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EVALUATING THE VISITOR RETENTION PROCESS
AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH
IN CONWAY, ARKANSAS

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EVALUATING THE VISITOR RETENTION PROCESS

AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

IN CONWAY, ARKANSAS

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To my bride, Toya.
My greatest friend, partner, and blessing in life and ministry.
I am so honored to be your husband.

To our son and daughter,
John Turner Aultman and Landri Hope Aultman.
The most amazing boy and girl in the whole world.
I am so thankful to be your daddy.

To my parents, John F. "Buddy" and Jeanette Aultman.
The greatest teachers I have ever had.
I am so fortunate to be your son.

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PREFACE

When one undertakes a monumental task, the load is made lighter if he is fortunate enough to have extraordinary support and encouragement from those around him. I have certainly been the beneficiary of such things.

Dr. Hal Pettegrew has served as my faculty advisor. I admire his mind and his humility. It has been an honor to have his guidance and input in this project.

I am blessed with an amazing church family. Many people in the Antioch family have served as cheerleaders throughout this journey. I thank them for their patience and support. It is a joy to be a part of such a family.

The staff of men and women with whom I am honored to serve are amazing. They have shouldered an extra portion of the load in order to allow me to complete this project. I am indebted to them.

Antioch's Pastor Emeritus, Henry Horton, was my pastor for fifteen years. He supported me in the decision to tackle a doctoral program, and I am grateful.

All of my grandparents are in Heaven now, but they influenced my life in greater ways than they ever knew. They were pictures of faithfulness and I desire to honor them to this day.

I was privileged to grow up with an awesome brother and sister, John David and Jan. Their talent has always amazed me, and they are two of my heroes still.

My parents-in-law, Richard “Dick” and Ester Turner, are a blessing. They raised a beautiful daughter and allowed me the honor of marrying her. They welcomed me into the family and have always encouraged us to serve the Lord. I am so grateful.

My parents, John F. “Buddy” and Jeanette Aultman, were career-long educators. They were A+ teachers in the classroom, but in the classroom of life they have taught me more than they will ever know. Throughout my life and throughout this doctoral program they have been an immeasurable source of help and encouragement. I owe them far more than I could ever repay.

Our two children, John Turner Aultman and Landri Hope Aultman, are my favorite boy and girl on the planet. In more ways than they realize, they have motivated me in the completion of this project and in life. I hope I can be found faithful in providing for them an example that is worthy of imitation.

I do not have adequate words to express my love and gratitude for my wife, Toya. Her support and encouragement have been invaluable, not only in the completion of this endeavor, but in this journey of life. She is an amazing person and a greater blessing than I could ever deserve. It is my privilege to be called her husband.

Finally, I am grateful to the Giver of each of these blessings and all others as well. Why God would show His love to me and allow me to be a part of His family is a mystery, but I am eternally thankful. He has blessed me above all I could ask or imagine. I pray that my feeble efforts to serve Him will bring Him honor.

Jason Mark Aultman

Conway, Arkansas

May 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the hospitality offered to guests at weekend services at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas. Specific attention was given to the matter of first impressions and the messages they communicated to guests. Additionally, the effectiveness of initial follow up efforts was assessed.

Goals

This project strove to fulfill three goals in the ministry of Antioch Baptist Church. These goals were utilized to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the project upon its completion.

The first goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of Antioch's weekend ministry from the perspective of those outside the church, with specific attention given to the reception that guests receive at Sunday worship services. While the measurement of a church's true success is most accurately gauged by adherence to biblical doctrine and the right teaching of the Word of God, this does not give license to disregard a church's responsibility to extend a genuinely hospitable spirit to visitors attending services. A motivation for church growth should not be fueled merely by the allure of larger numbers. However, it is significant to remember that numbers represent lives and souls, and a deep

concern for lives and souls is of fundamental importance in the scope of the Gospel. Guests who sense an atmosphere of warmth in a church are more likely to be receptive to the message proclaimed by that church, and are more likely to return in the future. For that reason this project sought to evaluate Antioch's effectiveness in this area.

The second goal was to motivate and train the members of Antioch to foster a warm, welcoming attitude toward newcomers. It is easy for those in a church to become very inward focused. Most people who regularly attend a church would likely consider their church to be "friendly," yet many people on the outside of the core might regard it otherwise. Antioch must strive to maintain a rich sense of fellowship within the body, while always maintaining an inviting posture toward others. While comfort within one's church is a blessing, one must remain ever cognizant of the truth that the church has not been called to simply be a holy huddle for believers. While fostering a rich sense of fellowship within, it is also to be a place of love, compassion and concern for others. Achievement of this goal was evaluated based on initial feedback from guests, and following a time of training within the church, feedback from a second group of guests to assess whether improvement had been made.

The third goal of this project was to implement a strategic plan for visitor follow up. A church communicates their concern for guests, not only in what happens during the guest's visit to the church, but also what is done afterward. Beyond a simple letter from the pastor extending an invitation to return to worship, how can others be utilized in effectively reaching out to those who have already expressed an obvious interest in the church by their own attendance? This project undertook the task of developing and implementing such a plan.

