

“Becoming a Welcoming a Church”

By Thom Rainer

“For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, Than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

Psalm 84:10

“Greet all of the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.”

1 Thessalonians 5:26

Greeters/Ushers are a very instrumental ministry of the church. The very first person that a visitor usually comes in contact with when they arrive to the church is not the Pastor, deacon, worship leader, or staff but it is the greeter/usher. First impressions are everything. If the usher/greeter is rude, stand-of-ish, unpleasant, and mean it can turn visitors away from the church and make them feel unwelcome.

The days of the rude usher have come and gone. Years ago if an usher slapped you in the back of the head for talking in church, scolded you for chewing gum, or made you spit the gum out in church that would be acceptable. In today's society, this behavior is unacceptable and does not promote church growth, show the love of God, or help us to appear like a welcoming church.

WHY DO WE NEED GREETERS?

It's a focused ministry: Many of our members are already involved in other ministries. The leaders who are checking in and caring for children can't go to the parking lot to greet people. The worship team that is making quick adjustments before the service begins can't drop what they are doing and become the greeters at the doors. We need people in ministry who's sole focus at the moment is greeting people.

We need church members who understand greeters do more than merely saluting people upon arrival; we need them to be praying about the encounters they will have each week. For some, they will have a divine encounter with a guest. That man or woman or child who is visiting your church comes with expectations and needs. The first line of ministry takes place with greeters.

It moves people to strategic locations: A greeter is a leader in ministry. It is critical that these leaders are strategically located where they will make first and powerful connections with guests. When we have a good greeter ministry in our church, we know where every greeter will be. We know the specifics of every assignment.

It commits volunteers to specific times: Among the many reasons we have a greeter ministry is to welcome the guests at the specific time they arrive. We want our churches to be welcoming churches, but we can't welcome people we miss. Greeters not only have specific places to be, they have specific times to be there.

STRATEGIC LOCATIONS FOR GREETERS

The parking lot: Parking lot greeters are essential. They form the first impression for the guests. Their role may simply be to wave and smile. If necessary, they can provide directions to guest parking. They can offer assistance in inclement weather. They can hold car doors open for young parents unloading their kids. They can simply answer questions.

The Entrances: This one is obvious but often neglected. Churches need at least one greeter at every entrance where a guest might enter.

The roaming greeter: He/she simply roams the church looking to greet members and visitors who just may be standing around or waiting. They take it upon themselves to engage in conversation with visitors, use it as an opportunity to get to know them as well as introduce themselves, and to make visitors feel welcome.

The worship center greeter: We've heard it repeated times. Guests feel most uncomfortable after they enter the worship center or sanctuary and sit down. No one speaks to them any longer. Typically, no one sits with them. And because many of the members arrive late or right at the beginning of the service the guest feels alone. Such is the reason worship center greeters are important.

Think of them as roaming greeters in the worship services. They observe guests entering. They speak to them as the point of entry. But then they

observe after the guests are seated. And if they see guests are ignored or uncomfortable, they engage them again while the guests are seated. In some churches, there are sufficient numbers of greeters to sit with the guests.

COMMON MISTAKES OF GREETERS

Holy huddles: If your church has two or more greeters conversing with each other as guests arrive, you are already excluding the guests. They are not a part of the conversation. They are not a part of the group. They feel left out.

Arriving too late; leaving too early: Greeters should be in their positions before the first guests arrive. And they should stay late, because as many as half of the guests will arrive late. Be on time. Stay late. Eternity could hang in the balance.

Failing to introduce yourself: Greeters are real people. Guests are real people. When greeters introduce themselves to guests, they need to speak as if it is a normal encounter. When we meet someone for the first time, or greet them for a second time, we don't just shake their hands and walk away. We say something like, "Welcome! I'm _____." It's pretty basic, but it makes a huge difference. And if you are good at remembering names, use their names to speak to them and their children again later. It is a powerful act. Just make sure you get their names right. It can be powerful in the opposite direction as well.

THE WELCOME CENTER

It can be simple: While some churches have fully built out welcome centers with counters, fixed signage, and lighting, it does not have to be elaborate. It can be a table with a tablecloth, some neat mobile signage, and adequate lighting.

It should be manned when guests are present: A welcome center is only an information center if no one is present. The person who mans the welcome center is typically a person with an outgoing and engaging personality.

It should have information on the church: Although websites and social media pages are important, we still have people who like to feel, touch, and keep information they can hold.

It should have gifts: Some churches offer Bibles. Some churches give away church mugs. Some churches provide a gift card to guests. When a guest takes a gift home, he or she is more likely to return to the church. Gifts are really important.

It should have pens. The person manning the welcome center often needs to write information for the guests. And it is not unusual for the guests to write down information to leave with the church. Have pens they can take home and remember the church.

It may have treats: Different churches have different views on providing treats like candies. I get that. But if I get chocolate from the church, I'm not forgetting the church. In fact, I may return the next week just to get some more chocolate.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and perfect, how would you rate your church's greeter ministry according to the information in this chapter?
2. What changes could your church make to be closer to a perfect score?
3. In the early church culture, it was common to greet one another with a holy kiss, such as portrayed in 1 Thessalonians 5:26: "Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss." While not all cultures include the physical kiss in greeting, why do you think the Bible exhorts us to greet people at church?
4. Pretend you are a guest at your church for the first time. Does the signage clearly point you to where the entrances and greeters are?
5. Review and discuss the importance of the worship center greeter.