



Helping Visitors find their way

Some church visitors understand traditional church subculture. They know what to expect before they walk through the door. Others have no idea what takes place during a church service. It's easy for them to feel anxious about their first visit. Here's how to give consideration to those who do not know what is going on.

Anxiety Reduction

Show people where to park and which door to enter. Place greeters at the entrance to direct people toward the auditorium, where they are handed a program that clearly outlines the order of events. Ushers guide people to open sections rather than specific seats, so they can claim their own space.

Keep anxiety to a minimum with the service itself. Be conscious of the need to explain what is going on. Keep the initial content of what you do, simple and meaningful. Only after these attempts to reduce the anxiety of visitors should you formally acknowledge them.

Minimise the cringe factor – stay away from things like signing books, having guests stand or receiving badges.. If they want to find out more about our church, give them the options of stopping by a counter in the foyer for more information; being contacted later, which they can arrange by filling in a section of the program and dropping into the offering plate; or calling the church. Don't pressure visitors any further.

Intangible Overtures

Strive to achieve two important intangibles. The first is **warmth**.

Greeters. Train greeters and ushers how to make people feel comfortable, and to be comfortable themselves.

The Pastor. Introduce yourself every time you are up front.

The building. Warm up the church through interior décor, plants, and art work. This is one area where smaller churches can be particularly effective. People also appreciate a clean, well-maintained building. Problems such as cracked paint, litter, dirt, and ugly trash cans can destroy a warm image.

Music. Church music leaders can talk too much or sometimes include long, reverential pauses for prayer and silences during transitions. But almost any length of silence can be uncomfortable for visitors, unless connected well with reflection.

Prayer. When congregational prayers are simple, basic, and conversational, God may not seem so foreign to visitors.

A second intangible is electricity created by the power of anticipation. Keep three things in mind:

Creativity. If the order of events is the same each week, build significant creativity of content. We want people to walk into our church with a sense of anticipation, wondering what's going to enable them to engage this week.

First impressions. The first 15 minutes of a service are extremely important. .

Scope. Electricity is not the result of trying to do something more and bigger each week. A simple song or image of story will often be more effective than a full up-front performance.

—DON COUSINS