

HOW CAN WE BECOME A FRIENDLY CHURCH?

I. PREPARING THE PLACE AND PEOPLE FOR OUR GUEST

The atmosphere of a church is much like that of a home. There is a huge difference between living in a house and living in a home. The same is true of our places of worship.

What is the difference between a house and a home? Atmosphere! We want our home to have a sense of warmth as we welcome. We want our home to be entertaining for our guest. So how do we make our home or place of worship appealing and have the welcoming atmosphere? This doesn't just happen! We must make the intentional effort to set this atmosphere before our guest arrive.

We have heard "*if you fail to plan, then you have planned to fail.*" That is true for how members of a church greet the guest God sends our way. Making these valued guests feel welcome doesn't just happen. It doesn't happen by accident.

Dr> Ken Hemphill says that there are *three* steps in making our guest feel welcome and valued. He describes these steps as:

- 1). Preparing for our guest
- 2). Welcoming our guest
- 3). Follow up with our guest

For this to happen we need to change our way of thinking. Especially about those who join us for Bible Study and worship. How we see these individual sets the atmosphere for how others see our church. The new mind-set is, "to treat every guest as a gift from God!" When someone goes above and beyond and gives you a gift how do you respond? You express your gratitude. You hold and handle the gift close and with great care because you love the gift and especially the giver.

Likewise, we should show how grateful we are for every guest and greet them with great care and compassion. Keep in mind that each guest is seeking a place of worship and study where they will fit in.

I like the idea Dr. Hemphill gives us (p 24 V.E.C.R.O. Book) when he writes, "People come to church looking for a "FRIEND" not a friendly church. Many churches boast that they are a friendly church. That they are friendly to each other would be a better way of putting it.

To ensure our guest feel wanted and welcomed there needs to be a brief conversation with them to learn as much about them as their needs as possible. This is to be done from a compassionate heart and not an investigation attitude. Getting to know guest breaks down the barriers and bridges our lives together.

So how can we better prepare our church for our guest God gives us?

FIRST – Looking at the parking lot and the building from the way first-time guest who are totally unfamiliar with the concept of church sees it.

Things to consider is the parking lot, the building entrances, a welcoming center designed with a guest in mind.

Is the property and building clean and inviting to those who are seeking a place to study the Word of God and to worship our LORD?

SECOND – Remove the “visitor” signs and replace them with “**GUEST**” parking and Preschool Parent Parking.

These parking spaces should be the closest to the entrance for obvious reasons.

THIRD – God has gifted some of His saints with the spiritual gift of hospitality. Those possessing this gift are who should serve the LORD as greeters.

These individuals find it natural to speak and assist the guest God sends their way.

The first-person guest should come in contact with is the greeter.

This greeting should happen in the parking lot and at the entrance of the building.

FOURTH – Greeters should be well educated on class areas, Pre-school and Children areas, rest room facilities and the way to the sanctuary for worship.

They should answer the questions the guest might have concerning the campus and classes that are offered.

Don't point them in a direction but walk with them and talk with them as you make your way in the building.

FIFTH – Your welcome area should be simple yet informing. This area should be marked clearly this is the appropriate time and place to register the children and ensure the security and safe environment for the parents.

After registering, the greeter will personally escort the family to the children's area introducing the children and parents to the workers who will be guiding their children.

After introductions and making sure the parent are comfortable then escort the parents to their class and introduce them to class greeters. Before you leave them ask if they have any questions.

Do not point them down the hall. Go with them and visit with them as you go.

SIXTH – The building needs to be clearly marked with guest-friendly signs that will help them know where to go.

Guest-friendly sign ages should be from the standpoint of the guest.

Sanctuary should be worship center
T E L Class means nothing to the guest looking for their class.

Naming classrooms presents a turf issue. Why not use numbers like 202.

Our median adult co-ed class meets in room 116.

The sign should read Rm 206 Median Adult Co-ed.

SEVENTH – Remember guest come seeking a friend not just a friendly people.

Bible Study lessons and sermons should be guest friendly.
Avoid using church words.

Here are a few ways you can develop a friend out of your guest.

Look for someone you don't know, Introduce yourself to the guest.
Ask how you might be able to help, invite them to sit with you or you move to sit with them.

Dr. Hemphill (p26) "The more prepared you are to receive guests, the more guest you will receive."

Expecting God to bless you with His guest must become the very nature of the church!

II. GREETING OUR GUEST

After you have prepared the place and people, then the second step becomes the focus.

Actually, greeting the guest.

