

130+ Proven Ways To Grow Your Church

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Introduction

“70% of all people who visit a church make up their mind about coming back —
BEFORE the pastor gets up to speak!”
— Barna Research Group

1. Visitors are the life-blood of your church’s growth. A top-down approach to getting and retaining visitors to your church is necessary for growth. The treatment of visitors begins and ends with you, the pastor. Your attitude towards visitors will be felt and emulated by your staff and membership.
2. Focus on visitor retention and new visitors will naturally follow, as your ‘newly retained’ visitors will tell their un-churched friends about your church and its treatment of visitors and new members.
3. Develop a specific plan for greeting, welcoming and incorporating newcomers.
4. Make following up with visitors a priority. Either block a specific time each week to make contact with last week’s visitors, or delegate this task to another staff member. Put the new person on your e-mail newsletter list. Add them to your mailing list. Growing congregations are those that let people know the congregation cares enough to contact them. The process of turning first-time visitors into active and continuing participants, and hopefully, new members is known as “assimilation”.
5. Consider assigning a sponsor to each visitor. The sponsor can answer questions, make introductions and perform other assimilation tasks.
6. Visit visitors at their home. Have a coffee mug or double-walled plastic mug made. Add the name of your church and, at least, a phone number. On Sunday or Monday evening, have a layperson deliver the nicely wrapped cup to the home of each local visitor. The purpose of the quick visit is just to leave a gift and express the appreciation of the church for their attendance, and extend an invitation to come again.
7. Decide if yours is a church for the community, or a church for your members.
8. Consider changing your service dates and/or times to attract the people you are trying to reach. For example, do people in your area head to the beach or other vacation spots on weekends? If so, why not try a Thursday night service so they can worship each week?
9. Decide if you want to cultivate an atmosphere that reflects the tone of the “mother church” or the community you’re trying to reach.

Advertising

10. Do regular, consistent local advertising for service times and directions (newspaper, yellow pages).
11. Use newspaper/radio/TV in advance of special events.
12. Use internet advertising. The major searches engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing allow for paid advertising targeted by specific geographic region, zip codes, etc. These are the ads that appear on the right-hand side of search pages. Take advantage of the “free” listings too.
13. Your receptionist should be a warm, friendly female. Research shows that women generally make the decision in the family regarding church and faith.
14. Have an answering machine for after-hours calls. Again the voice should be female. Be professional. Give clear, succinct information about service times, directions, and how to leave a message for staff members.
15. On your church’s website, the home page should have service dates and times, and directions from outlying areas. Don’t make potential visitors have to search for this information. If it’s not on the home page, have a link or button on the home page to get to this info.
16. Have a sign out by the street announcing the worship service or event in advance of the scheduled time.
17. Ensure all signs are readable by drivers in moving vehicles.
18. Make sure all signs look new, and/or clean, without visible rust or peeling paint, missing parts, etc.
19. Place your logo, church name and phone number on all signs.

Assembling Volunteer Teams

20. Clergy and other volunteer worship leaders should exude warmth and enthusiasm. Match the person with the assignment. The right person for each job is the one who has the appropriate spiritual gift. Consider testing staff and volunteers to find their spiritual gift(s).
21. Balance your volunteer teams with males and females, young and old. A balance of ages (youth = vitality; age = stability, older people love young people) is important. Run background checks on everyone, volunteer and staff, who will be involved with young people before allowing them to serve.
22. Train your greeters. They should be friendly and informed. Tell them their specific role in the process of the entire scope of the worship experience. Consider developing a brochure explaining the procedures. Be clear on attire for the staff and volunteer teams. Do you want relaxed and casual or coat and tie? Define for men and women.

The Parking Lot

23. Select several of the best parking spaces and mark them for visitors only.
24. Parking lot attendants - if the parking lot is crowded, attendants should help regulars and visitors park to make effective use of the space and to find empty parking spaces. Remember, welcoming begins in the parking lot.
25. Parking lot greeters - preferably a man and a woman who enjoy meeting people. They just walk around the parking lot greeting all arrivals with a smile and a handshake. They provide directions for visitors.
26. Have clear directions to the sanctuary or worship space. Don't allow visitors to stumble blindly around your facility trying one locked door after another.

