



# HOSPITALITY TOOLS

By Scott Busch

**H**ospitality is a gift and for some people it's part of their DNA. They're naturals. You can practically see the halos around those who easily connect with others. They smile. Ask questions. Listen with grace and interest. These natural evangelists are beacons and magnets for your church. Cherish and nurture them.

Then there's the rest of us – those who need a little help. We want to reach out, yet don't always know how. It's important to note, before we commit to any evangelism, we must first follow the advice of many learned disciples and vocalize our relationship with God and Christ. Before we reach out, we need to first be courageous and dig within ourselves.

Fortunately, there are an abundance of resources to help church members understand and become comfortable with the calling of evangelism. For those of us non-naturals, the process takes time and commitment; however, it almost always produces rewarding results for participants.

On the other hand, all of us – even the naturals – can use some tools to invite guests to church and infuse a spirit of hospitality into the process. If we know that 85 percent of guests and members initially come to church because a church member invited them, then let's begin with augmenting that fact. Let's find catalysts to help members invite people to church.

## *Host An Event*

Besides the high-holiday times of Christmas and Easter, your church should actively be hosting musical events (Jazz, Bluegrass, Bell Choirs), food events (picnics, farm markets, chili cook-offs, barbeques), art shows, plays, and crafts sales. Or perhaps you recognize the celebratory nature of Palm Sunday and Pentecost, and consider these important Sundays a reason for your members to invite guests.

It makes more sense to your members and their possible guests to be invited to something special happening at your church. In addition to the fellowship that an event creates for church members, events become opportunities to share our faith with others.

## *Call Your Visitors "Guests"*

What a difference changing those words will make. A visitor, by its very definition, sounds like someone making a one-time visit. A visitor is welcome perhaps, but not embraced. A visitor goes to museums. Even at our sporting events, a visitor is often our rival, an entity to defeat. A guest however, is someone who enters our home and is treated with respect, with honor. It is our responsibility to make a guest feel comfortable and happy to be in our presence. So be sure everything you say, or your members say, even any attendance card or Guest Books says guest, not visitor.

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## Reminders

As much as ministers wish each congregational member would hold tight to every word and message delivered from the pulpit, we all know that's not always (often?) the case. Though we walk out the church doors refreshed, we quickly become consumed by the clutter of our daily lives. And we all forget – a lot.

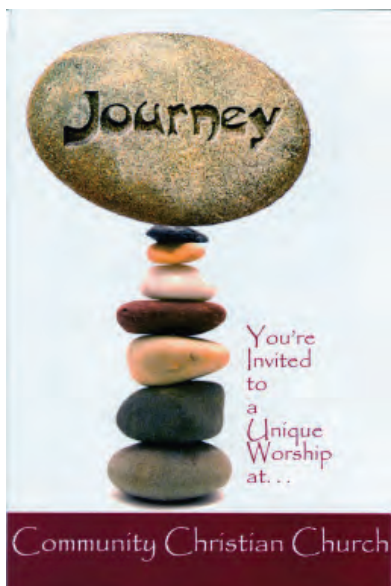
Advertising people know this and drive their message home – repeatedly. You don't have to hammer like the ad folks, yet you must do more than you probably are doing to get the message of your event to get noticed and sink in. And if your objective is not only to have members attend, but to have them invite others, you need to reinforce this message.

To promote your event:

- Of course ... talk about event during service
- Recap the event in your newsletter, program, and web site;
- Mail letters (maybe with a flexible fridge magnet);
- Give stickers to children during children's service;
- Have your church leaders commit to inviting guests;
- Use social media channels to spread the word (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, etc.);
- Be specific, tell as much about your event as time or space allows;
- Repeat reminders! Not every member, not even the dedicated ones, are in church every Sunday. By announcing the event multiple times in multiple channels your message reaches out to a larger audience and has a better chance of making an impact.

## Invite Guests

You have created your event. You have the time, date, and specifics about it confirmed. And you've covered all your bases to remind members about event. Now both the church and church members need to invite guests. This does not mean mass mailings to residents near your church. Mass mailings are expensive, non-productive, non-personal, and very non-green in our environmentally conscious world.



