

First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia
(adapted from The Unitarian Church of Lincoln NE)
Tips for Chatting With Newcomers
What To Say After “Hello!”

The ability to connect with people in short, casual conversation can make or break careers, friendships, and other relationships. It's how we gather information and, we hope, make a connection and favorable impression. People, even really shy ones, like to talk about themselves and will if you know how to draw them out. You have to be genuinely interested. You have to check your ego. And, you have to listen. If you can do all of that you can attract friends and give Newcomers to the Church a place to feel at home.

Hospitality is a spiritual practice!

I. Getting up the Courage to Approach Someone

- What's the worst that can happen?
- Realize that everyone has something to offer, including you.
- Remember that it isn't about you.

II. Roadblocks to communication

- Feeling awkward and uncomfortable. Feeling insincere in making conversation.
- Not knowing what to say to start a conversation
- Ingrained behaviors such as “don't talk to strangers.”
- Don't want to be perceived as pushy or needy.
- Risking rejection

III. Make a Good First Impression

According to Barna Research, 40% of visitors make up their mind about a church before they even see the Minister. You are the first contact they'll have with the church. Try to make it a positive contact. In other words, making a positive first impression is important to building rapport with newcomers. Imagine your first visit to the church. Who spoke to you first? What did they say? What made you come back a second time?

IV. Where do I Start?

- Make "eye contact"
- Smile ☺
- Center Yourself

V. I've said “Hello” What's Next? What makes a positive interaction?

- ✚ Introduce Yourself
- ✚ Show sincere interest in the other person.
- ✚ Be friendly and courteous
- ✚ Offer your hand and ask them their name.
- ✚ Evaluate the Situation
- ✚ Maintain eye contact
- ✚ Comment about something mutual (even if it's just the weather!)
- ✚ Ask them a question (*).
- ✚ Listen
- ✚ Answer any questions they may ask

VI. Asking Questions (*)

1. Try to ask open ended questions. This enables the visitors to talk about the things they're interested in and gives you information to ask more questions.
2. Ask Basic Questions.
3. Be inquisitive, but not an inquisitor.
4. Be careful not to make assumptions about who the person is or why they are visiting our church.
5. Be mindful of your body language .
6. It's OK to have a few standard questions memorized to make you feel more confident in approaching new people. Some suggestions:
 - a. Have you ever been to a UU Church before?
 - b. What brought you to the service today?
 - c. Are you originally from the Philadelphia area?
 - d. Do you live close by?
 - e. Is this your first visit or have you been coming for while?
 - f. Do you have any questions about the Church? How did you find us?
 - g. Do you have any children?
 - h. Do you have any pets?

VII. Extra Tips:

- ✚ Be Respectful
- ✚ Be aware of their comfort level.
- ✚ Avoid jokes the first time you meet someone.
- ✚ Notice who's around them: e.g., if they've brought other people show interest in them. Ask children's names and ages. Introduce yourself to their partner.
- ✚ Avoid "swarming" Newcomers - Don't mob newcomers with unwanted attention.
- ✚ Adopt a Positive Attitude
- ✚ Invite the Visitor to Stay for Coffee/Refreshments after the Service.
- ✚ When you sense that the conversation has run its course, exit gracefully. Let the visitor decide the length of the conversation. (e.g., *Thank you for visiting with me. I really enjoyed getting to know you a little bit and hope to see you again.*)

VIII. Follow Up

- ✚ Remember their name.
- ✚ Introduce Newcomers to other members of the congregation (If the visitor seems open to meeting others, introduce him or her to other church members, especially if you discover they have similar interests to someone.)
- ✚ If you can, take mental notes.
- ✚ Upon their second visit let them know you are happy they have come back.
- ✚ Encourage them to become connected and join in other church activities (e.g., UU & You, potlucks, special programs and social events)
- ✚ Be sure to visit the guest again if you see him or her at the next service.

Remember that hospitality is a spiritual practice.

Communication is a two-way street.

Welcoming people to the church is about building community and relationships.

All of you have relationships in your life so you've got some skills in building those.

If you bring all of that to Newcomers at the church you'll make them feel like part of the community - one they'd likely appreciate joining!