

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Don't Call Them Visitors

Let's play a word-association game? Your first word: "Visitor." What comes to mind? Here's a few of ours: "uncertain," "curious," "unknowing," "anxious," "uncomfortable." The whole assumption behind the word is that the person has little or no experience in his/her new situation. They are *visiting*, and thus don't really know what to expect. Being a visitor-in most situations-can be a rather disquieting experience.

"Being a visitor, in most situations, can be a rather disquieting experience. So, don't use that term."

— Gary L. McIntosh

Here's another word: "Guest." First impressions? Ours include: "important," "respected," "invited," "welcomed," "honored," "attention." Much more positive images, aren't they?

Now, think about the words used in your church to describe newcomers who attend for the first or second time. What do you call them publicly? Privately? Which of the two words describes how you feel toward them? And, which do you think describes how they feel, themselves?

The word *visitor* is defined as: "A person who resides temporarily; one who goes or comes to inspect; one who makes a short stay at a place for a particular purpose." The word implies previous distance from an experience or event or people.

Why not begin referring to your visitors as *guests*, defined as: "A person welcomed into one's house; a person to whom hospitality is extended; a person held in honor who is due special

courtesies." While the word still suggests "newcomer," it implies that this newcomer has a much more important place in the situation.

Changing your vocabulary may not change how your newcomers feel about their experience. But, it may very well change the way your members feel about the newcomers. And, that *will* change the way newcomers feel about their experience.

Imagine in your own personal life, when you have guests over to your house how do you treat them? You probably meet them at the door. You greet them warmly and express genuine pleasure at the honor of their presence in your home.

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

New website address:

www.churchgrowthnetwork.com

e-mail . . . cgnet@earthlink.net

write . . .
PO Box 892589
Temecula, CA 92589

Meet guests as they exit their cars.

Changing your vocabulary will change your attitude.

So, how do you treat those who attend your church for the first time? Here are some ideas to begin using this week.

Introduce the term “guests” into the vocabulary of your church leaders as you discuss and describe those who are attending for the first (or second or third) time.

Let's take this idea a little farther. In addition to calling newcomers “guests,” why not make another change in your vocabulary? Many churches have greeters who stand at the doorway of the church and extend a smile and “good morning” to those entering the building. Here's the dictionary's definition of the word *greeter*: “One who meets or extends welcome in a specified manner; one who gives a formal salutation at a meeting.” But if we're serious about entertaining newcomers in God's house, what might we better call those of us who have a responsibility for welcoming these guests? “Hosts,” of course! Here's the definition: “One who receives or entertains socially; one who opens his or her home for a special event; one who takes particular care and concern that guests are well accommodated.” If you are serious about welcoming the guests who come to your church, here's a few ideas on how and where you might be good hosts.

Parking Lot Hosts. Why wait for guests to come to you; why not go to them? Meet your guests soon after they get out of their car.

Lobby Hosts. A lobby host is much more fluid than greeters. One guest family might encounter a lobby host who escorts the mother to the children's department and explains the process of dropping off and picking up her kids. Another lobby host might introduce the guest to someone

in the church who has a similar job or who lives in the same neighborhood.

Service Hosts. These are people who are actually *inside* the worship center. Service hosts are looking particularly for guests or people they don't recognize, and taking the initiative to introduce themselves.

Coffee Hosts. Coffee hosts hang out in the immediate vicinity of the refreshments and are on the lookout for newcomers standing alone. Their task is to engage these guests in conversation, and not leave them alone until they have handed them off to someone else in the area.

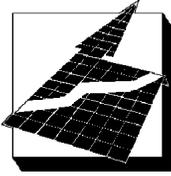
Spread the “hosting responsibilities” throughout the year. This allows more members to be involved in welcoming newcomers. And experience has shown that when members perform their hosting duty on their assigned days, they are increasingly friendly with guests even on the days they are “off duty.”

So, change your vocabulary and get starting in hosting your guests this week.



Adapted from the forthcoming book *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Baker Books March 2013) by Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn.

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What Do Your Visitors See?

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

P.O. Box 892589 Temecula, CA 92589-2589
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What Visitors See!

What do visitors see when they drive into your church parking lot? What do newcomers feel when they enter your front door? What do new people think as they enter your worship center?

What Visitors See! will assist your church leaders to understand what visitors encounter when they attend your church for the first time.

In this DVD Gary L. McIntosh walks you through the Ten Moments of Truth that all visitors experience when they come to a new church.

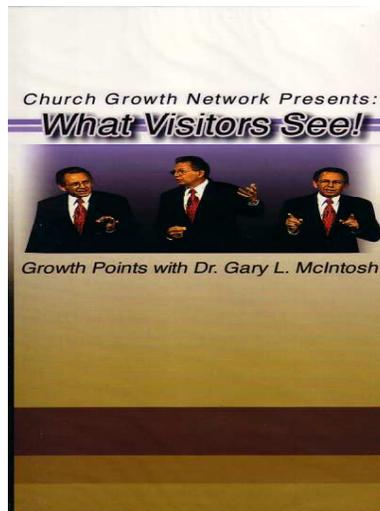
What do visitors see when they come to your church? Why not watch this training video with some of your leaders and find out? You'll be glad you did...and so will your guests!

Dr. Gary L. McIntosh is an internationally known author, trainer, consultant, and professor of Christian Ministry & Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada, California.

As President of the McIntosh Church Growth Network, a church consulting firm, Dr. McIntosh has served numerous churches in over eighty-three denominations throughout the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

What Visitors See! is an excellent resource for greeters, the welcoming team, evangelism committee, and visitor follow-up team.

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