

# VESTRY PAPERS

September/ October 2007



EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH FOUNDATION  
**Learn. Lead. Give.**

*To inform, inspire and affirm Episcopal leaders in their work*

## *Come Be Our Honored Guests*

*by Toni Daniels*

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2*

What would happen if we treated newcomers as Sunday morning guests, rather than as visitors?

Like many, I work hard to make my home a welcoming place for guests. Dinner parties often last for hours. Guests are anticipated weeks in advance. I often invite varied age groups, people who know each other and people who don't. Entertainment for all age groups is arranged, including intergenerational activities. Fresh flowers are set in prominent locations and an ironed table cloth graces the dinner table. Guests are encouraged to bring music to share. What is most important to me is that we spend time building relationships in the space I call home.

What would our congregations be like if we welcomed visitors as honored guests attending the most sumptuous banquet ever prepared? The feast would take place in a space that provided a comfortable seat for everyone. What if our guests felt they were cherished members of the Body of Christ?

Is your congregation a place where guests are warmly welcomed regardless of their age, gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status? Stop. Think before you say, "Sure!" Do you and other parishioners make a concerted effort to not only welcome, but to incorporate others into your church home?

### **Blessed by new memories**

You may want to ask your Sunday morning guests to share the traditions of their culture with you. The important thing is that you are open to learning about "the other," i.e.,

*continued on page 3*

*This Issue:  
Christian Hospitality  
Circulation 24,500*

*What does it mean to actively welcome visitors to our congregations? And if they decide to join, how best to fully incorporate them? What difference will our churches make in their lives? How will they change us? Here our writers explore those questions and others, paying special attention to new challenges of evangelism in the 21st century.*



Preparing for guests at home sheds light on how to best greet them at church.



*Vestry Papers won six awards at the recent Episcopal Communicators' conference in Virginia Beach, including three awards for General Excellence in the following categories: Overall Excellence, Writing, and Series of Articles on a Single Topic. Doing Holy Business: The Best of Vestry Papers, available from Church Publishing, also won a General Excellence award. In the last five years, Vestry Papers has won twenty-five national awards for high standards in religious journalism.*

*Next Issue:  
Sharing Spiritual  
Leadership*

## *A Sunday Morning Welcome*

*by John Adler*

Let's really welcome our new members! One step which is often overlooked in our various incorporation processes is that of having a meaningful welcoming ceremony for our new members. Here at Iona-Hope we have attempted to remedy that by having a very brief liturgy, offered at all three services, on a monthly basis (see next page).

A sponsor is appointed and introduces each of the new members to the congregation and presents them to the pastor. We have now accomplished one of the goals: the new folks have been brought forward and have been introduced to the congregation. All those present have had the opportunity to put a face with a name. I then ask them to join me in the liturgy, which is relatively brief but contains some very important elements.

The new members affirm that they understand the core values of the congregation and will support them. They also pledge that they will "support the goals of the congregation." Also, please note the parallel to the baptismal service near the end of the welcoming service. The entire congregation is invited to support these new members in their ministry.

Once the brief ceremony has been completed, we give each new member a gift bag. This is fun; everyone enjoys a bag full of goodies! The specific contents of the bag change from time to time but the following items are usually included:

- **A mug with the church logo.** We tease and say that this is Noritake or some other special make of china.
- **A complete list of small group ministries offered by the congregation.**
- **A small pocket cross.** Again we tease and say that this is made of fine silver and purchased from Tiffany's.
- **A framed photograph of the church.** We say that this is especially appropriate for the coffee table when you are having company. When someone comments on what a nice church that is, you quickly offer to bring them with you next weekend.

We have fun with this description of the goodies and also use it as an educational piece for everyone. In addition to all of this, we usually photograph everyone involved

and publish the pictures (in color) in the next issue of our newsletter — another way to help people make connections within the congregation.



