



The Guest Follow-up Blueprint for Churches

Bonus: First Baptist Orlando's simple, one-text, guest follow-up process [Clone it]

 **pastorsline**

About this guide

This guide is all about practical ways you can use text messaging to follow up more often and more effectively with your guests. Having worked with hundreds of churches over the last 6 years, we've learned along with churches and have seen how these shared tips have helped churches save time and cut through the communication bottleneck. Most of it goes beyond just having a tool. It's more a matter of knowing how to use it.

90% of this guide will be practice-tested data, including copy and paste templates you can use this weekend. This will include:

- The anatomy of a Guest follow-up strategy
- 4Cs - connect, capture, communicate, convert
- First Baptist Orlando's highly effective, 1 text, guest follow-up template
- 7 points on why this one text template is so effective for First Baptist Orlando
- Guest Follow-up Calendar - A 3-step process that works
- Swipe copies for texts you can use now - Copy and paste
- 9 rules to keep your dialogue going
- How to get started for free and test out these concepts this weekend

We don't share anything which hasn't been tested or isn't informed by our experience, churches' feedback and real data....such as the exciting experience of First Baptist Orlando Church which we are going to share with you soon.

Disclaimer: Communication strategies and digital tools aren't "magical" pills that solve all churches' problems. We know there is a spiritual component and many other layers. This guide is specific to tweaking the way pastors and leaders communicate, with specific tips and examples to help you do more in less time.

The anatomy of a Guest follow-up strategy

Before we dive into crafting a guest follow-up strategy and what First Baptist Orlando is doing, we know it's more important to understand why something is working, than just to copy it. From our experience, it is sometimes the only thing that a church is missing when we look at their processes for communication, and in this case, guest follow-up.

Let's quickly look at some of the must-have steps before you roll out a guest follow-up strategy.

Prelims - Digital Usher

Your guest follow-up begins **before** your guests visit your church. 4 out of 5 people will check you out online before actually walking through your physical doors. Though it's not the focus of this guide, ensuring that you have a 'digital usher / greeter' page which gives these guests all the basic information they need is "Step 0". This is typically in the form of an "I'm new" guest-focused page.

Usually, this page includes things like church location, parking availability, details about kids and disability access, service times, who the senior pastor is and information about the church beliefs, culture and worship style.

You see, for your first-time guests, it may be their first time to a church in a long while. They are nervous and unsure if it's the right time and you are the right church. Creating the right expectations for your guests creates the best momentum in your guest follow-up.

On Your Marks - Parking Lot Dos

The next step is ensuring their expectations (set by your online assets and your guest info on your website) will match what they see when they first arrive in your car parking lot.

Yes, guest services is critical to how successfully your guest follow-up process works. And for most, your guest services begin in the parking lot—that initial encounter your guests experience as they park and then try to navigate to and through your doors. For some, this may include shuttles or a guest services team in the car parking areas or simply clear signs about where to park and where to go once they have settled.

We have all been to churches where the main entrance isn't the entrance to use and the next door you see is permanently locked. This experience can dampen your guest follow-up by making your guests flustered and frustrated. They are less likely to engage with you if their first impression and experience isn't the best.

Get Set - Welcome

There are **tons of books** written about guests services and welcoming guests, so we will not reiterate that wealth of information, but in working with many churches, we find that they usually don't tie the two together. Many of them make the huge mistake of waiting until the guests leave and then trying to find ways to get them back. Waiting until your guests leave the church to "impress them" is like fishing twice for the same fish—the initial catch and then again, after you have released it.

With this in mind, you begin to understand the critical differences between healthy, growing churches and those who may not always see increases, despite the systems they are using.

Guest engagement follow-up only works well when you are deliberate and intentional with your guest services, and you are true to who you are as a church. This includes what your guests see, hear, smell, feel and even taste when they walk through your doors (Branding).

Don't try to be the mega church on the block if your best attribute is being traditional and laid back. And don't assume because you are a larger church with a welcome center that your process is actually welcoming to first-time nervous guests who can't find the bathroom or the entrance to your sanctuary.

The good news is that more and more churches get this. As a result, the process we are going to describe in this ebook works well for all churches as it's one simple addition which tweaks what you are already doing.

Go - The beginning of the Guest follow-up process

Now that we have briefly discussed the prerequisites, we are ready to move on to launching your guest follow-up process.

