

Visitor anxiety

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I'm always a little on edge when I spot visitors at church, especially truly new people who are checking out our congregation for the first or second time.

I become more aware of elements of the service. Did the worship leader *have* to pick that song today? Did the preacher *have* to tell that story? Little things I see as the usual quirks in a congregation become causes for concern.

I was in charge of planning worship one Sunday when we were expecting a group of visitors—not people looking for a church home but, more anxiety-producing for me, pastors from our denomination and leaders of national organizations who had been attending meetings in the church building.

I spent extra time preparing. Would “[Veni Sancte Spiritus](#)” fit as the first hymn, or would visitors find it strange for Mennonites to be singing in Latin? Which members would read scripture most eloquently?

At some point I stopped and reminded myself that I can't change our church members, nor do I want to. The church can't be ironed out, dressed up and plastered with makeup to look pretty on picture day. It is an imperfect reflection of God's love for us through broken people.

We haven't necessarily failed if the visitors don't come back, or if they take reports of our eccentricities back to their congregations. We can pray they saw some of the good, too.

If I love my congregation, warts and all, then I should be glad to have

visitors get to know us as we are. Perhaps that odd song or awkward story is a blessing after all.