The Entrance

27. Staff and volunteers should be available and clearly identifiable. Get permanent, hard plastic name tags or the hang-around-the-neck variety for them.
28. Train clergy and staff to be mindful of special needs. Ensure that your facility is handicap-accessible.
29. Have a weatherproof speaker mounted outside. Upbeat and energetic pre-service music should be playing, inside and out.
30. Position tables and chairs outside for relaxing and conversing prior to and following the services.
31. Have door greeters cheerfully greet worshipers. Open the door for guests.
32. Try this – pretend you're a visitor and step inside your church for the first time. What do you see when you first walk in the door? Are the colors warm and inviting? Is everything clean? Do the walls and ceilings need painting? Is it inviting and attractive? What do the decorations, graphics and symbols say about your ministry?
33. Pre-service music should be playing in the common social area.
34. The pastor and staff should be milling about, greeting and talking with the attendees.
35. Set up a coffee center with snacks and drinks. People will pay .50 to \$1 for drinks and snacks. Alternatively, the women of the church could take turns volunteering to bring baked goods, etc.
36. Have an attended information table with church bulletins, special event news, sign-up sheets, etc.
37. For clear visibility have a sign above eye level over the information table area.
38. Carve out a space for other supported ministries to set up tables or booths in the common social area.
39. Well-placed directional signs for access to sanctuary, nursery, coffee shop, restrooms, classes, etc. are required.
40. Lighting should match the desired mood. Harsh overhead fluorescent lighting should be replaced with softer floor and table lamps.

41. Set up tables and chairs for guests to use to visit with each other.
42. Place individually wrapped mints, etc. on the tables in a logo-emblazoned church mug or decorative dish.
43. Have a Christian education center where people can buy recommended books, music CD's, T-shirts, coffee mugs, etc. The information table can serve double-duty.
44. Place wall-mounted video monitors strategically. Show music videos, church member slide shows, or moving graphics. Add a countdown to service starts time to encourage people to move to the sanctuary at the appropriate time.
45. Gather the worship team for final instructions and prayer prior to the service. Point out any nuances or differences from the standard service format so everyone knows what and when to expect so they can all act as a coordinated team.
46. Have the worship team mingle with guests prior to the service.

Restrooms

47. Directions to bathrooms should be clearly visible.
48. Check the restrooms to be sure they're clean and functional. Broken hinges or latches on stalls must be fixed immediately upon discovery.
49. Keep extra supplies on hand.
50. Use an unusual, aromatherapy scent dispensed hand soap.

Nursery/Youth

51. Have a nursery and/or youth ministry drop-off table. Assign a number to each child that can be displayed in the sanctuary in the event of an emergency that requires attention by the parent during the service.
52. Have a brochure describing the procedures for check-in, check-out, security and emergency alerts during the service available for parents.
53. Have a sign (above eye level) over the drop-off table, or check-in area.
54. The nursery needs to be well lit and clean. Diaper odors must be controlled.
55. Cheerful, enthusiastic, trained, child-loving staff or volunteer workers are a must for the nursery. Run background checks on all volunteers before allowing them to serve.
56. Evaluate church terms in relation to your mission and culture. Consider coining catchy names such as “Kids Korner” for children’s church or Sunday School.
57. Have the room(s) set up and ready for children early so that parents can visit prior to the service starting.
58. Programs and materials should be safe, fun and age appropriate.
59. Don’t just baby-sit. Use at least some of the time the children are in your care to share the gospel with them, in an age appropriate fashion. 75% of parents say a church that provides religious training for their children would be of interest to them.
60. Suggest that people invite others to church. But did you know that “bring a friend to Church” works much better if it involves teenagers?
61. Consider changing your service dates and/or times to attract the people you are trying to reach. For example, is youth group on Sunday evening cutting into family time and preparation for the young people’s upcoming school week?

Transition to the Sanctuary

62. Post sanctuary door greeters (ushers) to open doors and hand out bulletins.
63. Evaluate seating and space. Comfortable seats with adequate personal space allotments are important. Keep in mind a church feels full when 80% of the seats are taken.
64. Music should be playing in the sanctuary for early worshipers.
65. The sanctuary must be clean and inviting.
66. Use sunscreens or shades to prevent glare or excessive heat inside during summer months.
67. Open window shades to natural lighting and openness, or to view seasonal blooming.
68. The sanctuary should be “echo” free. Has sound-reflectivity been addressed? Carpeted floors and stage are a must. Decorative acoustic foam can be mounted on walls. An acoustic tile ceiling will help.
69. Newcomers tend to want the back pews and aisle seats. Train ushers and regular attendees to keep a few of these free.

In the Sanctuary

70. Proofread all publications. Keep them free of typographic and grammatical errors. Keep publications simple and readable.
71. Avoid having worshipers fumble with too many books or papers. Consider printing the service in the bulletin, using only one book for music, or projecting lyrics on a screen or flat panel monitors using a laptop and projector.
72. In bulletins and announcements avoid acronyms and insider language that is not explained. Don't assume people know how the "church" works, or what the Book of Common Prayer is. Clergy or other speakers should assume that there's always somebody in the audience who doesn't know who or what they're talking about.
73. Keep copies of a "welcome" brochure or last month's newsletter available for newcomers to pick up. It should include a calendar of events. Post the calendar on the website also.

