

Questions and Answers

Sometimes I feel that ward members associate mainly with friends in their own social groups. I want to feel that I belong to the ward family. How can I have the courage to keep reaching out?



When I attended Relief Society for the first time after I was baptized, I noticed the other women chatting with friends and enjoying each other's company. I sat quietly, afraid to say much more than my name when the sister who was conducting the meeting asked me to introduce myself. Several of the sisters introduced themselves to me after the meeting, which made me feel welcome, but I still wasn't sure how I was going to fit into the already-established friendships I had observed.

When I received a calendar that listed a monthly Relief Society potluck dinner, I decided to attend. I thought it would be a good way for me to meet sisters in the ward.

I was so nervous on the way to that first potluck that I prayed for help in saying the right things and making friends. When I arrived I sat with a few of the sisters, hoping that they would talk to me. I asked them questions about different ward activities. Some of them were eager to share their knowledge; others were not as open.

Regardless of how others responded, I persevered in going to the dinners. Each month I sat with different sisters and got to know them. I enjoyed those monthly get-togethers, and they gave me the courage I needed to go to other church activities. I began to feel comfortable in knowing that I would not be left out if I was willing to reach out. I have been a member of the Church for nearly four years now, and I have discovered four basic things that help me get to know others:

- Attending Church regularly and going to as many ward activities as possible.
- Being supportive of other members' callings and offering them appreciation and encouragement.
- Magnifying callings. I find that when I magnify my calling by doing my best and being dependable, others often offer their appreciation.
- Being willing to introduce myself. I cannot always expect other people to come to me.

These things have helped reduce my apprehension and have helped me get to know others in my ward. As we demonstrate sincerity and commitment to the gospel, ward unity can be increased.

Lisa Black, Texas, USA

The Lord's standard for His people is clear: "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). This doctrinal foundation empowers each of us to reach out to other ward members in specific ways.

One way we can meet others is by arriving at church early, introducing ourselves, and shaking hands. Another

way to strengthen ward ties is by doing our home teaching and visiting teaching, which gives us a chance to visit and share a gospel message with people in their homes. Ward socials help to unify members in a casual setting. We can take advantage of these opportunities to get to know fellow ward members.

Kendal Brian Hunter, Utah, USA

Every time our family has moved into a new ward, my closest friendships begin naturally as I fulfill my callings. The calling of visiting teacher or home teacher offers exceptional opportunities for us to build close, caring friendships. As I pray for the welfare of those I teach, my heart fills with love for them. When my motives are pure, my courage seems to grow because my focus is on the reality of the Lord's love for all of us rather than on my own fearful "vain imaginations" (1 Nephi 12:18) of what people might think of me.

Leigh Shahan Wing, Arkansas, USA

When I returned from my mission, I attended a young single adult ward with a good friend. Even though we tried to get to know people, we felt we were treated like outsiders. After church my friend and I talked about our experience and our options: we could attend our home ward, or we could return to the singles ward and do all in our power to love others as the Savior does and then rely on Him to help us. After some discussion, we decided to go back and try our best.

As we went to ward activities, we made a concerted effort to get to know people from different social groups. We discovered that people weren't trying to exclude others; in most cases, they had good reasons for being close, such as a common upbringing, mutual interests, or similar jobs.

At first, getting outside ourselves and meeting people wasn't easy for my friend and me. But as we tried to follow the Savior's loving example, we developed friendships. Some of the barriers we had encountered started to come down. We learned that we can strive to reach out and make friends.

Laighton Jones, Florida, USA

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Q&A feature will focus on the following topic:

When I think about the things that have happened in my life, it's hard to love myself. I know that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ love me; how can I more readily feel Their love in my life?

If you would like to share your ideas, please label your submission "Feeling Their Love" and follow the guidelines under "Do You Have a Story to Tell?" in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by September 20, 2011.

I felt that I was on the outside of a social group in my ward. It bothered me because I felt that the group was taking away from the spirit of unity that should exist among ward members, so I started to silently criticize and resent them. But I realized that what I was doing also detracted from the spirit of unity in the ward. I decided to try to love these people as the Savior does. This has brought me peace and happiness.

I learned that I can't change the actions of others, but I can change my own. Ward unity is built by individuals. Our personal examples can be far reaching.

Name Withheld

Don't jump to conclusions. Few people would describe themselves as unfriendly; rather, they might be shy or insecure around people outside of their immediate group of friends. They might not even realize what impression they are giving. Giving them the benefit of the doubt will likely open doors of friendship in the long run.

Instead of worrying about not belonging to a particular group, try focusing your energy elsewhere. Don't let frustrating experiences damage your confidence and sense of self-worth. Chances are that many people in your ward need your friendship. We can all prayerfully consider whom we might contact, even if doing so is as simple as letting someone know that we missed them at church. The Lord can use us better if we are already in motion.

I believe that the law of the harvest applies to relationships: you reap what you sow. I know from experience that planting lots of seeds of friendship will produce fruit when we most need it.

Kristin Smith, New Jersey, USA

When our children were small we moved into a new neighborhood. We were excited to belong to our

new ward, but breaking in can be difficult and lonely, especially if you wait for an invitation. We decided that inviting families to our home to share a meal or a family home evening would be a great way to get to know our new brothers and sisters. We tried to be especially mindful of families who were new in our ward because we knew how they felt. We have enjoyed this practice for many years and have found that those whom we have wel-

comed into our home are still some of our dearest friends.

Milton and Elaine Fort, Arizona, USA

When I went to a young single adult branch about a year after I joined the Church, I felt overwhelmed. It was the largest branch I had ever attended! It seemed that the members had all known each other for years. How was I ever going to fit in? Feelings of insecurity consumed me.

During the sacrament one Sunday, I closed my eyes and asked Heavenly Father what I could do to stop feeling so out of place. A thought came to me: "You need to put in some effort, and it will all work out."

I followed that thought. I began greeting people, starting conversations, asking others how they were doing, and listening carefully to their responses. As a result, I felt part of the whole—I felt I belonged. I learned that if we put some effort into getting to know others, things will get better.

Claudia Sacasa Castellanos, Ontario, Canada

Feeling that you are on the outside of a circle or clique can be hurtful. On one occasion I nearly let it affect my attendance at church. Fortunately I decided that being active in the gospel was more important than any hurt—real or perceived—that I had received from a particular group.

The good thing about this experience, though, is that it made me want to make sure that others are included. I



have often prayed to know if there is anyone in particular I should befriend. In addition, I have asked Heavenly Father to send me friends when I have needed them.

Though there may seem to be an inner circle in your ward, there are usually members who are not part of that circle. I have gotten to know some wonderful people in my ward of all different ages and backgrounds.

Charlotte Goodman McEwan, Florida, USA ■



THE UNITY OF THE SAINTS

“Understanding that the Church is a learning laboratory helps us to prepare for an inevitable reality. In

some way and at some time, someone in this Church will do or say something that could be considered offensive. Such an event will surely happen to each and every one of us—and it certainly will occur more than once. Though people may not intend to injure or offend us, they nonetheless can be inconsiderate and tactless.

“You and I cannot control the intentions or behavior of other people. However, we do determine how we will act. Please remember that you and I are agents endowed with moral agency, and we can choose not to be offended.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “And Nothing Shall Offend Them,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 91.