

7 Ways to Reach More People

FROM GUEST TO ENGAGED



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Church attendance is on the decline. In 2000, 58% of adults had attended church in the last month. In 2015, only 46% of adults had attended church in the last month - a change of 12% in just 15 years!¹ Why spend so much time talking about numbers? Jesus left a clear command. Some of His last words were “Go and make disciples.” - Matthew 28. To understand the impact on your community, you’ll want to understand the numbers that measure success and engagement. The same process won’t work for every church, but each church can take best practices and implement them in ways that fit their context. There are several necessary stages to attract visitors, connect, disciple, and engage them into your church community. Here are 7 areas to give attention as you make and grow disciples.

1. Your Website is Now Your Front Door

Research shows that the average church has a 15% attrition rate - meaning, 15% of your current attendance will move away, leave your church, or pass away. Even with the best processes, most churches are able to get 20% of their first-time visitors plugged into their church.² What does that mean for you? It means that you need the same number of first-time visitors to come to your church as your current attendance....just to maintain your current numbers.

Your website is your new front door. Over 90% of people visit your website before visiting your church in person. It’s important that your website is easy to understand and provides easy-to-find information for your guests and visitors. Be sure to include these items CLEARLY on your homepage:

- 1. Services Times** - Include whether you provide children’s ministry or nursery at each service.
- 2. Location** - Include the address at minimum or link to Google maps.
- 3. What to Expect** - Explain how long your service is, what people wear, when the children’s services available, and take an opportunity to share your mission & vision. If you want to get into details of your theological beliefs, there can be another page devoted to that - it doesn’t need to be on the homepage.
- 4. Information on Kids' ministry** - Do you have the ability to check-in online, do you

provide safe areas for their kids to learn, how do you break up your kids classes, and where do families need to go once they arrive at your building?

5. Contact Information - Phone number and a monitored email is sufficient

6. Include the “why” - Make the vision of your Church and culture easily viewable.

Including these six important areas of information will help people be more confident in their decision to check out your church. Be sure you do NOT make online giving a focal point - that’s for your internal people, right?

75% of searches begin on Google.³ Optimizing your church website so it will appear in Google searches is arguably as important as social media. And keeping the Church contact information up to date is necessary. Anytime you change your service times, email addresses, or phone numbers, be sure to change them in Google, too!

PRO TIP: *Make sure your homepage has your church name in multiple places. This will help it rank higher in Google search results, and be careful you don’t write your Church name in multiple places on other pages. Think of it like a classroom of 20 kids. If one kid is named Annie, she’ll respond when you call on her. If all the kids are named Annie, it’s going to be chaos. This is why it’s good to focus on the main page you want to rank higher on Google.*

2. Use Social Media

Instead of expecting people to come to your church, you need to go to them, and social media is one of the ways you can reach them. Social media is the place where your community already is. Studies show that 7 out of 10 American adults are on Facebook and they spend an average of 6 hours per week on social media.⁴

Be careful about ONLY sharing your weekend services and event information. Your strategy should encompass your church mission and showcase you living that mission outside of your Sunday services and events. Tell a story of loving God and loving people. Share encouraging Scripture, engage followers in dialogue, and share the impact of mission trips, service projects in your community, or events to support your community (celebrate your

city). Create a team of staff and volunteers to help with social media. Often times, social media is an afterthought for busy staff members. How different could your social media efforts be if you had a team of people working together to improve communication and share ideas? Don't take it on alone!

3. 7 minutes

Many people that study church guest statistics have been saying for years that first-time visitors decide whether they want to return within 7-10 minutes of driving into your parking lot. It's important to show that you are prepared and ready for all of your guests, first-time or regular. Enter: [The Welcome Team](#). Church hospitality is an art; it's a challenge to greet people the way they want to be greeted. You can under-greet some and over-greet others. But there are several key places to place volunteers in order to make that first impression and create "wow" experiences for your guests and some general principles to follow, as well.

Parking Lot - The parking lot team is an extension of the door greeters. They are the first people your guests will encounter. They make parking as smooth as possible and provide visitor parking if needed. The parking lot team can offer assistance with carrying items, small children, or providing an umbrella. Extend your greeters throughout the parking lot, especially if you have a large one. Create fun, professional signs to welcome your guests with a special touch!

Greeters/Door - Have greeters at your entrance doors. They will hold doors, assist people if needed, and welcome everyone with a smile, handshake, or fist bump. If they recognize the dazed and confused look of a first-time guest, they can approach to provide assistance. A good rule of thumb is to never point people where they should go, but walk them there instead.