For many of you, what was discussed before is either known or was a good reminder. For others, you probably haven't been taught this way but know it might help paint the framework of what it takes to naturally increase your growth each weekend. For another good percentage of churches I've worked with, if it isn't Easter, Christmas or an outreach seminar, they skip these steps all together. They don't expect first-time guests to come to their church weekly — a huge opportunity missed.

Wherever you fall in the spectrum, we are not here to judge. We know we are passionate about using our time, talents and treasures for God's kingdom. So let's learn together and keep improving.

Next, we will discuss the 4Cs for the guest follow-up process.

The 4Cs - Connect, Capture, Communicate and Convert

The beauty of the world God has created is that everything runs in cycles and seasons. Same in nature as it's with people. A framework to break down your guest follow-up strategy is looking at the 4Cs - Connect, Capture, Communicate and Convert.

Connect

Your welcome and welcome center (discussed in previous sections) are critical components of guest services and the most obvious first step in your guest follow-up.

However, a welcome center and guests services that fail to “Connect” with their first-time guests can be a huge setback to your guest follow-up.

Your first-time guests are coming to connect with people who have connected with God. That simple. People connect with people and many

times, they may connect with the Jesus in you before they have a true encounter with God.

A recent study by Lifeway Research of 1000 pastors found that on average, churches connect with guests in several ways. Of all the ways used, the most popular are...

- Opportunities to meet the pastor
- Greeters at the church's entrance
- Completing connect cards
- A central 'Info Desk'
- Chats with regular attenders during the service
- Periodic info sessions to learn more

Many of you are doing at least one of these. But why do we do this?

In his blog, pastor mentor Hal Seed shows just how important they are: On average, 6-10% of your guests come back for a 'second date', 25% of those will go on to date #3, and 35% of those will join your church family. Then they tell others, and the cycle repeats. This is what is going to grow your ministry. We also know that the number one way someone came to know Jesus and attend a church was due to a friend. How friendly is your process and are you making real connections?

Without even doing any follow-ups, we recognize that being deliberate about connection with your guests is critical and the beginning of your guest follow-up workflow.

Greg Atkinson (Worship Impressions) speaks about the language we use. Do we use words during our services which non-churchgoers don't really know? If the after-service fellowship will be in "Smithson Hall" (after the church

founder), do we also mention that this location “is the large room to the left of the auditorium”? Download the full details [here](#).

So welcoming and connecting may not mean the same thing. And connecting goes beyond what you do to make a first impression. If you are not deliberately trying to make a human connection, asking your guests to return may be counterproductive.

Capture

Connect and Capture might mean the same to most, but we deliberately separated and ordered the two steps. You see, you can capture data from your first time guests without connecting with them. You can also connect and not capture their information. It’s not an 'either/or' but an AND strategy. It can be stated that connecting is the goal and capturing their information might be one of the ways to continue this connection after they leave your church that weekend.

Understanding that connecting is your priority and should never be compromised, capturing their best information will be easier. Most importantly, getting them to come back to your church the second time will be easier yet. Assuming your guests felt connected with your church community, life happens, and your guests might just get busy or distracted. They come; then they fall through the cracks.

For years, churches have been trying to bridge this gap by capturing the information of each guest that visits, in order to create a way to follow-up with them at a later time. This included options like guest books and connect cards. With the availability of technology, kiosks and digital cards were supplemented to help.

Yet, here's the plain fact: your guests didn't come to church to give you their information. It's the one place they believe they can go to have an experience of some kind without the typical 'pay or register' obstacles other non-faith experiences may have.

So with the number of ways you can capture your guests' information, what do you choose? This is where some churches get it wrong. They focus on what's "hot" (either/or) instead of thinking in an AND strategy.

Now, let's just make it clear: all tools have their place.

The strategy we recommend, which is working for hundreds of churches, is an 'AND' rather than an 'OR' strategy. So, your physical connect cards, greeters, kiosks, guest books can all be a part of your process. It's up to you to decide how, where, and how often each can be of value, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of each. For example, physical connect cards could be completed in illegible handwriting. Even if readable, the information on each card has to be manually digitized. However, it's the most natural way to use this medium as a way to connect and capture your guests' informations. Kiosks or self check-in can be manned or unmanned. These don't always create the correct first impressions, might be a turn off to some

guests and can create a bottleneck during bigger events -- people often have to wait in a “line” (or they just choose not to). Having said that, kiosks can be very handy for low guest flow situations in which the information is digitalized and perhaps accompanied by a useful action like checking their kids into your kids’ program.