Michael Bell, left, a new member of St. Augustine's in Santa Monica, California, is officially welcomed by the rector, the Rev. Hartshorn Murphy.

Although the entire cycle of the welcoming ministry is important, the actual ceremony seems to be a part that many congregations overlook. I heartily recommend this practice.

*John Adler has been a priest for nearly twenty years following a legal career in Chicago. He is currently the Senior Pastor at Iona-Hope Episcopal Church in Fort Myers, Florida. This is the second congregation Adler has planted. The first was St. Monica's in Naples, now a parish. Adler has a D. Min. degree in Congregational Development from Seabury-Western and consults in the areas of church planting, church growth and congregational development.*

St. Augustine's in Santa Monica, CA

*How best to officially incorporate newcomers into a congregation? At Iona-Hope in Fort Meyers, Florida, they are given the opportunity to commit themselves during a commissioning service, held once a month as part of the Sunday services.*

## Commissioning of New Members

by John Adler

**Celebrant:** Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus, we are all baptized by the one Spirit into one Body, and given gifts for a variety of ministries for the common good. Our purpose is to commission these persons in the Name of God and of this congregation into membership in Iona-Hope.

**Sponsor:** I present to you these persons to be admitted as confirmed members, baptized members and sojourner members of this congregation.

**Celebrant:** There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires everyone. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

**Congregation:** Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**Celebrant:** Will you become a committed member of the Iona-Hope congregation?

**New members:** I will.

**Celebrant:** I invite you to proclaim your covenant.

**New members:** I celebrate the gifts that God has given me and I pledge to use them to promote the mission of this congregation. I know, understand, and support the core values of Iona-Hope. I will worship regularly, participate in ministry, and give generously for the support of the goals of the congregation. I will strive to increase my understanding of God and enhance my relationship with God and I will do all in my power to bring others into a relationship with God.

**Celebrant:** Will all of you witnessing these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ and in this part of Christ's body known as Iona-Hope?

**Congregation:** We will.

## Come Be Our Honored Guests

*continued from page 1*

someone who is different from you. It is not easy! Being open to one who listens to a style of music which may be unfamiliar is challenging — not necessarily because you don't like it — but because your sacred memories (worship experiences, baptisms, weddings, confirmations, etc.) are attached to a certain style. It is wonderful to hold on to these reminiscences, but perhaps God is allowing you to be blessed by new sounds which will have new memories associated with them.

Welcoming guests into the congregation that God has entrusted to us requires action. Think about the things I mentioned in preparing my home, such as planning in advance and knowing what would make guests feel comfortable.

Think about what would make you feel included, should you be entering your church for the first time. Consider whether worship times and the church entrance are clearly indicated. A warm smile from a greeter, an escort to a seat, and a user-friendly service leaflet are always winners.

Is there a place for children? If so, the guest should be informed of the option. Again, escort the guest to the children's program, rather than just pointing the way. What about seating for persons living with a disability? If your congregation does not have a specifically allocated area for guests using a wheelchair, ask what would make them most comfortable. Don't make assumptions, including whether or not they would like communion brought to them.

What is most important to remember is that we must make the effort to receive these guests and invite them all to be incorporated members of our congregation. The banquet table is set for all God's children. I invite you to participate in making space for everyone.

*The Director of Learning and Leadership for the Episcopal Church Foundation, Toni Daniels has served on the vestry at St. Luke's in Ewing, New Jersey, and as chair at the Parish Council of St. Bart's in New York City.*



*"Jesus gave quality time for prayer in his daily routine. But then he usually pushed himself out the door and down the road into his community. The most effective pastors turn off their computers, grab their cell phones and leave their offices for a meaningful period of time each day to interact purposefully with others in the community."*

*Paul Nixon, author of I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*



# Newcomer Incorporation: A Countercultural Activity for Parishes?

by Harold T. Lewis

Many of us have heard the old saying “Everybody who should be an Episcopalian already is.” We laugh nervously when we hear it because we realize that the adage reveals, perhaps, a truth about American Anglicanism of which we are not particularly proud.

