

A Quick Start Guide for Greeters

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Introduction

God asks the church to be a fellowship sharing a common purpose and continually growing in faith. Paul describes the church as Christ's "body" (Ephesians 1:22).

People experience the presence of Jesus Christ in the world through the ministry of the church. When your local church serves the needs of people, members and non-members, it is an expression of the love of Christ. The church is a servant body, created for service. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Christ calls every member of the church into ministry. The church is "a kingdom of priests" (I Peter 2:9). As a greeter, you are a minister. Every Christian believer is called to ministry, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and in baptism ordained for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Shortly after Pentecost, the gift of greeting or hospitality (Romans 12:13, I Timothy 3:2, I Peter 4:9) was first exercised specifically for the church and those whom Christ died to save. As believers praised God, they had favor with people. Their love for one another attracted others to their fellowship and "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

God supplies each person in the church with the resources for ministry—scripture, spiritual power, God's character, and spiritual gifts. A greeter is equipped for his or her ministry by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to make their ministry effective and build up the body of Christ.

When a person steps into a church for the first time, he or she evaluates the atmosphere. He asks himself: "Will they accept me? Will it be easy to make friends? Will my spiritual and personal needs be met? Will it be easy to find my way around? Will my family like it here?"

The newcomer will quickly come to some conclusions during the first few minutes. First impressions are often lasting impressions. Consequently, the ministry of the greeters is one of the most important things that happens in any congregation! Sometimes it is called "foyer ministry."

Although a greeter's love should be no stronger than is the love found in the rest of the body of Christ, nevertheless the greeter performs a major role in ensuring that people see and experience that love. In Christ, you have received God's unconditional love, and, in Christ, you are called to extend that same unconditional love to others. The ministry of greeting is perhaps one of the most crucial in the church because it is one of the most visible. It is a ministry vital to the saving work of the church. ^

Duties of the Greeter - Ministry Description

Although the program varies from church to church, the ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes a greeter can best be described in the following ways:

Contact with newcomers

When you notice unknown guests, introduce yourself first, extend a welcome, and then ask for the visitors' names. While the visitors write in your guest book or complete registration cards, call over an usher or deacon. Introduce the visitors to this person who will show them to a seat or help them in finding Sabbath School classes, the parents' room, etc. It is especially important that you make a record of each visitor and turn this over to the pastor or interest coordinator. This is an important source of new members when properly followed up.

Take an interest in people

The congregation depends on the greeters to make their church personal. If you really care about people, they will be able to see it. Some are shy and will want you to preserve their dignity by not being too forward. Others are gregarious and want to be asked questions. Try to sense needs such as those who are confused about the location of children's activities or need access to a rest room, etc. Be as helpful as you can.

Invitations to dinner

Your local church should have a plan to make sure that visitors are either invited to lunch at someone's home or to a church fellowship dinner. Larger churches organize groups to host dinner every Sabbath. Small churches will have potlucks usually once a month.

Listen for deeper needs

People come to church burdened with hurts, disappointments and personal crises. As you have opportunity, steer hurting people to those in the church family to whom they can turn for help—the pastor, professional or peer counselors, teachers, physicians, social workers, Adventist Community

Services leaders, and others. Use your knowledge to meet people at their points of need.

Distribute materials

Your task as a greeter has more to do with relationships than mechanical aspects like handing out the church bulletin. At the same time bulletins are also important! Many churches have a special handout or packet for visitors also. This often includes a map of the Sabbath School rooms, some history and a list of week-day activities like Bible study groups, Pathfinder Club, health classes, the Adventist Community Services center, family life workshops and Bible seminars. If your church does not have something like this, perhaps the greeters should meet to prepare one.

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The ministry of being a greeter is one of the most significant roles in any church because greeters have a unique opportunity to help every person who comes through your church doors to see and hear and feel the love of Jesus Christ. When people enter your church for the first time they may wonder: Will they accept me here? Will I make friends? Will my family like it? Will I be able to find my way around? Will my spiritual and personal needs be met?

Newcomers often draw conclusions about these questions in the first few minutes of their visit. And first impressions tend to be lasting ones. That's why "foyer ministries" have such a huge impact on the life and growth of every church. The importance of your greeting and hospitality ministry can hardly be overrated!

"First Impressions are lasting impressions."

First Impressions

Recognizing the power of first impressions is a vital element when planning effective ways of making people feel welcome and comfortable in your church. There are four main factors that can influence a person's impressions of your church before he or she even makes it through the door: the church's sign, the building and grounds, parking, and the church entrance.

