

Online First-Time Guest Hospitality

For many years, churches have worked on their first-time guest hospitality for their buildings with greeters, parking lot attendants, ushers, etc. But of course, now it is a whole new ballgame with people "visiting" us for the first time, online. In a building we had a "captive audience" for an hour, but online, if a guest doesn't feel welcome or at home, they will be gone in a matter of moments.

So, here are some of the things churches are looking at to make sure they have great online guest hospitality:

- **Have a warm greeting at the beginning of the worship service. Even better if an individual or family records a message of welcome. This makes the beginning of worship very real and genuine.**
- **Tell your guests what will be happening in the service as new people may not have any idea.**
- **Watch any "insider" language; don't assume people know church words that are so familiar to us. This is especially true for announcements which can turn off new people very quickly.**
- **Keep the service brief and get to the message early on. People's attention span online is short.**
- **Have someone monitor the "chat" column and engage with anyone new who posts.**
- **Invite newcomers to participate by sending a prayer request, or fill out a connection card or participate in an ongoing group.**
- **Follow up with newcomers after worship. Many pastors will do Zoom calls with new people to begin to connect.**
- **Ask for feedback from newcomers which gets the new person involved and gives you important information about what is working or not working.**
- **Just as when we were in our buildings, invitation is the most important way to welcome someone into our churches. Invite and refer people and then ask them what the experience was like for them and how you can invite them again. The more you invite, the more first-time guests you will have.**

The rule of thumb when guests visited our buildings, was the guest would make up their mind in the first 8-10 minutes whether or not they would come back. Now, the window to make someone feel welcome is much shorter. Make sure your online hospitality is extravagant, so you may impact more people with the Good News.

