



Seven Things Church Members Should Say to Guests in a Worship Service

One of the more common questions I'm asked relates to growth barriers. For example, church leaders may want to know how to move past the 150-attendance level of the past five years. Or other leaders desire to know how to break through financial giving barriers.

Those questions are tough because they often presume a brief response to be adequate. In reality, there are many theological and methodological issues at work in growth barriers. Today, I am looking at a very basic barrier: lack of friendliness to church guests.

In a previous blog post, I noted things we should *not* say to a guest in our worship services. In today's post I look at the positive perspective: seven things we *should* say to guests.

1. **"Thank you for being here."** It's just that basic. I have heard from numerous church guests who returned because they were simply told "thank you."
2. **"Let me help you with that."** If you see someone struggling with umbrellas, young children, diaper bags, purses, and other items, a gesture to hold something for them is a huge positive. Of course, this comment is appropriate for member to member as well.
3. **"Please take my seat."** I actually heard that comment twice in a church where I was speaking in the Nashville area. The first comment came from a member to a young family of five who were trying to find a place to sit together.
4. **"Here is my email address. Please let me know if I can help in any way."** Of course, this comment must be used with discretion, but it can be a hugely positive message to a guest.
5. **"Can I show you where you need to go?"** Even in smaller churches, guests will not know where to find the nursery, restrooms, and small group meeting areas. You can usually tell when a guest does not know where he or she is to go.
6. **"Let me introduce you to _____."** The return rate of guests is always higher if they meet other people. A church member may have the opportunity to introduce the guest to the pastor, other church staff, and other members of the church.
7. **"Would you join us for lunch?"** I saved this question for last for two reasons. First, the situation must obviously be appropriate before you offer the invitation. Second, I have seen this approach have the highest guest return rate of any one factor. What if your church members sought to invite different guests 6 to 12 times a year? The burden would not be great; but the impact would be huge.

Let's look at one example of breaking attendance barriers by saying the right things to guests. Presume your church has two first-time guests a week. Over the course of a year, the church would have 100 first-time guests. With most of the members being genuinely guest friendly, you could see half of those guests become active members. Attendance could thus increase by as much as 50 persons every year.



Ten Things You Should *Never* Say to a Guest in a Worship Service

If you want to make certain guests ***never return*** to your church, say one of these things to them when they visit.

Indeed, these unfortunate and ill-timed comments almost always guarantee that you will offend guests and make them very uncomfortable. Most of the time guests are already ill at ease since they are in a new place and a new environment. By the way, each of these quotes was *actually communicated* to a guest in a worship service. My guess is that all ten of them have been said many times . . . *too many times*.

1. **“You are sitting in my pew/seat.”** This sentence was actually said to me when I was a visiting preacher in a church. The entitled church member did not realize I was preaching that day. I had the carnal joy of watching her turn red when I was introduced. And, yes, I did move. She scared me.
2. **“Is your husband/wife with you?”** This question is rightly perceived as, *“We really don’t want single adults in our church.”* Members see their church as family friendly as long as “family” meets their definition.
3. **“Are those your children?”** This question is becoming more common with the growth in the adoption of children who are not the same race or ethnicity as their parents. One parent with an adopted child was asked if he got to choose how dark his child would be. I’m serious.
4. **“The service has already begun.”** This sentence is rightly understood to mean, *“You are late, and you will be disrupting the service.”* I saw that happen recently. The family left. I was late too, but I stayed since I was preaching.
5. **“There is not enough room for your family to sit together.”** I was visiting a church a few weeks ago that did just the opposite. When larger families came in the service, members actually gave up their seats to accommodate them. Now that’s true servanthood! I bragged on the members when I spoke that morning.
6. **“You will need to step over these people to get to your seat.”** No! Please request those seated to move to the center. It’s a church worship service, not a movie theater.
7. **“That’s not the way we do it here.”** Of course, you can’t have a worship service where any behavior is acceptable. Most of the time, however, the varieties of worship expressions are absolutely fine. I heard from a lay leader recently who witnessed that spoken to a guest who raised her hand during the worship music. She never returned. What a surprise.
8. **“You don’t look like you are a member here.”** Perhaps when this sentence was spoken, the church member meant to convey, *“Are you visiting us?”* But to the guest it sounded like, *“You don’t belong at this place.”*
9. **“Have you considered attending the church down the street?”** I’m not kidding. Someone shared that comment with me on social media. She was new in town and was visiting churches. She had no idea why the man in the church said that to her, but she never returned to the church.
10. **“The nursery is real full.”** To the young parent, this sentence is interpreted one of two ways: *“There is not enough room for your child”* or *“Your child probably won’t get good care.”*