

A Welcoming and Inviting Church

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So Karen and I, and the Welcome and Communications Committee, have been wondering over the past month or two what would make our church feel really inviting. I began to jot down my own ideas.

First of all, we should be a very academic church, with a lot of serious classes that go deep into biblical and theological issues. We should have book clubs studying books like Walter Brueggemann's *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*. (It's really good. I'm only about a fifth of the way through, but that first hundred and fifty pages are great!) And then maybe a class on the collected works of Karl Barth or St. Thomas Aquinas. Now that would be fantastic!

But we wouldn't only study ancient theology; we'd also have classes that connect to key elements of our own culture – for instance, "The Theology of Western Movies," the John Ford classics with the Duke, the Anthony Mann movies with Jimmy Stewart. We'd have to have at least two sessions to explore *Support Your Local Sheriff* with James Garner. Then we'd have other classes, too - all very academic. And, if we ran out of time for classes; we could cancel some of our less interesting activities like music and UMW and missions projects and children's programming.

So I presented these ideas to Karen, and she didn't see it at all. She said that what we really need is a place to sing hymns, hymns, and more hymns – especially new ones with really interesting words and challenging melody lines! And if we have studies, they need to be book studies of novels with lots of introspection, especially of women's lives.

Well, that certainly sounded awful. At that point, a new thought came to me: What if the idea was to be welcoming and inviting even to people who aren't exactly like us?

That makes it harder, doesn't it? It's easy to imagine the things that we'd like ourselves, but what if the question isn't really about our own preferences? Then we have to ask "What sort of church is welcoming and inviting to strangers?" Here are a few thoughts:

- 1. A church where people smile and greet you**
- 2. A church that has made provisions for people like you and families like your family (e.g. a safe and inviting place for your children, access for people with your disability, a place to nurse your baby)**
- 3. A church whose welcome continues beyond your first visit**
Over the next month and a half, we'd like to think about this in more depth. The Welcome and Communications Committee is making a few changes which we will be introducing over the month of September, but we're definitely open to your ideas.

It used to be said that people wanted to join churches where everyone else is just like them. I'm not sure that's true. A church full of people just like me might, conceivably, be a little dull. I'll have to check with Rebecca to be sure. But this I'm certain of: a church made up of people who like you, whether they resemble you or not, is a welcoming congregation.