

CASE STUDY – WELCOMING & INTEGRATION

LESSONS LEARNED AT ST JAMES TURRAMURRA - 9AM FAMILIES CONGREGATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The St James 9am congregation is a modern Anglican service with 3 distinct demographics in attendance, these being 1. Families with primary aged children 2. Families with Secondary + aged children 3. Families with independent children.

Membership of this congregation is approximately 250 adults and 100 children, with an average weekly attendance of approximately 180 adults and 70 children.

Since June 2015 we have had an average of 13 “connections” per week, these being individuals who are not considered regular members of our church, and have been engaged in some way by our welcoming / connecting team.

Stats: Newcomers – 4 per week | Visitors – 6 per week | Returning Members - 3 per week

Some Basic Definitions:

Newcomer – Someone deemed to be new to our church and looking for a church to join

Visitor – Someone visiting our church but not looking to join

New Member – Someone who has decided to join St James but is not an integrated member

WELCOMING AT CHURCH – NOT AS EASY AS IT SEEMS

Welcoming people to church is perhaps one of the hardest things we can do in ministry as it relies on the relational skills of existing church members and the “newcomer”. This is complicated by a significant number of factors including... personality types, relational skills, previous church experience (for the newcomer), “buy in” to the process of welcoming (for the church member) and wrong assumptions by both welcomer and newcomer. On top of these factors are all the incidental issues that impact on someone feeling welcomed at church (which are often entirely out of our sphere of influence)... how the drive to church went, whether there was a parking spot close by, how busy the coming week is, whether the kids are behaving themselves and whether the newcomer knows what to expect of a particular church service.

With all this in mind welcoming people to church seems to be a daunting if not impossible task to get right and do well. This is where some clear objectives with measurable outcomes will help us develop a workable way of welcoming people to church, in a way that is both genuine and heartfelt whilst at the same time systematised so we can assess where we need to improve.

KEY OBJECTIVES AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Our key objectives are to welcome people in such a way that they...

- Experience genuine Christian friendship
- Get a sense of the community that we share at St James
- Feel comfortable enough to return to St James in subsequent weeks
- Know who they can speak with should they have questions
- Be engaged by a church member in a meaningful way
- Feel that St James could be a place they can call home

Sometimes we only get one shot at welcoming people to church, first impressions play a key role in a “newcomer” deciding to return. We want people to move from...

First Time Visitor -> Return Visitor -> New Member -> Regular Member

Our measurable outcomes are seen as “newcomers” return to St James, sometimes in the weeks following their first visit and sometimes months down the track after they have visited a number of other churches. Some specific measurables include the following...

- “Newcomers” become members, regularly attending our Sunday services, home groups, “life courses” or by establishing growing friendships with regular members.
- Traceable patterns of attendance are recorded in an excel spreadsheet so that follow up can be done by ministry staff or congregation members.
- As “newcomers” become new members we ask them about their experience of first coming to St James, how they were welcomed and why they decided to stay.
- “Newcomers’ often volunteer feedback when it’s positive, letting us know that they were made to feel welcomed and that their initial experiences of St James were good.

CONNECTORS AND WELCOMERS

We see the role of our connectors as two-fold.

1. Initial welcoming at the door as members and newcomers arrive at church, where service bulletins are handed out and a warm welcome given.
2. Engaged welcome of “newcomers” with conversation at the beginning and end of the service, with a personal invite to morning tea and someone to sit with during the service (either a connector or a regular member)

See extended notes on page 5 covering the roles and responsibilities of our connectors.

Connectors Training

At the beginning of each yearly roster cycle we run a training session on welcoming newcomers to church. In this training we run through the role of our connectors, what our aims and objectives are for this ministry and what “not to do” when welcoming a newcomer to church.

Reporting

Connectors report back to their team leader who then collates “newcomer” attendance details for the week and emails them out to the connectors’ team and ministry staff member. This allows for a relatively accurate record of “newcomer” attendance to be kept, which then helps us engage with newcomers in future weeks. Whilst the connector teams are rostered on a monthly basis they have a responsibility to look for newcomers each week and engage them as they are able. The weekly reports help with identifying newcomers to the entire team.

Follow-up

Connectors take responsibility for connecting with newcomers as they return. The intention is to greet them by name in future weeks and introduce them to regular members. Connectors seek to introduce a newcomer to a ministry team member within the first 2 visits. We hope to gain contact details within a few weeks of arriving at St James so we can be in contact through various means and help newcomers feel connected to church life.

Newcomers Morning Tea

The Pastor of the gam congregation invites newcomers to a special morning tea with the aim of connecting newcomers together. We believe that the shared experience of being a new members can help create helpful relationship groups that engage people early on.

Alive Registrations (Children’s Ministry)

All new children that attend our morning children’s ministry program are registered via our website, where parent’s and children’s names and contact details are collected. The registration process allows us to designate people as a visitors or new member. The system emails staff members with contact details for follow up. The registration form can be found at stjames.info/aliverego.

