

Script for Audio-Podcast-Overview - January, 2020

Hi I am Mary Foster Parmer. I am the creator of the ministry of Invite Welcome Connect.

Invite Welcome Connect is a ministry of transformation that equips and empowers individuals and congregations to cultivate intentional practices of evangelism, hospitality, and belonging. Rooted in the Gospel imperative to “Go and make disciples of all nations” this ministry is changing lives in this beloved Episcopal Church of ours.

(The Rev. Chris Harris, Associate Rector, Christ Church Cranbrook, Detroit, MI)

To me, Invite Welcome Connect is an intentional way of looking at the different stages that anybody finds their way into the Episcopal Church. At some point somebody had to invite us, at some point we come, and we need to be welcomed if we're going to come back, and then at some point we need to be connected into the community. We need to start to feel like we belong. My name is Chris Harris. I am currently the Associate Rector at Christ Church Cranbrook which is in the suburbs of Detroit. Invite Welcome Connect is a way of opening doors for folks who are new to the Episcopal Church but are on a spiritual journey. The magic isn't in the number of confirmations necessarily, it's in the moments of people telling you 'I feel at home here, people know my story and I know some of theirs, and I feel seen.' It's almost like the woman at the well story. We are trying to create those moments, those woman at the well moments for people, and it's life-giving for all of us when we do that work cause it's the Gospel in action.

Invite Welcome Connect is not a program but a transformational ministry helping congregations move from a maintenance culture to a gospel driven mission culture. The assessment tools provided on our website are meant to help your church endeavor in the work of the Gospel, intentionally transforming your congregation with new energy and spirit, because at the end of the day it is not about what we teach, preach, and say, it is about what we do.

(Nicole Spencer, Parishioner, St. James Cathedral, Chicago, Illinois)

I am Nicole Spencer. I am a second-year member of Chapter. Chapter is essentially vestry but at a cathedral it's called chapter. What we realized was that with Invite Welcome Connect it was a framework that we could apply to the community of St. James and make it work for us. It's not just some idea out there with random good intentions but that it's thought out, that it's holistic, that there really is an idea about how clergy and laity work together. It's the concept that many hands make light work and giving us a roadmap, per se, best practices may be another way to describe it. We don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Invite Welcome Connect is not a program, but a ministry, and various attempts to define it have emerged, including a theological framework, a methodology, an ethos, a Gospel imperative. And I remain steadfast that people do not see it as a program, as a one-off, nor is it a magic pill for church growth.

(The Rev. Gar Demo, Rector, St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Overland Park, Kansas)

It's not like you can buy a program and you get all the materials and then you implement it, it's really about...it gives you tools to change the culture, to get people interested and

excited about welcoming new people. My name is Gar Demo. I am the rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Overland Park, Kansas. Our folks have gotten so impassioned about taking our name out into the community that we are so much more known than we used to be because they've gotten excited about it, so I think that's a part of it. It's processes more than it is like a program so you just have to have the right expectations when you start it, that it's really about looking at all your processes and all the things you are doing.

Transformed culture is at the heart of God's mission in the world, and the vision of this ministry of Invite Welcome Connect is to assist Episcopalians in becoming creative culture change-makers, moving our church from maintenance to mission. In their book *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, Bishop Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley articulated the difference between the two. "...The missionary church is forever in deep water, always at risk, continually taking chances as it tries to carry the Gospel to the world, where the maintenance driven church keeps its feet on the shore, unwilling to risk, unwilling to change, just washing its nets."

(The Rev. Canon Lisa Hackney-James, Sub-Dean, St. James Cathedral, Chicago, IL)

There's something about breaking it down into these understandable parts - Invite Welcome Connect. It helps lay people to understand that they are authorized. They are authorized, they are claiming that authority that comes with their baptism. I am Lisa Hackney-James. I serve as the Sub-Dean at St. James Cathedral and I am the clergy person who is in charge of overseeing and implementing Invite Welcome Connect here.

(Anthony Jekyl, parishioner, St. James Cathedral, Chicago, IL)

This program is perfect for not only for people who are trying to find church but are also maybe rediscovering faith again for the first time in a few years or rediscovering faith for the first time. My name is Anthony Jekyl. I go here to St. James Cathedral and my role here is I've been coming here for a little over a year and a half and I've gotten involved in the Invite Welcome Connect committees, specifically in the Connect group. Invite Welcome Connect just seems like a great way to make sure those kinds of people feel welcome the first time they walk in the door and feel connected right off the bat, welcomed, and then allows them to connect with other people at the church. I think it's a great initiative and I'm excited we are doing it here at St. James.

