

How To follow-up guests

HOPE25
HOPE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



Why follow-up?

As a uni student, I became involved with a bible study on campus. Life got busy, and, as these things happen, I missed small group. I figured that they wouldn't miss me. But later that day, my phone rang (horror to a millennial), and it was the small group leader just checking in to see if I was ok and let me know that I'd been missed. Whether it was the anticipated horror of future phone calls or the knowledge that someone cared, I never missed small group again. And more than that, I got connected, grew in my faith, made long-term friendships, and was a small group leader by the following year, checking in on first-year students we missed when they didn't show up.

Follow-up is important. When people come along to something church-related, it's great to thank them, say that we noticed them, and let them know that they are always welcome. Many people in our communities today feel isolated from others, and being warm and friendly and then letting them know that it was nice to meet them can go a long way in building relationships. When our church communities are encouraging, open and caring, we help to build bridges between people in a society where this is not always easy.

When people come into our churches, for whatever event, they learn a lot about what we believe God is like from how we treat them; this includes the whole experience of church, not only the service, but the car parking, the welcoming, finding the bathrooms, and morning tea. Follow-up is an extension of that welcoming. It is about communication and building relationships; for that to happen, people need to be able to contact one another.

This How To focuses on following up those who are guests or visitors to our churches. However, many of these suggestions can also be used within our communities. It can be easy for people to become very busy and miss church for a little while. At this point, they may wonder if anyone has noticed their absence. Follow-up of those who are a regular part of our communities is central to pastoral care and can form a culture of care and support when done well.

Contact Details

Being Contactable

Ensuring people can contact the church is essential. Someone may have come to an event, but perhaps it wasn't appropriate for them to get contact details for some reason. It might have been a big event, a wedding, or a funeral. They went along, and now they would like to get in contact with the church. How can they do that?

You might be able to hand out flyers or simply have them available for some events. For others, this might not be appropriate. For a wedding or funeral, you *might* be able to arrange to have church contact details in a little box on the order or service, but often the parish won't be producing the orders of service to insert that information. In this situation, the easiest thing to do is to ensure that your website is up to date and that when a person searches for your church, the search engine's information is up to date (website, email, phone number, address, opening hours); this means that people whom you might miss or be unable to collect contact details from will still be able to contact you if they would like to.

Contacting Visitors

Ensuring that you can contact visitors is the other key area. When people come to a service or an event, it is great to get their contact details. Many parishes have pens and little contact forms in the pews or seats that people can fill in and put in the offertory. You might also consider putting a QR code in the pew, and people can fill in their information on their phones – this can also lead them to your website, and you may even program it to automatically send a “thanks for being in contact email.”

If you are doing a youth or kids' activity, you will automatically ensure that you have parental contact details. You might also be able to use this information to let them know about future events. Or simply send a message to say how great it was to see their child.

Asking for Contact Details

Asking for contact details can take discernment. I know a parish with a wonderful older woman in charge of name tags. If you come along to services more than one or two times, she will catch up to you and ask for your name so that she can make a name tag, “and while we are at it,” she says, “why don't you fill in this contact form too.” It's hard to say no to that!

For some, a pathway will become clear. If you're talking at morning tea and someone has a question about a church event, you can ask for their number and call or message them later with contact details. Someone might be visiting to bring a sick or elderly family member to church, so you could ask for their contact details to arrange a home communion or pastoral visit.

Making Contact

Reaching Out to Visitors

Following up with people after you receive their contact details will depend on how you got them. If they filled out a form without giving a reason that they would like to hear from the church, and you don't know them, then a friendly "thanks for filling in your details, would you like to grab a coffee?" might be appropriate. If they said they would like you to contact them about something particular, then address that, but still see if you can build a relational connection. That might be something like "thanks for filling out the contact sheet, you said that you wanted more information about knowing Jesus/small groups/church services, I'd love to grab a coffee and answer any questions you might have."

If you encourage a visitor to fill in a form during a service, it would be great to send a text message later that day saying it was nice to meet them; this can then be followed up later in the week with a phone call that might include an invitation to coffee or to church the following Sunday.

If a person doesn't respond to phone calls, it may be that they no longer want to be contacted. It may also be that they are part of a generation that doesn't tend to communicate through calls. Send a brief text or voice message explaining who you are, why you're in contact, and that you would love to meet up/chat with them on Sunday. If they don't reply, pray for them and leave the ball in their court to make contact in the future.

Remember, the purpose is to connect with people, build relationships, and connect them to events, groups, and people that can help them develop and grow in their faith.

Using Contact Details Well

Using contact details well is essential. Don't be like a political party sending constant, unsolicited messages or a shop trying to sell them something. Ensure that you are only using contact details for the purpose that you have been given them, for example, if a person gave contact details as part of getting a ticket to a concert or study day at the church, but didn't tick the box asking that you contact them about future events, you should respect their wishes. Ensure that the parish contact list is kept private and secure. If you send emails, ensure you blind carbon copy (BCC) the contact list unless you have permission to share those details. Hard-earned trust is difficult to win back when a person feels that their privacy has been violated.

Follow-up is important, and it is an opportunity to meet a new person and welcome them into our communities, not to mention help them come to love Jesus more. What a fantastic opportunity to be good stewards of those God sends in our direction!