



## Invite • Welcome • Connect



Born and raised in the deep South, Mary Parmer is a congregational development consultant/coach, speaker and retreat leader who commutes between offices in Austin, TX, and Sewanee, TN.

Invite\*Welcome\*Connect was born out of Parmer's 10-year experience as Director of Evangelism & Adult Ministries at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, TX, where she began creating and developing a newcomer ministry. This initial framework, entitled "Sacred Connection" and then "Invitation, Welcome, Connection" was piloted in 2010 in four Diocese of Texas congregations through the Newcomer Ministry Project. Mary has taken the work to forty-one (41) dioceses in The Episcopal Church, two Episcopal seminaries, University of Texas and Texas A&M college missionaries, and the Anglican Diocese of Calgary.

Inviting, welcoming and connecting people who come to our churches are critical and strategic steps for building healthy, vibrant and growing congregations. Parmer developed materials, including easy-to-use check lists for each step to provide an objective assessment of a church's current situation. The assessment tools are supported by an extensive list of creative and concrete resources and examples to form an intentional newcomer ministry that results in a systemic and positive change to participating congregations.

In the last four years, clergy and lay leaders from congregations and dioceses across the country have attended this dynamic training and report measurable results after using the materials. This transformative newcomer ministry process has brought new energy and spirit to congregations and sustained, real growth where the essentials of Invite•Welcome•Connect are followed. Two national Invite\*Welcome\*Connect Summits have taken place at Camp Allen, Texas, and in May 2017 Parmer will keynote the annual Academy for Parish Leadership Conference in Munich, Germany, sponsored by the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe.

Parmer serves as Director of the [Gathering of Leaders](#), a national leadership group of young Episcopal clergy, and as creator and developer of Invite•Welcome•Connect born out of her work in parish ministry and refined through the Episcopal Diocese of Texas Newcomer Ministry Project. Mary has served as a Lay Deputy to the last four General Conventions, and currently serves on the Task Force on Clergy Leadership Formation in Small Churches (GC 2015-A045). She holds a degree in Religious Studies from St. Edwards University in Austin and formerly served as Director of Adult Ministries & Evangelism at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, Texas. Parmer has two grown children and six young grandchildren, builds stone labyrinths, and spends her time away from work hiking and reading. Visit [maryparmer.com](http://maryparmer.com) for further information. Visit [invitewelcomeconnect.com](http://invitewelcomeconnect.com) for checklists, resources and videos from the Invite•Welcome•Connect initiative.

[Promotional Video](#) (courtesy of The Rev. Canon Frank Logue, Episcopal Diocese of Georgia)



## Invite • Welcome • Connect

### Testimonials

*The Invite • Welcome • Connect ministry is a theological and practical initiative, which goes beyond making “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You” a reality, but also insures those who do come to faith in our churches do not leave by the back door. It provides a theological rationale for outreach to the spiritually hungry, a means of engaging those who come into our places of worship and a way to engage those who become a part of our community of faith. Simultaneously, the vision of an outward focus can be preached as central to the gospel to encourage congregations to be welcoming and inviting. The Episcopal Church will continue to wallow in a high maintenance mode until it takes its outreach to seekers as seriously and happily as it does tending the Altar Guild. Here is a super working model that makes “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You” a reality and not an oxymoron. Like the Altar Guild, choir, Christian formation ministry, youth ministry, acolytes, Lay Eucharistic Ministers, etc., Invite • Welcome • Connect is a crucial and exciting vehicle for the faithful to fulfill their ministries of being the church. **The Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne, VII Bishop of Texas (ret.)***

*One of the great joys of my job is traveling around the diocese and meeting with congregations of all shapes and sizes. Although each of these churches possess unique gifts and face distinct challenges, one comment that I hear over and over again is the same: our congregation wants to grow. During the course of her excellent [INVITE-WELCOME-CONNECT](#) workshops, Mary Parmer explores how churches can implement practices and strategies that lead to growth. Mary's presentations are practical, thorough and thought-provoking. Her teaching style is relevant and compelling. Perhaps most importantly, however, Mary's guidance has the potential to transform your congregation. I highly recommend attending one (or several) of Mary Parmer's [INVITE-WELCOME-CONNECT](#) workshops. You will leave feeling inspired and prepared to lead your congregation with renewed energy. It is absolutely essential that our congregations learn how to effectively invite, welcome and connect newcomers into our communities. Mary has a unique gift for exploring these concepts with both a sense of depth and approachability. She is a visionary leader in the Episcopal Church and her teaching is not to be missed. **The Rev'd Canon John A. Kellogg, Canon Missioner, The Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana***

