

## How to Make Friends at Church (Elizabeth Mainson)

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Some time ago, I was approached by a new parishioner, after Liturgy, with a question, “How do I become closer to the people at church?” Shocked and saddened that she even had to ask that question (such implications!), I hurriedly mumbled something about her volunteering. And then I thought, and thought, and thought, through the night, the next day, weeks passed. How does one make friends, true friends? Sometimes life is so superficial. We kiss and say, “Hello. How are you?” But we don’t mean it. Or maybe we even do, but only on the surface. How do you break through that barrier and truly get someone to care about you? Well, you need to do several things.

First, pray. God loves you. He cares about you. If you ask him, and it will benefit you spiritually, he will grant your request. So if you want a friend, ask him.

Second, care. People care about others that care about them. Really care about them and their desires and needs. The following recommendations will be

meaningless, if you don't really, truly care about the person.

Third, listen. How can you get to know someone if you don't listen? If someone is speaking, don't be thinking about how you can mention a similar experience you had, or what you can say next that will sound amusing or knowledgeable. Show compassion. Let them know you care. You never learn anything while you are talking. Think about what you can do to help them. Not in a way that fulfills what YOU think they need, but in a way that would really help them. If you don't know, say so. "I really would like to help you, but not in a bothersome way. What do you really need?" Keep a record of people and what their interests are. If Helen likes horses, next time you read an article about horses, send it to her. If Peter's mother was hospitalized, next time you see him, ask how she is doing.



Fourth, talk. You can't become closer to someone without talking to them. Call them. The telephone is a two way instrument. If they don't call you, call them. My first job in customer service was very difficult. Every telephone call was horrible; full of anger from my customer and manipulation on my part. After a couple years, I developed an aversion to making telephone calls. I love to talk on the phone, but I have a hard time placing a call. Maybe they have a similar background, there may be a legitimate reason they aren't calling you. However, remember, people are busy. When you do call, don't spend too much time on the phone. That is not being a caring friend. You can also invite them to get together for coffee, lunch, dinner, breakfast. I used to know a woman who loved to meet her friends for breakfast. Then they could chat and still have the rest of the day to do things.

Fifth, be kind. Send a card once in a while. Buy them a book. If you come across a

tea that they like, buy some for them. Remember their birthday. 'Like' their Facebook posts. Remember their Name Day. If they have an operation, visit them in the hospital with flowers and a funny magazine. If they're sick, bring them some chicken soup. (Studies have actually shown that it can speed recuperation time.) Babysit their children. Give them a big smile when you see them. Luke 6:31 "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you." Think of what you would appreciate and do that.

Sixth, share. Share your life with them. Tell them your hopes and dreams. Tell them about your struggles and triumphs. Tell them about your childhood. Once I volunteered to help make kulich with a woman from church, Olga. We got on the subject of food and childhood. Olga told me about when she was growing up they would have a celebration in her village where they would dig a big pit and put in wood and roast a pig. And along with the pig, they would put in potatoes. The potatoes would get all black on the outside, but be delicious on the inside. She remembered it so fondly, because not only did the potatoes taste good to a hungry child, but she remembered how they would all get black streaks on their faces because of eating the blackened potatoes. I will never forget that moment. I felt like I was with the young Olga, waiting for the food to cook and laughing at the blackened faces of my friends.

Seventh, do things together. Find a common interest and plan activities around it. Do you both like art? Go visit an art museum. If you both like poetry, go listen to a poetry reading. Perhaps you like astronomy. If so, grab a telescope and go stargazing. Don't forget the hot tea. Are you both Godly people? Do something together to help others, give sweets to the children at an orphanage, pull weeds at a monastery, visit prisoners, have a dinner to raise money for the church, etc.

Lastly, pray. Pray for them. For their health. For their family. For their friends. For their neighbors. For them financially. For a good night's sleep. For their spiritual growth. For their salvation. Pray for whatever seems right. We can all use more prayer. And isn't it something that a caring friend would do?