14 Questions You Should Ask Before Opening Your Church Doors

I absolutely believe that most churches long to be welcoming to first-time guests and new attendees. But there is a gaping chasm between having a desire to reach people and doing the things that must be done to reach people. Here is a dare, if you will: *Ask yourself these 14 questions*. Some of them are hard to answer, especially for a longtime member. When you're are a part of one church culture for years, blind spots happen. These questions are laser surgery for culture cataracts.

- **How cluttered is your space?**

It's easy to overlook the useless items laying around your church. Whether it is a Christmas tree in late February unsuccessfully hidden behind a fundraising display that ended two weeks ago or a number of bulletins from past Sundays on your pews ready and willing to confuse the members and visitors alike, take a look around and cut out the clutter.

- **Who's the first person they will encounter?**

You can't overestimate first impressions. So, be purposeful about your greeting strategy. Make sure that you train your greeters. They must be focused on spotting new people and making them feel at home. By the way, if the first person who speaks to them is the pastor in his sermon, that first-time guest will not be back.

- **What will you give them?**

Your first-time guests should never leave the building empty handed. Find something with value to give them. Ideas might include, a jar of jam, a coffee cup or anything else that

works in the context of your culture.

- **How does your church smell (really)?**

I remember a line from a movie a few years back where a teenager commented on a friend's house: *"Her whole house smells like soup."* This was *not*a compliment. Did you know that the sense of smell has a longer brain shelf-life that any other of the five senses? Think about the smells you remember from your childhood. So, if your church smells musty, funky, or like your grandmother's mothball clothes closet, you might want to have a meeting about it.

- **Do you have a plan to get their information in a noninvasive way?**

Find a way to connect through an information card that you invite them to turn in at the welcome center or in the offering plate. Ask what kind of information they want to receive and how they want to receive it. Insure them that you'll protect their privacy with the information they give you. But *don't*ask for information if you are unwilling to follow-up with them.

- **Does your church know the drill?**

Welcoming is an ***everybody***thing. Find opportunities other than a worship service to inform people the welcoming plan and invite them to join you in the strategy.

- **Must they meet your expectations?**

Are there some unwritten rules in your church such as dress, ethnicity, tattoos, hairstyle, car model and year? If these rules exist, growth for your church will not only be difficult but heretical. Don't expect people to fit your cookie cutter. Jesus never did and to do so would place you in contradiction to the Great Commission. Here's our rule for clothes: wear them.

- **Can they understand you?**

Every church has a lexicon of religious terms or phrases. Mae sure you speak clearly and stay away from useless religiosity. In other words, be real.

- **What's the follow-up plan?**

If you don't know it, you don't have one. There are plenty to choose from and there are lots of resources to use for training, but you must have a plan that works for your church.

- **Have you prayed for connections?**

Chance encounters don't just happen at church. We pray them into existence. As leaders, pray for opportune times to connect and get beyond the, "Glad to see ya!" level of interaction.

- **Will they know what you're about?**

At the very minimum someone should say something about the church's vision, value, or mission during worship. It doesn't have to be a powerpoint-driven, visioneering keynote, just a simple statement that reflects why your church exist. Example: *"If you are visiting with us, we are honored that you are here. We love God and we love people. So you make today awesome."*

- **Does your church have a plan for kids?**

There has never been a generation that values childcare more than this one. Parents value safety and great experiences for their children. By great experiences I don't mean meeting a life-sized VeggieTales character and having a super-slide. I mean two leaders in every room that love kids and want to be there. If you don't have that, the visiting family will be *one and done*at your church.

- **Are there needless cringe factors?**

I went in the Sunday School class and it mainly sounded like a gossip group. (Cringe!) You can think of a bunch of other cringe-worthy moments. Intentional churches and leaders are standard bearers and protectors from cringe.

- **Do your people love people?**

You know it’s true. Some churches don’t want to grow because, frankly, they don’t love people. Churches that want to grow have this crazy love for people. And it’s not even like they have taste. They love *everybody*! And isn’t that the kind of church that could reach *anybody*? Isn’t that a family worth joining?