Tag-Tober (2015)

In the weeks of October 2015 we encouraged all members of the gam congregation to start wearing name tags at church on a weekly basis to help one another connect together. We believe that this is especially helpful for newcomers getting to know the names of regular members and promoting conversations that last more than a few minutes. It also helps us recognize new members who are not wearing badges. This was a successful initiative and will become a yearly event.

Church Membership Series (2016)

In 2016 we will begin a series of membership courses designed to outline the core values of St James and what it means to be a member of our church.

- Effectively tracking the number of newcomers we have come through the doors
- Ensuring that initial welcoming leads to engaged participation and membership
- Obtaining contact details so a staff member can welcome via phone call / email
- Recognising who a newcomer is
- Timing of morning services restricting after service greeting time
- Moving people from church space to morning tea
- Volume of people at morning tea – Engaging people week by week
- Home Groups – having an easy mechanism for inclusion and enough space for new members.
- New members feeling a part of the community
- Ensuring all team members have the skills necessary to welcome people well. i.e. what questions to ask / not ask., not making assumptions about a person's faith or previous church history, if any etc.

THANK YOU for offering to serve as a CONNECTOR. This is a vital role in welcoming and connecting visitors and regular members of our congregation.

- Your smiling face and warm welcome is vital as it is the first impression and point of contact for regulars and visitors as they come to the 9am service.
- We need you to be able to give your full attention to the CONNECTORS duties. It is therefore imperative that if you have young children, they are looked after by someone else on the weeks that you are rostered on.
- You will be in a team of 4 connectors: 2 Connectors will be rostered on the 2 entrances and 2 Connectors will sit in the back pews. These duties will alternate each month. If you are a Connector on duty please do not congregate in the back aisle as this gets very congested.

DUTIES:

- Be at church no later than 8.45am. This will provide you enough time to be ready to greet people as they arrive for church. Guests / visitors often turn up early.
- Gather with your team of 4 in the Upper Gallery (Team Leader check that all team present)
- First CONNECTOR to arrive to get the Name Tag Board & place on in lower gallery, left of stairs
- Place RESERVE notice on seats by 2 entrances to ensure a place there for duration of 9am service
- All to wear your name badges and if on Entrance Duty wear the **"Green"** 'Can I help you' badge
- Take the name tag board to morning tea at the end of the service & place outside the gate
- Return name tag board to set place after morning tea

CONNECTORS on ENTRANCES:

- Team Leader collect SUNDAY at ST. JAMES bulletins stacked on the Warden's table clearly marked 9am & distribute to Entrance Duty Connectors (there is also a copy of the run sheet there if you need to refer to it)
- Please place copies of the Bulletin on piano at the front of the church – one each for the musicians and singers that day; please also place a bundle of bulletins on a blue chair to the left of the entrance into the side chapel for late-comers.
- One person then to position themselves at the top of the front steps at the Main Entrance to the church - the other to stand in the Upper Gallery at the doors to the church – back to side chapel. Please switch with your partner to other entrance position on alternate months
- Greet and hand out bulletins as people arrive. Offer one bulletin to each adult (if stack of bulletins too heavy or if you have a last minute separate flyer to hand out suggest you use

the sideboard inside front door/erect a table in the upper gallery alongside where you stand)

- Sit during the service next to your entrance on reserved spot. After kids exit and parents return to church you will need to close the doors. **Be aware of opening & closing doors at appropriate times when external noise a factor & during cold winters**
- Offertory during **FIRST SONG OF FINAL BRACKET**. Collect baskets from Duty Warden. Stand in central aisle alongside your partner – **Please WAIT** until the congregation starts to SING before heading down the aisle to the front pews on each side of central aisle and work backwards. Make sure you, or the duty warden, collect from the side chapel. Return the filled baskets to the Duty warden. You will then help Warden to sort and sign sealed envelope. One connector should accompany the Duty Warden to the safe with the offertory money.
- At end of the service stand at your designated entrance until ALL the 9am congregation has filed out. Even if 10.15am door person arrives please remain standing at **your entrance** as often 9am people will ask questions on the way out. If people are gathering in the entrances please encourage them to move down to the morning tea area.

CONNECTORS BACK PEWS - DO NOT WEAR GREEN BADGES

- Your main role is to sit in the last pew (one on left aisle and one on right aisle) so that you can spot newcomers, and then discretely move and engage with them during and/or after the service.
Ask your Team Leader or Connectors Overseer if you are not sure who is new.
- It is helpful if you move & sit adjacent to newcomers soon after 9am or when spaces emerge when kids go out. Have an opening line ready to make newcomers feel at ease. It is also helpful to have someone in mind to introduce them to in the congregation.
- If there are more new people than you can handle, please alert regular attender sitting adjacent to newcomers to engage & report back with any names/details – also ask them to invite and look after newcomers at morning tea.

