



Postures of Welcoming a New Person



So, you are bravely meeting new people in your neighborhood and at your Love Avenue events. How can we demonstrate sincere, generous welcome and hospitality?

Think of it this way: our welcome and acceptance of a new person into our local expression of the Body is bearing witness to the reality of their membership and inclusion in God's family. We are not the gatekeepers of Jesus' kingdom. Inclusion doesn't equal assimilation, total agreement, nor uniformity. Communicating inclusion is giving affirmation to that person: you are loved, you are worthy of belonging, you are an image-bearer of God.



LET'S GET PRACTICAL. WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE:

- 1. Get back to basics. Make introductions!** This seems elementary but it's often overlooked. When we fail to acknowledge that a new individual has taken the courage to show up and visit or join the established group, it can be experienced as being ignored, erased, or rejected.
- 2. Grow in self-awareness. Ask yourself, what's it like to be with me and my fellowship?** Established members of any group can lose perspective of what it's like to be the new person. Place-sharing involves taking the perspective of the other person. Any new person that visits your worship service or avenue gatherings is likely wondering, could I belong here? Am I too much? Am I too different? Do the burdens I carry threaten my belonging? Our tender attention can be a resounding: Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ! You are needed here!
- 3. Eliminate the weird. How do we define weird?** Most perceive weird as behavior that is rude, impolite, self-centered, ambiguous, confusing, chaotic, or coercive. Is getting to know new people still awkward and uncomfortable? Absolutely! Hospitality invites us to lean into that tension. Think of hospitality as a sliding scale. On the far left is Comfort (I know I belong), on the far right is Discomfort (Could I belong here?) Can I move toward the other's discomfort, and join them there in order to bring them along into comfort? Embrace the uncertainty that it will feel uncomfortable and awkward at times—especially because we so often make an idol of being in control.
- 4. Recall your closest friendships and how they unfolded.** Friendships are miracles; slow miracles that unfold incrementally over time. Relationships cannot be forced. Discern if the other is leaning in. The other person could have wounds we don't know about. Perhaps you remind them of an exacting mother or boss, a cruel classmate or sibling, an abusive father or partner. We can try but they may not experience us as a safe person. That's okay! Friendships cannot be forced. Accept differences in people and realize that not everyone will relate to you.





IF YOU DISCERN THAT THE OTHER PERSON IS LEANING IN...



- **Show interest and resist over-talking and over-sharing.** Listen. Questions are better than answers, but be careful to not grill or interrogate. [Think curious, not nosy.] Ask questions that show you are listening, and which allow the new person to take the lead: “Would you like to tell me more about that?” “What is that like?”



- **Observe and attempt to understand the other’s emotions and mirror back what they are saying.**
 - » Joy shared is joy doubled. Celebrating with another is sacred work. The triune God delights in us. We participate and bear witness to God’s love when we demonstrate delight and enjoyment in another person.
 - » Burdens shared are burdens halved. You may not identify with their struggles in particular, but struggle is universal. Making them feel welcome says, “you are needed here with all your struggles.” Mutuality says, “you are not alone because we all struggle.” All of us are dependent on God and each other; we all have limits, frailty, and precarity. Empathize without making it about you.



- **Avoid over-spiritualizing.** Don’t give trite responses that attempt to avoid unpleasant emotions by pacifying the person. Hold space for the other’s lament. It communicates that nothing you carry can diminish God’s presence in you.



- **Be alert to trust-building moments.** People often drop hints or clues, like breadcrumbs, to what they want to confide. Don’t miss it. It’s as if they are sticking a toe in to test the water and asking, are you safe?
 - » Try saying, “Oh, friend, that’s terrible (or wonderful)! Would you like to tell me more about that?”
 - » Then leave the ball in their court. It respects their consent, agency, and boundaries.



- **Relax; you are no one’s savior.** Don’t treat people like problems to be solved. Others are not the object of your pity or charity. When people share their struggles, they are usually not seeking solutions, but connection. Lean into connection! Saviorism is the unequal power dynamic of seeing yourself as the fixer with the answers and the other as the problem.



- **Breathe; you will get it wrong at times. Keep trying.** Be quick to apologize if you get it wrong. “I’m sorry. I’m listening. I’m learning.” Here’s the good news: the most resilient relationships are not conflict-free, nor mistake-free, but have a pattern of rupture and repair. Intentionally making repair after discord is what builds strength and trust in relationships.

Many of us did not have attuned, empathetic caregivers. We simply didn’t learn it developmentally. But it is a skillset we can develop as we are being transformed by Jesus’ presence and conformed to his image. The Holy Spirit tutors us to be other-centered, and calls to mind that our roots go deep into Jesus who grounds us to be a non-anxious presence for others. The Biblical testimony demonstrates that belonging in the Body of Christ is healing. We are better together!