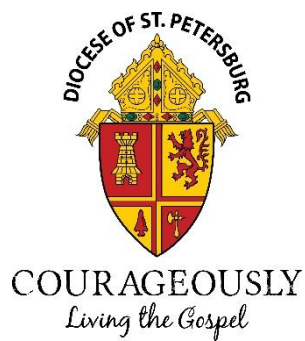




WelcomeOneAnother.org

WelcomingYou.org



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LETTER FROM BISHOP PARKES.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING AT YOUR PARISH.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>APPENDIX/RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Pray with your leadership team to have a welcoming heart and conduct a brainstorming session to create a specific plan for your parish .....	6
2. Train ministry leaders about the effort so they feel empowered to invite/welcome back people they know. ....	7
3. Train hospitality ministers so they can be attentive to the needs of returning parishioners.....	8
4. Train engaged parishioners about the effort, so they will feel empowered to welcome back friends, family and acquaintances. ....	9
5. Post “Welcome Back” back messages on your website and during livestream Masses. ....	10
6. Send a letter/email to parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass.....	11
7. Call parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass.....	12
8. Post “Welcome Back” messages on social media .....	13
9. Display banners and yard signs.....	14
10. Continue communicating about safety protocols in place to keep people healthy.....	15
<b>COMMUNICATION RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>TESTIMONIAL .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CASE STUDY OF A WELCOMING PARISH .....</b>	<b>18</b>



# LETTER FROM BISHOP PARKES



DIOCESSE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God (Romans 15:7).*

Jesus Christ our Savior profoundly welcomes us from the cross with open arms as we celebrate his greatest act of love in every Eucharist.

**"Welcoming You with Open Arms"** is a special initiative that invites each person to encounter the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and is connected to our diocesan vision, *Courageously Living the Gospel*.

Christ is calling us to reach out to those not currently attending Sunday Mass and invite them back. While our homebound population has increased during the pandemic, there are many healthy people who have not yet returned to Mass. These individuals and families need to hear a message of invitation and hope. They need a warm greeting at the door and a caring community attentive to their needs.

During our trials and difficulties, we are never alone. God is always with us, especially as we encounter the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, where he offers us abundant graces to heal the wounds of sin, division and fear.

I invite you to utilize the materials for the **"Welcoming You with Open Arms"** initiative at [www.WelcomeOneAnother.org](http://www.WelcomeOneAnother.org), as may be best for your parish. If you currently have a "welcome back" effort, perhaps these resources could be helpful in supplementing your plan.

By the grace of God, may we answer the call to welcome our brothers and sisters with open arms, just as Christ has so graciously welcomed us. May God bless you!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Gregory Parkes  
Bishop of St. Petersburg



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is *Welcoming You*?**

An initiative that invites each person to encounter the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and is connected to our diocesan vision, ***Courageously Living the Gospel***. It also provides a framework for welcoming people to Mass on a consistent basis. All parishes are invited to participate, and this effort will also be conducted at the diocesan level. Visit [WelcomingYou.org](http://WelcomingYou.org) to see new webpages that have been created to invite people to Mass and to teach about the Mass.

### **What resources are available to support this initiative?**

- Parish Toolkit that provides suggestions for implementing the initiative.
- Training webinars to provide an overview of all the resources and answer questions
- Hospitality training resources.
- Templates for communication resources that parishes can customize, print and distribute/display.
- The Communications Office will also be launching a diocesan-wide advertising campaign to invite people to Mass.

### **Why is this effort needed?**

Parishes are called to be welcoming places where the love of God is made known in a hurting world. A priority of ***Courageously Living the Gospel*** is to **invite all** to encounter the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and to **welcome** and accompany one another. In a 2018 Pew Survey, 14 percent of Catholics said they rarely attend Mass because they didn't feel welcome. Prior to the pandemic, only 34% of registered Catholics participated in the Mass each Sunday. The pandemic has prevented even more people from going to Mass. As life resumes a sense of normalcy, we are called to invite and welcome people to Mass and also educate Catholics about why the Mass is so central to our faith.

### **When will this be launched?**

This effort will be launched at the diocesan level once the general dispensation is lifted. Parishes can launch this effort at any time that they feel is appropriate.

