



WELCOME

**A Welcoming
Church
Assessment Pack**



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



A Welcoming Church Assessment Pack

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This Assessment Pack from BuildingChurchLeaders.com is a collection of tools to use with your leadership team. Each tool has been designed to help you and your team measure some dimension of ministry.

Here's how to use your Building Church Leaders assessments with your board, committees, or staff:

- 1) Print and photocopy the assessment tool you'd like to use (you have permission to photocopy for church or educational use)
- 2) Hand it to your team to complete
- 3) Lead a discussion based on the team's answers.

For more assessment packs, complete training themes, or other training tools for church leadership, see our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

From Friendly to Connecting

Overcoming 9 barriers to adopting visitors.

Acts 2:47; Romans 15:7

A congregation may unwittingly place barriers before newcomers, preventing them from connecting into the life of the church.

*Is this a barrier
in our church?*

	No	Somewhat	Yes
1. Large family networks. In our church, three family circles with a chain of relationships connect more than 175 people. These networks have their own social gatherings in which outsiders aren't included. Relatives often are so busy taking care of family needs, little time remains to consider the needs of outsiders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Existing friendships. I visited one church and heard the pastor talk about how friendly it was. The church was friendly: I watched people in animated conversations with their friends. But the whole time, I sat alone. No one talked with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Facilities. The design of church buildings can be an obstacle when there are no signs to direct people to entrances, the nursery, or rest rooms.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. A church's history. Some congregations seem more interested in the past than in the future. Sermon illustrations and announcements often refer to past events, cherished traditions, and former members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Special events. People attracted to a church by special events will likely stick only if the kind of ministry that first attracted them is sustained—a difficult undertaking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Philosophy of ministry. If the pastor or congregation believes church life is generated from the platform on Sunday morning, allegiance may be only to the pastor. If, however, a church's ministry emphasizes interaction among members and shared ministry, integration means providing facilities and programs for people to build friendships and to serve.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Reputation. Strife among members is picked up quickly by newcomers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Confusing service styles. Visitors often feel uneasy when they first attend church. Much of what we do in our services, though familiar to members, is intimidating to visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Poor attitudes. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to newcomer integration is the attitude of insiders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—CALVIN RATZ

Discuss

1. Which of the above barriers does our church place in front of newcomers? How could it (they) be removed?
2. What is the general attitude among the "insiders" of our church toward newcomers?
3. What would be the first step in creating a system that connects people into the core of the church?

Ready or Not?

3 questions to evaluate a church's readiness to reach out.

Ephesians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 2:5

Here are three questions to measure a church's ability to reach outward:

	Yes	No
1. Is our church willing? Every church wants to grow, right? Not necessarily. Some leaders and members subconsciously may see growth as threatening and prefer to keep things "the way they used to be." This secret resistance among key people will surely inhibit growth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is our church able? Church leaders can start with these key structural elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ <i>Accessibility.</i> Visitors need to feel comfortable and be able to find their way around, starting with adequate off-street parking. Clear signs make people feel welcome. All facilities should be accessible to those with disabilities.◆ <i>Ease of worship.</i> A newcomer ought to be able to follow the order of service. Words of choruses or musical responses should be printed in the bulletin or displayed on overheads. Large-print bulletins or hymnals need to be available. Both in print and from the platform, churches should be careful to avoid unfamiliar, archaic, or "in-group" terms.◆ <i>Entry points.</i> Churches need "side doors" through which people may enter into congregational life. Small support groups, Saturday-night coffeehouses, weekday preschools, older-adult care, men's softball—all are paths through which seekers and the un-churched can connect with a body of believers.◆ <i>Follow-up.</i> Once people visit, mechanisms should be in place to follow up: contact visitors, track attendance, and help people connect to the church family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is our church ready? In order to grow, a church must be staffed to grow, ready to function at a higher level of ministry. When a church invites people to be a part of its life, it must be able to "keep its promise." For example, have a quality children's program in place <i>before</i> you advertise yourself as a "family church."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—DOUGLAS J. BROUWER

Discuss

1. Should our focus as a church be on growth? Why grow? What is the biblical foundation for church growth?
2. Growth often means loss of comfort—perhaps the loss of a "family feeling" among church members. What are we willing to give up to see new people join our ranks?
3. What "side doors" do we offer people? What systems are in place to make sure these people connect into our church?

