

Capturing Visitor and Attendance Information Paper No. OCCG-020

Larry Keele, minister, church of Christ in Champions,
Houston, Texas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This report deals with two critical areas of information gathering for the local congregation. A successful method that has drastically multiplied the number of visitors who participate in leaving a written record of their visit will be described. Involved in that same method is a tool for the Shepherds of the congregation to use in tracking the attendance of their members. The great benefit is that the information gained through this single system can then be used to bring about both the growth of the local congregation and the retention of its members.

KEY WORDS:

Guests, Attendance Records, Visitor's Cards, Tracking Member's attendance, Shepherding

REPORT:

In most congregations, an effort is made to obtain vital information from visitors—their contact information, ages of children, spiritual and physical needs, etc. Yet, as important as this information is, there is always a constant struggle to actually obtain it in a recordable form.

The Champions congregation in Houston¹ was no different in that regard. Several different methods of trying to get such information were tried, all with varied, but very limited, success. For instance, we tried announcing that we would like our visitors to fill out a visitor's card they would find in the

holder on the “back of the pew in front of you.” Cards were picked up at the end of services. From these efforts, we would receive an average of 3-4 visitors' cards per Sunday. Good, perhaps, but problematic and troubling when we knew that we were having many more guests than the number of cards returned. We tried to increase the number of completed cards by asking our guests to drop their cards into the collection trays when they were passed. This would allow them not only an easy method of submitting their cards, but also would enable them to have something to put in the offering plate when it came by. Still later, we asked our greeters to not only welcome our guests, but also to invite them or, even better, to escort them to the visitor's center where the guest would receive a complimentary coffee mug with the church logo on it. Of course, while at the welcome center another opportunity was given to the guest to complete a card.

With all the extra effort and attention given to the problem, little real difference was made. We would still average only about 4 cards each week. Since going to the information system explained in this report, we have doubled to tripled that number on a regular basis.

The method described here is not new nor unique to Champions. We learned that the Memorial church of Christ in Oklahoma City² had implemented a method of obtaining guests' information that had provided them with good results. After consideration, we decided to adapt their system to meet our

needs. Since that time, the Memorial church of Christ in Houston³ has also adapted this system with great results.

We have learned that a key to better guest participation in sharing with us their contact information was to make the process a part of a larger effort that involved the entire congregation. Completion of the forms in such a manner is basically painless when accomplished in a manner that did not draw any undue attention to our guests.

It is at this point where the process—the use of attendance folders—makes a real difference. As the attendance folder is passed down the aisle, one member from every family signs a pad found on the inside as the books are passed from one end of the row to the other. Since each family, whether member or guest, is signing the book, one “stands out” only if they *do not* participate.



The first week the number of guest families who completed the information doubled our normal total. Later, on a holiday weekend, 21 guest families either completely or partially filled out their information. An additional 4 other guests completed one of the original visitor's cards that are still found near the songbook racks. On a typical week, we have 2 to 3 times the number of visitors leaving their information with us as compared to the old system. The Memorial congregation (Houston) kept detailed records from November 2015-January 2016. Previously, they had from 5 to 15

guest cards turned in on a typical Sunday. Through the use of this method, that number jumped to an *average* of 39 cards per week (Through the 14 weeks, the range was from a low of 28 to a high 57)!

In addition to the information gathered from the guest worshippers, a good accurate method of keeping the members' weekly attendance is gained. (“Good” is the descriptive word here because, unfortunately, it is almost impossible to get every member to participate in signing the book or any kind of record.) Nevertheless, by having members to sign the list each week, it is easy to chart attendance.

Now some of the other important aspects of the program:

1) The uniform passing of these notebooks is important! If passing them down the rows is left to be done by chance, the results will be just as haphazard.

In this regard, there are several good opportunities for the congregation to pass the notebooks.

During the welcome, an announcement can be made and individuals encouraged to begin passing the books at that time. The drawback with this is that often visitors might be late to the service. Another possibility is to use the very first of the announcements made at the end of service. However, this necessitates enough time being given for the books to pass down the complete row prior to the end of the announcements. A third approach is to have the folders passed down the aisles as or after the offering plates are passed.

2) If PowerPoint slides are used, an appropriate reminder slide can be used as an added encouragement for the notebooks to actually be passed.

3) Collecting the notebooks can also be done in several ways.

One effective method of the collection is to pick them up after they have been passed following the contribution. The Memorial Road congregation in Edmond does this. One additional feature that they have also used is that men have been asked to pick up the notebooks on assigned rows. They take the books to the back and note those who have completed the guest forms. Each man then makes it his responsibility to be sure and meet these visitors who are sitting in his assigned pews. This extra personal attention is an added benefit.

