BCYD Lead Forward Conference 2026

first impressions

The Sermons Before the Sermon

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“Before people hear what we say, they’re already experiencing what we believe – everything preaches! Your Pastor may spend 20 hours preparing the message, but your guests experience a dozen sermons before the preacher even gets to the pulpit. In this interactive workshop, we’ll look beyond cleanliness, friendliness and trendiness, to explore how our churches communicate theology, build trust and create belonging by removing unnecessary roadblocks so people can experience Jesus and His people.”

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

The question isn't simply, "Did we welcome people today?"
It's,"Did the people who crossed our paths today walk away feeling that they mattered?"

“EVERYTHING PREACHES”

The message we intend to communicate isn’t necessarily the message people receive.

Along with our **STATED** THEOLOGY, our guests are experiencing our **LIVED** THEOLOGY

First Impressions aren’t just a hospitality strategy, they’re a key part to our discipleship strategy - removing unnecessary roadblocks so people can experience Jesus and His people.

THE FIRST SEVEN MINUTES

“Seven minutes is all you get to make a positive first impression.” Nelson Searcy, Fusion

Imagine you were a first time guest at your church:

- *What would I notice first?*
- *What would confuse me?*
- *What might make me feel uncomfortable or uncertain?*
- *What would help me trust this church?*
- *What might make me decide not to return?*

WHAT IS YOUR CHURCH PREACHING?

A) What is the message of our **ENVIRONMENT?**

B) What is the message of our **CULTURE?**

C) What is the message of our **BEHAVIOUR?**

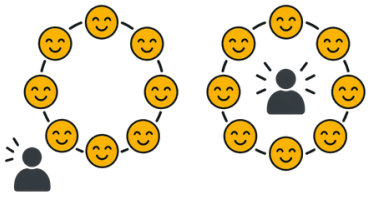
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CRASHING A PRIVATE PARTY…

Friendly isn't the same as welcoming:

- Your church might have an incredibly friendly and loving community that is completely invisible to the person standing outside of it.



- Someone has to intentionally break the circle.

5 QUESTIONS EVERY GUEST IS ASKING:

1) CAN I FIND MY WAY?

- Our msg: "We've thought about you!"

2) AM I SAFE?

- Our msg: "You can trust us!"

3) DO I BELONG HERE?

- Our msg: "There's room for you here."

4) DO THESE PEOPLE ACTUALLY CARE?

- Our msg: "You are seen, not just processed."

5) WHAT'S MY NEXT STEP?

- Our msg: "We want to help you take your next step!"

First impressions are really trust impressions: *People move forward at the speed of trust.*

Q: Which of the above questions does your church answer best & least effectively?

ON RAMPS…

1st Time Guest ➡ Returning Guest ➡ Regular Attender ➡ Connected & Actively Engaged Member



REWRITING THE SERMON…

- **We say we believe: _____.**
- **But a guest might experience: _____.**
- **One thing we'll change is: _____.**