
The Complete Guide
to Getting (and Keeping)

Church Visitors





Since 1992, Faithlife Corporation (formerly Logos Bible Software) has grown from a couple of programmers in a basement into the largest developer of Bible study software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing. We partner with more than 500 publishers to make more than 120,000 Bible study resources available to customers around the world.

Innovation is key to Faithlife's growth. In the last few years, we've expanded from our flagship software product, Logos Bible Software, to a variety of tools to complement your faith and Bible study experience. In June of 2011, we launched Faithlife Ebooks, a Christian ebook store and ereader app. In 2012, we released Faithlife Proclaim Church Presentation Software along with the Faithlife Study Bible and Faithlife.com, a social network that allows Christians from all over the world to connect and share ideas online.

Most recently, we've launched an entire suite of church administrative tools including Faithlife Sites, Faithlife Sermons, Faithlife TV, Faithlife Giving, and more! And we're still just getting started.

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Introduction

Picture it with me.

You're visiting a new church this Sunday. You've done your research: you combed through the church's website and Facebook feed, and you pulled up the address. As you drive into the parking lot, you look for a parking spot. Then you look for the entrance. Once inside, you look for a bulletin, coffee, where to take your kids for Sunday School, or maybe all of the above—really anything that will tell you where to go and what to do.

If you're like most church visitors, you've already made up your mind about whether you'll return to this church—and service hasn't even started yet.

Danny Franks, connections pastor and author of *People Are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel*, writes:

Church growth experts are nearly unanimous in telling us that first-time guests make a decision to return within the first 7–10 minutes on the property. The intangible “feel” of your church, the visual cues you deliver, and the general mood of the congregation will add to or take away from the main event.¹

You know the best thing about your church isn't how easy you make it to find parking.

It's the community, the teaching, the music, the years of faithful service.

But none of your visitors can see that in the first 5–10 minutes. All they see is what you show them, and they begin forming an impression before they even see your building.

This guide is all about the first-time guest experience. From tips for your church website to how to follow up successfully, you'll learn how to put your best foot forward to pique the interest of potential church visitors and help them find their home at your church.

¹ Franks, Danny. *People Are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel* (p. 67). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

5 Ways to Get Your Church Discovered

Having a solid visitor follow-up strategy is great, but it only works if you have guests in the first place.

So, how can you help people find out about your church?

Let's start by looking at tips you can use to increase your church's visibility in the main places where churches are typically found.

1. Personal invite

People are more likely to visit your church if they feel like they already have a friend there. When a visitor comes with a friend or neighbor, they can skip the awkwardness of deciding where to sit, searching for the restrooms, or knowing what to do during the service.

While the personal invitation works best in conversation, you can make a few printed or online pieces that make it easy for your members to invite friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Here are a few pieces you might find helpful.

- **Printed promo material (postcard or business card)** – Make these simple and easy on the eyes so potential visitors have all the info they want before they visit. Include: an appealing graphic with a short invitation (“Join us”), service times, location, website.
- **Church promo video** – In 60–90 seconds, give a high-level view of what your church is all about. Post the video to your church's social media pages, and encourage members to share on their pages.
- **Event invitation** – Write a short, clear invitation to an event your church is hosting. This can be a formal invitation, a postcard, or a shared video on social media. Make it clear that you're inviting people to come, not just making an announcement.

These types of pieces are particularly helpful in high-attendance seasons like Easter, Christmas, and when school is starting again.

Note: While it's good to create inviting videos, the best way to get visitors is to cultivate a culture that finds joy in bringing friends, neighbors, and coworkers to church. Building an inviting culture takes time, but an effective way to start is modeling how to invite unchurched people. When you are inviting new people to church, your congregation will notice, and some will imitate.

2. Online search

Your church website is the front door and first handshake of your church.

A good website will tell people what your church is like, and it helps your church appear in the right Google searches.

Some of the best ways to get potential guests to see your website are things you may already do. For example, if you have a solid About Us page (with your city name and denomination, if applicable), a Staff page, and pages for your ministries, you're on the right track.

