

# We Value Friendliness



## Core Value

### *We Value Friendliness.*

Through Christian fellowship we develop meaningful relationships with our church family. We value each person as a child of God. We seek to be warm and accepting, extending Christian love to everyone.

*We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this; those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (I John 4:19-21)*

*You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. (James 2:8, 23)*

*And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning-you must walk in it. (II John 6)*

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14)*

*...make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:2-5)*

## **Introduction**

I heard a pastor share this story in a sermon: “When I was growing up our family had a large front porch with a porch swing. Whenever a neighbor walked by, mom or dad would say, ‘come on up and sit awhile.’ Usually they did. Everyone was welcome at our home and the front porch swing was the place of greeting.” He then related this story to the church’s emphasis on hospitality and welcoming. “Hospitality is the front porch of the church,” he said. That image has stuck with me as I think about the church creating a welcoming and hospitable place for members and guests.

Often people who visit our church tell us enthusiastically, “Lexington Avenue Baptist Church is such a friendly church.” Yes, Lexington Avenue Baptist is a friendly church. We experience that friendliness in our Sunday School classes, when we gather around the table for Wednesday night fellowship meal, and when we see each other around town. Friendliness is the community opening its arms to each other and to neighbors. Friendliness is Christian hospitality in action.

## **Bible Study**

These scripture verses on friendliness are from five New Testament letters. They are letters of encouragement and instruction written to churches. Specifically, these letters are written to teach the church how to be Christian community. Each letter would have been read aloud to the gathered community. When I receive a letter from a friend, I can’t wait to open it and I will usually read it several times, pausing to reflect on certain sentences. Imagine how these early churches would have received these letters, hearing them read aloud as they sat together side by side.

### **1 John 4:19-21**

John notes that we cannot see God, at least not with our eyes. So how can we love a God we cannot see? We love our brothers and sisters. In fact to hate our sisters and brothers is to hate God. In a sense we make God visible to the world by loving each other and by loving the world. A Christian community of love is an illustration of who God is and an example of the kind of life God intends for all of humanity.

### **James 2:8, 23, II John 6**

The instruction, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” was given by God to Moses for “all the congregation of the people of Israel” (Leviticus 19:19). Jesus called it the second greatest commandment, second only to loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30-31). James here calls it the royal law. What does “royal law” mean? Certainly “royal” would suggest that it is important and “law” that it was meant to be followed. “Royal” reminds us of a king and kingdom, namely God and God’s kingdom. The royal law then is the rule for God’s people. Life in God’s kingdom means we love each other.

In verse 23, Abraham is called “friend of God” because of his righteousness. We might say that through our obedience and righteousness with regards to God’s royal law, “love your neighbor as yourself,” we too can be called “friend of God.” Being loving friends to each other, in a sense, makes us a friend of God.

So, is loving each other all that the law requires? If we love each other does it matter what we do? John's second letter offers a corrective and a deeper understanding of love. True love for God and neighbor means obeying all of God's commandments. If we truly love God and our neighbors, we will not conform to the ways of the world. On the contrary we will be a light to the world, demonstrating a better way to live.

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

As I write this, I am wearing a red polo shirt and blue pants. However, Colossians tells me I should be wearing compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience and I should tie it all together with love. It may be considered embarrassing to arrive at the party wearing the same thing as someone else, but Paul's letter tells all of us, "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" to wear the same thing. Paul presents a striking image of life in Christian community. The clothes we wear are visible for all to see. Imagine what is it like when, in a community, what you see first are the qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and most of all love. Instead of striking back at one another when we feel we have been wronged, we "bear with one another." When we have a complaint, we forgive because we remember that God has forgiven us. We are a community of the forgiven and forgiving—a community of harmony. So, Lexington Avenue Baptist Church, what are you wearing?

