

Welcoming Role-Play

While it may seem like a simple act, **welcoming is something of an art and requires "practice."** As noted elsewhere, welcoming is different than "greeting," which is a brief encounter. And welcoming requires two or three welcomers so that one person isn't overwhelmed or spread thin by a glut of newcomers. Welcomers should in essence consider themselves assigned to a particular visitor. When one arrives and is welcomed by a welcomer, another welcomer is needed for the next arrival.

What form the welcoming takes varies, depending on the needs and social "style" of the visitor. Those aren't always easy to discern. Hence the need for welcomers to "practice."

Welcomers will find that it's important to take a quick measure of what exactly newcomers are seeking, or more precisely, how and why they are seeking.

Accordingly, a useful form of "Practicing Welcoming" is to role-play different types of visitors.

Gather your welcoming team together in a group. There should be six to eight of you, although the number can vary with the size of the meeting. Also, if need be, invite others who don't see themselves as welcomers to help the welcomers "practice."

Ask the group to list some of the "types" of newcomers they have met and what their needs have been. Members of the group might recall what "type" they were as seekers and what they were seeking. A few types might be: the shy (name-tag averse?), the "know-it-all," the embittered former Catholic, the "church shopper," "the window shopper," the friend of a Friend, or the "just arrived in town" Quaker.

The list is endless but choose three or four types and ask for volunteers from your team to assume those roles. You'll need one volunteer actor for each visitor type, but don't make the assignments yet! Have the role-players meet separately outside to assign the roles among themselves without telling the "trainees" who is playing what role. The trainees will have to find that out on their own. As a group meeting outside, the role-players might discuss the different roles and even try them "on for size" amongst themselves. Then the roles should be assigned, again, keeping them secret from the "trainees."

Now put a trainee at the door to welcome one of the role-players. The other trainees should observe the interaction, and after the encounter offer gentle feedback. Role-players may also comment. Also, post-encounter, the two principals in the "scene" should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the welcoming. "Too much

information," "too little," "just right," "was there a personal connection made?" "Was it too personal?" etc. (Realize that the job of the welcomer continues with the visitor after the rise of meeting....)

After the first group role-plays, flip the assignments. Welcomers become visitors; visitors become welcomers.

When everyone has had a chance to play both roles, sit down and discuss what you have learned and how it might be put to work next Sunday at the door to your meeting.

-by Rick Seifert, Portland, Oregon