Here are a few other quick things you can do to get your church website to show up on Google:

- Ask your members to review your church on Google. The more reviews you have, the more Google thinks your church is the result someone is looking for.
- Have a church blog.
- Post sermon transcripts (or a few powerful quotes from each sermon if you don't have a transcript).
- Have your site linked from other sites. If your church is a member of a denomination or network, make sure it's linked on their church finders.

3. Social media

Some people will see your social media pages before your website. Your social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) often offers the best flavor of what your church is really like.

Statistics show that around 85% of churches use Facebook, and only 15% use Twitter or Instagram. If your church doesn't use social media at all, it's easy to get started and maintain, and it helps you connect with people who may not be ready to visit your church yet. Facebook and Instagram are the best place to start, and you can add Twitter later if you'd like.

As a general rule, people need to see or hear a message about seven or eight times before taking action. So don't be afraid of sharing the same message too much. If anything you're sharing it too little.

Churches have lots of content that's perfect to share on social media. Here are a few ideas of things you already have that make great social posts:

- **Sermon audio, or video if you have it**
- **This Sunday's sermon passage**
- **Upcoming events**

You can get even more engagement by adding photos or videos to your posts.

A little consistency can go a long way. You can schedule your posts in bulk so it doesn't take much time. Not only will your church members look forward to seeing your regular content but you'll also gain traction in social media algorithms (how Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter determine what goes in people's feeds). And the more potential visitors see your posts in their timeline, the more they'll remember you when they're looking for a church.

4. Advertising

Church advertising? Isn't that a bit . . . commercial?

² <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/01/09/most-churches-offer-free-wi-fi-but-skip-twitter/>

I felt that way when I first started using Facebook ads. But then I saw who was liking my church's ad. Far from the usual suspects, dozens of people I'd never seen at our church were liking our ads—some even commented to ask for our address (don't be like me: include your address and service times in your ad). And it's all because we made an effort to go where unchurched people in our community were.

The reality is, advertisements are a great way to raise people's awareness of your church. Someone browsing a local newspaper or Facebook might be interested in visiting one Sunday—if only they knew your church existed!

Why not run some ads for a while and ask visitors how they heard about your church? If you hear “saw an ad” enough times, you may be onto something.

Here are some tips for running ads as a church:

- **Boosted post on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter** – Boosted posts are Facebook's way of putting a little advertising money behind your regular posts. You can write a post for people who don't know church lingo to invite them to your church or a specific event (e.g., Easter, a new sermon series, back-to-school events). Try these tips for your first boosted post:
 - Use a graphic: video works best, but photos are good, too
 - Use a button to help people know the best next step (Learn More, Sign Up, etc.)
 - Be concise, but provide all the information someone needs to get interested
- **Google ads** – People read fast on the internet, so write to grab attention. Your ad will drive to your website, so no need to include service times. Write just enough to get people to click the link. For example: “**Now accepting lost people.** We gather as a church every Sunday to find meaning in God. Please join us!” That phrase in bold can appear on your church website so people know that the ad they clicked took them where they meant to go.

- **Print ad (can be in your local newspaper/magazine or a separate mailer)** – If you have (or can afford to use) a graphic designer, this is a great piece to give to a pro. If you can't use a designer, try using the same design feel as your website—with one font, two max. You know what potential guests want to know, so make these prominent: your website, location, and service times.

5. Driving by

Though most people learn about a church online or through friends, don't forget how many people drive by your church every day. What does your church property and signage say about your church?

Here are a few tips:

- **Post your service times** – Whatever your church sign says (and if you don't have one, there are affordable ways to get one), make sure the service times are always visible. This is especially helpful when you're changing your weekly service times or adding special services for Good Friday or Christmas Eve.
- **Watch your language** – Speaking of church signs, remember that the main audience for your church's marquee sign is unbelievers. A joke about “turning or burning” might be funny, but it'll scare away unbelievers. Whatever you say, be sincere and considerate. Perhaps a simple, “No matter where you are in life, you are welcome here.”
- **Maintain your property** – Well-kept grass, flower beds, and parking lots are signs that your church is in good working order. Conversely, if your church grounds are an eyesore, you're communicating that things aren't going well.

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Guests Are Here. Now What?

