



The Church As A Communicator

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The Church as a Communicator

Think about it. Just as humans send a message even when they are silent, a church sends a 'message' just by its very presence in a neighborhood.

Perhaps you have been on vacation and spied an ornate mosque or a small church with a tall steeple and an old bell chamber. You might live near a church that plays a series of hymn chimes every day as the clock strikes twelve noon. Or maybe you've seen a church with peeling paint, toppled sign and litter in its yard. Each of these churches and their settings sends you a message about the church, the group or denomination it represents, and the people who regularly attend. You, however, are basing the meaning of those 'messages' on how you view the church based upon your own understanding and past experiences with church life.

Suppose you have never attended any of the churches mentioned but that at least one of them made you curious enough to want to visit just once. Which one would you choose and why? As you plan for your visit, undoubtedly you will set up in your mind some exceptions for what you, a stranger in a new setting, will experience. If these expectations are not met and you do not feel somewhat at ease, it is not likely that you will return again. In fact, if it is too uncomfortable, you might not even stay long at all.

There are approximately 4600 Seventh-day Adventist churches in the North American Division. The word approximately is used because new congregations are being formed and new church buildings acquired regularly. At the same time, some churches are being closed and the congregations merged with other more active churches due to lack of growth and attendance. No longer can we just assume that people will be attracted to our church meeting places. We must do all we can to be sure our church gives a positive first impression to people who daily drive by. But first impressions are not enough. Our churches must be people-friendly places and inviting on both the inside as well as the outside. What kind of message or messages is YOUR church sending? You are about to embark on a process that will help you find out.

This booklet is designed to help you analyze what your church communicates to first-time visitors. Your task is to look at the evaluation scale through the eyes of one of your relatives who is not an Adventist visiting your church for the first time. Or you might use the eyes of a total stranger who is looking for a spiritual home and has never been to church at all. Or you might look through the eyes of someone that has just learned about the Adventist church from attending an evangelistic tent meeting or who has been enrolled in Bible studies but has never been inside an Adventist church before. Regardless of how they heard about Adventists, look at your church through their eyes as they attempt to locate your church and attend a worship service with your congregation for the very first time. In this document, these individuals will be referred to as "first-time visitors". Remember first impressions are lasting ones.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SELF-EVALUATION

This self-evaluation tool is divided into six categories. Within each category there are statements about various non-verbal and verbal messages that are transmitted through such things as the attractiveness of the church grounds; a wheelchair ramp; the absence or presence of visitors parking signs; or type of greeting received at the door.

One person may use this evaluation tool alone, but it is really designed to spark small group discussion with the goal of improving what a church communicates to first-time visitors. An evaluation of this type is more accurate if several rate it on their own and then come together to determine the average of the team's scores. The team average then becomes the working document. It is even possible that you might have a total stranger come to your church to do the 'audit' as a service to your team so that you can compare your team's ratings with that of an unbiased total stranger. There is no one right way to use this rating instrument. The important thing is that you put aside your own bias and think of approaching your church for the very first time as if you were a first-time visitor. What would you notice that was outstanding? What would you notice that was poor?

Read each statement within a category. Rate the item by circling the number to the right of the statement that corresponds to the type of message sends to first-time visitors: a poor message, a fair message, a good message, or an outstanding one. The N/A stands for not applicable. Use when an item mentioned is not relevant to your church or its facilities.

Below each statement you will notice subheadings that are in the positive voice. Beside each subheading is a line to the left where you may circle the appropriate grade you would give your church. The higher the mark the more outstanding your church is in this particular area. Because no two church buildings or congregations are exactly alike, it is impossible to place every possible topic area in this list of subheadings. Use the line provided and named 'Other' to specify subheadings that apply to your unique setting.

After each item, space is left for you to make brief comments or notes about things you would like to discuss with other team members. These might include what you were first impressed about when you had to rate something as poor or fair or may be not in existence at all.

A section in the back of the booklet is provided so that you and your team can decide which 3-5 areas you excel in and which 3-5 areas you would like to give your immediate attention to improving. There is space to develop goals, objectives and action plans to remedy the areas of greatest concern. The overall goal is to have every Adventist church in North America send warm and inviting verbal and non-verbal messages to guests, first-time visitors and potential members.

A SELF-EVALUATION

CATEGORY A SIGNS & DIRECTIONS

1. INFORMATION/ADDRESSES

What kind of messages do strangers find when they are trying to locate information about your church and its services for the first time?

