

Making Room

By Kim Shockley

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About eight years ago I received a traffic ticket for speeding – yes, I was guilty, and I haven't had one since! The officer reminded me that if I completed an online traffic school class it would help negotiate with my insurance company. So I completed a course online before the month was out! This particular class emphasized the need to keep enough space in front of your vehicle so that you would have plenty of stopping space and time if the need arose. Making room in front of the car also allows good reaction time and a better sense of safety. I started practicing this technique. Guess what happened! Every time I got enough room in front, someone else zoomed into that space and I had to adjust all over again. To this day, I still find myself adjusting so that I have that comfort level of space in front of my car. I'm also driving a bright orange Subaru so that I am easily spotted on the road, which also provides some accountability for my lead foot!

I felt a nudge from God during this learning time with my driving. Who is responsible for making room for new people within the life of the church? Visitors and guests should not have to do this work – it is hard enough to come to a new church without having the added burden to find your own way. Pastors can certainly help this process, but they shouldn't have to carry the total responsibility to help make room for new people. The job clearly belongs to those who are already established in the church, everyone, not just the leaders.

Each one of us should be able to greet another person warmly, welcome them to a seat, ask a question or two to get to know someone new. Find out what they might be looking for within the life of the church and introduce them to another person who can help get them connected.

Making room for others also extends to our class and small group times. Being invited to attend an existing class is easy, but to a new person it is a daunting task to navigate the "insider speak" of that group of people who have been together for a long time. It is the class member's responsibility to be aware of the needs of new folks and help them by adjusting their long held practices.

We do this work of adjusting for the sake of new people so that they can find a way to Jesus. Often today, people want to belong to a group or organization first – belief in what the organization is about comes second. Adjusting their behavior to the values of the organization comes third. All of this takes time, and the organization has to be aware of the work that it takes to bring new people into the fold.

Every church I visit tells me they are friendly. But, this goes beyond friendliness, making room is about welcome. Welcome is a much deeper value. It means we want to make room for new people, we want to help you find a way to Jesus, by being Jesus with you. It means we see each person as Jesus sees them – created by God, loved unconditionally, made for a purpose to build God's Kingdom. Disciples welcome others into the Body of Christ! Disciples can change the world!