



# Receiving Visitors from Overseas

## Introduction

Visitors from many countries, not only Zimbabwe, come to our parishes. Whether you have had such visitors before, or plan to act as hosts for the first time, you will be anxious to make the event a success. It is hoped that these brief notes will provide some practical advice which together with your own tact and sensitivity, will ensure that the visit is mutually beneficial and enjoyable.

## Welcoming your guest

It is important to give members of the parish information about your guest, the purpose of the visit and some background to his/her country. It will also be helpful to find out if this is their first visit to this country. When they arrive, the impact of the initial welcome will be all-important. The English tend to be seen as stiff and formal in some respects and over casual in others so, although we may not feel this is true, a friendly welcome and careful attention paid in introductions will set the visit off to a good start.

## Accommodation

Some male visitors may feel uncomfortable in the home of a lone woman but it would be silly to put single people off offering hospitality and in the case of a couple this would present no problem. Also single men could host men and single women could host women.

## In the Home

Food - if possible find out particular likes and dislikes as well as any dietary requirements. People will want to offer hospitality to your visitor but too many large meals and new foods within a short period can be an embarrassment.

## Clothing

Many Africans visiting here for the first time, find it difficult to comprehend that winter or spring sun may be bright, but the air is cold, so they need to be warned to wrap up in such circumstances. It may be helpful to check that your guest has enough warm clothing. As they are likely to be coming from a warm climate they may not possess gloves, scarf, nightwear or waterproofs so it would be useful to have these available.



## **Heating**

Our warm weather may be relatively cold to an Asian or African so expect to provide extra heating and do not forget to show your guest how to use it. Similarly with bathroom facilities and other equipment which are likely to be unfamiliar.

## **Customs**

Be prepared for differences. What is considered good manners in one country may not be so in another e.g. removing shoes on entering the house is normal in Asia. Some of our customs will be equally unexpected. On the issue of time keeping we are notoriously bound by the clock while others are not.

## **Pressure of time**

This will always be at a premium. However, visitors will need to relax, adjust and get over the journey when they first arrive. Many Africans are used to days of more equal length and to going to bed about an hour after darkness, so late evening meetings should be avoided. Also remember that African women are used to playing a subordinate role to their husbands in public so it may be a good idea to organise separate meetings for the wives with other women. The Mothers Union is very strong in Africa and meetings of such organisations would be a suitable occasion for this.

## **Time off**

A regular day off for rest and relaxation needs to be arranged each week. Some sensitivity is required over suggesting a day out as most visitors will be dependent on their hosts for transport and /or money for travel and expenses. Also consider the size and complications of travel in a large metropolitan city like London, which make it unrealistic for visitors to find their own way around. Always make arrangements for your guest to be accompanied on any difficult journeys. The vagaries of London transport continue to surprise most of us.

## **Language**

When your visitor is not over fluent in English, a large meeting can seem daunting to him / her and difficult for listeners. Small, informal gatherings are easier to handle and equally profitable, Visitors will also need time to be quiet, join in parish activities and not always be on show.

## **Gifts and money**

Christians in this country often want to express their love by giving gifts, and offering to send further gifts when the 'new friend' returns home. This can lead to serious problems. Small personal gifts are fine but it is wise not to go beyond that without discussing the matter fully.

We hope that your parish will enjoy hosting an overseas visitor and find within the experience an enriched understanding of our share in the world church.