In their 1978 tongue-in-cheek expose entitled *The Power of Their Glory — America's Ruling Class: The Episcopalians*, Kit and Frederica Konolige observe that Episcopalians possess “a preference for family expansion rather than missionary activity as a means of growing as a religion.” This, coupled with the fact that in many communities, the Episcopal Church has historically functioned as a refuge for the social elite, has led many members of our small but influential denomination to believe that everyone with good sense, and certainly everyone with good taste, would beat a path to our doors.

This cherished belief was first questioned in the '60's. Prayer Book revision, the church's stand on civil rights, the ordination of women, and more recently, the debate on human sexuality have all caused many to beat a path to the exit doors. As a result, the Episcopal Church began in earnest to enter into the art of evangelism, until then a countercultural activity.

## **Our most important evangelistic activity**

The ministry of welcoming newcomers into our midst is arguably the most important evangelistic activity in which a parish can engage. Gone are the days when people just plopped down at the nearest church.

New residents of a community unabashedly “church-shop,” often visiting parishes several miles from their home, and choose congregations based on a variety of criteria — music, preaching, Christian education, churchmanship, and politics — namely, where a given parish stands on the

a Methodist congregation because its youth program better meets the needs of their children.

Of course, this cuts both ways. Our liturgy and our reputation as a church that doesn't require its members to check their brains at the door continue to be beacons to those of other traditions. Many Episcopalians, for example, count among their membership former Presbyterian-Roman Catholic couples, who find in the Episcopal Church a spiritual and theological via media.

## **Intentionality begins the process**

We at Calvary do not believe that we have by any means perfected the newcomer process, but we have met with modest success by incorporating the following principle: intentionality. For the reasons outlined above, newcomer ministry cannot be left to chance. This means that vestries must allocate personnel, time and resources to the newcomer effort.

We must also be intentional for another reason. Our church building, described in a local newspaper recently as “44,000 square feet of Gothic Revival prominence,” is not, on its face, warm and welcoming. Our behavior, therefore, must serve to counteract the possibly chilling effect of tons of Indiana limestone.

During the announcements at the Sunday Eucharist, we welcome all newcomers and invite them to stand, and they are presented with loaves of bread, baked by our Parish Loafers. Some newcomers, having sought anonymity on their church-hopping tour, opt not to stand, but we know they appreciate the welcome, because they do identify themselves to the clergy at the west door following the service. Attached to the loaf of bread is an information card (also found in the pew rack) which we ask the newcomers to fill out.

Secondly, we bombard newcomers with information. A packet is mailed immediately following the first visit, containing a letter from the rector, the parish newsletter, music and Christian Formation brochures, copies of recent sermons, a list of parish programs and outreach activities, a pledge card and other materials.

Our curate, whose portfolio includes newcomer incorporation, follows up with a phone call, e-mail or personal visit as appropriate. (I am guided by the testimony

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*“The ministry of welcoming newcomers into our midst is arguably the most important evangelistic activity in which a parish can engage.”*

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conservative-progressive continuum. And in a day when “brand loyalty” is no longer a given, a recently relocated family with roots in the Episcopal Church may well choose

*“Congregations that have established or maintained a web site in the past year are most likely to grow. Congregations that have not done so, but are open enough to change in order for such a thing to happen have a somewhat lower rate of growth. Congregations that would oppose a web site are very unlikely to have a experienced growth.”*

*Kirk Hadaway, FACTS on Episcopal Church Growth, 2005.*

# Newcomer Incorporation

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of a parishioner who explained that she chose our parish after a church-shopping tour thirty years ago because on the Wednesday after her visit, one of the parish clergy appeared on her doorstep!