Research has shown that guest form an opinion about the church within the first 15 minutes of coming on the campus.

You never get a second chance to make first impressions.
First impressions should be the first priority.

The people in place as greeters will represent Christ Jesus and the congregation.

Choose these individuals carefully. Select people to serve as greeters who have the spiritual gift of hospitality – why – because they like people and it will show.

Here are **TEN TRAINING STEPS** in developing greeters within the congregation.

FIRST – Greeters should be faithful.

Greeters should be at their assigned locations at least 15-20 minutes before class or worship begins.

SECOND – Greeters should have Identity.

A name badge should be worn at all times during the times they are serving at their assigned locations.

THIRD – Prepare the materials needed.

Greeters should immediately verify they have all the materials needed and are ready and available.

Greeters should review all information about the days activities so they can answer questions that may be presented to them.

A greeter will have the responsibility to escort guest to appropriate locations.

Therefore, a secondary person should be available to stand in for the greeter assigned to the location.

Greeters are to be the point person to welcoming everyone to Bible Study and Worship.

FOURTH – Greeters are to communicate a warm and caring attitude.

Here is a standard greeting: “Greeter opens the door and says good morning, we are so glad you are joining us today.”

Call the person by name as often as possible. Repetition is one of the best and easiest ways to remember the guest name.

Greet everyone the same way.

If you are not sure if they are a member or a guest, use the following introduction to help you as a greeter to get to know them.

Have I had the pleasure of meeting you? My name is 'Jim'”

Individuals will readily respond with their name.

FIFTH – Team concept is better

As stated earlier, it is best to have two greeters assigned to a location. It is best if it is a husband and wife team.

It is good to select individual who truly represent the ministry of the church.

As mentioned previously, a husband-wife team is a great way to introduce people to the church. Other ways are youth and adults; children with their parents; different ethnic backgrounds working together is a great representation for the guest God sends our way.

SIXTH – Church should be a safe place where everyone can relax and feel at home.

Shake their hands, make eye contact, listen to their words; speak words of encouragement and avoid lighthearted remarks or joking around. Remember there will be others around you as well and we should not be offensive in our words or actions.

SEVENTH – Those greeting individuals as they come are representing the church to everyone who comes.

As stated previously, a person should be prepared to answer questions, give directions, and escort guest to their proper locations.

When a church has a well established “Welcome Center” introduce them to those at the center and return to your assigned location.

EIGHTH – Collect appropriate information from our guest.

Whether it be at the Welcome Center or Bible Study classroom, there should be someone there to assist guest in completing their registration forms.

NOTE – Some may excuse themselves from this manner of welcoming individuals by saying “we are not that big of a congregation.” But how we treat our guest and represent ourselves is the same for any church body.

NINETH – Churches want to attract young families with young children ... because “they are our future.”

Parents of Pre-schoolers and preteens are going to be in the “evaluation mode” when they drive on to the campus.

Whether you greet them at the door or escort these guests to the Welcome Center take the entire family to the pre-school and children’s departments.

This allows the parents to become familiar with the building and be aware where their children are during Bible Study classes and Worship.

Parents are paying attention to the safe environment, the secure area of the preschool department and the cleanliness of the room, equipment, and the workers where their children will be spending the next two hours separated from them.

NOTE – Churches used different ways to secure the safety of the children. Some have elaborate computer registration centers that print out the child’s information and name tag. Some use the pager system or the lighted number in the Worship center to alert parents to come to the children’s department. Some will have a security person stationed at the entrance to make sure only authorized individuals can get to the children’s area.

TENTH – In order to attract guest, the church must change their mindset.

To welcome the guest that God brings each week, every member must approach others as greeters.

NOTE – Every member is a missionary and their mission field is on the church campus.

It is wrong to only rely on the greeters to handle all the needs

An example is when a greeter needs to escort a guest to the welcome center or classroom, a member should step up and assist during the time they are away from their assigned location.

As God sends guest to His church, He expects them to be treated just like He would be treated.

Hebrews 12:2, ***Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guest without knowing it.***

The membership must be intentional in their "Welcoming Ministry."

This means that every member gets out of their comfort zone and intentionally seek out the guest to speak words of appreciation and encouragement to them.

Dr. Hemphill reminds us (p28) *Your smile, handshake, hospitality, and pleasant conversation will make a huge impact on our guest and fellow members.*

Each church must determine what works best for them. A "take a moment and shake a hand next to you" greeting one another lacks any serious care or compassion.

By not taking seriously the way a church welcomes other is one of the major reasons many guests approached their visit as a "one and done mentality."

