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# Leading Ideas



## | Top 10 Reasons Visitors Don't Come Back

By Thom S. Rainer On April 3, 2019

Leading Ideas

**What do visitors say when asked why they don't return to a church? Thom Rainer outlines the top 10 responses when hundreds of guests were surveyed about their experiences of visiting a church.**

When we asked hundreds of guests about their experiences of visiting churches, it was not a pretty picture. We asked specifically why they did not return to a particular church. Here were their top ten responses:

### 1. An unfriendly and awkward stand-and-greet time in the worship service

When I first saw this response coming in by the hundreds, I was surprised. But as I dug deeper, I discovered there were two issues with the stand-and-greet time. First, some guest just felt awkward with the exercise. It seemed to be a ritual more for the members than the guests. Second, a number of guests did not mind the stand-and-greet time, but they felt left out during the welcome. Either they were totally ignored, or they were inundated with what they perceived were superficial greetings.

“ *The first step in becoming a welcoming church may be the admission that your church may not really be a welcoming church.* ”

### 2. Unfriendly church members

Most church members do not view themselves from the perspective of church guests. They don't usually speak to guests because they don't know them. And the church members usually retreat to the comfort of the holy huddles of the people they do know.

### 3. Unsafe and unclean children's areas

This response generated the most emotional comments. If your church does not have clear safety and security procedures and if the children's area does not appear clean and sanitary to the guests, do not expect young families to return to your church. Indeed, as word about your children's area grows, do not expect young families to visit the first time.

### 4. No place to get information on the church

Guests are trained by their experiences to look for a central welcome and information center. But here is the catch. Some churches did have them, but guests couldn't find them. And some churches have them in a good visible location, but they have no one manning the welcome center. Guests told us they were hesitant to go to an unmanned welcome center. The church might as well not have an information and welcome center if no one is there to help guests.

## 5. Bad church website

Nearly all the church guests checked the church website before they attended a worship service. Even if they decided to visit the church after looking at a bad website, they visited the church with a negative disposition. The two critical items guests want to see on a church website are the physical address of the church and times of the services. It's just that basic. Keep in mind this reality. The church website is now the front door of the church. Will guest feel welcome when they come to your front door?

## 6. Poor signage

If you have been attending your church a few weeks, you don't need signage. But guests do. And they get frustrated when they don't have clear directional signage for parking, for the entrance to the worship center, for the children's area, and others.

## 7. Insider church language

Listen to the words in the worship service of your church. Listen to the announcements. Listen to the sermon. Listen to the casual conversations. Are members saying things that a first-time guest would not understand? Well, that's what church guests told us. They said they left some churches thinking that much of the language was foreign and filled with acronyms.

## 8. Boring or bad church services

My surprise was not that this factor made the top ten. It was that it was only listed as the eighth most frequent concern. In the past, church leaders of small churches would tell me they didn't have the resources for quality services. In the digital age, with so many affordable resources, no church is allowed that excuse.

## 9. Members telling guests they were in the wrong pew or chair

I thought that this rude and insensitive behavior disappeared years ago. The church guests told us otherwise. In fact, the most common comment was, "You are sitting in my pew." Unbelievable. Totally unbelievable.

## 10. Dirty facilities

Some of the comments were brutal: "Didn't look like it had been cleaned in a week." "No trash cans anywhere." "Restrooms were worse than a bad truck stop." "Pews had more stains than a Tide commercial." You get the picture. A dirty church communicates to guest, "We really don't care."

The first step in becoming a welcoming church may be the admission that your church may not really be a welcoming church. Are you facing reality in your church?

This article is excerpted from *Becoming a Welcoming Church* (B&H Publishing Group, 2018) by Thom S. Rainer. Used by permission. The book is available at [Cokesbury](#) and [Amazon](#). The material can also be found at: [thomrainer.com](http://thomrainer.com).

## Related Resources

- [50 Ways to Welcome New People](#), a free Lewis Center resource
- [3 Welcoming Strategies that Can Backfire](#) by Ann A. Michel
- [Pet Peeves of a Church Visitor](#) by Greg Atkinson

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