The parish also follows up with an invitation, either to a brunch at the home of the rector or warden, or to a foyer group, “cells” of about a dozen or so new and old members

*“Evangelism experts tell us that newcomer incorporation is not complete until the person has a job other than pew-warming.”*

who gather periodically for dinner and conversation. We find this an effective way to foster relationships which would otherwise be difficult to do in a large congregation.

No less important are “on-site” invitations extended by parishioners to join them at coffee hour, or an offer to help the visitor navigate through the Prayer Book or the Sunday bulletin. An Inquirers’ Class, led by members of the parish staff, is offered to newcomers (and oldtimers) at least twice a

year. Using James Griffiss’ *The Anglican Vision* or a similar book we provide an introduction to the faith as this church has received it for those from other traditions (or a refresher course for Episcopalians who may have had little instruction since their Confirmation class).

## More than pew-warming

All of these steps lead to involvement. Evangelism experts tell us that newcomer incorporation is not complete until the person has a job other than pew-warming. Serving on an outreach committee, volunteering in the bookstore, or reading a lesson means that the newcomer has a stake in parish life. When all is said and done, newcomer incorporation is about extending hospitality, an act which, the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, may result in entertaining angels unawares.

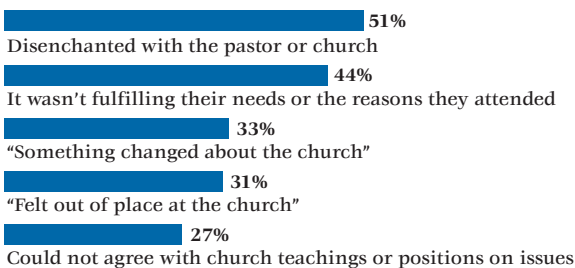
*The Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis, an Episcopal Church Foundation fellow, is rector of Calvary Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Adjunct Professor of Church and Society at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.*



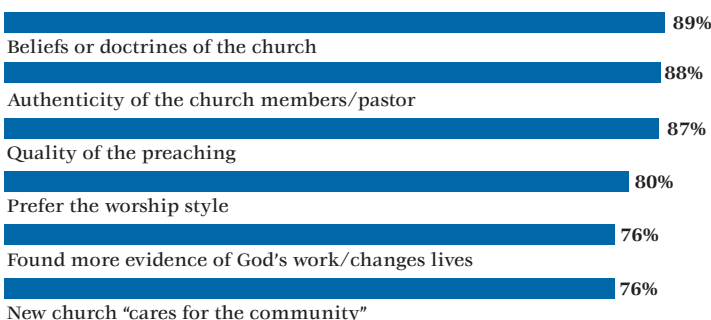
*What are the canonical responsibilities for vestries? How best to engage the congregation so that a vital and stable community of faith emerges? What about such issues as stewardship, conflict, and clergy transitions? These dynamics and others are examined in the new Vestry Resource Guide, an eighty-page resource developed by the Episcopal Church Foundation specifically for vestry members and other lay leaders. Orders of five or more are available now from Forward Movement. For more info, call (800)543-1813 or visit [forwardmovement.org](http://forwardmovement.org)*

## Why Do People Change Churches?

### WHY THEY LEFT THEIR OLD CHURCH



### WHY THEY CHOSE A NEW CHURCH



Source: Lifeway Research



# Radical Welcome: Embracing the Other

by Stephanie Spellers

Nobody knows just what Jesus Christ's body looked like. But most of us have some inkling, some dream, of how the Body of Christ could look and feel. Here's my dream:

In this body there's love, lots of love. There's justice and compassion and sharing within the body, and the same gifts spread out to the wider community and the world around them. Nobody gets thrown away or shoved aside. Rather, the ones who might have landed on the scrap heap in the world's economy are invited to the center in Christ's body, where they stand, lead, pray, sing and proclaim right alongside the traditional power brokers.

The ones who've held privilege feel their hearts stretch, grow and fill, as they discover the joy of offering *and* receiving, transforming and being transformed. There's a lively zing as people share the good news of Christ in their own language, and a deep resonance as together they all draw closer to the brightly burning fire of the living God.