*We here at the Episcopal Church of the Messiah in Rhinebeck, New York, invited Mary to bring [INVITE-WELCOME-CONNECT](#) to us over a weekend last November. I had first met Mary at the [CEEP](#) Conference earlier in the year and was bowled over by what I heard. Having been a priest for almost 30 years I thought I had heard every possible church growth program there is. But Mary's workshop took me completely by surprise. It is **not a program**, but a **ministry**, based in scripture, theology, and experience. It is comprehensive and incredibly well thought out, but perhaps most importantly, exciting! Mary's ministry encourages intentional listening by both the congregation and its individual members. She invites us to hear the story that each person carries and in listening acknowledge a deeper bond in ministry. I can tell a story that for me sums up everything about Mary. ~~~~ As Mary was staying outside of town in the country, we decided to rent a car for her. As I stood at the counter of the rental agency which is across the street from our church, Mary asked the young woman, who I had met several times before when I had rented a car previously, what her name was and if she had ever come over to church. Answering no, Mary said to the woman, “You ought to go over, it's beautiful and a really friendly place.” When I saw the look on the young woman's face, which showed how moved she was to be invited, I knew Messiah would never be the same once Mary spoke to us. And it hasn't been. We have been changed by her words and ministry and for that we are deeply grateful. Mary and her ministry are a blessing that everyone should experience for themselves. **The Rev. Richard McKeon, Episcopal Church of the Messiah, Rhinebeck, NY***

*After a year it is clear to me that Invite •Welcome •Connect is only partly about evangelism. Its primary outcome here has been transformation. St. Peter's has become a different parish. Long time members talk to each other more. People linger longer after church. More people stay for breakfast and participate in adult formation. We are having an adult Confirmation program for the first time in years. To my surprise, almost everyone wears a nametag! And as I talk with others in our neighborhood or in the diocese, more and more people refer to St. Peter's as "the welcoming church." I believe the best of the good news in this initiative is proclaimed anytime a new member tells a long-time member, "I joined this church because you all have been so welcoming." Anytime someone hears that it dispels the myth that "The Rector" draws people to the church and reinforces the truth that we all participate in the ministry of evangelism. **The Rev. Luke Jernagan, St. Peter's, St. Louis, Missouri***

*Mary Parmer brought her gifts, enthusiasm, wisdom, and **INVITE-WELCOME-CONNECT** into the life of St. David's Church and School at an ideal time. We were having new people come through our doors every Sunday, which we were very excited about, but we did not have a clear pathway through which to truly welcome and engage them in the life of the congregation. Mary was able to help our leadership hold a mirror up to our current way of hospitality and incorporation of people into ministries so that we could see more clearly and honestly. She was able to facilitate our ability to name and celebrate the things we were doing well and what we had to offer as the church, but also name the "growing edges" we needed to address and improve in order to become a "stickier" place and people through which to encounter the life-saving love and hope of Jesus Christ. **The Rev. Lisa Mason, St. David's Episcopal Church & School, San Antonio, Texas***

*When people finally find their way into the church, I often hear them say, "I've been looking for this all my life." Sadly, part of the responsibility for that statement resides with our church because we have always struggled with the invitation and incorporation of new members. Mary Parmer has developed a comprehensive process that is easily understood, adaptable and produces results. Mary not only provides the direction but also the tools necessary for any size congregation to participate in the fundamental and critical ministry of hospitality. Her Invite •Welcome •Connect work is the best evangelism resource I have ever seen in my years as a parish priest! **The Rev. Paul G. Pradat, St. Thomas, Huntsville, AL***

*Mary's work and the Invite •Welcome •Connect philosophy and methodology have been incredibly applicable and motivational in the life of St. David's! The moment our group was introduced to the project's core values and resources, they wanted to get to work helping to transform the life of the parish. No longer was "Newcomer Ministry" seen as just the work of a few people – it was embraced with enthusiasm as the work of the whole church. I highly recommend Invite •Welcome •Connect to help shape the way a congregation sees its ministry beyond a limited vision of what welcoming can entail. **The Rev. Hillary Raining, St. David's, Wayne, PA***

**Mary Foster Parmer  
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