Let it be clearly understood that nowhere in the scope of this project was the implication intended that the message of the gospel should be adapted to the desires or tastes of people. The truth of the gospel is authoritative and does not adjust to wishes or whims of individuals or groups. However, foundational to the message of scripture is that people are to be loved (Mark 12:31). It is far too easy to gather with the church and talk passionately and sincerely about taking the gospel to the world and sharing the love of Christ with others, while failing to express that effort with the very people that the Lord has placed in its midst. This project set out to analyze Antioch's effectiveness in this area and provide means by which to be strengthened.

Context

In order to establish the context of the project, an overview of data pertinent to Antioch Baptist Church and the Conway, Arkansas area is provided.

Antioch Baptist Church

Organized in 1925 with twelve members, Antioch has been in existence for over eighty-five years.

Attendance. Statistics from church records ten years ago show an average attendance of 645, and a decade prior to that, 316. A further analysis of statistics reveals that the church experienced a trend of steady numeric growth in the 1990's. From 2000 – 2004 this trend reached a plateau. From 2000 – 2004 the average attendance ranged from 685 – 699, never increasing or decreasing from one year to the next by more than ten. In 2005 Antioch experienced an attendance spike, reaching a new high of 782. Another

plateau was reached, however, followed by a slight decline. In 2008 the average attendance for the year was 743. Since that time the church has experienced an exciting season of numeric growth, reaching an average of 1093 in 2011. Thus far in 2012 the average Sunday morning attendance has been 1236. These numbers reflect a four year growth of over sixty-six percent. This is significant to the scope of the project. While the church's growth contributes to an atmosphere of excitement, it is of great importance that those in the church be aware of the significant role of hospitality shown to newcomers. Intentional efforts in this area are imperative in order to maintain and enhance the spirit of warmth and welcome which the church desires to demonstrate.

Location. For seventy-five years of its existence Antioch's facilities were in the same location on approximately three acres. With the growth of the church and the need to provide additional parking, facilities had become a limitation. In 1997 the church relocated to a twenty-five acre tract of land on a major thoroughfare through its city and county. It was the dream of the church to become more effective in not only reaching people from the city of Conway, but people from a wider region. In recent years this ambition has begun to be realized as the areas from which people are attending continues to emerge into an ever widening radius. While certainly regarded as a blessing, this has created an increasing challenge of providing personal follow-up of guests and helping people to connect with others in close geographic proximity to themselves.

While those in leadership at Antioch do not regard facilities to be the most important strength of the ministry, the facilities are regarded as a notable strength in initial contact with outsiders. The reason for this is the building location. It is situated on

Interstate 40 which is the most commonly traveled highway into and through Conway. For this reason many people report that their first visit to the church was due in large part to the simple fact that they “saw the church.” It is the writer’s opinion that this fact makes it even more critical for the church to be effective in communicating effective messages through first impressions. Experience has shown that many people come through the doors of Antioch without any prior relationship to current attendees. This reality multiplies the challenge of making sure that guests receive an enthusiastic welcome.

Leadership transition. Antioch was led by the same Senior Pastor for twenty years prior to his retirement in 2008. The Associate Pastor at that time had served Antioch for almost fifteen years in various roles. The church asked the Associate to assume pastoral leadership, and this transition occurred in May of 2008. Along with this change came several other key additions and restructurings of staff leadership. These changes seem to have been embraced positively, contributing to an excitement among members and a new curiosity among outsiders. Time will tell whether growth trends can be maintained or enhanced but, as already noted, the church has seen a sixty-six percent rise in attendance since this period of transition. This trend of growth adds both to the necessity of and the challenges in successfully connecting with guests who attend Antioch.

Conway, Arkansas

According to current census data, the population of Conway is just over 58,900. The city has experienced a growth of 36.5% in the last decade

(<http://www.cityofconway.org/>). Conway is the largest city in Faulkner County and, therefore, tends to represent the greatest growth in the county, though countywide statistics indicate a steady rate of growth in recent years. In 2010 the population of Faulkner County was recorded to be 113,237. This number reflected a growth of 31.6% in the prior decade. This significantly exceeds the average growth of counties across Arkansas, with the average increase in the same period measuring 9.1% (<http://quickfacts.census.gov>). If the same trend of growth has continued since that data was compiled, (and many estimates are that it has actually exceed it), the population of Faulkner County as of this writing would be approximately 120,000.

Community growth and church growth. As one can see from the population data, there has been a steady increase in the number of people available for Antioch to reach. In a community which is in “growth mode” a church can easily find itself believing that it is doing an effective job of reaching people, while in fact it might be simply maintaining pace with the community. In fact, a church could be growing numerically while actually failing to keep pace with the community. In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey notes such a trend in studying the history of evangelicalism. She analyzes the growth or decline of various denominations between the years of 1776-1850. Concerning one denomination she says, “The Presbyterians enjoyed some growth, but the increase . . . only kept pace with the growing population; they actually lost ground in terms of ‘market share’ – percentage of religious adherents” (Pearcey 2005, 258). In a community which is growing a church might experience an increase in number while actually decreasing in the percentage of their community they are effectively reaching.

Antioch's attendance kept pace, (in fact exceeding pace), with the community growth from 2000 – 2005. Following 2005 church attendance experienced a slight four year decline. Since that time, however, church attendance has significantly outpaced community growth.

