


7 WAYS

Your Church Can
Reach More People

From Guest to Engaged



Pushpay



Church attendance is on the decline. In the late 1990s, an average of 43% of adults attended church weekly. By 2009 nearly 48% of Americans worshipped weekly. However, in 2020, weekly attendance dropped to 29%.

Why spend so much time talking about numbers? Jesus left a clear command. His last words were, “Go and make disciples.” (Matthew 28). To understand your impact in your community, you’ll want to understand the numbers that measure success and engagement. The exact 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 seven areas to give attention to as you reach and grow disciples.

1. Your Website is Now Your Front Door

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

Your website is your new front door. Over 90% of people visit your website before visiting your church in person. Your website must be easy to understand and provide easy-to-find information for your guests and visitors. Be sure to include these items clearly on your homepage:

1. **Service Times:** Include whether you provide childrens' ministry or nursery at each service.
2. **Location:** Address at minimum or link to Google Maps.
3. **What to Expect:** Explain how long your service will be, dress code, whether children's ministry will be available during each service, and take an opportunity to share your mission & vision. If you want to get into the 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 Children's 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?
5. **Contact Information:** A phone number and a monitored email are sufficient.
6. **Have the "why" behind your Church and culture easily viewable.**

Including these six important areas of information will help people be more confident in their decision to come to your church. Be sure you don't make online giving a focal point—that's for your internal people.

Over 73% of searches begin on Google. Optimizing your church website so it will appear in Google searches is arguably as important as social media. And keeping this contact information up to date is necessary. Any time you change your service schedule, email addresses, or phone numbers, make sure to change them on your website, too!

PRO TIP: Make sure that the page you want people to visit on your website mentions your church name throughout the page. Keywords will help your page rank higher in Google. Ensure that 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 will respond when you call on them. If all the kids are named Annie, it's going to be chaos. This is why we recommend focusing on a main page you know you want to rank 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 those avenues. Social media is the place where your community already is. Studies show that seven out of ten American adults are on Facebook, and they spend an average of 6 hrs per week on Social media.

Be careful not to only share about your weekend services and events. Your strategy should encompass your church mission and showcase you living that mission outside of your Sunday service and events. Tell a story of loving God and loving people. Share encouraging scripture, engage followers in dialogue,

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, it's an afterthought of one busy staff member. How different could your social media efforts be if you had a team of people working together to improve communication and share ideas? Please don't take it on alone!

3. 7 minutes

A first-time visitor will decide whether they want to return within 7-10 minutes of driving onto your parking lot. It's important to show them 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 how they want to be greeted. You can under-greet some and over-greet others. But there are several key places to have volunteers in place to make that first impression a “wow” experience 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 personal interaction your guests will receive. Make parking as smooth as possible. When there's an opportunity, provide visitor parking to enhance their experience. 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. Add a special touch by creating fun, professional signs welcoming your guests!

Greeters/Door: Have people at your entrance doors. They will hold doors,

assist people if needed, and welcome them with a smile, handshake, or fist bump. If they recognize a first-time guest's confused look, they can approach to assist them further. A good rule of thumb is never to point people where they should go but walk with them instead.

For all of your welcome team, the key is providing the next step when your guests are ready. When it comes to greeters, it's important to recognize that extroverts and introverts will come to your church. Half of them want to have a personal interaction with everyone. The other half will be okay sliding in and not talking to anyone at first. 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? Do they know where to check in their kids? Or where the bathroom or worship center are located? You don't have to visit somewhere very many times to feel comfortable and know this basic information. 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: This 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 gives 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 attendees' line to continue moving. Have plenty of volunteers for this process! Think through anything you can do to make the process faster—think of 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 who are meant to roam within the lines, 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 asks visitors to raise their hands? For some, that can make them uncomfortable. For other churches, that trend has run its course. There are plenty of ways to recognize first-time visitors without pointing them out. Here are five ways you can make a big impact on your visitors.

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

Don't use insider 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 “hang out” or “fellowship” with friends? Be aware of church terms 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 “blood of the lamb” or “redemption.”

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 the congregation that they don’t belong. A good rule of thumb: 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 stand or sit at certain times, or a little longer at communion or offering, be sure you are explaining it every week. Quickly explain 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. Help 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. 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 guest 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 promptly. 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 reminder. 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 adding personal touches will make them feel valued and can even be automated within your church management system. 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.

Hand-written note & possible gift: Send these 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. Thank them for coming. Don't give them too many options to jump into a 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, a free drink coupon at the church cafe, free coffee mug. You name it. If you give an internal gift that they have to return to receive (or get during their first visit) be certain these people are trained and ready to serve first-time guests.

Email: Use similar wording to the hand-written note sent on Monday. This will arrive before the notecard. You could invite them to follow 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).
After 30-days - If your guests have not returned after 30-days, invite them back again. Explain the current series or invite them to upcoming events.
Second Time Visitor - When your guests come back for a second 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 why.

- 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’ll want to create a first step for your guests to show they are ready for more than just visiting. 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. In each step of your discipleship path, you give one next step. One option is to start with small groups that offer a smaller, authentic community. Next, 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 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. One path could start with worship, followed by connect, groups, serve, and then outreach and invite others. Your discipleship path will shape

the way you communicate from the 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 “you’re invited to take the next step...”.

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 and send personal and intentional invitations to their next step. For example, if someone has attended two or three times or more, but hasn’t attended your introduction class, this would be a great opportunity to invite them. That class offers them the 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 haven’t 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 a 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 increased attendance doesn’t equal faith growth. With a discipleship path in place, you will be able to lead your church in a personal and growing faith journey.

[Discover how ChurchStaq can help you further your mission and grow discipleship.](#)