As you can see, there isn’t a one fit solution. Instead, using all the tips we discussed, you can pick the best strategy for your church. The end goal of this activity has to ensure that it is guest-focused not administrative-focused so you can connect, then capture their information to launch your guest follow-up process.

Capture — Rookie mistakes

Regardless of your capture method(s), here are some rookie mistakes to avoid when attempting to capture your guest follow-up information.

- Asking for too much information—a long capture process can feel intrusive and time consuming, especially when it’s the first point of contact. Do you really need to know their home address the first time you meet them?
- Trying to ‘Speed Date’ new guests—the goal of speed dating is getting as much info in a limited amount of time; often it feels superficial.
- Having a administrative-focused rather than a guest-focused process—if you built your guest engagement according to what works best for your church, it might not be the most effective for your visitors.
- Did you know that a phone number (mobile) is now the most valuable form of contact with 90% of texts being read within the first 3 minutes?

Focusing on email or their address is good if you can capture it but may not be the best option to follow-up. Asking the least amount of information is critical to the “sales momentum” of getting the basic information you need to quickly follow up with someone. Remember, give your best gifts when they first visit to avoid having to send gifts via mail for first-time guests.

Capture—Digital Connect Texts

Now that we’ve talked about the ‘theory’ and a bit about what not to do, let’s look at a real case blueprint and how one church is capturing data.

First Baptist Orlando church uses the Church Management System (ChMS) Church Community Builder (CCB). First, they look at CCB to find people who checked in there AND whether it was their first visit. They also have staff who manually enter the information from any physical connect cards into their system which then gets synced up to our PastorsLine application.

Their capture involves getting data from their ChMS which is derived from people who check-in at their kiosk stations (typically for kids’ programs), connect cards etc.

Others are doing the same with our Planning Center integration. Having a ChMS is huge, but it’s not necessarily the main option.

The Church International manually enters the names from the physical connect cards they gather into their automated follow-up campaign (next section).

But many others are using our Digital Connect Texts capture system. In this system, guests would text the word 'WELCOME' to your local number (844-285-1815), and the system would capture their phones, emails and names automatically (more on this on page 18).

Regardless of how your church does it, capturing your guests' information should be non-intrusive and should offer options based on who your guests are. Make your capture process easier for your guests than it is for you.

Don't worry, we have a few tips to make this process super easy for you and your staff as well.

Communicate

So you're connected in a genuine way with your guest, and you've captured the least amount of information needed. As mentioned, the mobile phone number is the most important and most effective piece of contact information. And now, having tweaked your process to collect this information over others, you can communicate with them via text if you need (or want) to keep things simple yet effective. Collecting an email address is a bonus but a distant second way to engage.

It might be that a single text is all you need.

The data is based on what Dr. Matthew Robinson, former Connections Pastor at First Baptist Orlando, implemented for their church using PastorsLine. He shared that *[PastorsLine is] a huge answer to something we've been looking for. I was able to send a template with a field merge by scheduling it...*

You probably get how texting is THE most communicative, digital option at the moment, but just in case we've assumed too much, you should know that 90% of texts are read within 3 minutes. This compares with a 20% email read rate and a median 16% Facebook engagement rate. Despite this huge difference, as we said earlier, we don't think it is an EITHER OR decision but rather an AND methodology in which texting, combined with a well-thought-out digital strategy, keeps your guest follow-up conversation going, so that your first-time guests become friends and then family.

First Baptist Orlando is using PastorsLine's Church Community Builder (CCB) integration to pull in new guest information and automatically sending just one text message at 9:30 EST every Monday. It has been working so well, that this has become the gold standard for hundreds of churches using PastorsLine.

Dr. Robinson was able to easily delegate this process to their new Connections Director, Reid Adams. Adams also shared that "(After using) PastorsLine as part of our strategy for guest follow-up and member engagement, ... the conversations, responses, the opportunities for ministry and the increased engagement level which we've seen has been incredible."

It's not just First Baptist Orlando. Many other PastorsLine clients are using the PastorsLine Planning Center integration. Others are using PastorsLine's

digital connect texts (no links), and others are just manually adding new guests into the automated campaigns, with the end goal of sending at least this ONE TEXT template that First Baptist Orlando uses week after week.

