

NAMES ARE IMPORTANT

Baptist Times 19 January 2006

For me one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible is John 10.3, where we read that the Good Shepherd 'calls his own sheep by name'. Jesus is concerned doesn't need to know my reference number – he knows me by name. What a difference that thought makes to me! The Lord knows me: i.e. he values me, he loves me.

Names are important, and for that reason I believe that at church we should greet one another by name. Its not enough to say, 'Hi, how are you?' Superficiality may be sufficient in the everyday world, but not in the church. We need to be able to address one another by name.

'That's fine in a small church with a dozen members', some might say, 'but in our church with 120 members that is impossible'. I beg to disagree. I am convinced that when English people say they have a bad memory for names, by and large they are not telling the truth. What in effect they are saying is 'I can't be bothered; I am too lazy'. The proof of this is to compare English people with Americans. It is rare for an American to forget a person's name. In American culture knowing a person's name is important, and so Americans make a real effort to remember names. Its not that they are any cleverer than us – it is that in this respect they are more determined. Indeed, I once read of an American mega-church pastor who claimed to know all 16,000 of his members by name. Wow! So let me challenge those of you who say 'It's impossible for us to know everybody in our church', to get out your church handbook and begin to memorise names. Yes its difficult, especially if you belong to a multi-cultural church with people having all kinds of 'foreign' names – but it is possible.

Incidentally, the names of children are important too, for children are as much part of the church as the 'grown-ups'. Indeed, Jesus once said that to welcome a child is like welcoming him. In my experience many adults don't really believe him – for otherwise in the coffee scrum after church they would make more effort to talk to the children around them.

In our church, because we believe that names are important, many of us wear name badges. During the week, for instance, the helpers in our church café, the volunteer cleaners, everybody who in one way or another is on duty, wears a name badge. Similarly on a Sunday all the deacons, all the stewards, and even the ministers wear name badges. Does the last group surprise you? Surely everybody knows the minister? The answer is that the visitors don't normally know who the minister is – and if the minister stands on the door welcoming people to church, it is all the more important that his or her name can be known.

Names are important, for people are important!

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