



# BacktoChurchSunday

Parishes are preparing to welcome back people from all over the Diocese on Back to Church Sunday on February 19. Many people will be welcomed and encouraged on that day, and opportunities for reconnection and reaffirmation will be extended. But what happens after that? One of the greatest opportunities that Back to Church Sunday presents is the opportunity to re-establish relationships.

The question that every parish needs to answer is How will we do this? The answer will be found in planning for and extending an invitation to whatever your local “next step” opportunities are. This year it could be an invitation to a Lenten study group, or to the Holy Week and Easter services.

Perhaps a printed brochure listing the parish groups could be distributed, with times of meeting, and contact names and phone numbers. Maybe a social program could be developed into which people can comfortably find a place, or perhaps there are opportunities for ministry that might be taken up, in the Op-Shop or helping out with a seniors’ ministry or similar program.

Next step invitations are a sure way to grow a healthy church, but remember that they work best if the person invited is encouraged and supported in a personal way. “Would you like to come with me” is always a more positive encouragement than “why don’t you come”. And finally, a few dos and don’ts:

## **Do**

- Make sure everything you produce to promote activities is clear, informative, and accurate.
- Make sure it is attractive and encouraging.
- Be open and honest with people along the way, and allow them their uncertainties and questions.
- Make sure we are what we claim to be, a welcoming church. What happens over the cup of tea after is just as important as all the rest. In fact it often speaks louder than our words.
- Go out of your way to be serious about supporting and encouraging others. Your personal commitment will make all the difference.

## **Don’t**

- Leave people standing alone...it’s not very welcoming
- Assume people know what "Bible Study, Kate’s place” means.
- Assume that people understand “church speak”: they will often need things to be clearly and simply explained.
- Back off because you don’t want to offend...you’ve prayed about this, so trust God to lead you to those who have a yearning for God’s love and peace. Back to Church Sunday is a great opportunity to welcome and encourage those who are loved by the God of life into the community of faith we love and cherish, God’s Church. May God bless you richly as you do.

*-Archdeacon Stephen Pullin*