

It's Never Too Late to Make a Good First Impression! Improving First Impressions for First-time Guest Visits

*"We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way."
- 2 Corinthians 6:3-4a*

When the Lord brings people to our church – and the Lord **does** bring people to us, as well as keep them away! – we'd better be ready to receive them lovingly and openly, but also *preparedly*.

First impressions are exactly that, and there may be no opportunity for **second impressions!** People make up their minds after meeting other people within 5 to 8 seconds; 80+% of all people who visit a church (any church) will often make up their mind about coming back **before** the liturgy ever even begins. So what are some of the things that will influence that decision? Let's take a look...

First Things First...

The first things your guests will hear and see may take place before they've ever pulled into your parking lot. Some will call the church seeking information; others will check your website. Are you ready?

Is the church answering machine message:

- Warm, friendly, yet professional?
- Clear, up-to-date event information and service times?

Website – Does the site:

- Have up-to-date info (e.g., it's August and the website is still advertising Lent)?
- Provide clear service times and directions?
- Have plenty of current pictures of parish life?

They pull into the parking lot...

So what's next? What else will they see, notice?

- Are signs clearly marking where to park...and where not to?
- Are there spaces reserved for newcomers close to the front door?
- Are the facilities clean, especially the bathrooms?
- Are literature racks stocked? Is it clear that the literature is free?
- Are the bulletin boards clear and uncluttered, with calendars for the month and beyond, in addition to well-designed event flyers?
- Are copies of the OCA and diocesan magazines available?

→ FOUR (4!) SECONDS!

Since the average driver has less than *four seconds* to read your street sign, here's what it probably **should not** look like:

**The Orthodox Church of
St. Nicholas the Wonderworker,
Archbishop of Myra in Lycia**
A parish of the Diocese of X
Orthodox Church in America
Sunday Divine Liturgy, 9:00 am
Saturday Vespers, 6:00 pm
Church School and Coffee Hour
afterwards, All welcome!
The V. Rev. Haralambos Jones, Rector



Your Guests Will Then Encounter...Greeters! (or they should!)

→ Greeters are at the front line of parish ministry and evangelism! They will be the first people guests and newcomers will most likely speak to and engage with. Have your Greeters been trained? Are they friendly, and welcoming? Do they know what to do?

Greeters should also be delicately aware of the sense of **fear, excitement, anticipation**, and **awe** with which new guests, especially non-Orthodox ones, approach the idea of visiting our parishes.

Greeters should be trained to do the following:

1. Be ready with a smile and a handshake
2. Offer a copy of Sunday's bulletin
3. Offer a copy of the liturgy book
4. Invite them to sign a guestbook
5. Point out where the bathrooms are to mothers with children
6. Invite them to Coffee Hour



The *one* thing Greeters should *not* do:

Leave them alone **after** the service is over – make sure they get connected with parishioners and make it to Coffee Hour.

Once Inside...

- Are the candle stands polished, and excess wax buildup removed?
- Are lipstick smudges cleaned off the icons? Have walls and corners been dusted?
- Has all wax on the rugs been removed? When was the last time the rugs were cleaned?
- What about the floors? Cleaned, de-waxed and polished?
- Are vestments clean and pressed? Missing buttons replaced and sewn back on?
- When was the last time the chandeliers were dusted and cleaned?
- If the choir area is up front, is it neat, orderly and arranged?

A word about announcements at the end of Divine Liturgy

Do...

Make sure your guests and newcomers are welcomed **as a group** and specifically invited to Coffee Hour.

Do NOT...

Single them out! Don't have them wear name tags, and don't call them out by name, as this has the potential to embarrass them.

ULTIMATELY: Does Christ Make a Difference?

The unchurched want substance: an authentic, tangible and significant encounter with God.

Guests and Newcomers that are looking for authentic faith, ancient teaching and wisdom from the "Early Church" will be wondering if we take "church" seriously. They'll be wondering this as they reflect on everything we do, from the way we greet to the way we sing to the way we serve to how clean we keep those things entrusted to us by God – **essentially, how we "do" church!**