Population by age. County statistics indicate an age break down in the county as follows: Under 5 years of age – 7%; under 18 years of age – 24.5%; 18-64 years of age – 58.5%; age 65 or older – 10%. The church does not maintain accurate records regarding age in order to accommodate a side by side comparison, but it is the writer's informal opinion that the church population would closely resemble that of the county.

Population by race. Faulkner County is predominantly Caucasian, with this being the reported race of 84.3% of the population. African Americans represent 10.2% of the population and Hispanics account for 3.9%. The Hispanic population is experiencing significant and steady growth. All other minorities represent approximately 1.6% of the county's population.

If the church were a reflection of the county in this regard, more than fifteen percent of the membership would be made up of minorities. Records according to race are not maintained by the church, but it is estimated that 6-7% of the church attendance is made up on minorities. Approximately 5% of the church's minority population is attributable to the Hispanic population, with the church having added a Spanish-speaking service. The remaining 1-2% of minorities consists primarily of African Americans, as well as some Asian students who are enrolled at a local university.

Employment and education factors. There is a wide mix of types of jobs across Faulkner County, representing both “white collar” and “blue collar” occupations. The education system in the county has expanded dramatically over the last twenty-five years, with the number of students in public schools doubling during that time. A 1983-84 report showed public school enrollment at 8483 students, while the 2011 figures showed 17,116 (<http://www.connect-arkansas.org>). Additionally, a significant number of students are enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools.

These numbers explain a dramatic rise in the number of educators employed in the area. In addition to elementary and secondary education, there are three colleges in Conway with a combined student enrollment of approximately 12,000, as well as several other colleges within a thirty minute drive. The largest sector of jobs is considered “services” which constitutes thirty-two percent of the work force. Education services fall into this category, as do items ranging from hotels to attorneys and daycares to doctors (University of Arkansas Faulkner County Profile 2006, 30).

Rationale

There are multiple dynamics which make this an exciting time in the life of Antioch Baptist Church. First, the church enjoys the blessing of being a part of a growing community. The church has an ever-broadening scope of opportunity to reach people within its own area. Second, a sense of excitement and expectation seems to permeate the church body, and a sense of curiosity about the church seems to be present among many in the community. This has created another encouraging dynamic; an influx of first-time visitors to weekend services. According to church records, there have been

over eight hundred first-time guests who have registered their attendance at Antioch in the last year. This says nothing of an uncertain but significant number of others who have attended but not provided any personal information, thereby not being reflected in church data relative to guests. These reasons provide a snapshot of why it was an important time for Antioch to evaluate her effectiveness at the task of welcoming and following up with those who are attending for the first time.

Concern for others. The first reason this project was vitally important in the ministry of Antioch was that it addressed the critical area of concern for others. When Jesus was asked to pinpoint the most important commandment He actually pointed to two. First He noted what would have been an extremely familiar portion of Scripture to a Jewish audience – the Shema. Michael Anthony notes “The Shema was the starting point for most Hebrew family instruction. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and they memorized it at an early age” (Anthony 2003, 26). Within the Shema is what Jesus noted as the first and greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). He then went on to expand that to include a second Old Testament commandment, (Lev 19:18), that was essential and timeless: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). One would be hard pressed to convince an outsider that a church is fulfilling those commandments if the church does not so much as extend a hospitable welcome and adequate follow-up effort. While a warm welcome and effective follow-up are not all that are involved in showing love to others, they certainly provide a sound starting point.

Connecting with new attendees. A second reason that the timing seemed right to perform a study such as this was the influx of new attendees at the church. It had been observed by some that in recent years, as Antioch has grown, the sense of warmth for which the church used to be known had not shone as brightly as it once did. This trend needs to be reversed both for the sake of effective outreach and for the sake of optimum fellowship within the body as new people are added. Evaluating a guest's first impressions and their feedback concerning follow-up efforts assisted leaders in evaluating the job the church was doing in conveying a Christ-like concern for people.

Stewardship. A third reason for the importance of this evaluation process was a matter of church stewardship. It is arrogant for a church to desire and expect the blessing of God if that church is not faithful in the stewardship of the blessings which God has already provided. In Matthew 25, Jesus told the parable of the talents. It is interesting to note that the servant who went and buried the talent was not condemned by the master because the servant had done a wicked thing with what was entrusted to him. He was condemned because he had done nothing with what was entrusted to him. Many churches may feel they are doing an adequate job in guest services because they have not *mistreated* the guest. The fact is that, often, they may not have *treated* them at all!

Enhanced follow up. A final reason this project was vital was that it sought to enhance follow up efforts. As a part of the project a computerized tool was developed to geographically map the membership of the church. This tool enabled ministry leaders to enter the address of a guest and pinpoint church members within a designated radius of that guest's home. When the second phase of guest attendees visited the church, the

follow-up efforts included the use of this tool. This helped in providing not only a contact from a pastor or visitation team member, but a contact from a neighbor. The purpose of this effort was to make a personal connection, using home proximity as common ground, and extend an invitation to return to church.

Few churches would say that they do not desire to reach out to more people, but many church bodies do not pause to evaluate how they are doing at reaching out to those who are walking through their doors. In this respect, churches are not unlike businesses which must value customer service. A business which becomes known for a lack of service or a lack of friendliness will likely be hurt by such a reputation, while a business known for an enthusiastic concern for and service to customers will likely benefit by gaining new customers. In the same way, a church that becomes known as a place of love and hospitality will likely see additional guests as a result of friends telling friends of their experience at that church.

