

LOOK AT YOUR PROPERTY THROUGH A VISITOR'S EYES

The last thing most people do before they leave for church on Sunday is to step in front of a mirror to make sure everything is neat and clean and in place. Every church should do the same kind of last-minute check before the first worshipers begin to arrive.

Although it's difficult to look at your church property through a visitor's eyes, that should be the goal. Let's make a few observations on their behalf:

Outside

- If it's summertime, is the lawn freshly mowed and trimmed? Edging around sidewalks involves a small investment of both time and equipment but pays big dividends in making a good first impression.
- Speaking of sidewalks, are weeds and/or grass growing up through cracks in the concrete? There's an old proverb that says new businesses won't give a second look to a town that has weeds growing through its sidewalks. The same rule should apply to churches.
- Be sure that shrubbery and trees are kept trimmed. This tip assumes that you have some kind of landscaping around your church. If not, consider making at least a small investment. Perennials such as tulips or daffodils or mums are inexpensive, and you don't have to replant them each year.
- Does your church building need a touch of paint, especially around doors or windows? And while we're on the subject of windows, are the ones in your church clean? If you have multiple services, clean the plate glass in doors between services—and run the vacuum cleaner or shake the floor mats in entryways. People who arrive for the second or third service deserve the same attention to detail that was evident to early worshipers.
- And finally, are sidewalks and parking lots swept regularly—or cleared of snow and ice in the wintertime? And are the stripes and handicapped parking spots on the parking lot kept freshly painted?

Inside

- Remember when service stations used to post signs along the nation's highways proclaiming "clean restrooms"? For many motorists, that may have been the deciding factor in where to stop for a fill-up. Clean restrooms may not be the primary criteria for choosing a church, but they're an important consideration for many people.

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- Perhaps the only area of the church where cleanliness is a bigger consideration is the nursery. Every facet of the nursery should be spotless, from the furniture to the bathrooms to the carpet to the walls to the changing tables to the toys the children will play with (and put in their mouth).
 - Restrooms and nurseries should not only look clean but smell clean as well. Make sure to use a disinfectant that leaves a reassuring smell. And remember to keep supplies—soap, paper towels, bathroom tissue—refilled in restrooms as long as there are people in the church.
 - At Trinity Church of the Nazarene, teenagers are asked to check the restrooms between Sunday School and worship and pick up papers, wipe counters, and so on.
 - Certainly it's important for custodians to spend much of their workweek preparing the building for Sunday worship services. But their work doesn't end on Saturday night. It's vital to have someone looking after the building on Sundays as well.

Safety

Sad to say, the safety of worshipers has become a more important consideration in recent years. And the concerns don't end once people are inside your building.

- Outdoor lighting is important regardless of what kind of neighborhood your church is located in. Clearly, lighting is more important in some neighborhoods than in others. Every church should be able to make the judgment call on that matter.
- In some neighborhoods, security may be necessary outside the building, even during the daytime hours, to protect people walking to and from their cars—and to protect the cars while people are attending services.
- More and more churches are reporting thefts of coats and other personal belongings from hallways and narthexes during worship services. The larger the church, the more difficult it is to keep an eye on every nook and cranny—or to know who everyone is who comes through the door. Many churches now monitor their hallways during services.
- Too many churches are reluctant to spend money for parking lots that adjoin the church, but it's a good investment on several counts, foremost among them the convenience and security of church members. When property becomes available near your church, give serious consideration to buying it.

Maintenance and Repair

"Keeping up appearances" means more than vacuuming the nursery or pulling weeds from the sidewalk. The repairs and maintenance (or lack thereof) of your church building are also important factors. It doesn't take long for visiting guests to notice whether there's an effort to keep your church (the "Lord's house") in good repair. Kevin M. Quinley, a risk manager for a major insurance company, gave some good maintenance and repair advice in *Your Church* magazine:

- Understand both the advantages and disadvantages involved in outsourcing church maintenance and do-it-yourself approaches.
- Know the life expectancy of all systems.
- Budget for church maintenance well before troubles arise.

