

Suggested Welcome Evening For Non Churchgoing Catholics

First of all, form a team to host the evening. Identify individuals that are non-judgmental, good listeners, welcoming and able to take part in follow up to the evening if it's required.

Secondly, gather materials that may be of interest to those attending. For example: information about parish groups and activities, leaflets, copies of the Gospels, prayer cards, and invitations to follow up events. Arrange material so that it can be taken as desired.

Option One: Wine and nibbles

This would work for a large group (over six guests, plus an equal number of hosts).

Think about the setting with a view to creating a comfortable / relaxed atmosphere. The presbytery might be nicer than the parish hall, for example, and lighting and music may help to set the tone.

When everyone has arrived, take a moment to:

- Welcome everyone
- Introduce the hosts
(It may be wise for the hosts to wear name badges to identify themselves. Their role would be to generally chat to people – not necessarily about Catholicism, but being open and comfortable with that possibility – and to invite guests to follow up events as appropriate.)
- Lead a moment of prayer. For example:
'Loving God, we thank you for gathering us together this evening during this season of celebration. We ask you to come and be with us as we meet one another. Bless our conversations, bless the food we eat, and may we leave this place having somehow encountered you tonight. AMEN.'
- Explain that if people were interested, there would be an opportunity to meet again, either as a large group or in smaller groups. If there are concrete plans for how this might happen this would be a good moment to mention it, and to point people to where extra information can be picked up (material mentioned in point two).

With a large group, some time could be set aside to meet in smaller sharing groups, in order to facilitate conversation more easily. This could be around tables, or in different rooms.

Option Two: If the expected group is smaller, having a meal together might be preferable.

- This could also include a word of welcome and introductions. It would probably be possible for everyone at the table (hosts and guests) to introduce themselves. They could also be invited, if they felt comfortable, to say something about why they've come (this may happen naturally in any case).
- The evening could include both an opening prayer / grace (as above), as well as a closing moment of prayer, in which everyone could be invited to pray another prayer together.
- With a smaller group, different options for follow up to the evening could be explored together.
- Further information should be offered, as above.

Alternatives

You might like to invite an after-dinner speaker to briefly, and in a light-hearted manner, talk about what it means to return to the practice of one's faith, or to one's faith community. They could touch on some of the changes one could expect to see (for example, the involvement of the laity, changes to the Mass responses), whilst also talking about Jesus as the person who is at the heart of Catholicism.

If you are planning to run a programme such as KIT, Landings, CaFE or Alpha, the first introductory evening of the course could double as the welcome event.