

SPECIAL REPORT

What is an unchurched person thinking when he or she decides to attend a church on Sunday?



How to Think Like an Unchurched Person What a Pastor learned by Visiting a Synagogue

By Bob Franquiz

There's a scene at the end of the film, "Star Trek: First Contact" where the Vulcans land on planet Earth and meet humans for the first time. They make the V shaped sign of peace and when the humans greet them, they are unaware of the customs and rituals that humans deem common practice.

I had a similar experience recently (and no, I wasn't at a Star Trek Convention). I went to a Jewish synagogue service on a recent Sabbath. A friend of mine is

pursuing a religious studies degree and part of his class curriculum was to visit a religious service of a faith that was not his own. So he decided to drive down to South Beach and visit a Jewish synagogue and he asked if I wanted to tag along. I agreed with a little bit of hesitation because I had never been to a Shabbat service at a synagogue and I had no idea what to expect.

As a Pastor, I visit churches regularly when I am

out of town, but this was different because while churches vary in style and tradition, I have attended enough church services to know what to expect.

This experience, however, would prove to be one of the most enlightening moments of my life when it came to understanding what a first time guest is really looking for, what they fear, and what they are expecting from a church.

Your Digital Front Door

The moment my friend invited me, I grabbed my computer and found the website of the synagogue we would be visiting. I was looking for four pieces of information that would lower my anxiety level before I attended. They were: service times, directions, dress code, and length of the service. Pastors tend to think that those seeking to visit our churches want to know our statement of faith, history or mission statement before attending, which is probably why these items are highly visible on most church websites. So here's the question: what is on your church's homepage? Is it podcast information, a picture of the Pastor, or a link of ministries? People want to know what they are getting themselves into. They also want to make sure they don't stick out like a sore thumb. The more information we can give them about the four pieces of information they are looking for, the sooner we will lower the guard of those seeking to attend our services. While, I couldn't find the length of the service on the synagogue's website, when I arrived, I saw that their bulletin which said the service was from 10AM to Noon. Their website did give the service time, it addressed the issue of dress code and gave excellent directions to the facility. Three out of four wasn't bad, but I didn't realize how important it was to know the

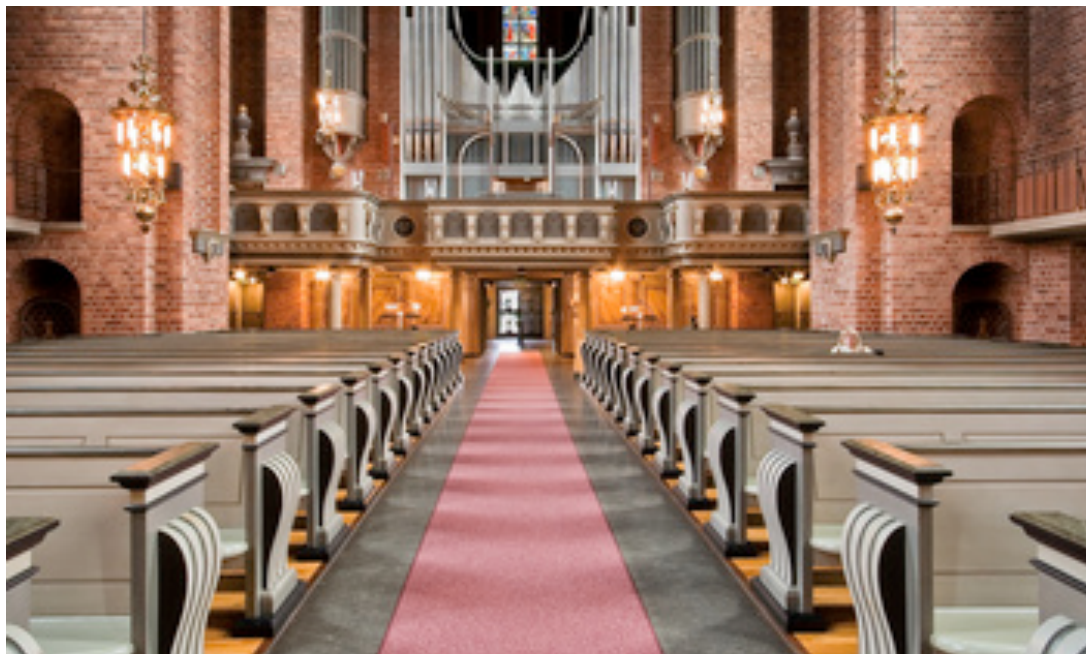
length of the service because I wanted to make plans after the service and was unable to because I didn't know the time commitment of the service.

