

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

Archdeacon Bob Barrett

**Incorporation
- Welcoming
Newcomers and
Helping Them Into
Active Membership**

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS Number 10

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Incorporation – Welcoming Newcomers and Helping Them Into Active Membership

**This booklet is for newcomers, clergy, vestry, sidespersons, incorporation personnel
- and all who are concerned with
how we can help those currently outside the life of our church become involved.**

This series of Booklets provide practical ideas to help leaders develop their skills in a variety of ministry areas. Experimenting with them, growing your own ideas, discussion with ministry teams will help both you and others grow in skill. Good modelling, evaluation and training will inspire worshippers to worship, pray and grow in their Christian life and ministry.

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These are provided free to those who have purchased a copy of

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The book’s content, layout, stories, examples and questions are designed to provide inspiration, encouragement and equipping for clergy, lay leaders (and emerging leaders) of the local Church in New Zealand and Australia. It covers the
21 Characteristics of a Leader in the Local Church and
21 Principles for Managing the Local Church.

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A Personal note

The seminar which led to this booklet evolved from a challenge I was given by a lay leader in Auckland.

*He said "**Bob, you have a lot of people in your church, people who weren't there years ago. How do you do it? How do you get them involved? I am booking you in to lead a seminar on that topic!**"*

His challenge made me stop and think. "How did we do it?"

Our parish, St Saviours, (now 'The Church of the Saviour') Blockhouse Bay, had grown from around 50 at worship each week to 550 per week. All of those people needed welcoming and incorporating. My experience shaped my answers to his question.

Since then the seminar has been shared in many parts of New Zealand and through one Australian Diocese. Many churches bought multiple copies of the booklet to pass on to appropriate leaders. I have been encouraged by the response of people who have "been helped". I hope this booklet version helps you.

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The Lord is with us!

INTRODUCTION

Incorporating newcomers is a **wonderful responsibility**.

Helping newcomers 'get involved' in our church is a vital, challenging and often difficult task. It can be done - but we need to work hard at it. There are particular skills to learn; issues to think through; decisions to make. Each church needs to know what its **procedure is for handling first time visitors** - the ones who could return and get involved. If we are not ready to welcome and incorporate them . . . can we be surprised if the Lord does not entrust many to us?

How to use this booklet

I suggest you could find it helpful:

- For all staff, vestry, incorporation ministry team, welcomers, sidespersons and people who could visit. newcomers to be **strongly encouraged to read** this booklet - to help them see where their role fits into the total picture.
- For as many **parishioners** as possible to read the booklet - to see incorporation as critical for essential **evangelism**.
- For appropriate **leaders** and ministry team people to **discuss** the ideas - clarifying, understanding, debating - and brainstorming possible actions for your parish.

Look for the underlying principles

. . . and seek the outworking of these principles for your situation. Stimulate discussion. **Experiment** - if it works rejoice; if not try another experiment. Look for the Lord's way for you. Don't just leave it as a theory - work out what you should do and do it. *Do what you can now - and don't panic about what you cannot yet do.* Add those things later. Keep **evaluating**. Keep **learning**. Keep **adapting**. Keep open to **God's guiding and blessing**.

*"If we continue to do things the way we do them now . . .
we will continue to be no more successful than we are at present."*

This booklet outlines many of the things I have shared in a four hour seminar. Space requires abbreviation and omission. This booklet focuses primarily on "How do we help people into the life of our church?"

Our task is to welcome and follow up those who could return to church (especially those who do not belong to any other church) and those from the community who have little or no Christian experience, and help them all into active membership.

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

Incorporation has two critical aspects - ignoring either means the task is incomplete.

The most difficult aspect is 'keeping' people.

The second hardest task is 'getting' them.

Incorporation is helping people into the life of our church; helping them become involved; bringing them to the point where they **feel they belong**. This is **much more** than welcoming them at the door on their first visit; more than making a follow up visit; more than seeing them attend for a few weeks; more than adding them to the parish roll.

'Shutting the back door' is the other aspect - the 'keeping'. The 'back door' is the metaphor for people ceasing participation in the church - (accidentally) drifting away or deliberately walking away. We want the door 'shut' so this does not happen.

Some of the things to **notice about the 'back door'**

- It is impossible to totally shut - death and some geographic transfers cannot be prevented.
- All churches have a back door - but many do not notice or care. *"We're here - they can come if they want to."*
- Some spiritualise the issue *"We're looking for quality - numbers don't matter."* I have noticed that quality in church life, worship, discipleship, friendships, incorporation, lay ministry etc., often attract people. Quality could well be followed by quantity.
- If we do incorporation well we find this helps us deal with the back door issues.
- There are occasionally some people, for whom it is best for them and the church, if we gently open the back door. Probably fewer than we think.

Ephesians 4:16 gives us a powerful **Biblical image** of incorporation *"the whole body joined and knit together"*. Ponder the image of wool and knitting.

To understand incorporation we reflect on **four questions**.

1. Why bother trying to incorporate newcomers?
2. How do we help people into the life of our church?
3. Why do people leave our church?
4. How do we help people want to stay?

Our church's ability to incorporate the people the Lord brings to us begins with us and our expectations:

- Do we want new people to join our church?
- Are we happy if they do?
- Do we care if they don't?
- Whose responsibility is it to welcome newcomers? Do we reach out to them - or must they reach out to us?
- Does it matter if people leave our church? Is it their problem or ours?

WHY BOTHER TRYING TO INCORPORATE NEWCOMERS?

