

Newcomers gathering

Objectives

1. Creating connection between the newcomer and
 - The rector
 - A few other people who might establish a parish-based friendship (e.g., other new people, possibly someone who is likely to connect with these particular people)
 - The parish and the Episcopal Church -- as institutions and communities
2. Creating a pathway toward membership
 - Providing information that would allow the new person to make a decision to join the parish (or establish a "Friends of St. _____" relationship)
 - Offers some specific next step, e.g., the next Foundations Course offering

Schedule

1. Newcomers gathering held every quarter
2. On an evening or Saturday morning with a defined beginning and ending time
3. Allows 2 ½ hours

Rational: We need a sense of stability about offering the event. Done even if there is only one new person. The newcomers need to know how much time it will take and have some idea of what will happen. We don't want them seeing it as primarily a social event. There needs to be enough time to accomplish the objectives.

Participating from the Parish

Just a few people (no more than 4 – 5 from the parish even when it is a large group, fewer when less newcomers)

- The rector/vicar (no other clergy unless they fit a category below)
- Another parish leader (a warden or vestry member who was able to address some of the likely questions)
- Someone involved in leading the upcoming Foundations Course (person can say a few words about the program; pass out information and a way to register).
- Two people who might make easy connection with the newcomers attending (e.g., same age, some connection in background or work, able to speak easily about faith)

Rational: The room needs to feel like the newcomers are the center of things. They need to be the majority of those present. Those present from the parish need to be those most directly related to the objectives. It is fine for this to have a social dimension but it needs to serve parish growth objectives. If it ends up primarily social then it can only work if the parishioners present are very much like the newcomers. While as a person continues to participate in the life of the parish we would hope they would end up connected to a wide range of people; in the first few months we need to pay attention to inclusion 101 – that means focusing on what they might gain from joining the parish and meeting people they are easily comfortable with.

Format (an example)

Activity	Time
1. Getting connected to one another <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Welcome and overview of the session▪ A connecting exercise	15 – 20 min
2. Pass out cards with "questions people often ask about the parish and the Episcopal Church" – people can check off up to three they have interest in and/or write down questions of their own	45 min
3. Food and social time (informal time)	40 min
4. Gather as a whole group – pass out packets, say something about becoming a member/friend of; etc.	15 min
5. Close with Compline or noon day prayers. Use cards. Have a hymn on the card (use if there are enough people)	10 min.

Materials A newcomers packet that is only given out at this gathering (there might be something shorter provided when the person first appears)