camps and concerts for people of all ages to enjoy themselves together.

We regularly evaluate our services and activities and ask how 'outsider friendly' they are.

We keep records of all people who visit or attend on a newcomers list so they can be followed up. This is reviewed every six months.

We have a pastoral system that keeps track of new people and if they stop attending they are followed up quickly.

We are a warm and friendly congregation which welcomes newcomers.

We have sufficient 'doors of entry' apart from worship services.

Other points you would like to consider...



You get only one chance to make a first impression!

- Questions and Exercises for Group Work
- Pool your individual responses to the checklist. The leader should make an overhead transparency of the list and fill it in with the group (15 mins).
 - Identify the areas where most of you feel you are doing well.
 - Then identify those areas where you feel some improvement is needed. List these separately (Steps 2 and 3 will take at least 20-30 mins).
 - Divide the large group into threes or fours. Give each small group two or three of these areas to work on, answering the question: "How can we take practical action to improve this area?" (40 minutes).
 - All groups report their findings. These should be recorded and passed on to a working group which should try to follow through as many points as possible (15-20 minutes).

Homework

Between now and next week ask three or four people to interview some of your new members and ask them:

- what they found most helpful when they first came,
- what they found most difficult, and
- what things they think could be improved about the church's welcoming.

The Minister Can't do it Alone

4 STUDY

Input

There are two traps into which congregations often fall. The first is to think that welcoming newcomers is the minister's job. The second is to say, 'We shouldn't need to organise this, that's artificial. Welcoming is everybody's job!' Jobs that are everybody's tend to be left to everybody else, and therefore don't get done.

The tasks of welcoming people and helping them become included in the life of the church are much more complex than people think. There is far too much for one person to do. If it is to be effective, the work must be organised and structured.

Research shows that when a variety of lay people as well as the minister are involved, it makes greater impact. Dr E.J. Kolb says: "The basic finding is summed up in the '36 hour principle'. When lay persons visit the home of a first-time worshipper within 36 hours, 85 per cent of them will return to worship next Sunday. When the visit is delayed for 72 hours, only 60 per cent return; when delayed five to seven days, 15 per cent return" (Anglican Digest, Pentecost Edition, 1988).

But then comes a surprise: if the minister makes the first visit, all of the percentages are cut in half. Far fewer return. 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 lay people, however, the first-time worshipper feels something like, "The church must be important to them... they care for me... this must be a caring community."

The '36 hour principle'² is based on two social factors that are similar in both Australia and America.

² see also "The Vital Congregation", by Herb Miller, Abingdon, 1990, p81

First, there is the new church shopper mentality among Australians. Remember that 17 per cent of Australians move each year and 39% every five years. This highly mobile population has little loyalty to their denomination of origin. They will go to the church that meets their needs and offers a warm welcome.

Second, these mobile people are looking for 'instant community'. They have a high need for genuine interest and active caring. When they feel that concern, they will return. The '36 hour principle' can probably be stretched out to 72 hours for Australians.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16 and ask yourself these questions: 'Why are the people in vs 11 given these gifts?' and 'How does this apply to this study?'

Every congregation needs a 'Welcoming Task Force'. It will have four duties:

- (1) Appoint and train 'welcomers' for all church services. These should be in addition to sidespersons, ushers or stewards.
- (2) Make sure there is a 'people trap' after services, i.e. tea and coffee. If you have no narthex or foyer, rearrange the rear of the church. If necessary, take out some pews.
- (3) Develop a follow up system, letters, phone calls, visits.

(4) Develop ways of creating friendship links with established members and other new members. This is the first step to including them in the life of the church.

In this study we are going to look at (1) and (2). In the next two studies we will examine (3) and (4).

Appoint and Train Welcomers

Selection is always more important than training. People should be invited to be welcomers rather than calling for volunteers. This avoids the embarrassment of saying no to people who are not suitable for this role.