7 reasons why First Baptist Orlando's 1 text follow-up worked so well

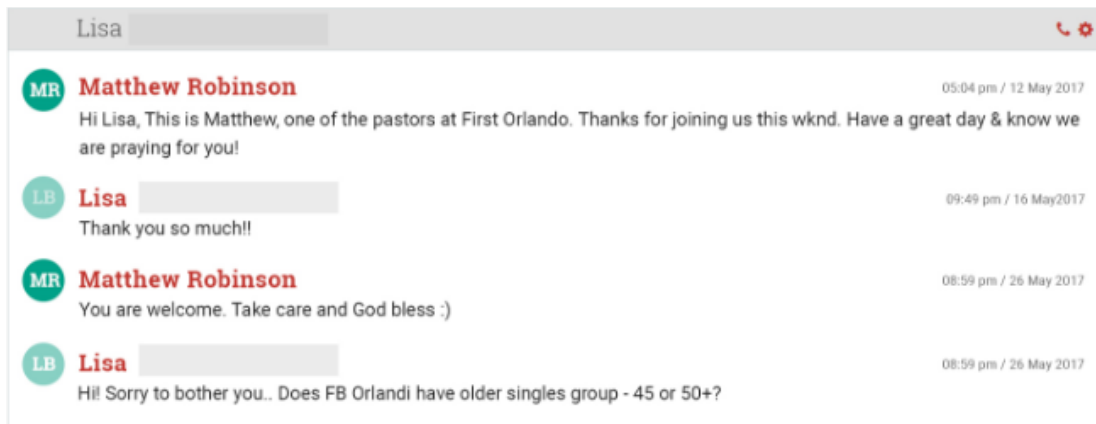
We were so intrigued by First Baptist Orlando's success, that we analyzed their follow-up text to see why it was making such a difference.

To reiterate, this guide isn't covering everything that First Baptist does to connect and capture their guests' info. It doesn't explore the church service or culture. However, what we have seen is that top churches (big or small), who are very deliberate with their guest services and church experience / services, still struggle with guests coming back.

As we mentioned, people are people with lives and distractions.

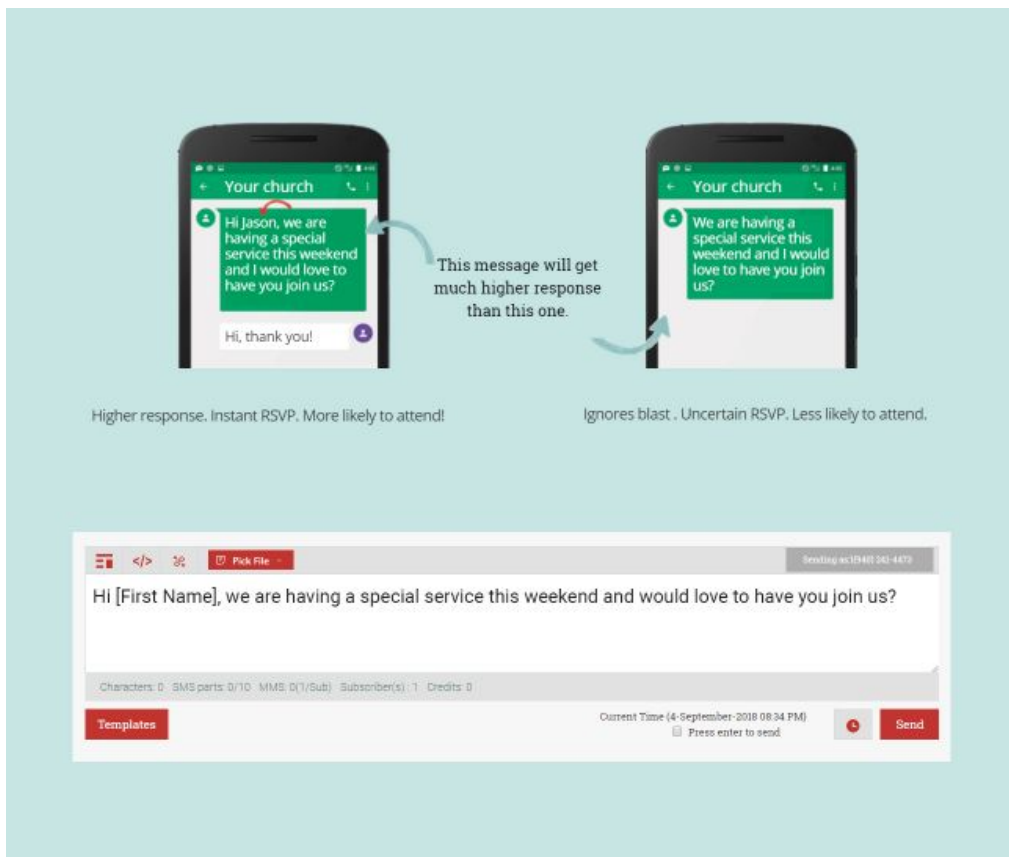
What First Baptist did next was to explore the use of text as their main follow-up process to compliment what they were already doing each week.

