

Below is a testimonial from the rector of St. Paul's, Harris Hill, The Rev. Dr. Jason Miller:

Invite Welcome Connect at St. Paul's: Growing a Culture of Hospitality and Belonging

At its heart, *Invite Welcome Connect* is not a program – it's a ministry and a way of being church. Rooted in the Gospel's call to welcome the stranger, nurture relationships, and empower disciples, it invites congregations to look honestly at how they extend hospitality, how they form community, and how they help people find their place in the life of the parish. Over the past year, St. Paul's has embraced this framework as a lens for renewal, asking how we can more intentionally reflect the warmth, generosity, and openness that already live so deeply in our community.

Our work began with the "Invite" pillar: examining how we present ourselves to the wider community and how we lower barriers for newcomers. This has included strengthening our Sunday morning welcome, refreshing our printed and digital materials, and encouraging parishioners to see invitation as a spiritual practice rather than a marketing strategy. From personal invitations to seasonal events, to looking at our signage and a more welcoming experience into the church doors, we've been learning that invitation is most powerful when it flows naturally from joy.

The "Welcome" pillar has shaped the way we accompany people once they arrive. At St. Paul's, this has meant working to welcome with renewed purpose, creating clearer pathways for follow-up, and ensuring that visitors feel seen without being overwhelmed. Coffee hour has become a more intentional space for conversation and connection, and our gatherings have helped people begin to feel at home. We've discovered that welcome is not a single moment but a series of small, meaningful gestures that communicate, "You belong here."

The "Connect" pillar has guided our efforts to help people move from attending to participating, from feeling welcomed to feeling rooted. This has included offering low-pressure entry points into parish life, including outreach projects, fellowship events, and ministry opportunities that allow people to explore their gifts. Our formation programs, outreach ministries, and small-group offerings have become key places where relationships deepen and faith grows. As we've listened to parishioners' stories, we've learned that connection happens when people feel both needed and known.

Through this work, St. Paul's has begun to cultivate a culture where invitation is intentional, welcome is genuine, and connection is lasting. *Invite Welcome Connect* has not been a checklist for us but a shared commitment to becoming the kind of community where newcomers, long-time members, and returning friends all find a spiritual home. As we continue this journey, we do so with gratitude for the Spirit's movement among us and with hope for the ways God will keep shaping us into a church of hospitality, joy, and deep belonging.