- Prepare for times when you will have to make agonizing decisions over dollars for maintenance vs. dollars for ministry.
- Have written maintenance plans, with multiple copies available in different places.
- Design daily, weekly, monthly, and annual tasks.
- Update your maintenance strategy at least every six months.
- Network with other church administrators to consider different approaches to church maintenance.
- View maintenance, especially preventive maintenance, as an investment rather than an expense.
- Focus on major areas, such as air conditioning, heating, and plumbing, where deferring maintenance can lead to very expensive repair and replacement costs.¹

Your trustee board or maintenance ministry team can actually do as much to improve your church's image as your Christian education or music ministry team. Their diligence in several areas will make your church a more inviting place to visit:

1. *Involve volunteers in cleaning storage areas (closets, cupboards, cabinets, shelves).* Even those areas that may not be as visible can contribute to a church's poor self-image if not kept neat and organized.

2. *Pay attention to the platform or stage area.* A sloppy platform or stage will give a negative effect—no matter how well the choir sings!

3. *Keep classrooms well organized.* Certainly, a group of children can “transform” a classroom during a single Sunday School class. But someone (who may be looking for a place to serve) assigned the task of straightening classrooms following their use can reorganize them and make them ready for the next session.

4. *Focus on the foyers.* A clean and well-organized foyer is a good place to make a good first impression. Old bulletins, newsletters, or other material strewn across tables; lost-and-found items lying on the floor; coat rack shelves full of discarded boxes or materials; dirty floor mats; unkempt and outdated bulletin boards—these are some of the things that keep visitors from taking a second look at the ministry your church has to offer.

5. *Organize the pew racks.* Make sure the visitor cards, offering envelopes, and give-away pens or pencils are in place and neatly displayed. (There may be a younger member of your congregation who would be just thrilled to have the responsibility of straightening the pew racks each Sunday or between services!)

6. *Conduct a work day.* Perhaps the men's organization of your church can have a “work dinner,” combining fellowship with doing some routine maintenance. The organizer can make it a fun event, with humorous awards and recognition.

Painting. Paving. Scrubbing. Fixing. Trimming. They're not all that fun! But the attention your staff and parishioners give to the facilities will actually improve the morale of the congregation and go a long way to improving the image of your church.

7. *Assemble a five-star inspection team.* At Trinity Church of the Nazarene, a “white glove tour” is conducted annually. All items for repair are noted and fixed during church-wide work days.

See Appendix 7 and the accompanying CD for a checklist aimed at improving the “winning welcome” of the church.

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Five-Star Church

Quality Goals for Trinity Church of the Nazarene

We will always seek to speak an encouraging word to our guests.

We will focus on our strengths and seek to improve our weaknesses.

We will strive to build quality ministry action teams.

We will be thoughtful and Christlike in every relationship.

We will cultivate physical, mental, and spiritual growth.

We will treat others as we hope others will treat us.

We will ask, listen, and hear—to determine the felt needs and potential of each newcomer.

We will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every decision-making opportunity.

POST CLEAR AND NEAT SIGNS

A sign in front of an optometrist's office reads, "If you don't see what you're looking for, you've come to the right place." But when it comes to signage in public buildings, people often don't find what they're looking for, even after they've come to the right place! Various factors, including growth, may contribute to the confusion.

Let's illustrate. Indiana Wesleyan University is one of the fastest-growing Christian colleges in the nation. It grew so fast, in fact, that administrators couldn't keep up with little details such as putting signs on buildings—either outside or inside.

Suddenly, this once-small campus had a problem: People actually were getting lost. Visitors—and even students—couldn't find specific buildings. And once inside, they couldn't find the classrooms or offices they were seeking.

The problem has been solved—sort of. Every building now has a name on it. Every room in every building now is identified with a sign. But the "solution" led to additional problems. For example, one sign identifies a room as housing the "Division of HKRSS." Another says "CLCL Classroom." People who know what HKRSS and CLCL stand for probably already know where the divisional office and the classroom for those departments are.

Those aren't even pronounceable acronyms, let alone informative signs. (Incidentally, the alphabet soup we've just mentioned stands for Health, Kinesiology, Recreation and Sports Studies, and Center for Life Calling and Leadership.)

Signage isn't just a concern for larger institutions and organizations—it's a concern for churches as well, regardless of their size. Signs are critical in helping people, especially guests, navigate their way around your church building. Signs may even be necessary to help people *find* your building and, once there, to help get them inside. Some churches even purchase signs to place at the various entrances to a city, listing the name and address of the church.