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Early Birds

My friend and I arrived about five minutes early to the service where we were one of only a handful of people early birds. There was only an armed guard at the door who looked about as interested as a vegetarian at a barbeque. We walked in what we thought was the right door and found a couple who put on a prayer shawl that was provided for each person. We put one on as well in addition to the head coverings they provided for visitors. I never realized how nerve wracking it can be to enter an environment so foreign to me. This is how unchurched people feel when they walk into church for the very first time. They arrive a few minutes early, usually because the last

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thing they want is to stand out in any way. They want to get a lay of the land and feel comfortable with the surroundings. Many churches don't have greeters at the doors or ushers at the stations until everyone starts arriving. However, when we aren't prepared for guests who arrive early, we miss an opportunity to create a "wow" experience for a guest. This experience taught me the importance of a smiling face at the door. Smiles disarm people; they put people at ease and welcome them into a new environment. Also, in addition to directing people, clear signage lowers people's anxiety level. I was very nervous walking into a place I had never been, and the lack of signage caused me to walk with even more trepidation. We can lower people's defenses by simply giving them clear direction through our signage. We don't realize it, but signage will make the preaching more effective. How? When a person is greeted warmly and sees signs that guide him or her to where they are headed, it lowers the walls that we naturally put up as defense mechanisms. The sooner we lower those walls, the sooner God's Word is able to enter the Word and begin its work.

Say What?

The parts of the service where the Rabbi spoke in English were educational and inspiring. He brought the Hebrew Scriptures to life through his explanation and application. Unfortunately, I do not speak Hebrew and the majority of the service was in the language of Zion. This barrier caused me to be in the dark for much of the service. I was new, but I was hungry to learn, experience the God of Israel in a new way, and understand the roots of my Christian faith better and what I got was 20 minutes that I could comprehend in a two-hour service. I recognize that tradition compels groups to conduct services in their original language, but as a newcomer I quickly realized that this service had not been planned with me in mind. I have visited many churches where the entire service was in English, but

may as well have been in Hebrew or some other language. The Pastor spoke over everyone's head and made no effort to bring an ancient message into the 21st century. It was a service for the already initiated and if you were new, well, too bad. The ancient Hebrews were called to be a light to the nations as the church today is called to be the light of the world. Thus, our services should be crafted with the newcomer in mind. I am not advocating that we cater exclusively to those who are not yet followers of Jesus, but I do believe it is vital for us to view our services from the perspective of someone who isn't familiar with every Bible story, who didn't grow up in church, and who doesn't know the words to every Christian song.

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Follow Up

This may sound a bit unusual, but I was hoping the leaders of the temple would have followed up with me. It didn't have to be much; an email thanking me for attending, a flyer in the mail inviting me to an upcoming event, or a card inviting me back the next week. Unfortunately, there was no moment in the service where my information was collected so I could be followed up on. This showed me the importance of gathering the information of first time guests so we can follow up with them. The strategy here is that the collection of this data must be done in a non-threatening way. However, many first time guests want someone to follow up on them.

This may not mean an unannounced visit to their home, but most would welcome an email thanking them for attending your church on Sunday and letting them know what your church has to offer their family.

Two hours and ten minutes after walking into this beautiful Jewish synagogue in Miami Beach, I walked out with a fascinating experience and several big takeaways that apply to every church leader:

- In addition to listing service times on your website, note how long your services are. If someone sees service times of 9AM and 11AM, most people will inadvertently think that your services are two hours long. Remember: Clarity is King.
- Be careful when you go over one hour in the length of your service. Some churches can get away with 75 minutes, but most need to keep their services to 60-65 minutes in length.
- “Come as you are” is not a description of how to dress. Tell people what the average person in your church wears on a given Sunday. The last thing a newcomer wants to do is stand out. They don’t want to wear a suit to a church where everyone is wearing shorts and t-shirts, nor do they want to under dress to a more formal church. The clearer you are, the more you will put a guest at ease.
- If you think you have enough signage, think again. Most of us have seen our facility too many times to be an accurate judge of how adequate our signage is. I encourage you to have a friend visit who has never been to your church and offer to buy them lunch in exchange for their first impressions. It will cause you to double your current signage.
- Use words that average person will understand. There is nothing wrong with using theological words or using original

language as you teach. However, simply explain what these words mean. In doing so, you will give guests new information they did not have and give depth to what they are experiencing.