Welcomers should be people who know the congregation well and have good 'people skills'. What do welcomers do? Their role is to:

- (a) give a warm welcome to people as they arrive,
- (b) get the names and addresses of new people on a 'welcome card' over tea and coffee. Welcome cards should

be given out at the door and placed in the pews (see sample in resource section),

- (c) introduce them to others,
- (d) introduce them to the minister,
- (e) ask them if they want to know anything about the church and its organisations,
- (f) invite them back,
- (g) pass the welcome cards on to the person co-ordinating follow up.

Name tags

If members bring their friends they should be encouraged to provide name tags for them. A batch of blank name tags should always be available at the welcoming table. Some sensitivity is needed, so as not to intimidate new worshippers. Members should be encouraged to wear their own tags. Make sure the print is large! Perhaps newcomers can have a badge that says 'Host' with their name underneath.

Training

Two training sessions should be run to equip welcomees with the skills needed, and to emphasise the importance of their role. Welcomees should receive training in how to approach people sensitively, particularly in relation to getting the information for the 'welcoming card', and how to involve other members so they have a network of people on a Sunday to whom they can introduce newcomers.

The resource section has a check list of some of the reasons people may be visiting your church. Welcomees should be familiar with these. What do you do with families? How do you welcome children? Where do you stand in the foyer? Just inside the doors or outside? Rosters should also be agreed on at these training sessions. Welcomees should be familiar with the 'welcome pack' (see resource section for a suggestion as to layout and contents).

The people trap

It is very important to develop a place and time after the church service where people can gather and talk. You may have to modify your foyer or move some pews at the back

of the church. Serve tea and coffee and encourage people to stay and chat. If you are rebuilding or remodelling, the welcoming/fellowship area should be high on your priority list.



Jobs that are everybody's are often nobody's.

Identify the welcoming tasks and recruit a team.

Questions and Exercises for Group Work

1. Report back on homework from the previous study. Ask those who interviewed some of your newer worshippers to share their findings (10 mins).
2. Ask each person to share an experience of being positively welcomed at a church. Ask them what was said or done that was so helpful (15 mins).
3. Divide into threes or fours and discuss the following (30 mins):
 - (a) If we don't have organised welcomees, how could we develop them? How many would we need at each of our services? If we have welcomees how could we improve our system?
 - (b) Would you want to add anything to the welcomees' tasks as outlined on page 21?
 - (c) Do you have an adequate 'people trap' after services? In what ways do your buildings need to be changed?
 - (d) What do you find most difficult/most enjoyable about welcoming newcomers?
4. Report back to whole group on questions 3 (a), (b) and (c) (15 mins).

Homework

Ask one person to analyse your present follow-up system and report back to the next session.

How to Develop a Follow-up System

STUDY

Input

Research shows that the longer follow-up is left the less likely it is that people will return. This increases dramatically after the first week and exponentially after that. Remember the '36 hour principle' mentioned in Study 4.

The following five steps need to happen for every newcomer in the first two weeks:

1. A letter of welcome signed by the minister should be sent on Monday or Tuesday (see samples in Resource section).
2. A welcome phone call by a lay volunteer the same week to make a time to visit.
3. A visit from a lay volunteer before the next Sunday.
4. A visit from the minister the next week.
5. Where there are Sunday school children or teens their names should be referred to the relevant person and contact made by them, with an invitation to the appropriate activity. The same can be done, for example, by a young mothers' group leader or a senior people's group leader, depending on the age of the newcomer.

These are the first steps in welcoming. Following sessions deal with helping new worshippers become involved in the life of the church.

The trap at this point is to leave too large a gap between the initial welcome and the next stage. The above five steps should be followed fairly quickly by building contacts and relationships between people. This can be done in a variety of ways such as organising luncheons, dessert and coffee evenings, morning teas or 'dinner clubs' (see Resource section). The aim at each event is for five or six established members to meet three or four newcomers in a comfortable environment where people can come to know each other.

Some people will want to join small groups fairly quickly;

others will take more time. Joining a small group is one of the best ways to include new members in the life of your church, but not everyone will be at this point.