Some would say - why not just let it happen? Why not leave it to the Spirit? As one lady said "*Why don't we 'shut the front door' (and stop welcoming newcomers) so we can have more of the Vicar's time?*" Not everyone has an evangelistic heart.

The ideas below may help you give answers to those who cannot see why we should put time and energy into incorporation (as one of the essential ministries we **must** do well).

We need to organise incorporation and develop a strategy appropriate to our size of church. **Size affects methodology.**

For example: a fellowship sized church may do incorporation spontaneously (although newcomers can feel conspicuous and unwelcome in a very small church). In a small church the paid clergy person may be at the centre of incorporation. As a church gets bigger lay people take a larger role - and when the church is a large church a staff member will put considerable time into the process.

So Why Work Hard At Incorporating Newcomers?

REASON 1: THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S INSTRUCTIONS.

Matthew 28:19-20 makes plain Jesus' intention that Christians would be involved in "*Going . . . to make disciples of all peoples*" Jesus means **make more disciples**. We expect more people to join us on the discipleship journey. Being new disciples they don't 'know the ropes'. They need us to help them.

Jesus frequently speaks of **love** - e.g. John 13:34-35. Loving people we desire the best for them. The best includes experiencing the love of Christ and fellowship of Christians. Love compels us to reach out to people to help them.

In Luke 15 Jesus challenges us about **the lost**. "*Leave the 99 sheep to look for the lost one.*" Here Jesus reveals his heart's desire for drawing individuals together. To Jesus numbers matter because they are individuals who matter! There are lost (drifted) sheep (once were Christians) in our community. Jesus wants them 'found'. He will use us in the process.

However they may be unwilling to return to a sheep fold (church) where those who remain are bleating (complaining) about the church, the vicar, their fellow Christians. Our negativity can drive people out of the 'fold'. Any apparent indifference to their possible return makes it look like they don't matter to us. We need to reach out to them.

There are many 'once were Christians' to 'find'. There are also many more who have never been a part of any church. The fact that they are 'separated' from the life of the church indicates a need to help them 'into fellowship'.

REASON 2: THE NATURE OF THE IDEAL CHURCH.

The church is called to **be family** (brothers and sisters in Christ); fellowship (of friends); the Body of Christ (each belonging with a part to play). A family wants to help those belong who are also called to be a part of the family.

God has chosen to make the **church vital** in his work. It is important for Christians to belong and be involved. We therefore want to help people belong, especially when we compare the ideal church with . . .

REASON 3: THE NATURE OF THE REAL CHURCH.

The church does make **mistakes**. It can be hard to get to know people. We do not always provide all the love, care and support we should. We can fail - members can feel alone.

We therefore work hard at overcoming possible faults and any hurts that may have resulted. Therefore we think through the things we do in our incorporation.

REASON 4: THE NATURE OF PEOPLE.

Many people are shy. Many feel hurt and misunderstood. Having begun to follow Christ, not all continue.

People want to know others and be known by them

- but they are scared of the process of getting known.

REASON 5: THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM.

There is a great difference between coming and belonging. Many come - but they think, or talk of *'this church, your church, the vicar's church'*. We can befriend and help people reach the stage of *'my church'* - in the right sense of I belong - not taking away from the fact that *'the Lord is building his church'*.

People quickly think *"Why should I come if I . . . don't feel cared for . . . nobody speaks to me . . . no one rang me when I was sick . . . I won't be missed."*

Incorporation is never finished for any one individual. Sometimes people (even leaders) feel like giving up and walking away.

REASON 6: THE NATURE OF TODAY'S BELIEF.

Times have changed. People's beliefs have changed - they do not automatically believe in God and Christianity. The influence of, secularism, Eastern religions, New Age and the Occult means that if people hear the word 'God' they may not automatically understand that we are talking about a personal creator. If they think of the spiritual realm it is more likely to be on the basis of some 'vague spiritual life force'.

People need help if they are to grow to a complete understanding of Christian truth and the place of the church. All of these reasons link to . . .

REASON 7: THE NATURE OF GOD'S WILL.

Our Lord wants to touch people and draw them into fellowship with himself - giving them a better quality of life in the fellowship of his church.

We are called to **receive the people the Lord draws** to us. There will be things we can do to help receive such people - making them welcome into the family of God's church.

Incorporation seldom happens by accident. It does sometimes - but we don't want people to 'fall through the cracks'. **Workable strategies** enable us to be ready for all who would come.

HOW DO WE HELP NEW PEOPLE INTO THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH?

Seven Steps in the Incorporation Process

There are many **entry points** into the life of a church. The larger the church the greater the number of groups, services and activities - the more entry points there are. Worship services are perhaps the main entry point. As is often said "*we win or lose on Sunday*". The steps following apply to Sunday Services, worship services on other days and to other entry points - small groups, women's fellowship, craft groups, play groups. We try to make the most of each entry point by keeping the seven steps in mind.

STEP 1: ENCOURAGING NEWCOMERS TO VISIT OUR CHURCH.

→ WE NEED TO KNOW OUR COMMUNITY.

To reach the people of our community we need to understand them. What type of people are they, what interests, what needs, what age groups? How would we relate to such people?

The census figures give us an indication of such things as age, education, marital status. Take **age**: often people say "*there are no young people or . . .*" The census shows many communities do have young people (local schools remind us) and their parents. There are people in their 30's and 40's - they may not be in church - but they are there to be reached.