### **Who at the Parish should coordinate this effort?**

It would be ideal for a pastor to work with a specially formed committee or an existing committee that is already involved with missionary discipleship, evangelization, communications and/or outreach.

# TEN STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING AT YOUR PARISH

1. Pray with your leadership team to have a welcoming heart and conduct a brainstorming session to create a specific plan for your parish (see example in Appendix).
2. Train ministry leaders about the effort so they feel empowered to invite/welcome back people they know (see Appendix for suggestions).
3. Train hospitality ministers so they can be attentive to the needs of returning parishioners (see Appendix for suggestions).
4. Train engaged parishioners about the effort, so they will feel empowered to invite and welcome back friends, family and acquaintances (see Appendix for suggestions).
5. Post “Welcome Back” back messages on your website and during livestream Masses. Include links to webpages that explain the importance of the Mass, why and how we keep holy the Lord’s Day (see Appendix for suggestions).
6. Send a letter/email to parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass (see Appendix for suggestions).
7. Call parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass (see Appendix for suggestions).
8. Post “Welcome Back” messages on social media (see Appendix for suggestions).
9. Display banners and yard signs on church property and invite parishioners to display on their home property (see Appendix for suggestions).
10. Continue communicating about the safety protocols in place to keep people healthy (see Appendix for suggestions).





## APPENDIX/RESOURCES

### 1. Pray with your leadership team to have a welcoming heart and conduct a brainstorming session.

#### WELCOMING PRAYER

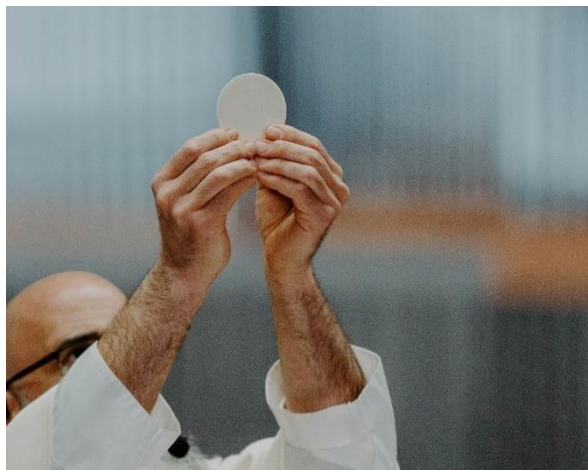
*Jesus, you are the Bread of Life, the everlasting source of life, goodness and love. Instill in us the courage to share your Good News. Form us as your disciples of hospitality who welcome our brothers and sisters to the celebration of Mass with open arms. Help us to follow your example of accompaniment, especially with those who are different from us in appearance, attitudes, culture and language. Keep us humble servants, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that we too may proclaim that the Lord has done great things and holy is His name.*

*In your holy and blessed name, we pray.*

*Amen*

#### BRAINSTORMING FORMAT SUGGESTION

- Hold an in-person or virtual meeting with the leadership team.
- Pray the Welcoming Prayer.
- Share the Leadership PowerPoint Presentation.
- Share the manual and materials with them.
- Ask for their input on how to implement the effort at your parish.
- Construct a timeline for what parts of the manual you will follow and any additional ideas you have for “Welcoming You.” Include a list of each task.



## 2. Train ministry leaders about the effort so they feel empowered to welcome back ministry members, their families and friends.

### TRAINING FORMAT SUGGESTION

- Invite ministry leaders to an in-person or virtual meeting.
- Pray the Welcoming Prayer (see Page 5).
- Share the Parishioner PowerPoint Presentation.
- Tell them about the initiative and how you will implement it at your parish.
- Consider starting a prayer ministry based on the hymn, “Hosea/Come Back to Me” by Gregory Norbert, OSB © 1972, 1980. Let new and returning parishioners know they have been in your prayers.
- Ask leaders to contact all of their past and present ministry members to invite them back to Mass if they are able to attend and to visit the website to learn more about “Welcoming You.”
- Review Communication Resources that can help transform the culture of the parish and convey a welcoming message to current and returning parishioners.



There's a smile behind this mask!