From Comfort to Commitment

Why many members find growth difficult.

Luke 15:25-32; Revelation 3:15-18

Most longtime members find it more comfortable to attend a church plateaued in size, or one experiencing gradual numerical decline, than to participate in a fast-growing congregation. Why?

1. Stability. The first, and for many the most powerful, reason for this attitude is that the worshiping community can be a comforting and affirming stability zone. For people who find that every other facet of their life is complicated by unwanted change, they want their congregation to be stable and predictable.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

2. Continuity. In a church shrinking in size, there is much continuity in familiar faces, in traditions, customs, and events, in the denominational affiliation, in the music, in the organizational life, and in those trusted and long-tenured volunteer leaders and officers.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

3. Giving cycles. For those responsible for paying the bills, a common pattern makes numerical decline more comfortable than growth. The typical pattern in rapidly growing congregations is a two-year lag between the membership or attendance curve and the income curve. In the numerically shrinking congregation, that lag disappears. Frequently the decline in dollar receipts lags about two years behind the decline in average worship attendance. Those longtime members may attend less frequently, but a combination of institutional loyalty, guilt, habit, and stewardship often means their financial contributions may increase rather than diminish.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

4. Complexity. Growth almost invariably is accompanied by an increase in the level of complexity. The vast majority of people prefer simplicity. Life in the numerically shrinking parish usually is less complex than in the rapidly growing congregation.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

5. Neglect. A substantial proportion of the pastor's time and energy must be allocated to potential future members. Since the increase in staff frequently lags behind the increase in membership, this often causes longtime members to believe they are being neglected. Gradual numerical decline is one way to offset this perception of neglect.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

6. Commitment. Numerical growth tends to be more common in congregations moving toward the high-commitment end of a spectrum. Frequently, numerically shrinking congregations are drifting toward the low-commitment or low-expectation end of that spectrum. A decrease in the level of expectations for members can raise the comfort level.

We're too comfortable in this area. *This isn't a barrier to growth for us.*

—LYLE E. SCHALLER

Discuss

1. How would you address the complaint—"We are paying too much attention to the new people at the expense of the longtime members"? What is underlying that feeling?
2. How should church leaders serve longtime members? What is our biblical obligation to people who have spent many years in the church? To make sure their needs are met? To challenge them to grow up spiritually?
3. What level of commitment does our church expect from its core leadership? Do we expect enough from our members/regular attenders?

Welcome Check-up

How does our congregation measure up?

Acts 16:14-15; Matthew 5:

Every church wants to welcome and nurture new people. Here are 5 categories to help you assess how your church is doing:

1. Visibility. Newcomers to our community can easily find out about our church through a listing in the Yellow Pages, a weekly ad in the local newspaper, brochures in motels, a web site, a message on the church's answering machine that lists the times of services and classes. Our building is easy to find. If yours is not, make sure visible signs clearly point the way to it. We have a prominent sign listing our church name and times of services; the information is up to date.

We do this well. *We need to work on this.*

2. First Impressions. People measure us by what they see: Our grounds are well maintained. We have adequate parking, and our lot does not have major problems. Our building is accessible to the physically handicapped. Friendly members greet people at each major entrance. Bulletin boards or other displays inside the church are attractive and up to date. Childcare is available. Room numbers and directions are clearly visible.

