

## **THE HOW TO.... SEMINARS**

***Our premise: "to grow the community of faith in confidence and trust."***

### **1. What does welcoming look like?**

- The Poustiniki in Russia

In Russia, so I am told, there is a group of hermits called the "poustiniki". They live a solitary life, situated outside the villages, the poustinik lives in a bare wooden hut. In the hut is a mattress, a table and chair, a cup, a jug, a Bible, an icon and a bare cross without a figure. The poustinik tries to think of him or herself as being on the cross in place of Christ. He spends hours in silent prayer, and because he makes himself available to God, he makes himself available to others also. One of the rules of the poustiniki is that the door of the hut may never be locked, he is available to the villagers at any hour. He is called away from his prayer if the farmer needs help with the harvest, or the postman for the delivery of letters, or if a woman is sick and needs manual help or repairs done to the house. After the work, he goes back to the hut and offers himself to God again in prayer.

- The Taize Community (Br. Roger)

When the Second World War began, he had the conviction that without wasting time he should come to the assistance of people going through this ordeal, just as his grandmother had done during the First World War. The small village of Taizé, where he settled, was quite close to the demarcation line dividing France in two: it was well situated for sheltering refugees fleeing the war. Friends from Lyon started giving the address of Taizé to people in need of a place of safety. In Taizé, thanks to a modest loan, Brother Roger bought a house with outlying buildings that had been uninhabited for years. He asked one of his sisters, Genevieve, to come and help him offer hospitality. Among the refugees they sheltered were Jews. Material resources were limited. There was no running water, so for drinking water they had to go to the village well. Food was simple, mainly soups made from corn flour bought cheaply at the nearby mill. Out of discretion towards those he was sheltering, Brother Roger prayed alone; he often went to sing far from the house, in the woods. So that none of the refugees, Jews or agnostics, would feel ill-at-ease, Genevieve explained to each person that it was better for those who wished to pray to do so alone in their rooms.

## **2. Personal insights into being welcomed**

- Examples – good and bad of being welcomed in church
- Psychological perspective – the moment of highest anxiety, the dentist's chair experience, walking across the threshold, "who will I meet?" "What will I meet?"
- How might we welcome newcomers and strangers - those whom God is sending to join us?

## **3. A theology of welcome**

- James 2: 1-8 – importance of welcoming the whole people of God, not just those who happen to look like us. A healthy church is one that reflects the demography of its parish. Think how you would like to be welcomed.
- Matthew 28: 19-20 – making disciples of people so that we can share the wonder of a life fulfilled in Christ. Celebrating the Good News.

## **4. Resources for welcoming**

- The sidespersons guidelines
- Everybody Welcome Course
- Welcome cards and church literature (incl. website)

## **5. Conclusions**

- "People need to belong before they come to believe."
- "If someone makes 2 or 3 friends in the first 2 or 3 weeks of coming they will stay and join the church"
- "If they meet the living God, [through authentic and beautiful worship] they will become disciples."
- Providing a welcome is the responsibility of the whole baptised community, that's you and me!