

On subsequent visits, newcomers can keep whatever distance they deem appropriate. King of Peace will not ask for further involvement during the first 6 months of attendance. Periodic mention will be made to the availability of Baptism and Confirmation during the service and in the bulletin and newsletter. It will normally be up to newcomers to make the first step toward these sacraments. The various small groups of the church will also be advertised. In addition, there are always outreach projects and fellowship opportunities taking place. Newcomers will be encouraged to participate in these and other events at King of Peace. However, they will not be pushed into making a commitment.

Step 7: Membership

At the point that someone attending King of Peace inquires about membership, a new level of assimilation into the congregation takes place. Members are, of course, required to be baptized and confirmed (if they have not already taken part in these sacraments). Members also are expected to take a spiritual gifts survey to determine what gifts they have. Then they will meet with the Vicar to discuss opportunities for exercising their gifts within the congregation and in mission. All members are expected to use their spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of the community. Members are also expected to give money to the church as a part of their offering back to God from the gifts God has given. The tithe is considered the norm, which all Christians should be working toward. If they are not already members of a small group at King of Peace, this is the time when the Vicar will help them to find the right small group.

Conclusion

Remember that we do not welcome the stranger to help our church grow. We welcome the stranger because hospitality is part of who we are as Christians. It is through the stranger that God will speak to us and guide us to spiritual growth as a community of faith.

King of Peace Episcopal Church
Kingsland, Georgia

Welcoming the Stranger

King of Peace Episcopal Church is a welcoming community that seeks to reach out to all people we encounter and aid them in their own journeys to know and serve the living God. As a member of the Welcoming Team at King of Peace, you are fulfilling a vital ministry in this church. You serve as a missionary out on the front lines of the mission field. The time you spend welcoming newcomers can make a real difference in someone's life. This booklet should illuminate the scriptural and theological foundations for why welcoming the stranger is essential to King of Peace as well as give some nuts and bolts description of how the process typically works.

King  *of Peace*
Episcopal Church - Kingsland, Georgia

Scripture

In Leviticus 19:34, the Children of Israel are told, “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” Through this verse, we too are reminded that all of us have experienced times when we were the stranger. We are to love the stranger in our midst.

Throughout the Old Testament we find further references to the importance of hospitality to the stranger. In Genesis 18, Abraham extends hospitality to three strangers and is blessed. While in Genesis 19, Lot extends hospitality to two messengers from God and he and his family are spared in the destruction of Sodom. In 1 Kings 17:8-15, the widow of Zeraphath offers hospitality to the prophet Elijah and her supply of food miraculously lasts through the time of famine.

Within the New Testament, the word for hospitality is the Greek word *philoxenos*. *Philoxenos* means to love the stranger (*philos*=love, *xenos*=stranger). So to offer hospitality in the New Testament is by definition to show love for the stranger. Jesus himself is both the stranger and the one offering hospitality. In the Gospel of Luke from 9:51 when Jesus “sets his face to go to Jerusalem” until 19:45 when he enters the Temple, Jesus is almost always on the road. In his travels Jesus stays with others, relying on their hospitality. Jesus is not always greeted warmly as we see when he is not welcomed in the first Samaritan village he tries to visit (Luke 9:52-56). Jesus remains the stranger, the one on the margins of society in need of the hospitality of others. At the same time, Jesus is welcoming and extends hospitality himself. Jesus used table fellowship to show what the Kingdom of God should be like and then he shared the table with “tax collectors and sinners.” Finally, love of strangers is an important part of Jesus’ teaching. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), love for the stranger is seen as a form of love of neighbor. So throughout the Gospels, we see that hospitality was both something Jesus depended on for his life and ministry and a vital part of who he was as God incarnate.

Other New Testament passages show the importance of welcoming the stranger. In Romans 12:13, Paul told Christians to “Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to stran-

expectations of members). You will also want to offer a response card along with the service bulletin. For visitors with small children, you will want to make sure they are aware of our nursery. But also let them know that children are welcome in the service. The nursery is there if the parents feel their child should not yet be in the worship service.

Step 4: During and After the Service

The celebrant will welcome newcomers and visitors during the service. They will not be asked to contribute to the church in any way nor will they be singled out to introduce themselves. All baptized persons will be invited to join in taking communion, others may come forward for a blessing.