If this vision gives you a charge and a thrill, even if it scares you but you pray for hope and courage that's bigger than your fear...then welcome. *Welcome to Radical Welcome.*

## What is Radical Welcome?

Radical welcome is the spiritual practice that allows us to live into the compassionate, just, colorful, boundary-crossing dream of God. It's a lot more than a warm welcome at the church door on Sunday morning, or a full platter of donuts and flavored coffees in the

church hall.

A radically welcoming community seeks to welcome the voices, presence and *power* of all people — especially those who have been defined as The Other, pushed to the margins, cast out, silenced and closeted — so they can help to shape the congregation's common life and fulfill the reconciling dream of God.

This welcome is not afraid of reckoning with the nitty-gritty roots, the Jesus-level questions about power and fear and resurrection and surrender. It has the potential to touch every aspect of congregational life, making room for fresh voices and perspectives to join trusted traditions in shaping the church's mission, identity, worship, ministries and leadership. That's why it's radical.

But it's fundamentally about embrace, reconciliation, making room inside to truly receive one another, shaping communities where the love and Spirit of God dwell richly. That's why it's welcome.

## Embrace The Other

To radically welcome The Other — that is, the stranger, the Christ in your midst — you must know who The Other is. The Other is the group of people who have been systematically, historically silenced, marginalized and oppressed in relation to your community.

The Other is not just a group that feels marginalized or left out, though you

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*You've heard from us.  
Let us hear from you.  
Please take a moment  
to visit our online  
survey and tell us how  
we're doing. Go to  
[www.episcopal.foundation.org](http://www.episcopal.foundation.org)  
and follow the link from  
the Vestry Papers page to  
complete the survey.*

# Radical Welcome

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should tend carefully to any experience of exclusion. But when we speak of radical welcome, we are digging deeper.

- First, **look inside**: What groups are present in your community? Primarily consider the major axes along which some groups experience systemic oppression and others receive privilege: race and culture, language, education and socioeconomic status, generation, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability.
- Then **look around**: What are the communities surrounding your congregation? Which groups are least likely to feel valued and embraced as part of your church? Which ones are present around you but not among you?
- Then **look back**: Even if you think your congregation is welcoming, your denominational heritage may not be. Whose story and culture rarely shows up in your tradition? Which groups are likely to see a sign for your church and to say, “Well, they don’t want me.”

Honestly inquire and assess who doesn’t feel welcome, and realize there’s no shame in God’s house — we’ve all got growing to do.

## The Nitty-Gritty of Radical Welcome

Everyone wants a quick list of specific activities that will help them to immediately become more radically welcoming. Alas, just as The Other is different in every context, so the steps to radically welcome The Other will differ everywhere. After you’ve named The Other(s), a group of leaders should intentionally take up these activities:

Identify the barriers blocking full embrace of The Other in your community. Consider the five elements of congregational life: your stated mission and vision, your identity,

your ministries and relationships, your leadership and feedback structures, and your worship.

Identify the changes your institution would need to make to radically welcome The Other. In other words, what activities, images, messages and events would make it clear that you are making room for their voices, their presence, and their power, at the heart of your life together?

Invite an existing group in the congregation already committed to part of the radical welcome vision — like the Newcomers’ Committee, Outreach or Anti-racism — to join the effort.

Identify and equip the “bridge people”: members of marginalized groups who can be nurtured and tapped as leaders; who can stir the community to develop competence in the marginalized group’s culture; and who can provide a touchstone and ease entry for others in their group.

You don’t have to demonize the dominant culture or attempt to erase everything and start from scratch. But you can examine the elements of your church life and determine where you could make room for another voice or practice to enrich, enhance, stand alongside and even transform the one generally privileged. You can stretch your arms, stretch your imagination, and know the joy of embracing and building community with The Other.