We do this well. *We need to work on this.*

3. Worship Experience. The bulletin is easy to read. It lists the church's name, address, and phone number. The words to hymns, whether printed or displayed, are easy to read. Directions are given for all portions of the service in which people participate, such as prayers and responsive readings. During the service, traditions or approaches that might be unfamiliar to people, such as the way Communion is handled, are explained. Children are welcomed through special music or children's sermons, or are provided with a children's service.

We do this well. *We need to work on this.*

4. Reinforcement. Visitors need reminders that someone cares about them. The newcomers may be long-time members of the community, but when they attend a church worship service, they need to be reassured they have done a good thing. Each visitor is sent a letter (personally signed), called and/or visited as soon as possible.

We do this well. *We need to work on this.*

5. Nurture. We offer special study groups or discipleship classes for newer Christians. We also offer several short-term groups or activities. (After meeting together for six to twelve weeks, people in a group tend to bond together, and newcomers find it more difficult to break in.) Also, before each membership class begins, we invite every nonmember who has attended the church recently.

We do this well. *We need to work on this.*

—STEPHEN C. BUTLER

Discuss

1. Which of the above areas are we strong in? Where do we need improvement?
2. On a scale from 1 to 10 (high), how much do we truly value bringing new people into our church family? How does what we say we value correspond to reality?
3. What one change would you like to see our church make in order to welcome people better?

7 Ways to Rate Your Church

Values that measure your spiritual environment.

John 13:12–17; Ephesians 2:19–22

Yes No

Try to see your church from the perspective of a newcomer and then rate it according to these 7 characteristics:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Can you sense the presence of God? People expect God to come to church. I wish I could define what exactly people are looking for. I can't. I guess it's like beauty—you know it when you see it even though you can't put it into words. Experiencing the supernatural is a high priority in today's culture. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Is it others-centered? An others-centered church is immediately interested in new people, what they need, and how the church can help. The others-centered church talks little about its programs or its people unless that is truly helpful to the newcomer. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Do you use understandable terminology? Healthy churches tend to speak in terms everyone can understand. They make an effort to translate religious terminology into everyday language. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Are there people who look like me? As soon as most of us enter a room, we look around to see what everyone looks like. Our level of comfort can be high or low depending on how quickly we find someone else who looks like us. In a room full of women, a man thinks, <i>I'm in the wrong place</i> . In a church where all the people up front are men, women wonder if they are welcome. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Do you handle problems in a healthy manner? You can often tell more about a church by the way it handles problems than by the way it handles success. This is an easy measure because every church has problems. A healthy church is not about the absence of problems. It's how problems are handled. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Is your church accessible? Wheelchair ramps and parking stalls are only the beginning of accessibility. Is there clear and easy access to getting questions answered, meeting new people, talking to church leaders, joining the membership, becoming part of a small group, resolving complaints, and signing up to serve? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Is there a sense of expectancy? Listen to hallway conversations about the church, and you can decide if the primary verb tense is past, present, or future. Most healthy churches are permeated with high expectations of God's blessing for the future. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

—LEITH ANDERSON

Discuss

1. Which of the above characteristics are plainly evident in our church? How are they manifested?
2. What is one concrete way we can improve our area of greatest weakness?
3. In Ephesians 3:19, the apostle Paul prays that believers would be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” When has our church been filled with the fullness of God?

Religion-less Spirituality

Reaching people who think church is the problem, not the answer.

Matthew 5:47; Romans 1:16

“Growing numbers of Americans say they are spiritual but not religious,” says Robert Wuthnow in After Heaven, his assessment of American spiritual development since 1950. It is a spirituality without truth or authority but filled with belief in the supernatural. It is a trend born of the modern fears of religion.

The church must echo Jesus’ own powerful critique of religion and visibly demonstrate the difference between religion and the gospel. Two questions can help churches think about their core message:

1. Does our church communication clearly distinguish between religion and the gospel?

Jesus condemned self-justification through moral performance, at one point claiming that religion was more spiritually dangerous than overt immorality. Both traditional religion and the new spirituality are forms of self-salvation. The religious way of being our own savior leads us to keep God’s laws, while the irreligious way of being our own savior leads us to break his laws. The solution is the gospel.

