

Invite, Welcome & Connect Ministry

There is a plaque on the wall outside the entry of the church that has wise words from a parishioner, "There is a simple and gracious way to welcome and invite people to this congregation. People just want to be asked. Give them a phone call. People are honored when you ask them to join in." Max Sadler (8/23/22-10/06/99)

The sense of community at St. Bede's is a critical factor in our identification and one of the main reasons parishioners cite for loving St. Bede's. The "Invite, Welcome & Connect Ministry" focuses on welcoming and integrating all into this community. This ministry is important for building a healthy, vibrant and growing congregation, for introducing people to St. Bede's unique identity and for helping each individual find their unique place in our community.

An invitation is not only about inviting people into a relationship with you and others in your congregation, but rather it is about inviting them into a relationship with God through Jesus. People need a language with which to talk about their faith. We need to help them "spell Episcopalian with the alphabet of their own soul." –Roy Oswald, Speed B. Leas. *The Inviting Church* (Alban Institute, 1987).

People of St. Bede share their love of our congregation and God with others directly, as well as indirectly, through the mission and relational work we do. St. Bede's as a parish has a particular interest in immigration, social justice and caring for people on the margins of society. Through service to these groups we are observed by others who share these interests. Frequently this shared interest brings families to St. Bede's.

Welcoming the stranger is welcoming Jesus. Jesus paid attention to what was going on around him and especially to those people he encountered on a daily basis. He modeled for us a new way of seeing the other - the way of love, compassion, and forgiveness.

At St. Bede's many people combine to welcome newcomers who appear at our doors. These include a friendly, dedicated group of "greeters" at the doors, the gift of a loaf of homemade bread along with a packet of information about us, a welcome card from our "scribes" and a phone call from one of the priests. All these are intended to warmly welcome all who join us for worship.

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. We cannot force anyone to such a personal and intimate change of heart, but we can offer the space where such a change can take place. –Henri Nouwen

Connection is giving meaning to membership and discovering the gifts of the people. Connection helps the newcomer answer these questions:

- Where do I fit in?
- Can I make friends in this church?
- Is there room for me relationally?
- Does this church need me?
- Can I find a place to belong and serve?
- Am I safe here?

At St. Bede's, various efforts are made to connect newcomers with more seasoned parishioners to help them answer the above questions. Early, casual conversations attempt to identify areas of interests and introduce newcomers to parishioners who might have similar interests. As Newcomers share their gifts, they are introduced to relevant Ministry leaders and offered the opportunity to join in serving in specific and meaningful. Small group dinners in the home of parishioners provide the opportunity for

newcomers and more seasoned parishioners to share a meal and get to know each other in a social setting and may serve as the opportunity to more deeply connect with each other.

Loretta Vail, Chair