

6

Enriching Christian Community

Welcoming – part 2

This is our second study on the theme of Welcoming others into Christian Community. What do you remember as the main point of the first study on 'Welcoming'?

What does the word 'incorporate' literally mean?

This study will particularly focus on **incorporating** people into our church. The previous study considered the experience of a person first joining a Christian Community but now we are asking, what happens in the following weeks and months.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 13:7.

1 Cor 13 is often read at weddings. How does discussing 'love' in the context of the body of Christ impact its meaning?

This rather long passage gives us a biblical perspective on our identity as 'the body of Christ'. This is central as we consider how to help people feel a part of our local branch of Christ's body.

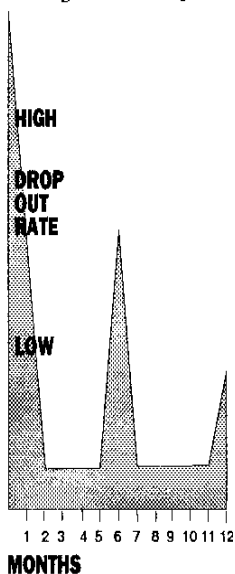
1. How does Paul use the image of a body to shape our understanding of what it means to be 'the church'? (12:12ff)
2. If we are 'the body of Christ' how will this impact our welcoming?
3. How will our individual 'strengths' and 'manifestations of the Spirit' (12:7) shape the way we welcome others?
4. How might our welcoming recognise that each of our newcomers has differing 'strengths' and 'manifestations of the Spirit'?

Some Research

The graph at the left is part of some research which asks the question, "Why do people *stay* at a church?" When a person feels they belong to the church, and are a part of its life and activities, they have been 'incorporated', made part of the larger body. They start saying, 'This is my church'. They start talking about 'us'. This happens when people have: (a) developed two or more significant relationships with other people or families in the church, (b) a role, however small, through which they feel they are contributing, (c) become involved in some area of the church's ministry, and (d) acquired a sense of ownership and membership of the congregation. The process of incorporation must address all of these four areas.

The research suggests three points at which drop out occurs for new people:

1. In the first few weeks. This was because your church was not what they were looking for, or they have not been welcomed properly.
2. At the fifth or sixth month, the person has not developed any relationships or doesn't feel needed or valued. [Continued over page]



(Graph from article by Robert Orr in Kiwi Growth Report, 1990, NZ)

3. At the 11-13th month they become inactive. Their reasons are similar to Point 2 above, but with more of a focus on the fact that their needs were not being met. They have usually not found a role.

In short, this research reveals that the two key factors impacting whether a person stays at a local church are relationships and roles.

Evaluation and Discussion

1. Would you say that you have been 'incorporated' into this church? Why or why not?
2. What does our church do well to incorporate new members? What could we do better?
3. [optional] What does our Home Group do well to incorporate new members? What could we do better?
4. In what ways do you personally seek to build relationships with people at church?
5. *Roles*: New people should be involved in ministry roles only when their maturity and gifts have been discerned. However, we might consider inviting relative newcomers to help with something like the morning tea roster, the transport or maintenance team or the meals bank. Can you think of other roles which might give the newcomer a significant sense of belonging and contributing?

"People join churches for all sorts of reasons. They stay for just two: relationships and a role."

Ministry

Unless a person is mobilised into the congregation's ministry in some significant way they are still not fully incorporated. Some people attend churches for years, but never make this important step. By 'ministry' we mean active participation in some area such as evangelism, pastoral care, prayer teams, leadership, worship, music, children's and youth work, ministries of compassion to the local community such as working with the unemployed or the homeless, or the administration which backs up any of these areas.

People should be involved according to their gifts, abilities and preferences; taking seriously the model of the body in Romans 12:4-12, Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

6. Following our previous series on 'The person and work of the Holy Spirit' you should have a reasonable idea of your 'gifts' (if not, pause and review this with your group). In what ministry areas are your gifts now being exercised? In what ways would you like help in using your gifts more effectively?
7. What could your Home Group do together in order to help 'incorporate' people into our church? (Be specific about which people you aim to help)

Practical Assignment

Work together as a group now to plan and implement one of your ideas from Question 7. Ensure that you have a clear aim and that what you do really will help to 'incorporate' identifiable people into our Christian community.