### **Philippians 2:2-5**

One mind? We are already wearing the same clothes, now we have to have the same mind? You get the impression from all these verses that God really wants us to be together and not just together in the same space, but together spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Paul tells the church to put away selfishness ambition and conceit and to humbly look out for the interests of others. In the Christian community there is to be no looking out for number one, if number one is me. If there is any doubt about whose one mind we are to have, Paul settles it in verse 5, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

## **LABC Core Values**

Lexington Avenue Baptist seeks to love one another as these letters prescribe and to develop meaningful relationships and be warm and accepting of all as our core values suggest. We "value each person as a child of God," by welcoming others and cultivating Christian community.

**Welcoming.** Lexington Avenue Baptist has a plan for welcoming others to our church:

(1) *Greeters.* We have greeters stationed in the upper parking lot and at the drive through during Sunday School. Before and after worship, greeters stand at each door of the Sanctuary. Beverly Durham leads our Welcoming Ministry Team and schedules our Sunday greeters.

(2) *Worship Greeting.* During worship we welcome members and guests and invite the congregation to turn and welcome each other. Our hope is that no one leaves worship at Lexington Avenue Baptist without receiving a smile, a handshake, and maybe even a hug.

(3) *Follow-up.* Any first-time guests that visit and leave an address and phone number receive follow-up. The deacon of the week makes a quick contact, usually on the same Sunday a

guest visits. We send a letter from the pastor. Someone from the staff makes a contact and names are submitted to a Sunday School class for additional follow-up.

(4) *Friendly Members*. Greeters at the doors, a word of welcome in worship, and making contacts help us welcome our guests, but the best way to make others feel welcome is to create an atmosphere within the church community where hospitality is offered freely to all. People feel welcomed because we genuinely care. It is the responsibility of all our members to welcome others. This includes being on the look out for guests, helping them find their way around our building, offering to sit with them, introducing them to others, or carrying a diaper bag for a parent with small children.

With additional leaders and greeters we might choose to expand our system for welcoming others. Consider, for example, these ideas: (1) Parking lot ushers throughout our parking lots to direct members, guests, senior adults, and the disabled to appropriate parking spaces, especially before worship; (2) A golf cart shuttle to carry persons from the lower levels to the Sanctuary door; (3) A children's Sunday School greeter at the lower door to our educational building and at the entrance to our nursery; or (4) A team to bake and deliver a loaf of bread or pie to a first time guest. You may have additional ideas for welcoming others to our fellowship.

**Community.** We live in a culture that values individualism and independence, perhaps to the exclusion of community. This cultural value has carried over into the church in subtle ways, so that I (and maybe you too) often think of the spiritual journey as mostly a personal and private one. Even when we come together for worship we may tend to think of ourselves as a group of individuals who hear sermons, pray, and sing hymns as individuals to learn and be inspired in our individual Christian lives. To the contrary the Bible speaks more often to the community as a whole than to the individual Christian life. If you are like me, the difference may be hard to see. Recently I have been involved in some small groups and have done some reading through which my focus on the individual over the community has been called to my attention. For example, when reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, I realized that I thought of it as the personal prayer of an individual Christian. However, when I considered again the words, which we pray together every Sunday, they were clear, "Our Father," "Give us," and "forgive us our," not "My Father," "Give me," and "forgive me my." Of course I knew the words, I just didn't think of them as a community prayer.

Thomas R. Hawkins, in *Cultivating Christian Community*, says it this way:

*God has created people for community. Only within community is authentic humanity possible. There is no life that is not lived in community. "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So God creates us to be partners in a common life. We discover our deepest selves when we live face-to-face and side by side with others in the give-and-take of relationship. Before we can speak in the singular, we learn to speak in the plural. We cannot say I without first saying we.*

Christian community may begin with a friendly smile and a hug, but it goes much deeper than that. So, what does Christian community look like? Hawkins names six qualities of genuine Christian community:

1. *Christian community practices hospitality, creating a safe space where different people feel welcomed, affirmed, visible, and valuable.*
2. *Christian community is centered on Christ. We share a common focus of relationship in Christ.*
3. *Christian community practices the means of grace [compassion and justice, studying scripture, public and private worship and prayer, Holy communion, fasting, and Christian dialogue].*
4. *Christian community occurs when we find healing and wholeness.*
5. *Christian community invites us to discover our unique gifts for ministry.*
6. *Christian community equips us to live out our baptismal covenant, sharing in God's work of healing and restoring all creation.*

Christian community is about our whole life together as Christians. Christian community includes an atmosphere of welcome to all people, our love for Christ and one another, the way we relate to each other, and even our worship and ministry.

