

Welcome!

A Training Resource for Parishes
in the
Ministry of Welcome

**Parish Pastoral Development
Diocese of Cork & Ross
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About this resource...

Why?

- To prompt parishes to engage more fully in the ministry of welcome to all people
- To guide parishes into thinking about how they welcome the faith community who gather to worship and how they build connections with those who live in the geographical area of the parish

How?

- A group of parishioners (it may be one of the established groups) gather to reflect and decide a plan of action together
- Meeting over 4 sessions to discern the best way to engage in this ministry in your parish
- Creating a space in which to assess the needs and to explore different ideas and experiences of welcoming and being welcomed

The programme:

This programme is designed for use by a parish group and it is important that any group follows the sessions as planned in order to take time over the first session which offers a space to put this idea into the context of scripture and personal reflection.

Each session will need to be led by a member of the group. It is not necessary that this leader be any better informed about the topic but rather that they are able to facilitate the discussion and reflection of the group. At each session it is good to record the observations and discussion points to help the group in forming its action plan.

It is always good to begin and end with a time of prayer including a space for quiet time - especially at the opening of the session. You may wish to share this task of preparing prayer among the group.

Session One

1. Introductions

- Time of prayer
- Members of group introduce themselves (if it is not a group who meet regularly)

2. Questions

- In pairs answer discuss "name and share about a time when you felt welcomed into the parish community" or "why do you not feel totally included in the parish community"
- Some members may share with the whole group their personal experiences of welcome in the community
- In plenary (the whole group) discuss "why does welcoming really matter?"
- Chart up the ideas/comments made in the whole group

3. Welcome in the scriptures

- Select scripture passages from the following list and in small groups (3/4) take one passage per group and discuss the welcome theme expressed in the words

Luke 19: 1-6

Matthew 25: 34-45

Mark 9:37

Matthew 2: 1-11

Luke 1: 39-45

Luke 2: 6-20

Luke 10: 38-42

- When all the small groups have spent time reflecting on these words of scripture chart up the ideas they wish to share with the larger group

The moral of the story...

What is at the heart of God is what must be at the heart of the Church. To welcome is to be the very heart beat of God in the faith community.

Session Two

Time of prayer

Session two comes in two parts and will require some work to be done outside of the meeting of the group which will form the basis for session three.

1. thinking about our parish...

In small groups discuss the following...

- when you arrive at the church door for weekend Mass what happens?
 - Who do you meet?
 - Who do you speak to?
 - does someone offer you a hymn book/missalette/newsletter?
 - Do you always proceed to the same seat?
 - Do you smile/say hello to the people around you?
 - What do you do if a stranger sits in the pews near you?
 - After mass do you meet for coffee?
 - Do you invite strangers to join you?
 - Do you stop for a chat on your way out of the church?

- How welcome are children and babies in your parish community?
 - Is there a special room for parents to take children to?
 - Is there a children's liturgy during mass which parents/children can join?
 - Are the children encouraged after their 1st Holy Communion to participate in the liturgy eg. The offertory procession

- How welcome are parishioners with special needs?
 - Are there clearly marked spaces on your car park for the disabled?
 - Are there disabled toilet facilities available
 - Is there a loop induction system provided in the church
 - Is there provision for liturgy to be "signed" for the deaf - do you have information about the Chaplaincy to the deaf in the diocese?
 - Is there a large print version of the hymn book/missalette/newsletter available - or an audio version of the newsletter
 - Is there disabled access - ramps etc... and someone to assist those in need of help

- celebrating the sacraments
 - is there a baptism team in your parish

- when/how are baptisms celebrated
- who is present from the faith community
- are your parish using the "Do this in Memory" programme for 1st Holy Communion - who is involved
- what happens after the 1st Holy Communion day - how are these children and their families included in the parish community
- who prepares children for confirmation - how are they welcomed in the community after receiving the sacrament
- is the RCIA programme offered in your parish - Is there a group of people trained to lead this programme - are the parish aware of what it is about - do you know who is the director of RCIA in your diocese?
- who welcomes couples and their families and guests to the parish on the day of marriage
- who welcomes the families and friends of those who have died and come to your parish for removal or funeral rites

other points to discuss...

