

Step Four: Ask for Some Sort of Commitment

After guests have visited a fourth time, seek at least a modest commitment from them. Ask to include them in the church directory, invite them to a Christianity Explored class, encourage them to join a small group, or get them into an orientation class for prospective members. Help them make a commitment to at least take the next step in their relationship with the church and guide them toward taking the next step of commitment to the Lord.

These four steps are not a guaranteed plan because we cannot control what people will do. Work at what you can control, such as the way your church practices hospitality toward new people, and pray for the things that are beyond your control.

Romans 12:13 instructs us to practice hospitality. The Biblical sense of hospitality is love toward strangers. That would include guests to your church. This is a leadership issue because 1 Timothy 3:2 says that being hospitable is a qualification for being an elder and leader in the church. Part of being hospitable as a church is training people to talk with guests on Sunday morning.

Evaluate your results over the past year:

- How many first time guests have visited your church over the past 12 months?
- How many of them came back at least a second time? Divide this number by the number in the previous question to get the percentage that came back for a second visit.
- How many of them have become either regular attenders or members?
- Again, figure the percentage. What does this tell you?



OUTREACH NORTH AMERICA

For further help in this area, please see:

McIntosh, Gary L. *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.

Many of the ideas for this brochure are from McIntosh.



Helping Guests Connect with Your Church

How well have you welcomed new people into your church this past year, and how you can improve in the coming year?

God works in the lives of people especially through the Word, sacraments, and prayer. We need to effectively follow-up with first time guests so that they will attend regularly and experience the grace of God through the ministry of the Word, sacraments, and prayer.

Effective churches in North America keep at least 16% of first time guests and 85% of second time guests. A crucial goal is to get first time guests to return for a second visit, and then continue to **focus on building relationships**.

In following up with guests, you want to develop a system to ensure that they receive a:

- Friendly contact
- Personal contact
- Prompt contact
- Nonthreatening contact
- Continual contact.

An Example of a Four Step System to Help you Retain Guests

Step One: Acknowledge Their Visit

Someone from your church should call first time guests within 24 - 48 hours of their visit to your church. This shows that you care about them. Be sure to thank them for coming and invite them back!

The phone call does not have to be from the pastor. Follow up the phone call with a personal letter or email. This letter thanks the guest for attending, outlines the times of services, offers general help, and is signed by the pastor.

If possible, try to find out what led the person to visit your church. Asking for their opinion about their experience as a guest is a good way to show that you are interested in them. You can also learn about how people are being drawn to your church. Ask open ended questions and avoid coming across as pushy.

Remember that a primary goal is to see the first time guest return for a second visit.

Step Two: Enhance Your Relationship with the Guest

If guests return for a second visit, they are showing real interest in your church and are certainly worthy of your attention. Send them a card or email. Let them know that you are glad they came to your church and that your church has something to offer.

Arrange a second phone call or personal visit from someone in the church who has something in common with them, someone who comes from the same place, someone who works in the same field, or someone who has the same interests.

You may want to assign a matchmaker in your guest follow-up system, a person who helps guests build personal relationships with people in the church. This person will try to find out as much as possible about guests' interests and needs, and then introduce them to people in the church that have something in common with them.

Delivering cookies or homemade bread is another special touch to set your church apart. Personal attention like this may increase the likelihood that your guests will return.

Step Three: Invite Them to Dessert

Once guests have visited your church three times invite them (and other guests) for dessert either at the church or in a home. This is an opportunity for them to meet the pastor personally, along with other church leaders and people who are interested in guest follow-up.

Let them know that this will be a casual event and a good time for questions and answers. During the dessert, invite them to a class or small group designed to incorporate guests into your church.



If a guest returns for a third visit, it is safe to assume that they want to learn more about the church. Provide literature that will explain more about your ministry. Mail or hand deliver this more detailed information about the church after the third visit.