

## Everybody Welcome Seminar: Emmanuel Church, Billericay, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Two Quotations:

People matter more than policies. Jesus touched lepers - so why are we [in the churches] so scared of Equality and Diversity?"

- *Richard Jordan, Church & Society Officer, Derby Anglican Diocese*

"In life we receive more than we give; therefore it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

- *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

**Definition of the word Welcome:** to take pleasure in the coming of another.

Praxis: And then discovering how we can tangibly express this pleasure. In other words what can we say or do in our churches that express this pleasure in presence of those who we encounter?

**What does it mean to be welcoming?** Charlie and I began with a sketch poking fun at some of the silly things we get up to in welcoming people into our churches. We have perhaps misled you, because welcoming is not merely about what we do when people come into our churches. **It is primarily about who we are, and our attitudes and mindsets.**

**What are the signs of the Christians who have embraced a spirit of welcoming/hospitality in their skins, that it oozes out from them very naturally?**

- I am acknowledged, and not made to feel lesser than...
- I am noticed
- I am loved unconditionally
- When there is consistency in the approach (our intentions is not just to get them onto a rota)
- When I sense an authenticity (this is not just church policy, but intrinsic to who we are)
- When I don't feel that someone wants something from me

The most important aspect of this ministry, is that it is whole centred, it Christocentric and is an attitude of mind, not a job, a principle or an idea. Welcoming is something we should aspire to become, not something that we do. On the peripheries, we can include for example, ensuring that people have good clear

information about what is taking place, good facilities for coffee etc. But what about when we are not in the comfortable, familiar surroundings of our buildings. What do we do, when we are minus the updated, well presented notice board, and the name badges or t-shirts that tell people who we are?

**Welcoming is about who we are to friends and strangers alike on Sunday and throughout the week.**

Let's have a look at some examples from scripture and see how the welcoming psyche is clear in the approach that God has intended, and exemplified by Jesus in the gospels, and at the centre of the early church in Acts.

How can we show others, our pleasure in the encounter? Reminding ourselves of our common humanity, shared experiences and identical needs and wants, and opportunities for mutual giving and receiving. Ecclesiastes 3 – familiar and the same questions that everyone asks in life. Newcomers will be exploring the same stuff as us.

Some of the work of welcoming is intuitive, but if we look at the biblical skills and make them more explicit, then we can more easily share what we are aiming at.

The ministry of welcoming Christians and non Christians, definitely includes

- Avoiding 'cliquey' behaviour
- Acceptance of difference in understanding and approaches
- Willing to work in partnership
- Valuing mutual respect
- Dialogue and the ability to listen

Faith example

Action

God + Creation

I have made it for you. Enjoy it.

Joseph + his brothers

Generosity and Forgiveness.

Gen. 50.21

I will take care of you and your children.

Birth of Moses

Welcome + Hospitality Ex. 2.9,10

Matthew 14, Mark 6.30-44, Luke 9.10-17, John 6.1-14 The Feeding of the 5,000

Jesus feeds a great crowd. Sometimes we shall have to **put aside our agenda** for the sake of others. Developing a spirit of welcoming is costly. The parameters won't necessarily coincide with our programme – we shall have to be prepared to follow up initial encounters with people. This can be difficult and should not be an individual task, but a group one, leaving behind the temptation for pride and self centredness to intervene.

Jesus is anointed at Bethany Matt 26.6-13

This is an example of the **mutual listening** that has to take place if we are going to be authentic about our hospitality. Here we are at the end of a healing service, Jesus has healed Simon from his skin disease. At the end of the service, it is usual to have a time of contemplation, a few worship songs, expressing thanks to God. Instead, the disciples are challenged by a woman no less, and a woman with perfume, which would have just punctured the atmosphere with her pungency. Was it possible to listen to her and welcome her, with her particular style and fragrance? For Jesus, yes it was. The disciples were still learning. We are still learning.

We need to cultivate an attitude of openness... so that we are not welcoming in order to...., but simply welcoming –( period) and finding pleasure in the one God presents before us.

John 8.1-12: Similar example The Woman caught in adultery.

There is the fear, that newcomers will upset the way we have always done things, and the likelihood is that they will, but this can be very good for us. This is the nub of the problem that we face in our church communities, where sometimes, there is a culture of those who are in, and those who are out. The Pharisees in bringing the woman before Jesus, want to puff themselves up a bit, by humiliating another person. Jesus restores the pleasure in her presence. He welcomes her. He points out her sin, and in doing so makes – points out the sin of all those present. Common humanity issues. Jesus doesn't have to work at this, because He is all love. We have to work at acquiring such devotion to God that it spills out in our relationships with everyone.

Affirmation of our current situations.

I want to affirm all that you are doing in your parishes. The projects, initiatives, attempts at reaching out and making our churches welcoming. These should act

as resources for the attitude of mind we want to cultivate. The initiatives and projects should not be an end in themselves. In fact, I would suggest that they become reminders of what God wants us to be.

### **Scriptures Verses that help us to cultivate Christ centred lives.**

Ps 51.10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,.

Colossians 3.2 Set you mind on heavenly things and not on earthly things.

Luke 1.80 The child grew and developed in body and spirit. (the text is speaking of John the Baptist and reminds us that we have to develop this mindset of welcoming)

Colossians 3.12 Clothe yourselves with God. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

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