

PRESERVING THE FRUIT: FOLLOW-UP

Follow-Up *with newcomers* Step-by-Step

For the follow-up with newcomers coordinator

Thank you for committing to assimilate new people into your congregation. Over the course of the four weeks, September 19-October 17, **we are following up with every person across Montana who responded to an invitation to worship with a Montana Southern Baptist church on Harvest Sunday, both those who did not and those who did place their faith in Jesus.**

For the purposes of **ACROSS MONTANA 2010**, newcomers are defined as those persons who attended on Harvest Sunday but did not receive Christ. For them, follow-up is essential. They have expressed interest in your church by attending worship with you; your church wants to express interest in them by going to visit.

- 1. Create a systematic, workable plan for follow-up.** The plan should include both (1) *immediate follow-up* and (2) an *ongoing process* of connecting them to the life and ministry of the church. The ultimate goal is to place the newcomer in the pathway of God's grace so that he or she comes to trust in Jesus. Develop a simple, easily-understood plan that includes a time table and tracking of visits made. An effective follow-up strategy will provide realistic opportunities for church member involvement.
- 2. Involve many individuals from your church.** The most obvious church members to involve will be leaders and members in the small-group ministry of your church. Be sure that each person understands the importance and the goal of follow-up, as well as how his or her individual effort contributes to the whole.
- 3. Begin follow-up on Harvest Sunday.** Work with the Harvest Sunday coordinator to develop a simple process for collecting information from newcomers when they worship with you on Harvest Sunday. The information will need to include home address and phone numbers; you may also want to get e-mail addresses.
- 4. Prepare gift bags or baskets to be used in follow-up visits.** Prepare a small gift—with church information and/or newsletter, snacks, tea or coffee, and a novelty item—for each person or family to be visited. Church members who follow up will take the gifts with them.
- 5. Train church members to make effective visits.** Prepare those who visit to thank the newcomers for attending and invite them to come again. Use the visit to get acquainted, ask how you may pray for them, pray *with* them (as well as continue to pray for them in the days to come), and be alert to opportunities to minister to them. Be sure that church members can answer questions about the church and are prepared to give a testimony of what Jesus means to them.

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Follow-Up Principles

For the follow-up with newcomers coordinator

Before you begin, you may be asking the question, “**Why follow up and how do I do it?**” Here are some thoughts as you prepare yourself and others:

Follow-up is critical for newcomers who visit a church. Experience shows that the first four weeks following a non-churched person’s first visit to a church are critical. This is when he or she is most receptive to the church and to the Gospel. This receptivity gradually declines. If no contact has been made between the church and the newcomer in four weeks, the newcomer will become indifferent to the church again.

The small group is your church’s most effective evangelistic tool. A small-group, relationship-oriented ministry—such as your church’s Sunday School or Bible study classes, or outside-the-church discovery groups (see information regarding Discovery Groups elsewhere in this packet)—is the most effective venue for non-churched people to explore Christianity. In small groups, not only can they ask questions about Jesus Christ, but they see in others first-hand what it means to have a changed life because of the Gospel. Also, through small group connections, seekers experience Christian living alongside believers.

Research shows:

- A church will baptize one out of four hundred (1:400) people she tries to reach outside a small-group ministry.
- A church will baptize one out of two (1:2) people she enrolls in a Sunday School class, involves in a small-group Bible study, or engages in a discovery group.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of non-churched Americans will attend a small-group Sunday School class, Bible study, or discovery group if invited.
- Only twenty percent (20%) of non-churched Americans have ever been invited to a small-group Sunday School class, Bible study, or discovery group.

The small group is your church’s most effective evangelistic tool. You want to connect newcomers to an age-appropriate or affinity-based small group as soon as possible.

Follow-up is one of the most important aspects of discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship are like two sides of the same coin. They are both necessary. The Bible calls a new believer a "babe" in Christ. As a baby, new Christians need much attention and care during their formative years. Those who place their faith in Christ must enter into an ongoing process of discipleship. Therefore, a concise, well-planned process for the purpose of growing and maturing believers is critical follow-up for new believers.