Service Start

74. Ushers should be available to seat late comers.
75. At some point in the first few minutes of the service greet the congregation. Be friendly. Thank them for coming. Make announcements about members, illnesses, deaths, births, etc.
76. If other supported ministries are present with a booth in the common area, talk about that ministry and why your church supports it. In they're comfortable with it and you've talked with them prior to the service, invite someone from that ministry to speak.
77. Make special note of first-time visitors. During the service, the pastor could ask for a show of hands for first-time visitors, but at the least announce that first-time visitors are appreciated and invited to pick up a specially prepared gift bag after the service. Tell them specifically where to pick up their gift.
78. These "first-time visitor gifts" should be prepared in advance and available immediately following each service. They can include such things as a welcome message from the pastor, a coffee mug with church logo, a pen, notepad, or other logo-emblazoned items, along with info about upcoming events.
79. Include attendance cards to be filled out by all in attendance, not just visitors. Have check boxes for First-time visitor, Second-time visitor, Member, prayer requests, etc.
80. Divide your sanctuary into blocks. Recruit a person who is responsible for greeting every visitor in his or her assigned area, either before, during, or immediately after the service. There should be no name tags or other suggestions indicating those folks have this job. That defeats the purpose. You don't want anyone to visit your church without at least one person greeting them in addition to those who work the doors. This can't be left to chance.
81. Have a 1-2 minute "greet your neighbor and welcome them to church" break after the announcements while the worship team plays an instrumental.
82. Invite visitors to *not* give. Prior to taking an offering, add something like "For anyone new or visiting, this worship service is our gift to you, and you are not expected to give."
83. Pray for other churches in the area. We are all on the same team trying to build the Kingdom.

Worship

84. Music communicates more than anything else and defines you as a church. Match music to the listening tastes of the audience you are trying to reach.
85. Select music to match energy heights and depths during a service.
86. Worshipers **MUST** be able to hear the vocals.
87. Many of today's Christian artists have recorded their own versions of the old classic hymns. Incorporate some of them into your worship service.
88. And, if there is corporate singing, the lyrics **MUST** be available. Two ways to accomplish this: 1) either the lyrics are printed and every person has a copy of them, or 2) the lyrics are displayed on some type of screen located at, or near the front of the sanctuary.
89. The worship leader or pastor should instruct worshipers when to stand, sit, kneel, join in corporate prayer, etc.
90. The service should flow smoothly and efficiently without feeling rushed.
91. Smooth the transitions between the different parts of the service. For example, show a video with lights dimmed after the worship team completes their worship set and clears the stage of instruments, while putting the lectern in place.
92. Consider other communication forms to blend into the worship experience. (The sermon is not the only medium). All people respond to beauty in art. If your church does not have its own drama or liturgical dance teams, bring in groups from the local community occasionally.
93. Show videos related to the current message, sermon series or other mission that the church promotes.
94. Put together slide shows of youth programs, missions, special events, and sermon series topics. Don't omit the sad, funny and silly photos.
95. Change your worship. Show a willingness to adapt to change. If your service has not changed in format in the last five year you might need to experiment with some minor changes right away. Accept the fact that a small percentage of every congregation resists change of any kind. Stay focused on the big picture (building the Kingdom). Get your congregation on board. Is yours a church for the community, or just for the current congregation.

The Message

96. Be genuine, open, and approachable.
97. Use humor appropriately – Christians can be fun; don't have to be stodgy.
98. Refer to scripture and the Bible for what it is – a symbol of truth and authority.
99. Don't assume people will have a Bible with them or know how to use it. As with song lyrics, either provide pew Bibles, or display scripture on video monitors for viewing.
100. Contrary to what you may think, non-Christians don't make a habit of listening to Christian music, singing hymns in their home, or praying out loud.
101. Expectations — Explain without patronizing.
102. After 20 minutes, you lose your audience.
103. Understand your audience's world – you're trying to reach them where they are.
104. Don't give somebody else's message.
105. Spend time preparing.
106. Feed your flock. Give them something they can mull over, discuss, research.
107. Make your message relevant to the listener's lives.
108. Use language that the common person understands.
109. Let your people know you are human and struggle with sin too.
110. Use duplication technology to have CD's/tapes of your sermon available immediately following the service. Charge \$1.00, or so, for each item so that only those seriously wanting to listen or distribute the message will take copies. "Free" will get expensive and wasteful, but remember you're just trying to cover your costs. Use pre-labeled CD's with church logo, phone number, website address and street address on them, so that newcomers can connect with you after listening.

