



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#9 - May 2011

## A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging (Part 7)

As we begin the seventh in our series of considerations on what it might mean to be parishes of welcome/belonging/hospitality, perhaps some questions for reflection and discussion:

- Is hospitality a program, committee, commission, emphasis, ministry, programme, special effort, attitude, over-all life-style...?
- Who did Jesus spend most of his time with, outsiders or insiders? What about us? Are we limiting “pastoral care” to only those inside our parish membership?
- How does our parish build bridges of care to the whole neighborhood around us? Name specific ways and make a list.
- Where are the “entry points” for newcomers to our parish? Are there “non-threatening” activities that are relatively easy for them to take part in on a regular basis?
- What are the strengths and challenges that strike you as you consider the hospitality across your parish’s everyday life?

So we continue – in this seventh issue - with a few more reflections from you, from authors, from those who have reflected on welcoming and hospitality for quite a while.

We’ve said this before (**GEMS #5**), but it bears repeating: **Whose “job” is the ministry of hospitality** in a parish?

Has welcoming/hospitality been reduced to a “ministry of hospitality” or **are our parishes hospitable communities** ~ because **EACH AND EVERY PERSON** is living in **gratitude, inclusivity, welcoming and hospitality**?

Some more ways to encourage each and every parishioner to live welcoming and hospitality **both within the parish as well as in their everyday world:**

- Constantly and continually – and personally – invite people to be a part of the Ministers of Hospitality at the parish. Look for extroverts (of course, do not neglect introverts who are likewise genuinely compassionate and welcoming) and families – as well as people of all ages.
- What about Ministers of Hospitality for many “functions,” not just the parish liturgies? Are there designated people to welcome people to the parish picnic, the parish potlucks, Advent by Candlelight, the Parish Retreat, coffee and doughnuts, etc.?
- Encourage parishioners to support their Parish Pastoral Council members, sending thank you notes for their ministry, for their time given in servant leadership to the parish (...and what about others in parish ministry ~ how are they thanked, supported, affirmed by parishioners?).

A test of a parish’s maturity  
will be not only how much is happening  
at or through the parish, but how much is happening  
off the parish grounds and in the everyday world  
of lay people.

-Frank DeSiano and Kenneth Boyack  
in *Creating the Evangelizing Parish*

- Sensitize parishioners to be aware – especially at the Sign of the Peace – of people who are at Mass alone.

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- Encourage everyone to make eye contact with those with whom they exchange the Sign of Peace.
- Invite a group of people to be responsible for inviting new parishioners into coffee with them after Mass. Look out for those who have come to Mass alone.
- Is your parish known throughout the (arch)diocese as the parish where everyone is kind to each other in the parking lot?
- Why not recommend to parishioners that when they meet people at work, at school, at social events, in their neighborhood or community gatherings, they bring up – whenever/wherever it fits in - their membership in their parish community?
- Because of their opportunities at the parish, are adults comfortable with “God-talk,” the ability to speak easily and often about their relationship with God? Thus, in their interactions with others – at work, in their neighborhood – this is a natural topic.
- Are parishioners equipped to be welcomers? To be inviters? Are they encouraged to keep extra copies of the parish bulletin, newsletters, even business cards to distribute to their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers ... whenever the need might present itself?
- Enable and empower parishioners to become informed about the church’s position on today’s challenging, everyday issues such as capital punishment, war, economic justice, fair wages, annulments, divorce, immigration reform, etc. Conversation happens in everyday life; being well-informed will help them provide a welcoming stance in their conversations with others.
- Support, encourage and affirm parishioners for their outreach in the community, such as,
  - food distribution centers
  - homeless shelters
  - English as a Second Language or adult literacy programs
  - tutoring children, etc.

**Some additional ideas** adapted from an article by Jim Lamm, Director of Stewardship and Development, St. Louis King of France Church, Austin, Texas, and posted on the website of Holy Family Catholic Community, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin:

- Warmly greet your fellow worshippers at weekend liturgy - not only at the beginning of Mass, but also on your way into and out of church.
- Cheerfully slide over when someone wishes to share your pew; offer a hymnal.
- Assist those who may need help with doors, kneelers, getting into and out of the pew.
- Volunteer to be a Minister of Hospitality - a greeter, usher, or Donut Sunday volunteer.
- Participate in Holy Family prayer circles, offering your gift of prayer to others.
- Work at festivals and dinners, providing a helpful, smiling face to everyone who comes to socialize.
- Invite new parishioners you may meet to Family Night or another parish event; offer to bring them with you.
- Offer a ride to a parish event to someone who does not drive, or who prefers not to drive at night.

Hospitality...is not a function  
of being friendly to friends but of learning how  
to be good host and hostesses  
to the strangers and the seekers who come  
to church in search of something they do not have.

- Bishop Claude Payne  
in *Reclaiming the Great Commission*

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**Walk with them:** Perhaps the do's and don'ts for parishioners (for staffs, for the parish as a whole) can be summed up through a borrowed analogy. A friend of mine is currently involved in CPE training at a hospital. One of the key messages that they (and all hospital employees) are constantly advised regarding responding to patients, visitors, anyone who needs them: "Don't just point the way; walk them to the next place."

