

Editorial: Churches should be more like bananas than oranges

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I opened a boxed lunch and liked what I saw—turkey sandwich, baked vegetable chips, white-chocolate-chip cookie and an orange.

The orange offered the pleasant surprise. Most boxed lunches come with apples. Usually dry, shriveled, mealy apples. So, an orange down on the bottom, beside the cookie, made me smile.



Editor Marv Knox When I think about smell and taste, oranges are my favorite fruit. A good orange is pungent. And that's only a set-up for the sweet-tangy-tartness that twists and tickles your tongue.

But when I started eating this orange, I suddenly wished it were a banana.

This has happened before. Usually, when I'm wearing dressy clothes and don't have a paring knife. And often when I'm in a hurry.

See, bananas come in simple, easy-open containers. Oranges arrive shrink-wrapped in sticky, crumbly, annoying, next-to-impossible-to-remove covers.

[Dan Koeppel](#), author of [Banana: The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World](#), reports Americans [eat more bananas](#) than apples and oranges combined. It's not because they stay fresh longer or taste better. It's because they come in simple, easy-open containers.

Friendly and accessible

Bananas are user-friendly and accessible. Oranges? Not so much.

So, what's this got to do with church?

While I was trying to peel the orange—making a mess of it, getting more frustrated by the minute—I thought about my younger daughter, Molly, and her husband, David, who moved to a new city this summer.

Molly and David love the Lord and church. So, even before they moved, they got on the Internet and started checking on churches. After they arrived, Sunday by Sunday, they searched for a church home.

In his new position, David works some Sundays. When he couldn't attend Bible study and worship, Molly explored.

That led her to a Baptist church that seemed like a fit. And that led to frustration and disappointment. This church was much more like my orange—maddeningly inaccessible—than a friendly banana.

Molly walked into the building and looked around. Nobody greeted her or even seemed to notice. She searched out the church office, tracked someone down and asked about a Bible study class.

Churches that don't care

Over and over, people at this church acted surprised to meet a visitor. They didn't know what to do with a newcomer, especially a young adult. Worse, they didn't seem to care.

Molly gave this church the benefit of the doubt. She visited a second time. Same boring song; second lethargic verse.

You might be thinking, "Well, that's only one church." Unfortunately, it's

not. I've been guest preacher for scores of congregations. I get depressed about the times I walked in and people didn't seem to notice or pretend to care.

That's not a problem for me. Jesus is my Savior, and I have a church home.

But I shudder to think about hurting souls who walk onto many church campuses. They limp away, wondering if God loves them. They know God's people don't.

A few simple steps

You don't have to be a megachurch to make guests feel welcome. You can make huge progress by following a few simple steps:

- Recruit your friendliest members and station a couple of them at each main entrance during Bible study and through the early part of worship services.
- Make sure they know how to find classes for every age, as well as where to go for childcare.
- Encourage them to listen, so they sense needs.
- Place at least two people at each door, so if one is helping guests, another is ready.
- If you don't have enough friendly people to cover all the doors, post signs providing clear directions to your welcome center, where friendly people await them.
- Recruit someone in each adult class to take newcomers under wing. Help them find everything they need—from where to pick up their children, to how to get to worship, to information about the church and how to contact a minister.

- When guests aren't around, teach members to identify and welcome people they don't know.

The churches I love to attend—and want to join—make sure I know they were happy to see me and helped me feel at home.

Church members can get lackadaisical about this, because going to church feels routine. But every Sunday, eternity weighs in the balance for people who drive to church looking for God. A friendly greeter can make a divine difference for a searching soul.