In short, execution of this project was intended to enhance Antioch Baptist Church's awareness of and ability to demonstrate the love of Christ to other people. Bill Hull says,

It's one thing to believe in Jesus. It's quite another to believe what Jesus believed. And the first can't be what it should be without the second. Acquiring the mind of Christ . . . that's transformation. What did Jesus believe about life? What was important to him? How do we conduct our life? And in the end, what really matters. (Hull 2006, 130)

One does not have to study the life of Jesus much to see with crystal clarity that He demonstrated a deep love and compassion for others. If one believes what Jesus believed, then one must believe that people matter. And if it be true that people matter,

then the reception they receive at church matters. Even before the first note of the first song is sung, many people attending a church service will form their opinion as to whether or not that church cares about others. The opinion of others will be largely influenced by whether or not anyone acknowledges their presence after the visit. For both of these reasons, it is critical that Antioch be effective at connecting and following up with visitors.

Definitions and Limitations

Definitions

To ensure clarity, the following definitions are provided:

First time guest. This was a person who was attending Antioch Baptist Church in Conway for the first time. Because the location and make-up of the church has changed dramatically within the last decade, people were sought out who were making their first visit to a regular weekend service at Antioch within the last ten years.

Follow-up. This was the process utilized by the church within a week after a guest's visit. Effort was made to contact the guest, attempting to make a connection with them, and inviting them to return.

Group 1 visitor. There were two windows of time in which groups of visitors were asked to attend and evaluate Antioch. A group 1 visitor (mystery worshipper) was a participant that took part in the first portion of this study.

Group 2 visitor. This was a guest who participated in the second group of mystery worshippers.

Member evaluation. This was the questionnaire that was completed by all people in attendance at Antioch on a given Sunday. This questionnaire was answered predominantly by members, but any guests present on that day were welcomed to respond as well. Questions addressed matters similar to those posed in the visitor evaluation, but with the purpose of gaining an “insider” perspective.

Member map. This was a tool developed to show the residence location of church members. During the second window of guest evaluations this map was utilized to determine members who live in close proximity to church visitors for the sake of follow-up efforts.

Mystery worshipper. This was a person who agreed to attend Antioch within a designated window of time for the specific purpose of providing feedback concerning their impressions of hospitality and follow-up. Ideally, this person did not have a recent history of attendance at Antioch.

Mystery worshipper evaluation. This was the information provided by the mystery worshippers following their visit to Antioch and following at least a five day period to allow follow up efforts to transpire.

Limitations

This project focused primarily on the ministry of Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas. The findings in this project are specific to this church and information gained from members of Antioch and guests visiting Antioch. The findings are not necessarily true of what might be found at another church, though the procedures could be utilized by any other church for the purpose of a similar evaluation. Certain

limitations also exist due to the timeframe of the project. The actual study spanned a period of approximately ten months, therefore, while giving a good overview, might not provide a precise measurement of long-term results.

Research Methodology

Efforts were made to design a process by which this project would be executed in a way that (1) offered the greatest likelihood possible that the stated goals would, in fact, be attained, or at least significant progress made toward them; (2) provided an accurate means by which to measure and evaluate the results of the project.

The methods utilized are described below.

Attendance of Group 1 Mystery Worshippers

A window of four months was provided during which a group of mystery worshippers attended the church. These individuals and families were gathered primarily from contacts and acquaintances of the writer. The two primary criteria for this group were that participants would agree to attend within the designated window of time, and they did not have a significant history of prior attendance at Antioch.

Group 1 Evaluation

One week following a guest's visit, that guest was asked to fill out a feedback and evaluation survey. Guests were asked to wait one week in order to gain feedback for both the "first impression" aspect of the visit, as well as each guest's impression of the follow-up efforts.

Antioch Member Evaluation

At the mid-way point of the project a survey was conducted within the membership of Antioch Baptist Church. This survey asked questions similar in nature to those posed to the mystery guests, but with a purpose of gaining insight as to a church member's perspective. The timing of this survey was specified to happen following the attendance of the first group of mystery worshippers. It was the wish of the writer to not raise awareness of this issue within the congregation as a whole prior to gathering an accurate assessment of the present reality from the guests. While seeking to gain personal reflections as well, the surveys which were offered to both guests and members utilized a series of questions scored on a ten-point Likert Scale. This scale allowed the writer to establish a "grade" from both an outsider and insider point of view.

Revealing the Study

Following the survey of church members and organization of the data, it was made known to the congregation that a group of mystery worshippers had already provided their evaluation. A comparison of the "grade" from both the outsider group and insider group provided a comparison to determine whether a discrepancy existed between the perception as envisioned by those inside the church, and the reality as exposed by those outside.

Training the Church

At the mid-way point of the project a period of teaching on the topics of hospitality and concern for others was conducted. This was executed in the context of a one month sermon series entitled "Welcome?" This series sought to raise awareness of

the need for hospitality and present a biblical basis which should be the foundation of the church's motivation to effectively reach out and follow up.

