

A Friendly Church

A few years ago, I was speaking with a member of, what I believed to be, a very friendly church. This Christian sister said that when she first began attending that church she and her husband were not impressed that the congregation was all that friendly. For them it was most difficult to get close to people in the church, and that it was not until they made the effort to break down barriers that they began to feel they were accepted. I was shocked to hear such, since I was sure that the congregation she attended was a most friendly church.

What makes a church friendly and accepting of outsiders? Are continuous proclamations from the pulpit, saying that the congregation is friendly, enough to make it so? Is it the case that a friendly nod or the shaking of the hand of a visitor, going to be all it takes to get it across to visitors that the church is friendly? Or, can we make a person feel welcome when just one member seeks to strike up a conversation, attempting to touch a visitor's soul with Christian friendship, which will cause a whole church to be known as friendly?

People want to feel loved. Truth of God's Word is most important, but that is not all visitors seek. Outsiders want acknowledgement and acceptance from insiders. The important thing is that everyone tries to do their part.

Extending friendship is no easy task. It means moving beyond your comfort zone and into the lives of others. It means being inventive, and open to differences in people. Being friendly takes work. It is about not being afraid "to get your hands dirty."

Being friendly to others, especially those less fortunate than you, is not always popular with the "in" crowd. Remember the example of Jesus. He said, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" Matthew 11:19. Clickish groups, being uncheerful, always in a hurry, cold and empty glances, and shy reservedness will never help to expand the borders of the Lord's kingdom simply because it not Christ like. He did not treat others that way, and neither should you.

Is our congregation a friendly church? Some visitors of late have said we are a friendly group of Christians! Leadership loves to hear things like this. It shows that more than one or two are doing their part to see that the message of the love of Christ is extended to all who enter the doors of the church building.

This congregation is growing. If you introduce yourself to someone who tells you they have been a member of the congregation for five years, just grin, and introduce yourself to someone else! There are many new faces, and getting to know who is new and who is not new takes time. So reach out and shake hands with folks and invite them to come again. Look people in the eyes when you speak to them, giving them undivided attention. Most people who visit have walls of protection built around them to emotionally guard themselves. Be genuine, letting the light of Christ show through your hearty handshake and smile. Seek common ground, and build bridges of connection. Soon those

protective walls will disintegrate, and people will be blessed. The church will continue to grow, and more and more the word will get out, that this is a friendly and caring church.

—Scott