

What Guests See

by

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I was visiting a church in Indiana. As I walked into the church lobby, the person who was walking with me commented, “You’ll like our church. It’s a very friendly place.”

Once inside the building, we were immediately met by a man carrying an arm full of papers. Introductions were polite and we shook hands. However, it was what followed that surprised me.

Upon completing our handshake, the man turned to my friend and began to talk about some church business which, in truth, should not have been discussed in my presence.

As they talked, the man moved nervously back-n-forth on his feet gradually changing his position so that his back was actually pointed toward me.

I remember thinking to myself, “Hey! I’m the guest here. Quit ignoring me!” But, I did not say anything to him.

Once he was done discussing his bit of church business, he seemed to catch a glimpse of me out of the side of his eye. In an embarrassed and hasty attempt to make me feel welcome, he said, “It was nice to meet you. You’ll like our church. It’s a very friendly place.”

Encounters of the Right Kind

When a person talks to a member of your church, or calls on the telephone, or receives a brochure in the mail, or drives into your parking lot, or whatever, it is a moment of truth.

A **Moment of Truth** is any occasion in which a person comes into contact with, and forms an impression of, your church.

The importance of these moments of truth should not be underestimated.

First, remember that people outside of your church do not go around thinking about you.

Second, remember that your church only exists in such a person's mind when he or she makes some type of contact with you, either directly or indirectly.

Third, remember that the impression formed by such contact is generalized in an individual's mind to your entire church.

Fourth, the end result of the contact is a feeling—positive or negative—about your entire church.

What do you think I felt about the church I visited in Indiana?

Think Like A Guest

To honestly appreciate the new person's experience, you need to set aside your "insider" understanding about your church and think like an "outsider."

A good way to do so is to list the key moments of truth which guests to your church encounter. Then, walk through each one with "guest eyes" attempting to see each aspect as they would.

There are, of course, many moments of truth. However, the ten which follow are faced by newcomers to every church. Think through each one and describe what happens now and what should happen when a guest encounters each moment of truth at your church.

1. Driving up to the church building. Is the landscaping around your church well kept? Is the parking lot nicely paved and clear of debris? Are the exterior walls and windows of the building attractive? Are there parking spaces clearly marked for guests?

2. Walking up to the front door. Are there warm and friendly people greeting guests before they enter the building? Is the entrance clearly marked? Does the entrance present an inviting look which says, "Please come in?"

3. Entering the front door. Are the sounds that guests hear upon entering the building uplifting? Is there a pleasant smell? Does the decor seem attractive and welcoming? Are the directional signs easily visible? Are there people available to answer questions and give assistance?

4. Contacting people. Are church members outgoing and approachable? Do they express an attitude of acceptance to newcomers? Is there an honest friendliness without being mushy or overbearing?

5. Experiencing ministries and services. Is the child care area clean, bright and open? Are the rest rooms clean and free of unpleasant odors? Are classrooms nicely decorated?

6. Meeting ushers and entering the sanctuary. Do ushers smile and express a friendly attitude? Is the atmosphere of the worship area vibrant and happy? Is there room to sit without being unduly crowded? Are guests welcomed graciously and treated with respect?

7. Participating in the worship service.

Is the order of the worship service explained and easy for the guest to follow? Are the songs singable by newcomers? Are the words of the songs available to them? Do newcomers leave wishing the service had been longer? Do guests feel at ease and comfortable?

8. Exiting the worship service. Do guests find a friendly atmosphere upon leaving the worship area? Are they greeted in positive ways by people around them? Are they invited to a refreshment table to talk and meet others from the church?

9. Following contacts. Do guests receive a personal contact within 48 hours of their first visit to your church? Are they thanked for their attendance? Are they invited back? Do you ask for their evaluation of your church? Do you in some way surprise guests with an extra measure of service beyond what they expect?

10. Ongoing contacts in the future. Are guests put on your mailing list for appropriate future contact? Do guests receive a church newsletter on a regular basis? Do you mail them informational brochures describing ministries they might find interesting? Do you call them to extend a personal invitation to special events?

What do guests see, experience and feel from these moments of truth in your church? What should they experience? What can your church begin to do to make these moments of truth positive experiences for your guests?