The key to a successful welcome team is providing next steps **when your guests are ready**. When it comes to greeters, it's important to recognize there will be extroverts and introverts coming to your church. Half of them want to have personal interactions with everyone. The

other half will be okay sliding in and not talking to anyone. Recognizing the difference is crucial to making all of your guests feel *welcomed*, but not *overwhelmed*. A handshake or conversation is great for some, but a smile can be a blessing to others.

Directional Signage - This is an important area to address both outside and inside. Do your guests know where to park, where to check-in their kids, or where the bathroom and the worship center are located? You don't have to visit somewhere very many times to feel comfortable and know these basic items, but for a guest, everything is unfamiliar. You'll want to force yourself to imagine you don't know anything about your building. Maybe even ask a friend to visit from another church and let them "test" whether your signs give great direction. Your signs can easily be tied into your general aesthetic of the church, but you'll want them to be recognizable and clear.

Children's Check-in - Children's check-in is one of the most important areas in the entire church. It ensures the kids in your church are safe! Many people will decide whether their kids attend a children's ministry (aka also whether they will return) solely on the safety and quality of children's ministry. If your volunteers are late or seem unorganized, people will wonder whether you can really take care of their kids.

Be sure you have an extra line for first-time guests. You know the drill. Everyone arrives within the same 10-minutes to check their kids in before service. Typically, you need to gather more information from your first-time visitors, so let them skip the line. This will give you an opportunity for more individual interaction with your visitors (remember to walk them to class and give them specific "pick-up" directions). It will also allow your regular attenders' line to continue moving. Have plenty of volunteers for this process! Think through anything you can to make the process go quicker - think about the last time you went through Chick-fil-a's drive-thru. You don't even have to wait to get to the microphone to order! They have staff members standing outside to take your order! Whether I have to wait as long or not, they've communicated that they planned, expected me, and have given me a pleasant experience. Have designated volunteers that are just meant to roam within the lines and answer questions and direct people who might be lost!

Here are more great suggestions for first impressions.

4. In service

Have you ever been to a church that asked visitors to raise their hands!? For some of us, that sounds miserable. Fortunately in most churches, that trend has run its course. There are plenty of ways to recognize first-time visitors without obviously pointing them out. Here are five ways you can make a big impact on your visitors.

Introduce yourself - Everyone that is communicating from stage should introduce themselves. Maybe quickly mention their role, or more importantly a short reason why they are on stage.

Don't use inside language or names - Use language that you would use in everyday conversations. Talk like you would talk if you were hanging out with your friends (do you “fellowship” or do you “hang out” with friends)? Be aware of “church” words that you might have heard growing up, but aren't words we use this century. If someone didn't grow up in the church, they might not understand what the “blood of the lamb” means or what “redemption” means.

If your host mentions an inside joke or someone in the congregation by name from stage, it might be funny to them or maybe even half of your congregation. But you're assuming that everyone knows the inside joke. Instead, you are reminding the rest of congregation that they aren't connected. A good rule of thumb is to include names when it applies to the entire crowd (e.g., see Sally at the welcome center to sign-up for groups).

Explain your processes - This doesn't have to be a long explanation and can be done smoothly and naturally. Whether it's simple prompts to sit or stand at certain times, or a little longer explanation at communion or offering, be sure you are explaining it every week. Explain quickly who takes communion (all believers or just members of your church). Do you get up to take communion or do people come forward during communion to pray? Do your guests need to take the cup and return immediately or hold it and dispose of the cup? Do you pass a basket for offering or have online giving? Remember, even experiencing your service one time, you would pick up on these things. But a new guest has either never experienced a church service or has experienced many, neither of which helps them understand your service.

Announce a time to capture info (if you do that) - we will talk later about follow-up that happens after Sunday morning. But this is difficult without capturing information, and there are varying opinions of how to capture that information. Your church will have to figure out what works for your church. Whatever you decide, make sure to do it every week. If you have guests fill out a connection card, you might consider having everyone fill out a card so guests don't feel alone! Announce and request the information in a timely manner. Give them time to fill it out, but not too much time! No more announcing your card at the beginning of the service and "after the service please see us in the hall"...people will forget unless you remind them again. You can explore digital options, too! Insert a QR code in your bulletin that directs to an online form or host a form on a landing page with a memorable URL (e.g., gracechurch.org/welcome).

Every Sunday is someone's first Sunday - This is an important thing to remember. Giving the same instructions every week, seems monotonous. Introducing yourself each week might seem like overkill. But when there's someone in the congregation for the first time... it's exactly what they need to hear.

5. Personal Follow-up Without Threatening Personal Space

Not everyone is comfortable or ready to have very extroverted people in their face. But personal touch makes them feel valued and can even be [automated within your church management system](#) (we call ours process queues). Here are some best practices and some fun new ideas to try at your church!

