

# Welcoming Newcomers Into Fellowship

## Participant's Handout

The purpose of this module is to **encourage the church to love people into fellowship.**

### Objectives :

- To recognize the human need for belonging.
- To identify the obstacles that prevent us from freely loving newcomers into the fellowship of the church.
- To strategize ways to improve biblical hospitality in our church.

### I. Introduction

#### A. Acts 9:26-28

“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul, on his journey, had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”

1. To bring Saul of Tarsus into the fellowship of the church was no simple assimilation task. He was a feared Jew who was known throughout Palestine for persecuting the followers of Jesus.
2. His conversion to Christ made little impact on the willingness of the Christians to open their arms to him.
3. “Barnabas,” the Scripture says, “took him....” Barnabas loved enough to \_\_\_\_\_ bringing Saul into the fellowship of the church.

#### B. Research shows:

1. If people, who attend church for a month, don't make \_\_\_\_\_ friends, they will not return.
2. Visitors make up their minds whether they will come back to our church in the first \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.
3. Newcomers to town will try to find a church that will treat them like their church treated them. If they do not find what they are looking for within six weeks, they will not return to church for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

#### C. What is it that helps newcomers remain in a church?

1. An answer to that question might be biblical \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Biblical hospitality communicates love and \_\_\_\_\_ to all strangers.

II. If our church is to become effective in meeting the needs of worshipers, we must know:

A. We are called to meet the human need for \_\_\_\_\_.

1. We will inevitably face \_\_\_\_\_ in loving newcomers into the fellowship.

2. We can improve in the area of biblical hospitality within our church.

3. Churches tend to be inclusive in evangelism but \_\_\_\_\_ in relationships.

a. Most churches recognize God's \_\_\_\_\_ to reach all mankind with the Gospel (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9).

b. While they might \_\_\_\_\_ everyone to come to faith in Christ, some congregations will not open their friendship circles to the new Christian.

c. Christ was radically \_\_\_\_\_ in relationships and was criticized because of it.

i. The people, by whom the Pharisees were repulsed, were the same people to whom Jesus was \_\_\_\_\_.

ii. While the Pharisees thought the tax collector would make Jesus dirty, Jesus made the tax collector \_\_\_\_\_.

iii. Jesus spent time \_\_\_\_\_ with these "sinners" before they became disciples.

4. When a person accepts Jesus, he enters community theologically and hopefully \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Three metaphors describe this community of believers:

a. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.

i. Each and every Christian is a part of the body of Christ.

ii. Each person has his/her special \_\_\_\_\_ within the body.

b. A part of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrews 3:6).

i. The Christian \_\_\_\_\_ represents the house of God.

ii. Each member represents a \_\_\_\_\_ in that house.

iii. Christ is \_\_\_\_\_ building this house (Matthew 16:18).

c. A member of the \_\_\_\_\_ (John 1:12)

i. Receiving Jesus makes one a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's family.

ii. We are brothers and \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ.

6. We are to bring people into the life, fellowship, and \_\_\_\_\_ of the church.

7. We must spend time and \_\_\_\_\_ with new people.

- a. New people are seeking \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. People are not as interested in a friendly church as much as a church where they can have \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. Twenty-three times in the New Testament epistles, the authors refer to the recipients of the letter as “friends”.
8. We are to create a climate of \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. In I John 3-4, John \_\_\_\_\_ fellow believers five times to “love one another.”
  - b. Love is the \_\_\_\_\_ characteristic of the Christian individual (1 Corinthians 13:13).
  - c. With love comes patience, kindness, protection, trust, hope, and \_\_\_\_\_, (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)—qualities needed with newcomers.
- B. We face a number of \_\_\_\_\_ in loving newcomers into the fellowship.
1. \_\_\_\_\_ family networks
    - a. Many family networks within the church are controlling and do not allow for others to become fully \_\_\_\_\_ into the life and ministry of the local church.
    - b. Family networks generally resist \_\_\_\_\_.
  2. Traditions may be comfortable to us but \_\_\_\_\_ to others.
    - a. Many newcomers feel that the church speaks a different \_\_\_\_\_.
    - b. Sometimes traditions evolve into rules, and rules without reason are difficult for \_\_\_\_\_ to understand.
    - c. Tradition without \_\_\_\_\_ is unacceptable to most newcomers.
  3. Strife, friction, or \_\_\_\_\_
    - a. At times the highly committed volunteers of the church feel a level of burnout and complain that no one helps, while at the same time, others are frustrated they cannot be more \_\_\_\_\_.
    - b. Conflict ended by \_\_\_\_\_.
    - c. Differences of opinion do not divide churches; attitudes stunt the growth of the congregation.
      - i. We should let \_\_\_\_\_ be our final guide in disputed matters.
      - ii. When disputing matters of doctrine, \_\_\_\_\_ should prevail.

4. A \_\_\_\_\_ attitude can be heard in a number of comments:

5. Differences among people

- a. Economic, \_\_\_\_\_, and educational differences can be obstacles to assimilation.
- b. Sunday morning has been called the most \_\_\_\_\_ hour in the week.
- c. People tend to \_\_\_\_\_ to others who are similar to them.

C. We can \_\_\_\_\_ our ministry.

1. Identify newcomers in \_\_\_\_\_ ways.

- a. The church must walk a tightrope between being \_\_\_\_\_ to a newcomer on one side and appearing cold and callused on the other.
- b. Newcomers generally don't like to be \_\_\_\_\_ out in a crowd.
- c. Newcomers tend to want to be anonymous to the whole, but \_\_\_\_\_ on the individual level.
- d. Be \_\_\_\_\_, but not overbearing.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ newcomers, but don't corner them.

2. Look at our church through the eyes of the \_\_\_\_\_ visitor.

3. Welcome newcomers \_\_\_\_\_ greeting our friends.

- a. Practice the \_\_\_\_\_ Rule.
- b. After worship services, attempt to have a friendly \_\_\_\_\_ with five people you don't know or don't know well before you go to your friends.

4. Help new worshippers find a group and start \_\_\_\_\_ groups as often as possible.

- a. A small group is any group that...
  - i. Less than 15 in attendance.
  - ii. Meets on a regular basis – at least \_\_\_\_\_ per month.
  - iii. Creates a sense of caring – people are missed and contacted if they are not there.
- b. Small groups provide a place for individuals to...
  - i. Be open and vulnerable in a \_\_\_\_\_ environment.
  - ii. \_\_\_\_\_ and grow.
  - iii. Gain \_\_\_\_\_ during life's difficult times.

## **Small Group Exercise**

1. Identify the areas of our church that enable people to be assimilated into the church. In what areas do we do well?
2. What in our church hinders people from being loved into the fellowship? What area of improvement do we need to concentrate on most?
3. What fears would you identify as being associated with numerical growth of a local church? Why do new people bring fear to established members?

## **Action Planning/Reporting**

- Since people enjoy participating, who new to our church could be invited to serve on a committee, worship team or discipleship class?
- How do we address the fears our established people have?
- Who needs us to phone and to encourage them? How can we assure this personal interest in others is sustained?