

## Welcoming and inclusive are not synonyms

Written by Josh Winslett

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Churches should strive to be both but can often miss the mark in one area without knowing it. Welcoming is simply understood as giving a welcome. Think of the traditional church usher as being a good word picture for how welcoming typically looks. A smiling face and a hand to shake. Yet, inclusion goes past that principle.

Inclusion involves incorporating everyone present in the activities, conversations, news, and events. Inclusion involves even taking those newer individuals and their opinions under consideration. Inclusion often can be seen by congregations forgoing their normal seats at lunch and sitting with visitors. It can be seen through simple activities such as consistent active listening to those to whom are in the perceived outgroup.

You see, we can smile and say hello without actually including people into our group. Certainly, being welcoming is the first step. No one will ever know how inclusive of a congregation we are without the initial welcome. But it takes further commitment to make sure that congregants and guests are not overlooked as we enjoy our normal circle of friends. No matter how welcoming we are to people, they will sense if we are sincerely wishing to invest in them as individuals. They can sense if our "Hello, how are you?" is really a "Hello, now please sit over there by yourself."

If you are wondering why this even matters, remember that discipleship involves relational inter-church fellowship (Titus 2:1-8). It should not surprise us that exclusivism was one of the first church controversies and that the apostle Paul even condemns the rich in Corinth for their divisive church culture (Acts 6:1-2, 1 Corinthians 11:22).

Does your church have plenty of space for visitors? Your church may have a lot of physical room in the building to fill, but it may have no real room for growth if they are not welcoming and also inclusive. One strong asset that Christ built into his church is the simple fellowship of the saints. People are filled with spiritual turmoil and live in a lonely cultural setting. The gospel message of Christ's finished work acts as medicine to the soul. The fellowship of the saints helps the lonely heart. However, like all other utilities of the church, it often only functions properly if we are using it as God intended. In the end, churches who act exclusive will soon find no one to act exclusive to.

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Tomorrow is Sunday. Perfect time to find someone needing fellowship in Christ. It may not seem like a big deal to you, but I promise, it will make a huge impact in someone's life.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:42