DUTIES FOR ALL CONNECTORS:

- There are 'WELCOME TO ST JAMES' BOOKLETS in each pew to which you can direct new people. **Sick bags & extra green badges in plastic box on floor by Warden's table**. Bottles of water and cups for fainting congregation members on Warden's table.
- It is helpful to have pen/paper to jot down details of new people – descriptions are also helpful – as well as where the people sat. **Please email your Team Leader a.s.a.p. on Sunday whether or not you have any information**. Your Team Leader will collate and circulate to all on the Connectors link (connectors@stjames.info)

- Be aware of any regulars or newcomers who may have a disability and offer help or give information as necessary. We endeavour to be a disability inclusive church and we need to be mindful of how we relate to those with disabilities. (Please see separate handout on tips for helping those with disabilities) Many young families with new babies and strollers find the back of the side chapel a good spot as plenty of room for the strollers and they can have easy access to Upper Gallery through doors at back of side chapel. It is very important for ease of access and evacuation to keep all aisles free of obstructing prams/wheelchairs so please be vigilant about this along with Wardens and sensitively advise parents where to place their pram.
- For newcomers, going down to morning tea can be daunting – to turn around and not know anyone. The rostered team of CONNECTORS (4) should position themselves near the coffee queue so that when newcomers/visitors peel off with their drinks you can engage with them and introduce them to regular members of the church. Also be aware of new parents taking their kids to kids table. Engage newcomers with regular members as you are able.
- It is helpful if all CONNECTORS, **every week, whether rostered on or not**, can sit midway or towards the back of church so that they can see newcomers in front & around them. Please can you take an interest on a regular basis with those that you initially meet, letting your Team Leader know who you will be responsible for and are happy to follow up.
- The Roster co-coordinator is the person to make name tags when Newcomers feel they would like to have one

Again, THANK YOU for offering to serve as a CONNECTOR.

IMPORTANT NOTE: As your rostered Sunday remains the same throughout the year please give advance thought to arranging a swap/replacement if you are unavailable on one of your rostered Sundays. Please first check that the person you target to fill in is not on another duty that day. Team Leaders will not be available for this. They will remain in place on their rostered Sunday (unless they are away). **Also please do not ask anyone who is not presently on the Connectors teams.**

Please note: All changes from the roster you make are be cc'd to your regular Team Leader (if a swap then advise the Team Leader of person you have swapped with). Also inform our roster co-ordinator and Connectors overseer **with at least 1 weeks' notice** so that they will have a clear picture of the Team before the weekly run sheet is sent out.

Notes on Disability Awareness:

DISABILITY TIPS:

PLEASE NOTE in relating this to 9.00 a.m. at St. James those CONNECTORS that are manning the entrances need to stay put and those CONNECTORS in the back pews also need to be in position but should keep an eye out for anyone coming into church with a disability that they can help out with BEFORE they take up position near newcomers.

General:

Treat people with a disability as you would anyone else.

Always speak directly to the person with a disability.

Always ask the person with a disability if you can help him or her in any way.

Try to be aware of hidden disabilities, such as epilepsy or Alzheimer's disease, which may require assistance.

Assume nothing – always ask!

DO NOT use negative terms such as 'crippled' or 'victim'

DO NOT consider a companion or carer to be a conversational go-between.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED:

Identify yourself by name and as a CONNECTOR

Offer to show a visually impaired person to his/her seat

Offer them a 'large print song sheets' - There are 2 printed copies of the PowerPoint slides on the warden's table for this purpose.

Explain to a visually impaired person where things are located

Try to place person with guide dog near the area at back of side chapel so dog can be near owner who can sit on the left side aisle of the main body of the church.

DO NOT PUSH VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSON – ALWAYS ALLOW THEM TO TAKE YOUR ARM.

DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS:

Ensure your face and mouth can be seen clearly

Look directly at the person and speak at normal speed with clear (not exaggerated) lip patterns.

Advise the person that St. James has a loop on the first 6 pews on the r.h.s.

DO NOT exaggerate or shout

DO NOT speak directly into the person's ear

DO NOT obscure your face.

SPEECH IMPAIRMENT:

Give your whole, unhurried attention with good eye contact

Remember the person with a speech impairment may use another method of communication, such as writing.

DO NOT finish a sentence or word for the person.

DO NOT get agitated or impatient.

MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT:

Always ask a wheelchair user if she or he would like assistance before you help.

Try to sit or crouch down to talk to wheelchair users so that eye contact is easier.

Try to place wheelchair users where there is more space in the church and where the chair will not be blocking an aisle – towards back of side chapel with prams and guide dogs a good area.

DO NOT put a person in a wheelchair unless they ask you to

DO NOT hold on to or lean on a person's wheelchair.

LEARNING DISABILITIES:

Be patient; give someone with learning disabilities time.

DO NOT assume the person cannot understand you.

DO NOT be patronising or use childish language.