

Entertaining Angels Training Session

– week 2

Pope Francis preached very powerfully at the Mass for Corpus Christi on the welcoming church. This is part of what he said:

“The Church too must be a large room. Not a small and closed circle, but a community with arms wide open, welcoming to all. Let us ask ourselves this question: when someone approaches who is hurting, who has made a mistake, who has gone astray in life, is the Church a room large enough to welcome this person and lead him or her to the joy of an encounter with Christ? Let us not forget that the Eucharist is meant to nourish those who are weary and hungry along the way. A Church of the pure and perfect is a room with no place for anyone. On the other hand, a Church with open doors, that gathers and celebrates around Christ, is a large room where everyone can enter.”

Let's spend some moments reflecting on this.

What surprises you the most?

What gives you heart?

What challenges you?

This week we are really going to get into the nitty gritty:

- What is the role of a welcoming team: who to recruit and what they can do.
- Resources to make our parishes more accessible for people with disabilities.
- How to engage the whole congregation in welcome. What practical steps should we be taking to get everyone involved?
- Making plans.

Firstly before we kick off,

Did you manage to mystery worship another church, or have someone visit your own?

Was there anything you noticed just having done the last workshop?

The role of a welcoming team

“Parish hospitality is more than simply a spontaneous welcome. It is an intentional and strategic plan that begins long before the sun rises on a given Sunday morning.” William Simon Jr., *Great Catholic Parishes*

Hospitality takes strategic organisation behind the scenes, with extensive preparation and planning. Volunteers need to be recruited and trained with a clear sense of how hospitality contributes to the mission of the church. The whole parish shares a common sense of welcome where everyone is made to feel equally at home.

Why have a welcoming team?

1. They make time to welcome people. While the whole church has a part to play, these are people who have a distinct purpose to be hospitable. In England, where we really worry about stepping on toes, this is a great help.
2. It's too important to be left to chance. We've already seen that this ministry is key to our Gospel values. Having a team tells the whole congregation, and especially our guests, how important welcome is.
3. It puts people in strategic locations, and gives them a clear role to do. These places include
 - a. The car park – smile and wave, help anyone who needs assistance, help with parking
 - b. All the entrances. Outside is better than inside.
 - c. Roaming greeters – to show people to their places, watch out for anyone who looks unsure, pass on details of children's liturgy, disabled toilets, kids books etc

Mistakes of welcoming teams

- a. Holy huddles – if the greeters are chatting to each other, they are already excluding guests. Better to have no greeters at all than greeters who only talk to people they know.
- b. Arriving too late. Greeters need to be there before the guests. If they see their role as building the kingdom, it will give them the passion they need.
- c. Calling the bulletin-hander-outer a greeter. They're not – they don't have time to greet people properly.
- d. Not introducing yourself. Greeters are people, and so are guests. It's lovely as a new person to know someone's name – and we are terrible about this in Catholic churches!

What difference does this make to people visiting our churches?

What's the state of our welcome currently?

Who should be a greeter?

You really want people with a servant heart for this role – to see how it fits in strategically, and how it is really profound outreach. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves.” Phil 2:3

What would it be like to have a group of greeters who treated every guest in that way?

Who are those people in your church?

Welcome Centres

Thom Rainer says that all churches should have welcome centres, even if it's just a table.

What should be on a welcome table?

Rainer suggests:

- leaflets and church info (about the most likely topics that people will want, like the local Catholic school, sacraments, becoming a Catholic).
- Pens with the church name on (people will take it home and remember you)
- Gifts – maybe a prayer card with the parish/pastoral area prayer on?
- Gift bags, with all this in and some chocolate?

Greeters and welcomers don't just say “We're expecting you,” they say, “We want you here”. And a guest who feels wanted and welcomed is a guest who will likely return. It really is that important.

Welcoming people with disabilities

In our last session we touched on welcoming people with disabilities. There were some great ideas shared, including having large print or differently coloured newsletters, or having a wheelchair friendly space in your church. Disability is such a broad term that sometimes we get overwhelmed just thinking about it, but Pope Francis reminds us:

“The church cannot be ‘mute’ or ‘tone deaf’ when it comes to the defence and promotion of people with disabilities.

Words and gestures of outreach and welcoming must never be missing from any church community, so that everyone, particularly those whose journey in life is not easy, can encounter the risen Lord and find in that community “a source of hope and courage,”

Pope Francis speaking to families, carers and disability professionals on 21/10/17.

CSAN have produced an excellent “Parish Guide to disability” <https://www.csan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200815-Parish-Guide-to-Disability.pdf> If we look at their main recommendations, we can see that we've covered a lot of it already in thinking about a general welcome, it just needs that thoughtful perspective to make sure everyone is included.

