

Top Ten Ways Churches Drive Away First-time Guests

If you attend a church regularly, you've probably noticed the phenomenon. A guest shows up for a worship service, but he or she never returns. It is, unfortunately, a common issue in many churches.

I did a Twitter poll to ask these first-time guests why they chose not to return to a particular church. While some of the responses were anticipated, I admit being a bit surprised with some of them.

Though my poll is not scientific, it is nevertheless fascinating. Here are the top ten responses in order of frequency.

1. **Having a stand up and greet one another time in the worship service.** This response was my greatest surprise for two reasons. First, I was surprised how much guests are really uncomfortable during this time. Second, I was really surprised that it was the most frequent response.
2. **Unfriendly church members.** This response was anticipated. But the surprise was the number of respondents who included non-genuine friendliness in their answers. In other words, the guests perceived some of the church members were faking it.
3. **Unsafe and unclean children's area.** This response generated the greatest emotional reactions. If your church does not give a high priority to children, don't expect young families to attend.
4. **No place to get information.** If your church does not have a clear and obvious place to get information, you probably have lowered the chances of a return visit by half. There should also be someone to greet and assist guests at that information center as well.
5. **Bad church website.** Most of the church guests went to the church website before they attended a worship service. Even if they attended the service after visiting a bad website, they attended with a prejudicial perspective. ***The two indispensable items guests want on a website are address and times of service. It's just that basic.***
6. **Poor signage.** If you have been attending a church for a few weeks, you forget all about the signage. You don't need it any more. But guests do. And they are frustrated when it's not there.
7. **Insider church language.** Most of the respondents were not referring to theological language as much as language that only the members know. My favorite example was: "The WMU will meet in the CLC in the room where the GAs usually meet."

8. **Boring or bad service.** My surprise was not the presence of this item. The surprise was that it was not ranked higher.
9. **Members telling guests that they were in their seat or pew.** Yes, this obviously still takes place in some churches.
10. **Dirty facilities.** Some of the comments: “Didn’t look like it had been cleaned in a week.” “No trash cans anywhere.” Restrooms were worse than a bad truck stop.” “Pews had more stains than a Tide commercial.”

There you have it. The top ten reasons first-time guests said they did not return to a church. I can’t wait to hear from you readers. You always have such good additions and insights.

---By Thom Rainer