
7 STEPS TO RUN A PARTY WITH THE PASTOR

The connection party that turns first-time guests into family — without adding another class, program, or announcement.

From the Build the Church Podcast conversation with Pastor Victor Ehiemere of The Well Church — hosted by Josh Roberie



Build the Church

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THE MOST FUN ROOM IN THE CHURCH

Every pastor knows the ache of the back door. People visit. They smile on the way out. They say they loved it. And then you never see them again — not because your preaching was off or your worship was flat, but because *nothing connected them to anybody*. A first-time guest doesn't come back to a service. They come back to people.

This playbook is about a system that fixes that — and does it, of all things, with a party.

It comes from a conversation on the Build the Church Podcast with Pastor Victor Ehiemere, lead pastor of The Well Church in Maryland. Victor is a trained medical doctor who left medicine for ministry, planted The Well in January 2022 with around 490 people on launch day, and four years later is averaging 1,300–1,400 each Sunday — with nearly 2,800 people at their most recent Easter. That kind of growth doesn't come from attracting a crowd. Crowds are rented; churches are built. It comes from *keeping* the people God sends you.

Ask Victor what they do differently and he won't hand you a org chart. He'll tell you about a room across from the auditorium with round tables, music, snacks, name badges — and a monthly gathering they deliberately named a party.

“We put the pressure on ourselves by calling it a party... It should be one where people find a hard time walking away from. Because — wow, these guys are nice, these guys are warm. I want what they are.”

PASTOR VICTOR EHIEMERE, THE WELL CHURCH

The idea itself has deep roots. Pastors have been gathering newcomers to connect and socialize for decades — Rick Bezet of New Life Church in Arkansas famously invited the month's new folks into a home at the end of every month, just to eat, laugh, and belong before anyone asked them to do anything. Nobody owns this idea. The Well's contribution is turning that instinct into a repeatable, staffed, automated system — and that system is what this playbook hands you.

What follows are the seven steps, expanded from the podcast conversation into a playbook you can run at your church — whether you gather two hundred people or two thousand. At the end you'll find a 30-day launch checklist and word-for-word scripts for every text, announcement, and table conversation the system needs.

One warning before you start: none of this works as a program you bolt on. It works because the lead pastor decides that first-time guests are the most important people in the building — and builds a room that proves it.

1

Step One

THROW A “PARTY WITH THE PASTOR”

Here's the core mechanic: **once a month, on the last Sunday, every first-time guest from that month is invited into a room to party with the pastor.** Not a membership class. Not an information session. A party — snacks, music, round tables, laughter, and fifteen intentional minutes with the lead pastor and their spouse.

The rhythm matters as much as the room, so let's get the calendar straight. At The Well it works like this:

- **Every Sunday:** a brief “meet the pastors” moment at the first-time guest area right after each service. Quick handshake, warm welcome, a small gift, and one goal — invite them back for the party.
- **Last Sunday of the month:** the Party with the Pastor, held after the second and third services so there's room to linger. Every guest who visited that month is personally invited.
- **First Sunday of the next month:** Growth Track begins — in the *same room*. (More on that genius little detail in Step 7.)

Why monthly instead of weekly? Three reasons. First, it concentrates enough guests in one room that the party actually feels like a party — ten households mingle; two households stare at each other. Second, it protects the pastor's energy: you can be gloriously, fully present for one party a month. Third, it creates a natural monthly cohort that flows into Growth Track together, so nobody walks into next steps alone.

Keep the invitation window wide open

Don't be legalistic about “this month's guests only.” The Well's stage announcement is deliberately generous: *if you've visited for the first time this month — or in the past three months and never made it to a party — this is for you.* Someone who visited nine weeks ago and got busy still deserves an on-ramp. Victor's team will happily catch a six-month-old first-timer: “Let's make this one count.”

No registration required

There is no sign-up form and no RSVP. The connection card a guest fills out on their first visit is the registration — it drops them into the invitation workflow automatically (Step 6). On party

Sunday, the stage announcement scoops up everyone else: if you're new, just walk across the hall. Every barrier you remove is a person you keep.