### 3. Train hospitality ministers so they can be attentive to the needs of new and returning parishioners.

#### TRAINING FORMAT SUGGESTION

- Hold an in-person or virtual meeting with hospitality ministers.
- Pray the Welcoming Prayer (see Page 5).
- Share the Parishioner PowerPoint Presentation.
- Review Resources here: [www.dosp.org/welcome-one-another/embracing-hospitality/](http://www.dosp.org/welcome-one-another/embracing-hospitality/)
- Encourage ministers to focus on three areas to be attentive to the needs of new or returning visitors to your parish.
  - a. **Acknowledge:** Ask questions. Offer a warm greeting.
  - b. **Affirm:** Let them know they are welcome, appreciated and valued. Ask if they are interested in learning more or getting involved.
  - c. **Acclimate:** Let them know about relevant safety measures, parish traditions or special feast days celebrated by the parish, where to find the restrooms and church bulletins, opportunities for involvement, etc.





**4. Train engaged parishioners about the initiative, so they will feel empowered to welcome back friends, family and acquaintances.**

**TRAINING FORMAT SUGGESTION**

- Include messages about this effort during homilies and announcement time.
- Hold meetings after all Masses for 2 to 3 weekends and inform parishioners about the effort.
- Pray the Welcoming Prayer (see Page 5).
- Share the Parishioner PowerPoint Presentation.
- Do role playing on how to invite someone back to Mass.
- Consider [www.pemdc.org/programs/awakening-faith/](http://www.pemdc.org/programs/awakening-faith/) as an ongoing ministry.



5. Post a “Welcome” message on your website. Include links to webpages that explain the importance of the Mass, why and how we keep holy the Lord’s Day.

**SUGGESTED CONTENT:**

Here: <https://www.dosp.org/welcoming-you-with-open-arms/>

Here: <https://www.dosp.org/welcoming-you-with-open-arms/about-the-mass/>



6. **Send a letter/email to parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass.**

**SUGGESTED LETTER TEXT**

We miss you! Being apart has been difficult on us all. Especially since the Sunday Mass is the highest form of prayer for Catholics. At the Mass, we encounter the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and we receive God's abundant graces. Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because He loves us. We hope you will join us each Sunday but if you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day and we invite you to pray with us via livestream (include date/time/location). We're here for you and we welcome you with open arms!

May God bless you!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Pastor Name



## 7. Call Parishioners who have not yet returned to Mass.

### SUGGESTED PHONE SCRIPT

Volunteer: *Hi (Name of person), (Name of caller) here from (name of church). How are you doing?* (Pause. The response will be short because they will be processing why this stranger might be calling). *Father Mike has asked a handful of parishioners to reach out to you and others to see if things are going ok for you.* (Pause to see what they say---write down notes to see what they might need or request and pass it along to the church. Most will be fine. Some will request a prayer--either pray with them if you are comfortable doing that or take down the prayer request and send it to the church. Father can use it in the prayer petitions at Sunday Mass as "we pray for all those who have requested prayer in our Open Arms efforts to minister to our fellow parishioners. For all of those individual petitions, we pray to the Lord." Also, the phone volunteer may want to have the phone number for Catholic Charities or St Vincent de Paul on hand in the event of a physical need. Does the parish have the ability to assist?)

Volunteer: *We want to remind the faithful that our church is making it a priority to welcome everyone with open arms and so I'm inviting you to come to Mass each Sunday, if you aren't already doing so.* (they'll say one of the following:

Caller: *"I've been back for a while."* Volunteer response: *"That's great! I usually go to the 4:30 Mass, I'd love to meet you in person sometime. I usually sit on the right side of the church."*

Or Caller: *"Thanks for the reminder, I'll be back soon."* Volunteer Response: *"Great I look forward to meeting you!"*

OR Caller: *"I'm not going back until I feel it's safe."* Volunteer Response: *"I totally understand. The parish is concerned for everyone's safety so we are following many safety protocols and we continue to offer the Mass on livestream and on the radio. I hope you'll consider rejoining us when you feel you are able."*

OR Caller: *"I'm not really happy with the way things have gone so I'm not coming back; or "I started going to a new church."* Volunteer Response: *Oh I'm sorry to hear that. Can I let the staff or pastor know what it is specifically so that we can improve?*

Close: *If there is anything we can do for you or lift you in prayer, please let us know. And be sure to check out our website with updates on things going on at the parish. Would you like me to follow up with you in a couple of weeks? I hope to see you at church and we get to talk in person soon! Have a good day and God bless!* Volunteer should have a sheet with parishioners' name and responses or at least a way to take some notes for potential follow-up.