To understand how to **incorporate different age groups** discuss the **attitudes** of different generations. Reflect on each generation and how their background, beliefs and expectations are different from those older and younger. Explore attitudes to tradition or to breaking free from tradition; ways of expressing themselves; goals in life; willingness to accept women in leadership; post-book culture, internet culture etc. Not all will be like us - but some will be. How easily will they fit into a church which gives them large books and majors on tradition? Think of younger generations absent from our church life. Are we relevant for them? How could we become more welcoming and worthy (for them) of being involved in?

→ WE NEED TO BE KNOWN BY OUR COMMUNITY.

Does the community **know we exist**? Do they know they are allowed to come? Probably not!!

Look at the **image** of our buildings, notice boards, advertising, activities and worship. Do they say - we are for this generation or we are of the past - with little relevance today.

We can look for ways to up our **profile** in our community. For people to visit we need a profile with a positive relevant image. We want to say:

"come, we want you to be with us, you are welcome, you'll find us relevant, it will be worthwhile including worship in your busy schedule . . . "

Our image and profile are a part of our marketing strategy. We have assumed that people know we exist and will come when they are interested. No longer is this the case. Today we must market our church - or people may never hear the Gospel or be introduced to the Living Jesus. Remembering that the under 45's are likely to know nothing about the church. Their understanding of Christianity has probably been shaped by TV takedowns and bad press (of occasions when the church has got it wrong).

Look at the image and message of **your notice board**. Does it imply your church is relevant as we head into the 21st century? Notice boards today should have an easy to read modern print style; attractive colour and life about them and be placed in a position and on an angle where it is easily seen by people driving past. Large print (much of it around 120+ mm, some may be as small as 75mm) and not too many words, all easily readable from across the road and 50 metres away.

Not too much information. Just:

- Who we are, including our logo.
- A simple inviting phrase.
- When we meet (not what services as that is meaningless to most outsiders).
- A contact number and person.

Advertising can be useful. Consider what is the most cost effective. Letter box drops 'drip feed' your interest, concern and willingness to welcome. A life conveying **logo** and catch phrase used on all advertising, notice boards, letter box drops and letterheads links your church to the invitation. They remember the picture. Newspaper 'church columns' are read by church people - are they the ones we want to attract?

→ WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND INVITE OUR COMMUNITY.

We need to recognise how outsiders **feel** about the church and the **barriers** which prevent their involvement.

- A useful **exercise** for vestry, sidespersons and members is to **consider the invisible barriers** which exist between the church and the people of our community. A barrier which somehow stops them attending. Many things make up the barrier - some real (I don't know anyone, I won't know what to do), some (hopefully) imaginary (it will be boring).

- It is up to us (not them) to break through the barrier. To then reach out to people - being open for however the Lord may use us in inviting and helping them.
- List all possible barriers which could make it difficult for people in your community to visit your church. Be honest. Consider what you could do to diminish the barrier and help people overcome the hurdle - e.g. by addressing the issue in letter box drops.
- When people do this exercise they often raise such things as fear of the unknown; use of books; temperature (too cold); busyness; Sunday work and sport; clothes; language; . . . what applies to you?

Consider the following:

To the not yet Christian and not yet involved there is:

1. The barrier of **ignorance** and **misunderstanding**. People think for example *"I'm not good enough", "The Church is full of hypocrites" . . . etc.*
2. The barrier of **'club membership'** - *"we don't belong"*. -just as I cannot play at the local tennis courts because I have not paid my subscription. We are in a generation that applies such thinking to 'turning up at church'.
3. The barrier of **no invitation**. As a non member I cannot attend Rotary unless invited. How many await our invitation?
4. The barrier of **fear** - *"what will happen there - to me?"* Having never been (or not for years) they don't know what goes on. Overcoming that barrier by bringing them **with** us helps many discover they do like these new ways.
5. The barrier of past **irrelevance** *"I tried it once . . ."*
6. The barrier of past **hurt** *"(decades ago) that Christian did I'm never going near such a church."*

The **friendship principle** - 80-95% of people in churches are there because they were first invited by a friend or relative.

Meeting needs. People often come to church because of some need - e.g. spiritual, social and family. The more successful a church is in meeting felt needs, the greater the likelihood of incorporating those people.

Make the most of any **entry points** we have for introducing people to the church - all services, baptisms, weddings, funerals, groups, activities in our hall etc. **Photos** of our members and activities, posters, tidiness, colour - all tell people whether the church is alive and potentially relevant for them.

Discuss:

What could your church do to encourage more people to visit?

How could you break down the barriers?

How could you improve your image and increase your profile?

STEP 2: ENCOURAGING A WELCOME FEEL.

**People want to be welcomed
but they do not want to be embarrassed.**

Welcoming is a task for **everyone**. Our smile says *"you are allowed to be here."*

People, coming for the first time, will most likely be uncertain, edgy, worried, embarrassed and fearful. We do all we can to reduce this - so that they relax and begin to enjoy the occasion. If they remain **'ill at ease'** they may feel **negative** about the experience and not return.

A number of things can **help people relax**.