There are some basic factors for posting effective signage on your church campus:

1. Church signs should be informative.

The first purpose of any sign is to give directions. Use simple words that anyone, especially those who don't attend church regularly, will understand. For example, most people probably know what the word "auditorium" means, but they may not know the meaning of "nave" or "worship center" or the other such euphemisms.

And what's a "narthex?" Ask regular church attendees to define that area of the church, and see what kind of responses you get. More familiar words are "foyer" or "lobby."

One church has a large room called "J. C. Body Shop," but it has nothing to do with repairing automobiles. It's the youth center. There's nothing wrong with clever names, espe-

cially when they relate to youth ministries. Just make sure people know what the rooms are for and, in the case of names such as “J. C. Body Shop,” what the name means. An explanation line underneath would make it more informative and useful.

What “the Body” Is All About

The Body ministers with TCN.

Harmony within “the Body”

Experiencing God through worship

Biblically training disciples

Opportunities for building relationships

Developing servant leaders

Youth sharing Jesus

—Trinity Church of the Nazarene Youth

While simplicity is the rule, both in the words you choose and in the number of words that will fit on most signs, it’s important to allow enough space to provide the necessary information.

Before you install directional signs inside the church, you may want a room-numbering system that’s sequential and easy to follow. Those numbers should then be posted, along with a building diagram, near each entrance way.

Signs that are placed along highways or city streets to direct people to your church must be large enough, and have a limited number of words, so that motorists can read them as they drive by. Ten words or fewer generally are considered to be the maximum even for billboards, depending on the speed limit for passing motorists.

As a general rule, when someone drives onto your church campus, the buildings should be clearly marked—perhaps beginning with “arrow” signs along the driveway. And once those visitors get inside the building, there should be a sign that clearly points to every crucial area of the building (office, classrooms, nursery, restrooms, auditorium, fellowship hall, Christian education area, coat room, and so on). A rule of thumb: Look at your signs—from the entrance on—through the eyes of a first-time visitor to your church.

2. Church signs should be neat.

Hand-scribbled signage may have the right information, but it will certainly give the wrong impression! Desktop publishing makes it possible to add attractive and colorful signs to your meeting areas. They should not be gaudy (black lettering on a white background is usually best, and putting signs in an attractive wood or metal frame will add a “five-star” touch). Typestyles should be simple as well. Large, block letters (perhaps serif) are easier to read than italics or script.

Also, signage should be uniform throughout your building. And arrow symbols always give added information.

A local sign shop has plastic or wooden signs that may be worth the investment. Your signs’ professional look immediately creates a good impression.

Outside signs should likewise be well designed. The name of your church on the build-

ing itself should be in large block letters. (White against red brick. Dark lettering against a dark background won't be visible in poor lighting.)

Secure the services of a professional sign company, and specify design and installation. (Caution: Be on hand for the installation, to make sure that lettering is installed in the right location and spaced properly.)

3. Church signs should be strategically placed.

Inside signs should be placed in convenient locations and at eye level. Initial signs ("auditorium this way") may need a follow-up sign ("auditorium").

If your church wants to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there are specific guidelines for how high the signs are to be placed and where the signs must be placed in relationship to the doorknob. ADA-compliant signs also must include Braille.

4. Church signs should be checked for accuracy.

You've seen the classic "PLAN AHEAD" sign. It's a good reminder, that signage should be carefully planned. Be cautious about putting information on signs, such as service times, that will be expensive to change if those times change. While a sign that provides useful information is a plus for any church, a sign with outdated information can reflect on the church's organizational skills.

And remember that spelling and grammar are as important on signs as they are in any writing. How many signs have you seen in churches that say "mens restroom" or "womens restroom"? Is it "alter" or "altar"? Even professionally constructed signs should be checked for correct grammar and spelling and accuracy at the "proof" stage.

5. Church signs should be eye-catching.

While the primary purpose of signs on church property is to be informative, a secondary function is entertainment. Practically every community has a church that is known for its catchy sayings on an outdoor, lighted sign. Most of those churches have choice locations at major intersections, but if well done, even a church off the beaten path with a familiar sign will attract passersby.

