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Give people space to decide

Avoid putting pressure on others – respect their right of conscience, and aim to ensure that all participation in the Christian faith is freely chosen by people. We want everyone to know more of Jesus, so we need to find ways of doing that which are attractive and invitational, rather than coercive. Part of that is being able to hear ourselves as others hear us!

Understand what others believe

Take time to try and understand what others believe. If you want them to understand and engage with you, then it is important to meet their objections to the faith. That means starting where they are, with the concerns that interest them, not simply what interests us. You will want to introduce them to the claims of Jesus, but that may well take time.

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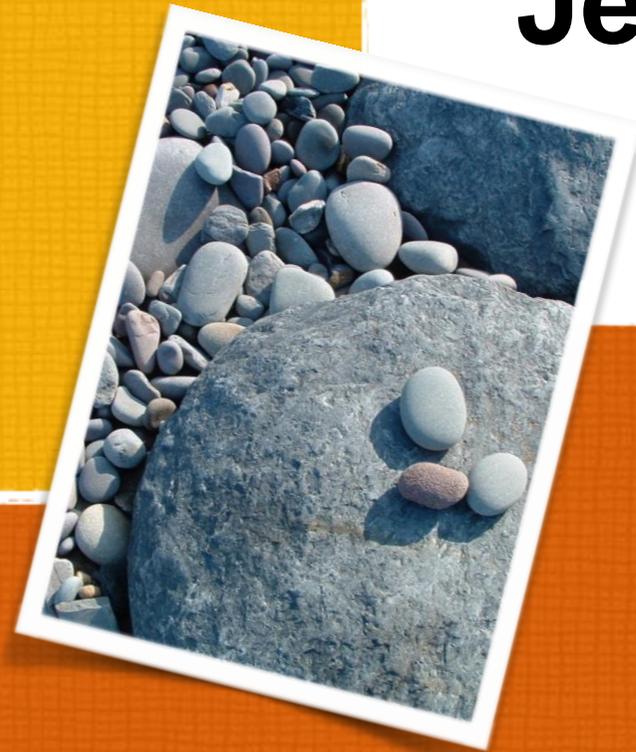
Respect other religions

Although we will want to introduce people of all faiths, and none, to Jesus, we should respect other religions. That means taking time to discover what other faiths believe and also learning something of the history of Christian engagement with them. Make sure that, if you are to impact other people's lives for Christ, you become fluent in their actual views and values and speak directly to those.

Love your enemies

Which may sound harsh, but at times Christians can be perceived as having a love that is negative towards those who have a different set of values or beliefs. But God loves everyone, so ensure that you are ready to stand up for others when they face injustice, and care for them when they are in need because they are made in God's image, not simply because you hope to change their outlook on Jesus Christ.

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Hints & Tips

Sharing Jesus

Me reach
In reach
Out reach

Sharing Jesus

Enabling everyone in Cumbria to discover more of God and God's purpose in their lives involves each one of us sharing what a relationship with Jesus means to us. The reality is that many of us don't find doing that particularly easy, not least because we don't want to be inappropriate or offend people unnecessarily. As we explore ways in which we can be most effective in talking about Jesus, sometimes it can be helpful to stand back and look at what we are doing from the perspective of someone who is not yet a Christian – asking what are the approaches that are most likely to appeal to them, and may encourage them to want to explore further. What follows are a number of suggestions, from someone who would describe themselves as an atheist, of approaches that might encourage them to explore further whether or not God exists, and is interested in them.

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Be like Jesus

Jesus spent lots of time with those who didn't follow him. If we want to reach those who are not yet Christians, we need to pursue connections outside of the church, investing time and energy in those who hold different views or live by different values.

Form genuine relationships

Connect with people out of a desire to have loving relationships with them. Evangelism, if it happens, must be an outgrowth of that. Don't treat people as projects. Treat them like your peer, and not someone to be manipulated and shaped for their own good against their knowledge. We don't know what is best for others. But God does. Our job is to sow seeds. Some will fall on rocky ground. Some on the path. Some on fertile ground that will grow. Don't worry about results. That's Jesus' job, not ours.

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Actions speak louder than words

People will figure out whether they like you or have anything to learn from you by how you behave far more than by anything you say. If you are convinced that a life in Christ is transformative and that it makes you salt and light to the world such that they envy you and want to know what you have, then just do it. Be salt and light.

Ask more questions, do less preaching

Let the other person's curiosity guide the discussion. Give them short answers that don't satisfy them, but that whet their appetite instead. If they are interested in knowing what you think, make them pry more. If they are not interested, let it go. Let them express themselves honestly, and ask them honest, open-ended questions that they could answer in any way. Then listen to their answers, responding to what they actually say.

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Let others ask for your input

Don't give advice unless it's part of your job or unless you are asked. If people want our opinion, they'll ask for it. Let them talk, and listen to them. Ask them if they want advice before giving it – and if it is good, and your life is a clear reflection on the value of your faith, then let them work it out for themselves at their own pace. If they routinely hear from you about a way of looking at the world that makes sense to them they may eventually want to learn more.

Let God decide who is a Christian

If you spend time categorizing people into two groups (Christians and not-yet Christians) you run the risk of being judgmental, and also of alienating yourself from those you want to see and discover more of God. And it could well be that those who haven't been spotted in church in a decade may have a clear understanding of the faith, and a commitment to Jesus. We tend to look on the outward appearance – it is only God who knows what is going on inside. And different Christians express their faith in different ways at different times.

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