

Research reveals: No substitute for a personal invitation to church

May 1, 2009

NASHVILLE (RNS)—An invitation from a family member or friend is the most effective way to get people to attend church, a new survey shows, casting doubt on several time-tested methods used by churches to attract new members.

The other approaches—from broadcast commercials to information packets left on doorknobs—are far less effective, LifeWay Research reports.

A majority of respondents—67 percent—said an invitation from a family member was either somewhat or very effective. Likewise, 63 percent said an invitation from a friend or neighbor was effective.

In contrast, just 33 percent said an invitation left on a door hanger would be effective, while 31 percent said door-to-door visits from a church or faith community member would be effective.

Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, said the research shows people are open to invitations to church—but they need to be personal.

“Unbelievers next door still need a simple, personal invitation to talk, to be in community and to church,” said Stetzer, whose researchers were commissioned to do the survey by the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board. “Clearly, relationships are important and work together with marketing.”

The survey says...

Researchers reported the following percentages of respondents thought these other modes of invitation were effective:

- letter in mailbox: 41 percent*
- weekly religion section of a newspaper: 40 percent*
- billboard or outdoor sign: 38 percent*
- newspaper or magazine ad: 36 percent*
- TV commercial: 34 percent*
- radio commercial: 33 percent*
- Website listing or ad: 31 percent*
- E-mail message; 30 percent*
- social networking site: 30 percent*

The survey, conducted in December using an online panel, included a sample of more than 150,000 respondents and had an overall margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point.