

7 Things that Will Keep Me from Coming Back to Your Church

1. Refuse to see me.

It's easy to spot visitors: we don't know where we're going, because we don't know what we're doing in this new environment. Whether you're a greeter or the person sitting two seats to my right, I need you to see me – because isn't seeing half the battle?

2. Don't offer me a smile.

Now here's the deal: we're Jesus people. We're supposed to be filled with his light, his joy, his love – because *this* is how the Spirit of God has changed us. But I can't tell you how many times I've visited a new church and not received a single smile. So, be brave, meet my hopeful gaze, and give me a genuine grin, will you?

3. Neglect offering me help.

It's easy, when we know the routines and the rhythms and the know-hows of a place, to forget that not everyone knows what we know. Chances are, if it looks like I might not know what I'm doing, I really *don't* know what I'm doing. So, offer to help me. I'll be so grateful to you.

4. Abstain from introducing yourself to me.

Sometimes we think the business of getting to know newcomers belongs to the staff of a church – but that can't be further from the truth. As the body of Christ, *we're* the fleshy arms and legs of Jesus, and just as Christ calls us to be the Church, the staff of your church needs you to notice new people like me.

5. Forget that I'm a person who wants to be known, just like you.

It always amazes me how much I can learn about a person in less than a minute's time. That being said, because we humans were and are made for genuine relationship, there's something about another person wanting to really *know* me that makes me feel known and understood. So, ask me where I'm from. Connect

the dots. Practice active listen so you can ask me *another* question. I guarantee it'll make someone like me feel loved!

6. Ignore my boundaries.

In one breath, I write about getting to know me, but in the next breath, I also ask you to respect my boundaries. If I'm an introverted or private person, I may not want to answer your questions – so be okay with and respect my boundaries if I choose not to flow with you in conversation. Don't take it personally!

7. Forget my name.

Here's the deal: we, as parishioners, oftentimes sit in the same area in a church service. Visitors, who might still be *visiting* four weeks in, oftentimes sit in the same area in a church service as well. Whether I see you afterwards the church foyer, or the next week while sitting behind you again, I'll probably remember you, because, to me, you're one of the few representatives of this place. So, remember me. Write down my name in your cell phone or write it in something you bring to church. Build up this name-remembering muscle.

The list could continue on forever. If you're an usher, don't seat me in the front row. If I choose to keep my newborn or my children with me, because one of us isn't comfortable in the children's program, don't glare at me if they act like children – Jesus *loves* the little children, just as much as you and me.

But here's the bottom line: we really *can* be good neighbors to those who are visiting our churches for the first time. We can emulate the actions and compassion of Jesus who welcomed every sinner and saint into his midst. We can take note of the Good Samaritan who noticed the stranger, the one every other passerby ignored and walked right on past.

And maybe in doing this, we'll prevent *some* new visitors from church shopping – because we'll have appropriately welcomed them into Christ's space.



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