

Welcoming others

This article is to help us to think through the ministry of welcoming at EFC. Welcoming is an important aspect of what we do at church. Imagine if you were a newcomer who had never been to a church before in your life. If no one greeted you, or no one said a word to you, would you go back to that particular church? Well highly unlikely. It may even turn you off Christianity for a while!

At EFC, as the gospel is proclaimed from week to week, we need to expect that a greater number of newcomers at church on Sundays, or at other meetings eg. youth group. Therefore, as regulars we need to be on the look out for these newcomers, know what to say when you're with them, and know what to do afterwards.

Currently at SWITCH, when someone walks into our service (especially if it's someone new) it's DIY. ie. get your own Bible, make yourself feel welcome, and sit somewhere not too conspicuous. And after the service, then what? Do you go outside, stay inside, stay for lunch, go home, where's the toilets, what if I have some questions about Christianity???

Therefore, we have proposed to have an usher/welcomer each month for the SWITCH service to greet people, to hand a Bible (if they need one) and give newcomers pack to them. If they are a newcomer, to make them feel welcome during their stay (as if it was your own home).

Outlined below are some the responsibilities for the usher/welcomer:

You are responsible as a regular of the church to serve by making sure that everyone feels welcome as well as giving out stuff. Most importantly ushers arrive at church with an attitude of joy and expectation. Be thankful to God for your ministry and for the people he provides for you to serve, especially guests and newcomers.

You will take responsibility for the following:

Before the service:

- B.E.L.L. - Be early, Leave late. Maybe arrive 10 mins earlier.
- Attend to lights, enough ventilation, too hot/cold
- Chairs organised
- Check microphones are working and loud enough (with the audio person)
- Greet and mingle with everyone who arrives at church. Be warm and friendly
- Look people in the eye. It demonstrates an interest in them. Be cheerful.
- If you can, introduce a visitor to someone else of same age/gender./interest to speak with during service
- Inform and invite newcomers to after service activities eg lunch
- Be prepared to greet latecomers, making them feel welcome, putting them at ease and helping them to 'catch up' with the meeting

At the start of the service

- Spot newcomers and welcome them appropriately
- Tell the MC the newcomers name
- Direct and encourage people to sit towards the front, and leave back row for latecomers
- Direct the latecomers so as to make them feel welcome without disrupting the meeting
- Be on the ball to help people during the service eg toilets, finding Bibles and assisting with problems

After the meeting

- Pack up and tidy any Bibles and bulletins left behind (throw old bulletins in bin)
- Inform leaders and others of any newcomers to speak with
- Be ready to talk with guests and make them feel comfortable. Assist them by introducing them to the minister/speaker, or someone of similar age and interests- churches can be weird places.

Some extra pointers:

- Your appearance affects how people react to you. Dress appropriately to church. Make sure your breath isn't overly offensive, and you are wearing deodorant
- Usually the first task of the usher is not to evangelise, but to welcome them to the church meeting. But there will be occasions where evangelism is appropriate. Be prepared to share what you believe with gentleness.

Guidelines for conversations:

Having a good conversation is a work of art. It takes time but here are some guidelines that will help you get in the right direction:

- Don't invade people's personal space by making them feel uncomfortable.
- Maintain good eye contact, Sit or stand facing them to communicate an interest in them. Work hard at listening to people and don't become distracted.
- People love to talk about themselves. Until asked, don't talk about yourself
- Be interesting and informative. Know the churches activities so as you can invite people to various functions
- When talking to two people, be careful to speak to both people. Try to spend more time with the same gender as a rule of thumb but don't neglect the other partner
- Invite the newcomer for lunch or other event.

Extra pointers:

The main reason that we don't usually welcome newcomers is not because we are lazy, but because we are afraid. What will we say? How will we introduce ourselves? How will we finish the conversation? Here are some tips that should stand you in good stead:

1. Assume nothing

Don't assume that the person wouldn't be interested in talking to you. Don't assume that someone else with more social skills will see the newcomer and approach them.

2. Take initiatives

Newcomers need to be welcomed immediately. First impressions can make the world of difference. Go out of your way to make sure the newcomer receives a personal welcome to church.

3. Listen

God gave us two ears and one mouth. Therefore we should listen twice as much as talking. People love the chance to speak about themselves. By listening to them, you may learn where they are coming from and have a more engaging conversation.

4. Beginnings

You are trying to make the newcomer feel welcome, searching for a subject in which they are genuinely interested. Here are some suggested openings:

Hi there, welcome to EFC. It's great to have you along and we hope that you find the service helpful.

Welcome to EFC, my name is Bob. Do you know someone here? How did you find out about our service?

Good morning, I don't think we've met before. I'm Jenny. What did you get up to on the weekend/spare time?

Hi my name is Bruce. Welcome to SWITCH. What's your name?

Try not to ask 'what do you do?' but rather ask them about their family, how they came to find this church, who they know, what they do in their spare time, hobbies. What they do will eventually come out in due course.

5. Endings

Finishing a conversation can be harder than starting one! You must continue to care for newcomers at this point. Be sure they will not be left on their own, feeling awkward. They should sense that you have been pleased to speak with them and will welcome the resumption of the conversation. If they sense that you are relieved to get away, you might as well have not spoken! There are many ways to achieve a pleasant ending.

- Say you got to go home (as long as you are honest!!)
- If SWITCH is about to start, offer the newcomer to a seat
- Offer to return their plate, cup to the kitchen, or their Bible to the shelves. This is a natural closure of the conversation- and it still involves serving newcomers
- Explain that there are some other people you would like to catch up with. Confirm that you have enjoyed the conversation. eg I should really catch up with some people- I hope you don't mind. Thanks for the chat and I'll forward to seeing you next week.
- Introduce the newcomer to other people who can continue the conversation and excuse yourself

Follow-up of newcomers

Once we've met the newcomer, and know their name and make sure that they have filled out the welcome card in the newcomers pack and pass onto Pastor Dave. Also follow up may involve the following: a letter/email (from you as well as Pastor Dave), a phone call or a visit. You may invite them to a church activity, or there's a social happening.

Danger!!!

Even though we need to look out for newcomers, we must not lose sight of caring and welcoming those who are already part of the congregation. We don't want the regulars to feel unwanted, lonely and neglected, and possibly leaving!!!

Remember that we are all meeting together to encourage one another towards love and good deeds as we see the Day of Jesus approaching!!!