Some churches solicit the sayings from members or even from someone in the community. A few churches even have kept track of the sayings over the years, eventually compiling them into humorous booklets to distribute to church members and others in the community.

6. Church signs should take advantage of technology.

Larger churches that want to make a major impact in the community may want to purchase a large, programmable electronic sign on which messages can be changed daily or even several times a day. It is almost imperative, though, that such signs be along major thoroughfares to justify the cost.

The programmable signs are an outstanding way to let the community know about special events, or even special people, in the church. One church in Iowa even lists funeral services for church members on its sign, which is situated on a busy thoroughfare. The church also uses the sign to post milestone birthdays and wedding anniversaries of church members. And when such signs aren't being used for church business, churches can make them available to community groups to post notices of communitywide activities.

We live in a visual world. The more attractive the sign, the more likely it is that people will read it.

Top Ten Amusing Church Signs

10. The lite church . . . everything you wanted in a church and less!
9. Stop in for a faith lift!
8. If you're tired of sin . . . come on in!
7. Our Sundays are better than Dairy Queen's!
6. Bean supper tonight . . . music to follow.
5. Home of the discount tithe!
4. Sign broken . . . come inside for message.
3. Where will you be sitting in eternity . . . smoking or non-smoking?
2. There's no other church like this church . . . this must be the church!
1. Don't let worry kill you . . . let the church help!

See Appendix 4 for a list of 20 clever church sign messages.

PAY ATTENTION TO BULLETIN BOARDS

One of the most neglected areas of the church ministry is the bulletin board. Some churches may still have notices about service time changes due to World War II! Whether your bulletin board is in the main lobby, the Christian education wing, or the fellowship hall, an attractive and informative bulletin board is important to a positive image of your church ministry.

We know what you're thinking: *Bulletin board! I hardly have time to get my sermon in order, let alone spending time putting decorative trim and updated announcements on the bulletin board!* The good news is that there's help. Some of the best "bulletin board personnel" are probably already at hand. Retired or active teachers or teacher aides have years of experience in designing and decorating bulletin boards that will draw attention and give information. Those same parishioners can use the "gift of bulletin boards" to give a good first impression to your church guests.

1. Determine its purpose.

After you've chosen a prominent location and have built an *attractive* and *large* bulletin board, think about the reason you've installed it. The church bulletin board serves two primary purposes: inspiration and information.

The millions of dollars that are spent on television spot commercials and brief commercial roll-ins indicate the importance of brief imagery impressions. Of course, people aren't going to park in front of your bulletin board! But the few seconds they spend there in passing can make a lasting impression on their mind and their heart.

Inspiration. Just imagine a road trip without seeing a billboard along the highway! Why are they there? They're strategically placed to sell an idea or product. The well-lit, creatively designed, and carefully scripted billboard is a Madison Avenue way to change minds and attitudes and to influence spending habits.

Likewise, churches have an opportunity to change minds and attitudes. They also have an opportunity to change spending habits—to influence people to good stewardship of their time and resources. The church bulletin board is a good place to start.

(In fact, you may want to have two bulletin boards—one for *inspiration* and one for *information*.)

By investing in some good quote books from your local Christian bookstore or by downloading quotable quotes from free sites on the Internet, you'll find that your church bulletin board can be a source of inspiration. By choosing a yearly or monthly theme (perhaps based on the local church's yearly emphasis), you can outline 52 weeks of inspiring

sentences or short paragraph statements that will be attitude-changers. Creatively and attractively designed (with large-enough letters to be seen in passing), a quotable quote or Scripture reference can be a great attention getter. (It's almost like bringing the church sign inside!)

A short sentence from the writings of classic or contemporary Christian bestsellers can make some hurried parishioners stop in their tracks. And once they know the quotes will be changed from week to week, they'll stop by to see the latest "installment."

Remember: in creating eye-catching, first-impression bulletin boards, *less* is usually better than *more*. Cluttered bulletin boards, whether they contain information or inspiration, are usually overlooked.

The church bulletin board may also be a place to advertise the mission statement or purpose of your church. Lumped together in one eye-catching statement, or outlined in weekly sections, the bulletin board can inspire your congregation to their ministry purpose.