An orientation or 'newcomers group' can be organised if you have sufficient numbers of newcomers or visitors. These can run for four to six weeks. A sample outline of a program for such a group can be found in the Resource section. The ideal is to work towards the members joining small groups or even forming a new small group themselves.

Some churches use a 'buddy system' where they link new families with an established family, couple or individual. Those members who volunteer for this should be clear that they will have to be prepared to keep in touch with the new people closely for at least six months (see Resource section).

The following materials and basic administration will be needed.

Administration

1. The welcome cards with visitor information have to be sent to the parish office or the person co-ordinating the follow-up on a Monday.
2. The names should be sorted through on that day with the minister, and a decision made on:
 - (a) Who do we follow up? For example, if people are on holidays from interstate or are visitors from another parish, we won't follow up.
 - (b) Do we put them on the contact roll or follow-up list?
 - (c) Which letter do we send; one for families, singles, or for youth?
 - (d) Do any require sensitive and discreet pastoral follow-up?
 - (e) Which ones should also be referred to other people such as the Sunday school superintendent or youth leader?
3. Letters and referrals should be sent off on the Monday.
4. The co-ordinator assigns the follow-up calls and visits to their team of volunteers and passes the list on to the minister for reference.

4. The small groups should now report their answers, which should be recorded on a board or overhead transparency. Be concrete and specific (15 mins).
5. The whole group should now answer:
 - (a) Who should take responsibility to see that these things are put in place?
 - (b) What resources will be needed?
6. Simplify the answers from (5) and have them typed up for the action group.

Homework

Ask two people each to prepare a three minute explanation of how they came to feel 'part of the family' of your congregation. They should emphasise those events, people, activities, attitudes and roles that were key to the process.

5. The co-ordinator also refers the new names to the person organising the dessert and coffee evenings or orientation group for invitation in two or three weeks time to the next scheduled function.

Materials required

1. A welcome card. Keep it short and simple.
2. A welcome pack outlining the various services, clubs, organisations, small groups and resources offered by your church.
3. Letters of welcome (the Resource section has samples of all the above).
4. Contact roll. This can be on a computer data file with the relevant code (eg C, contact). You could then, say, select and write to all the people who have come in the past six months. This file needs to be reviewed every six months and people who have become regular given a different code (eg RA, regular attender) or if they have not been seen again, dropped from the list. If you don't have a computer, use a card index system.

Read Exodus 18:13-27 and ask yourself "What does this story tell us about the need for delegation and the involvement of others in ministry?"



Newcomers are VIPs.
Give them priority follow-up and detailed attention.

Questions and Exercises for Group Work

1. Ask the person who was given the task of analysing your present follow-up system to report back to the group (5 mins).
2. If the group has not yet read the Input section for this study, allow five minutes now for doing so.
3. Break into groups of three or four and answer these questions:
 - (a) What are the gaps in our present follow-up system?
 - (b) How could it be improved? (20 mins).

Incorporation - Closing the Back Door

STUDY

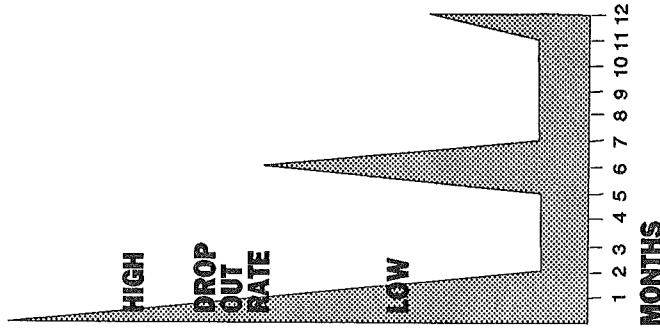
Input

When a person feels they belong to the church, and are a part of its life and activities, they have been 'incorporated', made part of the larger body. They start saying, "This is my church". They start talking about 'us'. This happens when people have:

- (a) developed two or more significant relationships with other people or families in the church,
- (b) a role, however small, through which they feel they are contributing,
- (c) become involved in some area of the church's ministry, and
- (d) acquired a sense of ownership and membership of the congregation.