Leadership

111. Be the leader of the flock. Be gregarious. Generate enthusiasm. Have a clear vision for the congregation. Cultivate a cheerful, outgoing, friendly nature to let those around you know that you care about people. The results may astound you.
112. Delegate. Don't try to do it all yourself. Moses was instructed to delegate because his elders advised him that he was burning himself out. Some tasks will require your hand though.
113. Do the right things at the right time. Are you spending too much time in sermon preparation while ignoring visitations? Pray for effectiveness in all you do.
114. Take care of yourself. Eat right, drink plenty of water, get some exercise.
115. Take occasional short vacations. Recharge your batteries. You can't be effective when you're running on empty.
116. Know how to get people to work together. Learn conflict management skills.
117. Leadership is critical to the growth of your church. Be the protective shepherd of your flock.
118. Leaders empower others for ministry. Leaders let go of responsibility and let God's energy be seen in other members.
119. Pastors need to be both goal and relationship oriented. If your gift is relationships, get a volunteer administrative assistant whose gift matches that job. Hire one if necessary. The details involved with managing and growing your church are too important to be left to chance, or overlooked, simply because you're overloaded. Use church management software to help keep up with members, phone numbers, email addresses and to record notes about visitations, etc.
120. The ministers of the church are lay people, bishops, priests and deacons. What is the leadership organization of your church? How should your organization chart look for a church your size? How are you caring for your leaders?
121. People are able to recognize and use their God-given talents and Spiritual gifts for ministry both inside the church and in the local community. Find ways to help your members identify and use their gifts.

122. Write a Mission Statement. It should be short and easy to memorize. Print it on all publications, post it on your website and incorporate it into your sermon or announcements 5-6 times per year. People want to be connected to something bigger than themselves that will give their life meaning. Be clear about why your church exists and what it should be doing. Conflict can often be eliminated with a clear vision statement and a strategic plan that contains specific goals and objectives.

Evangelism

123. Train your members to be evangelists where they work and live.
124. Provide quarterly education classes for visitors seeking membership.

Technology

125. You **MUST** have a website these days.
126. Update your website home page frequently - at least weekly.
127. Make it easy to find information on worship times, directions, nursery and Christian Education. These are the most important elements for a visitor. Keep in mind that new research finds that many adults under the age of 30 are finding churches to visit by searching the internet.
128. Finding information should never require more than two or three mouse clicks.
129. Try to have your website reflect the needs and interests of your community.
130. Update your logo and use it on publications, advertising, website, signs on street side of the building. Possibly include one on a wall inside the main entryway inside of the building.
131. Use membership software such as WorkingChurch.com to track and communicate with newcomers and members. Modern software programs allow you to group your members and send an identical email, or telephone message to every member of a group.
132. Get Facebook and Twitter accounts. Post thoughts and mini-messages weekly, or even daily.
133. Send an electronic newsletter to your members and visitors.
134. Upload video of the weekly message to the website.

Pre-service Checklist

- Are signs out by the street announcing the worship service or event in advance of the scheduled time? How many hours/days in advance?
- Are all signs readable from the road while driving?
- Do all signs look new, not rusty, or peeling?
- Does the sign have your logo and church name on it also?
- Is the parking lot clean and free of debris?
- Has the grass been freshly mowed? Have leaves, debris and trash been removed?
- How does the facility look? Does the church look 'alive'? Does it say that you care about the facility? Is the building clean? Have cobwebs been cleared, outside and inside? Porches swept?
- Is the interior clean? Floors swept? Carpets cleaned and vacuumed?
- Are tables and chairs positioned outside and inside? Are they clean and dust-free? Neatly arranged?
- Are the pews or chairs in the sanctuary neat and clean? Are the rows of chairs straight?
- Are the aisles clear of debris and other trip-hazards?
- Do pew or seat backs have offertory envelopes available? Are they stocked with visitor and prayer request cards?
- Are pens and/or pencils also available? Most people don't carry them.
- Do you have one or two boxes of tissues (per row) available under the seating?
- Have the bathrooms been cleaned? Are they stocked with necessary supplies?
- Is the HVAC on and set at a comfortable setting. Remember that human bodies generate heat. Provide sufficient cooling before the first arrival.
- Turn on and set the lights in each area to the desired level. Is the lighting right?

- Are sunscreens and shades down to prevent glare or excessive heat inside during summer months?
- Are window shades open to natural lighting and openness, or to view seasonal blooming?
- Have the audio and video systems been powered up and checked for functionality? Has the sound system been checked for volume and balance prior to the first person being seated?
- Is coffee brewing? Incense burning? What kinds of odors are effervescing? Make sure any smells are positive and inviting. Fresh and clean, not offensive.
- Are the greeting, worship and A/V teams assembled, instructed, and stationed? Are they identifiable with common T-shirts, permanent name tags, etc? Have they been thanked for their service? Have they been greeted by name by you and/or your staff?
- Do the teams have the necessary tools to perform their tasks? Safely and effectively? Do parking attendants require safety vests? Flashlights?
- Turn on the background music. It should be upbeat, energetic.