The gospel shows us a God far more holy than a conservative moralist can imagine—for he can never be pleased by our moral performance. Yet it also shows us a God far more loving than the liberal relativist can imagine—for his Son bore all the weight of eternal justice. His love for us cost him dearly.

Practically speaking, this means we must be extremely careful to distinguish between general moral virtue and the unique humility, confidence, and love that flow from the gospel. Without the gospel, we can restrain the human heart, but not change the human heart. The gospel calls for repentance over our self-righteousness. The true virtue that results creates an attitude of acceptance toward the poor, the outsider, and the opponent that neither religion nor secularism can produce.

We do this well. *We need work in this area.*

2. Do our deeds demonstrate the difference between religion and the gospel?

Jesus condemned religion as a pretext for oppression: “If you only greet your brothers, what do ye more than others?” (Matt. 5:47). Only when Christians non-condescendingly serve the poor, only when Christians are more firm yet open to their opponents will the world understand the difference between religion and the gospel.

Pushing moral behaviors before we lift up Christ is religion. Religion has always been outside-in—“If I behave out here in all these ways, then I will have God’s blessing and love inside.” But the gospel is inside-out—“If I know the blessing and grace of God inside, then I can behave out here in all these ways.”

We, of all people, ought to understand and agree with fears about religion, for Jesus himself warned us to be wary of it, and not to mistake a call for moral virtue for the good news of God’s salvation provided in Christ.

We do this well. *We need work in this area.*

—TIM KELLER

Discuss

1. Our church is known for _____ in this community (fill in the blank). Why?
2. What ministries or programs demonstrate our compassion for the poor, the downtrodden, the outsider (Matt. 5:47)?
3. What is one way we can tap into our community’s interest in spiritual things?
4. On what do we base our appeals to the nonbeliever.

FROM MISSIONS TRAINING THEME

The 4 Spheres of Outreach

We don't have to go far to find people who need Christ.

Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:7-8

The church is more than a set of long-standing programs; it's believers who reach out to the world. To succeed in reaching out, think about the 4 Spheres of Outreach—four categories that group the unchurched according to their physical and emotional proximity to us.

How well are we reaching out to these people?

Not very well Very well

Sphere 1: Fringe Churchgoers

Not yet involved in the church, Sphere 1 people are the unconnected visitors, the occasional churchgoers, the church-hoppers.

An enfolding process involves three steps:

- ◆ Give a warm welcome.
- ◆ Link newcomers to church members who have something in common.
- ◆ Visit or call each newcomer quickly after the first visit.

What could we do to improve our outreach?

1 2 3 4 5

Sphere 2: Geographically and Relationally Near

These people live or work near the church, have relationships with church members, but are yet to attend a service or event. To reach them means:

- ◆ Motivate and equip members to evangelize.
- ◆ Provide creative activities and events.

What could we do to improve our outreach?

1 2 3 4 5

Sphere 3: Geographically Near, Relationally Distant

This sphere comprises people near the church whom members are not likely to meet daily—the homeless, foreign exchange students, battered children, wheelchair-bound veterans, teen-age mothers, elderly shut-ins, crack addicts, and all those who can't (or won't) come to us. To reach them means:

- ◆ Make contact through existing structures: the halfway house, the jail, crisis hotline center, etc.
- ◆ Have members use their skills in those new structures.

What could we do to improve our outreach?

1 2 3 4 5

Sphere 4: Geographically and Relationally Distant

This group is the concern of what we typically call missions—people who are distant and whom we don't know. To reach them means:

- ◆ Instill vision for the world.
- ◆ Plan short trips to the mission field for members to gain exposure.

What could we do to improve our outreach?

1 2 3 4 5

—Adapted from *Mastering Outreach and Evangelism* (Christianity Today/ Multnomah, 1990)