Here's a sample of the text in real use:



We found that there are 7 parts to an effective guest follow-up text:

1. Short (~ 160 characters or less) sent within 48 hrs after the event.
2. Coming from a local, 10-digit number (not a short code).
3. Integrates the person's name—personalization.



4. Says who you are in a very natural way — ideally, from a person like a pastor or with some specific, church-related role.
5. Writes using shorthand and natural communication — e.g. wknd vs. weekend.
6. A reminder of how you got connected so they don't feel spammed. In other words, how did you get your guest's number?—e.g. Hi, (guest name), thx for joining us this wknd.
7. An implicit ending that shows you care and can invoke a response. Alternatives might include asking questions to promote engagement and that can work. However, it does put some pressure on your first-time guest to respond and raises the flag of wanting something. But if you decide to ask a question, it should always be focused on showing that you care about how they feel—e.g. “Were your needs met at our church?” or “Can we pray for you?”.vs. “Are you able to do...? ” or “Do you want to attend an event?”.

Here are some examples of great guest follow-up texts.

- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Was great to see you this past wknd. Enjoy your day & know we are praying for you.
- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Grateful for your presence this past wknd. Have a super day and a blessed week.
- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Thanks for joining us this past wknd. Our prayers are with you.
- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Thanks for taking part this past wknd. Were we able to meet your needs?

- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Was great you took part this past wknd. Any questions we can help with?
- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). Grateful for you choosing to worship with us this past wknd. Is there something you would you like to learn more about?
- Hi, (guest name), (your name) here, a (your role) at (your church name). If you were to describe this weekend with an emoji, meme, or picture, what would that be?

You can read more about effective guest follow-up texts [here](#).

Guest Follow-up Calendar

A 3-step guest process that works

First Baptist's digital strategy was working so well, we wanted to integrate their text template into the general process our current clients had been using along with the new tools we developed to automate this process.

3-Step follow-up process

Step 0: Guest Services

As discussed in detail above but worth reiterating in this simple template.

Don't wait until your guests leave to consider sending them

a gift card or another carrot. Give them your best gifts and experience while they are at church for the first time. The Holy Spirit role is still the same.

However, our privilege to take part in the Gospel story is a privilege we take up and execute with excellence. There are dozens of books and experts on

these aspects, so you can explore other ideas, but the key is to ensure your

guests don't leave without having the genuine opportunity to connect with

your church family, getting your best gifts, and then ensuring you naturally

capture the least amount of information needed for following up.

Digital connect texts

If it suits your church, you can use a digital connect text conversation to

capture your first-time guests' data on this 'first date'. However, you can opt

out, concentrating on the 'Monday after' text as First Baptist does.

A huge part of the success of digital connect texts is that they are controlled

by your first-time guests, so your texts never feel too intrusive.

Enter the triggered response

By entering a keyword on their phones (perhaps 'WELCOME'), your first-time

guests trigger a personalized, automatic text conversation which you have

set up earlier. They do it in their own time. They do it at their own pace. The

process is short, so it does not feel intrusive. In addition...

Texting is always legible.

Texting is a one-step, digital data capture process.

Texting is an automatic process which does not require staff.

Texting can be done by hundreds of people at the same time.