During this time of teaching, members were invited to sign up to make themselves available to contact a guest if one visited who lived in close proximity to them. Members interested in serving in this way indicated so by completing a card with their name and appropriate contact information.

Member Map

In cooperation with The Gadberry Group, an information systems company in Little Rock, Arkansas, a member map was created. This web-based tool allowed the location of member's homes (those who had volunteered for this role) to be plotted on a map.

Strategic Follow-Up

Beginning with the second group of mystery worshippers, when a guest attended a Sunday morning service, if they provided their address that address was entered into the mapping tool. A report was then generated which revealed the locations of members who lived in close proximity to the guest. With the assistance of the Outreach Coordinator, one of the members who had volunteered to serve in this way was provided contact information for the guest and asked to make a personal contact in the week following the guest's initial visit. (It should be noted that this tool was used with any guest from this point forward who provided contact information, not only with designated mystery worshippers).

Attendance and Evaluation of Group 2 Mystery Worshippers

Upon the conclusion of the month of training within the church during which the role of the first group of mystery worshippers was revealed, it was expected that most church members would assume the emphasis had ended. Those who had volunteered to visit guests would be engaged in that task if needed, but attention would no longer be drawn to the topic of hospitality in the context of the morning services. It was at that point that the second group of mystery worshippers was utilized. The same process was utilized with the second group of mystery worshippers as was used with the first. A week after their visit they were asked to provide an evaluation using the same survey instrument given to the first group of mystery worshippers. Data gathered from this group was used to establish another “grade” of the church’s efforts, providing a means of measuring whether the church body had become more effective in reaching out to and following up with first time guests.

Instrument Development

The instruments used in analyzing this study were questionnaires utilizing various methods of feedback from participants. Some questions sought a dichotomous response. (Example: “When you entered the building were you greeted personally by anyone?”) Some were open ended. (Example: “If you have suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the first impressions you received upon entering the building, please share it here.”) Still others used a Likert Scale level of measurement. (Example: “Overall, on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being ‘very poor’ and 10 being ‘very good,’ how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church?”) A model

version of this instrument can be seen in Appendix 1. It was the writer's belief that this multi-faceted opportunity for response would provide more clear results than any single method.

Summary

The synthesis of the variables mentioned above in relation to Antioch Baptist Church made this an opportune time to conduct an analysis such as this. The timing of the project and the dynamics of the context in which Antioch exists made for a study that was helpful both individually and collectively. It is further believed that the project served a valuable purpose in the frame of time in which it was conducted, and will continue to prove beneficial in the future of Antioch Baptist Church.

This study was conducted in compliance with the ethics guidelines as established by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE
MANDATE OF HOSPITALITY AND
CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Introduction

Patrick Keifert asserts that “many congregations are quite adept at proclaiming the gospel but very inept at welcoming and assimilating people. Others may be very successful at welcoming and receiving new members but seldom proclaim the gospel” (Keifert 1992, 5). Those who function most effectively recognize that it must not be an “either / or.” Proclamation of the gospel and a warm welcome are parts of the whole which function together in reaching people. Just as individual instruments are played in concert to form a beautiful orchestra, the various components of ministry function in harmony as God’s people raise a symphony of service to the Lord. The horn of hospitality is one that adds richly to the song.

Balancing Truth and Concern for Others

The focus of this project is the task of effectively welcoming and demonstrating hospitality to guests. The writer does not suggest that this function rises above that of preaching, teaching, or any other vital facets of ministry. The writer does not propose that hospitality should be held in higher esteem than correct doctrine. On the contrary, a warm welcome with false teaching would be nothing short of hospitable

heresy. The argument could likewise be made, however, that the church where true teaching is presented but warmth and love are not demonstrated is also displeasing to the Master.

Alvin Reid insists that truth matters more than technique. It is the truth that is shared which must permeate and transcend everything else, and truth must not be watered down or compromised. It is ultimately the life-changing truth of the gospel that must be presented to people. He goes on to caution the reader, however, that theology without love for others leads to dead orthodoxy. “Vance Havner said you can be straight as a gun barrel and just as empty. There are conservative churches across America that are ineffective and spiritually dead. They have the right doctrine, but their practice is far from the biblical standard” (Reid 1998, 84).

Daniel Akin voices a similar conviction. He cautions that churches and church leaders must not fall into the drifting currents of pragmatism at the expense of truth. Akin warns that the church must not conform to the culture when culture and scripture stand in contradiction, but instead must maintain an unshakable fidelity to the Word of God. The worship of God, not the whims of the times, must remain the goal. Akin says, “Worship of God is the supreme end of the Christian church, whether considered locally or universally, or in the individual lives of the members” (Akin 2007, 812). In order to maintain a view that remains in balance with Scripture, however, he goes on to say that “In addition to looking up, the church exists in order to look across. Put another way, the church’s vertical purpose to worship God mandates its horizontal purpose: working to evangelize and edify those made in God’s image” (Akin 2007, 812).

The Motivation Behind the Welcome

Akin's assessment of the vertical purpose mandating the horizontal purpose is well stated. The writer likewise suggests that it is the love of God and worship of Him which should motivate the church to be passionate about the simple act of demonstrating hospitality and a warm welcome to guests. "Christians are called to live lives of love toward others The church is the mirror that reflects the whole effulgence of the Divine character. It is the grand scene, in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe" (Akin 2007, 815). Can this analogy be accurate if the body of believers fails to demonstrate the most basic act of welcoming others? Alvin Reid issues a sobering reminder that "some people have forgotten that the local church is God's plan to reach the world" (Reid 1998, 93).