- Ensuring they can **find the church and their way in**. You know the main door but will they recognise it?
- **A friendly welcomer** guiding them in and maybe linking them with someone. See appendix 2 for hints for welcomers.
- **Signs** pointing them to whatever they might need: Toilets (their 3 year old will want it), Crèche, Sunday School.
- **Name tags**. Many visitors do not want to wear name tags. Visitors want to be anonymous spectators.
- **Sitting at the back**. Leave space in the back row for visitors - many will sit there although some will sit elsewhere.
- **Welcoming** them in the service. Not: *"Stand up the newcomers"* - or *"Mrs E.M. Barrassed is here today"*. Rather: *"Welcome everyone, especially those here for the first time; it's great to have you with us."* (see Booklet 1: 'Visitor Friendly Worship').
- **Displays**. Where they can glance (especially if nobody is talking to them) and sense something of the life, beliefs, hopes and activities of the church.
- **Clear instructions**. A service that is followable; nothing which needs to be known by heart (don't assume they know the Lord's Prayer); explain where people need to go - e.g. for Sunday School; no confusion for coming forward to Holy Communion, etc.
- **Coffee** following the service gives an opportunity to chat with regulars (if they reach out to newcomers). Most visitors appreciate this. Note that coffee these days means at least Plunger Coffee – not
- **Making contact** is important. To follow people up we need to know who they are and/or where they live and/or a phone number. Finding this information without embarrassing or 'putting them on the spot' can be difficult. Chatting with people often relaxes them. When at ease they will often give names, addresses etc. *"Do you know anyone here?"* often gives us someone to check with. Some churches use a pew card. It can help - but it does leave the initiative with the visitor. It is better if **we** can find ways to reach out to them.
- A **welcome** corner/shelf/table/**desk** can be very useful. *'Visitors, it's been great to have you with us. We'd love to tell you more about our church. You'll find information on the welcome desk . . . Christine will be there to help you.'*

Visitors come as **spectators**: *"Is this a place where I can fit in, be fed, belong, grow and contribute - or will I be made to feel guilty and overloaded? Will my family needs be met?"*

Discuss:

What does it feel like to come as a first time visitor? (Listen to the feelings and perceptions of the most recent arrivals).

What are the things we could do to help people feel more welcome?

Are there things we should stop doing?

STEP 3: ENCOURAGING THEM TO MAKE A SECOND VISIT.

This is the most critical step. Many churches try to rush people into involvement - even on the lawn mowing roster. The immediate aim is not to get them involved in church activities.

The aim of every contact during the first visit, afterwards over morning tea and in any follow up is to encourage them to return for a second visit.

If they come back a second time it will be easier to encourage a third visit, a fourth will be easier . . . and involvement is likely to follow.

The **service** itself (or other activity they visit) will be **vital**.

- A survey was done among people who visited a church but did not return. They were asked *"at what point did you decide not to come back?"* Their replies were *"During the first visit - before we left to go home"*. Many said *"During the first five minutes of the first service we attended."*
- The service is vital. We may have only one chance to encourage them to explore the Christian faith and find out more about our church.
- The first five minutes of the service is critical - which is why we do not begin with the notices (they are 'in house' and not yet relevant to the visitor).
- These days the style of the service, quality of preaching, leadership and music is vital.

Before the service we can **pray** specifically that . . .

- *"Before anything happens, before a word is spoken or a hymn sung, people will sense the presence of God."*
- *"That people will have a need and reach out to the church to meet it . . . and find the Lord meeting them here . . ."*
- We will see specific answers to specific prayers.

Comments made as people leave can encourage a second visit. *"You have just experienced . . . kind of service. At . . . we have another style, more . . ."*

Information is important.

- The **newsletter** will convey our life (or lack of).
- A special **welcome-newcomer's leaflet** is essential for encouraging visitors to return. It can have a brief sentence explaining more about our life, activities and other styles of worship. It introduces people to staff and some parish leaders. It tells them what programme we have for children, youth, small groups and special interests. It links them to people - who they could contact for exploring interests or seeking help. It whets their appetite to return.

With today's computer and printing methods these can be kept updated and produced with top quality.

Follow up is vital - not to be pushy but to respond to their questions; provide further information; help them get to know you; help them be aware that they are welcome; to let them talk; and to describe more of our church life so that they can see if

- your church will fit their needs and the needs of any family or friends they may wish to bring.
- Write a **letter** - saying how you appreciated their visit and how welcome they are to return any time. Send it within two or three days - well before next Sunday.
- **Phone**. This is increasingly effective in our busy society.
- **Visit** - without pressurising. Some like, even want a visit to discuss their observations and questions. Today many find this threatening or invasive. We need to be sensitive - the prior phone call will help us 'read the situation'.
- Being sensitive may alert us to the particular **reason** that inspired people to come. Being aware of this may help us meet the needs or interests which draw them. A spiritual desire, a family or health problem, an interest . . .

Some Challenging Statistics.

In Australia I was given the results of a survey about visitor return rates.

It was discovered that if a **lay person** visited a newcomer within 24 hours 80% returned for a second visit (and within 48 hours 40% returned). If **clergy** (instead of lay) made that follow up visit, both percentages were halved!

Two things (from this and other observations) are clear:

1. Visitors want to know **what the people are like**. The clergy are paid to believe it, be friendly and get people into their church - but will I find friends among the members?
2. The importance of **urgency** - not waiting a couple of weeks to see if they come back. Within one to three days is vital.

In reality we found 24 hours **impossible**. We sent a letter and made phone calls every Tuesday - where possible arranging visits.

Discuss:

*What procedures does your church adopt
to encourage newcomers to return for a second visit?*

STEP 4: ENCOURAGING FRIENDSHIP LINKS.

People need to get to know others.
They will initially come to church for a variety of reasons.
But only stay because of the friendships they make.

There is a great difference between coming and belonging. Belonging develops as people feel they know others and are in a caring relationship with fellow members.

We need to be proactive in helping people link to people.

1 + 6 = 7 One new person in **six** months should know **seven** others - or they will leave. This is a good goal to aim at. What can we do, over the first six months of a person attending our church, to help them get to know at least seven others?