Information. Updated information on the property, personnel, and program of your church is good material for the bulletin board (and don't forget pictures!). People want to be "in the know," and the bulletin board is a great place to give them the information they seek. Used in tandem with your printed church bulletin, the bulletin board can reinforce information about your church staff and its ministries.

A monthly calendar of events (attractive and bold) can alert busy parishioners of church activities—activities often overlooked by those who fail to read the bulletin or tune out the announcements.

The bulletin board is a good place to highlight your pastoral team. Using pictures (including their families), the bulletin board can be used to inform parishioners about the pastors or laypersons who lead your ministry. Modern technology, including digital photography and printing, makes it possible to make prominent pictorial displays.

Or you may want to feature the pastoral staff one week (or month), the church board another, and then give some information about the Christian education staff the next. Many parishioners will come and go without ever putting a face with the name of a church leader. The bulletin board is a good location to place both!

Departments of your church ministry can also be featured on the bulletin board. Activities, achievements, and actions by your various church departments are eye-catching material for this great source of information.

2. Focus on people.

People like information about other people. That's why a best-selling magazine has *People* as its name! If you must make a bulletin board choice about activities or people, always choose people. A picture of the person responsible for an activity will draw as much (or more) attention than simply an announcement about an activity.

If you're having special services, a large photo of the special speaker or musician (with a brief biographical sentence) is as important as the date and time of the services. Too often, pictures and biographies are posted that are so small a microscope is needed just to see where the special guest comes from!

Achievements by your parishioners should be treated with *big notices*. As long as the

attention is spread out to include the accomplishments of a large number of your congregants, you shouldn't be afraid to feature (in a big way) the achievement of one.

Graduation time is a good time to feature enlarged pictures and bios of your graduates. And an enlarged engagement announcement or wedding picture could be just the thing to make a peripheral attendee feel a part of the local church.

3. Make sure the bulletin board is updated.

Bulletin boards can say much about the credibility of an organization. An outdated bulletin board may say, "This church doesn't care about details." Your appointed "bulletin board secretary" can make sure that dated material or announcements are quickly replaced with materials or announcements of upcoming events. Likewise, changes in personnel (pastoral staff, board members, teaching staff) that are featured on the bulletin board should be updated.

Comments or activities that tie to current events can also make a statement: "This church is concerned about what's happening in the world." A Christian quotable quote or scriptural promise in the climate of a world, national, or local cataclysmic event can bring hope and focus on the relevance of God's Word.

4. Keep it neat.

Neat bulletin boards will be noticed over those that are cluttered. Here are a few reminders:

- Large is better than small.
- Subdued is better than gaudy.
- Typestyles should usually be classic and readable.
- The bulletin board area should be unobstructed.
- Computer-generated type or stick-on lettering is better than hand lettering.
- Pictures are usually worth more than words (unless it's scripture, of course).
- Good borders bring attention to the message area.
- Bulletin boards "on the way" are better than those "out of the way."
- Bulletin boards (and displays) intended for children should be at child's eye level.

5. Include the evangelistic.

Bulletin boards can also be used to share the gospel. The same type of eye-catching billboards that are used by church, denominational, or parachurch organizations outside the church walls can be used inside! Your church bulletin board can also be an oasis for thirsty minds and weary hearts.

If your church has a "Decision Sunday," make sure the bulletin board is included in the planning. The theme of your special emphasis, or an outlined presentation of the gospel plan, can be a vital link.

You may want to have a stand-alone bulletin board that presents the gospel. It should be attractive and positive in its approach. Placed in a prominent position (perhaps inscribed in an attractive wood display), it can draw attention to God's love and forgiveness through the redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eye-catching quotes and phrases (including testimonies from well-known Christian

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“personalities”) displayed over or near photographs of world events can give a message of God’s hope. And that message is even more important than the date of the next Sunday School picnic or church softball league schedule!

Scripture verses (preferably in an easily understood translation) are always appropriate material for your bulletin board. A verse of the week, a brief Psalm, or a weekly Bible reading guide will not only improve the image of your bulletin board—and your church—but will also bring attention to the most important activity of your ministry: sharing the gospel of Christ and making disciples.

Take a good look at your church bulletin board. What do you see? What will others see? What’s working? What isn’t working? And what’s so outdated that it would make the dinner menu on the *Titanic* relevant in comparison?

See Appendix 5 for a list of creative bulletin board ideas.