



## 15 Reasons

# Why First-Time Guests May Not Return

By Lynette Hawkins

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Congregations often wonder why some Sunday morning guests may come once but never return. Although many people without church homes may visit Easter, Mother's Day and Christmas, getting these guests to return for a second trip has some ministry leaders baffled. Research studies indicate that people decide whether they will ever return during the early moments of a Sunday morning visit.

First time visitors notice a lot within the first four to eight minutes of their visit. From what happens in the parking lot to the pews, the first impression can shape a visitor's feeling about a church visit. Although worship experiences may vary by faith tradition, some of the biggest reasons first-time visitors may not come back relies on what happens in those early moments.

What do guests really notice when they visit for the very first time? This question may be on the minds of many pastors and church leaders as they see empty pews after Easter Sunday. Here is a starter list of common reasons visitors may not come back. Addressing items on this list may help to create a welcoming church that gets repeat visits. The 15 items listed were generated from many conversations with first-time visitors across faith traditions:

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## 1. No welcome from the parking lot to the pews.

2. Finding the right door to the sanctuary appeared difficult.
3. People in the pews held on to their “good seats.”
4. Too many “churchy insider words” like doxology and introit throughout the worship experience.
5. No safe, clean nursery for the babies and toddlers.
6. No sincere greeting extended by pastors or members.
7. No warmth or hospitality extended.
8. Missing joy and a spiritual atmosphere.
9. No sense of family in the church community.
10. Very limited reaching out to outsiders or strangers.
11. Very few ministries or activities for youth or children.
12. Public recognition of guests that left them feeling uncomfortable.
13. Appears to be no vision or purpose for the congregation.
14. On Sunday morning, members and ushers seem focused on “member only” conversations.
15. No one invited them back.



The **third place** offers a space for first-time guests to **connect.**