

Reaching Out TO BELONG

No one should feel lost in the crowd at church. Here are some tips for finding a place in your ward family.

BY REBECCA YOUNG

We all want to feel like a valued member of a loving ward family. While we don't go to church solely for its social aspects, attendance is much easier when we feel comfortable, accepted, and surrounded by friends. Unfortunately, there may be circumstances—such as being new in a ward, belonging to a ward with frequent turnover, or living in a ward that doesn't seem very social or welcoming—when we feel we don't belong.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “We all belong to a community of Saints, we all need each other, and we are all working toward the same goal. Any one of us could isolate ourselves from this ward family on the basis of our differences. But we must not shut ourselves out or isolate ourselves from opportunities because of the differences we perceive in ourselves. Instead, let us share our gifts and talents with others, bringing brightness of hope and joy to them, and in so doing lift our own spirits.”¹

Following are some suggestions to help any of us feel more a part of our ward families.

Make a smooth transition. Before you leave your old ward, request that your records be sent to your new ward. Let your new bishop know you will be joining the ward and try to set up an appointment with him soon after you arrive so he can get to know you and your family. Ask him if you have any nearby neighbors who are members.

Know you're not alone. On our first Sunday in our new



ward, my husband and I stood up hesitantly after sacrament meeting, trying to find someone we could follow to the next meeting. While we were looking around, we saw another couple in the adjacent row doing the same thing. We smiled, approached them, and introduced ourselves. It was their first Sunday as well, so we searched for a Sunday School class together. That experience has continually reminded me that in new experiences I am probably not the only one feeling lost or alone. All of us have been new at one time or another.

Take the lead. Be the first to smile, say hello, or extend a hand. You might feel that others should reach out first, but as has been said, “To have a friend, first be a friend.” They may be waiting for someone to reach out to them too.

Participate in class. Not only does participating in class help you feel like a part of the ward, but it also helps others see who you are and learn your name, making it easier for them to reach out to you. Be sure to introduce yourself in class. Volunteer to read scriptures or say prayers. When appropriate, share a thought or personal experience. What you share may spark a conversation with someone later.

A large Sunday School class might feel overwhelming. It can be easier to get to know others in classes that





Participate in ward social activities.

Share your interests with others.



Be persistent in attending church and reaching out to others.



tend to be smaller, such as in Gospel Principles, Teacher Improvement, or Family History classes.

Get connected. When I have had callings that prevented me from hearing ward announcements, I have learned to seek out the information and pass it along to others who also might not have heard.

Home and visiting teaching also provide a connection to the ward. Be sure to do your own home or visiting teaching. If you don't have an assignment, let your quorum leaders or the Relief Society presidency know you would like one. Extend an invitation to your home and visiting teachers. Tell them when you will be available that month, schedule an appointment, and let them know you are looking forward to seeing them.

Attending activities in addition to Sunday meetings is another great way to get to know others. Home, family, and personal enrichment meetings; ward activities; ward and stake temple nights; and service projects all provide opportunities to associate with others. Prior to the activity, ask someone if they plan on attending. Then carpool or meet them at the activity.

Advertise your interests. When my mother moved into a new ward, she mentioned in Relief Society that she was looking for someone to join her on morning walks. A sister who lived nearby took the invitation, and they became fast friends. I know of two women in a ward who, while admiring a quilt at an enrichment meeting, discovered they both wanted to learn how to quilt and decided to learn together. Another sister traded babysitting services with others in her ward. This helped her get to know other families better, and she received affordable babysitting in return.

Help the missionaries. As ward mission leader, my husband had the chance to help fellowship new members and

investigators, even at a time when we were fairly new to a ward. We have found that inviting the missionaries and the people they teach into our home is a great way to feel like a part of a ward family, as is encouraging new or less-active members or investigators to come to activities and greeting them at church. We have met some of our closest friends by being involved in missionary work. Ask the missionaries to

introduce you to new members or investigators. As President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, every new member needs "a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with 'the good word of God.' (Moro. 6:4)."²

Keep your perspective. My father often reminded me that while the gospel is perfect, people aren't. Even though you may feel that a ward appears unwelcoming or seems to have set social groups, it is important to remember that first impressions are not always correct. We must be persistent in attending church and reaching out to others.

During the times we feel excluded, we can remember that during His earthly ministry, Christ was despised and rejected of men (see Isaiah 53:3). As He took upon Himself our sins and sorrows, He experienced every kind of pain and loneliness. We must rely on the Lord, seeking guidance through prayer and scripture study. As we do so, we can be guided and comforted by the Spirit.

As Paul reminds us, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Each of us has a responsibility to strengthen the "household of God." As we strive to feel a part of our ward families by reaching out to others, no one need feel lost in the crowd. ■



THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAINTS

"We speak of the fellowship of the Saints."

This is and must be a very real thing. We must never permit this spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood to weaken. We must constantly cultivate it."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "Fear Not to Do Good," Ensign, Jan. 2000, 2.

NOTES

1. "Belonging to a Ward Family," *Ensign*, Mar. 1996, 16.
2. "Converts and Young Men," *Ensign*, May 1997, 47.