



## Ten Things You *Should* Never Say to a Guest in a Worship Service

*Thom S Rainer*

If you want to make certain guests never return to your church, say one of these sentences to them when they visit.

Indeed, these unfortunate and ill-timed comments almost always guarantee that you will offend guests and make them very uncomfortable. Most of the time guests are already ill at ease since they are in a new place and a new environment. By the way, each of these quotes was actually communicated to a guest in a worship service. My guess is that all ten of them have been said many times...too many times.

- 1 **“You are sitting in my pew/seat.”** This sentence was actually said to me when I was a visiting preacher in a church. The entitled church member did not realize I was preaching that day. I had the carnal joy of watching her turn red when I was introduced. And, yes, I did move. She scared me.
- 2 **“Is your husband/wife with you?”** This question is rightly perceived as, “We really don’t want single adults in our church.” Members see their church as family friendly as long as “family” meets their definition.
- 3 **“Are those your children?”** This question is becoming more common with the growth in the adoption of children who are not the same race or ethnicity as their parents. One parent with an adopted child was asked if he got to choose how dark his child would be. I’m serious.
- 4 **“The service has already begun.”** This sentence is rightly understood to mean, “You are late, and you will be disrupting the service.” I saw that happen recently. The family left. I was late too, but I stayed since I was preaching.
- 5 **“There is not enough room for your family to sit together.”** I was visiting a church a few weeks ago that did just the opposite. When larger families came in the service, members actually gave up their seats to accommodate them. Now that’s true servanthood! I complimented the members when I spoke that morning.
- 6 **“You will need to step over these people to get to your seat.”** No! Please request those seated to move to the center. It’s a church worship service, not a movie theater.
- 7 **“That’s not the way we do it here.”** Of course, you can’t have a worship service where any behavior is acceptable. Most of the time, however, the varieties of worship expressions are absolutely fine. I heard from a lay leader recently who witnessed that sentence spoken to a guest who raised her hand during the worship music. She never returned. What a surprise.
- 8 **“You don’t look like you are a member here.”** Perhaps when this sentence was spoken, the church member meant to convey, “Are you visiting us?” But to the guest it sounded like, “You don’t belong at this place.”
- 9 **“Have you considered attending the church down the street?”** I’m not kidding. Someone shared that comment with me on social media. She was new in town and was visiting churches. She had

no idea why the man in the church said that to her, but she never returned to the church.

10 **“The nursery is full.”** To the young parent, this sentence is interpreted one of two ways: “There is not enough room for your child” or “Your child probably won’t get good care.”

If you’re wondering how to help your members not say such unwise things, share this blog post with them. They may simply need to learn some basics of guest friendliness.



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*Source:*

*[thomrainer.com/2015/05/ten-things-you-should-never-say-to-a-guest-in-a-worship-service](http://thomrainer.com/2015/05/ten-things-you-should-never-say-to-a-guest-in-a-worship-service)*