*The Reverend Stephanie Spellers is the Cox Fellow and Minister for Radical Welcome at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston and the author of Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Stranger and the Spirit of Transformation (Church Publishing). She is also the founder of The Crossing, an emergent worship gathering at the Cathedral.*



*You may know all about the stained glass window and its message, but chances are guests and returning visitors will not. Appoint one or two of your parishioners with good memories to give a monthly tour of your church and its grounds. Chances are that some old-timers will show up as well.*

We regret the misspelling of author John Koenig’s name in our last issue. His book, *Soul Banquet* (available from Church Publishing), examines the transformative power of sharing meals in congregations.

## RADICAL WELCOME BIBLE STUDY

Read one of the scripture passages below as a group. For each passage, consider these questions:

- What does this passage tell us about God?
- What does it tell us about what we are to be and to do?
- What does this passage inspire us to be and to do as a community?

Deuteronomy 10:17-19: You shall love the stranger.

Isaiah 43:18-21: See, I am doing a new thing!

Luke 9:23-25: Those who lose their life for the sake of the gospel will find it.

Matthew 25: 31-46: Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.



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To strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry.



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## Reader's Corner

"We live in a world in which people no longer attend church in response to a broadly held cultural expectation," says Clayton L. Morris, author of *Holy Hospitality: Worship and the Baptismal Covenant*.

"People who do attend church regularly are far less likely than fifty years ago to attend the church in which they were raised."

As a result, says Morris, a parish priest and the Episcopal Church's staff officer for liturgy and music, the connection between liturgy and evangelism must be clearly maintained, and vestry leaders are on the front lines when welcoming the newcomer. "Liturgical hospitality and radical welcome are absolute necessities in the life of a worshipping congregation. Vestry members, as natural leaders in the life of the community, are in an especially good place to be effective welcomers of the newcomer and visitor.

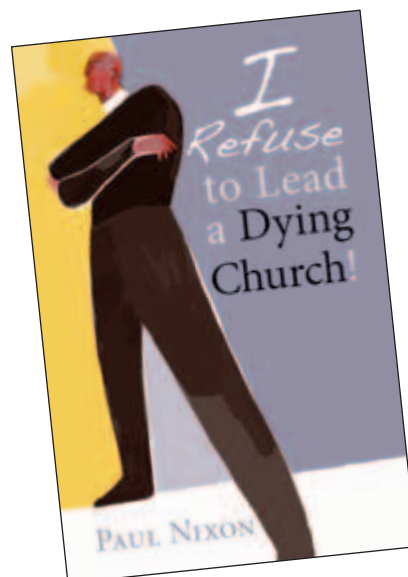
"Welcoming the stranger is not a skill that comes easily," writes Morris. "We're far more likely to fall into patterns of exclusivity than inclusively in community life. The good news is that there are suggestions available to teach us the hospitality skills we need."



Offering guidelines about how ushers, greeters, musicians, acolytes, members of the altar guild and other liturgical leaders can develop habits of liturgical hospitality, *Holy Hospitality* is available from Church Publishing. (800) 242-1918 or [www.churchpublishing.org](http://www.churchpublishing.org).

## Other Good Picks

*I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church* by Paul Nixon. Offers enthusiastic theological and practical tips on helping congregations come alive. Pilgrim Press.



*Shaped by Images; One who Presides* by William Seth Adams. A readable book exploring the presidential role in the Eucharist from the perspective of the Baptismal Covenant. Church Publishing.

*Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*, by Stephanie Spellers. Explores the concept of inclusivity in terms of age, race, culture, sexuality and class. Church Publishing.

*Reclaiming the Great Commission* by Bishop Claude Payne and Paul Beazley. A classic for those interested in church growth. Jossey-Bass.

*Fireweed Evangelism: Christian Hospitality in a Multi-Faith World* by Elizabeth Rankin Geitz. An exploration of the challenges posed by different faiths and how Christians might best respond as they open their doors. Church Publishing.