From the Parish Guide to Disability

General Tips for Welcome and Inclusion

It is helpful if YOU.....

- how a welcoming manner, a smile, welcoming words such as “good to see you”
- speak directly to the person with disability, not only to their companion or interpreter
- focus on the person, not the disability
- treat adults with disabilities as adults
- use a normal voice and volume, unless instructed to do otherwise
- offer to shake hands when introduced
- ask for instructions before providing assistance; don’t assume you know the need
- recognize that the person may have multiple disabilities and, therefore, multiple needs
- relax; we are all people with gifts and challenges

It is helpful if THE PARISH...

- has prominently displayed WELCOME signs outside the church and parish centre;
- provides reserved parking spaces for parishioners with physical disability;
- ensures that the church and parish centre are easily accessible to wheelchair users;
- has a team of trained welcomers, on a rota, at all weekend Masses and main parish events;
- ensures that the church and parish centre are warm, well lit, clean and attractive;
- has an easily accessible toilet, which includes adaptations helpful to people with disability;
- has a good ‘loop system’ in place for the use of those with hearing impairment;
- displays appropriate and clear signs in all parish facilities;
- provides respite facilities and opportunities for families and children with disabilities;
- asks what other accommodations and facilities parishioners need;
- recognizes that people with disabilities have talents and skills that are useful to parish communities;
- includes parishioners with disabilities in liturgy, ministries, etc.
- asks persons with disabilities to evaluate facilities, such as toilets and respite areas;
- forms a ‘Disability Support Group’ and trains volunteers (adults and youth);
- has a ‘disability contact person’, named on notice board and newsletter, to be informed if any persons with disability, or their carers, experience problems (e.g. with a hearing loop);
- includes (in the parish library) copies of this Guide, with resource information, signposting to specialist resources, with contact details for relevant services/ societies in the neighbourhood;
- makes provision for house-bound parishioners, by arranging for social visits, Eucharistic ministers to call, arranges availability of transport suitable for wheelchairs to convey some to church and parish events, where possible;
- where necessary, provides facilities for ‘streamed’ services, allowing house-bound parishioners to follow the Mass on their TV, computer, or tablet;
- invites all house-bound parishioners to become members of the ‘Apostleship of Prayer’.

<https://www.csan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200815-Parish-Guide-to-Disability.pdf>

What is your personal experience of this?

What steps could parishes take straight away?

Becoming a welcoming community

Smile: Colgate dental floss campaign <https://www.nedmartin.org/v3/amused/colgate-dental-floss-advert>

“Rejoice in the Lord always” Philippians 4:4

“An evangeliser must never look like someone who has come back from a funeral” (Evanglium Gaudium, 10)

“If Jesus is in your heart, please notify your face”

Welcome has to be a priority of your church community. The Bible says so, Pope Francis says so. If welcome is about more than greeters, it needs to be a golden thread that runs through the whole parish.

Firstly – speak to the whole church about welcome. Ask your priest to preach about it, institute name badge Sunday or something similar. Ask everyone to think about when they have been made to feel welcome and what difference that made to them

Welcome begins with the welcoming team, but extends to everyone who has a liturgical function, including music leaders, children’s liturgy, Eucharistic Ministers, those doing the announcements.

Could include:

- Children’s liturgy – could someone be the welcomer for late comers each week?
- Baptism programmes – is this a new family? We often hope that people will return at this point
- First communion and confirmation – again, what is our attitude to families that we haven’t seen before?
- What about screens in church with words of hymns and prayers so everyone can join in?
- How does coffee after Mass fit in? Is it ever announced? Is it clear where to go?
- Strategic – look across the whole experience of coming to church. What are the glaring/stand out issues right now?

Where other opportunities are there for welcome?

Planning next steps

Firstly – do not do everything!

- Find a team – some people who share your thoughts that welcome is actively building the kingdom
- Share the vision - get them to watch the videos/read through the resources
- Do your homework – mystery worship other churches, look at your own church with new eyes
- Find 3 things that you can easily do

“May we become a Church with pitcher in hand, a Church that reawakens thirst and brings water. Let us open wide our hearts in love so that we can become be the large and welcoming room where everyone can enter and meet the Lord. Let us break the bread of our lives in compassion and solidarity, so that through us the world may see the grandeur of God’s love. Then the Lord will come, he will surprise us once more, he will again become food for the life of the world. And he will satisfy us always, until the day when, at the heavenly banquet, we will contemplate his face and come to know the joy that has no end.”

Pope Francis, conclusion to Homily for the Feast of Corpus Christi.