The Church Sign

- 1) Does your sign clearly identify your church? Can it be easily read by people driving by? Is it accurate?
- 2) Is your sign attractive? Does it need to be cleaned, painted, or repaired?

The Buildings and Grounds

- 1) How does your church and the grounds look to passersby? Take time to walk and drive past your church from both directions and note your impressions. Ask several other church members to do the same.
- 2) Are the church and its grounds adequately lighted at night? Good lighting is essential for appeal as well as for safety.

Parking

Visitor is a word that seems to say “temporary.”

Guest is warmer and sounds more like family.

- 1) Is there enough? If side street parking is your only option when your lot is full, ask regular members to park on the street to leave spaces in the lot for guests.
- 2) Do you have reserved parking spaces for guests? If so, they should be the best spots in the lot, next to the handicap parking. They should also be clearly marked by standing signs or instructions painted on the pavement.
- 3) Could you use a parking lot attendant? Some guest-oriented churches provide parking lot attendants trained to recognize guests, welcome them, and direct them to the reserved parking spots. These carefully chosen attendants are truly the front-line greeters.

The Church Entrance

- 1) Is the main entrance to your church clearly the main entrance? If there is any way for a guest to be confused, consider doing one or more of the following:
 - Provide clear, attractive, yet unobtrusive signs to point the way.
 - Have parking lot attendants direct guests to the main entrance.
 - Assign a greeter to the parking area to serve as a guide to guests. (This is an especially good idea if members tend to congregate outside the doorway. Guests may feel uncomfortable walking past or squeezing through a group of strangers.)

If you're starting to feel overwhelmed right now, take a deep breath. It's not the sole responsibility of the greeters to create a good first impression! Many other people in your church help with this – deacons and deaconesses, the building and grounds committee, and members of the church board, to name a few. Sometimes just sharing a vision of what could be done to improve your church site will inspire others to get involved.

Preparing to be a Greeter:

Identification

As a courtesy to strangers, greeters should be clearly identified. Being able to read a greeter's name on a badge or identification tag is best. If guests in your church have questions or need directions they will probably feel more comfortable asking someone who is clearly available for the purpose of helping them.

Grooming

It goes without saying that greeters should be neat and clean. Remember to give special attention to your hands, as they will be seen and felt by many people. A sweet breath is important, too. If you use perfume or cologne, apply it with moderation. Too much is...too much! (Remember that some people have allergies to perfume and cologne.)

Wardrobe

Guests may arrive wearing almost anything. Without prior experience at your church, they may have no clue regarding the standard mode of dress. Those who arrive in leisure or casual attire may feel embarrassed, especially if they are met at the door by greeters who are dressed like fashion models. The goals of your guest care plan may be best served by greeters whose working wardrobes represent the average dress standards of the congregation, rather than the highest. You want to be perceived by your guests as looking approachable.

Size

Greeters, like elders and deacons and Sabbath school teachers, will come in all shapes and sizes. Those with large frames should be aware of the "intimidation factor." Big people may cause smaller folks to feel threatened. This "intimidation factor" can be defused if large people cultivate a non-aggressive, yet warm, greeting style.

Location

Ideally, greeters will be stationed where arriving guests can see them and identify them as greeters from a reasonable distance. In good weather, a wide-open main entrance offers a real advantage because it allows approaching guests to see a little of what they're getting into. This may help them feel more at ease than if they have to open a door and walk into the unknown.

If the door must remain closed because of the weather, keep watch so you can open the door for arriving guests. Perhaps one greeter, dressed for the weather, could be stationed outside the door. Either way, a warm and friendly hand, a smiling face, and a welcoming voice make a much better first impression than a cold, hard door handle.

Basic Philosophy

While greeters are members of the church, with the interests of the church in mind, you should constantly strive to see things from the guest's point of view. Your ministry is more on behalf of the guest than on behalf of the church. You are there to make guests feel welcome and wanted, to set them at ease, not just to "get them registered." Learning names and other pertinent information is important, but this should not be done in a formal or bureaucratic way. Every person is incredibly valuable in God's sight. And greeters need to create an atmosphere of acceptance and warmth that reflects the value God places on every individual who has chosen to attend your church. Be particularly aware of your body language and tone of voice; these are major ways of conveying attitudes.

Types of Guests

There are five general categories of guests who walk through your church door:

- 1) Unchurched people who for one reason or another visit your church.
- 2) People from other church denominations.
- 3) Adventists who attend occasionally or very seldom.
- 4) Adventists from out of town or other local Adventist churches.
- 5) People brought to church by friends, relatives or acquaintances.

