

## Getting the basics right: Open wide the front door

In the previous article we ended with an exercise. So, how did it go considering what it would be like if you were attending your own church for the first time? Seeing our church and all it does with 'fresh eyes' is a crucial skill to cultivate.

In 2005, Archdeacon Bob Jackson wrote *Go for Growth*. In that book Bob refined the whole concept of 'welcome.' We usually think of welcome in terms of having a friendly person at the door. Bob expanded our understanding. He explained that our welcome needs to have an 'open front door' and a 'closed back door.' So what does he mean when he asks, "Is our 'front door' open?"

Let us imagine that someone is considering attending your church service. Where is the first place that most people now go for information? Yes - the internet. When they google the name of your church, what comes up? Does your website give them all the information they might need? What does your website say about you as a church family? Are you using social media? Being welcoming with 'an open front door' starts right here.

You may feel it is unnecessary to use social media. You may not like the internet. 'What has that got to do with the gospel?' you may be wondering. In one sense, nothing at all. The gospel is unchanging. But the context in which the Church is called to witness to His Love is always changing. Our current context is that we live in a world where social media is prevalent. If we want to speak the language of the young people and families we say we want to be part of our churches, and to be taken serious by them, then it is 'welcoming' to share who we are and what we do in ways that are meaningful to them. So, 'welcome' starts before people even arrive.

Then, having arrived at our Sunday services, does the 'welcome' extend beyond the door? For example, is it clear how to follow your service liturgy? Are page numbers announced, or do we expect or assume that new people will know what to do? They won't! 'Welcome' includes making our services as easy to follow as possible. Finally, are they invited to coffee after the service and will someone make a point of speaking with them? If we see someone standing on their own, whose face we do not recognize, let's go and say 'hi.' This role, of making visitors feel welcome, is not 'someone else's job.' It is the job of us all. Some church families use name badges. This can be a great tool for welcome, as long as everyone has one. Finally, are there events to which we can invite newcomers, so they can get to know us better? Building relationships is 'the glue' that helps people want to stick around.

Next time: we look at ensuring the 'back door is locked.'

P.S. Bob Jackson has recently published a book called, *What makes Churches grow? Vision and Practice in Effective Mission*. Watch this site for more on that.