



What New Visitors See

Put yourself in the shoes of the first-time visitor to your church.

Although there are many complex factors that affect people, certain issues of friendliness, style, facilities and comfort directly impact their decision to attend and join a church. The following responses were generated from a survey of people not yet connected with a church.

Friendliness

Friendliness of the people is a major attraction. Make sure a friendly greeting is genuine—people can detect manufactured friendliness, which is almost as bad as being unfriendly. Friendliness of members tends to be correlated to a church's evangelistic effectiveness. The pastor's modeling of friendliness is critical. A relationship is also apparent between the friendliness of a church and the members' willingness to accept change.

Nice Facilities and Adequate Space

Every six months, have someone do a thorough examination of the church grounds and buildings. Give them a notebook with a page for every room, hallway, foyer, and area of the grounds. Ask them to proceed from area to area taking notes, and then report their findings. You may be surprised what they find. Though many visitors may return even with negative impressions, it is obvious that these issues are vitally important to them.

The Creche/Preschool/Children's Issue

The issue that generated the most intense comments was the cleanliness, neatness, and safety of creche, preschool, and children's areas. While parents with young children were among the most vociferous about quality care for children at church, they were not alone. Similar concerns are held by parents with older children, adult children, and no children. It seems that many people measure the quality of a church by the quality of childcare.

People expressed repeatedly how difficult it was for them to visit a church. And those who had young children were especially sensitive to their kids' needs. They raised the issues of safety, easy accessibility to their children, the ability to be notified if needed, concern and attitude of adult workers, and cleanliness.

Also cited by several people was how up-to-date the children's area was. Old furniture, broken toys, worn carpet, and 1980s baby beds are a sure sign of neglect.

Organization or Chaos

Several people said one of their first impressions was the organization of the church, particularly the organization and flow of the worship service. These former seekers remarked that such attention to detail was an indication that the church was serious about its mission. The worship service is where the most people gather at one time. If that isn't planned well, many visitors believe the church members do most everything else poorly.

Greeters and Welcomers

Greeter ministries in particular can be implemented with relative ease. In nearly one-third of the interviews, people shared positive first impressions when the church had a good greeter ministry and a welcome center. A helpful hand, a friendly smile, and good directions can make a real difference.

—THOM RAINER, adapted from "Impressed by First Impressions Part 3: What the Unchurched See"; www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/Article.html/id/20566. Used by permission