Each of these groups has its own expectations, fears, and preconceived ideas. Talk with other greeters and develop a general approach of how to welcome each group. (See *How to Say "Hello" Without Saying "Goodbye"* in the Resources section on page 14 for more information.)

The Greeting Process

Identifying Guests:

If your church is small enough that you know the regular attendees, this won't be an issue. But if your church is large with many people coming and going it can be a real challenge. It's rather embarrassing to ask a person you don't recognize if he or she is visiting and be informed: "I've been a member here for 5 years!" Unless you're quite sure a person is a visitor it is best not to ask him or her to sign the guestbook.

Setting Guests at Ease

When two strangers find themselves face to face there can be a brief moment of uncertainty. A string of questions may begin flying through their minds: Have I met this person before? Should I know her name? Where did we meet? What if he calls me by name and I can't remember his? Should I speak first, or wait to see what he does? This scenario may last only one or two seconds, but to the parties involved it may seem much longer.

Greeters can prevent this awkward moment by taking the initiative. This does not mean that you should be aggressive, but that you should make the first gesture of greeting.

A handshake is the conventional gesture of greeting in North America. While formal rules of etiquette may direct that a gentleman not shake a lady's hand unless she first offers hers, common practice in your area may permit greater informality. Some people, however, do not want to be touched at all. If you sense that a guest is uncomfortable, don't feel that you have to shake hands to give a proper greeting.

Smile, try to make eye contact, and speak warmly, but do not be too intimate or pushy. Taking a half-step back after shaking hands or giving a guest a bulletin is a good way to reassure strangers that there is no threat to their personal space – you are not going to “smother” or “bulldoze” them! Always conduct yourself with proper dignity for your responsibility, combined with an appealing sense of genuine warmth and a friendly, welcoming attitude.

Another way to increase the comfort level of your guests after the initial greeting is to engage them in casual conversation on some safe topic. Children in the visiting party make ideal conversation starters. Your best bet, however, is to mention some key element of the day's activities and invite your guests to attend/participate. Share any important information about the program. (Communion, for example, may be confusing to someone who has not attended before.) Always remember that your goal is to help guests feel comfortable and welcome.

Different people need different approaches. Learning to say the right thing to guests takes practice and sensitivity, combined with the “prayer factor.” As you see a guest approaching make it a habit to breathe a prayer for the Holy Spirit to give you the words that person needs to hear. Remember also to spend time in prayer before you arrive at church.

Guests with children want to know where their kids will be and what they will be doing. It's nice to explain what Sabbath school is about, walk as a group to the appropriate room, and introduce your guests to the teacher.

Be prepared to welcome guests who are visually impaired, deaf, or physically handicapped by accessing the information at www.christianrecord.org and www.deafadventist.org.

**AN EXCELLENT
GREETER IS:**

Secure: assured of God's love and his or her value to Him.

Dependable: shows up when scheduled, or makes arrangements.

Selfless: able to concentrate on others.

Welcoming: able to convey warmth and genuine concern for others.

Securing Guests' Names

For some guests anonymity is extremely important. They may feel that giving their names is more than they are ready to do. Thus, the ideal way to learn the names of guests, along with other pertinent information about them, is the natural, unobtrusive way: through friendly conversation.

What form of a guest's name should be used? It's usually best to be guided by the way the guest refers to him or herself. If a guest introduces him or herself as Dr. Smith, you should use that title. If the guest gives a first name, it's probably OK to use that. Incidentally, if you introduce yourself as Mr. or Mrs. or Dr. Jones, guests may not feel comfortable offering their first names. If greeters choose to be less formal, guests are likely to respond in kind.

Greeters should practice the art of remembering names. One simple method is to connect the name in your mind with something that already has meaning for you. Another way is to say the name several times again out loud. There's no need to worry about overdoing it – people love to hear their own names used.

Special Needs

Besides developing the ability to remember names, greeters should be sensitive to the spoken or unspoken needs of guests. The spoken needs usually pose no great challenge if greeters pay attention to what guests are saying. It's the unspoken needs that call for greater perception.

Some of these unspoken needs may be obvious: guests with babies need to know where the parents' room is located. A guest in a wheelchair needs to know which restrooms are handicap accessible.

Other needs are less obvious and may remain unexpressed and unmet, unless a perceptive greeter picks up on them. Some parents may seldom attend church because it's so hard to manage their small children. When you see frustration in the eyes of a harried mother, try to arrange for someone to sit with her during the worship service or care for her children in a separate room.

