

## Some questions

I think of the people I'm most comfortable with. How did I become comfortable with them in the first place? What appeals to me about them? Might these same ways help me to deepen friendships with newcomers at church? Or have I reached my practical and emotional limits when it comes to sociability?

Do I really have a "faith *life*"? Is it a Sunday thing? Where does it fall in my list of priorities? Or is it the ground of my being that determines my priorities? Why **DO** I go to church? What is the *purpose* of my church? How can I share my reasons for being in church?

*I already have my own circle of friends and network within the congregation. Why would we include newcomers? Wouldn't this interfere with the way we're "there" for each other?*

In what ways do I help to put strangers at ease? How do I communicate that openness to newcomers? Does it work?

Am I honestly all that interested in other people? Am I interested in other places, cultures, experiences and ideas? Or is my focus inward, on me and my relationship with Jesus and God?

What do I not include in "inclusion"?

What conditions do I put on "unconditional"?

*It used to be said that it was very bad manners to talk socially about money, sex, politics or religion. Should religion be on this "don't go there list"? What should NOT be talked about in church circles? Would this get in the way of my having a friendly, open conversation about faith issues with, let's say, a gay, destitute, anarchist New Ager?*

**Where is the church door? Is it something on hinges at one end of the sanctuary that opens now and again, or is it "out there" in the community? Is my life and home a doorway? How comfortable am I with the idea of its being "open"?**

Do we think we really need more people in church? Why? If it's the financial base, why not focus on more effective fundraising?

What NON-financial reasons can we offer people? How long is that list? How persuasive is it? Can we deliver?

**Do interactions with other people deepen my relationship with God? Can they?**

*What are my personal interests and activities "outside" church? Do I talk about them, and invite other people to be involved in them? Do I find it easier to talk to other people about my church involvement or my other involvements? Why?*

How do I respond to negative views of "the church" and "Christians" that have become common in secular society? (e.g. comments about child safety, about Christians "leaving their brains at the door", being "judgmental", "irrelevant", or "just wanting your money"? Do I just feel hurt, or do I try to respond? How might I best respond?

*If we're going to work on being more "hospitable", where do I start?*

*How do I start? Do I need to begin by working at my own faith life?*

**Is there any sense in which I might imagine that a stranger who turns up at church has been "sent by God"?**

**Would I see us then taking a greater interest in a newcomer or stranger?**

## *Jesus' models...*

**Matthew 9: 9-13; Mark 2:14-17; Luke 5:27-31**

*eating with tax collectors and "sinners" at Matthew's (Levi's) home.*

**Matthew 9: 14-16**

*celebrating the presence of Christ.*

**Matthew 11: 16-19; Luke 5: 31-35**

*Jesus contrasts the asceticism of John with "the Son of Man" who came eating and drinking and points out that both were criticised... "but wisdom is justified of her children".*

**Luke 7: 36-50**

*a woman washes Jesus' feet at a Pharisee's home for dinner.*

**John 12: 1-8**

*Mary pours precious oil on Jesus' feet and is criticised by Judas for her waste. Can we imagine Jesus smiling or chuckling before he answers Judas?*

**Matthew 14: 12-21; Matthew 15: 32-38; Mark 6: 35-44**

*shared out, the few loaves and fish feed a multitude.*

What is the point of the water to wine story and the wedding at Cana? (**John 2: 1-10**) Does it affirm celebration? Does it affirm the appreciation of tastes and flavours, shared food and dance and laughter and the enjoyment of giving and receiving hospitality?

When Jesus spots the comical figure of the dumpy little tax collector Zacchaeus (**Luke 19: 1-10**) scampering up the road ahead of the crowd to climb a tree, can we imagine Jesus being moved by sympathetic laughter to asking Zacchaeus to put him and his disciples up for the night? And might he have imagined that here was someone who could afford to be hospitable, and that this would be good for everyone's sakes.

Can we imagine, beyond the theme of betrayal, suffering and loss that is the context of the story of the Last Supper, that there might also have been laughter, song and celebration along with the food and the wine — and, from that, take personally the invitation of Jesus to "do this in memory of me "whenever" we break bread, take wine or celebrate with friends?"

**Matthew 7: 9 (NIV)**

*"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?"*

**Can the stories of the Gospel help us to open less fearfully to strangers?**