
Closing the Back Door of Your Church

Not everyone who visits a church stays at the church. And not everyone who initially connects stays involved over the next few years.

Every Church Has a “Backdoor”

I know this isn't a shocking revelation, but if you're struggling to connect people, involve people, and close the back door of your church, here are some important steps you can take to close the back door.

#1 – Know the numbers.

Most pastors didn't go into ministry so they could look at trends and study spreadsheets. But an understanding of some basic numbers can really help pastors shepherd their churches well.

According to [Lifeway Research](#), only 12% of first-time guests become regular members. If these are the averages, how does your church stack up? The only way to know this is to track the numbers.

If you're a senior pastor, you need to know the numbers. And if you want to focus on closing the back door, pay special attention to these two.

- **First-Time Guests.** Closing the back door begins with getting people in the front door. How many brand new people attend your church every weekend? Whether you find out through checking in kids or promoting a communication card in your service, this is a number you need to know.

- **New Members.** You should know how many people become members (or small group members, or whatever designation you give to people who you consider fully involved).

#2 – Find out WHY people are leaving your church.

Sometimes people don't connect with a church for good reasons. Maybe they were visiting from out of town or are already active in another church. But many times, people don't connect with a church over something you could fix.

You might feel like you're doing a good job, but do you know the facts? Instead of making decisions based on feeling, why not gather some facts? You can absolutely know why people are leaving your church if you ask them. Here's how to do this.

Once a month or once a quarter, run a report of people who used to attend but no longer participate in church. Then call a few people and ask them for their feedback. Say something like this...

This is Pastor Chris from City Church. Real quick...I'm not going to ask you to do anything and I'm not even going to ask you to come back to church. But I'm trying to learn and I wonder if I could have about five minutes of your time for some feedback.

When you get people on the phone, ask them why they didn't connect. Ask them what they didn't like about the church. Give them permission to be honest, and then listen. You'll need thick skin to do this, but if you follow through, what you learn will help you like nothing else.

You can send surveys, but actually talking to a few people every quarter will give you much more information. You might even engage the help of a few key staff members or volunteers and go on a learning journey like this twice a year.

Here's a [great article](#) from John Pavlovitz on why people are really leaving you.

#3 – Create a clear guest follow-up process.

In the next 12 months, you are likely going to have first-time guests visit your church. Even if you do nothing to intentionally invite people, someone will be in town visiting family or someone will stumble in the doors accidentally.

What's amazing about this is you get to design what happens next. You can't guarantee that first-time guests will become fully involved participants, but you sure can do a lot to set that expectation.

Your first-time guest follow-up process might include:

- A phone call or a text from someone who could act like a personal concierge
- A personalized, hand-written note thanking the person for visiting
- A series of automated, scheduled emails over the next 40 days in order to provide important information and create a connection.

Creating an environment that's welcoming to guests and then designing a first-time guest follow up process that works is one of the most important things you can do as a church.

#4 – Point people to one clear next step.

Closing the back door of your church is most effective when you have clear steps. And the best clear steps begin with one clear first step.

Instead of offering and promoting ten ways to get connected, work hard to create a first step for everyone. Work hard to make it a quality experience. Work hard to communicate the benefits of participating. And work hard to make it effective. Possible first steps include:

- 101 Class

- Small Group Kickoff Night
- Pastor's Reception after Church
- New Members Class
- Dinner with the Pastor

The important thing is to choose a first step that makes sense for your church and be consistent. The first time you do it, it might not work. But if you're consistent and you make it a real thing, it will work.

#5 – Provide opportunities for people to connect relationally.

The relationship you should talk the most about in church is a relationship with Jesus. People don't need more religion – they need Jesus. Our church services should clearly articulate the Gospel and be a picture of what it's like to truly follow Jesus.

But people also need relationships with other people. The Bible word for this is fellowship. How well does your church do at facilitating relationships?

Maybe you're great at distributing information. Whether it's a sermon or a class, information really is important to the Christian faith. But relationships are also a tremendous catalyst for faith and your church should facilitate them

Of course, you can do this through small groups and volunteers teams. But you could also intentionally create a few environments throughout the year that give people an opportunity to hang out and get to know one another. Sharing a meal, hanging out with families at the park, or doing something fun together can go a long way to facilitating relationships.

Organize a church picnic. Throw a party. Create opportunities for conversations to happen. These go a long way toward closing the back door.

#6 – Focus on relationships and responsibilities.

There's a good chance your church is busy. Maybe even too busy.

But events and programs on their own will not close the back door of your church. In fact, they can be a detriment to closing the back door. If you want people to truly stick in your church, they need one or both of the following: relationships and responsibilities.

- **People stay at a church because of relationships.** People don't connect with a church, they connect with people at a church. If they have friends, they are more likely to stick. If their family is there, they are more likely to stick. If they know a pastor or some of the leaders, they are more likely to stick. Programs and ministries are important in the sense they facilitate relationships.
- **People stay at a church because they have responsibilities.** Volunteerism is not a way to get stuff done; it's a way to encourage people to follow Jesus and build up the body of Christ. If you want people to stick, give them a responsibility (not just tasks). Work hard to communicate the benefits (not just the need) of serving and connect people to volunteer teams.

#7- Connect kids and students.

One of the best ways to close the back door in your church is to focus on creating a thriving, growing and healthy family ministry. If you're a parent, you'll be far more likely to commit to any organization that serves your kids well.

Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, and Family Ministry give you a great opportunity to connect with people desperately in need of relationships. For many churches, this is a tremendous growth opportunity. And if you're looking to close the back door in your church, there's no better place to start.

Take a Next Step

If you want more ideas and tools on equipping your church to invite, we have a free resource called The Senior Pastor's Guide. This insanely practical

resource is filled with ideas, examples, and principles to help you lead your church to healthy growth.

[Download the resource](#)