

Purpose and Role of the Parish Welcoming Committee

The Parish Welcoming Committee plays a central role in helping our parishes become more vibrant and welcoming communities. The welcoming committee is the face and heart of the parish to new members, visitors and even other members of the parish. They help to build up the Body of Christ by helping to increase the membership and making them feel that they are an important part of Christ's living body, the Church. They are an example of Christian community building at its best.

Some of the tasks of a welcoming committee:

1. Invite parishioners to join the committee. Depending on the parish size the committee could be from 4 to 30 people. It would be a good idea to have membership based on a rotational model with a 2 or 3 year commitment so that members don't feel 'locked' into the ministry and to give others an opportunity to be a part of it.
2. Membership should be representative of all age groups from teens to seniors. Newcomers will also be of all ages and will generally find it easier to relate to someone their own age.
3. Educate the committee. It would be advantageous to invite an expert to teach the committee how to be effective in their role.
4. Prepare and distribute welcoming kits.
5. Keep track of new parishioners with the assistance of the parish priest and keep in touch with them.
6. Organize an annual dinner in which new parishioners are honoured and given the opportunity to meet other parishioners.
7. Prepare coffee, tea and snacks for fellowship after Divine Liturgies. This should not be left to one person. A sub-committee of the welcoming committee could be responsible for this.
8. Greet people in the narthex as they arrive. Hand them a bulletin and give them a big smile. Be ready to answer any questions that newcomers may have.
9. After Divine Liturgy, invite visitors, new members and parishioners to coffee and fellowship. Introduce them to other parishioners and spend time with them.
10. Meet monthly as a committee. Discuss how effectively the committee is operating, plan events or activities, pray for new parishioners and support each other in difficult situations that anyone may have encountered.
11. A web page on the parish web site should be devoted to the welcoming committee. Contact information, events, etc. would be listed there. Photos of past events and committee members would be useful in helping new members recognize who the members are and what they do. It should include an online registration form.
12. Ensure that there are short forms for basic contact information in the church and that

possible new parishioners have easy access to them. Later, the parish office can provide the comprehensive parish registration forms if that is the desire of the possible new parishioners.

13. Help all the parishioners understand that welcoming others is everyone's role. If the love of Christ is truly within them, it will manifest itself to all who join them in worship and fellowship.
14. Incorporate a ministry to the sick of the parish. Visits to the shut-ins, bringing them Holy Communion, special treats, etc. would be part of it. Visits to those in hospital, especially those who have no family to care for them.
15. Consider initiating an outreach to those parishioners who have fallen away or who have minimized their attendance at Divine Liturgies.
16. Consider establishing a group whose ministry would be to heal rifts between groups and people in the parish.

"The biggest disease is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted."

- Blessed Mother Theresa

Resources:

Creating More Welcoming Parish Communities

<http://catholicstandardsforum.org/forum/topics/creating-more-welcoming-parish-communities>

Welcoming the Stranger By Richard J. McCorry, D.Min.

<http://www.americancatholic.org/SAMO/Feature.aspx?articleid=68&IssueID=32>

Excerpt:

SIX TIPS for Becoming a More Welcoming Parish

Although each parish has a unique set of circumstances it works in, here is a rough outline of one possible spiritual process a parish can employ to develop and implement a strategy to become a more welcoming community.

1. Assemble and train a parish team. *This team, assembled by the pastor or his designee, should consist primarily of parishioners with appropriate staff support. Bulletin articles and announcements at the end of Mass can be used to recruit team members, but the pastor could also personally invite influential, active members of the parish who he believes would be well-suited for this team.*

2. Develop a communication plan to keep the entire parish informed. *The process needs to be transparent, engaging and consistent—one sermon or bulletin article is not enough.*

3. Assess the current reality of welcoming in the parish. *Have an observer attend all the weekend Masses and report on his/her experiences as a newcomer. Focus on three key areas of welcoming: the facility, the bulletin and website (if any) and specific workshop experiences. Survey current active parishioners on their opinions of the parish as a welcoming community.*

4. Discern God's vision for welcoming strangers in the parish. *Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit's*

perspective.

5. Develop a plan for bringing God's vision and reality into alignment. Create a plan specific to your own parish and then research successful welcoming programs employed by other parishes.

6. Implement the plan, measure the results and continually improve. Conduct a second full assessment of reality after a specific time period to see what impact the plan has had on the welcoming of the parish.

For further information on creating a more welcoming parish, refer to catholichospitality.com