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Sample Plan for Follow-Up *with newcomers*

For the follow-up with newcomers coordinator

The immediate follow-up plan equips the church to assimilate newcomers. Follow-up actually begins on Harvest Sunday, with greeting newcomers, gathering their contact information, and providing a high-quality worship service they will appreciate and enjoy. The immediate plan then continues for four weeks, with a variety of contacts from your pastor, small-group leaders, and others.

Also, the plan should include having church members pray for each newcomer by name and being alert to opportunities to share the Gospel and invite newcomers to place their faith in Jesus. It is inevitable that, as they are being prayed over and connected to church people, and hearing the Gospel preached each Sunday, newcomers are encountering God and His Holy Spirit is working to draw them into a relationship with Him.

Week One

Goal: Have newcomers return

- On Monday morning, a welcome letter is mailed from the pastor to each newcomer (one letter per individual or family) who attended on Sunday. The letter is addressed to the newcomer by name(s) and personally signed by the pastor. In it, he thanks the newcomer for attending and invites him or her to come back next week.
- For the newcomer who participated in a small group, the leader of the group visits, taking a gift (as described earlier) and inviting him or her to come again; a member from the group contacts him or her by phone.
- For the newcomer who did not participate in a small group but attended the worship service, someone from a small group that best matches the newcomer's age or affinity visits, taking a gift, sharing information about the small group(s) available to the newcomer, and inviting him or her to come again. Don't forget that outside-the-church discovery groups may be just the fit for some newcomers who are hesitant to jump into church activities. Be sure to include information about discovery groups along with the presentation of Sunday School and Bible study classes.

NOTE: In the event that the newcomer is a child, the same careful attention applies. As the pastor and small-group leaders follow up, they address the child directly but include his or her parent(s) or guardian(s) in all discussions.

Week Two

Goal: Empower and involve newcomers

- On Sunday, greeters are on alert to spot newcomers returning from Harvest Sunday. They have memorized their names in advance and greet them by name. Greeters are also prepared to show newcomers to the age-appropriate or affinity small group that best matches them.

- On Monday morning, a second letter is mailed from the pastor to returning newcomers. Like the letter the week before, this one is addressed to the newcomers by name and personally signed by the pastor. In it, he recognizes newcomers' attendance and invites them to complete a church evaluation form. If the evaluation form is enclosed with the letter, he provides a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which newcomers can return it. By sharing their experience with the church via the evaluation, newcomers are empowered and begin to participate early on in the church.
- For the returning newcomer who participated in a small group on Harvest Sunday, the leader follows up with him or her by phone, sharing information about the group such as its purpose, general make-up, and value to the lives of those who participate; a second member of the group contacts him or her with a brief welcome.
- For the returning newcomer who has yet to participate in a small group, the leader from the small group that best matches his or her age or affinity contacts him or her, sharing information about the group such as its purpose, general make-up, and value to the lives of those who participate, and inviting him or her to meet with them next week.

Week Three

Goal: Attract and enlist newcomers

- On Sunday, greeters continue to call second- and third-time newcomers by their names, as well as provide greeter service for first-time newcomers.
- On Monday morning, a third letter is mailed from the pastor to returning newcomers. This letter recognizes their interest in the church, expresses appreciation for their insights shared on the church evaluation form, and invites them to a fellowship meal* in the pastor's home two weeks hence. Recipients of the letter are asked to RSVP by the end of the week.
- Small group leaders and members continue to make contacts with newcomers. One or two weekly contacts with brief, welcoming statements are sufficient. The idea is to keep in touch (thereby communicating that the church cares) but not deluge newcomers with contacts or information (thereby coming on too strong).

Week Four

Goal: Have newcomers commit

- On Sunday, greeters continue their ministry to newcomers. And, newcomers who have committed to come to the pastor's fellowship meal meet briefly with the pastor following the worship service to receive information about the meal such as day, time, address and phone number, directions, and even a map.
- On Monday morning, a card is mailed from the pastor, confirming the newcomers' involvement in the upcoming fellowship meal and expressing eagerness to visit with everyone in a more informal setting.
- Small group leaders and members continue to touch base with returning newcomers, as appropriate. By week four, leaders are seeking to enroll newcomers in a small group.

* The fellowship meal, held at the pastor's home in Week Five, is an opportunity for your pastor and his wife to mingle and talk with guests. Following the meal, they can introduce themselves and their family; talk about the church, its mission and what it means to them personally; and invite everyone to consider participating in a special class to learn more.