

## HOW DO NEW PEOPLE SEE YOUR CHURCH?

New guests at worship can help us see things from the perspective of those not as familiar with our church as we are. The Lewis Center recently asked church members in different states to attend nearby churches as visitors and report on their findings for the benefit of the visited churches and other churches. This report covers two major findings, both of which arise from the difficulty churches have in viewing things from the perspective of persons new to their church.

With all the strengths of a church, the challenge is always to think of everything from arrival through departure from the perspective of someone who has never been to your church before. In fact, the new person may have never been to church at all or at least not for many years. This new perspective will help to shape signage, instructions in the bulletin, the work of greeters, and a host of other things.

### Signage

Most visitors found directional signage inadequate. The problems they encountered typically related to: directional signage to the church, outdoor signage indicating directions to "sanctuary" if the entrance is not obvious to a visitor, and outdoor and indoor signage as needed to direct people to the nursery and rest rooms.

You can quickly survey the adequacy of your church's signage by using a simple exercise. Have some people do a "drive in and walk through" as if they had never been there before. Was it easy to find the church? Is the entrance clear? Is there visitor parking? Are there greeters near where people park? Is it obvious what door to enter for worship? Are there directions to the nursery and restrooms? When you add signage, current members will hardly notice, but newcomers will immediately recognize that you are "expecting them." It is somewhat like turning the front porch lights on when you know guests will be arriving. The guests immediately feel you are anticipating their arrival.



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### The Worship Service

Visitors also found some parts of the worship service confusing. Churches today need to recognize that every day there are fewer people who grew up in church and thus many visitors are unfamiliar with worship practices.

Simple things can help. If there is a part of the worship that most members know from memory (e.g., Apostles Creed or Lord's Prayer), then still indicate in the bulletin the page number where people can find it or print the text so all can participate. Those who already know these elements will not be offended, but guests will appreciate your thoughtfulness. If people are to stand at a particular time, you can indicate that in the bulletin, and the worship leader can lift a hand as a signal for people to stand. Simple instructions for communion or brief introductions to other parts of the service can help bring on board those who did not grow up in the church and those whose previous churches had different patterns. Walk through the entire service thinking of what it would be like for someone coming to church for the first time. Make it easy for new people to participate and to feel at home.

Lovett H. Weems, Jr.  
Lewis Center for Church Leadership