

Worship Guest Follow-up A Vital Part of Outreach

by Rev. Eric Roecker

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were one-million guests at our WELS Easter Sunday services this year? Wouldn't it be awful if we were not ready for them?

One of the most important ways a congregation can prepare for worship guests is to have a well-designed follow-up system. The tactics will vary slightly from church to church, but every congregation will want to have a system in place. If your congregation has not historically had a system, it is time to create one as you prepare for Easter Sunday.

There are several important aspects to worship guest follow-up. No matter what system your congregation adopts, it will need to include the following.

Information Gathering

Connection cards are often an effective way to gather contact information from your guests. If you use a worship folder, you can put a connection card in each one. Connection cards aren't just for guests, but can be used by members to let you know they attended worship. Be sure to instruct your members beforehand to fill out those connection cards too! Having members participate creates positive peer pressure for worship guests to fill their connection card out too. Members and guests can place the connection cards right in the offering plate. (PDF and MS Publisher connection card templates are available in the [E20 Resources](#).)

Another option is a pew register. This is a binder which is handed down the pew during the offering. Each sheet in the binder has room for six or seven families to list their contact

information. Again, you need to instruct your members that the register is there for them too. Not only does it let you keep track of member attendance, but when guests see others filling out the registry, they are more likely to do so themselves. Another benefit of the pew registry is that, unlike connection cards, you see what others have written. You can learn the names of the people sitting in the pew with you.

Some congregations, rather than having the registers sit in the pews, have young children hand them out at the beginning of the offering. This does two things. First, it makes it more likely folks will fill it out. (Who can say no to a sweet little child!) Second, it provides a demonstration of your congregation's interest in involving children in ministry, something all parents appreciate.

Information Organizing

Congregations should have someone trained to organize the important information you have gathered. A back-up should also be trained to do this important task if the main person is absent. Contact information should be recorded *immediately*. Congregations typically count offerings immediately after a service is over. This is right

and orderly. The worship guests God sent to your congregation are an even more valuable gift than the financial offerings. So give the recording of their contact information the same level of importance.

You are not just collecting their contact data, but learning whether the worship visitor is a first-time visitor (which requires one type of response) or a repeat visitor (which requires a different type of response).

CONNECTION CARD

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City State Zip code
Phone: _____
E-mail: _____

You are a:

- first-time visitor
- repeat visitor
- member
- member of another WELS church

You may place this card in the offering plate or return it to one of our ushers. Thank you!

It is also important that the responses to these worship visitors are prioritized correctly. WELS visitors, for example, are not outreach opportunities. You might have WELS individuals from other congregations visit you on Easter Sunday to worship with their family. It is certainly a nice gesture to send those WELS worship guests a “thank you” card, thanking them for joining you. However, *unchurched guests are your top priority*. Once all of the unchurched guests have been identified, their contact information is shared with those responsible for the next phase of follow-up. That would be...

Initial Contact (within 24-48 hours of visit)

When a congregation has a first-time worship guest, it is important that guest is contacted *quickly*. Studies show that contacting and thanking a first-time worship visitor within 24 to 48 hours of their initial visit makes it almost twice as likely that individual will return for a second visit.

It is absolutely *vital* to make this initial visit quickly. What is not so important is *how* this initial contact is made. It could take the form of an email, phone call, house visit, or handwritten note.

One congregation has a small team prepare handwritten thank-you cards the very Sunday the guest visits in worship. They include a \$5 gift card to Starbucks for each adult. It goes out in the mail first thing on Monday.

Some congregations have a volunteer do an unannounced door-step visit within 48 hours. The goal is not to have an extended conversation but simply to thank the individual for visiting and drop off some print information about the congregation and its ministries. Typically, some sort of small gift is given. One gift option for this Easter Sunday is a copy of the evangelism movie *Road to Emmaus*. Perhaps you could include a bag of microwave popcorn with the DVD. [You can order copies of the movie HERE](#). They are being offered at cost (\$2.50/DVD) plus shipping.

Pastor Phone Call

It has been proven that multiple “touches” make it more likely that a first-time worship guest will

come back for a second time. So, if that initial contact is made 24 to 48 hours of the guest visiting worship, then later in the week is a good time for the pastor to make a phone call to each visitor. It can be brief. He simply thanks them for visiting and says how much he’d love to have them visit again. If the conversation goes well and the person seems interested in learning more about the church, the pastor might use this phone call to set up a time to visit in person.

