



WELCOMING THE *Stranger as Friend*

TIPS TO BEGIN WITH COMMON INTERESTS

ONE OF THE CORNERSTONES OF healthy community is being welcoming and truly making space for new people to belong. With many faith communities, an open, inclusive atmosphere is what can convince a visitor to return for another service or to continue searching. When churches embrace genuine community, and nurture and sustain a culture of inclusivity, they have the power to positively influence health and well-being. The feeling of being truly included into a new space is transformative and can lead to a deeper understanding of the innate value of each human being.

How can we collectively welcome the stranger in our everyday lives?

Begin by considering the fellowship opportunities that already exist in your faith community, such as the monthly supper club, book club, community garden, service group, centering prayer group, or church choir. These groups, often organized around common interests, are a perfect place to begin.



1 | **Make information easy to find.**

Are meeting times and places published openly, such as on the church website? Will persons interested to attend first have to introduce themselves to a stranger or call an unfamiliar number to find out the details? If people feel like it truly is an open space, they will have less reservation about joining the group.

2 | **Designate someone to welcome newcomers.**

Help getting oriented is particularly helpful to any activity that requires more than walking into a circle and sitting down!

3 | **Be intentional about your group dynamic.**

Plan an intentional five minutes before or after the official agenda to list out prayer requests and praises. In doing so you encourage group participants to get to know one another beyond the context of the shared activity. Personal connection happens when you discover common interests, share in common pain, and grow in empathy for one another.