**In every way, is that our mantra ~ as parishioners, as a parish?**

## Top Five Things

As we close this section of "A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging," I asked several parish ministers to imagine that someone was beginning a brand new parish. What would they tell them should be the five top things to do to ensure that the parish is a parish of welcoming? The following are some of their responses (some respondents exceeded the five!).

1. *Encourage parishioners to embody the friendliness of Christ*
2. *Encourage social and spiritual growth in tandem*
3. *New parishioners book*
4. *Name tags*
5. *Get new parishioners involved, by indentifying and encouraging them to use their talents*

Kathy Nix, St. Matthew Parish  
Cornubia, Queensland, Australia

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1. *Serving coffee and doughnuts and providing a space and opportunity for people to gather and socialize*
2. *Having social activities where people can get together informally (Picnic, pot luck, bus tours, etc.)*
3. *If the priests, staff and parishioners are genuine in their enthusiasm to welcome people, the people will want to keep coming*
4. *There must be something to come for...good liturgy, a community that participates together in the liturgy, e.g. sings together enthusiastically*

5. *Make one-on-one phone calls when help is needed. A bulletin announcement is impersonal, but when someone takes the time to call and invite, it can have long-lasting benefits.*

Marianne Slattery, St. Noel Parish  
Willoughby, Ohio

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1. *Community involvement and consultation in planning a future*
2. *Hospitality – welcoming at weekend Masses, cuppas after Mass*
3. *Good participative liturgies with relevant and challenging homilies*
4. *Celebration of key events, e.g. anniversaries, significant birthdays*
5. *Concern for families in crises, the aged, the lonely, etc.*
6. *Formation for ministries*

Mary Robinson, OSU, St. Mary Mackillop Parish  
Birkdale, Brisbane, Australia

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*I recently had a close friend, who is not a parish member attend liturgy two weeks ago, say that we have a warm, welcoming parish. When I asked him to expand, he said, "Well, everything: your ministers of hospitality, the music, the liturgical celebration, the friendliness of the people." I'm also inclined to answer from my business background:*

1. *Leadership*
2. *Ownership*
3. *Discipleship*
4. *Service*
5. *Friendliness*

Deacon Richard Manning, St. Ludmilla Parish  
Dubuque, Iowa

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1. *Make a roster of welcomers who are outgoing and warm people, interested in others, and train them in what hospitality actually entails.*
2. *Follow up on newcomers to the parish.*
3. *Make sure new parishioners know what clubs, activities, etc. go on in the parish.*

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4. *Just talk to new people until they get to know some people in the parish and feel part of that particular community.*
5. *Invite new parishioners to any community activities that may occur and make sure they know all the details of time, place, etc.*

Jo Ceglarski, Our Lady of the Rosary Parish  
Caloundra, Queensland, Australia

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1. *Emphasize Biblical Stewardship*
2. *A full RCIA process (including year-round inquiry)*
3. *After-Mass gathering*
4. *Lay leadership*
5. *Intergenerational learning/events*
6. *Liturgies celebrated with reverence, enthusiasm, and good music*

Vicki Hawkins, Nativity Parish  
Brandon, Florida

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1. *Pleasant friendly people waiting at the church door to smile and welcome people*
2. *Have specific people go to the homes of new parishioners to help them become part of the community*
3. *Make sure children and older people are welcomed to the parish*
4. *Check that the church looks attractive (flowers, candles, hymn books available, etc.,)*
5. *Buildings at a comfortable temperature*

Anne Pratchett, St. Quivox Parish  
Prestwick, Ayrshire, Scotland

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1. *Develop – and use – a Mission Statement expressing a concrete attitude toward welcoming*
2. *Allow relationships first and procedures second. (See **GEMS** #5 describing the parents calling regarding Baptism for an example.)*
3. *Decide who will be the one contact for each ministry, especially each sacrament. That person must be knowledgeable about the entire*

*process and have the authority to accommodate common family situations with a pre-approved plan.*

4. *Be family-friendly. Adult formation has little reach if it always takes place at the parish during late evenings without babysitting.*
5. *Be a social center. If we believe that a desire for catechesis is born of evangelization, we shouldn't undercut efforts to bring people to the parish through social activities.*

- Lauren Ellis, St. Catherine of Siena Parish,  
Carrollton, Texas

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*Let me think about this and get back to you...but number one is having a paid position for your website. It is the most important communications venue outside of the pulpit and since most people today will make a virtual visit first, it has to make an excellent first impression: friendly, welcoming and current.*

Susan Francesconi, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish,  
Naperville, Illinois

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In a few issues – after a look at some best practices in Adult Faith Formation – we will move to a reflection on hospitality specifically in Adult Faith Formation.



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived  
at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com).

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Best Practices can be found at [www.pastoralplanning.com](http://www.pastoralplanning.com). Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.