

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?