The process of incorporation must address all of these four areas. Research suggests three points at which drop out occurs for new people:

1. In the first few weeks. This was because your church was not what they were looking for, or they have not been welcomed properly.
2. At the fifth or sixth month. This is usually because the person has not developed any relationships or doesn't feel needed or valued.
3. At the 11-13th month another but smaller group



(Graph from article by Robert Orr in Kiwi Growth Report, 1990, NZ)

CHURCH

become inactive. Their reasons are similar to Point 2, but with more of a focus on the fact that their needs were not being met. They have usually not found a role.

Relationships

In the previous study we suggested a number of ways you can help relationships develop. You could run social events at which newcomers meet established members like dinner clubs, dessert and coffee evenings or morning teas; newcomers' groups which meet for four or five weeks to orient people to the congregation; involving people in small groups or home groups; or linking established families with new ones in a 'buddy system'.

In some small churches there are de facto 'gatekeepers' who have a great informal influence on whether a person or family feels 'admitted' or not. These people need to be involved in the welcoming and incorporating process in some way.

Roles

A balance must be struck here between involving people too quickly, either before they are ready or before you know them well enough; and too slowly so they feel kept on the periphery.

Initially the roles offered should be fairly practical ones that don't carry too much responsibility. New people should be involved in ministry roles only when their maturity and gifts have been discerned. But to be involved in something like the morning tea roster, the transport or maintenance team or the casserole bank, can give the newcomer a very significant sense of belonging and contributing. Openings should be made known by regularly listing 'opportunities for service' in your pew sheet.

Membership

Some denominations have a very defined membership perimeter and others a very vague one. There are advantages and disadvantages in both. The weakness of the very defined perimeter is that it's harder to get in, and in the vague one it's easier. The strength of the former is that there is usually a much greater commitment to and ownership of the congregation and the responsibilities of membership.

It is possible to combine the advantages of both by creating a very open and easy path to regular attendance and a feeling of belonging, but towards the end of that track provide a point where people can choose to attend a membership class if they so desire. If membership classes are offered two or three times a year new worshippers who have become regular can be invited to attend.

It is also helpful to develop a 'membership manual' which explains the congregation's ethos and philosophy of ministry and sets out the privileges and responsibilities of committed membership of a local church. The manual should also have a section that deals with any particular denominational requirements. Remember that today denomination of origin is not a very significant factor in why people join churches.

In one large Anglican church in London every newcomer who wishes to join the congregation is asked to attend a group that runs for eight weeks and includes a weekend away. The group models the church's small group structure and its study content is a review of the basics of the Christian faith. The weekend concentrates on their particular approach to worship, ministry and evangelism. This ensures that every new person is introduced into the congregation's particular ethos quite quickly.

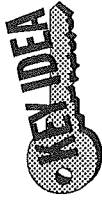
For new Christians who are being baptised as adults their introduction to membership should be connected with their baptismal preparation. Some churches which use Christianity Explained groups as a primary evangelistic tool follow this with a discipleship class for those who have made decisions. These classes should include teaching on membership.

Ministry

Unless a person is mobilised into the congregation's ministry in some significant way they are still not fully incorporated. Some people attend churches for years but never become involved in ministry. By ministry we mean active participation in some area such as evangelism, pastoral care, prayer teams, leadership, worship, music, children's and youth work, ministries of compassion to the local community such as working with the unemployed or homeless, or administration that backs up any of these areas.

People should be involved according to their gifts and abilities as we take seriously the model of the body in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 4. Gift identification exercises can be a useful part of membership classes or 'ministry equipping' groups. A number of these are listed in the Resource section.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, as you read this ask yourself: "What is the one big idea that Paul is trying to get across and how does this relate to the incorporation of newcomers?"



