

Attracting Guests

by

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I just finished a consulting assignment with a small Presbyterian Church. One of the interesting things discovered in the consulting process was that the church kept an average of 15% of its first-time guests. Actually this is just barely below the national average of 16%

Further research found that this church only attracted about two guests each month. With an average of 24 visitors per year and a 15% retention rate, the church is able to add only four new people a year!

This church illustrates a common pattern among churches. It does a fairly good job of keeping people once they come but just doesn't attract enough guests to see much growth.

If this church could only attract one guest per week, it would add eight new people each year. If it could attract two per week, it would add 16 people per year.

Preparing for Guests

When you know that guests will be coming to your home for a visit, you spend time cleaning the house, fixing a meal, and generally making the atmosphere as delightful as possible. In a similar way, before you even begin to ask guests to your church, do some house cleaning.

1. Develop your church's concern.

Is your church good at welcoming new people? If not, then it is doubtful if many new people will be attracted to your church.

Begin by preaching a series of messages on "hospitality." Create a profile of the average unchurched man and woman who might attend your church and share it with the congregation. Start a task force to plan better ways to welcome new people. [Hint: staff the task force with people who have been in your church less than one year.]

2. Develop your church's morale.

The main way guests come to a church is through the invitation of present church attenders. However, if your congregation has low morale, people will not invite others to attend.

Begin by celebrating positive aspects of your church's ministry. Interview new people from the pulpit. Ask people whose lives have been touched by your church to share their story. Set some reachable goals and praise the congregation when they are reached.

3. Develop your church's fellowship.

Some people attend churches without making many friends. If people in your church do not fellowship with each other, it will be difficult to get them to reach out in fellowship with strangers.

Begin by hosting bimonthly church dinners. sign up people to share meals with each other on a rotating basis. Schedule a half hour fellowship time between Sunday school and your worship service.

4. Develop your church's welcome.

Most churches perceive themselves as friendly. However, if newcomers don't echo the same sentiment, you need to improve your welcome.

Begin by using ushers, parking attendants, and greeters who are friendly people. Build an information center and place it where new people will easily be able to ask questions.

5. Develop your church's plan.

Growing churches usually average 4-5% of weekly worship attenders as guests and eventually retain 20-30% of them as members.

Begin by looking over your records for the past one or two years and determine your percentages. If they are as high as those above, rejoice! If not, set a goal to improve your percentages within the next year.

Prepare Your Plan

After you've prepared for guests, begin to plan ways of attracting new people to your church. Here are five basic ways to begin.

1. Encourage word of mouth invitations.

Word of mouth is the best way to attract guests to a church. When satisfied people give testimony to others that your church is a great place to attend, you will have all the guests you need.

Here's one way to encourage people to invite others to church. Print a general church business card. Give every person in your church 52 cards and ask them to give one card a week away with an invitation to attend your church. Remember: one-fourth of non-churched people say they've never been invited to church.

2. Reward people who bring others.

After a church dinner it is customary for the cooks to be thanked for preparing a fine meal. Usually the cooks are invited to come out of the kitchen and then those who have participated in the meal applaud them for their efforts.

Here's one way to reward those who bring new people to church. When you have a new person register their attendance, provide a place for them to note who invited them. Keep track of the people who invite others. Host an appreciation dessert once each quarter to honor these key people.

3. Advertise your church's ministry.

If your church is smaller, just getting off the plateau, or located in a place with low visibility, you will need to do something to make your church known to potential guests.

Here's one way to advertise your church. Develop a "first impression piece" about your church. This year mail it to everyone within a five minute drive of your church. Next year mail it to everyone within a ten minute drive. Then the third year mail it to everyone within a 15-minute drive.

4. Create non-threatening entry points.

Growing churches usually have at least three non-threatening entry points to their church. The reason? New people find it uncomfortable to attend a church.

Here's one way to develop low threat entry points. Ask your regular attendees to list the names of unchurched friends. Then have them list things their friends are interested in, such as sports, classes, crafts, etc. Group the various interests together, select the three largest groupings and then create three new ministries around those three interests this next year.

5. Welcome guests to church.

When guests visit a church, they like to be noticed but feel anonymous. If guests feel in any way embarrassed, they won't be back.

Here's one way to welcome guests to church. Begin using the five-minute rule. Ask regular attendees not to talk with friends or do any church business, but to welcome guests during the first five minutes following your worship service. As soon as you finish your benediction, or last song, tell people to "remember the five minute rule."

Conclusion

It's true! No one ever joins a church without first visiting. So . . . use some of the ideas above and increase your potential for growth by attracting more guests to your church.