Other congregations pick up the notebooks on Monday. The secretary makes copies of the completed visitor's forms for the various ministers and ministries for follow-up. The members' attendance is recorded as well. This provides a method for the elders to keep track of each member's attendance. If a member at Champions does not sign-in to complete their attendance form for three consecutive weeks, their name is put on a list and sent to the elders and ministers.



4) One additional effective idea (from Memorial Road) is to announce that the book should be passed to the end of the row and then back to the center aisle. As it is returned, everyone is told to feel welcome to look back over the list of those who are sitting on their row. (This helps people know the names not only of visitors, but also of members who might be sitting on that row as well. Special connections might be made as names are recognized, by children's

ages, address location, etc. This is a great additional personal benefit to the program.)

Through this method, the leadership has been provided with visitor's names and pertinent information. Members' attendance has been tracked as well. The former will be used to help the church to grow and the latter can be used to help the Shepherds to keep the "back door" closed by becoming aware of absentee members.

Of course, it must be remembered that the attendance folders are but a tool. For such results as listed in the preceding paragraph to occur, proper follow-up is necessary. The guests' information must be disseminated and appropriate contacts made. Elders and leaders must use this "early warning system" for absentees and check on them to see if special needs or problems exist that can be helped or corrected before that member becomes habitually absent.

One of the concerns about this program may be the cost involved. Actually, the cost is as low as about \$11 per pew or row. The notebook, which is embossed with the church logo costs just over \$6, plus shipping⁴. (The embossed congregational name or logo on the cover adds a significant look of importance to the project, for both visitors and members.) One folder is needed for each pew. Inside each binder are two pads (made from 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of paper cut vertically.

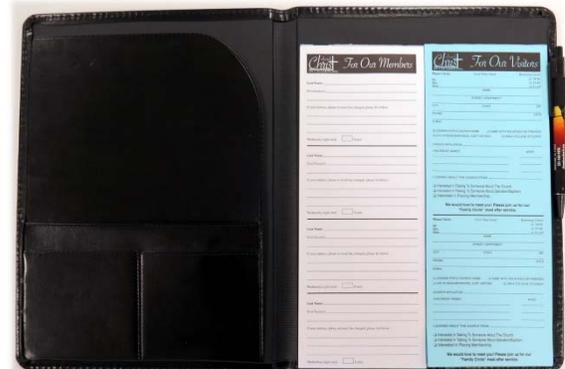
This allows both pads to fit into the large slot on the inside of the folder. One pad is for the members to record their attendance, the other—of a different color for convenience and recognition—is for the guests.) These pads are custom printed as each congregation desires, giving a very finished, professional, yet personalized appearance to the unit⁵. This also allows each congregation to obtain any additional, specialized information they would like to gather. For instance, our members' list

has a place to indicate the number of their family members who will be present for our Wednesday meal. This provides an easy way for such a count to be taken. Each pad of 50 pages cost about \$1.50. Two pads per notebook add \$3.00 to the per unit price.

An attractive personalized pen can be inserted in the pen holder of the notebook. (Pens can be obtained in quantity for minimal prices from the same source as given for the folders or from other companies such as National Pen Company⁶. Cost is generally less than \$1 when purchased in bulk.)

The resulting folder is a very attractive, functional *tool*. It is of great benefit in both

identifying guests and monitoring members' attendance. With the proper follow-up, God will be glorified as the addition of visitors to the membership and the retention of current members brings about true church growth to the glory of God.



References:

1. *church of Christ in Champions*, 13902 Cutten Road, Houston, Texas (281) 440-9898
2. *Memorial Road church of Christ*, 2221 East Memorial Road, Edmond, OK. 73013 (405) 478-0166
3. *Memorial church of Christ*, 900 Echo Lane, Houston, Texas 77024 (832) 460-2390.
4. *Queensboro Shirt Company* was the source for our embossed binders. [Http://www.Queensboro.com](http://www.Queensboro.com). They will often have promotions for discounted items or free shipping.
5. Our pads were produced by a local printing company *Lone Star Quick Print*, but any printing company can produce them. Contact the Champions church of Christ listed above for free sample sheets.
6. *National Pen Company*. <http://www.pens.com>

Note: There are no business ties between the author and any of the businesses referenced in this paper

Reviewed by: David Duncan, minister, Memorial church of Christ, Houston, Texas.
Gary Smith, minister, Fifth Ward church of Christ, Houston, Texas