

# Ministering Principles

## How Can We Create a Culture of Inclusion at Church?

**W**hen we look around our wards and branches, we see people who seem to fit in easily. What we don't realize is that even among those who seem to fit in, there are many who feel left out. One study, for example, found that nearly half of adults in the United States report feeling lonely, left out, or isolated from others.<sup>1</sup>

It's important to feel included. It's a fundamental human need, and when we feel excluded, it hurts. Being left out can produce feelings of sadness or anger.<sup>2</sup> When we don't feel like we belong, we tend to look for a place where we are more comfortable. We need to help everyone feel that they belong at church.

### **Including Like the Savior**

The Savior was the perfect example of valuing and including others. When He chose His Apostles, He didn't pay attention to status, wealth, or lofty profession. He valued the Samaritan woman at the well, testifying to her of His divinity in spite of how the Jews looked down on Samaritans (see John 4). He looks on the heart and is no respecter of persons (see 1 Samuel 16:7; Doctrine and Covenants 38:16, 26).

The Savior said:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35).

### **What Can We Do?**

Sometimes it's hard to tell if someone feels like they are on the outside. Most people don't say it—at least not so clearly. But with a loving heart, the guidance of the



Holy Ghost, and an effort to be aware, we can recognize when someone doesn't feel included at Church meetings and activities.

**Possible Signs Someone Feels Excluded:**

- Closed body language, such as arms folded tightly or eyes downcast.
- Sitting in the back of the room or sitting alone.
- Not attending church or attending irregularly.
- Leaving meetings or activities early.
- Not participating in conversations or lessons.

These may be signs of other emotions too, such as shyness, anxiety, or being uncomfortable. Members can feel “different” when they are new members of the Church, are from another country or culture, or have experienced a recent traumatic life change, such as divorce, death of a family member, or early return from a mission.

Regardless of the reason, we shouldn't hesitate to reach out in love. What we say and what we do can create a feeling that all are welcome and all are needed.

**SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES**

Send us your experiences as you have ministered to others or have been ministered to. Go to [liahona.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://liahona.ChurchofJesusChrist.org) and click “Submit an Article or Feedback.”

## Some Ways to Be Inclusive and Welcoming

- Don't always sit by the same people in church.

- Include others in conversations.

- Take time to think about what it really means when we say the Church is for everyone, no matter their differences. How can we make this a reality?

- Invite others to be part of your life. You can include them in activities you are already planning.

- Express love and offer sincere compliments.

- Don't withhold friendship just because someone doesn't meet your expectations.

- When you see something unique about a person, be interested in that instead of glossing over it or avoiding it.

- Find and build on common interests.

- Look past people's outward appearances to see the true person. (For more on this topic, see "Ministering Is Seeing Others as the Savior Does," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, June 2019, 8–11.)



### Blessed by Inclusion

Christl Fechter moved to another country after war tore apart her homeland. She didn't speak the language well and didn't know anyone in her new neighborhood, so at first she felt isolated and alone.

As a member of the Church, she summoned her courage and began attending her new ward. She worried that her thick accent would keep people from wanting to talk to her or that she would be judged for being a single woman.

But she met others who overlooked her differences and welcomed her into their community of friends. They reached out in love and acceptance, and she soon found herself busy helping teach a Primary class. The children were great examples of nonjudgmental acceptance, and the feeling of being loved and needed strengthened her faith and helped rekindle her lifelong devotion to the Lord.

It's not always easy to feel comfortable around people who are different from us. But with practice, we can get better at finding value in differences and appreciate the unique contributions each person brings. As Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, our differences can help make us a better happier people: "Come, help us build and strengthen a culture of healing, kindness, and mercy toward all of God's children."<sup>3</sup> ■

#### NOTES

1. See Alexa Lardieri, "Study: Many Americans Report Feeling Lonely, Younger Generations More So," *U.S. News*, May 1, 2018, usnews.com.
2. See Carly K. Peterson, Laura C. Gravens, and Eddie Harmon-Jones, "Asymmetric Frontal Cortical Activity and Negative Affective Responses to Ostracism," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 6, no. 3 (June 2011), 277–85.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Believe, Love, Do," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 48.



#### DISCOVER MORE

For more ideas, read "We Can Do Better: Welcoming Others into the Fold," *Ensign or Liahona*, Sept. 2017.

#### PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Sister Linda K. Burton, former Relief Society General President, taught, "First observe, then serve" (*Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 78). Following this counsel can help us create wards and branches where everyone is included and needed. Here are some additional ideas to consider:

- When we enter our church building, we can **look around and observe** whom the Lord would have us bring into our circle of friendship that day.
- Sometimes we avoid those who are different than us or who are going through a difficult time because we are afraid of saying the wrong thing. This can leave them feeling isolated, wondering why no one speaks to them. **Sit by them, express love, and ask sincere questions.** Ask them about their experience with their challenges and how you can help.
- In our talks and in our Sunday lessons, we can choose to **use examples that show that individuals and families in a variety of situations** can live the gospel and enjoy its blessings.
- Class members can be greatly blessed when teachers find ways to **include members from a variety of ages, nationalities, and family situations.** We have much to learn from the many faithful members of the Church who have experiences different than our own.
- Teachers can create a safe place for all to share their experiences in living the gospel. Whenever a comment is shared, a teacher can **respond positively to something that has been offered.** Class members will then be more likely to feel confident and comfortable in sharing their thoughts.