People join churches for all sorts of reasons. They stay for two: relationships and a role.

Questions and Exercises for Group Work

1. Divide the group into four small working teams of three to four people in each and allot each team one of the following four tasks (30 mins):

- (a) List all the ways you currently have for building relationships with new people and suggest some new things you could do.
- (b) What kind of roles could you offer new people who have become regular attenders? Can you create any appropriate new roles? What do you think is the best way to go about giving roles to new members?

(c) Do you have a way of introducing people to the concept of membership? If not, how could you develop a method? What content would you put into a membership class/course?

(d) What do you think is the best way to identify people's ministry gifts and how could you do this more effectively in your congregation?

Do you have a strategy for training leaders and people to learn the ministry skills other people in the congregation have? How do you recruit and train an apprentice finance committee chairperson or Sunday school superintendent? Most churches wait till the existing one retires or leaves, and then panic!

2. Call the groups back together and ask each one to report their findings. The leader should record these on an overhead transparency (25 mins).
3. Conclude by inviting two people, who have been invited to prepare the week before, to tell their story of how they came to feel part of the family of your congregation (10 mins).

RESOURCES GUIDE

1. **Worship, Leadership and Welcoming**
a check list for leaders.

The way worship is led contributes greatly to the newcomer's sense of welcome. The following things should be carefully considered by the worship leader:

- (1) Your opening remarks and words of welcome at the very beginning should set a tone of relaxed warmth and inclusiveness.
- (2) Children should be acknowledged and made to feel welcome if they are present.
- (3) You should know exactly what's happening and be in control. The newcomer should not be made to feel anxious by thinking that you don't know quite what's happening next! There should be no long pauses between sections of the service. People should be told when to sit or stand. If silence is used it should be explained.
- (4) Instructions should be clear and easy to understand. Tell people which books you are using and what page number.
- (5) At the passing of the peace encourage people to find someone they don't know and introduce themselves. Occasionally explain 'The Peace'.
- (6) Encourage people to fill in the welcome cards.
- (7) You could say, 'I would love to meet any new comers today after the service at the welcome desk over a cup of coffee. Please come and say hello.'
- (8) Don't embarrass newcomers by singing them out or asking them to stand or speak.
- (9) Encourage people to stay for coffee and tea after the service.

2. Newcomers' Group
 Contents of Program

Note: These groups should be lay led.

- Session 1**
- Use a good 'getting to know you' exercise.
 - Meet at the church and show them around.
 - Give them a little history.
 - Introduce some of your organisations and one or two key lay leaders or staff.
 - Go through your welcome pack.
 - Supper.
- Session 2**
- Introduce the minister who outlines the ministry, philosophy and main emphasis of your congregation, your approach to worship, ministry and lay involvement.
 - The minister explains how pastoral care and counselling work in the parish.
 - The minister answers any questions.
 - Introduce one or two more organisations and their leaders.
 - Supper.
- Session 3**
- If you have a small group or house group organisation this should be explained and promoted.
 - Introduce the person in charge of this area.
 - Explain how the church's budget works, where the giving goes, how people can give, your stewardship system.
 - Supper.
- Session 4**
- Split into smaller groups to attend established small groups for the evening.
- Session 5**
- Meet over a buffet meal.
 - Talk about ways people can become involved.
 - List role opportunities.
 - Offer 'gift discovery' programs if available.
 - Meet another key leader.
 - Hand out membership manual.
 - Supper.
- Session 6**
- Attend a service together and be welcomed into fellowship as a group.

Note: Sometimes a new small group can be formed out of a newcomers group, but you need to have leadership prepared and introduced early in the newcomers' meetings.

3. Welcome into Fellowship - conducted in a public service of worship

In some churches a 'Welcome into fellowship' is held for people who have become regular attenders. People are invited to take part in this if they wish. They are asked to come forward to be introduced and formally welcomed into fellowship. Each person may be given a small gift and a simple certificate (see sample below). A short prayer is then said:

"Lord we thank you for the gift of our new friends (names). We pray that you will enable us to embrace them into our family. We thank you for all the gifts they bring with them. Enable them by your Holy Spirit to share with us in the service of your Kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

**St Barny's Anglican Church,
Elsewhere**

We welcome into fellowship

.....

