

+WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



I was a stranger and you welcomed me

How does your church welcome people? Well, I hope!

It sounds like a pretty basic thing really - why wouldn't you say a simple hello to a new person?

But, in my time, I have visited many churches of all denominations around the country (on holiday etc) and it doesn't always follow that a new face feels welcome.

I remember one particular holiday visit where NO-ONE - not even the Vicar - proactively said hello, from the minute I and my family walked through the door to the moment we left. We did interact with a few people but always it was at either my or my wife's instigation.

The opposite should always be the case.

Have someone on the door to warmly welcome all those attending - new and old faces - without distinction.

(You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you ...' Leviticus 19 v34

Make a point of welcoming anyone new to the church at the start of the service - regardless of whether they are watching in person or online.

('I was a stranger and you welcomed me.' Matt 25 v35)

Encourage the entire congregation to own the importance of welcome by chatting to new faces nearby - not just the people they know and feel comfortable with!

('A new command I give you: Love one another as I have loved you ...' John 13 v 34)

If you do coffee and refreshments after your service, make sure to invite newcomers to stay and chat.

(Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared.' Nehemiah 8 v10)

In doing all this, remember also to invite those watching online to browse your website and social media channels if you have them and they are active. Encourage them to drop a line to a church email to introduce themselves. (Just don't forget to check the relevant inbox!)

You might like to offer a small gift - a copy of John's gospel maybe - to each new person as they leave, with a direct invitation to return if they live nearby. Post a copy (if they are happy to give their address) to those who contact you online.

Finally, and crucially, ensure there is a 'welcome pathway' in place to 'induct' new members into the church.

This can include a 'getting to know us' meeting to find out more about the church and, of course, an invitation to your next Alpha Course - or equivalent - so people seeking more about Jesus can do so in an easy, comfortable way.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

As they say, it's not rocket science, and if your church isn't do at least these basics then maybe it's time to think again about your own welcome.

We want to ensure EVERYONE gets a chance to hear the Good News, and so often we can fall at this crucial first hurdle so let's work hard to ensure the welcome is always warm; whatever the weather outside!

Ronnie Semley, Diocesan Communications Manager