0 - N/A 1 - Poor 2 - Fair 3 - Good 4 - Outstanding

- 0 1 2 3 4 in the church section of the telephone book
- 0 1 2 3 4 with the 'directory assistance' operator
- 0 1 2 3 4 in the local newspapers
- 0 1 2 3 4 in hotel/motel church directories
- 0 1 2 3 4 in the local chamber of commerce church directories
- 0 1 2 3 4 a professional message on an answering machine
that gives and receives information
- 0 1 2 3 4 call backs are made promptly

Other, please specify:

Comments:

2. DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

What kind of messages do the directional signs to your church send when strangers are in the general vicinity of the church?

- 0 1 2 3 4 directional signs are rust-free and well painted
- 0 1 2 3 4 directional signs are free of weeds and branches
- 0 1 2 3 4 directional signs are well-lit
- 0 1 2 3 4 directional signs are placed in clearly visible areas

Other, please specify:

Comments:

3. CHURCH SIGNS

What kind of message does the information on the sign in front of your church send to strangers?

0 1 2 3 4 the sign includes times and days services are held

0 1 2 3 4 there is a number to call listed on the sign

Other, please specify:

Comments:

CATEGORY B EXTERIOR

4. PARKING LOT

What kind of messages do strangers and first-time visitors get from your church parking lot?

0 1 2 3 4 it is in good repair

0 1 2 3 4 it has adequate visitor's parking

0 1 2 3 4 it has well-marked handicapped spaces

0 1 2 3 4 it is well lit at night

0 1 2 3 4 its surface is smooth and hazard-free

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

5. CHURCH GROUNDS

What kind of message does the church grounds send to 'neighbors' or those who are first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 the curbs and drainage systems are in good repair
- 0 1 2 3 4 the lawn is mowed and edged regularly
- 0 1 2 3 4 the grounds are free of litter
- 0 1 2 3 4 the shrubbery and plants are well groomed
- 0 1 2 3 4 the sidewalks are in good repair

Other, please specify:

Comments:

6. BUILDING EXTERIOR

What kind of message does the exterior of the church buildings send to individuals who drive by or are first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 glass windows and doors are clean and in good repair
- 0 1 2 3 4 buildings are well painted, stained or bricked
- 0 1 2 3 4 buildings are attractive to those who pass by
- 0 1 2 3 4 buildings are in good repair

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

9. REST ROOMS

What kind of messages do rest rooms in the church send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 they are in good repair
- 0 1 2 3 4 they are freshly painted or wall paper is 'attached' and not dated
- 0 1 2 3 4 they are free of odor
- 0 1 2 3 4 they are free of mold and mildew
- 0 1 2 3 4 they are children-friendly (step stools at the sink, etc.)
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is a baby changing area in both men's and women's rest rooms
- 0 1 2 3 4 there are air fresheners in each stall
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is notice of where to obtain additional supplies
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is notice of where to obtain first aid supplies/assistance

Other, please specify: _____

Comments: _____

10. CHILDREN'S ROOMS

What messages do the children's Sabbath School rooms send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 they are clearly marked by age or grade level (the unchurched don't recognize "primary, kindergarten, juniors" like we do)
- 0 1 2 3 4 the rooms are orderly
- 0 1 2 3 4 the rooms look 'safe'
- 0 1 2 3 4 the rooms are free of odor

Other, please specify: _____

Comments: _____

11. FELLOWSHIP HALL

What kind of message does the fellowship hall send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 is well-maintained
- 0 1 2 3 4 is well-lighted
- 0 1 2 3 4 has adequate heat/air conditioning/ventilation
- 0 1 2 3 4 has chairs and tables in good repair

Other, please specify:

Comments:

12. PASTOR'S STUDY

What kind of message does the pastor's study send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 is neat and free of clutter
- 0 1 2 3 4 creates an atmosphere of professionalism
- 0 1 2 3 4 represents a sense of the pastor's mission
- 0 1 2 3 4 is private but not secluded
- 0 1 2 3 4 has comfortable seating

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

CATEGORY D PRINT

13. GUEST REGISTRY

What kind of message does the process of registering your visitors send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 it is not intrusive
- 0 1 2 3 4 it offers certain visitors a place to eat lunch
- 0 1 2 3 4 it provides an avenue for someone in need to
express that need to the greeter

Other, please specify:

Comments:

14. BULLETIN

What kind of message does your church bulletin send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 it clearly indicates where activities/services are located
(a layout of the church accompanies room names)
- 0 1 2 3 4 it is free of Adventist jargon
- 0 1 2 3 4 it is free of smudges and typographical errors
- 0 1 2 3 4 it is clear that events during the week are open to visitors
- 0 1 2 3 4 it gives the name, address, telephone number of the church

Other, please specify:

Comments:

15. CHURCH BANNERS AND POSTERS

What kind of messages do your church banners and posters send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 compliment church decor
0 1 2 3 4 direct thoughts to God
0 1 2 3 4 are motivational or provoke a sense of awe

Other, please specify:

Comments:

16. OFFERING ENVELOPES & COMMENT CARDS

What kind of messages do the offering envelopes and comment cards in the hymnal racks send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 a reminder of one's stewardship
0 1 2 3 4 a way to communicate one's needs to the pastor

Other, please specify:

Comments:

17. MUSIC

What kind of message does the music during church send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 the congregation is led in music by someone who can sing
0 1 2 3 4 there is a mixture of tempo
0 1 2 3 4 words exalt and praise the name of Jesus
0 1 2 3 4 words follow the theme of the worship
0 1 2 3 4 the congregation sings enthusiastically
0 1 2 3 4 special music is well planned
0 1 2 3 4 special music offers variety of solo, groups, and instrumentals
0 1 2 3 4 if words are projected on screens, the words and music are in sync

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

18. LITERATURE

What kind of message does your church literature rack send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 it is orderly and attractive
0 1 2 3 4 a sign indicates whether or not it is free
0 1 2 3 4 it is current
0 1 2 3 4 there is a large variety of subject matter with balance of gospel and doctrine
0 1 2 3 4 there is a sense of God's love for people of all ages
0 1 2 3 4 there is an urgency to share 'good news' with others

Other, please specify:

Comments:

19. EVANGELISTIC/OUTREACH FLYERS

What kind of message does the church evangelistic/outreach flyers send to a potential first-time visitor?

- 0 1 2 3 4 this is a church with a Christ-centered relevant, relational message
0 1 2 3 4 this is a church who has a 'mission'
0 1 2 3 4 this is a church that cares about people

Other, please specify:

Comments:

CATEGORY E VERBAL

20. SOUL-WINNING/OUTREACH

What kind of message does your 'soul-winning'/outreach period of the service have to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 this is a mission/service driven group of people
0 1 2 3 4 there is something for everyone who wishes to get
 involved in helping people get to know Jesus

Other, please specify:

Comments:

21. CONGREGATIONAL WELCOME

What kind of message is sent when visitors are welcomed?

- 0 1 2 3 4 they are not put on the spot
0 1 2 3 4 they are treated with respect
0 1 2 3 4 the welcome is authentic not just a routine

Other, please specify:

Comments:

22. ANNOUNCEMENTS

What kind of message does the announcement period send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 re-reading details found in the bulletin or church newsletter is avoided
0 1 2 3 4 there is intentional avoidance of the use of jargon known only known to
 Adventists in general and local members in particular
0 1 2 3 4 reference to secular activities are avoided

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

23. PRAYERS

What picture of God do your public prayers send to first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers are well thought out in advance
- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers praise and give glory to God as well as outline the
concerns of the congregation
- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers are not lengthy
- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers use words that are simple
- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers avoid Adventist jargon
- 0 1 2 3 4 prayers are given by old and young, men and women, youth,
young adults, boys and girls

Other, please specify:

Comments:

24. MONEY

What message does your church's request for tithe and offerings send to a first-time visitor?

- 0 1 2 3 4 no pressure is applied from the pulpit
- 0 1 2 3 4 visitors are not made to feel obligated to give
- 0 1 2 3 4 calls for offering are thought out in advance
- 0 1 2 3 4 calls are not read but given in one's own words
- 0 1 2 3 4 denominational church-specific words are explained
- 0 1 2 3 4 motivation is not to create 'guilt'
- 0 1 2 3 4 the issue of money is tied to responsible stewardship

Other, please specify:

Comments:

 **CATEGORY F**
NONVERBAL

25. CHURCH NURSERY

What kind of message does the fact you do or do not provide service for parents with infants and children under age 4 during the worship service have on first-time visitors with small children?

- 0 1 2 3 4 has appropriate supervision
- 0 1 2 3 4 gives a confidence of child safety
- 0 1 2 3 4 has a system of child-parent identification
- 0 1 2 3 4 has a system so attendant knows how to locate parent in the sanctuary
- 0 1 2 3 4 has an orderly climate
- 0 1 2 3 4 cribs, toys and play area are clean and free of odors

Other, please specify:

Comments:

26. ATTIRE/DRESS

What kind of message does the way church members are dressed have on the perception of visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 visitors are made to feel welcomed regardless of what they are wearing

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION

27. SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

What kind of messages are sent to first-time visitors who are “differently-abled” and have special needs?