Start smaller than The Well if you need to. If you're running 80–150 people, your version might be six guests, two hosts, one pastor, and a folding table with good coffee and better donuts. The size of the party doesn't matter. The warmth does — and so does the rhythm: every month, same Sunday, no exceptions. Systems beat sporadic hospitality.

2

Step Two

MAKE IT THE MOST FUN ROOM IN YOUR CHURCH

Victor's team didn't name it “the party” as marketing. They named it that to *put pressure on themselves*. If you call a room a party, you are now obligated to make it one — and everyone on the team knows exactly what the room is supposed to feel like. People stick where they laugh and feel at home.

That clarity of feel drives a very concrete environment checklist. When a guest crosses the corridor at The Well, here's what happens to them, in order:

- **They can't miss it.** Two smiling people with signs stand at the door: *First-Time Guest Party — Here!* The room is directly across from the auditorium. Nobody wanders a hallway feeling stupid.
- **They're checked in and badged.** Someone helps them check in (even if they're not in your church database yet) and hands them a name badge. Victor is emphatic about this one: nothing beats being welcomed by name. A \$20 pack of badges and a Sharpie removes the most awkward part of every conversation a guest will have for the next hour.
- **The room is alive.** Music playing. Round tables — not rows — with seats, snacks, drinks, water. Rows create an audience; circles create conversations.
- **A host is already expecting them.** Each table has a host who left the worship service early, decompressed, and is now fresh, smiling, and ready. Guests never sit at an empty table wondering what happens next.
- **Kids are celebrated, not tolerated.** Families walk in with children — and the pastors light up. Victor will walk a kid to the snack bar mid-conversation. If mom and dad see their kids delighted, the family comes back.

“That room should be the most fun room in our church... we want people laughing, we want outbursts of laughter. It should be one where people find a hard time walking away from.”

PASTOR VICTOR EHIEMERE

Budget-level honesty

None of this is expensive. Signs, badges, a Bluetooth speaker, Costco snacks, and round tables you already own. The expensive ingredient is intentionality: assigning hosts, releasing them from service early, and refusing to let the room feel like a DMV waiting area with pastries. Fun is a decision before it's a budget line.

Name the feeling, then staff to it. Tell your team: “Our win is outbursts of laughter.” That single sentence recruits the right hosts (your warmest people, not your most available people) and gives you a way to evaluate the room afterward that has nothing to do with attendance.

3

Step Three

RUN THE 5-5-5

The genius of The Well's party is that the *planned* part lasts only fifteen minutes. Guests can linger as long as they want — some have stayed straight through the next service, deep in conversation — but the intentional structure is three crisp movements of five minutes each. Write it on the whiteboard for your team: **5-5-5**.

First five: mingle and snack

Guests arrive, get badged, find a table, grab snacks. Hosts facilitate introductions and hunt for common ground — neighborhood, kids, schools, jobs (Step 4 is entirely about this). The pastor isn't on stage yet; there is no stage. This is the sound of the room warming up.

Second five: the pastor shares their heart

The lead pastor and spouse walk in — and this is a hard rule, they walk in *together as people, not presenters*. At The Well, Victor and Pastor Ambi introduce themselves, tell the story of the church's name (a woman meets Jesus at a well in John 4 and runs to tell her whole city — “come and see a man”), and share what the church is about in plain language. Five minutes. No slides, no sermon, no fundraising. The point isn't information — it's *affection*. Guests should walk away thinking, “I've met the pastor. I know their heart. They're normal, and they're warm.”

Notice what Victor embeds in even those five minutes: he tells guests his dream is that *on the way to their car* they'd invite someone else — “hey, you need to come to church with me next week.” He's already turning brand-new guests into inviters. Vision leaks even at a party.

Third five: help them take the next step

The final movement makes the party a system instead of a social. Everyone gets a Growth Track card at the same time — the whole room fills it out together, which removes every ounce of awkward pressure from any individual. The pitch is one sentence: “Next Sunday, in this very room, is Growth Track. Don't overthink it — do exactly what you did today: after service, walk across the hall.”

Then the structured part simply ends. No closing ceremony. Hosts keep talking with anyone who wants to stay; families drift out happy; the pastor works the tables.