A church can only grow when they have returning guest!

WHY HAVE A GUEST REGISTER?

The reason for obtaining guest information is not to grow the church.

It is to meet the ministry needs of the guest and members alike.

So how do we obtain this information without prying?

- 1). Guest are handed a card when they enter.
- 2). Guest information from on the printed bulletin to be torn off, completed and placed in the offering plate when passed by.

- 3). Connection card in the chair in front of you where one side asked for personal information and on the other side is "How can we pray for you... area?"
- 4). Some churches have a guest reception room where they meet with the pastor and staff after the service to obtain more information about the ministries of the church and the needs the guest might have.

The person greeting others should make each person, guest or member, feel both welcome and comfortable.

This person sets the tone for the entire experience.

Many churches provide a gift to the first-time guest.

The guest receives this gift bag after the worship service is completed.

What to include in this gift bag is important?

The contents should be meaningful and personal.

One of the items is usually a personalized pen.

NOTE – Don't go down to the "Dollar Store" and buy a pack of 20 pens for a buck and put one of them in the bag. (Don't laugh it does happen)

Provide a personalized pen with church name, email address, and telephone contact number.

A CD of the Sermon Series.

A Bio of the pastor and staff.

A Christian book.

A home-made batch of fresh baked cookies.

III. FOLLOWING UP WITH OUR GUEST

The third major problem many dying churches experience is poor follow-up if there is any at all.

Good follow-up communicates a simple "thank you for coming and we would love to have you again" message.

Poor follow-up happens on delayed timing for many congregations.
For Follow-up to be effective it MUST be done immediately.

The goal is to turn first time guest into regular attenders.

NOTE – Statistics prove that first time guest become a regular attender nearly doubles with each follow-up visit.

In order to ensure great follow-up, the church makes it their goal to make seven specific contacts within seven days.

Each church must design their own follow-up ministry.

FIRST - The first key to great follow-up is to obtain adequate information from the guest that allows calls, cards, email contacts, and personal visits.

If email address is available, send an immediately email expressing again how thankful you are that they joined us in Bible Study and/or Worship. Encourage them to share with you their questions and also encourage them to come again next week.

NOTE – Nelson Searcy (p31) suggest using a simple three or four question evaluation they can return by email.

Here are the simple questions:

How did you hear about our church?

Did you find adequate guest parking?

Were you made to feel welcome and part of our church family?

Did you enjoy our time of study and worship together?

SECOND – The second key is, if you have a **PHYSICAL ADDRESS**, have someone to drop by after service to express gratitude personally.

This person does not enter the home. Sometimes this is where the warm cookies are handed out.

This person can also deliver an information packet that explains who we are, our mission and the strategy for reaching our community with the message of Christ Jesus.

When a **TELEPHONE NUMBER** is provided, someone should follow-up with a personal call within **3** hours after that service.

The best person to make this call is the pastor or staff member. This could also be a Bible Study leader as well.

This call is the ideal time to set up a personal visit or a lunch appointment to get to know them better. It should be done at the guest convenience.

In today's culture, drop-in visits are not the most popular or productive way to make a visit.

If the guest only attended worship, then someone from their appropriate age group Bible Study class make the call and gives them a personal invitation to join them in Bible Study next week as their guest. You can meet them at the Welcome Center and help them get their family situated on the way to class.

If the guest attend both Bible Study class and Worship, the Bible Study leaders should make the personal call.

Also, the children and/or youth leaders should make their calls expressing gratitude to the parents for trusting them with the care of their family.

If parents give permission, the children's leaders should speak with those attending if possible and confirm the appreciation of the children's participation in class.

A **PERSONALIZE LETTER** should be sent on Monday to every guest attending the previous LORD's day.

Do not use the generic form letter. The letter should be personal to the family.

The persons making the in-home visit should be very comfortable making a Gospel presentation.

Keep in mind that God sends guest to our church who are seeking a relationship with Christ Jesus for the first time or to rekindle that relationship with Christ Jesus.

Our guest has taken the initiative and opened the door,
they are searching for a friend not a friendly church.

The **PRIMARY GOAL** is to get to know each of our guest on a more personal basis.

In doing so, we will be made aware of what ministry needs the family will have.

A system must be designed and in place for keeping track of our guest.

Bad follow-up has cracks where God's guest will fall through.

The best tracking process is done through the Bible Study Class ministry.

NOTE – For additional information or clarification refer to chapter two of Dr. Ken Hemphill's book V.E.L.C.R.O.