- **Text a 'thanks for coming'** at the end of service to first-time guests. You can do this by running a report through your ChMS.
- **Text an engaging question to parents** who checked their kids into children's services so they feel connected to what their kids were taught.
- **Send a hand-written note & possible gift** in the mail on Monday, so they are delivered by Tuesday or Wednesday. They are most effective if signed by a pastor or staff member. Don't give them too many options to jump into commitment. Just thank

them for coming and invite them back. We have heard all kinds of ideas of gifts: \$5 gas card, \$5 Coffee card, Free drink coupon at church cafe, free coffee mug, etc....if you give an internal gift that they have to return to get (or get during their first visit) be SURE these people are trained and ready to serve first-time guests.

- **Send a first-time guest email** using similar wording to the hand-written note sent on Monday. This will arrive before the notecard. You could invite them to like your church on Facebook or direct them to your website to listen to a sermon or check out a sermon series (even though they've probably already been there).
- **If your guest has not returned after 30-days** invite them back again. Explain the current series or current events going on. You can send an email, a notecard, or both.
- **When your guests come back for a 2nd time** the chance that they will be committed to your church doubles. Send a notecard & email, again. This time, invite them to an introduction step (Get to know you event or 101-type class).

Remember, your **FIRST** goal is **NOT** to integrate your first-time visitor into your church.

The **FIRST** goal has to be to get them to come again. Here's why⁵:

- If the church is growing, you'll need more guests each year than you have people in your total average attendance. In other words, a growing church of 500 will need more than 500 guests in a year.
- The typical growing church sees 20% of first-time guests become part of the church.
- Growing churches see nearly 40% of second-time guests become part of the church.
- Close to 60% of people will become part of the church after their third visit.

6. Introduction to Your Church

Whether you host a "Pizza with the Pastor" event or an "Introduction to the Church," you want to create a first step for your guests to show they are ready for more than just visiting. You need to create a space to share your church's mission, vision, and values and give your visitors a chance to share a little about themselves, too. Fight the tendency to give your visitors all the options to get involved. If you haven't developed a discipleship path,

your church needs to. This class is designed to help make a guest's next step easy, strategic, and obvious. In each step of your discipleship path, you give one next step. One option. Maybe you start with small groups, providing a small and authentic community. Then you can target people in small groups to volunteer as their next step.

7. Develop a Discipleship Path - Not Programs

Tony Morgan compares a philosophy of a busy calendar full of programs and one with a clear discipleship path. “The ones [churches] experiencing the most healthy growth tend to approach discipleship as a path. The leaders spend time thinking on how to best help people along in their journey following Christ. They spend their energy simplifying to offer people a series of next steps.

By contrast, many of the churches I see that are in decline have an overwhelming number of programs available to attendees and even the community, but no cohesive path that helps people learn which steps to take and when.”

[When you give people too many options, they won't pick anything!](#) Start by defining your discipleship path, with clear steps. These steps should be simple, for example: worship, connect, groups, serve, and outreach/invite others. Your discipleship path will shape the way you communicate from stage. Resist the urge to ask or expect everyone to jump through the steps all at once! Use phrases like “if your next step is” or “if you've been in a group for a while, your next step might be to jump in and serve.”

Allow your church management system and technology to help you invite your people to their next faith step in a personal and intentional way. You can customize reports to send personal and intentional invitations to their next step. For example, if someone has attended 2-3 times or more, but not attended your introduction class, invite them. That class will give them ONE next step. If you begin new small groups at specific times of the year, be sure to personally invite people who have attended your introduction class but not joined a small group.

Closing

Every person that walks through your church doors, whether they are first-time visitors or a graduate from seminary has a next step of faith they could take. Your church can provide the necessary steps to help all your people continue to grow. If you provide a “potluck” version with all the options at once, most people will not take any step at all. Some people will leave and look for guidance and clear direction elsewhere. Others might keep showing up. They might even start showing up more often, but their increase in attendance doesn’t equal faith growth. With a discipleship path in place, you will be able to lead your church family in a personal and growing faith journey.

[CLICK TO LEARN MORE: How to Use CCB to Create Your Volunteer Schedules.](#)

Resources:

¹<https://www.webfx.com/blog/marketing/how-churches-use-internet-marketing/>

²https://resources.churchcommunitybuilder.com/articles/first_time_visitors_number_matters

³<https://www.webfx.com/blog/marketing/how-churches-use-internet-marketing/>

⁴<https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

⁵<https://tonymorganlive.com/2014/12/02/visitor-retention-church-keeping-guests/>