## 8. Post welcome back messages on social media

### SUGGESTED POSTS

#### Welcome Back Post #1

The Mass is where we encounter the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. This is why the Mass is so essential for Catholics. It doesn't matter how long you've been away. You are always invited to the Mass to encounter Jesus, who welcomes you with open arms. If you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day and we invite you to pray with us virtually (include date/time/web address).

[www.churchname.org/welcome](http://www.churchname.org/welcome) #ParishNameWelcome

#### Welcome Back Post #2

Sunday is a holy day because it recalls the day of our Lord's resurrection – the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead so that we might have eternal life. join us each Sunday but if you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day we invite you to pray with us virtually (include date/time/web address).

[www.churchname.org/welcome](http://www.churchname.org/welcome) #ParishNameWelcome

#### Welcome Back Post #3

Catholics worship together at Mass on Sunday and give thanks to God for the grace we receive through faith. In fact, the word Eucharist means "thanksgiving." We hope you will join us each Sunday but if you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day and we invite you to pray with us virtually (include date/time/web address). We welcome you with open arms.

[www.churchname.org/welcome](http://www.churchname.org/welcome)

#ParishNameWelcome

#### Welcome Back Post #4

At each Mass, Jesus invites us into Holy Communion with his Real Presence. We hope you will join us each Sunday but if you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day and we invite you to pray with us virtually (include date/time/web address). We welcome you with open arms.

[www.churchname.org/welcome](http://www.churchname.org/welcome) #ParishNameWelcome

#### Welcome Back Post #5

Mass is God's invitation to rest in the loving arms of Jesus. We hope you will join us each Sunday but if you're not able, please know that we hold you in prayer each day and we invite you to pray with us virtually (include date/time/web address). We

welcome you with open arms. [www.churchname.org/welcome](http://www.churchname.org/welcome)

#ParishNameWelcome



**9. Display banners and yard signs in the church and invite parishioners to display on their home property**

- a. Together We Worship
- b. Welcoming You



**10. Continue communicating about safety protocols in place to keep people healthy.**

*Example text:* While the suspension of public worship during the height of the pandemic was a difficult time in recent Church history, this was an absolute necessity to protect lives. To this day, your safety is always top of mind and we are committed to preventing the spread of illness. To read about our safety protocols, visit...

<https://www.dosp.org/welcoming-you-with-open-arms/safety-protocols/>



## COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES

Visit [www.dosp.org/welcome-one-another/communication-resources](http://www.dosp.org/welcome-one-another/communication-resources) to access:

- Branding Materials – font, color, wordmark, the image of open doors, photo of open doors, crucifix, stock photos
- Yard Sign
- Banner
- Postcard mailer
- Email header
- Bulletin Insert
- Web Graphic
- Prayer Card
- Bookmark
- Prayer Intercessions
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Social Media Graphics and Text
- Welcome Videos
- Mass Minutes
- Key Messages
- Livestream Graphic/Invitational Text
- Phone Text
- Letter Text
- Web Text

For information about these resources, contact Teresa Peterson, [tlp@dosp.org](mailto:tlp@dosp.org) or 727-344-1611, ext. 5402.

## TESTIMONIAL 2020

*(This letter is an example of how impactful a welcoming parish can have on an individual and a family. This letter has been edited to remain anonymous.)*

Bishop Parkes,

My wife and I recently moved to Florida. We were looking for a parish. We attended a few Masses at different churches close to our residence.

Well, after Mass we had the warmest welcome from the priest outside the Church. He opened his arms hugged us and said WELCOME. He asked us if we were vacationers or recent transplants from another state. He was personally interested in us.

WE KNEW FROM THAT MOMENT THAT WE WANTED TO BE PART OF THIS PARISH. HE made us feel so comfortable and wanted. Our daughter & son-in-law have also become parishioners of this parish.

