

Keeping People Who Visit

I believe it takes much more effort on the part of a church to walk someone through the door for the first time than at anytime in my ministry. I am hoping that a church is able to keep about one-third of the visitors who walk through the door. Few do better than that. Many don't do that well. A church has to plan for the arrival of new people before they get there. There are several strategies to make people feel welcome.

First, take several of the best parking spaces and mark them for visitors only. If the parking lot is crowded, attendants could help regulars and visitors to park so as to make effective use of the space and to find empty parking spaces. I believe that welcoming begins in the parking lot.

Second, have parking lot greeters. Preferably a man and a woman who enjoy meeting people. They just walk around the parking lot, greeting all arrivals. They offer a ready and friendly smile. They provide directions for visitors. This is particularly true if the door most people use is not obvious. I have visited churches. People were already there. I tried 3 or 4 doors before I found one that was not locked. An unchurched person may not try that many doors before leaving.

Third, have an attended information table. Friendship Community Church near Dover, PA has people who write everyone's first name on a mailing label. They are affixed to the clothes. Everyone is treated the same. Everyone walks around calling people by their first name even though the church is near 250 in average attendance.

Don't do things that make visitors stand out in a crowd. Only churched extroverts really like that.

Fourth, design a strategy to get the names and addresses of first time visitors. An attended guest register may work for you. You need names and addresses to do follow up ministry. I know that Willow Creek has taught anonymity for visitors. But, I firmly believe a visitor who chooses to attend a church, that is not a church of choice in the community is expecting to have some personal attention. Again, Friendship Church passes clip boards and urges everyone to sign in. Ushers move from aisle to aisle making

sure each person has the opportunity to sign in. It provides attendance and names and addresses of new people.

Fifth, divide your sanctuary into at least four segments. Recruit a person to be responsible to go up and greet every visitor in their area either before or immediately after the service. There should be no nametag indicating those folks have a job. That defeats the purpose. I don't want anyone to visit your church without at least one person greeting them in addition to those who work the doors. This can't be left to chance.

Sixth, have a nice cup made with the name of the church and at least a phone number on the cup. On a Monday evening, have a lay person deliver the nicely wrapped cup to the home of each local visitor. It is not the intent to get inside but just to leave a gift and express the appreciation of the Church for the visit along with an invitation to return.

Since we have to work really hard to get someone to visit our church, shouldn't we work smart in our efforts to get them to return.

Article written by:

James W. Moss, Sr.
Church Consultants