

# Are you ready for 5 types of visitors?

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When we think of welcoming newcomers, we often think first about friendly greeters, good signage, useful Q&A opportunities, clean bathrooms and helpful nurseries. Be assured — every one of those things is important.

However, many visitors make up their mind about a church before worship begins. Within a few minutes, most visitors decide whether the congregation is friendly. There is a small window of opportunity for the congregation to communicate its identity and welcome guests.

Before we welcome newcomers into our congregational “living room,” it is important to think about the whole equation: If we attract these people and they become partners in faith with us, how will we change as part of the body of Christ?

For example, we want to attract young adults, those who will be the bridge between the church as we know it and the church of the future. We know people in this generation want to be an active part of any organization with which they associate. They don’t want to do something just because it’s always been done a certain way. Welcoming young adults means welcoming guests with new voices and new gifts to share. This can mean change.

Welcoming newcomers means initiating relationships with people who will become members of our faith family. Our welcoming ministry begins with laying a good foundation to attract people and to encourage them to return and knowing what to do as they become a part of the family.

## **Different guests**

Identifying different types of visitors can help you to understand what each seeks.

1. **Dissatisfied** visitors are looking for a “better church.” Either yours has what they are looking for or it doesn’t. Their decision about returning will be based on these criteria.

2. **Invited** visitors come at the request of someone they know. They may not be looking for a church, but they may find a reason to return and stay.
3. **Seekers** want something spiritual. They look for real people with genuine smiles. They want authentic answers to their questions.
4. **Skippers** jump from church to church. Some like to meet people or network. Others are transient, moving on when something doesn't suit them. Sometimes their job calls for continual travel.
5. **Deep-rooted** visitors are active in their church and looking for a place to settle in for the long haul. When they move into a community, they are usually ready to serve.

Knowing these categories can be helpful. Understanding what different visitors seek can guide you as you get to know them and help them understand whether your congregation is a good spiritual fit.

### **Different welcoming churches**

- **Stationary** churches say, "You are welcome to join us." If newcomers fit the existing culture, they become members. If not, they usually leave.
- **Medley** churches welcome diversity because they know they should. This model looks and sounds beautiful. However, if the church does not welcome the rituals of different ethnicities and nationalities, eventually visitors will look for the exit sign.
- **Transformer** churches welcome all newcomers along with their unique gifts from God. They like new ideas, advocate for people and aren't afraid to change the culture and their community.

### **So, what do we do?**

It is good to know our identity as a local body of believers amid the larger community around us. However, if we want to grow, if we believe that's part of God's calling, our identity may change as our membership does. Ministries never envisioned may suddenly be a volunteer away. Discussions never had may be happening in the hall. Ideas never challenged may be questioned. Leadership roles may be filled differently.

As you consider welcoming newcomers, consider the entire cycle of incorporating new people into your fellowship. Tend to first impressions, but know you also are initiating potential family relationships.

Whether your church is just beginning a welcoming ministry or looking for ways to take welcoming to the next level, UMCOM offers a variety of resources and online training opportunities such to assist you.

***If you want your congregations to grow, you must be willing to let your identity change as your membership does.***

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