Forming Christian community means going beyond surface pleasantries. Being authentic Christian community means we learn to resolve our conflicts (and every community will have conflicts and tensions) in healthy ways. Healthy conflict resolution means we communicate clearly, listen to understand, confront lovingly those who have offended us, see things from the perspective of others, and seek mutually beneficial solutions. Stuffing our disagreements until we explode in anger or become bitter or talking with a third person when we have a problem with someone else are not actions that cultivate Christian community.

## **Conclusion**

The truth is we need each now more than ever before. With the rapid pace of our society, there doesn't seem to be enough time for friendliness and community. Who has time to sit on a front porch swing and chat with neighbors? We have things to do and places to go. We barely have time for our own families. Yet deep inside, perhaps, many of us are starved for genuine community. God calls us to slow down and carve out time for community. Lexington Avenue Baptist Church can offer community to our Danville community. We are after all "God's Own People." That means we are family—the Family of God.

## **References**

*Mercer Commentary on the Bible*, "1 Peter". Watson E. Mills and Richard F. Wilson, Editors (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995).

*Harper's Bible Commentary*, "1 Peter". James L. Mays, Editor (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

*Cultivating Christian Community*. Thomas Hawkins (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001)





## Daily Devotionals: Friendliness



**Monday: *Friendliness from the Welcoming Committee*, by Beverly Durham**

**Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:19-21, Colossians 3:12-14**

Friendliness is evident each and every Sunday morning and on special occasions as members of the Welcoming Committee at Lexington Avenue Baptist Church meet and greet visitors and members as they enter the building for Sunday School or morning worship service. Our goal is to make people feel welcome and at home in our church. God himself commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too. (1 John 4:21)

What better way to follow His wish than with a friendly hello, warm smile, handshake or hug? The Welcoming Committee is there to not only make folks feel welcome, but to assist in finding classes, the nursery, children's programs or escort visitors to the sanctuary. They also assist in the comings and goings of those who ride the bus or van to church. The members of this committee voluntarily stand in 90+ degree heat, rain or snow and ice to give a hardy welcome to all.

Each November an appeal is made for new members to this committee. Members are then assigned monthly rotational duties, which they can switch with others when necessary. The committee is open to all and new members are always welcome. The only qualification to be a member of this committee is a pleasant smile and a friendly "hello."

God tells us that the most important piece of clothing you wear is love. Love is what binds us "together in perfect harmony". (Colossians 3:14) The Welcoming Committee of Lexington Avenue Baptist Church clothes us in love and **friendliness**; and hopefully binds us in perfect harmony.

**Tuesday: *Listening*, Thomas R. Hawkins**

**Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:2-7**

The practice of listening fosters the qualities and experiences that characterize Christian community. Listening involves hospitality. When we listen to others, we create a free and open space where they feel welcomed. In such hospitable space, people discover their own true identity. As almost any counselor or therapist will affirm, listening promotes healing and wholeness. When we feel heard, we experience a healing of our spirits.

A good friend tells me that her primary ministry is hearing others into speech. In her presence, people are encouraged to speak. As they do so, they discover gifts and graces for ministry that they never dreamed possible.

The discipline of listening is an ascetic practice. It involves self-denial for the sake of some greater spiritual good or purpose. Listening is hard because it involves a loss of control. When we listen, we become a servant to others. We forget ourselves and our agenda in order to be fully present to the other person.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
(Philippians 2:5-7)

Listening requires us to give up being the center of our little world. Listening reminds us that the Christian life has a new focus of relationship in Jesus Christ. With Christ as the third party in every relationship, we can listen openly and graciously to others.

