

## “Be the First Friend” program inserts Suggestions for Use

At the EXODUS Network, we’ve helped hundreds of families across the U.S. and Canada relocate and connect to the Christian community in their new area. Time and again, we’ve found that families who are warmly received by a new church have a much more successful transition into their new community.

Whenever new people visit your church, whether they are new to the community or simply looking for a church home, they have special needs that are often overlooked. Important information that regular church members take for granted can be unintentionally kept secret from newcomers. In turn, visitors may feel left out and unwelcome. However, just one person reaching out to them can make all the difference in the world.

The next five pages provide tips to help you gain insight into the needs of new families, as well as practical ways in which you can be their “first friend.” the pages are also designed for you to give to your church leaders. They can print or copy the documents, cut the pages in half, then insert them in your church’s weekly program so that other congregation members can learn to be more welcoming as well.

The EXODUS Network provides moving families with FREE referrals to pre-screened REALTORS® who serve with utmost integrity. If you or someone you know is planning a move, contact the EXODUS Network toll-free at **800-395-8556** (M-F, 8:30-5:00 EST) or visit our website at <http://www.exodusnetwork.com>.



## Being the “First Friend” An Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you are a visitor to your church . . .

You may want to slip in and out without too much attention OR you may really desire lasting friendships. We don't need to smother visitors, but..

- ◆ *Is there anyone reaching out to you with a friendly smile?*
- ◆ *Do the church members even notice you're there?*

When new people visit your church, they should feel welcomed! No matter what their desire for contact, visitors need to feel welcomed by you, the church body. We are often friendlier in the store than church!

Many long-term church members simply do not realize how difficult searching for a new church can be. Individuals and families looking for a new church home often only visit a church one time before deciding to move on to another place where they'll feel welcomed. Even worse, they may give up altogether and decide it's easier to stay home than to struggle their way into a tight-knit church community.

Most church members don't try to exclude others, they may not recognize the needs newcomers experience. Others are uncomfortable approaching people they don't know. Still others just aren't aware of the specific actions and responses that will really make a difference for visiting families. Despite all of these reasons, you and every member of your church are capable of being the “First Friend” of newcomers.

For the next five weeks, check you program for inserts like this one.

These tip sheets will provide ideas on how you can “Be the First Friend” when people visit your church. Study these suggestions, then put them into practice.

Being the first friend is not difficult, but it ever so important. Something as basic as a simple “hello” can encourage visitors to become regular members, and eventually to be the “first friend” to someone else.

## What do New People Need to Know?

Long-time members often take certain norms about the church for granted. Such information may unintentionally be a well-kept secret for newcomers, however. The following list will help you begin thinking about what newcomers need to know when they visit your church:

### What do new people (newcomers) need to know?

#### Location of:

- Restrooms
- Nursery
- Church Offices
- Meeting rooms for various programs and activities

#### Information on:

- What the church believes
- Types of programs offered
- How one becomes a member
- Available opportunities for service
- Expectations of subgroups within the church
- How to access prayer support

### Who do newcomers need to know?

#### Leaders in the church:

- Pastor
- Leaders of organizations
- Members of the decision-making body
- Caregivers
- Office staff

#### Fellow members:

- People with similar interests
- Grandparent types
- Play-group friends/kids of similar age
- People being remembered in prayer
- Baby-sitters

### How do they learn this information?

- Host families
- Member orientation classes
- Teachers of various classes
- Involvement in church life
- First friends like you!

## Personal Inventory

How do you rank yourself as a "First Friend?" Take this personal inventory to find areas that need improvement.

### 1. I search out visitors and newcomers at my church:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 2. I am able to have an extended conversation with someone I have just met:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 3. I introduce newcomers to other acquaintances who have similar interests:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 4. I invite newcomers to join me in activities, programs and projects in which I am involved:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 5. I invite visitors and newcomers into my home for a meal and/or fellowship:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 6. I try to help new families locate the resources and information they need:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 7. I am able to look past a person's color, clothing, social standing or education to make them feel welcome:

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

### 8. I am willing to add newcomers to my close circle of friends.

Always [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never [ ]

Commit yourself to improving in one area above!

### Will you be the First Friend?

There are many ways that you can make new people feel welcome and included in the body of believers. The following are some suggestions to help you be a new person's **First Friend** in your church or community:

- ◆ **Wear nametags at church.** This not only helps newcomers remember your name, it helps you identify visitors. (They won't have a name tag.) Remind them of your name each time you see them for the first few weeks, and please do not ask, "Do you remember my name?" It puts them on the spot.
- ◆ **Introduce yourself to someone you don't know.** Ask if they are new to the community and if they have any questions you might be able to help answer.
- ◆ **Involve newcomers in discussions with your friends.** It is easy to accidentally exclude visitors, so try to focus your conversation on topics that they can relate to. Explain any necessary background information that others may already know.
- ◆ **Invite newcomers and their families to join you in a volunteer effort.** Meeting people and getting involved is much easier for when new people have a host who will stick with them.
- ◆ **Invite newcomers to join you on your next shopping trip.** Show them places they "must" know about for shopping.
- ◆ **Arrange a breakfast or luncheon for your new friend.** Invite old friends with similar backgrounds or interests to join you.
- ◆ **Call newcomers a few days after their visit to your church.** Ask them if they have any questions or need any other information.

### What's Their Perception?

As regular church members, we sometimes get so caught up in our routine activities that we don't provide visitors with the information they need. In turn, new people may feel unimportant and misconceive that we don't want them to join our church.

#### Newcomers may perceive they are not welcome because:

- ◆ They do not know all the history of your congregation and they are uncomfortable asking questions.
- ◆ Few church members introduce themselves or their families.
- ◆ They forget the names of people who were just introduced to them and they feel too self-conscious to ask.
- ◆ They send their children to a different school.
- ◆ They are not familiar with all the names, places and events being talked about and so can't participate in discussions.
- ◆ Their income level is different from the majority of church members.
- ◆ Their skin is a different color from the majority of church members.
- ◆ They bring their children to events that are planned for adults only.
- ◆ The way they dress for an activity is different from the norm of the church (i.e, they dress too casually or too formal).
- ◆ They have some noticeable disabilities and special needs.
- ◆ They don't know the songs you sing from memory.
- ◆ They don't know when to stand, sit, speak, or remain quiet during the worship service.
- ◆ Their children were disruptive during worship, but they didn't know where the nursery was or they felt insecure about leaving their children in a strange place.

For each of the situations above, think of something you or your church can do to ensure that newcomers do not perceive that they are unwelcome. There is no question that welcoming people into your church community is hard work and demands increased sensitivity. But if you accept the