

The Second Impression

If you are serious about wanting people to return for subsequent visits, let guests know they are welcome and important. Though it may be true that a few people will be put off by a letter or a call, most people will have a positive impression of such follow-up efforts. Most folks who really don't want a letter or call probably won't have filled out a guest registry, or will have left it incomplete.

During the first week after a person's first visit, send them a letter, signed by the minister, president, or membership committee chair thanking them for their visit and inviting them to return. Enclose a brochure about the church in general or about upcoming events and/or enclose a copy of the newsletter. *See II.f. & II.g. Visitor's Letter versions I & II, and II.h. JUC Church Brochure.* In congregations without a minister, the letter should be signed by the president of the board.

During the second week after a visit, a lay person, most likely someone on the membership committee, should call the guest for a brief chat. A simple "glad you could come; did you like the service?" is often sufficient. Comments or questions sometimes may need to be passed on to ministers or other leaders in the church for further action. If you have an upcoming event that may be of interest to newcomers, invite them. Be sensitive to how the call is received; only engage in further conversation if it is welcome.

The Guest Registry form is more than a guest book. *See II.b. Guest Registry Form.* It not only has the name, address and phone number of your guests, it also can ask information about the names and ages of children and how the visitor found out about your church. It can ask their permission for you to make them a name tag for their next visit and to mail them a complimentary subscription to your newsletter. If they do not give permission, it is often because they are not sure on their first visit if they are going to like your church. If, during the follow up phone call, the caller finds out that the guest did enjoy the service and may well attend again, permission to make the name tag and send the newsletter can often be obtained during the call. Name tags can easily be made on a computer, with some kind of border or icon that distinguishes it from a member's name tag, with the date of their first visit, and pinned to a visitors' name tag display. Have it ready by the very next weekend. *See II.i. Visitor's Name Tags.*

A loose leaf Guest Registry form can be alphabetized in a three ring notebook for easy reference and for keeping track of subsequent visits. When a guest returns, a simple conversation with the greeters can indicate they have already visited and filled out the form. The returning visitor can be shown where they can find their name tag. They are usually very impressed that you cared enough to make it. Have them return their name tag before leaving the church to a basket on the welcoming table. A volunteer can mark the date of the visit on the Guest Registry form before re-alphabetizing it on the board. When the name tag board is getting overly full, a volunteer can take down the name tags that have not been used for, say, three to six months. The name tags which are removed from the board can be taken out of their plastic holders and alphabetized in a little stack, kept at the welcoming table. If a guest does eventually return, it can be easily retrieved and put back into use.

Good information about upcoming programs, an invitation to a fellowship dinner (the first one should be complimentary), a special spot away from the intimidating throngs during coffee hour where guests can go to ask questions, all are important to making them want to return. An open invitation to participate in Adult RE classes or other small gathering should be extended personally to each visitor. It is in these small group settings where they will meet and get to know people. Once they have made several good connections in the congregation, they will be much more likely to become a member. The process of becoming a member should be made clear, as well. A written brochure about the membership process should be on the information table. *See II.j. Becoming a Member.*