Need one look farther than Genesis 1:27 to find a stirring motivation for care demonstrated toward and hospitality extended to guests in the church? "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Augustus Strong states, "The fact of man's creation is declared in Gen. 1:27. The Scriptures . . . negative the idea that man is the mere product of unreasoning natural forces. They refer his existence to a cause different from mere nature, namely, the creative act of God" (Strong 1907, 465). As believers in the church are reminded that guests who pass through their doors are products of God's creative hand, designed by Him and sent to them, the waters of hospitality and love must be stirred. Hugh Berry challenges, "Think about your motivation for welcoming people into your congregation. Is it because you care about them as people or because of what they can contribute to the life of your church family? Genuine hospitality is grounded in God's love for us and the

commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves, not for self-serving reasons” (Berry 2000, 8).

Demarest and Lewis echo a similar sentiment when they say that the unity believers share with Jesus and with one another is “a *diversity of unique persons* who love each other and with their varied gifts serve common values. Human love is directed to other persons for their worth in themselves; but those who have spiritual love care for (others) for Christ’s sake” (Demarest and Lewis 1987, 274).

Admonition from the Old Testament

A reading of the Old Testament demonstrates numerous accounts which highlight matters such as law, rebellion, punishment, and destruction. Perhaps some might question whether it is a place to find teachings on matters such as hospitality and care for others. The truth is that it not only contains such teachings, but it is in many ways the very anchor of these teachings. As will be seen momentarily, even Jesus harkened back to the Old Testament when presenting the mandate to love others.

Two primary examples of instructions to love will be examined from the Old Testament. These will be lifted from the pages of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus calls the people of God to a life of holiness. “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy (Lev 11:44-45). Warren Wiersbe notes, “Happiness, not holiness, is the chief pursuit of most people today, including many professed Christians. They want Jesus to

solve their problems and carry their burdens, but they don't want Him to control their lives and change their character" (Wiersbe 2001, 252). Leviticus sounds the call to followers of God to devote themselves to walking in the holiness of God.

While calling the reader to holiness, from the pages of Leviticus it is also made unmistakably clear that this call emanates directly from the Lord Himself. Gleason Archer says, "No other book in the Bible affirms divine inspiration so frequently as Leviticus" (Archer 1964, 213). More than three dozen times in Leviticus it is stated that the Lord spoke to Moses or to Aaron. Archer says that this provides great clarity to the fact that the entire sacrificial system was not an invention of people, but a revelation of God.

Emphasizing the Divine nature of the book of Leviticus one writer says, "It contains but little else than God's own utterances. It is more entirely made up of the very words of the Lord than any other book of the Bible. Jehovah himself speaks in every chapter, and in almost every verse, whilst Moses merely sits by, and hears, and writes, as the amanuensis of the speaking Lord" (Seiss 1860, 10).

While it is true that the seams of Leviticus bulge with the weight of inspired instruction, it also must be acknowledged that most Bible students do not find themselves drawn to its pages.

For most Bible readers, the Book of Leviticus is 'as barren as the dry, trackless wilderness' of its setting. Most readers prefer to skip quickly from the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20 to Deuteronomy or even to Joshua, once they discover how this material reads. Why should they bother with ancient laws, tabernacle, sacrifices, priesthood, and dietary laws? After all, the church does not function in the way that ancient Israel did. And so to spend time reading this section seems to be unprofitable exercise. Accordingly, modern churches do not give much attention to Leviticus.

But it must be recognized that Leviticus was and is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. It not only presents the entire religious system of ancient Israel, but it also lays the theological foundation for the New Testament. (Ross 2002, 15)

Joseph Seiss says that it is not overstating the significance of Leviticus to call it “*The Gospel According to Leviticus*, just as the third book of the New Testament is called *The Gospel According to Luke*. The one tells of Jesus and redemption through him, as well as the other, and if we do not find it full and overflowing with clear and beautiful evangelical instruction, it is because we know not how to read it” (Seiss 1860, 12). Seiss goes on to define the Gospel as “God’s proclamation of a plan of mercy to sinners. It is the divine revelation of grace to fallen man. Hence, whatever announces Christ as the Redeemer, and holds forth forgiveness and salvation through him, comprises and proclaims the Gospel” (Seiss 1860, 12).

Just as such authors assert that in Leviticus one finds the proclamation of the Gospel and the theological foundation for the New Testament, this writer suggests that it also proclaims and lays the theological foundation upon which the matter of concern for others rests. One such example will be examined specifically.

Leviticus 19

Leviticus 19 encapsulates much of the Law by which God’s people were called to live. Speaking of Leviticus 19 Allen Ross says, “There is no question that the Decalogue is reflected in this chapter, and for some time, biblical scholars have tried to find the pattern. Nothing emerges neatly, even though links to the Ten Commandments can be seen” (Ross 2002, 360). The tenth commandment in the Decalogue states that one must not covet that which belongs to another. This commandment’s parallel, says Ross,

can be found in Leviticus 19:18, which commands one to “. . . love your neighbor as yourself.” It is that instruction which is the focus of this analysis.