Date.....

Signed.....

4. Dinner Clubs

A dinner or supper club is organised around either four couples or six to eight single people. The couples' groups agree to meet for about four months and then disband. Each couple hosts a meal once over those months rotating around each couple's home. In the case of singles they may choose to meet in their homes or at a restaurant for six meals over six months.

The idea is to mix some established members with newcomers.

After four to six months the clubs can be reformed and people can drop out or join a new club. Meeting over meals is a great way for people to build relationships.

5. Helpful Books on Welcoming

- *Assimilating New Members*, by Lyle Schaller in the Creative Leadership series (Abingdon).
- *How to Build a Magnetic Church*, by Herb Miller (as above), especially chapters 5, 6 and 7.
- *How Your Congregation Can Become a More Hospitable Community*, by Gerald Hoffman (Augsburg Fortress). This is very helpful and has excellent worksheets for groups. It has a good section on welcoming children, something we too easily forget.

6. Gift Identification Exercises

These might be as useful for existing members as well as newcomers!

- *Discovering Spiritual Gifts in Small Groups* by Paul R. Ford available from the Charles E. Fuller Institute, PO Box 91990, Pasadena CA 91109-1990 USA.
- *Eddie Gibbs' I Believe in Church Growth* (Hodder and Stoughton). This also has a simple exercise (p451).
- *Your Spiritual Gifts can Help Your Church Grow - How to Find Your Gift and Use it*, by Peter Wagner (MARC Europe).
- Also useful is *The Leader's Goldmine* by G. Waugh (J.B.C.E Australia) pages 28 and 29.

7. Visitors' Cards

Welcome

We are glad you have come to All Saints' today. Please help us to extend a personal welcome by wearing this ribbon and joining us for coffee on the lawn following worship. Please fill out this card and either give it to an usher, put it into the offering plate or take it to the "Welcome Table".

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....Date.....

I am interested in becoming part of this parish community.

I am visiting Santa Barbara, my home church is:

.....

Comments (special concerns, prayer requests, etc)

Please use the reverse side

Friendship in Worship Card
 New worshippers please fill in this side
 Regulars please complete reverse side

WELCOME TO...
BLACKTOWN NORTH BAPTIST
"A church that cares"

We want you to feel really at home and part of our Church Family, and hope you will give us an opportunity to get to know you after the service.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Date _____

CARE CARD
 Regular attenders, would you mind filling in this card. It will help us to keep in touch with one another.

Name _____

Address & Phone _____
 (if changed recently or not advised previously)

Use the space below for Comments, Needs or Special Prayer Requests

- I would appreciate a call from _____
- one of the PASTORAL TEAM one of the ELDERS

To talk about _____

I would like an opportunity to discuss my involvement in the ministry of the church. Please fill in this card (one per family) and place it in the offering plate TODAY.

ST PAUL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

*For Newcomers:
 Welcome to St Paul's*

Would you kindly use this card to help us welcome you to our church family and keep in touch with you.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Please Tick: _____

Date _____

- Visitor Newcomer
- Interested in church activities for myself and/or family
- Would like minister to visit

For Parishioners

Please assist the ministers and pastoral workers by using this card to inform us of your own or others' needs.

