

How Mature Christians Can Help New Christians

Intro: There are things that the mature can do to help ensure the success of a new Christian. In fact, the new convert needs the leadership that more mature members can give. Let's consider some of these things:

Encourage new Christians to attend all the services

And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)
And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. (Romans 15:14)

We cannot always assume that new Christians will know the importance of attending all services.

Many have never attended services very much at all.

Some come from other faiths that customarily meet only once a week and where there are few activities of a spiritual nature beyond that. So, they may just continue the same habits.

One of the things more mature Christians can do is create expectations that will help guide the new convert.

Show them the divine obligation to break bread with the saints.

Show them the importance of growing in knowledge and how attending the other meetings and classes of the church will help them in that goal.

Offer affirming support when the new convert makes a sincere effort.

Get involved in the life of the new convert

When someone decides to leave a worldly life behind there is often a feeling of loneliness. If a person has commonly associated with unbelievers and participated in the habits of unbelieving people like partying, going to morally questionable entertainment, etc. they will have to disassociate themselves to some degree from past friends. Here is where Christians must step in!

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. (1 Peter 4:9)

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (1 Timothy 3:2)

Surely those who seek to be in leadership can appreciate the importance of building a relationship with new converts and new members.

Make a genuine effort to befriend new disciples

Speak to them at services and get to know them by name

Invite them to your home or to a restaurant where you can get to know them better and where they can get to know you
Consider invite them to join you in some recreational activity in which you both have a common interest

Offer to study the Bible with new disciples

Is there any doubt that the most critical need of new disciples is continuing instruction in the word!?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Many times those who obey the gospel may have only a beginning knowledge of the Scriptures. They may have many questions. They may not have any sense of the big picture or what the Bible story is all about. Some churches have remedied this by formulating formal programs of instruction for new converts.

A new converts class stressing fundamentals of the faith

A program of visitation and study where the new convert visits many homes and studies a needed lesson

A personal interest with someone who is comfortable with you

Some observations:

Sometimes our approach to new converts is more one of indoctrination than helpfulness. We want them to embrace a set of viewpoints that we think are important to keep them with us rather than give them the tools to live a better life.

Yes, indoctrination is important. But sometimes what is more important are teaching the skills to study for one's self and to develop a personal relationship with God.

Adopt a watchful attitude toward new disciples

In the absence of someone to follow up, sometimes new converts are quickly discouraged or re-captured by the world. God has given instructs to the mature to prevent this from happening.

One of the key words to describe leaders in the congregation is "overseer". That word calls attention to the "watchful" attitude leaders should have for their flock.

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Elders are specifically held accountable for the loss of souls.

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

In the absence of elders, the spiritually mature members must develop this mindset. More specifically the church's leadership should focus on weak members and make their growth a constant part of their deliberations.

In fact, it is the ongoing interest in the welfare of weak members that really proves that someone is qualified to oversee. But the issue is more fundamental.

We are all our brother's keeper!

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (Hebrews 12:15)

Interestingly the command uses the same word used to describe the work of the "overseer", i.e. to look out over. In a general sense, Christians need to watch out for new converts and respond to their needs..

Help them find a place where they can serve in the congregation.

Deal with new converts with gentleness and patience

And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

So often we forget how long it took us to develop some of the attitudes, habits, and viewpoints that we have developed.

New disciples ought to be encouraged to participate and if they say wrong things they do not need to be embarrassed or rebuked but gently corrected. There must be an order of priority just like with children. We teach them general principles first and then work on refinement.

Sometimes we just need to look at ourselves and our own failures and shortcomings as a reminder that new converts will make mistakes and need forgiveness.

Make your life worthy of imitation

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Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:12)

I fear that in many churches new converts are negligent in service to the Lord and spiritual growth because they learned that from the rest of the members. We can often become hard on new disciples, when they are not really much different from us.

If we are involved, enthusiastic and productive, then we create an expectation for the new member and a standard of demeanor that encourages them to grow.

Conclusion: I appreciate the discussions we are having on developing a stronger and more committed membership. Everything rises and falls on leadership; and that leadership has to be provided by those experienced in the faith to get the results we would all like to see.