



# The *Big* Invite

More Guests Than Ever For Easter

## GETTING YOUR CHURCH READY FOR THE BIG INVITE

**Imagine it's finally Easter Sunday. You've been preparing for months.**

And your efforts have paid off because the Smith family decides to attend church for the first time in over 12 years. They choose First Church because they saw your marketing and received an invitation from a member in their neighborhood.

However, from lack of being greeted, to bad signage, to awkward experiences during the service — plus the fact that no one even invited them back — they've made their decision about your church. While thousands of individuals around the world made decisions for Christ this Easter Sunday, the Smith family made a different decision—they decided never to go back to First Church again.

**It wasn't because they didn't like the sermon or the music. It was because First Church wasn't ready for guests. First Church simply wasn't intentional about the guest experience.**

Here the truth... In any given family of first-time church attendees, or those coming back to church after an extended absence, at least one person in that family is looking for a reason NOT to come back. They're looking for that *"See, I told you this is how it would be"* moment that justifies them staying away.

Have no doubt, we are in a spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of our guests. **How you welcome visitors this Easter is one significant tactic in that spiritual battle. This is why you must prepare in advance for the battle.**

How? Below you'll find a series of checklists that allow you and your team to implement these best practices so that visitors find more reasons to come back than to stay away.



These pivotal and eternally significant Easter services cannot be “business as usual.” There must be an intentional plan to make sure each guest feels welcomed, loved, and wanted.

**If your church is not ready for company, it could mean your visitors will never return or respond to the gospel. So what should your church DO to get ready for company?**

Below are several easy yet essential steps every church can take to make certain they are prepared — prepared to be intentional with each new guest. Fact is, your church has one chance to make a good first impression.

## Outside the Church

Researchers have discovered that church guests decide whether or not to return to the church they are visiting in the first 6-10 minutes upon entering the church campus. So, here's how to make sure you get *the first time right every time*. But especially for your big day.

1. **Guest Arrival.** Everyone has heard of body language. There is building language as well. Your building communicates how much the members of your church value their church facility and the ministries offered.

Therefore, your church campus must:

- Be clear about **where to go** and **what to do** upon arrival by using directional signs in parking areas and outside of buildings. Think like a first-time guest. Are your signs clear about where the “front door” is? The welcome center? The sanctuary? They are already asking “where do we go in?” as soon as they drive into your parking lot. Remember, you need more signs that you think.
- Be well landscaped, clean and well maintained.
- Be inviting. Your greeters and your grounds are there for this.

- 2. Guest Parking.** Why do we need guest parking spaces? Those spaces quickly identify to your greeters who your guests are. Greeters can ensure those first critical ten minutes for those guest are the best they can be. If you do not have guest parking with greeters, you cannot be certain their first ten minutes will be a positive experience.

Therefore guest parking must be:

- Adequate
- Easy to locate and identify
- Your best parking spaces
- Have greeters outside

**TIP:** Consider painting a yellow stripe that leads from the entrances at the road all the way to the guest parking area. Put a sign by your entrance that says “guests follow yellow line.”

- 3. Guest Parking Greeters.** This time is critically important and should be used to discover useful information about the guest(s) such as their names, where they are from, how long they have lived in the area, information about their family, interests, or possible needs. The conversations can be short, but fruitful.

Therefore guest greeters:

- Should be your friendliest people
- Must wear name tags
- Need to understand the value of this ministry

- 4. Transitioning Your Guests to the Inside.** Guest parking greeters should escort (that means walk with the guests, not merely point to the entrance) all guests from the parking lot to the Welcome/Information Center and introduce them to the Welcome Center staff.

**TIP:** Have pre-written letters thanking guests for attending services, hand-signed by the pastor. Have someone place these letters on the windshield of each car in the guest spaces area.

Why should our church have a Welcome/Information Center? **Most families do not visit a church when things are going well.**

It is likely that your promotional campaign was only a catalyst in helping them make a decision to come to church, while the decision itself was most driven by an immediate felt need in their life. They might be looking for help, friendship, or fulfillment in life. If your church does not have a Welcome/Information Center, how will a guest find out



about your youth ministry, parenting classes, marriage retreat, women's Bible study, or any of the other wonderful ministries and activities your church offers? At the Welcome/Information Center, guests can discover many of the benefits your church offers those who attend.

Remember, they are arriving at the Welcome Desk during those prime minutes where they are evaluating *whether to come back!* You're still very much in that "first impression" phase.

You may unknowingly discuss how your church can meet one of their most critical needs. They probably will not receive this information during a worship service and certainly will not have the opportunity to ask questions. At the Welcome/Information Center, guests are informed and encouraged to get involved in the life of your church... with a smile!

### 1. Welcome/Information Center

- Should have very friendly greeters
- Should have well-informed greeters who know all about the church ministries
- Should have greeters who can provide up-to-date information on:
  - Upcoming events for all ages
  - Recreational leagues and opportunities
  - Discipleship classes/small groups
  - Church staff and ministry directors
  - All age-graded and affinity ministries
  - How to contact various ministries within the church
  - Campus map

After visiting the Welcome/Information Center, the greeter should **escort** the guest to the appropriate area, such as nursery, children's church, youth ministry, discipleship classes, or worship center.

The greeter should **introduce the guest** to the ministry staff or leader and make sure they are accommodated. (When this is done with intention and love, the guest will have met three friendly people in their first 10-15 minutes — the parking lot greeter, the welcome center greeter, and the ministry greeter).

- 2. Nursery Area.** Some guests may not be ready to leave their newborn in your church's nursery. To assist visiting parents with this emotional dilemma, it might help to encourage them to tour the nursery area and make their own decision. If they still do not feel comfortable leaving their baby, you can suggest they sit in the back of the worship center to allow easy access to the foyer.

Therefore the nursery area must be:

- Clean
- Safe
- Secure
- Organized



- 3. Acknowledging Guests During a Worship Service.** Most churches consider themselves very friendly. The truth is they are, but usually only to each other. It is important for your church to do its best to make sure every guest feels loved and welcomed.
- Most guests prefer anonymity while visiting a church. **They do not want to raise their hand, stand up, or stay seated while everyone else stands.** They want to do what everyone else is doing and feel as comfortable as possible. Read Thom Rainer's "[Should Your Church Stop Having A Stand-And-Greet Time?](#)"
  - It is important for someone to acknowledge them in a way that makes them feel welcomed and wanted. Since they will be blending into the crowd, church leaders must **teach their members to value their guests and speak to those seated around them with a kind word and inviting smile.**
  - **Use the "everybody's in" strategy for gathering the contact information of guests.** Guest cards may be placed in pew racks or in bulletins, as usual. But here's a strategic twist: On your big day Sunday, **have everyone fill out a card.** That's right. Everyone. This does two things:
    1. It removes virtually all the pressure off the guests to do anything that stands out. They are simply doing what everyone in the congregation is being asked to do.
    2. It allows your regular members — and other members who will be there on your big day as one of the few Sunday they attend during the year — to update their contact information for your database. **It is critical for church leaders to gather the contact information of their guests to follow up with them. Deploying this strategy will increase your guest card response rates by 20% or more.**
  - Some churches have a guest reception following each worship service to give them an opportunity to meet the pastor and staff.

As you incorporate these ideas and your own into the life and ministry of your church, you will be well on your way to being fully prepared to receive those special guests you've worked hard to gain!