

Being a welcoming community at EPC is not only important for our growth as a congregation but also an essential expression of what it means to be a Jesus centered community, God's redeemed people. If we truly treasure what we have, we will want others to come and join in with us.

What does our culture Say?

The idea of community is something most people value and look for. We treasure it when we find it in football clubs, mothers' groups, bike clubs, Men's Sheds and so on.

Community is so important in tribal cultures that your village community is integral to personal identity. In our western culture we have drifted away from community into individualism. We also are a very mobile culture where we often end up living far away from our wider family systems and become socially disconnected.

The natural human tendency seems to be to gravitate into social groups based on common interests or even the colour of our skin. Our culture often falls into a tribalism that fragments society rather than bringing it together.

What does the Bible say?

First of all, the fragmentation of our world along tribal lines with resulting racism and hostility between people groups is a curse placed upon humanity because of its

rebellion against God. This is explained to us in Genesis 11.

Secondly, the whole point of the Gospel is the reversal of our alienation with God and the fragmentation of humanity. Whether it is the reference to being made into one house through the cross of Christ in Ephesians 2, or the visions of Revelation where people from every nation and tribe are singing with one voice in the Age to Come, the message is the same; God is redeeming humanity by saving and uniting people from every race, nation, culture and social standing.



God's saved people are to start living by the principles of a redeemed humanity and thereby providing a taste of heaven on earth. This is now part of our identity and we are called to demonstrate this future grace in a new model of community to honour Him and draw people to Him. Jesus said, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John 13:34-35)

The best way for people to see our redeemed community in action is to welcome them into our lives and our public gatherings as a church. We have something they are looking for, a stable loving community that supports people in all stages of life. We also have something else that they might not realise they are looking for – the Gospel!

Practice Steps for welcoming on a Sunday

It takes each one of us doing what we can to live out what it means to be a welcoming community.

Value your salvation: Through faith You have been purchased by the blood of Christ and placed in the household of God (Acts 20:28). Treasure this reality!

Come to serve: *Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well.* (Phil 2:4)

Be regular: Don't underestimate the impact regular attendance has on creating a welcoming church. It is so much easier for you to know who the visitors are and to develop connections with them if they visit a number of weeks in a row. (Heb 10:24-25)

Come early, leave late: This is a key aspect of other-centred, servant-hearted ministry. If you arrive 5 minutes before the service

you will be able to identify visitors and even greet them before the service starts. Arriving at 10:00am means arriving too late to be a blessing before the service starts. Staying later afterwards allows time to get to know visitors, should they stay for morning tea or coffee, and still catch up with regular friends.

Door Greeters: When you are on door duty you are the first point of contact for visitors. While you might not have much time to talk at the beginning you are well placed to be the first person to make sure visitors are being attended to after the service. They already know who you are. Once you know a bit about them you could then introduce them to others in the church with similar interests.

Be good listeners: Be a genuine listener and make it a priority to learn something about the person you talk to. Work hard at remembering something about them, even if you have to write yourself a few notes afterwards. It is good to know the difference between finding out about someone and allowing them to have personal space and not pry too much.

Don't always sit in the same place: Sitting in the same place all the time can shut you off from connecting with other people and can mean you miss newcomers altogether.

Be watchful after the service: While it is great to catch up with our regular friends, coming to church with a heart for ministry includes taking care to see if there are visitors to talk to. As a visitor, there is nothing worse than being left standing alone. Also, we shouldn't leave it just to one or two people to talk to a visitor so go and join in when you can. This can mean sacrificing our personal comforts to demonstrate community to a newcomer.

Invite people home: In the end this is the most powerful way we can show our interest in others and minister to them.

Be genuine: Be natural, open and real with people. People are attracted to real communities with real people.

Keeping the property looking nice: Visitors see our property before they meet us. The Board of Management has primary responsibility for our property but it takes many people to do basic chores like weeding and watering the gardens and raking the car park. If you don't feel confident as a conversationalist you can still make a vital contribution to the welcoming culture of our church through property maintenance.



NEIGHBOUR

TO NEIGHBOUR



To be a
Welcoming
Community

It
Takes
everyone