Following the service, you will want to try to touch base with the people you greeted before the service. If an opportunity presents itself, introduce the newcomers to others in the church. You should also offer to introduce them to the Vicar.

Step 5: Within 48 Hours

If a newcomer fills out their address in the guest book, or turns in a response card with their address, the Welcome Team will send someone by as part of the “Mug a Newcomer” program. Two lay persons will drop by the newcomer’s home within 48 hours to drop off a King of Peace mug along with the current newsletter and a schedule of services. It is best if the persons visiting the home are not the same persons who greeted the newcomers at church. These lay persons will stay as briefly as possible and will not go inside even if asked to. The purpose of the visit is to make a second point of contact to let newcomers know that we appreciate their visit.

Step 6: Follow Up

The Vicar will send out a note to all newcomers and one-time visitors within a week of their visit. This note will thank them for their attendance, outline upcoming events, and give information on how to contact the Vicar if they desire. Any member inviting a guest to King of Peace is asked to follow up personally within the week after the first visit.

ers.” Hebrews 13:1-2 says, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Christians are clearly called upon to continually show love for the stranger. The hospitality Jesus taught is not a decorative add on to our beliefs, but a central tenant. Just as hospitality (love of stranger) was part of who Jesus was, it is to be part of who we are. Acts of hospitality flow out of love for the stranger.

Theology

As theology is the study of God (*theos*=God, *logos*=words, things, concerns), then you as a member of the Welcoming Team are a theologian. In theology we look both backward and forward. As we look backward to the scripture for teaching, we also look forward to the coming reign of God. In God’s time, there will be no strangers. All will know God and one another fully. The sign of that coming reality in our own lives is the Eucharist we share each week. It is to this communion with the Triune God and through God with one another that we invite the stranger. To this communion, each stranger brings his or her own unique gifts. We at King of Peace are made more fully into the image of Christ through each newcomer we welcome. This means that we will want to welcome into our community people whose experiences, backgrounds, abilities and interests are different from our own. God will speak to us through the strangers we encounter. The uniqueness of each newcomer is not to be overlooked. To shut ourselves off to the diversity that strangers offer is to shut ourselves off from the wonderful gift of coming to know God more fully through the stranger.

The Process of Assimilation

The following is an outline of the process of assimilating newcomers into our community of faith. It must be stressed that not all of the steps will be followed in every case, nor will they always follow the same pace. This outline is to give you an awareness of how your ministry as a greeter at services fits into the bigger picture.

Step 1: Prayer

First and foremost comes prayer. We should all individually and as a group pray for the strangers God will put in our way. Through prayer we can become more tuned in to the voice of God and the ways God would have us show our love for the stranger. Greeters always meet to pray together 20 minutes prior to the service.

Step 2: Invitation

Many of the people we encounter in our lives are estranged from each other and from God. Most of these people will not find their way to King of Peace unless they are invited. Your church and your pastor will team with you to spread the word about our church. But the invitation is not to church alone, but to a life-changing encounter with the living God. As such, it is important to recognize that we do not invite people alone. God the Holy Spirit is now working in the lives of people in Camden County in ways they cannot see or comprehend. That work of the Spirit is part of our invitation. In fact, without the work of the Holy Spirit, our invitation is nothing but yet another offer to attend yet another social gathering.

Step 3: Before the Service

As a greeter, you are the point person for this part of the process. Before church services, you should be out front looking for unfamiliar faces. I know that we are all new here, so this task may seem daunting. But if you are not sure whether someone is new, don’t be afraid to speak up. Just say, “Hi I’m _____, I don’t think we have met before.” So whether they are new or not, they are welcomed. There is no need to follow a preformatted script for greeting newcomers. Just be interested and available without forcing yourself on folks who just want to get in and get a seat. In general newcomers who arrive early will want a chance to check out the church fully and find out more. Visitors arriving close to service time or after the service has started usually want to slip in with little or no fuss. Be sensitive to what our guest wants.

Be sure to point out the visitor’s table with the guest book and the introductory brochures (these tell about all of our worship service, groups, outreach programs opportunities for fellowship and

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