

Welcoming, Valuing, and Belonging at All Peoples

Welcoming is more than greeting people at the door. It is the practice of building relationships and nurturing community. It may be one of the most important spiritual practices we can offer one another.

Every conversation is an opportunity to help someone feel that they belong.

Whether someone is visiting for the first time or has attended for years, **we invite you to speak with at least one person you do not know each Sunday.** In offering welcome, we give the gift of belonging—and often discover a greater sense of belonging ourselves.

- **We welcome** people by noticing them and reaching out.
- **We value** people by listening, respecting, and learning their story.
- **People belong** when they know they are wanted here—not just as visitors, but as part of us.

Making a Connection

Meeting someone you do not know is an opportunity to make a new friend while giving them the opportunity to find one in you.

Remember: the conversation is not about you. The best way to make someone feel welcome is to be genuinely interested in them.

Begin with warmth

- Make eye contact.
- Smile.

- Introduce yourself.
- If appropriate, offer a handshake.
- Learn and use the person's name.

If they are with family or friends, include everyone in the conversation.

Start a Conversation

Whenever possible, begin with something you share—perhaps the morning's service, music, or another common experience.

Keep the conversation positive. Speak well of All Peoples, our members and friends, and the opportunities our congregation provides.

Ask open-ended questions such as:

- Is this your first visit to All Peoples?
- How did you find us?
- Have you attended a UU church before?
- What brought you here today?
- Do you have any questions about All Peoples?
- Are you originally from the Louisville area?

Allow the conversation to develop naturally rather than working through a list of questions.

Listen More Than You Speak

The greatest gift you can offer is your attention.

Listen with curiosity. Nod, affirm, and ask thoughtful follow-up questions. As you share your own experiences, resist the temptation to take over the conversation. The goal is not to impress someone—it is to know them.

Welcoming Across Differences

We aspire to be a multicultural congregation where people of every race, ethnicity, culture, age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, family structure, and life experience feel seen, respected, and valued.

Some helpful reminders:

- Notice your assumptions and set them aside. Remember everyone has multiple identities and refrain from focusing on any one identity you notice or assume.

- Avoid introducing someone primarily by a visible characteristic such as race, disability, or age.
- Avoid asking someone where they are "really from."
- Use inclusive language whenever possible.
- Say "partner" rather than assuming "husband" or "wife."
- Rather than assuming someone needs assistance, ask, "Please let us know if there's anything we can do to make your visit more comfortable."
- If you make a mistake, apologize briefly, learn from it, and move on. We all continue learning.

Help People Feel at Home

Invite newcomers to stay for coffee, conversation, or potluck.

Show them where things are, introduce them to others, and help them become part of the community rather than leaving them standing alone.

At the same time, be careful not to overwhelm someone with too many introductions or conversations all at once.

Ending the Conversation

Let the visitor determine how long the conversation lasts.

If they express interest in learning more, help connect them with the information or people they need. Point them toward our website, social media, newcomer materials, or upcoming newcomer gatherings.

A simple closing might be:

"It was wonderful meeting you. I hope we'll have a chance to visit again soon."

Things to Avoid

- Don't assume someone is new.
Instead of, *"You must be new,"* try *"I don't believe we've met. I'm..."*
- Don't focus on differences; look first for common ground.

- Avoid closed body language such as folded arms or constantly looking around the room.
- Don't ask overly personal questions or inquire about someone's theology, career, or education unless they bring it up.
- Avoid church acronyms that newcomers may not understand.
- Save humor until you've had a chance to know someone's personality.
- Don't "swarm" visitors. One or two genuine conversations are usually more meaningful than many brief ones.

Make a Mental Note

If possible:

- Remember their name.
- Remember something they shared.
- Welcome them back when they return.
- Continue the conversation if you see them at another church event.
- Invite them to newcomer gatherings after they have attended a few times.

Everyone Matters

Children belong here just as much as adults. Take time to greet them, listen to them, and learn their names. A child who feels welcomed today is much more likely to feel that All Peoples is their spiritual home tomorrow.

When appropriate, communicate with greeters, staff, or other members if you think someone would benefit from additional connection or support.

Above all, remember this:

People may first come because of our values, our music, or our programs—but they return because they feel genuinely welcomed, valued, and that they belong.

