

Welcoming Visitors

A warm, friendly, measured welcome is what we strive for. Warm and friendly may be obvious, but why “measured?” It’s important to communicate that each and every visitor is important and we’re glad to see them. But sometimes, we can be a little too enthusiastic. It’s good to remember that visiting a new community is a time of vulnerability and sometimes, anxiety. We don’t want to make that worse by asking a thousand questions or by rushing to describe what we may feel are weaknesses in the congregation.

Here are some basics from an article on welcoming visitors:

- Seek out new people and introduce yourself.
- Start slow. You don’t need to obtain 30 years of backstory in one conversation or invite them over on the first visit.
- Listen well. You will be able to tell if something makes them uncomfortable. You will also learn things that you can mention in future conversations.
- Introduce them to someone else in the church. Think of a member who has something in common with the visitor.
- Ask a question that doesn’t have a yes or no answer.

Questions to ask a Visitor

1) What is your name? Preface this question with “Hello. I’m xxx. I am glad to see you here.” Remember the visitor’s name. Write it down if you have to. Review the name before next Sunday so that you can call them by name next time. *Even though I have trouble remembering names, I believe this is the most important question I can ask.*

2) How did you learn about us? It’s likely you will find out a little about what the visitor already knows, e.g., from looking at the website. In addition, some visitors are comfortable with sharing more without being asked. You might learn that they are dissatisfied with their current church or that they are new to the area and don’t know anyone. This will help you understand them better and be able to make good connections.

3) Is there anything you need to be comfortable? Being a visitor is a tough job. Every church is different and they don’t know what to expect or have information about practical matters of where to sit, how to find the restrooms, what happens in the service, what happens after the service, what is available for their children.

4) What are you looking for in a community/congregation? The answer to this question will help you connect the visitor with another person. Do they want to sing in the choir? Are they looking for community and relationship such as one of our groups? Do they have experience as a UU? Are they looking for ways to get involved in the community and work for justice?

Even if the visitor dashes for the door at the first opportunity, and you never get a chance to ask any of these questions, the warm smile you offer from across the room may be the start of a great conversation. Next Sunday.