- 0 1 2 3 4 the elderly and crippled have access to ramps and elevators
- 0 1 2 3 4 someone is at every door to assist persons coming into church in wheelchairs, walkers, or crutches
- 0 1 2 3 4 at least one rest room is wheelchair accessible
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is a list of individuals who are available to interpret for the deaf
- 0 1 2 3 4 a section of the church is available for the deaf and the interpreter
- 0 1 2 3 4 there are amplifying systems for the hard of hearing
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is a section of the church where wheelchairs fit and don't block aisles
- 0 1 2 3 4 the blind are offered Braille lessons
- 0 1 2 3 4 accommodation is made for seeing eye dogs, if necessary

Other, please specify:

Comments:

28. OVERALL IMPACT

What is the overall impact of your church on first-time visitors?

- 0 1 2 3 4 members are Christ-like in the way they deal with one another and with first-time visitors
- 0 1 2 3 4 there is a sense that this is an open community of faith that welcomes others into its fellowship regardless of class, race, gender, age or disabilities.
- 0 1 2 3 4 the church facilities are well maintained
- 0 1 2 3 4 the worship service is Christ-centered
- 0 1 2 3 4 the church and its people point first-time visitors to a loving Savior

Other, please specify:

Comments:

A SELF-EVALUATION SCORECARD

Now that you have rated each statement, place a plus (+) sign on the line to the left of the item if you rated it either "good" or "outstanding." Place a minus (-) sign beside the ones you rated either "poor" or "fair." Place N/A on the line if not applicable to your church or its facilities.

 (+) = Good/Outstanding

 (-) = Poor/Fair

CATEGORY A—SIGNS & DIRECTIONS

- _____ 1. Information/Addresses
- _____ 2. Directional Signs
- _____ 3. Church Signs

CATEGORY B—EXTERIOR

- _____ 4. Parking Lot
- _____ 5. Church Grounds
- _____ 6. Building Exterior

CATEGORY C—INTERIOR

- _____ 7. Church Entrance
- _____ 8. Church Sanctuary
- _____ 9. Rest Rooms
- _____ 10. Children's Rooms
- _____ 11. Fellowship Hall
- _____ 12. Pastor's Study

CATEGORY D—PRINT

- _____ 13. Guest Registry
- _____ 14. Bulletin
- _____ 15. Church Banners and Posters
- _____ 16. Offering Envelopes &
Comment Cards
- _____ 17. Music
- _____ 18. Literature
- _____ 19. Evangelistic/Outreach Flyers

CATEGORY E—VERBAL

- _____ 20. Soul-Winning/Outreach
- _____ 21. Congregational Welcome
- _____ 22. Announcements
- _____ 23. Prayers
- _____ 24. Money

CATEGORY F—NONVERBAL

- _____ 25. Church Nursery
- _____ 26. Attire/Dress
- _____ 27. Services for People
with Disabilities
- _____ 28. Overall Impact

SELF-EVALUATION ACTION PLAN

As a team, decide together which items above are the top 3-5 areas where your church communicates best to first-time visitors. List them in the space below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now choose the top 3-5 areas where your church could improve it's messages to first-time visitors and list them in the space below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

This section is essential to complete if any changes are going to be made. It is not enough just to identify our areas of greatest strength and weakness. We must find ways to turn our weaknesses into strengths. The following steps are designed to help you move from problem to solution with each of the areas you choose to improve.

Look at the 3-5 areas you have decided need improvement if you are going to send positive messages to first-time visitors. Some items might take just a little time and thought and no money while others may require a subcommittee to analyze the problem and make a proposal to acquire other resources.

Use the photo copy master to set action plans for each of the areas that your church group wants to see improved. The following is an example of a church whose members decided they wanted to have reserved parking spaces for visitors.

ACTION PLAN

GOAL: TO CREATE PARKING SPACES FOR VISITORS

A. STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOAL

1. Bob will call the local sign company to find cost of visitors parking sign.
2. Carolyn will check with friend who is a sign painter to get a cost estimate.
3. Committee (use names) will meet (date) to determine lowest/best bid and the number of spaces/signs we need and can afford at this time.
4. Funds will be raised by January 15 or funds will be requested of the church board from the building and grounds fund.

B. RESOURCES REQUIRED

1. Research time
2. Cost for each sign
3. Labor and equipment if we decide to install signs ourselves.

C. SUGGESTED TIME-LINE

Completion date: March 20, 1999

D. INDIVIDUAL(S) ASSIGNED TO KEEP PROJECT ON TRACK

Bob

ACTION PLAN

GOAL:

A. STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

B. RESOURCES REQUIRED

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

C. SUGGESTED TIME-LINE

Completion date:

D. INDIVIDUAL(S) ASSIGNED TO KEEP PROJECT ON TRACK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____