This is more than just introducing them at church. It includes **hospitality** (programmed and spontaneous); gatherings for recent arrivals; congregation lunches; **linking them** to people with similar backgrounds (e.g. solo parents, recently widowed, recently married, similar age children, interests, living nearby . . .); dessert and coffee evenings (say six to eight regulars providing dessert and six to eight recent arrivals).

A variety of other **things help people** get to know names and people: name tags, members' photos on display, skilled welcomers/greeters, monitoring by an incorporation team, ongoing pastoral contact teams.

Incorporation **may take years** - for some people. Keeping in touch and gently encouraging is important for many on the fringe of the church - until **they** no longer want our contact, or choose another church.

In all of this we are careful **not** to be **judgmental** about their slowness to decide, occasional attendance, doubts, partial involvement, background, dress, behaviour, experience. We encourage - at the pace they are comfortable with - their progress to the point of *'this is my church, I feel I belong and am accepted'*.

Discuss: How can we improve friendship links?

STEP 5: ENCOURAGING THEIR UNDERSTANDING.

Never assume people understand our language, beliefs, ethos, vision, reasons, background or purpose. Belief may be a foreign new journey. The Christian church can seem like a confusing maze to newcomers - even those with a church background.

People need to **understand the Faith**.

- Enquirers' classes, new Christian groups, Baptism preparation, Bible reading material are all important. Opportunity for one to one discussion study will help many. Groups for newish Christians place them alongside people with similar questions.

- Some evangelistic strategies (such as ALPHA) provide much of this (and other aspects of incorporation - e.g. step 4). We may need to arrange for ongoing discipleship and groups to belong to.

People need to **understand our church**.

- Every denomination is different. Every church within a denomination is different. Christians changing church need help to understand our church - as do new Christians.
- They need understanding of our belief, ethos, vision, uniqueness, mission statement, goals, journey (past and possible future), reasons for doing things, staff, activities, ministries, opportunities for involvement, budget - **and** the **words** we use.

A Potential Members Meeting is a vital addition to any church's incorporation strategy - where three to six (or more) times a year recent newcomers are invited to meet key staff and hear about the church.

Discuss:

What do we now do to help newcomers understand the faith and our church?

What could we add or change to improve our ability for this step?

STEP 6: ENCOURAGING THEIR COMMITMENT.

As we grow on in our Christian life we find ourselves making **four commitments**.

- To Christ
- To Church
- To Serve
- To Grow

The order does **not** matter. The essential thing is that all four come - in any order. These days as people journey with Christ they may come to the commitments in any order.

We often fail to give people an opportunity to commit themselves to **their local church**. Sometimes we fail to give people an opportunity to commit themselves in the other three areas.

Churches today need to **examine their membership concepts** - and how people express their desire to be linked to our church. No longer can we assume people want to be regarded as members. The Law does not allow us to add **who we choose** to our membership lists. We will want to be aware of all who may be vaguely interested in the church - so that we can keep reaching out to them. We will want to let everyone know they are welcome to come or to seek help. Yet we should not assume that these people want to be regarded as members.

A published contact list with an opportunity for people to choose to be listed has been found to be a relevant and powerful way of helping people today. In urban areas this is easier to introduce than in some rural communities where we must be careful not to override 'the church belongs to us' principle.

Before having their name listed some people will want:

- to **understand** the church
- to know what **expectations** are placed on members.
- to be aware of what the church does and does not offer and why (e.g. in a very large church the vicar may not visit but pastoral care will be done by other trained people) and that their names can go into a circulated parish directory. Occasionally people may not want their snail mail address or email address or phone numbers disclosed. A check list they tick and sign will help.

People can **express commitment** by such things as:

- Filling a form.
- Being welcomed in the church service and prayed for.
- Putting their names in the newsletter and/or their photo on the notice board.
- Given a parish directory/contact list (to which their names will be later added at the next printing).

Discuss: Is there anything we should do to help visitors, when they later choose to become members, to express their commitment to Christ and/or the church? What about our membership roll?

STEP 7: ENCOURAGING THEIR INVOLVEMENT.

Lyle Schaller says: *"A member who does not become a part of a group, accept a leadership role, or become involved in a task during their first year tends to become inactive."*

As soon as it is **appropriate** people need to enter some network of contact, care, encouragement and giving out.

People often need to be able to make a contribution before they **feel** they belong. The **challenging** thing for **us** is to know **when** that should be encouraged.

- New Christians may need time.
- Christians transferring may come burnt out from Church work - wanting the assurance that they can sit back for some time.
- Christians transferring may want to be involved in a ministry group or task rather quickly - only needing to be encouraged to take time to understand the church's ethos and methods.
- Apprenticeship opportunities and co-leadership positions help with the earlier involvement of new people.

Small groups are the most important way of fulfilling this step.

Those who do not belong to such groups need **regular contact** (over and above weekly worship services) - which the church (not them) initiates. Some say visits to such people should be made every 30 days. It is difficult to cover this for all such people - but be alert to those who need it.

This step also involves helping people into ministry opportunities - challenging the church to look closely at its procedures for:

- **Recruiting** people into every member ministry - opportunity providing and assisting with gift discovery.
- **Equipping** - initial and ongoing.
- **Overseeing** the ongoing needs, opportunities and development of the ministry.
- **Supporting** people in ministry - so that they are not left continuing the responsibility they have been landed with - without any support, encouragement, contact or escape.

For more on these four areas see Booklet 15: 'Every Member Ministry – Making it work'

Be aware of any **warning signs** and follow up quickly. For example when people's worship or group involvement patterns change; negative vibes are given; hurts are heard of; ministry struggles filter through.

