

G. PREPARING FOR GUESTS THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY

The Sundays following Serve Local present opportunities to have many guests in your worship services. The immediate Sunday following offers a natural bridge from the connections at Serve Local to attendance within the church building. As follow-up begins and invitations to attend are issued, you may have more guests attend than any time in the recent past. Generally, you will connect with two kinds of people through Serve Local: those with some church background and those with little-to-none. The first type has some expectation of what attending a service will be like. The second goes by rumors, TV shows, and, often, negative word-of-mouth. How we engage guests—especially first-time guests—can determine not only whether they will return, but also whether they will judge us as genuinely interested in them.

As you prepare for your day of ministry, think ahead to the Sundays following contact with your community and anticipate the arrival of guests. Making guests feel valued and welcome is an important part of Serve Local. While this list is not exhaustive, these are a few of the items that we encourage you to focus upon.

Evaluate your online presence.

Before attending in person, potential guests first-

turn to the internet to learn about the church. What is discovered on the church's website and social media can help answer questions the guest has about attending. Up-to-date information, service times, driving directions, a facility map, child-care information, and contact information are all vital components. Potential guests may choose to watch a service before deciding whether to attend. Pictures from church events that reflect the church's vision help the guest view the church as a place where they can belong.

Consider the outside appearance of your facilities. The conversations that church members have with the unchurched during Serve Local ministries will paint a picture of the church as a place of life and vitality, as well as a place that cares. When a guest pulls into your parking lot, do they get the same picture from what they immediately see? Most people decide whether or not to return to your church within their first ten minutes of arriving on your campus. Mulched flower beds, manicured shrubs, bushes and lawn, a parking lot free of trash, and clean sidewalks all speak to a place that pays attention to visible needs and maybe is as full of life as members described. The outside appearance of your facilities speaks volumes to first-time guests!

Clean up nursery and children's

areas. Many of the service projects in Serve Local will engage children and/or young families. If your nursery and children's areas have not been used recently, they will probably need some TLC before welcoming new children. View the nursery and preschool area through the lens of a young mother bringing her newborn to church. Will they be comfortable with what they see: cribs, toys, and appliances? Are lighting and wall colors inviting? This does not mean that you must spend a large amount of money. Much of the clean-up and updating can be done by volunteers in the church. Updated fixtures, toys, and furnishings will often be donated by those whose children have outgrown this stage.

Mobilize greeters.

Guests find it apprehensive to enter an unfamiliar place. For some, the apprehension begins when they pull into the parking lot, see multiple doors, and wonder which one they should enter. Place people in the parking lot, outside the main entrances, and inside the building who are outgoing and willing to initiate conversation. Consider positioning people at the parking lot entrances with signs reading, "Welcome" or "Glad You Are Here." The primary ministry of greeters is to extend a hand and a smile to break down guests' apprehensiveness. Mobilize greeters to brag on kids, admire new babies, and help guests find the friend who invited them. This goes a long way toward showing guests that they matter and that you expected them. No guest should pass through your doors without hearing more than a half-hearted "good morning."

Have available seats in the back.

The most sought-after seats in a Baptist church are in the back, whether that is in a Sunday School class or in the sanctuary. When a guest enters a room and finds that the back is full and they must walk to the front, in plain view of everyone, they do not feel welcomed. They certainly conclude that no one expected them to come, regardless of the number of invites. In the weeks preceding Serve Local, as you talk about reaching the unchurched, train your people to move to the front in anticipation of guests.

Be friendly. The average church member enters the church and heads to the same room and/or seat in the sanctuary week after week for years. They speak to the same people, who are also in their same seat. While they are friendly to those they know, they seldom speak to anyone they do not know. In anticipation of guests, encourage your people to slow down, look around, and engage in conversation to those they do not know. A smile and warm words may be what causes someone to return the following week.

Every church visit tells a story to the guest of how you prepared for them and how you cared for them. Every visit also gives your guest the opportunity to tell the story of how your church valued them. You may never get a second chance to make a first impression. Following these simple steps can help your church prepare for guests before they arrive.