Face-to-Face Gospel Presentation

Eventually, the pastor or a trained evangelist will want to visit the worship guest face-to-face for something longer than a door-step visit. You actually want to sit down and talk for a bit with the worship guest.

When should this visit take place? If the pastoral phone call that takes place a few days after the initial worship visit goes well, it would be good for the pastor to schedule that visit ASAP, the next day if possible. If the first-time worship visitor seems polite during the call but not very interested in learning about the church, you might wait to see if he comes back the following Sunday, or even the Sunday after that. If they come back to worship a second time, that is a *big deal*! You will want to sit down with them very quickly. Strike while the iron is hot!

What if they don’t come back to worship for a second time? You *still* want to attempt to schedule a face-to-face visit. About two and a half weeks after their initial visit, give them a call and ask if you could get together. The reason is simple. If God brought a worship visitor to your congregation, your congregation will want to do everything possible to attempt to have a sit-down, face-to-face visit with that worship guest, a time where the gospel can be applied specifically to their life.

Where should this visit take place? The pastor or evangelist can throw out multiple options. *“I wanted to talk to you a bit more about our mission. Could I stop by your place sometime tomorrow, or perhaps can I buy you a cup of coffee at the coffee shop on Main St?”*

What are the goals of this visit? There are three.

First, you simply want to get to know the worship guest a bit better. You don’t need to get

too personal. But asking what someone does for a living or where they are from initially is socially acceptable small talk. Such conversation demonstrates interest and respect. It also has the potential to help you make connections. You learn a worship visitor works at the factory downtown, the same factory where two of your members work. You can connect those individuals.

Second, you transition the conversation into a *simple* law/gospel presentation. It need not be as direct as, “If you died tonight, do you know if you would go to heaven or hell?” That might be a follow-up law/gospel presentation. In this initial visit, talk about what your church means to you. Explain how important it has been to you personally, in your life (especially at hard times) to have a Christian community to provide both gospel and emotional encouragement. You do not need to go much deeper than that. If the individual opens up to you, that’s fine. But think of this simply as the first of many spiritual conversations you hope to have with this person.

The third goal of this visit is to begin to steer that worship visitor toward a Bible Information Class (BIC). It is probably unwise to call it a “new member class,” as that puts too much pressure on the guest. *“Take this class and you’re in!”* It is simply there so they can better learn what Christianity is all about... learn about who Jesus is and exactly what he did.

It would be a good idea for your congregation to schedule a new BIC to begin in late April or early May. Then when you follow up with Easter worship guests, you can be specific—“We have a new Bible Information Class beginning in two Sundays.” If you’re a layperson, offer to join them at the class. Or, if their contact information reveals they joined you on Easter at the encouragement of a family member or friend, ask that member to attend BIC with the guest they invited. Even long-time members benefit spiritually from a catechetical review. But it also sets the guest at ease to be able to attend the class with someone they know.

Continued Contact

Lord willing, your visitors will continue to worship with you and attend your new member class. However, some will not. It will be up to you to stay in contact with them. They have already taken the most frightening step by being a first-time worshiper at your church. You don’t want to waste this opportunity! There is a myriad of ways to stay in contact with your visitors. One option is to send them the monthly Outreach Newsletter. [You can find all twelve articles HERE free of charge.](#)

Another option is to invite those previous worship visitors back to subsequent special services. Mothers’ Day may be a good opportunity as it is one of the most highly attended Sundays of the year. The point is, keep in touch! Home missionaries can all tell stories about individuals who took *years* to pull into the church. They visited twice a year for a half-decade, and then finally joined. Give the Spirit those repeat opportunities!

In Conclusion

It makes no sense to spend time trying to invite people to join you for Easter Sunday and then not aggressively follow up on them after they come! You have a few weeks. Adjust your worship guest follow-up plan so you’re prepared for the influx of worship guests. If you don’t have a worship guest follow-up plan, hopefully this demonstrates, it’s not that hard to put one together. There is still time.

May God richly bless your efforts to follow up on the guests he brings to his house this Easter!