Love your neighbor. Leviticus 19:18 establishes that which the Lord pointed to as one of the greatest commandments: “. . . love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Speaking of Leviticus 19:18 another writer says, “Revenge and malice are forbidden as well as hatred, and the negative precepts culminate in the positive law, **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**, which sums up in itself one half of the Decalogue (Matt. xxii. 40)” (Spence and Exell 1950A, 288).

Rather than hating others, one should cultivate love: ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ Here is the rule that has been used by so many philosophers and teachers down through time. It is unique in the ancient world, and Old Testament moral principle that is the driving force behind all dealings with neighbors. The point seems to be that they were to see others as people with needs, as they themselves had needs. The expression of love for other people then meant to come to their assistance. Thus, far from exploiting and oppressing people, the covenant member had to help them The idea here is clearly that of beneficial action motivated by concern for someone. (Ross 2002, 362)

This command to love others as one’s self is couched in a portion of Scripture (Lev 17-22) that focuses attention on the individual. In it the Lord gives detailed instruction on things to avoid and things to fulfill, establishing for the people a code of Christian righteousness. “All the laws in these several chapters relate to what is more or less personal and private. We do not again meet with any public services until we come to the twenty-third chapter. From the sixteenth to the twenty-third, everything relates to the duties, qualities, and associations of individuals in private life” (Seiss 1860, 303).

The writer believes this to have profound implications in relation to the topic of a modern day church and her hospitality. Often a church member may desire a church

that is loving, warm and hospitable, but that same church member may make virtually no effort to fulfill this goal. It is true that the collective church body should be welcoming, just as it was true that the Israelites of old were called to a collective holiness. However, it is also true that just as the Israelites were called to individual lives of dedication, church members must see their individual role in offering hospitality to guests. Without the role of the individual being played, the collective goal of the whole will never be met.

Leviticus 19:18 contains the instruction that “deals with the state of the heart toward our neighbor which the law of holiness requires, as the soul and the root of all righteousness Words so simple that all can understand them, so comprehensive that in obedience to them is comprehended all morality and righteousness toward man” (Kellogg 1978, 401).

One commentator has said that two observations lend a special interest to Leviticus 19:18. “1. It was twice quoted by our Lord (Matt. xix. 19 and xxii. 39). 2. It shows us the Law as closer to the gospel than we are apt to think. It proves that . . . God was not satisfied with a mere mechanical propriety of behavior, that he demanded rightness of feeling as well as correctness of conduct” (Spence and Exell 1950A, 301).

I am the LORD. One thing easily overlooked from Leviticus 19:18 is the last phrase: “I am the LORD.” This phrase gives insight as to both the “how” and “why” of fulfilling the command to love. *How* can one love the person who may in so many ways appear unlovely? Through the presence, grace and love from the Lord. *Why* must one love the person who may in so many ways be unlovely? Because of the command the Lord has given and the love the Lord has shown. “The motivation is obvious, if not

explicitly stated: as God has been impartially just with you, so you should be with one another” (Boyce 2008, 73).

How can we do this? The answer is here, ‘I am the Lord.’ We must look at all men *in their relation to God*. God is interested, Christ is interested in the worst of men, is seeking to save and raise them; do we not care for those for whom he cares so much . . . ? Can we be indifferent to them? When we look at our fellow-men in light of their relation to God, to Jesus Christ, we can see that in them which shines through all that is repelling, and which attracts us to their side that we may win and bless them. (Spence and Exell 1950A, 301)

At least 16 times in the chapter of Leviticus 19 the reader is reminded “I am the LORD.” From that observation it is not difficult to conclude that the instructions given were issued with the authority of the Almighty and would be fulfilled through His strength.

Deuteronomy

As Israel made preparations for entering the land that had been promised Moses reviewed the law that had been given to them at Sinai. “Deuteronomy” means “repetition of the law.” Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy as he reasserted the importance of obedience to God’s instructions and provided the people with instructions concerning the coming efforts to occupy the land. He also provided insight as to Israel’s relationship to those who inhabited the land (Wiersbe 2001, 373).

The primary exhortation of Deuteronomy . . . is the intense and all-absorbing loyalty which Israel owes to Yahweh, who alone is God The chief emphasis of the book is accordingly on the grace, power, and jealousy of God, which should elicit from the members of the Israelite community the corresponding response of love, obedience, and fear. The order of life in the Israelite society rests upon an acknowledgment of the lordship of God. (Buttrick 1953, 326)

The Shema

Foundational to the instruction of Deuteronomy is the passage of Scripture known as the Shema. Found in Deuteronomy 6, it was memorized by Hebrew children at an early age (Anthony and Benson 2003, 26). It begins with the profession of God's supremacy: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5). The very simple and simultaneously profound truth is that full adherence to this command results in obedience to all other decrees and desires of God. Thus, this command in partnership with the Levitical command to "love your neighbor as yourself" sums up the Law, as declared by the Lord (Matt 22:34-36; Mark 12:29-31).