(Thomas R. Hawkins, *Cultivating Christian Community*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001, p. 42)

**Wednesday: *Friendship*, by Youth Sunday School**

**Scripture Reading: James 2:8, 23, II John 6**

***A Friend is...***

someone who cares.  
someone who's there for you.  
someone who will let you cry instead of just telling you that everything will be okay.  
someone you trust and that you care about.  
loyal.  
forgiving.  
crazy, fun, helpful, happy, my friend.  
someone you trust to tell secrets to and they won't tell.

***Friendliness is...***

caring for someone special  
saying "hi" to a friend when you see them.  
buying a friend a cookie.  
being helpful.  
giving to people who need it.  
praying for those in need.  
going to the nursing home.  
helping anyone in need even if they have hurt you. To forgive no matter what they did.

**Thursday: *Hospitality Evangelism*, Phil Nall and Mark Price**

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:34-40**

*Hospes venit, Christes venit.* The translation of that ancient Latin dictum is "when a guest comes, Christ comes." While the focus of the church's evangelism tends more often than not to view the "stranger" as the one who needs what the rest of us have, the focus of Scripture seems to be on viewing the stranger as having both need and gift. In the New Testament, as John Koenig observes, welcoming another in the name of Christ reflected an understanding of hospitality as partnership with strangers. And in the Old Testament, hospitality was an obligation for God's people primarily because it reflected God's covenant with them. In both instances, the idea of proselytizing was not an end in itself. Strangers were not to be welcomed in order that they become a part of the community. They were welcomed because that was the kind of community response God required to be God's people. To focus on a stranger as a guest to be received rather than as simply a soul to be won shifts the emphasis of evangelism from

result to relationship; and in so doing, we act as host not so much to change others, but to make room for change to take place. (Nouwen)

**What would our evangelism look like if we considered a stranger - someone not like us, someone who did not believe like us, someone whose life was very different than ours, someone whose opinions were strange to us, someone whose appearance or language or economic status was foreign to us - as a guest of Christ? Or even as Christ himself? What would our evangelism look like if we saw our role as that of host?** What if we understood our evangelism not only as a means to give the gift of Christ to another, but as an act of welcoming the gift of Christ we find in another? What if we heard as Christ's call to witness both Matthew 25 (The Great Judgment: "when I was hungry you gave me food...") and Matthew 28 (the Great Commission: "go therefore and make disciples...")?

(Phil Nall and Mark Price, *Hospitality Evangelism: Sharing the Bread of Life, Leader's Guide*, Atlanta: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 1999, p. 4)

**Friday: You Welcomed Us, by Bob and Debbie Gresham**  
**Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-14**

The first Sunday my husband and I attended LABC Tommy said in his sermon, "Your church is your community." Now as we look back at our time here, we realize how true that statement is for us.

As a community of God's people, the members of the church make a special effort to be friendly by being kind, compassionate and caring. The friendliness starts as you come in from the parking lot. You are met with a smile and pleasant greeting. As you make your way to your Sunday school class, you are once again met by more greeters and more smiling faces. In the Milestones Sunday School Class one of the first things that happens is a discussion about the prayer requests, the joys, and the concerns of the church and the community. The members of the class use the information from this discussion to send cards, to make phone calls, to make visits, to take food when needed and to do other acts of kindness and compassion.

As the class draws to an end, everyone agrees on a place to go for lunch. The name of the chosen place is listed on the board. Everyone is always welcome. You never hear anyone say, "You are not with us or we don't have enough room for you." What you hear is, "Who wants to go? We can get a bigger table."

As you make your way to the church service, again, a variety of people greet you. Whether it be a single person, a senior citizen or a young person, everyone is friendly. We feel so comfortable and welcome. It makes the verse in Philippians 1:3 come to mind: I thank my God every time I remember you. We thank God for LABC; our kind, compassionate, caring, friendly community.