Digital Connect Texts (automated data capture)

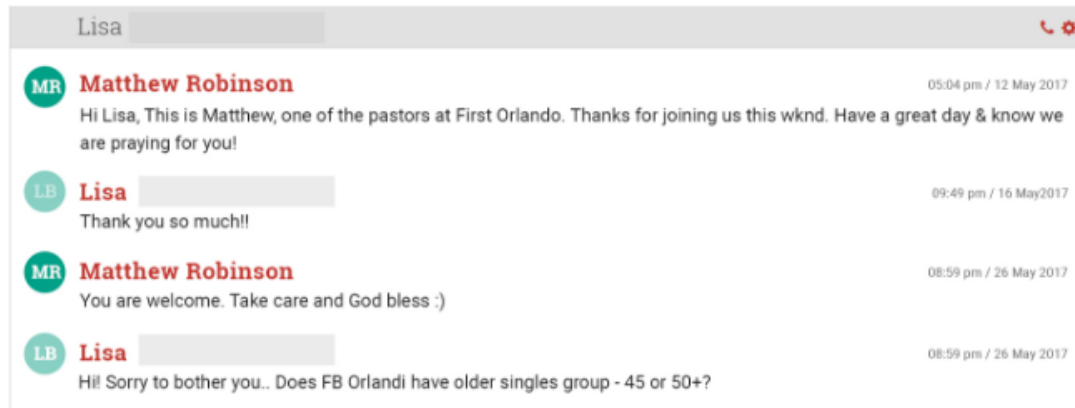
	First-time Guest	Returning Guests
Capture first name	We are so glad you are here! We would love to connect with you! Please reply with your full name.	Thank you for visiting us again, [First Name]. We already saved
Capture email	Thank you for sharing your name with us [First Name]. To fully update your record, can you reply with your email address?	your information in our system. I would love to connect with you. What's the one thing we can do to help you this week?
Last message	We are glad you are here, and we look forward to seeing you again next weekend!	

Pro tip: Results consistently show that guest follow-up is most impactful when the Pastor makes the call to action from the pulpit during the sermon. One example is to ask all guests to text 'WELCOME' to a number—the keyword and number being shown on a big screen or large poster.

Step 1: Text and a Handwritten Note

Step 1a: Send a text message on Monday after your weekend service. This is the text that works best for our churches: Hi, (guest name), this is (your name) one of the (your role) at (your church name). Thanks for joining us this past

wknd. Have a great day & know we are praying for you. Here it is 'in action' using PastorsLine.



Just stopping at this point and re-engaging when the guest replies works really well.

If you could not get them to engage after this step, chances are, they are not interested at that moment. You may decide to stop there or continue with Step 1b and then stop. Both can work.

Step 1b: Guest Services

Initiate a **handwritten note** from one of your pastors (and/or include a gift card) to be mailed out if you have their address—packed and ready to go by Tuesday. Ideally, they should get this note before the next weekend. If local, it should arrive within 2-3 business days (Thursday or Friday).

Step 2: Call / Voicemail and Email

Step 2a: Wait 2 days then call the guest and ensure you leave a short clear voicemail, similar to #1. Even if they don't pick up, many are able to see the voicemail transcribed into a text.

Step2a: Follow-up immediately with an email, referencing the call made or voicemail left. #NinjaTrick for full engagement.

Step 3: Evaluate and Next Steps

Stop - Don't overdo it. When a special event comes around, you can always circle back to this list.

Find out more about this process [here](#).

Here are all the text swipe copies for Steps 1-3 of your first-time guest follow-up process.

As you can see, this data capture is automated, making your process even easier.

Automated Messages (Follow-up)

	First-time Guest	Staff
On Monday after the weekend service	Thank you so much for visiting us this weekend [First Name]! I just wanted to thank you for joining us and let you know we are praying for you!	Just wanted to let you know [First Name][Last Name] just entered the guest follow-up process. Send them a handwritten note welcoming them to church!
On the Friday before the next weekend service	Hi [First Name]! I hope you had a great week so far! We have been praying for you and we hope to see you at church this weekend too!	
A few weeks later	Hi [First Name]. It's been a couple of weeks since your first visit! Can we pray for you? Would you like more information on getting connected?	

During the Week (Regular/Ongoing)

A text message came and invaded your space...but it asked for nothing. It was a no-sell. Instead, it was a Spirit-influenced, prayerful, short note of encouragement. Now that's powerful!

In fact, it's probably the #1 thing that Pastors can do to get their flocks more plugged in. And when people are plugged in, they show up to church more, do more for their church, and donate more resources to church causes.

In addition to encouragement, you can include a really short call to action for weekly meetings or weekend sermons.

Following up continues the conversation because helping people to act on what they have heard is critical. Keep in mind that too frequent texts tend to turn people off. One or two a week about important things usually hits the right note.

