

Welcoming Tips and Tricks

Walking in the doors...

Visitors are vulnerable guests. When we invite people into our homes, we do not let them find the bathrooms and coffee; we show them where important things are. We help them feel comfortable. Most visitors are looking for connection, kindness, acceptance and shared values. They want to be personally recognized and welcomed. It is easy to provide these things:

- A smile
- A warm welcome (“Hi, how are you? I don’t believe we have met.”)
- A friendly question (“Is there anything I can answer for you?”)
- Showing them the Order of Service, coffee/tea, bathrooms, RE classrooms if appropriate
- Telling them about your first experiences at the Fellowship
- Introduce them to someone else- anyone else

One quarter of Americans have no close personal relationships. We can be gentle in our approach but still ensure our visitors/guests know that we want them to be part of our community. There are some people who would prefer to have space on the first time they are here. They will make that clear. Please don’t assume this is the case because most newcomers will open up if given the chance. If the visitor does want to be left alone, tell them you will be available after the service at the Visitors Table, if they have any questions.

How do you know if they are new?

We have a lot of members, friends and visitors here during services. It is hard for all of us to know who is technically new. It may feel awkward going up to someone and finding out they have been a member for 10 years. Please keep in mind that although we have Welcomers to ensure newcomers are greeted and to answer questions, we want everyone who walks in our door to feel Welcome- so it is ok to Welcome everyone! Starting out by saying “I don’t believe we have met...” rather than “Are you new?” helps ease the awkwardness.

Some good ways of determining if someone is new:

- Someone who is looking at books in the bookstore
- Someone who is reading everything on the bulletin boards, lobby displays, etc.
- Someone who is looking awkward or unsure
- Someone who shows up 15-20 minutes before the service starts (especially if they go straight into the Main Hall)

Visitor Questions and Answers

Some Welcomers may worry about questions they will be asked. Some FAQ’s:

1. How do you explain Unitarian Universalism quickly? Now is a great time to rehearse your elevator speech! What is the most important thing about the Fellowship for you?
 - Strong community
 - Faith in action- social justice
 - Unity in diversity- many different faith backgrounds coming together
 - Non creedal faith
 - Create a statement that explains why you come here to a newcomer. The following quote is a good way of explaining each part of our faith.
“As Unitarians, we believe all names for God point toward the same mystery. As Universalists, we believe all creation shares the same destiny.”

2. Where do children go?
 - The children are welcome to go into the Religious Education classroom or to stay with their parents in the service. There are activity binders available on a shelf in the bookstore.
 - The first weekend (remember, it goes by the Sunday of the month!) the children start in the Main Hall. The other weekends, unless it is a service for all ages, the children start in their Religious Education classroom. Please show the parents where they are and if possible, introduce them to Ann Barker.
 - There will be signs posted on the front doors if the children are to start or stay in the Main Hall. If you are not sure, check them out.
3. Can we bring coffee into the Main Hall?
 - Yes, yes and please, yes!

You can also show them the resources we have on the kiosk in the lobby. Invite them to take any brochures they would like. A current copy of our newsletter and the small groups brochure show newcomers the activities and programs we have going on here.

Most newcomers do not have difficult questions, but if they ask something you cannot answer, there is usually a staff member or long term member who can help. A staff member can always follow up with them as well.

AFTER the service: Your work is not done!

Research has shown that visitors determine the friendliness of the congregation during the 10 minutes AFTER the service. Please stay near the visitors table and follow up with any visitors you may have seen before services. Questions to ask:

- “How did you enjoy the service?”
- “May I answer any questions for you?”
- “Would you like a tour of the Fellowship?” Show them the mural in the Anthony room as a visual representation of what we are about.

“How are we caring today for the many people who dare get out of bed on a Sunday morning and risk meeting us in hopes that we will provide the religious community they want?...Let us treat each visitor as the precious gift they are, just as we were when we first visited...This is not rocket science, this is human love.”

--UUA Moderator Gini Courter