- Don’t force guests to drop off their kids with strangers. If you’re a church regular, they aren’t strangers, they’re children’s ministry workers. To a guest, they are strangers. I encourage you to create an environment for parents to enjoy the service with their children. At Calvary Fellowship, our main auditorium is an adult environment, but we offer a room adjacent to our main auditorium where families can view the live service on a big screen. This allows new parents to experience our service without having to leave their children in the hands of people they don’t know.
- Follow up is key. Most people want the church to follow up with them in a non-intrusive way. Our goal should be to gather guest information in a non-threatening way and use it wisely to lead first time guests to returning the next Sunday and making a significant spiritual step.

For more relevant resources, visit: www.church-strategies.com

Calvary Fellowship “Before you Visit” page www.calvarywired.com/before.php

We'd like to answer a few questions you might have as you decide to be our guest this Sunday at Calvary Fellowship.

1. What time are your services?

We offer 2 identical services at 10:00AM and 11:30AM.

2. How do I get there? Our address is: 14100 NW 89th Ave Miami Lakes, FL. We meet at Barbara Goleman High School. You can get turn by turn directions by [clicking here](#).

3. How long are the services? Our services last about 65 minutes and contain music and teaching from the Bible that will apply directly to your life.

4. Is there a dress code? No. Feel free to dress in clothes that are comfortable for you. You can "dress up" if you want, or wear casual clothes. God is interested in your heart, not your wardrobe.

5. Will I be singled out if I'm new? Absolutely not. You are our guest. Each Sunday, there are lots of people just like you who are checking out Calvary Fellowship for the first time. Our goal is for you to have the best experience possible. So you can feel free to be anonymous.

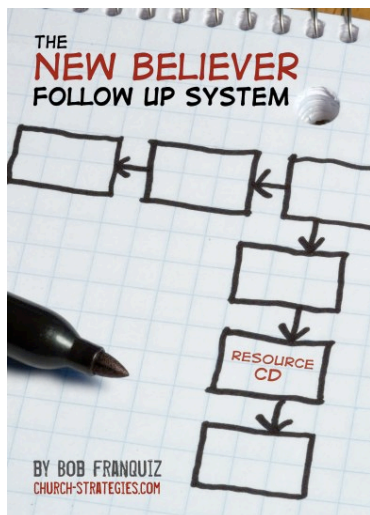
6. What about my kids? Calvary Fellowship has an exciting Children's ministry where your kids will be taught the Bible in age-appropriate classes. Our goal is to make church on Sunday the best hour of your kid's week. Should you want to stay your child during the service, we have a parent/child room designed for you to enjoy the service and stay with your little ones.

If there's a question you have that we didn't cover, feel free to email us at info@calvarywired.com or call us at 305.822.7000.

For more relevant resources, visit: www.church-strategies.com

Recommended Resources

Available at www.church-strategies.com



Help people go from a decision for Jesus to a disciple of Jesus!

Many people pray to receive Christ but never grow to maturity in Christ. Instead of allowing people to fall through the cracks, implement a system that will bridge the gap between decision and disciple.

The New Believer Follow up System will teach you: - The 8 steps new believers take to maturity - The answers to the 9 most frequently asked questions about new believer follow up - The most under utilized “secret weapon” of new believer follow up - The most common mistake churches make that sabotage their follow up process - The 4 things you should not do under any circumstances! - The 1 thing you must do to make your new believer follow up effective! - Plus much more!

This resource also includes EVERY DOCUMENT you will need to follow up with new believers plus a copy of "Start Here" by Bob Franquiz, a book written specifically to help new believers take next steps.



Learn to Make every Sunday as Powerful as Easter Sunday!

Every Pastor dreams of a church where every Sunday has the impact, excitement and attendance of Easter. Yet here’s the secret most churches don’t realize: it’s possible with focus and planning! “How to make every Sunday like Easter: Strategies for Making Every Sunday an Event” will teach you 14 strategies for taking ordinary Sundays and making them extraordinary!

What will you learn in this 3-CD resource? You will learn:

- How to maximize the 10 most underutilized Sundays of the year!
- How to make the calendar work for you
- To identify the Sundays that you can grow during the Summer!
- Discover 5 ways to stabilize attendance during fluctuating seasons
- What are the answers to the 10 most frequently asked questions about having multiple high impact Sundays!
- The 1 Factor you must have to turn any weekend into a Mini-Easter!
- Plus, a resource CD filled with everything you need to make this Sunday an event in your community!
- Plus, much more!