

# First-Time Visitors



As a pastor you may think that your church is the best place to worship in town, but if the first-time visitors don't come back a second or third time they may never know it for themselves.

All growing and healthy churches pay close attention to their church members, and also to their first-time visitors. These churches know that new people are accentual to the growth and health of their ministry.

## **1. The church has about ten minutes before most first time visitors make up their minds to come back again for another visit.**

Frequently, ahead of hearing a song or singing a hymn and hearing an inspiring sermon, a first-time visitor may have already made up their mind whether or not to return. Here are some things that will need attention for any church to be prepared for first-time visitors.

- Are the church grounds in shape? (mowed, trimmed, edged, clean buildings / grounds)
- Are there appropriate signs that tell visitors where they need to go? (Nursery, classes, bathrooms)
- Are there ushers and greeters who are ready to meet the visitors at the door? (trained, happy with church materials)

These things may seem small but they weigh big on the first-time visitor.

## **2. The church members are to be friendly to first time visitors and each other.**

I have even used the phrase "The friendly Church" but the fact is that many churches are not friendly at all. If we use that phrase or say that our church is a friendly church, then we better make sure that it is, because others will know if it is really true. Many of the unchurched people claim that church people are unfriendly, and it may be true, but hopefully not in your church. When first-time visitors walk into the church do they see people that are truly interested in them, or is there a lot of clicks gathered around each other without even noticing the new people that just came into the church.

Rick Ezell says, "The six most important minutes of a church service, in a visitor's eyes, are the three minutes before the service and the three minutes after the service, when church members introduce themselves, seeking genuinely to get to know the visitors, offer to answer any questions, introduce them to others who may have a connection, or any number of ways to demonstrate to the visitors that they as a church member care."

It would be very helpful to train your members in the art of being friendly to first-time visitor as well as to each other.

**Pro. 18:24** A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

### **3. The church is dealing with a new generation and a new cultural thinking.**

Our culture is very different from the 1950's in which they are looking for the best deal, price, "church" in town. Not that we are to cater to the whims of our generation, but we better understand how they think. Put yourself in the place of a first time visitor and see what they would see if they were to come to your church for the first time on any given Sunday. How does the church grounds look, are the ushers and greeters friendly in welcoming them, are the ministries and classes visible or is there someone being helpful in showing them where to go? Even Wal-Mart knows how to welcome and show people that they care, hopefully our churches will do at least the same.

**Ps. 35:14** "I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother"

### **4. The church is to use hospitality towards first time visitors.**

Every pastor should be welcoming and friendly, that's just showing hospitality to others. It's sad that I've seen in many churches the pastor is the most unfriendly person in the whole church, maybe he is going through some things, but he should still try to be friendly. The pastor should show a spirit of hospitality to his church family as well as the first time visitors. Just a few kind words and actions can make a real difference in the first impression upon the first time visitor to your church. This may again take some training, but it will be well worth the time and energy to teach others to show hospitality to their first time visitors. The hospitality of the pastor and the members shouldn't stop at the church service but afterwards also they should be shown that you really care for them by a follow up visit that next week. Many times my wife and I have taken first time visitors out to lunch after church and then brought them back to the church to show them around the buildings and explain our ministries. This has been very helpful to the visitors and rewarding to us with many coming back and joining our church.

**1Tim. 3:2** A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, *given to hospitality*, apt to teach; {of good...: or, modest}

**Titus 1:8** But *a lover of hospitality*, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; {men: or, things}

**1Peter 4:9** *Use hospitality* one to another without grudging.

**The church has only one opportunity to make a good first impression upon the first time visitor. What will the first time visitor be impressed with in your church this Sunday?**