How much “charisma” you put into your texts needs to match your personality and your church. These are just examples.

	Guests	Church
During the week	Uplifting	[name], Although we've just met, I want you to know brother/sister that I believe in you and I pray God's blessings over you to be strong and full of love, grace and truth!! You are a Man/Woman of God!!! Believe it and confess it!! -Pr Mark
	Uplift + reminder	[name], You are the Child of a loving God. Feel blessed and uplifted now and always. Loved meeting you at church last weekend. Hope to see you this Saturday/Sunday. -Pr Mark

Pro tip: Use the voice broadcasting feature to send the same type of message if you think that's a better way. Many Pastors do this. Hearing a voice might resonate more with some of your congregation.

Convert Next Step = Nurture

The final C is conversion. The conversion we are talking about is the step-by-step process guests take to go from guests, to friends, to family. For first-time guest follow-up, the next conversion event is when they come the second time. If they do, then you would have to add them to your second-time guest follow-up campaign, right?! This may include getting them plugged into a small group or getting a personal text from your pastor.

However, if they don't come back after your initial first-time guest follow-up campaign, then they have exited your guest follow-up process and should be handled by a different workflow. This is usually considered to be nurture or a long-term, follow-up process.

Remember we told you to stop texting after Step 3 in Communicate?

That was so your first-time guests didn't feel overloaded with too many texts, too much information and too much attention (which can feel intrusive).

But now you have a special event coming up. Perhaps a Family Life series, a VBS or an evangelical seminar.

The good news is that PastorsLine has put your first-time guests into

a segmented list (or group). Now, you can circle back to this list of contacts and invite them personally to your upcoming event.

Greg Atkinson has some good ideas about this, too. He identifies a 4-step methodology. It begins with goal-oriented thinking—start by identifying what you want to happen in the end. Then, work backwards. Check the exact steps [here](#).

Making the most of your Digital Dialogue

Just like in face-to-face conversations, text conversations have rules. Establishing and sticking to these 9 rules will maximize the effectiveness of your digital communication strategy.

Here are the short forms of these rules. For a longer read with more specifics and tips for each rule, check out [this article](#).

1	Decide on the purpose of your account: make a decision on what the number will be used for. Does a specific number “belong” to the pastor (or a leader) or is it a ministry number?
2	Get permission. People can opt-in specifically or you can send them a text to ask, making it clear about who it is from.

3	Timing is everything. Choose the time of day wisely.
4	Use the first name merge field appropriately. If you are doing a guest follow-up, you would want to use it naturally.
5	Keep it simple. People tune out when a conversation becomes lengthy.
6	Keep it 2-way. You need to respond. Find excuses to reply and keep the conversation going.
7	Blasting one-way communications are kind of like shouting at your members/guests by sending out texts of events but never engaging.
8	Before sending a follow-up blast, always respond to all unread messages. It's very unlikely that when you are chatting with someone directly, you are going to just press 'send'—ignoring their question or the thread of the last conversation.
9	Respect your members' privacy. Never give out any of their personal information, either on social media or in a text message.

For more event tips, NinjaTricks and swipe copies,
[check out all our guides](#)

Sounds like a strategy you should be implementing, right?

If you are not already using texting (or want to see how PastorsLine compares with the app you currently have) use the invite code **WELCOME** to get a free 30-day trial with 500 additional credits.

Our standard free trial comes with 500 credits, so you will have 1000 credits to use. No CC required.

[SIGN UP](#)

Pastorsline.com/register



Tommy Carreras
Groups Director

PastorsLine has totally changed not only my workflow, but it's taken our "personal" factor up 10x! Just with our welcome process, we have gone from a 40% READ rate to a 95% READ rate and from a 3-4% CONVERSATION rate to a 40% CONVERSATION rate. So thanks.



Kristen Waddle
Communications

...the guest connection card... We had a great response — people whose names and contact info we might not have captured otherwise. Our autoresponder directs them to our Welcome Center... where we have a gift... with their name on it.



Cara Saliby
Director of Administration

A few of the initiatives we did with [PastorsLine]: Annual Picnic Registration - text 'PICNIC' to register—our church's intro to texting; Parent Survey - text 'PARENTSURVEY' to respond —50% of those responding took the survey; Baptism Worship Service Reminders - bulk texting—we were blown away by the number of people who showed up.

