



Rector's Essay

The Grace Rule of Welcome

By Jarrett Kerbel (09/06/26)

One common obstacle in growing congregations is the anxiety and awkwardness that some feel when introducing themselves to unfamiliar people. Many fear that they may insult a long time member by presuming that the person is a newcomer. Some fear an awkward encounter in general.

Here is a simple solution offered by a vestry member at St. Johns: The Grace Rule of Welcome. Under the Rule of Grace we all agree that it is perfectly wonderful, good and acceptable to introduce yourself to anyone at church at any time with the expectation that you will be received with grace and kindness. Even if the person you greet has been a member for 200 years it is ok to say, "I am not sure we have met yet, my name is Jarrett Kerbel."

A vestry member taught me this rule. She said that at a former church they had "Forgiveness Sunday," which gave everyone permission to make introductions without fear. Another vestry member suggested renaming this fine practice as "Grace." I am extending it from one Sunday a month to every Sunday.

Grace is simply offering an open heart to people we meet. Through Jesus, God has assured us that God will turn toward humanity with an open heart no matter our failures or limitations. Having received bountiful grace, we offer grace to each other by responding to anyone we meet with enthusiasm, as if we are meeting an angel sent by God.

Just this past Saturday before a very large wedding at our church, I was out and about greeting people. One of the most common questions before a wedding for visitors is, "Where is the restroom?" Now, I could respond to this question gruffly or impatiently. After all, I am a priest, blah, blah, blah. But, no, I see this interaction as an opportunity for grace! I smile, I direct the person gently and with humor, and

sometimes I show them the way. All awkwardness and embarrassment evaporates under the power of grace.

We are so blessed at St. John's that so many of our members seek out newcomers and welcome them with generous, open hearts! Keep it up in the spirit of grace!

Welcome folks and introduce yourself with a simple, "I am not sure if we have met yet, my name is Jane Doe." Before church, during the passing of the Peace, directly after the dismissal, and after church at coffee are all good times to have your head on a swivel for newcomers. In fact, you can join me out front as I welcome people on Sunday mornings. I would love to have a welcome partner out on the sidewalk!