Another person may be struggling with despondency that a too-quick smile cannot disguise. A discerning greeter may sense the real need and spend some extra time expressing Christian friendship in ways that preserve dignity and uplift sagging spirits. Always be willing to go the extra mile in meeting the needs of guests. Put them in touch with the pastor, support groups or community services, if needed.

Greeting Members Versus Greeting Guests

Sometimes greeters get so wrapped up in welcoming church members that guests slip by unnoticed. Yes, members need to be welcomed as warmly as guests and made to feel that their needs are just as important. But guests are first priority. This should not create a problem with your regular attendees as long as there are enough greeters on duty. There should be a sufficient number to welcome every person entering the church, plus additional greeters in the parking lot, if needed. (As you evaluate your “welcoming program” you may realize the need for more greeters.)

The Guestbook and Other Follow-up Devices

While most greeters are able to learn the names of guests and pick up some information about them, remembering addresses and phone numbers is just too much. Many churches rely on the guestbook for a more complete record of guests.

Most church-going people are accustomed to writing in a guestbook or on a guest card, but unchurched guests may be very hesitant. If people feel like you’re asking them to “sign in” or “register,” that may suggest more of a commitment than they really want to make. A low-key approach may help them feel more comfortable. For example, the greeter could say something like: “We’re a family here, and we like to remember the friends who visit us. Could we have your name in our guestbook?”

If you ask directly for the names and addresses of guests it’s good to have a reason for inquiring. Examples: “Every Monday we mail a small gift of friendship to our guests. We wouldn’t want to miss you!” Or: “The pastor has asked that we mail information about upcoming special events to all our guests.” (This is most plausible if the pastor reinforces it from the front.)

There are alternatives to the guestbook method of obtaining names and addresses. One is to rely on guest information cards supplied in the racks on the back of each pew. This method works well in many places, but it requires a regular and appropriate announcement by the pastor or elder.

Another technique involves attendance logs that are signed by the entire congregation. The fact that worshipers around them are registering their attendance may make guests feel at ease in signing the log themselves. Of course, this method will not work with all guests. Some may be turned off by the idea of “registering,” even if everyone around them is doing it.

In churches where the attendance log is used successfully, a Ritual of Friendship or similar feature is a regular part of the Sabbath morning

program. During this segment of the service sign-in books are passed along each row, with each person present having a chance to write down his or her name and address. When the book reaches the end of the row, it is sent back the other way so that each worshipper can read the names of those seated nearby. It's not so much a registration as a get-acquainted exercise. This is one of the most effective methods used in churches today.

Materials for Use by Greeters

Nearly all churches provide bulletins for those attending services, members and guests alike. But how many churches have guest brochures? Wouldn't it be nice to offer each guest a brochure that gives a brief history of the local congregation, some basic information about Seventh-day Adventists, a floor plan of your facility (with restrooms and babies' room clearly marked), and a listing of services and programs? If you're already doing something like this in your church, congratulations! If not, the greeting team may want to consider putting together a simple brochure for your guests. It doesn't have to be fancy – a single sheet of paper will do. What's important is that your guests know you have considered their needs and planned ahead for welcoming them.

Other items to include in a Welcome Packet for guests could be a calendar of upcoming events, the brochure "What's a Seventh-day Adventist?" (available from AdventSource), and Bible study information. Be sure that your literature directs guests to your church's website, especially if you have podcasts, devotionals, or a pastor's blog. Many people are more comfortable exploring your church online at first. Also, make sure your literature rack looks neat and contains items you can give to guests who may have particular needs.

Another thoughtful gesture is to offer arriving guests the use of a good quality Bible with large, clear print. An attractive bookmark could be placed at the Scripture for that day, making it easy for your guests to find. Other verses to be used in the pastor's sermon could be identified on the bookmark.

While some guests are happy to be recognized as visitors, others would prefer to remain inconspicuous. The challenge is in determining which type of guests you have. To be on the safe side, don't put tags or flowers on them so they stand out (unless your culture expects this as a courtesy). Respect their natural desire for anonymity by allowing them to blend in with the crowd.

Reserved Seating

If your church tends to be crowded, you need a plan for helping guests find seating. Having reserved seats for visitors is not practical in every church, but it can work in most. Choose seats that are easy to access. That usually means seats on or close to aisles and not too far forward – but far enough forward that guests are not distracted by parents with small children in the back rows. If guests hesitate or seem unsure where to sit, an attentive usher can point out the available seats for them or escort them to those seats. You may also want to designate members of the greeting team to sit near the guest seating area during the service, to be friendly and offer assistance if needed.