The further a person drifts –
and the longer they have been drifting away
(from involvement or positive feel about the church)
the harder it is to reach them.

The larger the church becomes the more challenging this step. Large churches need to be very intentional about **every aspect**. Good records are needed - to analyse why you are gaining/loosing people.

Discuss: What aspects of Step 7 do we do well? Could we improve? How?

We cannot do everything . . .but do not let what we cannot do divert us from what we can do.

- Many aspects of the seven steps are difficult. We can, little by little develop more things to improve our incorporation process.
- We will need to constantly **evaluate** the effectiveness of what we are doing. **Learn** from other places. **Adapt** - experiment - be open and ready to take any potential newcomers through the steps - as relevant for them.

Rating Exercise:

Appendix 1 helps you **rate your parish**.
Be honest! What areas could you improve?

THE NEXT TWO QUESTIONS - SEVEN REALITIES

- **Why do people leave our church?**
- **How do we help people want to stay?**

For these two questions there are **seven realities to keep in mind**. Discuss these with others to ensure you understand the implications of the brief statements of each. Being aware of what may happen to people will assist you in providing the care you and your church can give. As a result fewer people will leave - more will want to stay. Watch that our attitudes and actions are not the cause of any difficulty.

Reality 1:

There is a great difference between a person's commitment to Christ and their commitment to our church.

Reality 2:

There are a number of reasons why people move away from the church. Some they are consciously aware of, some they are not. We may need to help them see their real struggles.

Reality 3:

Some people quite deliberately walk away from the church. Many more accidentally drift away - never intending it to happen. Both groups need to be ministered to.

Reality 4:

There is a spiritual reality. The devil seeks to drive wedges between people so relationships are broken.

Reality 5:

It is more difficult to 'keep' those who do not belong to small groups. It is hard to work with those who stand back and wait for others to reach out to them - while not informing us of struggles.

Reality 6:

There is a tension - how much to push people and how much to leave the initiative to God. Generally we hold back too much. Galatians 6:1-5 encourages us to reach out in love - without falling into the trap of Matthew 7:1.

Reality 7:

We need to distinguish between the excuses people offer and the real underlying reason why they may be wanting to leave. The guilt they feel and the anger they express may not necessarily have anything to do with the issues they are facing.

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE OUR CHURCH?

It is easier to lose people than it is to gain them.

Rather than ask "*why people leave*" it can be more important to note "*why people stay*". Being aware of the 'glues' keeping people involved enables us to strengthen the bonds that help people stay attached to our church.

'Glues' include friendships; family attachments; historical links; geographical proximity; liking the ethos and theology; relationships with clergy; loyalty to staff members; denominational links; enjoyment of worship and/or other programmes; agreeing with the vision.

In 'unpacking' the issues causing people to leave it is important to identify with **THEIR** feelings - alert to what it is like for **them**, what **they** are going through.

Issue 1: To do with people's understanding.

Some people drift from the Lord because of their **misunderstanding** of Christianity (e.g. it should be easy going) and/or their misunderstanding of the church (it should be perfect, should not ask for my money, etc). We need to help people understand Christian truth and the church.

Issue 2: To do with life and living.

One side are the things that **distract us** - especially for those who have very busy life styles. These days the pressure is on - with work, family, . . . People often lay aside church involvement to relieve pressure. We should ensure church life does not add undue pressures by expecting people to attend too many meetings - especially those unnecessary for the life of the church.

A second aspect are the **life stages** people pass through. Some can lead to a drift from church. Be alert to help people so they do not drift. Some create openness to the Gospel - we can be ready to respond.

Life stages include teenage years, leaving school, entering into or breaking friendships, marriage, children, children begin or leaving Sunday School, problem with children, marriage problems, serious illness, children leaving home, new jobs, new house, new city, retirement, death of a spouse etc. In each of these stages people can drift or be more open to the Gospel.

Issue 3: To do with relationships.

When people feel misunderstood or face hurts (gossip, let downs . . .) they can begin to pull back. Finding better friendships in another organisation or church pulls them in that direction. Major on relationships and respond to hurting people quickly.

Issue 4: To do with lifestyle pressures.

Pressures from the media and society push people into un-Christian ethics and moral **behaviour** - causing drift from the church. People need help, forgiveness and understanding.

Society often reacts against **authority** - including the 'authority of expectation the church seems to impose'. Christianity speaks of discipline and standards. We need to ensure this is only applied to **essential** things - and watch such things as unnecessary dress and behaviour standards.

Issue 5: To do with habits and willingness.

Christian lifestyle is a habit. New Christians haven't got into the habit of regular worship. Some quickly do, others take time. We can patiently encourage and appreciate the slow changes - acknowledging that God does not hit us with everything at once.

The 'I have done my bit for the Church' syndrome also needs recognising.

Issue 6: To do with Christians who are keen.

Some, especially new Christians, maybe too idealistic - we need to hang in and encourage as we help them to realistic perceptions.

Some may not be released into ministry when they want to be - help them to appropriate areas, to receive skilled training and be placed in apprenticeship positions.

Some don't feel they are getting good teaching; or the church has no vision (or it is not conveyed to them; or . . .).

We need to find ways to use the enthusiasm of such Christians. In the future they may be the leaders we need.

Issue 7: To do with our local church.

If we perpetuate a low self esteem; a critical attitude; unfriendliness; always money focused . . . - then, we will not be a very happy place to belong to. If key roles are kept to the 'same few' then we may not provide opportunity for significant ministry. If we are not creating new small groups or do not have enough empty seats in church - the message will be 'they are full, let's go elsewhere'. Some people may never quite fit into our church, with the particular way we do things and the desires they have. We are not the type of Church they need.

