

How to Get Started at Your New Church

By Kevin DeYoung

Over ten years in pastoral ministry I've seen many new people come to church and I've seen a few long-time members leave our church. Some make these moves better than others. While there are many things I have learned about what pastors and current members should do in these situations, I'll save those ruminations for another time. Instead, I want to reflect on what new people can do right in coming to a church and what is helpful from those who decide they must leave the church.

So what should I do when I start attending a new church?

1. **Make a decision to decide and then stick with it.** Pastors understand that choosing a church is a big deal. We realize that you may check out different churches for several months. It's okay to tell us that. We won't (or shouldn't be) offended. But make up your mind to make up your mind. And when you do, throw yourself in to your new home.
2. **Introduce yourself.** Yes, the church should make an effort to get to know you. But if you really want to make friends also make an effort to get to know people at the church. Wear a name tag if your church has them. Remind people of your name, even past the point when you think surely they must remember you. Make a point to talk to the pastor in the greeting line and make yourself known. Some pastors are great at meeting people. But others are introverted, bad with names, or just very busy.
3. **Start coming to church functions like you've been there forever.** In my experience new folks that go to the evening service, the potluck, the congregational meeting, the Christmas program, and join a small group, almost always feel like the church is incredibly welcoming. Those who only come on Sunday mornings, and maybe only 2-3 times a month, struggle to find their way.
4. **Do ask about important doctrines, but do not press for massive changes.** I have no problem with newcomers asking me where our church stands on gender roles or homosexuality or justification. It can be a very good sign when someone takes doctrine this seriously. But if you have been at the church for a month and already want to inquire about a new worship style, a new approach to children's ministry, or a new stance on spiritual gifts, then you either need to keep a number of things to yourself for awhile (or forever!) or check out a different church.
5. **Take the membership class.** Even if you don't join right away, you'll be glad you got to know more about the church and meet other new people.
6. **Try not to be offended if you don't get asked to do something right away.** I'm not letting pastors and church members off the hook. We need to seek out the new person. The welcoming process is most incumbent upon the incumbents. But be patient if we don't single you out for involvement in a special role. I know it feels good to be asked, but it is okay to volunteer too.
7. **Don't worry about saying no if you do get asked to do something right away.** If you need a break after a hard church experience or if you just aren't ready for the task, it's okay to tell your new church "not right now." No hard feelings. We'll ask again!