Sincerely,



## CASE STUDY

**St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic Church, Tampa** - Interview with Dr. Valerie Mainguy, Director of Development, Stewardship, Marketing & Communication. Valerie has been a parishioner of St. Mark the Evangelist for 20 years and has been on staff for six years.

### **Is your parish known for its hospitality?**

Yes! Our mission statement is to “Invite All on our Journey to LOVE.” “Invite” is the action verb of our mission and we specifically state that we invite “All.” This means we are very focused on inviting and welcoming. This mindset is in our hearts, smiles and eyes. This is who we are. We aspire to be the most welcoming church in the country!

### **When did your focus on intentional hospitality begin?**

When I started working at St. Mark’s, I let the pastor and the leadership team know that although I had been a parishioner for many years, no one had ever invited me to get involved. It was sad, actually. I learned that many of our parishioners had the same experience. Back then, there were some strong cliques and if you weren’t a part of those groups, it just wasn’t very easy to engage. So our pastor and staff began this journey of how we could uplevel our welcoming and make all of our parishioners know they are an important part of our church family.

### **How did you all start to be more welcoming?**

It started with the staff developing a new mission statement, embracing it ourselves and sharing it with our ministry leaders in order to help everyone embrace this new way of thinking. We wanted people to know that all are invited into our ministries and to our events and we REALLY wanted them to come... that this was not just lip service. We wanted everyone, all parishioners, to exude hospitality and welcoming by being God’s heart, smile and eyes here at St. Mark and also around our community.

### **How do you communicate this spirit of welcoming?**

We have strong branding with our mission. We have welcome signs as you drive in, a welcome message on the front of our bulletin each week, a welcome message on the church screens while you’re waiting for Mass to start, a welcome letter on our website and when you first walk into the doors of the church, we have a large mosaic on the floor that says, “All Are Welcome.” We also include “All Are Welcome” on every email we send...it’s our tag line.

### **How are you welcoming the larger community?**

We want the community to come to St. Mark the Evangelist. One of our core values is to be intentional in inviting all to join us here on our journey to LOVE and get closer to God and for some, it’s for the first time in their lives. We partner with the Rotary Club each year for the New Tampa Brew Fest which brings many people onto our campus for the first time. We offer tours too because people love seeing our church. Our Lenten Fish Fries are open to everyone and we have 800-1000 who enjoy those each week. We want to be a community gathering point and



strive to be inclusive and open. At the time we opened the doors to our new church, we had over 37 different nationalities represented in our parish!

**What are some other ways you welcome people at your parish?**

We encourage and empower our parishioners to help people find a seat, get comfortable and feel at home. We let them know that this is our /their church home and you don't have to be an usher to be friendly and welcoming. We also have official greeters who stand outside and greet people as they walk into church. We have official ushers who help people find a seat and official hospitality ministers who serve coffee and donuts after masses. We don't want anyone to have the feeling I had for 15 years so now every person and every ministry is asked to be involved in hospitality.

**How do you welcome newly registered parishioners?**

After someone registers via our website, we send them a welcome letter and the individual or family is invited to a welcome reception. We've had wine and cheese or sangria and salsa receptions. At this event, we hand out a welcome packet and our Parish Resource Manual. We explain our mission and we talk about all the ways we have to communicate with our parishioners. We also let them know what events are coming up over the next three months and invite them.

**How do you demonstrate that you are a family?**

One thing we tell new parishioners is that this parish is their home and we are your family. I give them my cell phone number and I tell them to call me directly or the Parish Office if you need us. We get a lot of calls so we feel confident they know we're really here for them.

**What is your hospitality budget?**

Zero – other than our coffee & donut costs. So much of welcoming involves being friendly and caring which costs nothing! We do run ads in local papers/magazines around Christmas but we are able to barter or negotiate on pricing so there is very little cost. We also have volunteer receptionists who hold the title of Office Angels. They sit at the front desk and their primary responsibility is to be the welcoming face of our parish. They always offer a warm smile and let people know they are loved and valued.

**Is this a team effort?**

Absolutely! ALL of our staff and volunteers are incredible!