

How to Welcome Church Visitors

Making guests feel welcome is an important goal for many churches who want to have a positive impact in their communities.

Remember the first time you visited a new church and how awkward you felt in not knowing anyone there? This may be one reason that some folks stop coming to church or keep shopping for one that makes them feel welcome.

If your church would like to see new members join, the pastor may want to consider adding programs like the following to make visitors feel at home:

1. Post greeters at the door. Friendly, smiling faces and outstretched hands to grasp those of guests can have a wonderful impact on first-time visitors. Greeters should be ready to answer questions about the church's doctrine, time and location of the main service, Sunday school class schedule, and child care, if provided. In addition, the church members who volunteer to welcome visitors may be asked to answer questions about the dress code, parking availability, and restroom facilities.

2. Create an attractive decor. Clean glass doors, freshly vacuumed carpet or shiny tile, and colorful photographs or pictures, as well as other foyer and sanctuary decorations will help to make people feel comfortable and secure. On the other hand, finger-printed door panels, stained carpet, and defaced wooden trim may make some people want to turn around and leave. Potted plants or artificial flowers, along with wall photos of the church staff, can lend a comfortable air to the entranceway.

3. Host a reception. Offer doughnuts and coffee before or after the service in a cozy room where longstanding members can get acquainted with new visitors. The pastor and deacons, along with their families, and the congregation at large can answer questions about church programs, make friendly conversation to put guests at ease, and provide a social opportunity that may be part of the quest for a church home. Look for common interests with which to link the newbies with current members:

"Oh, you must meet Sallie and Frank. They're both amateur photographers, too!"

This is also a good time to tell guests about church programs or services that may interest or help them.

4. Provide follow-up contact. Your church may form a committee to follow up with visitors to see if they have questions or would like additional information. Contact information can be solicited during the first visit by placing it in the backs of pews or in the offering plate that is then passed around to everyone so newbies can remove and later return the visitor's form. They will likely appreciate a friendly telephone call or email of this sort.

5. Sponsor fellowship activities. Perhaps a committee of rotating members can organize a monthly event that will allow current and prospective members the opportunity to socialize. Potluck dinners, basketball games, after-service lunches, and other activities can bring everyone together in a low-key, fun setting that will benefit all.

In addition, post visitors' names in the next week's program and consider offering name tags for new people to wear until they get to know several members. That way you can spot a new person by the name tag and be sure to offer a greeting and welcome. Everyone wants to feel valued as a part of an organization, so take a few steps like these to welcome new folks to your congregation.