We are called to play our part but it is not all up to us. We can do all we can to make it less necessary for people to leave . . . but . . . ultimately we cannot be held responsible for people's waywardness, immorality and decisions.

Discuss:

Which of these issues are especially significant for our situation at this time?

What other issues have caused people to leave our church?

What can we do to ensure these are less likely to happen in the future?

HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE WANT TO STAY?

The answer to this lies in the whole life of the church - the quality of activities, the opportunity for personal growth and involvement, and the way we approach incorporation.

Consider the importance of these **seven essential needs** (as well as others appropriate to your situation).

NEED 1: PEOPLE NEED GOOD TEACHING AND PREACHING.

Which connects with people who have been Christians for 30 years (and know it all) and the not yet Christian (who knows nothing).

Which covers the whole Christian Gospel, Christian living and Christian growth - AND - is practical (so you can live it), challenging (so you want to live it) and encouraging (so we keep at doing it).

Help people grow in their ability to read and interpret the Bible, pray, listen to God, handle hurts, make wise decisions, find and follow God's guidance, deal with life pressures etc.

Such teaching requires quality preparation time. See Booklet 5: 'Preaching and Teaching'

NEED 2: PEOPLE NEED FRIENDSHIPS.

Shown by the way we continue to take the initiative to reach out to, befriend, care, encourage, support, build up and hang in with all types. Honest and open friendships which help people cope with any pressures and hurts coming their way.

Small groups are the most effective way to build friendships.

NEED 3: PEOPLE NEED OPTIONS.

Not everyone enjoys the same thing. We have different tastes in music, different backgrounds and appreciate different styles.

In the past churches said, in effect "*We offer this style of worship - opt in to it or opt out.*" Most opted out. Now more churches say "*Instead of opting out why not try this style, or this one . . . in the variety of worship options we provide.*" Rural and small churches naturally find this more difficult - but endeavour to provide a mix of styles in the one service they do have - encouraging people to appreciate their preference while allowing others to enjoy theirs.

Options are an expected way of life for today's generation.

NEED 4: PEOPLE NEED RELEVANCE.

A challenge! What is relevant for one may not be for another.

NEED 5: PEOPLE NEED TO SENSE LIVING REALITY.

People (especially the younger generation) come to church more for experiential reasons than theological ones. They look to experience the Living God, living worship, a living Gospel and be among living Christians who have a living faith.

We are to be more than another 'community club'. People will sense the presence of Almighty God at work in their midst.

Spiritual life is ultimately in the hands of the living Holy Spirit - the convictor and empowerer. We play our part, by being open to God's Spirit, as we plan our worship, and providing music - suitable to the target generations we are seeking to involve.

As our Christian life grows the light of the Gospel will shine through. People will notice a 'faith which makes a difference'.

NEED 6: PEOPLE NEED AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE.

Creating opportunities where people can contribute; helping people identify gifts; providing training and oversight support are all important. Timing is crucial.

People need to know their contribution is vital and valued.

NEED 7: PEOPLE NEED TO BE NEEDED.

They want to be wanted.

People in the church, those considering involvement, those drifting away, those on the fringe - all need to know they are a vital part of our church, and important for all our Lord wants to do in and through the church.

Many people also appreciate gentle, loving nudges (not telling off) about missing them at worship or home group.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

As we look to be a welcoming church we will find that aspects of our life encourage inclusion, other aspects imply exclusion. We can be deliberately intentional about including people. While our church will always exclude some we can minimise the exclusion.

Evaluate our exclusions. Consider these: language; music; service time (beginning and length); wheel chair access; the hard of hearing; the deaf; the immigrants with language problems; variety of worship styles; children (either Sunday School or church - depending on preference); the off putting effect of too few people or too many people in our space; the 5% with phobias; the alcoholic and what we offer at Communion; those who cannot read; those whose eyesight is failing or is sensitive to glare; non book culture; illiterate people or those with verbal difficulties; those with bad backs; those who can't come on Sunday; those who can't climb stairs; the widow or widower; childless couples; single parents; unmarried and living together; gay people; those with no church background; the shy; those without appropriate dress; youth (by our style of worship or the timing of their programmes); single people, the divorced and remarried; the alternative lifestyle/counter culture people; the very poor; the very keen; the addict; people coming from another denomination.

Do we deliberately or accidentally exclude or include?

Can we make a few changes so we become less 'exclusive'?

INCORPORATION IS A CHALLENGE

- so what can we do now? Heaps!

Look again at the suggestions in the introduction.

Set up a **short term** incorporation ministry **improvement team** - to work through this booklet and to suggest appropriate actions - you can do now (and other things for later).

Ask an outsider to **evaluate** your incorporation strategy.

Ask **recent newcomers** why they did or did not make a second visit - and what you did well or could improve.

Appoint people to the incorporation ministry team. Maybe one or two to oversee incorporation of new members; and/or a person (or a small team) to visit newcomers; and/or an incorporation person for each congregation who will 'keep an eye out for, make contact with and follow up newcomers in their congregation'.

Write out (in diagram form) your incorporation **process** - so that you can explain the path a newcomer would walk.

Prepare a standard letter that could be personalised and sent to all who visit a church service.

Prepare content for a **potential members' meeting** and plan dates, invites, visual aids, hosts and presenters.

Plan special 'getting to know you' newcomers' events.

Ask all sidespersons, welcomers, visitors and worship leaders to **read this booklet**. Have meetings to discuss its content - exploring suggestions for your parish. Run **training** sessions.