Guard the fifteen minutes. The moment your five-minute heart-share becomes a twenty-minute mini-sermon, the party becomes a class, and guests can smell the difference through the door. Assign someone on the team to be the clock.

4

Step Four

HAVE ONE GOAL: HELP THEM MAKE A FRIEND

If you only remember one sentence from this playbook, make it this one. The goal of the party is not to collect contact information, promote Growth Track, or even to make the pastor accessible. Those all happen — but they're byproducts. The goal, stated explicitly to every host before every party, is: **help every guest make a friend.**

“Research shows that nothing makes a person stick to a church more than just finding a friend. So we're going to do everything possible to make it easy for someone to find a friend.”

PASTOR VICTOR EHIEMERE

Decades of church research back him up — the classic finding is that newcomers who make several friends in their first six months stay, and those who don't, leave, no matter how good the services were. Friendship is the stickiness. Everything else is delivery mechanism.

Staff the tables with small group leaders

Here's The Well's smartest staffing decision: the table hosts are *small group leaders*. Not generic greeters — people who already know how to host a circle, draw out a quiet person, and keep a conversation warm. The party is essentially multiple micro small-groups running in one room. And because these hosts lead real groups, the guest who clicks with a host on Sunday may be sitting in that host's living room by Thursday. The friendship path is prebuilt.

Teach hosts to hunt for commonality

Train hosts on one skill above all: finding the overlap. *You live in Bowie? They live in Bowie. Your kids are at this school? Theirs too. You're new to the area? So is this couple.* Commonality is the raw material of friendship, and a good host mines for it relentlessly and then names it out loud: “Wait — you two need to meet.”

Listen for the deeper next step

Hosts also carry a quiet sensitivity. Mid-conversation, a host might sense a couple would thrive in a marriage group, or that someone is carrying grief, or that a young mom just needs to know

other young moms exist. The “big room” next step is Growth Track for everyone — but hosts are empowered to make personal, informal connections on the spot: “We lead a small group on Thursdays — you’d love it. Let me get your number.” Nothing formal. Just a friend inviting a friend.

Redefine the win for your team. After each party, don’t ask “how many came?” Ask: “Who made a friend? Tell me their names.” What you celebrate, your team will repeat.

5

Step Five

BE THERE FOR THE FIRST-TIME GUEST

The party is the monthly centerpiece — but it only works because of what happens *every single Sunday* around it. And that starts with a sentence The Well says out loud to its own members, from the stage, without apology:

“After service, we are here more for the first-time guests than we are for you... I would interrupt a conversation with you to talk to a first-time guest — just so we're clear.”

PASTOR VICTOR EHIEMERE

That's not rudeness; it's culture-setting. Members already have a friend, a group, a pastor. The guest has fifteen minutes of impression before they drive away, possibly forever. So Victor and his wife position themselves at the first-time guest area after *every* service — because nothing stops a guest in their tracks like the person who just preached now standing there wanting to shake their hand.

Anatomy of the weekly first-time guest moment

- **Celebrate guests during the service** and point them to the first-time guest area — a loud, obvious, signed, smiling space near the exit flow.
- **Learn names and stories.** How did you hear about us? TikTok, Instagram, a friend, a search? (Track this — it's free marketing data.)
- **The tearaway card.** Guests fill out a simple card — name, phone, email on a tear-off strip. The church keeps the strip; *the guest keeps the invite*. What goes home with them is a physical invitation to this month's Party with the Pastor, with the date on it.
- **The gift that hijacks the car ride.** Every guest gets a gift — at The Well it's a water bottle that says “Drink from the Well.” Victor is explicit about the strategy: he wants to hijack the conversation on the way home. Kids talking about kids' church, adults holding a bottle with the church's name on it, everyone already half-planning to come back.
- **A fallback net.** Too shy for the guest area? The guest services table near the exit offers the exact same treatment — card, gift, invite — minus the pastors. Two chances to be caught, zero chances to slip through anonymous.

Don't forget the online guest

The Well welcomes online first-timers verbally in the stream, gives them a text code, and drops them into the *same* workflow: personalized video text, party invitation, Friday reminder. If someone in your area watches online first — and many will — the party is their bridge from screen to room.

