

Creating Community in Your Church: A Guide for Young and New Christians

Entering a church for the first time – or perhaps for the fifth time – may at times seem overwhelming. The many unfamiliar faces, traditions, and conversations swirling through your head will cause you to question: How am I supposed to truly belong here? Creating community in your church isn't just a pleasant idea – it's an important aspect of practicing your faith and developing your spiritual growth. Regardless if you're a young Christian or completely new to the church setting, this guide will help provide you with the knowledge of why community is so important and more importantly, how to take an active role in creating it.

This article will describe some practical ways to develop real relationships, become involved with your church family, and create a thriving church community that you feel is home.

Why Building Community in Your Church Matters

Jesus demonstrated community throughout His ministry — welcoming, teaching and sharing life with his disciples and those around him. Scripture calls upon us to be part of a supportive, loving church body. In Hebrews 10:24-25, scripture reminds us not to abandon meeting together, instead to encourage each other.

A 2019 Pew Research Center study revealed that individuals who believe they are part of their religious community tend to feel a sense of belonging, emotional support and a sense of purpose. This is particularly important for new Christians, as it provides them with a means to fight off the feelings of doubt, loneliness and/or isolation.

What Does "Community" Look Like in a Church?

The church community is much more than attending services on Sundays. It's the relationships that exist beyond the pew — praying, celebrating, struggling and living day-to-day life together. It's a place where you feel seen, accepted and encouraged to grow.

Understanding Your Part: You Are Important to the Community

When you're new to a church, it can easily feel as though you are merely observing from the sidelines. But remember this: your attendance and involvement are valuable to the community. We all possess

gifts whether it's hospitality, listening, organization, etc., which contribute to the church family and development of the body.

Think of the church community similar to a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Each component is vital to the overall health and function of the body. You shouldn't undervalue the contributions of your individual experiences and passions!

Steps to Developing Community in Your Church

1. Participate in Small Groups or Bible Study

Attending a small group or bible study are two of the best ways to begin establishing connections. Small groups allow for conversations to occur that don't typically happen in a larger service, and the smaller size provides a more relaxed atmosphere to ask questions or to share your life.

Find a group that fits your age, interests, or current level of faith. Many churches have small groups specifically designed for young adults or new believers.

2. Utilize Your Time and Gifts by Volunteering

By using your time and talents in serving the church, you will not only find a greater sense of purpose, but you will also establish relationships with others who share the same vision and mission. You can utilize your gifts in greeting people, assisting in children's ministry, leading worship, planning events, etc.

Not sure where to start? Simply contact your church's volunteer coordinator or pastor to learn of available volunteer opportunities.

3. Attend Church Social/Fellowship Events

Social/fellowship events such as church potlucks, game nights, retreats, or coffee hours, provide you with multiple avenues to meet new people and establish friendships with those beyond Sunday services. To make these events meaningful, don't simply attend — engage! Start a conversation with someone or invite someone to sit down and eat with you.

4. Develop a Culture of Hospitality

Hospitality doesn't necessarily mean hosting big events. Hospitality can be as simple as inviting a new friend over for coffee or a meal. Providing a welcoming hand outside of church hours will deepen the bond between members.

5. Utilize Social Media to Connect

While phones and social media can be isolating tools, they can also be used to build community within your church. Follow your church's social media accounts, join your church's Facebook page, participate in online prayer chains, etc.

Establishing Community Requires Time and Vulnerability

Community cannot be established quickly. It takes patience, ongoing effort and vulnerability. Being vulnerable can be difficult, however, sharing parts of your story (struggles, doubts, fears, hopes) can provide a space for others to do the same and create a safe and nurturing environment.

The Process of Overcoming Common Hurdles in Developing Church-Based Community

Worry About Not Fitting In or Judgment

As a new Christian, many fear they will be rejected or judged by their fellow church members. The church is a place of Grace, however. It is through Gods Love (and our transformation) that we are called to receive others, as they are.

Busy and Time Conflict Issues

It is easy to become overwhelmed between work, school, or family commitments. However, try to make time for at least one consistent church-related event each week/month. Consistent attendance builds trust and relationships.

Church Too Big

While large churches may provide a sense of anonymity, small group settings and/or volunteering can help identify where you fit-in best. If your church is large, ask church leaders about small group options; if your church is small, propose new group(s)/activities.

Case Study: Sarah's Journey to Feeling Part of a Community

Sarah, a 20 year old new Christian, was struggling to find her place at her large urban church. Sarah made the decision to start attending a weekly Bible study for young adults and began to serve in the children's ministry. Sarah developed meaningful friendships through the regular weekly study and shared serving experiences and now feels connected to her church. Sarah has also recently begun hosting a monthly women's fellowship night, allowing her to build further connections within her church.

Next Steps & Encouragement

It is likely that developing a community at your church will take some effort initially; however, every step counts. By being your true self, consistent in your involvement, and open to forming relationships, you create an environment to develop a church "family" that will support, encourage, and grow with you.

What Can You Do Today?

Take the first steps toward developing a community at your church by: 1) Joining a small group, 2) Volunteering for a church ministry, or 3) Simply introducing yourself to someone you don't know at church next Sunday. These simple acts can lead to lasting friendships and a deeper walk in your faith.

We would like to hear from you! How have you experienced developing community at your church, or how did you experience finding community at your church? Please share your experience in the comment section below or forward this article to a friend that could benefit from this information.

To continue learning about ways to increase your involvement at your church and your overall spiritual development, please view the links to additional resources provided at the bottom of this article.