There are many alternative communication channels for which to promote your event – over the backyard fence, by phone, through email, Facebook, Twitter, and by highly targeted mail. If you've made your event really special, you should even alert various print publications and broadcasters in your area (newspapers, locally based magazines, neighborhood newsletters, and even the radio and television stations – you just never know).

Your members could use and would appreciate any means available to make sending an invitation easy. Send them a sample email they could resend. Give them blank invitation card(s) they could complete and mail. Or consider the newly created [www.smileinvite.com](http://www.smileinvite.com) tool which allows each church to set up a web account for custom-

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izing invitations, which members can log onto and personalize themselves to/for their guests. Invitation designs can be selected from pre-designed templates or a church can create their own. Churches can even hyper-link from their site. *Net Results* now includes a church sign up for a discounted rate. The cards options are selected and customized specific to each church, personalized by the member, ordered on-line, yet delivered to the invited guest by regular post in a closed faced envelope. And the \$2.95 cost of the card is paid for by church members, not the church, so this process doesn't even come out of the church budget.

## Event Follow-up

Selecting a church is a very personal thing. Don't try to convert someone after a one time visit. That's pushy and a turn off. The first thing you want to do is thank a guest for coming to your church. Let them know you understand it can be daunting, difficult, and just plain different coming to a new church. And it is! The reason most of us frequent the same grocery store, hardware store, or restaurant is because we know it. We're comfortable. Getting to know a church and its people takes time – acknowledge that to your first-time guest and they will appreciate your understanding. And then, invite them back.

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It seems like virtually every church mails a follow-up letter from the pastor to a new guest. And often new guests are put on the churches' newsletter distribution. Some churches will have their gregarious members phone a guest. And many churches will even deliver home made bread, cookies, or a bag of goodies to the visitor. All of these are good, if they are done quickly and in the spirit of hospitality – not closing a “sale”!

Here are some considerations for how you could (and probably should not!) follow up with a guest:

An obviously canned letter from the minister may do more harm than good. The letter should be personalized, short, and heartfelt. It should be written from the perspective of what church can mean for the guest – less from what it means for the church or pastor. And it should reach the guest prior to the next service.

Strike a balance of making sure the guest is welcome for a return visit, without making them feel like a target! The difference is finesse. Coach your phoners to ask questions that may interest the visitor. Delivering goodies is great, but keep the visit short. There are volumes of new techniques in advertising with a theme called “Permission Marketing” which basically recognizes no one wants

products, services, or a church to jam anything down their throats. People want to make their own choices – especially about the church they plan to attend.


If you use phone or in person follow-up, match the age

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and perhaps the sex of the caller with the visitor. It's great that churches and our Christian faith embrace diversity, yet don't force this issue in your initial follow up. A twenty-five year old being called by a sixty-five year old, could again be less productive than no call at all.

Whisper, don't shout. If your church sets up a flurry of activity with a new guest and then just stops – that sends a message of recruitment, not one of hospitality. Perhaps a small little note card mailed once a week for a few weeks from the pastor might let people know you're there for them without being pushy. This too can be done personally, yet automatically through [www.smileinvite.com](http://www.smileinvite.com), or if done by the church on a scheduled basis that could be even better.

Less is more. Repeat – less is more. Pastors and ministers are word smiths, words are powerful, they preach it, teach it, and write it. Put a tight governor on those words in your follow-up messages! A short, clear, and sincere message will have greater impact on your guest than more words on the page.

The old ways of bringing your church to the people is changing. New attitudes and new tools are needed to introduce church to those who are interested. The best resource of who would know those open to attending church are your church members themselves. Empower them with an understanding of why it's important to invite others, help them articulate what being a Christian means to them personally, and offer some tools to make the inviting easier. Host events that get people talking and excited. By doing so, you increase your odds of having more guests, repeat attendees, and perhaps more committed members. It's not that hard. And it can be fun! You just need to be a champion and go ahead and, as Nike encourages, “Just Do It!” 



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