As a pastor friend of mine says, “What you win them with is what you win them to.” As far as you can, try to make sure your website and ads match the flavor of your church. That way, visitors have an idea of what to expect this Sunday—and every Sunday.

When your church is prepared for guests, new people will notice—and they’ll be glad to know that you wanted them to be there.

You can help guests know they’re wanted when you make it easy for them to navigate your building and find friendly, helpful people. One way to do this is to post clear and helpful signage throughout your building, especially signs for:

- **Welcome table / visitor info**
- **Children’s wing (and cry room if you have one)**
- **Restrooms**
- **Coffee**
- **Worship center**

Even if you think your building is easy to navigate, remember that you know your building. Post signs just to be safe.

Also, you can make it easy for people to learn more about your church using connection cards. Ask them to fill out a short form with their name, email address, and any other info you want to collect (some churches ask for marital status, phone number, home address). It should be quick to fill out with space for guests to ask questions. Just make sure you follow up with each person who fills out a connection card (more on that in a minute).

Another thoughtful touch is offering gifts to your first-time visitors. Just make sure they're really gifts! Some churches give a coffee mug with hot chocolate mix and a handwritten note from a staff member. Other churches give DVDs of a Christian kids' show or a CD of songs often sung at your church. Whatever you give, make it something people will enjoy. And don't forget to tell guests where to pick up their gift!

Of all these options, though, nothing can top a personal connection. Part of building an inviting culture is helping your members find the boldness to ask a first-time guest to go to lunch after the service, or to swap phone numbers and set a time to grab coffee that week. It might take a while before a guest is comfortable enough to visit a small group, but a one-on-one lunch is far less intimidating—and far more welcoming.

The Day after Day One

So your visitors have scouted out your website and social media, they attended on a Sunday morning, and you collected their information using a connection card or a similar piece. The next part is even more relational.

A good next step for visitor follow up is mailing your guest a handwritten thank-you note and sending a short email with your contact info and a few Bible studies or upcoming events that are great on-ramps for guests. Ideally, that happens within a day or two of their visit. It's best to do it right away, but if it takes you a bit longer, it's still good to do.

The point of the personal email and the mailed thank-you note is to let guests know they've made a friend. People stay where they feel they belong. Your efforts here communicate to your guest, "There's a place for you here."

If you want to schedule some additional guest follow up, you can create a short automated email series using your church's Faithlife Group. These emails don't replace your personal connections, but they offer a few touchpoints to help visitors learn how to take the next step at your church. Here's an example of how you can automate your church's guest email series:

- **Email 1 (send day-of)** – A warm welcome and invitation to come back next week from your lead pastor.
- **Email 2 (send day 6)** – Address felt needs, like ways to meet people or join a small group. Include a reminder about this week's services. Invite people to join your church communication hub to connect with others in the church.
- **Email 3 (send day 12)** – Offer a meeting with the pastor or staff, and invite people to upcoming ministry events.

- **Email 4 (send day 19)** – Include a free gift (such as Faithlife TV) and links to your church’s group on Faithlife. Remind people to join your church communication hub so they can connect with others and stay in the loop.
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Put It into Practice

Visiting a new church takes a lot of courage. That’s why thinking through the process of reaching potential guests is so important. By making people feel like you want them there—even before they visit—you’re helping people build up the courage to walk through your doors.

So here’s our last tip: if you can, walk a mile in your guests’ shoes by visiting another church in your area. Notice everything you can, and write down ideas as they come to you. What did the church do (or not do) to make you feel comfortable? Did you know where to go? Why or why not? Absorb the guest experience as much as you can so you can better appreciate what your guests go through.

By doing so, you can extend a warmer welcome and help your guests know there’s a home for them at your church.

And that’s when the most important things start happening. Hurting people are welcomed with open arms. Single parents find the support they need. And above all, people seeking answers find them in the gospel.

Your church is already making a difference in the lives of people in your community. Now use these tips to welcome more people.

Church Tech with a Mission

Learn how Faithlife Sites is helping churches like yours grow.

Explore our website or schedule a demo with our church website experts to learn how Faithlife Sites helps churches grow in the Light of the Bible.

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