(The Rev. Canon Lisa Hackney-James, Sub-Dean, St. James Cathedral, Chicago, IL)

It's an awesome thing to say I'm acting on behalf of God welcoming you here. Some of us might say "Who am I?" In fact, some very famous people in the Bible have said "Who am I?" and God's Holy Spirit has said 'you are the one I've chosen' and so this is helping the average Christian, the average sort of seeking striving. If you talk to most people in church there are very few of us who think we have it figured out.

(The Rev. Anna Broadbent, Curate, St. James Cathedral, Chicago)

I'm loving watching how Invite Welcome Connect is pervasively expanding within our community. I am the curate here at St. James, which means I'm a brand-new fresh priest out of seminary and this is my first call at a church. I truly love the fact that my meals ministry leaders, who are not members of the formal Invite Welcome Connect committees, are

noticing and talking about what they are doing. They want to see that extended to our meals ministry guests who may or may not ever be on an official church registry but they are part of this community. As a clergy person it's fun to see lay leaders step up with energy and excitement, and if there's anything I can do to support that I want to do it.

(The Rev. Canon Lisa Hackney-James, Sub-Dean, St. James Cathedral, Chicago, IL)

This work has helped embolden us, all of us lay and clergy alike, to know we don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to have it perfectly worked out to be in that stream of God's grace and love and to claim our authority already given us as Christians, lay or ordained.

The **Core Values** of Invite Welcome Connect are to be Prayerful, Intentional, Relational, and Accountable.

PRAYERFUL - We need to pray that God gives us the hearts to reflect God's gracious invitation and welcome. It's not our table to which we are welcoming people - it's God's table.

INTENTIONAL - We must intentionally nurture a commitment to engaging with evangelism, the ministry of hospitality, and the ministry of belonging.

RELATIONAL - Relational ministry is at the heart of Invite Welcome Connect and this is a critical core value!

ACCOUNTABLE - We are accountable to God, to the Gospel, and to each other.

INVITE is **Evangelism**, providing the tools to help folks invite others to church, to learn how to articulate and share their faith stories, creating avenues to invite the local community and then examining communication as an evangelism tool whether it be your website or social media. **The deep truth of Invite is Courage versus Fear.**

WELCOME is the **Ministry of Hospitality** and this essential assists congregations in creating organized comprehensive strategies for welcoming newcomers into our faith communities. In Joan Chittister's book, *The Rule of Benedict*, she writes, "The rabbis wrote, 'hospitality is one form of worship - come right in and disturb our perfect lives. You are the Christ for us today.'" **The deep truth of Welcome is seeing the other.**

CONNECT is the **Ministry of Belonging** and can be described in a variety of ways - giving meaning to membership - empowering laity for ministry - helping people who attend our churches discern their God-given giftedness and then empowering them for ministry in the body of Christ and in the world beyond. Connect means simply to help connect someone to the living life-giving Love of God, helping connect someone to a faith community and to God. It's about helping newcomers and long-time members understand how God has shaped them for ministry, which in turn helps them find a place of belonging within that community. **The deep truth of Connect is the sacred act of listening.**

As many Episcopalians can attest, engaging and participating actively in the ministry of Invite Welcome Connect is a helpful way of shifting the culture of our beloved Episcopal Church. As

bishop-elect Frank Logue of the Diocese of Georgia put it in an interview last year, “Invite Welcome Connect is not a program ‘do this and find life’...rather it’s ‘attend to these things in a way that fits your context.’” I deliberately created Invite Welcome Connect so that any size congregation may use it, so the flexibility inherent within Invite Welcome Connect means that each parish can focus on cultivating a culture of hospitality that fits their individual needs and matches their individual skills.

At the end of the day, Invite Welcome Connect is a ministry focused on transformation, and that transformation begins first in the heart of an individual saying yes to Jesus, saying yes to a deeper life of following him. Invite Welcome Connect simply offers a framework for clergy and lay leaders to assist in that transformation. At the close of his sermon at the very first Invite Welcome Connect Summit in 2015, Bishop Michael Curry said this, “The way of Love, the way of Jesus, is a game changer, and to Invite Welcome and Connect is to create space for God to do God’s game-changing work!”