



Invite-Welcome-Connect (aka Evangelism)

By Anne Schmidt—*Director of Evangelism and Welcoming Ministries*

I grew up in the church. My dad is an Episcopal priest so this is a literal as well as figurative statement. Our family life revolved around the churches my dad served and the members of those congregations became our extended family. As a preacher's kid people knew who I was and took an interest in me and what I was doing and supported me as I grew in age and faith.

It wasn't until after I was married to my husband Walt, and we got transferred to a new city and state, that I ever had to experience church "shopping" and what it is like to be a newcomer in a congregation. It was pretty daunting even though I had a broad knowledge of the worship, structure, and language of the Episcopal Church.

After time in several congregations we eventually landed in a church plant that was brand new and worshipped in a school cafeteria. The mission of this unique Episcopal church was to reach out to the unchurched people in the community. We had to be very intentional about not assuming guests knew anything about how we worship, our beliefs, or norms. We were careful to make sure folks knew they were welcome whatever their background or experience. We also had to look

for creative ways to spread the word of our existence and invite people in.

These experiences were formative and they, along with some great new resources from, and discussions with, thought leaders in the Episcopal Church will guide my work as Director of Evangelism and Welcome at Transfiguration. One such resource is a model for evangelism called Invite-Welcome-Connect, created by Mary Parmer from the Diocese of Texas and now of Sewanee. This model simplifies our efforts

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into three components that help congregations evaluate and focus their efforts in sharing the Good News.

We at Transfiguration have a reputation for being good at welcoming, so we'll be looking for ways to expand on the things we already do well. Our Greeter team is fabulous, and we host a lovely newcomer brunch. We follow-up immediately with our visitors, and we are friendly and inclusive. But are there other ways we can make sure people feel welcome? Are we speaking with and acknowledging



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE REV. SHERILYN PEARCE

Transfiguration was proud to host Invite Welcome Connect Facilitator Training the last week of November.

all people who sit with us in the pews? Are our groups and ministries equipped to make sure guests feel welcome? We'll be looking at all of this to see if we can be even better than we are now at welcoming.

Making sure that our newcomers get connected and become part of the community is a challenge in many congregations. It involves follow-up with folks and making sure there are clear paths to becoming a full part of the community. I will be working with you to make sure we are able to help new members find the ministry and community that helps inspire their gifts and passions.

I think the hardest step of this model is the Invite piece. We imagine Evangelism being something in the vein of a cold-call; approaching strangers and asking them to come to church. We do not like to impose on others so thoughts of this makes us very uncomfortable. Leading Evangelists in the church tell us that "invitation" is really about three things. The first is to be aware of opportunities for invitation. These

will most likely be in your day-to-day interactions and with people you are in contact with regularly. The second is to be a good listener. Being a good and intentional listener does not come naturally to most of us. It is a learned skill. We will work on this together so that when we meet people we are really hearing their story. The third part is being able to tell our own story so that we can find commonalities between them and us. How did we come to our faith? How is God working in our lives? Where do we struggle? What does it mean to us to be a disciple? We as a community will look at our daily spiritual practices and make sure we are grounding our faith in prayer and study. We will also start to find words to articulate our faith and practice telling our stories. Once we have the words and can recognize opportunities it should be easy for us to issue an invitation into our community's walk with Jesus.

In her new book about this model appropriately named *Invite*. *Welcome.Connect*, Mary Parmer invites us to dream:

- ◆ *Imagine a church filled with members who are bursting with love for one another and God, who feel compelled to invite others to experience the same joy...*
- ◆ *Imagine a church filled with people who have cultivated the ability to really see the other with the eyes of Jesus and truly welcome them...*
- ◆ *Imagine a church filled with holy listeners, hearing the stories of those with whom we worship and whose who have entered the doors of our church for the first time...*
- ◆ *Imagine a church transformed by a loving God.*

I am so excited to be here and to continue this work with you.

Anne and her family, husband Walter and children Andrew and Caroline, have been members of Transfiguration for almost 12 years. Anne is returning after 14 months at Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church serving as Director of Membership. Anne also serves on the boards of directors of Forward Movement (chair), The Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes (CEEP) and the Office of Transition Ministries (OTM), and she is a facilitator for Gathering of Leaders. In addition, Anne also helps congregations and dioceses in times of transition by guiding their search teams in the process of calling a new rector/bishop. 🙏



Why Transfiguration?

"...we will do what we can and be thankful that we have been able to return to the place where our lives together began."

Allan and Connie Watson

We were married by Father Niles at the Church of the Transfiguration in 1974, and that is where our connection begins. At the time of our wedding, Allan was serving as Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs at UT and Connie was teaching at J.J. Rhodes in south Dallas. We wanted to get married during Spring Break, which happened to coincide with Easter. Father Niles said he "would take care" of getting permission from the Bishop, but you can't miss the purple draped altar cross in our wedding photos!



Soon after the wedding we moved to San Marcos where we lived for the next 10 years. Allan was Vice President for University Affairs and Connie taught at a private kindergarten. At St. Mark's, Allan served as lay reader, chalice bearer, and Senior Warden, while Connie served on the Altar Guild. During his second term as Senior Warden, we were pleased to help with the founding of St. Stephen's, a mission church in Wimberley that quickly grew into an independent parish.

From there, we moved to Washington, D.C. (where Allan had lived before) to accept a position as Vice President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. We headed straight for Bethlehem Chapel and The National Cathedral, where Allan had previously attended while in graduate school.

We got back to Dallas in 1991, when Allan became President of the Alliance for Higher Education. Over the next several years, we intermittently attended Transfiguration while visiting several Episcopal churches close to us in Plano and/or Frisco. Much of our Sicilian family remains Roman Catholic, and we also visited several Roman Catholic parishes. Finally, we decided that we would return to Transfiguration.

Like many of you, we do not mind the drive from Frisco to Hillcrest and Spring Valley in Dallas. We normally attend the 5:30 Saturday service, and that has made it a bit more difficult to get to know as many folks as we would like. In addition, over the last few years, we have had some health issues that have limited our involvement. We love the liturgy at Transfiguration, the music when we make a Sunday morning service, and we are impressed with Father Casey's leadership. We feel that he has made a significant difference in the life of the church and in our lives. Father Casey, Liz, Erin, Shea, and Ginny have been extraordinarily supportive as we addressed our recent health issues. And when Connie's sister lost her husband, they were right there to help.

This year, we increased our support of the work of Transfiguration by increasing our pledge. We also recently modified our wills to provide for the continuing work of this parish. We hope, as our health improves, we will be able to contribute in other ways to the ministry of the church. In the meantime, we will do what we can and be thankful that we have been able to return to the place where our lives together began. 🙏