



How Can I Welcome the New Faces in My Congregation?

by Jenny Ertel

Everything we do is rooted in holy scripture, our road map for our faith journey. What has scripture to tell us about welcome and hospitality.

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

With parishes closing, we have many new faces in our pews, people discerning where to make their home parish. For myself, I am sometimes wary of asking if someone is new when their face is unfamiliar to me. Are they new or is that I just don't know them because I don't usually go to this Mass, and they've been coming to Holy Cross as long as I have. I don't want to welcome, and possibly offend, someone who's been here all along.

The Stewardship Committee has been focusing on how to make all people *feel welcome, not just put the words on a banner*. I realized that I could be doing more to welcome anyone who is a “stranger” to me, even if they are only *new to me*.

Many people find it difficult to talk to newcomers/strangers. Here are a few tips to make this easier.

- Extend a welcoming gesture, a warm smile
- Make eye contact during the Greeting of Peace
- Say, “Hello! Have we met before? I'm Jenny Ertel.”
- Move over or get up and let someone in when we see them still searching for a seat at Mass
- Invite a “stranger” to join “our” group at Coffee Hour

I encourage all of us—current parishioners and visitors—to try these suggestions (if we haven't already) sometime from the time we enter the church parking lot until we make our way home.