Name _____

Address _____

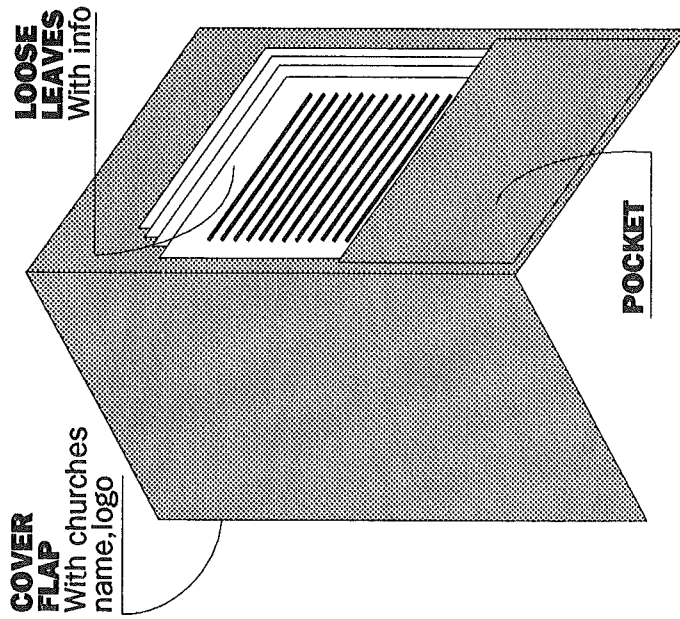
Phone _____

Date _____

Please write brief details on the back of this card and give your name and today's date.

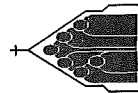
Please place completed card in collection plate, or clergy messages box in foyer or give to a church member.

8. Welcome Packs - contents and design.
 If you make your welcome pack loose leafed then it is much easier to be updated as things change, as they frequently do: leaders' names, group times, new groups, etc.
- Suggested contents:
- Name and phone number of minister and other staff, preferably with photos.
 - A brief description of your philosophy of ministry.
 - Times of services with a brief description, eg 9.00am - family oriented.
 - List of parish organisations with contact names and phone numbers, a brief description, when and where it meets.
 - How to request help or assistance, eg personal counselling.



9. Sample letters of welcome
 - adapt for your own circumstances

St John's, Smithtown



St John's Anglican Church
 12 Good Street, Bathurst, 2795. Phone: 81 4513

Dear

Just a note to say how pleased we were to have you worship with us at St John's on Sunday. We do pray that the service brought some blessing for you.

We trust that you felt welcome on your visit, and hope that you will visit us again if you are able.

May the Lord be with you always.

Yours sincerely,

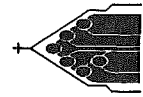
Rev Harry Smith
 Vicar

Dear

We are pleased to have you worshipping with us at St John's, and on behalf of the congregation I would like to extend a warm welcome to you. St John's has been ministering to this community for over 100 years, and has been a spiritual home to many individuals and families. We have a wide range of programs, activities and services catering for people of all ages. We at St John's like to think of ourselves as a family, and as a family church. Should you need a friend or help at any time, do not hesitate to contact me, and I will do whatever I can in the name of the Lord. Welcome to our family,

Yours sincerely,

Rev Harry Smith
 Vicar



St John's, Smithtown

St John's Anglican Church
12 Good Street, Bathurst, 2795. Phone: 81 4513

Dear

We are pleased to have you with us at St John's. On behalf of the congregation, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you.

Since you have indicated an interest in joining St John's, I'd like to invite you to attend our 'MAP' program. 'MAP' is a series of meetings, (either mid-week in the evening, or late Sunday afternoon), aimed at helping folk in their decision about membership by familiarising them with the church's ethos (its aims and activities), and to build friendships. The series runs for four or five weeks.

Please ask Gerry Donald or Robyn Smith when the next series commences. Phone 81 4513.

St John's has been ministering in this community for over 100 years, and has been a spiritual home to many individuals and families. We have a wide range of programs, activities and services catering for people of all ages. We at St John's like to think of ourselves as a family, and as a family church. Should you need a friend or help at any time, do not hesitate to contact me and I will do whatever I can in the name of our Lord. Welcome to our family,
Yours sincerely,

Rev Harry Smith
Vicar

10. A Study to be used in Existing Home Groups to Introduce a Host Scheme or 'Buddy System' for Newcomers.

This is a very useful way of also raising the congregation's awareness of the need for welcoming. This is a study which can be used by groups, permission is given to copy.

