

A Different Kind of Prayer List: Is your church ready or Easter Visitors?

Here are some different prayer tips to help you evaluate your church's preparedness for new folks who might "connect" with your church after coming Easter Sunday.

This past weekend I went to a home improvement store. I needed help from two different departments on two issues I had in my home. As I walked into the spacious warehouse, lost at where to go, I started my quest to find the right person to help me buy the right product to end my nightmare problem at home. Now I could go into a lot of details, but the bottom line is I left that store two hours later, frustrated and no closer to finding my answer than when I walked in the door. Feeling aggravated, lost and frustrated; the Lord used that situation to help me make sure what I experienced in that store, people wouldn't feel at our church.

So what do people feel in your church? Do they leave your church no better than when they walked in the door? Do you have lots of new people and yet your church doesn't grow? Do just as many people walk in the door as those that walk out the back door? Take a look at these different types of prayer tips and ask yourself where you rate in each area, 1 to 10.

Prayer Tip 1. Community - When we think about connecting, what people are truly looking for is community. Community is a place where people can know and be known, love and be loved, celebrate and be celebrated. How does your church help people find community? This can be done in many ways. The most common ways churches do this are through small groups or Sunday school. Regardless of what your church does, you need to rate yourself not only in how people find community, but what happens in the community. True community helps people stick to your church and to what the Gospel is about. Other ways to help people find their way to community may be through the web, sign ups in your printed material, an "ask" through the message, a Campaign or a host of other ways. Rate your church on how well people can find community.

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10

Prayer Tip 2. Own the vision and pass the passion - The only way for your church to know and feel the passion for connecting people is for you to model what you want. If the people God sends to your church really matter, then you will instill in your people the desire to do the basics for when new people come to your church. What should these basics be? It starts with being friendly. Before you go to your friends after church, go to someone you don't know and say "hi" to them. If you are going out to dinner with some friends, invite someone you don't know that is new to the church. If you see someone out in the parking lot, walk up and welcome them. Sit in a different place in church each week to force yourself to see and greet new people.

Go up to people like you and get to know them—good chance you will have something in common. It is in the simplest day to day activities that you can model to people that new people to your church matter. Rate yourself on how well you have the vision and model passing it.

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Prayer Tip 3. Never give up on them - Scripture only records a couple of times that Jesus weeps. One is in John 11:35 where Jesus finds out that his best friend has died. The other is in Luke 19:41 when Jesus is looking out across the multitudes and sees them harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. When people in our church aren't connected to a qualified shepherd, it causes Jesus to weep. The fact that he cares for people, especially lost people, should drive us to make sure that we are getting people connected at any cost.

What could be blocking you from making sure this is happening? Are you focused on each person that comes up on your radar to get them connected? Are you training someone in your church to see that these people get follow up? If you knew this person was going to donate \$100,000 dollars to your church, would your follow up be different? My guess is, in the case of the latter, that person would not fall through the cracks. Rate your church on how well and with what care new people get followed up on.

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10

Prayer Tip 4. Next steps - At every event a person's next steps should be clear. At Saddleback we like to say, "Help people make their next step in the current step." People are looking for guidance. So often the church makes you guess at what your next step should be. We are to be a light to people, not a fog in their journey. Make the path clear so they can get connected. The shepherd picks the next pasture for the sheep, not the sheep! Have it spelled out in your printed material, on the web and in your verbal communication from the pulpit. If you aren't clear or you are unsure, you can guarantee a visitor or new member won't have a clue. If you think it is clear, have an unsaved friend read what you think is clear and see if they agree. So often we put church jargon in our documents or words only our church people know, but that a visitor wouldn't. Rate your church on how clear the pathway is for a person to get connected.

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Prayer Tip 5. Empower others - Give people in your church the responsibility to connect to others. During our church's 40 Days of Purpose Campaign, we challenged each of our host homes to go out and get people. Now that is nothing new. Each week we always want people in our church to invite others. But when people feel the responsibility to reach out, something happens. 40 Days not only challenged people to lead a group, it challenged them to FILL a group—with their friends! They felt the desire because we empowered them. They were our army, they had the passion, they had the connections. When we empowered them, our people in groups went from 8,000 to 30,000+. That's more than we could have hoped for. This Easter have your folks look around the Easter meal they are having and encourage them to start a group with those God brought around the table. Rate your church on how well it empowers people to connect others to the church.

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Prayer Tip 6. Customer service: Hard on you, easy on them. A simple sentence, but one the church hasn't caught on to. We are on this earth to serve our customers—the lost, the unchurched, the sheep God has sent to our pen (church). But so often we behave like the disciples in John 13. We walk into a room wanting someone to wash our feet. But when Jesus modeled what to do, in that moment, each one of the disciples WISHED they had done something different. Avoiding the towel to wash the feet was the easy thing to do, not the correct thing to do. When your church plans an event to connect people, or develops a pathway for people to get connected, or anything—make it easy on them even if it means hard on your church. Take the burden totally off them and put it on you. If the best time to get people connected is on Sunday morning, guess what, connect them on Sunday mornings. If the bulletin is the best method to sign people up, use the bulletin. Rate your church on how well you service new or visiting members.

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Prayer Tip 7. They are your future - New people know other new people. Not rocket science, but it is amazing how often we miss this common fact. We want our church to grow, but we don't invest in the people that know other people who need Christ. I heard a stat that when you first become a Christian, you know 50 unchurched people. However, by the time you have been a believer 10 years you know 5 unchurched people. Whatever the numbers, for most Christians, the longer we are a believer the more we don't know unbelievers. Two things: first, as believers, we need to make a conscious effort to always be in the path of unbelievers. Second, each new person in your church has a network that they can influence for Christ. If we want to reach

our area for Christ, let's network with the people God sends to us. When we see one visitor, let's see 51 (1 + the 50 they know). Now that should give you motivation and a snapshot into your church's future! Rate your church on how well you see the future in each visitor.

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Now that you have rated your church on connecting people, review your scores. You may go to a low score and work on that and pray for wisdom. You may go to a "prayer tip" you feel the Lord wants you to make better even though it may not be the lowest. Whatever the case, how we treat people should be our driving force. We are on this earth to help people prepare for eternity. Shouldn't their experience in the church be the best experience they have on this earth?