Make a list of all **people not seen at church** over the last few months - and either write or visit - with the message *"We've missed you, you are important to us, we would love to see you again, is there anything we can help with . . ."*

In a **small church** develop a system of alerting the vicar of newcomers the Vicar could visit (Vicar's visits are important in small and rural churches because of the role of the Vicar).

In a **larger church** ensure one staff member has special responsibility for the incorporation programme.

Evaluate regularly how well the parish is doing each step. Set aside an hour or two for vestry (or another group) to bounce ideas around for improving each step.

THE LORD IS WITH US

- At times **we will fail** - yet with God's help we will see more people incorporated into the life of our church.
- The Lord wants us to do it. The Lord will help us do it. The Lord will show us ways to do it.
- So - what should your church do next?

Appendix One - RATING YOUR CHURCH

Work through each of the seven steps and score your parish.

Rating as 1 = we do not do this very well; 5 = we do this very well

Step 1: ENCOURAGING NEWCOMERS TO VISIT YOUR CHURCH.

How good are we at encouraging people to visit our church?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Notice Board
- Advertising
- Letter Box Drops
- Events which encourage people to visit
- Parishioners inviting friends
- Other

Step 2: ENCOURAGING A WELCOME FEEL.

How good are we at helping the visitor feel welcome?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- They can easily find their way in
- Skilled welcomers at the door/foyer
- Helping visitors feel comfortable in Church
- Regulars talking to visitors
- Other

Step 3: ENCOURAGING THEM TO COME AGAIN.

How good are we at getting the newcomer to return for a second visit?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Newcomers leaflets in foyer/porch/back of church
- Welcome position for further information
- Phone call follow up
- Letter to send to newcomers
- Visiting newcomers
- Other

Step 4: ENCOURAGING FRIENDSHIP LINKS.

How good are we at finding out where the visitor is coming from?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Obtaining the visitor's name and address
- Finding out their needs/hopes
- Introducing them to other people to befriend
- Keeping in touch until they decide to join or otherwise
- Other

Step 5: ENCOURAGING THEIR UNDERSTANDING.

How good are we at helping people understand the Church?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Displays
- Basic Christian teaching
- Helping them understand the Church ethos/systems/activities/goals
- Potential members meeting
- Other

Step 6: ENCOURAGING THEIR COMMITMENT.

How good are we at giving new members an opportunity to express their commitment and (when they are ready to join) recognise that commitment?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Introducing new members in the Church service
- New members names in the newsletter
- Parish Directory or
- Other

Step 7: ENCOURAGING THEIR INVOLVEMENT.

How good are we at getting people into a network of friendship, care, encouragement, and giving out?

Rating 1 2 3 4 5

Checklist

- Building friendship ties
- Pastoral care network
- Knowing their ministry gifts/desires
- Involving them in ministry
- Providing ongoing encouragement
- Other

Appendix Two - Some Hints For Welcomers

1. Arrive at least **15 minutes before** the service.
2. Wear a name tag - perhaps also one saying 'Hi, I'm here to greet you'. Regulars know that you are on special duty. Visitors then know why you are talking to them.
3. Welcome **everyone** as they arrive. Remember children are people - most like to be greeted. For regulars only a brief 'Hi' etc. Concentrate on visitors and newcomers.
4. **Positioning** is important. Be in the right position to do your job well. Normally the following apply:

Before the service (where possible) greet people outside. It is better for a visitor to find a person welcoming and guiding them than to be faced with a closed door - uncertain as to what lies behind. For larger services have a second greeter inside or elsewhere. Visitors do not have to be greeted by every welcomer. The 'outside' welcomer should stay there 5-10 minutes into the service.

During the service at least one welcomer needs to sit at the back - to watch for latecomers; guide people if they have any needs (e.g. to the toilet or Sunday School); chat with people who may be upset or who leave early.

After the service welcomers go outside to greet people as they leave. Most newcomers will leave quickly as they have nobody they know to talk to. The welcomer goes to the back during the final hymn, then outside to talk to newcomers as they leave.

5. Develop **sensitivity**. You may be able to introduce visitors to appropriate people, answer their questions and provide information - including for the Vicar or incorporation team.
6. Be open and **friendly but not pushy**. Say who you are - often they respond by saying who they are. Ask them if they know anyone here. That helps with follow up. Explain what is likely to be happening in the service (with regard to Sunday School or crèche or youth - if that seems appropriate). After the service be alert to any discomfort they have felt. They may need to know there are other styles of services which may suit.
7. Ensure they have copies of any **newcomers leaflets** or other information which may be appropriate for their family situation.
8. Look for and talk to previous newcomers who are returning for a second or third visit - whether or not you are on duty.

TITLES IN THE SERIES:

- Number 1 "Visitor Friendly Worship"
- Number 2 "Worship - Who is it for?" – 2001 edition.
- Number 3 "Leading Worship - The Prayers"
- Number 4 "People Helping Skills"
- Number 5 "Preaching and Teaching"
- Number 6 "Stewardship - The Financial Area"
- Number 8 "Healing - Prayer Ministry"
- Number 9 "Informal Worship - Designing and Leading"
- Number 10 "Incorporation - Helping Newcomers Into Membership"
- Number 11 "Change - Introduce New Things Successfully"
- Number 12 "Youth Ministry For the 21st Century"
- Number 13 "Handling Hurts in the Church"
- Number 14 "Managing Conflict in the Church"
- Number 15 "Every Member Ministry – Making It Work"
- Number 16 "Criticism – How Do We Respond?"

Please note that Number 7 on Planning is not available in the Electronic Series.
