

“Becoming a Welcoming Church”

By Thom Rainer

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Philippians 2:3

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Matthew 28:19

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Hebrews 6:10

THE PATH TO BECOMING A WELCOMING CHURCH

What takes place in the first ten minutes when a first-time guest arrives at your church will largely determine whether he or she returns. Think about, for example, an unbeliever visiting your church. When non-Christians feel welcomed, they return. When they return, they have more opportunities to hear the gospel preached and to develop relationships with believers in the church. And those relationships are often used of God to bring people to His Son.

Let's do the math. If four first-time guests/visitors attend every week that's more than two hundred a year! While we should definitely be reaching out beyond the walls of our church facilities, imagine what a difference it would make if we were just as effective welcoming those who showed up.

GATHER A TEAM OF PASSIONATE SERVERS

Regardless of the size of your church, you will need several people to carry out the welcoming ministry well. This team must include those with a servant's heart, those with an "other" focus. The apostle Paul powerfully describes the role of servant of servant-hood in Philippians 2, where he wrote that becoming a servant means following the example of Christ. That example, though, is one that took Jesus to the cross.

We need welcoming team members who respond positively to the admonition of Paul in Philippians 2:3: ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves.”*** Now imagine a team of committed members treating people in this manner, including church guests.

CHANGE SOMETHING EVERY QUARTER

Any type of ministry or relationship can grow stale. WE can get in ruts and routines. And when we get in ruts and routines, we take our relationships and ministries for granted.

- 1. Change the way guests are welcomed in the worship services.***
- 2. Change the specific assignments of the greeters.***
- 3. Ask every greeter to write a handwritten note to a guest on five occasions over a three-month period.***
- 4. Change the welcome gifts completely.***

Any relationship needs an intentional refresh on occasion. And most ministries do as well.

GIVE THE GUESTS SOMETHING TO REMEMBER THE CHURCH

It doesn't have to be expensive. A small church with very limited funds refused to accept that they couldn't offer something to give to guests. So, some of the ladies in the church quilted potholders with the church's initials on it. They put the potholder and a handwritten note in a small bag. Guests loved it. The gift is an expression of gratitude and a reminder. And the

reminder can be very important in a guest's life. For the couple in Wisconsin, the gift had an eternal connection. Simple gifts (*pens, mugs, cups, hand-written notes, candy, bookmarkers, smartphone stylist, etc.*)

UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

Find someone who has never visited your church. Let them come in with fresh eyes. Ask them to be objective. Let them know you are not looking for all affirmations, but ways the church can really make improvements.

A POSTSCRIPT OF PRIORITY

Church leaders find themselves in paradoxical times. On the other hand, there is great frustration and even futility. Churches are struggling and declining. Some are on the precipice of closing, and many more have shut their doors. On the other hand, church leaders have so many opportunities. In almost any community, there are countless numbers of people who are not in church and have not responded to the gospel. And these unchurch people are neither resistant to the gospel nor adversarial toward the church. Indeed, many of them are seeking or waiting for an invitation from us.

The Millennials and their kids. The Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, represent the largest generation in America's history. Over 78 million younger adults could be in our churches, but fewer than one out of five actually do attend church.

Generation Z or iGen. These two generations represent massive waves of opportunities for our church. And they may grow more receptive to a message of hope represented by messengers of hope.

Cultural frustration. It hasn't been that long ago when the culture of churches and Christianity was the culture of our communities. At least on the surface, many of our values were the values of the rest of the communities around us. Not so much today. Church leaders and church members become increasingly frustrated with the world around us. We don't

understand why so many members of our communities see things so differently than we do.

Welcoming means going. Before I conclude this book let's be clear on a major issue. The welcoming church is not merely a church that waits for the world to arrive at the physical address of the congregation. I do not want to leave with you the impression that the Great Commission is about waiting for people to come to us.

The welcoming church is more of an attitude or disposition. It represents the mind-set of an outward focus rather than an inward focus. It is about serving rather than being served. A welcoming church is a going church. The members realize that church is not a place confined to walls, but a people determined to go. They demonstrate caring and the love of Christ in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, in the places they shop, and in all the places where they encounter people in their communities.

Those people in the community see Christ in the welcoming church members. They decide to visit the church. And when they come to the church, they are welcomed, truly welcomed. That's what the Great Commission is all about. That's what welcoming churches are all about. Is your church truly a welcoming? The answer to that question has eternal implications.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Review Philippians 2:3. Relate the details of that verse to becoming a welcoming church.
2. What qualifications should a member of a church welcoming ministry have?
3. Explain the importance and significance of a secret guest survey. Who should do the secret guest survey for your church? How often should you conduct the survey?
4. What can your church do more effectively to reach the Millennial generation and their children.
5. Why must a welcoming church also be a going church?