Pastor, this one costs you. You can delegate almost everything in this playbook except this: being there. If standing with guests after three services feels like too much, remember Victor's math — the party plus the guest area is a couple of focused hours a month that feed everything else your church does.

6

Step Six

FOLLOW UP WITH A PERSONAL VIDEO TEXT

Most churches follow up a first visit with a form letter or a generic email that screams *automation*. The Well sends something almost nobody sends: **a text message with a 30-second video of the pastor** — and it arrives the same day, while the visit is still warm.

The script is nothing fancy: “Hey, I heard you came to church for the first time today. If I met you — so good to meet you. If I didn’t — I’m so sorry, and I’d love to! Mark your calendar: we’ve got a party for you on the 28th. Can’t wait to see you next week.” Thirty seconds, shot on a phone, no graphics. But it makes a guest feel *known* — and it converts a nice visit into a relationship in motion.

The full message sequence

Here’s the cadence The Well automates (they run it through Planning Center workflows, but any church management system — or a shared phone and a spreadsheet — can do it):

- **Sunday (day of first visit):** video text from the pastor or spouse. Thank you, so glad you came, party date, see you next week.
- **Friday before the party:** a reminder text. “Two days out! Bring the kids. One ask: come to the second or third service this Sunday so you have room to hang out after.” (Notice they even steer guests to the services the party follows — make logistics effortless.)
- **Sunday after the party:** another video text. “Thank you for partying with us! Next Sunday, same room: Growth Track. See you there.”
- **Friday before Growth Track:** a final nudge. “This Sunday is Growth Track One — you already know the room.”

Each touch does exactly one job and asks for exactly one next step. Nobody gets a newsletter. Nobody gets asked to volunteer, give, or join twelve things. One warm human message, one clear door.

Why video beats everything else

A video text is unmistakably personal even when it’s templated — your face, your voice, their church. It takes the pastor ten minutes on a Sunday afternoon to record a handful of them (or record one great generic version per week and personalize the first line). Response rates

embarrass every other medium. As Victor puts it, it “makes people feel known — and brings them back.”

Batch it. Right after the last service, sit in your office, open the guest list, and record the videos while your suit jacket is still on. Sunday-you is more believable than Tuesday-you.

7

Step Seven

FEED YOUR GROWTH TRACK

Here's where the party stops being a warm idea and becomes an engine. Remember the calendar: the party lands on the *last* Sunday of the month. Growth Track One begins the *first* Sunday of the next month — seven days later — **in the same room**.

That one scheduling decision does something remarkable. The guest's next step requires zero new information and zero new courage. Same hallway. Same door. Same round tables. Probably some of the same faces they laughed with last week. “Do exactly what you did today” is the entire onboarding instruction.

“If we do it very well, you don't have to announce Growth Track at all... the system is such that everybody who comes for the very first time is naturally ushered into Growth Track.”

PASTOR VICTOR EHIEMERE

Read that again: a church of 1,300+ barely has to promote its next-steps class, because the connection system walks people there monthly, cohort by cohort. The party fills Growth Track; Growth Track fills teams and groups; teams and groups produce the hosts and greeters who make next month's party warm. It's a flywheel.

“Make it easy for _____”

Behind the flywheel is a staff value worth stealing wholesale. The Well's team began the year with one sentence on the wall: **our job is to make it easy**. Easy to join the church. Easy to take a next step. Easy to find friends. Every system gets re-examined against that test until the friction is gone. The party exists because “attend a class” is hard and “walk across the hall to a party” is easy.

Keep a perpetual on-ramp

One more Well detail that serves the same value: their small groups are *sermon-based* — discussion groups built around last Sunday's message — which means they never really close. Someone who joins the church between semesters doesn't wait three months for community;

there's always a group mid-conversation they can join this week. Whatever your group model, audit it for dead zones: where does a brand-new person have to *wait* to belong? Kill the waiting.

Trace one guest on paper. Write your church's current path from “first visit” to “serving on a team.” Count the steps, the days, and the decisions the guest must make alone. Then rebuild it with the party in the middle. Most churches discover their old path had six lonely decisions; the party path has one — and it's fun.

