



Every mature disciple wants to see each person that comes among us thrive spiritually and become active in the Lord's work. There are a number of things that will contribute toward that goal, but one of the most important is the process of enfolding.

The Need for Enfolding

Enfolding is building a relationship with a person who comes among us commensurate with the newcomer's comfort level. It seeks to establish a personal working relationship with another person that is honest, helpful, and non-threatening and that involves a significant number of the church's members (perhaps as many as 20-30 people).

Getting to know the family

Initially the first step in enfolding is meaningful communication. It means that we find a way to get to know the person that needs to be included and to let that person get to know us. Activities that will assist in this communication might include chatting with the person at services or in their home, including that person in social activities where there will be time for conversation and opportunity to observe the lives of other disciples, and inviting a person to be involved in some area of spiritual service where they might effectively participate without self-consciousness.

Ironically, I've seen people who have attended a congregation for a significant period of time and even become "members" who have never quite felt "a part" of the group because there has been little significant communication between them and the rest of the flock. The lack of communication prevents the second level of enfolding.

Knowing the family cares

Enfolding means that we respond to the needs of those who come among us. When we make genuine effort to get to know others, we become aware of the unique personal struggles that others have in trying to manage their lives and live as disciples. We become aware of areas where we may show love and care. It may be teaching that would build faith; it may be financial help or spiritual support as one deals with a difficult life situation. Whatever the need, each member of the church needs to feel that the church is "there" for them, that is, that we would not hesitate to do whatever is needed in a time of need or discouragement.

Making a commitment to the family

When a person feels accepted and loved by others, he finds it easier to make a commitment to others. Often we are tempted to reverse the process—asking others to make a commitment before we will commit to them. Thus, we simply stand aloof waiting for them to change and judging them for their lack of involvement.

I submit that a more productive approach is to make a commitment to the people we want to enfold first! We need to get involved in their lives, seeking to communicate and show love. Often you will notice that such people will naturally step up their involvement when they feel known, accepted and loved by the church. Consequently, not only will there will be fewer cases of wayward members, more importantly, someone who may have spent considerable time "on the sidelines" will be actively involved in the church's activities.

—Johnny Felker (www.truthchasers.com)