

## **Come with Me**

It's been one year since I arrived in Belfast. In one year I've gone from feeling like a stranger in a strange land to feeling quite at home. I've mastered the aisles at the local grocery store, figured out the shortest routes around town, made a few friends and found a home congregation.

Prior to settling into a congregation I visited nearly every church in South Belfast. I experienced many types of singing, preaching and praying. In some churches I walked in, sat down and sixty minutes later walked out without anyone saying hello. Occasionally, in other churches, the person sharing a pew gave handshake and a word of welcome. On other Sunday mornings the pastor greeted me as I exited the church. And a few times someone extended an invitation and welcome: Come with me.

Come with me to the back of the church and have a cup of tea. Come with me to my home after church and share a meal with my family. Come with me to house group next week and see what you think. Come with me and play badminton with others from the church. Come with me to an open house lunch for newcomers in the church.

Come with me. These three words made a difference. While some churches seek to make newcomers feel welcome by inviting them to tea following the service or mention from the pulpit that visitors are most welcome, for me that was not quite enough. Some people might find accompaniment or a "come with me" to be overbearing or pushy, but I found it to be a sign of an authentic, genuine welcome. Not only did I feel invited to "go," I felt an invitation to join into the lively activity of the church family.

One year after I've arrived in Northern Ireland I realize I am still new, still an outsider; however, I also feel I am welcomed and invited to join into the life of the church. I hope that I will always remember what it feels like to be a stranger and to be invited to "come with me," so that I may extend the same invitation to others.

Jenna Liechty Martin.

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