Guest Follow-up

A church's ministry to guests should not end when they leave the building. Their attendance should trigger a follow-up process designed to maintain contact, nurture friendship, discover personal needs, encourage a deepening relationship with Christ, answer spiritual and doctrinal questions, and invite participation in the activities of the church.

Consider these three important elements of guest follow-up: timing, content, and personnel.

Timing

Your first chance for follow-up comes immediately after the close of the service. The presiding pastor/elder should give priority attention to greeting guests. One way to make this possible is to dismiss those sitting in the guest section first.

Greeters can also play an important role in follow-up by seeking out guests after the service, speaking to them by name, and introducing them to other members. Hopefully the guests will already have received at least one lunch invitation from friendly church members, especially if a meal is not being prepared at the church.

Some churches use the guest card method or the “meet down front by the organ” plan to determine who would like a lunch invitation. The problem with these methods is that they require guests to take the initiative. Consider starting “hospitality groups” so guests will always have a lunch invitation to a member's home on days when no meal is served at the church.

The next phase of the guest follow-up program should happen early in the week immediately following the guest's attendance at church. This involves contact with the guest by mail, phone, or in person. Telephone contact is often the most effective for first time follow-ups.

If guests have given a mailing address, you can send an attractive card saying how pleased you are that they attended your church and invite them to come again. Also offer to assist them in any way possible. Generally speaking, the shorter the delay before this contact is made, the more effective it will be.

Content

Precisely what is said and done in guest follow-up depends on what is known about guests. Why did they come to your church? Were they attracted by a musical program, health seminar, or special speaker? Are there current needs in the guest's life that motivated attendance, such as the death of a close friend or family member? Has the birth of a child caused a reawakening of interest in spiritual things?

Tailor follow-up contacts to what you know about each guest. For example, if a gentleman was attracted by a musical program, offer him opportunities for participation in the church's choir or other musical group. If a guest has recently divorced, invite him or her to a support group. If a couple brought their children because of a special children's feature, invite them to Vacation Bible School or Pathfinders.

Follow-up visits with guests should be friendly and purposeful, but not pushy. Delivering a loaf of homemade bread or a batch of cookies or a gift book from the church is a thoughtful gesture of friendship. Remember to specifically invite guests to attend again the following Sabbath. It's especially good to invite them to an appropriate Sabbath school class – one that meets their needs and matches their degree of Biblical literacy.

Personnel

The ideal plan is to have guests contacted by a church member they met with whom they have something in common. Members with children are often the best ones to reach guests with children. Senior church members might be able to connect with senior guests. Perhaps people in the same line of business or with shared interests will be the ones to maintain contact with guests.

If guests came with a church member, the person who follows up will likely want to include this member in their contact. This will serve to strengthen the potential for friendship evangelism.

If You Are the Greeting Team Leader

Having a person who is responsible for coordinating the scheduling and training greeters is very important. If you've been asked to fill that need, here are a few tips and ideas:

- 1) Host a potluck for all the greeters, followed by a brainstorming session. Talk about first impressions and how you can create better ones for your church.
- 2) Hold a training session for all greeters. Discuss the skills needed to be a greeter (in addition to being willing to arrive at church early). Remind greeters that within the first few minutes of a guest's visit he or she is often deciding whether or not to return to your church a second time.
- 3) Plan a troubleshooting session. Talk about difficult situations and how to meet the challenges effectively. Ask greeters to tell about times they were unsure of what to say or do and ask the group to offer ideas and solutions. Role playing sometimes helps.
- 4) Discuss types of greetings that are appropriate for your community and make greeters aware of what is considered appropriate in other cultures. (See list of Resources for additional information.)
- 5) Have a time of celebration, thanking all the greeters for their ministry and offering affirmation and encouragement. Ask a few greeters to share positive experiences they have had with guests.
- 6) Recruit new church members as greeters. They often have a "sparkle" of freshness and an interest in meeting people.
- 7) Develop a training/recruiting ministry plan for the future that fits with your church's mission statement.

Resource Materials:

The following recommended resources can be purchased at your local Christian bookstore, the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955), or AdventSource (800-328-0525).

Evangelism as a Way of Life by Rebecca Manley Pippert. Intervarsity Press, 1979.

First Impressions Matter by Eileen Gemmell. A video seminar for training greeters and ushers.

How to Say "Hello" Without Saying "Good-Bye" by James Zackrison. A 14-page booklet on reaching out to visitors.

Ushers Guide for Ushers Pride by Kenneth Washington. Truth for These Times Ministries, 2000.

Visit AdventSource at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest available resources for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 800-328-0525.