

# From the Pastor

March 13, 2018

Experts in the area of church growth tell us that the first few minutes of a person's first visit to a church determines whether or not they will return.

In her book called, *Fusion, Turning First Time Guests Into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church*, author Nancy Searson writes:



Seven minutes is all you get to make a positive first impression. In the first seven minutes of contact with your church, your first-time guests will decide whether they are coming back. That's before a single worship song is sung and before a single word of the message is uttered. Obviously your guests aren't making a logical decision based on the integrity of the preaching, the character of the church staff, or the clarity of your doctrine in these seven minutes. They are not weighing pros and cons of worship styles and theological viewpoints. Instead, they are taking in clues about your church's atmosphere and people's friendliness on a much more rudimentary level. Their subconscious minds are working overtime to evaluate their compatibility with the new environment they've walked into.

If you haven't attended a church as a visitor in some time, try to imagine what it would be like to enter an unfamiliar church, particularly if you have not attended church before or for a long time. To say that most people feel a little anxious when first visiting a new church is an understatement. Again, Nancy Searcy has said there are four points of contacts through which we can help people visiting our church feel welcome and less stressed.

The first is to **greet** the person warmly. We have awesome greeters at St. Mark's who I often hear compliments about from our guests. Our greeters do an awesome job! Yet, remember the seven minute clock we have to make a positive first impression starts ticking from the moment a guest pulls into our parking lot. Fortunately, we have a beautiful well maintained facility that suggests that we care about making people feel welcome, but if you see someone you don't know as you walk into the building, take the opportunity to introduce yourself and say, "Glad you are here."

I am amazed at how many people tell me they visit other churches without anyone ever speaking to them.

Another thing we can do is offer to **direct** our guests to the sanctuary or Sunday school room or to the Narthex for coffee. I have visited churches while on vacation and it is not always easy to find the sanctuary of a new church.

Creating an environment where guests feel welcome and at home is also hugely important in helping them have a positive first impression of our church. We have recently redone our narthex to help us **treat** our guests in a more hospitable way. Let's let them know WE are excited to be here and look forward to seeing them again.

Finally, as the seven minutes tick toward an end, we can offer to **seat** our guests. Our ushers do a great job distributing bulletins and seating our visitors, but we can always assist them and even invite someone who may be new to sit with us. I would especially ask that we watch for any guests during the passing of the peace and help them feel respected and appreciated.

St. Mark's has a great reputation as being an inviting and friendly place to worship. Thank you for all you do in helping our guests feel welcome. Let's do all we can to make everyone feels at home and wanted at St Mark's. When guests experience our welcome it will be far easier for them to know that the God we worship in the name of Jesus Christ also welcomes and calls them.

With Much Appreciation,

Craig Goff