

5 Creative Ideas for Welcoming New Guests

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My friend Marjorie moved to my town to be closer to her family. She is a people person. When she visited my church for the first time, even if every other thing had been just right, she might have gone to another church if people had not been friendly!

Steve thought he might visit a church in his neighborhood, but it was really hard to make himself go. He didn't know much about Jesus. But a friend of his said he liked the men's Bible study, and his friend didn't know much

more than Steve did, so he thought he might go and look it over. It took three weeks for him to get up the courage to walk into a church alone.

Betty is a single mom with three children in elementary school. More than anything, she wants Christian friends and Biblical discipleship for herself and her young family.

People like these are in your community and may be visiting your church on any given Sunday. But remember, although there are visitors, there is no "typical" visitor. Here are some tips to help you engage all guests more effectively.

Idea #1: Provide Welcome Centers

Put a Welcome Center at every entrance to the church that a visitor might use on a Sunday. Put joyful individuals (not scary, over-the-top people-grabbers) at those centers to welcome people. At the centers, provide the church newsletter, a CD or DVD of a previous sermon, a list of some of the church projects and a leaflet with a short description of all the Sunday school classes and planned short-term mission trips. If you have youth and other specialty groups, make a leaflet for each one, describing what they do and when and where they meet. An investment in this center will pay off.

Idea #2: Offer maps of your campus and directions.

Guests can't go to places they can't find. Make a really colorful map of your campus, even if it is tiny. If you are in a neighborhood with lots of children, make a color, easy-to-read map, and on the reverse, put the map outline only so the younger kids can color it



and print the locations on it during church.

Put up directional signs, not just ads for what's going on at church. Use whatever languages are appropriate for your neighborhood.

Idea #3: Update your website.

Declutter it and get all the ancient stuff out of there. Get six new people to tell you what's wrong with it and why they still can't find information on the current evening or home Bible studies. What did they try to find that they would never, ever find?

Idea #4: Prepare regular attendees to respond well to guests.

If there's no joy in our churches, don't you think we should get to work on that before we invite anyone to come?

Stand up in the front and watch your congregation for a couple of Sundays. Do they sing? Well, get them to sing! Do they smile? Do they actually talk with one another before the service starts? Do they greet new people? When they greet new people, do they tell them anything valuable? For example, do they say, "You'll love our church. We take care of each other here." Or do they say, "Some of the best friends I've ever had in my life I made in this great, friendly church." If they don't, suggest that they start saying good things when they meet someone they don't know.

Do they ask any questions about people they don't know? Do they say something like, "I've missed meeting you before. My name is Paul Smith and this is my wife, Betty. We've been in the area for about five years. How about you?" Believe us: Some people do not talk to other people. Encourage this conversation, and tell people to do this before the service starts.

Idea #5: Put lots of ways to connect into your church.

If you have a website, make that website work for you. Have a button that says, "Just Checking Us Out?" and another that says, "Ready to Get Connected?" Behind "Just Checking," put all the basic, simple information about the church and how to find things, park, get to meetings, services they can get from the office and on the Web, and hours for all the activities. Put your beliefs there and a simple presentation of the Gospel (you can use EvanTell's video from YouTube). Behind "Ready," put all the service projects, all the small group contacts, the Sunday school and evening/morning Bible classes, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, GriefShare, and any other help groups you have with contact people and emails and phone numbers.

The BEST—Idea #6: Have some FUN with these new folks! God sent them to you for a really good reason!

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