



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY / INVITATION SUNDAY

A. This section to be read by all those who do not know what BTCS is all about **(If you know what the concept is, please go to section B. for information about 2013)**

What is Back to Church Sunday (BTCS)? A major initiative that GtC proposed to all our dioceses for 2011 and beyond is called “**Back to Church Sunday**” or “**Invitation Sunday**”, depending which fits best. See <http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/home> and hear what Archbishop Justin Welby has to say.

Back to Church Sunday is now the single largest local-church invitational initiative in the world. It is based on the simplest and shortest step in evangelism - when we invite someone we already know to our church. While the initial focus was to invite ‘back’ those who used to attend church, others who do not attend can also be invited, gently encouraged and warmly welcomed. Thus, this season could also be called “**Invitation Sunday**”. Creative changes can be made to include weekday congregations.

It is a very simple way of getting the congregation to reach out to others. First started in 2004, it has already proven to be very effective. Anglican Churches from **all traditions** have embraced this resource.

There are other benefits – like intentionally creating a more welcoming atmosphere among our worshipping communities and several more. **We have given a lot more detail below in section C** for those who are not acquainted with BTCS.

Our hope is that this initiative will be embraced by most of our dioceses, if not all, so that it becomes a Provincial initiative. Anyone can embrace this initiative with relative ease. May we thus humbly encourage you to please give it serious consideration. **Please discuss this with your parish and register your participation before 28 June 2013 on the GtC website:**

www.growingthechurch.org.za – click on “events” and you will find “BTCS”. Here you will also find all the material that you will need. This is the preferred method to register. If you cannot register electronically, email / call Estelle, our GtC Office Manager ASAP on office@growingthechurch.org.za / 021 763 1315.

May our Lord bless you and keep you as we journey towards Pentecost and beyond.

Yours in Christ

*†Martin: St Mark
the Evangelist.*

The Rt Revd Martin Breytenbach
Chair: GtC Board

The Revd Trevor Pearce
Director: GtC

B. “BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY 2013”

For more information and encouragement from **Archbishop Justin Welby**, go to <http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/home>

1. Training and information about BTCS

Last year we had the privilege of hosting Michael Harvey, founder of BTCS, as a key-note speaker at the Anglicans Ablaze Conference. He spoke twice and copies of his talks, “**Back to Church Sunday**” and “**Evangelism that anyone can do**” can be purchased from our office at R150 for both. This includes the cost of packaging and posting. (May I suggest that you rather purchase the full set of the conference DVD’s for R300 which includes postage, and you can get the study-guide that goes with the set off our website for free. This will be valuable as material for follow-up and is designed to be used in small groups, new or existing ones. There is enough material for about 20 to 25 sessions.)

We will also provide you with the 12 steps process, poster, prayer card and invitation card on request. Last year’s training is also available on DVD. Request these things when you register or contact Estelle Adams at office@growingthechurch.org.za / 021 763 1315.

2. When will BTCS take place

We are providing two opportunities this year:

- A South African date – **21 July 2013**. This is at the start of a new school term and is also connected to a massive roll-out of Alpha by many churches that ensuing week. This would serve as one means of immediate follow-up to BTCS. For more info go to: <http://www.alphasa.co.za/p/regions.html#wc>
- The international date – **29 Sept 2013**. Join with hundreds of churches around the world in hosting BTCS.
- You may also choose a date of your own which may coincide with a significant time or event in the life of your parish. But first prize is to be able to say to your congregation that you are engaged in an event that hundreds of others are engaged in at the same time.

C. “BACKGROUND TO BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY”

BTCS has grown beyond all expectations since the first one in Greater Manchester in 2004. In 2009 about 6,000 churches across the world (4,650 in the UK) invited their family, friends, neighbours and colleagues to church. As a result over 80,000 extra people attended church on **Back to Church Sunday** in the UK alone, with a long-term result of around 10,000 people added to the church in one day! Many who did not immediately join, had a new fire rekindled in their hearts and at very least had made a new connection.

A vibrant God-centred Anglican Church, clearly growing spiritually, numerically and holistically

Back to Church Sunday is an international initiative encouraging churches to hold a **Back to Church Sunday** event on the last Sunday in September, preceded by training in things like welcoming, how to pray for and encourage people to come back to church and so on. It is most effective when it is linked with an up-coming nurture course that returners can be invited to or other initiatives that help build relationships and community. The aim is to reach people who are not attending church, through the people who are. The success of this initiative is seen not in percentage or numbers but as one person inviting another person. Furthermore, it is not intended to be a one-day-wonder. On the contrary, it is intended to develop a warmer and welcoming atmosphere at churches that lasts all year-round. The best encouragement emerging from this success is that so many Anglicans are acting together as **one big family located in many parts of the world!** Back to Church Sunday takes place on the last Sunday in September. This year it will take place on September 30th. For future dates and loads of information please visit the website <http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/home>

Growing the Church is encouraging our bishops, clergy and church leaders to consider adopting “Back to Church Sunday” as a diocesan and parish initiative. It is an initiative that is profound in its simplicity. GtC will coordinate the provision of suitable materials like posters, leaflets, invitations etc. via our website: www.growingthechurch.org.za . You may also write to us at office@growingthechurch.co.za . Please share your creative ideas with us which could add value to our context. We would love to hear from you!

The benefits of having a ‘Back to Church Sunday’ is that as a church prepares for BTCS we can brush up on how we welcome people who are new, have not been around for a while and our regulars, as well as our hospitality and inculcating evangelism through a simple invitation and so on. One also has to think through how we encourage those who respond to the invitation to keep coming back, and help them to become connected to the church family.

Church groups can easily and unintentionally become ‘closed’ groups. Participation in the life of the parish - perhaps through Rooted in Jesus, Companions in Christ or Alpha may contribute, among many other offerings.

Each BTCS event is measured through evaluation forms completed by participating churches with transparency about the results. They ‘listen’ to feedback and learn from it. The strength of the **Back to Church Sunday** began and continues to be the network of participating Anglican churches and dioceses that learn and work together. Resources and learning’s are shared and the cumulative success becomes a spur.

Participating churches will decide what will work best for them, but in general the BTCS process is:

1. Churches sign up for BTCS – online or manually – details below...
2. Churches order BTCS packs from the supplier - Posters, Invitations, Prayer Cards, Gift Postcards, and T-Shirts etc. Each year BTCS produce a growing range of free, downloadable resources. In the past these have included sermon resources, service sheet templates, PowerPoint templates, logos, meditations and “top tips” for welcoming people.
3. Churches begin to pray and plan their BTCS services and events – preparation, execution and follow-up that is designed for a hoped for longer term relationship.
4. Details of BTCS events are written or printed onto invitations
5. Church members personally hand out invitations to friends / family / neighbours / colleagues etc.
6. Church members keep hold of prayer cards and pray for the friends they have invited

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7. People coming back to church are offered an especially warm welcome when they arrive on the day and shown great hospitality. (Part of the training is about maintaining such warmth over the long-term).
8. People who have come to church are given a gift post card to take home as a reminder of the day – this can be overprinted with details of future events and services

Back to Church Sunday works best with Bishops, GtC Coordinators, clergy and leaders who proactively communicate information to the churches in their diocese. Each participating parish should thus raise up a suitable BTCS Team to assist this process.

Please register on the GtC website as a participant before 28 June (preferred method); or by email: office@growingthechurch.co.za or telephone: 021 763 1315, so that we can include you when producing resource templates.

Thank you.

The Revd Trevor Pearce

Director: GtC