

Keep Those Visitors Coming Back (Part 1)

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Fact: Your church will have visitors who never come back. Some will leave after settling their mere curiosity about what you're all about. Some will leave because what you teach "just isn't for them." Some will leave because they were just passing through town on the way to their timeshare in Timbuktu. And some will leave because they do not like the whole of the gospel (just fluffy good parts).

But not everyone needs to be a statistic. How can we increase the likelihood that visitors will come back?

1. Be welcoming

You want those visitors to be there, right? Then show them! Introduce yourself. Talk to them. Have someone (or a team of people) each week prepare a small goodie basket or loaf of homemade bread to give to visitors. Let them see that you are a warm and inviting bunch of people.

Show that you are interested in them as *human beings*. Where are they from? What church have they attended in the past? Do they have kids? Where do they work? Do they have any

skills or expertise that could be utilized at your congregation?

When they leave your church building for the first time, they need to feel like they are leaving a place where they felt at home. They should feel not just *wanted*, but also *needed* as a necessary part of your church community and mission.

2. Be friendly

There is a difference between being friendly and being welcoming. When you are *welcoming*, your attention is *externally focused* - making guests feel welcome. When you are *friendly*, your attention is *internally focused* - meaning you are also giving attention to those who are already a part of your congregation. Visitors need to see what it is like to be a member at your church. They need to see that your “welcoming attitude” isn’t a façade; that you’re not all about numbers - you’re about church *family*.

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one another” (John 13:35). The world needs to see what it is missing out on by not being a member of the church of Christ. And visitors need to see what they are missing out on by not being a member of your congregation.

3. Don’t be weird

Whatever you do, don’t make them stand up. Don’t call their names. Don’t put them on the spot. Don’t make them fill out a ‘visitor card’ while you stand there with a gun and watch. Don’t force members to talk to them during some ‘meet and greet’ period.

Never, never, never, never do these things. Never.

Most people just don’t like to be in the spotlight in a strange place. Keep the first point of this article, “be welcoming,” in balance. You need to be sensitive to the fact that visitors (especially if they are introverts) are easily intimidated by awkward moments.

We’re all weird to some degree. And some are weirder than others. So protect your visitors from the weirdness.

4. Create a relaxed atmosphere

We all know how unpleasant it is to visit that one old lady who keeps her house *immaculate*. Everything is **so** clean and **so** expensive that you fear every move. If you make one wrong move, she will bark at you.

Make sure your church isn't the religious equivalent of that stiff old lady.

Now, I know there's a word game people play these days; when some say, "We should have a relaxed atmosphere at our church," they actually mean, "We should sit around in bean-bags, wear pajama pants, and drink hot-chocolate while we sing Kumbaya." In other circles, "relaxed atmosphere" means remodeling the church building to look like an abandoned warehouse, wear tight hipster jeans and Converse shoes, open a Starbucks coffee bar, and talk about how much we hate "legalism" and "proof-texting."

No, I don't mean *that* kind of relaxed atmosphere.

I simply mean to say that **our assemblies shouldn't be stale and stuffy**. In an age when expensive-looking outfits and formal presentations are perceived as *pretentious* by a growing number of people, there's no need to offend our visitors by our presentation if we don't have to. (The gospel is offensive enough as it is; why make it worse by making everyone button their top buttons?)

You can lighten things up without diminishing the seriousness of worship.

Depending on whether your congregation is located in an urban, suburban, or rural location, your dress and presentation should be appropriate to your cultural setting. While Christians shouldn't be on the 'front lines' of changing society's clothing-norms (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1-16), we shouldn't be in the very back either.

5. Explain everything

More and more visitors to your assembly are "un-churched," meaning they have a little-to-none religious background. "What are we doing during the worship service?" "What is a Bible class?" "Which class should I attend?" "Where should I go?" "Why are the men passing around dishes with crackers and grape juice?" "What am I supposed to do when they come to me?" "How did everyone but me know to stand up during this song?"

There's no need to leave visitors in the dark.

Occasionally offer explanations for what you are doing in worship. This of course isn't just for the visitor's benefit - this is good for the entire congregation. It helps avoid the rut of routine by reminding people why we do what we do.

Give every visitor has a 'welcome packet,' complete with some sort of brief, simple explanation of the church of Christ and why we do what we do.

Help visitors be where they need to be. Make sure your rooms and hallways have labeled and that a first-time visitor can easily be where he or she needs to be.

Society has conditioned people to think of Christianity as a hollow tradition or a mindless ritual. When a visitors honor us with their time and presence, we have a great opportunity to teach them what true Christianity is and why we every part of our assemblies is intentional and full of meaning.

Stay tuned for [part 2](#).

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