

Explore:

Who Is My Neighbor?

The Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church teach that people are not all neighbors to us in equal ways. In fact, if we treat people who do many good and useful things in the same way as we treat people who do many evil and harmful things, we will unfortunately be furthering evil in the world, because we will be supporting people whose actions harm others.



The New Church tells us that we should pay attention to the character of each person we help. Although we cannot be certain whether people are good or evil—only the Lord knows that—we can reflect on their actions. If people’s actions are evil, we need to take care not to promote evil in the world by supporting them in these kinds of actions. And in supporting the goodness we see in other people, we are really supporting the Lord’s goodness, and so supporting Him. This discussion activity is designed to help students consider who their true neighbors are.

Supplies Needed

- two chairs, set up on opposite sides of a room, facing each other
- copy of *Who Is My Neighbor?* for each student

Directions

1. Read the following statement aloud a few times:
The Lord created all people equal. We should be helpful and kind to people who are in need, regardless of who they are and what they do.
2. Students who agree with the statement should move to the right side of the room. Students who disagree with the statement should move to the left side of the room. Students must take one side or another, but may switch sides at any time.
3. Each side of the room has a speaker’s chair. Only the person sitting in this chair may speak. Speakers from each side take turns explaining why they agree or disagree with the statement. As speakers make their points, other students may change sides by walking across the room if the speaker’s points persuade them.
4. Distribute *Who Is My Neighbor?* and read the teachings aloud. Ask, “Do these readings change the way you think about the original statement we discussed? How?”
5. If time allows, explore another statement, such as one of the following:
 - Giving money to a person who is begging and is obviously in need is the right thing to do.
 - Buying a sandwich for someone who is begging and is obviously hungry is a truly helpful thing to do.

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Teachings from the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church

Most people think that everyone is equally their neighbor, and that everyone who needs help should be helped. But it is the part of Christian prudence to search the quality of a person's life, and to exercise charity in accordance with this. (see *Arcana Coelestia* 6704)

People who have the good love that motivates true charity...do all things with discrimination. They do not do good things for poor people, orphans, widows, and strangers just because of their situation. They know that people who are good are neighbors more than others, and that each person is a neighbor according to what he loves, and that a person who is truly the neighbor is in love to the Lord and in charity towards his neighbor. (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2425:3)

Unless people have a correct understanding of who the neighbor is, charity will be exercised uniformly and indiscriminately, equally towards the evil as towards the good, as a result of which charity ceases to be charity. For with the benefits given to them the wicked harm the neighbor whereas the good benefit him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6703)

The neighbor is to be loved for the good that is in him...he who loves his neighbor for the good that is in him, loves the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2718)

Cut in half and give one to each student.

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