- is your church clearly signed - can the sign be seen from the road
- what are your notice boards like - how easy is it to see information - what message do they give to others about your parish
- do you have a parish welcome pack delivered to homes as newcomers move in
- is there information available on the church notice board of contact people for newcomers
- who visits the homes of parishioners - how often
- who visits the homes of the sick and housebound with Holy Communion - how often
- do you create welcome liturgies eg. Inviting back all those baptised in the last year, celebration of love for couples who married in your parish etc...
- do you have a team of people engaged in welcome ministry already
- is there a network of parishioners who look out for newcomers moving into the area
- do you visit them/welcome them - offer house blessings
- how are newcomers welcomed to the station masses (if your parish has these)
- do you celebrate special days/significant moments in the year - Mothers/Fathers Day; Grandparents day; children starting school/exam time...

social life of the parish...

- how often do you meet as a parish socially
- do you have annual picnic, barbecue, sports days, etc...

- do you have regular events for different areas of the parish - perhaps have a picnic for a new housing estate and get the residents involved in the organisation
- do you offer a social time after mass - coffee/tea - getting to know each other

Having discussed all of these points part two of this exercise is to go and have look at your own parish. Arrange amongst yourselves to attend different masses at the weekend, attend a funeral or removal... have a look outside/inside at what message your parish gives to those who don't know much about you... talk to others - particularly those who don't come regularly...

Bring all the information to the next session

Session Three

Time of prayer

1. Sharing what we have learnt...

- Go back over the questions from the last session and begin by sharing what each member has learnt or reflected upon since then
- Chart up all the thoughts/comments/learnings
- In small groups go over what has been listed and discuss what are the most important comments to respond to
- Sharing in the large group - chart up what are seen the most important issues to respond to
- When everything has been charted up and all members have made their comments begin to look at the "who"; the "when" and the "how" of your response/initiatives
- NB> some of the ideas may not be the remit of this group eg. Any structural, car parking, fabric changes need to go to the parish finance committee; liturgical suggestions need to go to the liturgy group etc...

2. our plan of action

- draw up a list of the ideas and the people who need to be involved in further conversation and decide who will invite them to the next session

Session Four

This session will involve members of other groups in the parish. It is designed as a space to share your findings and ideas with them. It is for them to consider these at their own group meeting. You may wish to set a date and time for this group to re-convene and to review what has been done in the parish and how ideas have worked out in the reality of the parish situation.

➤ Prayer time/welcome

Introductions - ask each member to introduce themselves and say which group they belong to

1. presentation of findings

- individuals make short presentation of each of the findings as per the sections outlined as questions in session two
- in small groups discuss the presentations - feedback to the whole
- the leader of the meeting tonight invites each of the groups invited to this meeting eg. Finance, Liturgy etc... to take these findings and ideas to their own group meetings and all agree a date for review meeting
- These people may now leave the meeting - the group who have been engaging in this programme continue

2. Our group plan

- Look again at your findings - what other ideas/issues remain on the list
- Draw up a plan of action to respond to these - who, when, how
- Is there anything else we can plan to improve on our welcome/hospitality to each other

Remind each other of agreed review date - who will convene the meeting and remind other groups?

Close the programme with some social time as a reward to yourselves - the work may only just be beginning but it is good to gather, to get to know each other better!

Other resources...

See websites:

- www.knowyourneighbour.ie a site designed by Macra
- www.portsmouth-dio.org.uk this site has an excellent resource entitled "The Ministry of Welcome"
- www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk a site designed with excellent ideas/resources/links by the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales as part of a three year project of welcome

Books:

- The Welcoming Parish by Donal Harrington published by Columba Press
- Prayer for Parish Groups by Harrington and Kavanagh published by Columba Press

Contact us at the Diocesan Parish Pastoral Development office for further information and assistance with hosting this programme in your parish

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