YOUR FIRST PARTY IN 30 DAYS

Weeks 1–2 — Build the system

- ☐ Pick the date: last Sunday of next month, after your final service.
- ☐ Choose the room — as close to the auditorium as possible. Round tables, not rows.
- ☐ Recruit table hosts from your small group leaders (one host per 6–8 expected guests). Cast the one-sentence vision: *help every guest make a friend*.
- ☐ Create or update the first-time guest tearaway card (their half is the party invite with the date on it).
- ☐ Order the gift (water bottle, mug — something useful with your name on it) and name badges.
- ☐ Set up the text workflow: same-day video text, Friday reminder, post-party text, pre-Growth Track text.

Weeks 3–4 — Warm it up

- ☐ Start (or sharpen) the weekly first-time guest area: signs, greeters, pastor present after every service.
- ☐ Record your first batch of 30-second welcome videos.
- ☐ Brief the stage announcement: who it's for (anyone new in the last 1–3 months), where, when.
- ☐ Schedule Growth Track One for the following Sunday — same room.

Party Sunday — run of show

- ☐ Hosts released from service early; room set: music, snacks, badges, signs, two smiling door greeters.
- ☐ Stage invite at every service; pastor at the guest area as usual.
- ☐ Run the 5-5-5: mingle → pastor's heart → everyone fills the Growth Track card together.
- ☐ Let people linger. Hosts capture stories and follow-ups.
- ☐ Debrief Monday: Who made a friend? What felt like a class? Fix one thing for next month.

SCRIPTS YOU CAN STEAL

STAGE ANNOUNCEMENT (PARTY SUNDAY)

“If you've been with us for the very first time this month — or anytime in the last few months and you've never been — you picked a great Sunday. Our pastors love to party, and they'd love to party with you. Right after service, walk straight across the hall — snacks, music, fifteen minutes, and the most fun room in this church. We've been waiting for you.”

SAME-DAY VIDEO TEXT (30 SECONDS, PHONE CAMERA)

“Hey [name]! This is Pastor [you] — I heard you were with us for the first time today. If we met, it made my Sunday. If we didn't, I'm so sorry — I'd love to fix that! On [date] we're throwing a little party for our newest friends right after service — snacks, music, fifteen minutes, kids welcome. Consider this your invite. Can't wait to see you next week!”

FRIDAY REMINDER TEXT

“[Name]! Two days until the party One tip: come to the [second/third] service this Sunday so you'll have plenty of time to hang out after. Bring the kids — there's a snack with their name on it. See you Sunday!”

THE PASTOR'S FIVE MINUTES (SKELETON)

1. “We're [names] — we're so glad you're here.” 2. The story of your church's name or founding — two minutes, heart first. 3. “Our dream for you: that you'd find a friend here, and that before you even reach your car you're inviting somebody else.” 4. “Next Sunday, this same room: Growth Track. Don't overthink it — do exactly what you did today.”

POST-PARTY TEXT

“[Name], thank you for partying with us today! Next Sunday in that same room: Growth Track One — the best next step you can take at [church]. You already know the way. See you there!”

TABLE HOST CHEAT SHEET

Your one goal: help every guest make a friend. Hunt for commonality (neighborhood, kids, schools, work) and name it out loud. Listen for deeper needs — a marriage group, a young-moms group, a grief share — and make the personal connection informally. Never let a guest sit alone. Never let the table feel like an interview.

Go Deeper

KEEP BUILDING

Hear the whole conversation. This playbook is drawn from the Build the Church Podcast episode “Party with the Pastor” with Pastor Victor Ehiemere of The Well Church (Maryland) — find it at **buildthechurchpodcast.com**, on YouTube, or wherever you get podcasts. Read the companion post at **buildthe.church**.

Learn from The Well. See how a church that launched in 2022 connects thousands: **mywellchurch.com**, and Pastor Victor's resources at **Pastor Victor TV** on YouTube.

Grab the free outreach library. At **buildthe.church** you'll find 101 Outreach Ideas, Another 101 Outreach Ideas, 10 Outreach Ideas That Work, and the Final Marketing Push e-book — all free.

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