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A Resolution: Welcome Visitors At Church

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A Resolution: Welcome Visitors At Church

By Diana Davis

INDIANAPOLIS (BP) -- A tattoo artist, a CEO, and a homeless guy walk into your church's worship service ...

No, that's not the first line of a joke. It could become a weekly reality. Thousands of churches will plan "attractational" events this spring, with the purpose of inviting their community to church. But when those strangers walk into church, will they receive a warm welcome? How can a church assure that outsiders are accepted?

The answer is spelled with just three letters: Y-O-U.

Yes, you -- the normal Christian person sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. It's nice when the greeter at the door says hello, and it's great if the pastor or church leaders have a moment to speak to guests, but what really makes a difference is when you offer a sincere hand of friendship to a guest.

Will you make a New Year's resolution to welcome every guest who sits near you during worship? Try this strategy:

- Make a specific commitment. Look at your church layout and select an area, such as a section of seats, or three pews nearest you. Make a personal commitment to God to welcome anyone who sits in that area. Don't fret if others greet them; no one

complains about being over-welcomed.

- Say a silent prayer as you enter church every Sunday. Ask God to direct you to those who need a welcome and to give you boldness to show His love to them.
- Just say "hello." Speak to each person who sits in that area. A simple "Hi, Teresa" can mean the world, even to regular attenders. Watch for ways to encourage them.
- Keep an index card in your Bible. Take notes on your smart phone. You'll discover that many people sit in the same general area, and you'll soon be calling them by name. This also makes it easier to recognize guests.
- Intentionally watch for visitors. It's difficult to be a first-time guest, but just one willing person -- that's you -- can help put them at ease. Sit beside or in front of the guest. Introduce yourself, and repeat his name in conversation. Write it on your index card or make a note on your smart phone. Make a goal to call him by name when he returns. Tell him you're glad he came.
- Introduce the guest to at least two other people before she leaves. For example, help a young mother meet another mom, then escort her to meet the pastor.
- Offer a "next step." Invite the guest to your small group, Bible study or an upcoming church fellowship event. Write down details for the guest.
- Offer friendship. Give her your personal contact info, and encourage the guest to email or call with questions. Invite her to join you after church for lunch or for coffee one day this week. Be sure to invite her to come again for worship next Sunday.

What would happen if the world began to walk into your church doors next Sunday? Would those guests be shunned or warmly embraced? The answer is in your hands.

You thought the first line of this was a joke, right? Instead, it's the crux of the Gospel, the serious work of loving all people to Jesus. Will you begin this Sunday to make a resolution to welcome guests?

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