Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Four Principles for Visitor Follow-up

Here are four simple, but very important, principles that will help you increase the number of visitors who eventually become members of your church. The more of these principles you apply, the more visitors will stay.

Time Principle: Contact visitors within 48 hours of their visit to your church.

The first two days are the best time to contact visitors. The longer you wait beyond that time, the fewer number of visitors will return the following week. Your follow-up contact should be via telephone. The caller should introduce him/herself, thank the person for attending, and answer any questions they may have about the church. The call should conclude with the member sharing some particularly outstanding aspect of the church's ministry.

Purpose Principle: The goal of the follow-up contact is to see newcomers return.

Research tells us the likelihood of a visitor becoming a regular attender doubles every time the visitor returns. A person who attends your service two times over several months is **twice** as likely to become a regular attender as a person who visits only once. A person who attends three times is more likely to become active than even a second-time visitors. The caller should invite the visitor to return ... and arrange a time and place to meet at church.

Personnel Principle: Laity should make the follow-up contact.

Visitors' return rate to your church **doubles** when a layperson makes the follow-up contact (rather than a pastor/staff person). That's the positive way to phrase it. An equally true statement, though somewhat more humbling for clergy, is that when the pastor makes the call, the return rate drops by half! Why? When newcomers are contacted by a church staffperson they know he/she is being paid, and it is part of their job. But when a visitor is contacted by a layperson, the conversation is processed as considerably more believable.

Entry Path Principle: Create opportunities for newcomers to get involved.

Growing churches provide ways for outsiders to become insiders. This happens when newcomers become comfortably involved in church-sponsored activities and start building relationships with other members. These are called entry paths. An entry path is a small group, a special class or an ongoing activity in which newcomers become participants, not just observers. Research indicates 75% - 90% of today's church members joined because of a friend or relative they already know in that church.

—Dr. Charles Arn
President of Church Growth, Inc.

"The more friends newcomers make in your church, the more comfortable they will be in the church, and the more likely they will want to stay."
—Dr. Charles Arn
Church Growth, Inc.

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Visitors fear unannounced visits

Practice the principle of disclosure with your guests.

How Do You Get Visitor's Names and Addresses?

Most churches average between fifteen and thirty-five percent of their first-time visitors voluntarily identifying themselves and giving out their name and address. So, while any church will benefit from a good visitor follow-up system, it is hard to put one in place if you cannot get in touch with them

Here is a suggested monologue for the pastor or worship leader to give in your service as you welcome newcomers:

Good morning, my name is pastor ... On behalf of the family here at ... I would like to welcome you this morning. If you're a visitor with us today, we want you to know that you are our guest and that it's our privilege to have you here. And we want you to know that you're welcome to come back.

If you're here for the first time, we know that you probably have more questions than answers. To help answer some of your questions, and tell you a little about how glad we are that you're here with us, we've prepared a special guest packet of information just for you.

If you'll identify yourself to the closest host or hostess, we would like to give you this packet. Inside this visitor packet you'll find a brochure that tells you a little about our church and a welcome letter from me telling you what we're about and how glad we are that you are with us.

You'll also find a guest registration card and a pencil. But before I ask you to fill that out, I just want to give you the assurance that no one from this church will show up on your doorstep unannounced.

What we would like to do is put you on our mailing list so that you can get further information about our church. And a friendly lay person from our church will be giving you a call in the next day or so to answer any questions and see if there is any way we can be of further assistance to you.

The number one fear unchurched people have in filling out a registration card is that they are going to get an unannounced visit. Practice the principle of disclosure with your guests, being forthright about what will be done with the information. And then do what you say. You will find that guests are far more willing to share their life with you.

—Dr. Charles Arn is this month's guest writer.

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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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