HOST SCHEME OR BUDDY SYSTEM (or befriending newcomers) Introduction

Joining a church is like joining any new large group of people. For most people it's not easy. All of us were 'new' at some stage. It is often a time of insecurity and uncertainty. For many people who have not had much association with a church before, the experience of being new can produce a range of feelings, from being threatened to being pleasantly positive about the whole idea. The first contacts in such a situation can influence whether a person continues to come or not.

Write your answers down first, then discuss them with the group.

- i. (a) Describe how you felt when you first attended or joined a new group of people (eg social event, club, church).
(b) Describe a positive experience you have had under the same circumstances.
ii. How long did you take to feel 'settled' at your church?
iii. (a) Who were some of the first people you met?
(b) Do you still see these people regularly?
(c) Did some people take an interest in you for a while and then fadeout? How did you feel about that?
(d) Do you think you would still be attending church if these people had not taken the time to welcome you into the congregation?
iv. What were the most helpful first activities/groups you attended when you first came to your church?
v. Read the following passages which relate to welcoming and hospitality:
(a) Romans 12:6-16
• List the gifts and qualities mentioned.

- Underline the gifts and qualities which may be able to be used as part of welcoming a new member.

(b) 1 Peter 4:8-10

- List the two commands.
- What are our gifts to be used for?

It has been proposed that we adopt a 'Buddy' system for new people, ie that new people be assigned to the care of a member (or family) for a period of up to four months after their arrival. The job of this person (or family) would be to welcome the newcomer, help them find out which groups/activities are available to them and their families, be a contact person for them, invite them to their home, introduce them to others and generally watch out for them as they become part of the congregation.

- vi. What do you think of the idea?
- vii. Would you be prepared to be a host for a new person? If so fill in the form below and hand it to your group leader.

I would love to be a host for new people to our church

Name/s

Phone

Age: 17-20 20-30 30-40 40-50 50+

Married or Single.....

(permission is given to reproduce this study outline.)

11. Who may be Visiting your Church

There is a wide range of people who may visit your church. These may include:

- Active Christians who have moved from another town, state or suburb.
- Someone with a deep personal need such as loneliness, loss, relational breakdown, confusion or unemployment.
- Someone returning to check out the 'old values', often in their mid 30s to early 40s.
- Someone returning to the church of their youth, trying to restore their faith.
- People who are spiritually seeking.
- People looking for community, 'family', 'home', friendship.
- Parents who want their children to have 'Christian values'.
- New converts.
- Young people looking for a peer group.

Note: Be sensitive and alert to people's needs.

12. Photo Welcome Board

Some churches have a newcomer's photo board. Once a person or family has started to attend regularly they are asked if their photo can be placed on the board for a month.

13. 10 Commandments for Welcoming Newcomers and Visitors

A church that has no visitors or fails to welcome and incorporate them will have no new members.

1. You get only one chance to make a first impression. Make it a good one!
2. Visitors are honoured guests, they should get VIP treatment. They are not intruders, they are opportunities for us to express Christ's love.
3. Remember that the environment and the people are all strange to them, visitors will feel very apprehensive, especially in the coffee time after the service.
4. Members must go out of their way to speak to visitors. Be prepared to chat for quite some time. Look after them, introduce them around. A brief 'Hi, nice to see you' is not enough. Don't leave them stranded.
5. Take the newcomer at their pace, they may want to

THE WELCOMING CHURCH

'enter' your community slowly or quickly. Don't embarrass them. Be warm but not pushy.

6. Wear your name tag, it's a great help to newcomers.

7. Generally they want to meet the minister so create an opportunity for this after the service and introduce them to him or her.

8. The minister can't do it all! He has lots of people wanting to chat and pass on news.

9. A warm welcome is only stage one. Incorporation involves more than a handshake.

10. Remember people visit churches for all sorts of reasons but they stay mainly for one - relationships.