



## *The Problem of Friendliness*

Why might a worship visitor not be welcomed in your church? Someone might worry, “Is the problem that our church isn’t friendly?” That probably is not the problem.

If a Christian has been touched by God’s love, that Christian cannot help but reflect that love. Yes, we all get up on the wrong side of the bed from time to time. Therefore, we do well to begin our days by praying that the Holy Spirit would give us a demeanor that reflects the joy we have in Christ. This is doubly true on Sunday. We want to come to church with a sincere smile, the type that flows from knowing one is an heir of an eternal Kingdom. And generally, most WELS Christians do that. So when a visitor is not warmly welcomed, rarely is the cause a lack of friendliness. More likely is the opposite problem.

**Sometimes visitors aren’t welcomed because a church is so friendly.**

A church is a family. If Christ has given you and me the same Father, that means we are kin. Therefore, on Sunday morning, we are eager to put St. Peter’s words into practice. *“Love the family of believers”* (1 Peter 2:17). So in this corner of the church you find friends laughing and catching up on their week. In that corner you see three generations — grandfather, son, and grandson — talking about the big game. The church is very friendly! It is so friendly, members completely miss the visiting couple that walks in.

Friendliness like that can be a problem. *“I didn’t feel welcome”* is frequently cited by worship visitors as a reason they don’t visit a church a second time. And the problem is not really that they were not welcome. The “problem” was on that Sunday morning members were visiting with people they know and love, to the exclusion of those they don’t know.

How do we avoid this? There is only one way. The members of a church need to adopt the attitude that on Sunday they will engage with people they don’t know *before* they engage with family and friends.

Think about it. Normally, when you walk into church and see someone you don’t know, you say “good morning” and maybe shake his hand. But if you see someone you do know, you spend some time talking to him. You need to turn that around. Give a quick “good morning” and handshake to your family and friends. Then spend serious time talking to people you don’t know. Once you have talked to everyone you don’t know, then you can talk to those you do know. If there is not enough time for that, then catch up with family and friends at other times during the week. Let Sunday morning be for people you do not yet know.

By the way, this is not just a good policy to make sure visitors are welcomed. It is important you get to know all your fellow members too. Your church probably has some shy members who do not feel all that connected to others. If your church would adopt a *talk-to-those-I-don’t-know attitude*, it would benefit those shy members greatly.

Someone is going to object: “Some people just want to be left alone. They will be scared off if people actually talk to them.” You might be right. Maybe one in ten visitors will be overwhelmed and scared off if a bunch of your members try and talk to them. The other nine out of ten will love it.

Here is the modern reality. Prospects are not looking for a friendly church. They are looking for a church of potential friends. Most church visitors are expecting that if they join a church they will find people with whom they can share their lives, both joys and burdens. Therefore, welcoming a guest to worship requires more than a handshake and “good morning” at the door. That is a fine start. However, you also need members who are willing to look for and converse with worship visitors, getting to know their names, where they are from, what they do for a living, etc.

It shouldn’t be that hard. You are a group of Christians. Therefore, you are plenty friendly!



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