Loving Outsiders

Modern day churches face a challenge that was common for ancient Israel – that being the question of how to relate correctly to those who were outsiders, or "aliens." Even a casual reading of God's instructions to the Israelites reveals the fact that He left no question that they were to be uncompromising in their devotion to Him, in many cases even going to measures to avoid this danger that may appear thoroughly disturbing to the modern reader. However, while God's abhorrence of spiritual compromise is undeniable, His immeasurable love for people is also explicitly clear.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 states,

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and widow, and *loves the alien*, giving him food and clothing. And *you are to love those who are aliens*, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. (italics added)

Motivated by God's love for outsiders, and their own history as aliens in the land of Egypt, the Lord called them and commanded them to show love to outsiders.

As a result of God's affection for aliens, Israel was to follow suit. If God's own example should prove insufficient to motivate them, they need only remember their own plight when they were **aliens in Egypt**. Israel knew the empty feeling of being outsiders in a strange place. When others found themselves in a similar predicament in Israel, the people of God should show compassion and love. (Anders 2002, 137)

Patrick Keifert elaborates on this truth when he says,

Israel's status as stranger reminded the people that in public worship, Israel was the guest of the Lord. Public worship was primally God's act, the ritual hospitality of the Lord extended to Israel as beloved and honored guest. Israel was also reminded, however, that in the events of the exodus, God chose Israel over the existing Egyptian social structures, creating a new community. Since Israel was the recipient of the Lord's hospitality, so Israel's worship was to be hospitable to stranger. As God is host to Israel, so Israel is called to be host to the stranger. (Keifert 1992, 59)

Keifert goes on to contemporize this teaching.

The theme of hospitality to the stranger important in the Jewish . . . tradition is taken up and intensified in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is portrayed as the stranger who initially appears as needy guest but is revealed through hospitality to the stranger as the ultimate host. As such, he offers, through God's abundance, a great banquet to which all strangers are invited. To secure and realize this invitation and the coming of God's rule, God gives God's self in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. In turn, those who enjoy this self-giving, self-sacrificing presence are moved to repentance and hospitality to the stranger *Contemporary public worship that is faithful to this heritage of worship will be characterized by hospitality to the stranger* (italics added). (Keifert 1992, 70)

Walter Brueggemann likewise connects the dots of Old Testament to New Testament to modern day when he states, "The core ecclesial tradition of the New Testament is an insistence that the church, like Israel its model and forebear, is a gift of YHWH's inexplicable love and grace" (Brueggemann 2001, 134). He goes on to say that the church today, as demonstrated in the book of Acts, is to carry out the same missional

ethic demonstrated in Deuteronomy which includes, in part, the responsibility to love the stranger.

Admonition from the New Testament

If the Old Testament instructions to care for others were seen as a campfire around which to gather, by the New Testament this teaching has been fanned into a consuming blaze. The fuel for this flame, consistent with what has already been noted, is to be a response to one's love for and obedience to God. J. I. Packer says that there are two motives that should spur Christians constantly to evangelize, and this writer would add that the same two motives should spur the practice of hospitality. "The first is love of God and concern for his glory; the second is love of man and concern for his welfare" (Packer 1961, 82). The second motive will only come to full fruition when it does so from the overflow of the first – genuinely loving people in response to one's love for the God who genuinely loves people.

Instruction from Jesus

In the New Testament, followers of God are not only given instruction to love, but are given the supreme model to emulate in so doing.

God has not only given us the responsibility of being hospitable to His guests, but He has also given us the perfect example of how to go about it. Jesus came to the earth to serve, not to be served. Throughout the New Testament, we see His examples of selfless service for those He had the opportunity to influence. And we've been left with the challenge of doing even greater things. That is a high challenge, especially when it comes to caring for those who may not yet know Him. When we serve our guests well, we reflect Jesus' attitude and mindset toward them. (Searcy 2007, 43)

The Greatest Commandment

In Matthew 22:34-40 is recorded an encounter where Jesus was questioned as to the greatest commandment in the Law. (This episode is also recorded in Mark 12). An expert in the Law posed the question, inquiring of Jesus what He considered to be the most important of all the commandments.

The first command. Jesus answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matt 22:37-38). In review of this passage one commentator says, “Here was a plain answer to the question of the scribe which no one could gainsay They who repeated daily in their devotions ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord’ . . . could not help acknowledging that love of him whom they thus confessed was the chief duty of man – one which was superior to every other obligation” (Spence and Exell 1950B, 365). To those in the religion-by-rule-keeping audience Jesus summed up the matter in that single statement. Love the Lord your God with all that is in you. Fulfillment of that command will accomplish what God requires. Neglect of that command cannot be compensated by any measure of human effort and good intentions.

The second command. Jesus did not stop at that point, however. He goes on to say,

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt 22:39). The questioner has not asked about a second command, “but Christ is not satisfied with propounding an abstract proposition; he shows how this great precept is to be made practical, how one command involves and leads to the other Our ‘neighbor’ is everyone with whom we are concerned, i.e. virtually all men. He is to be loved because he is God’s image and likeness, heir of the same hope as we ourselves, and presented to us as the object on and by which we are to show the reality of our love to God. (Spence and Exell 1950B, 366)

John MacArthur notes,

In whatever age or with whatever group of people, it has been the almost universal belief that love is the greatest thing in life, the summum bonum, the virtue par excellence. Consequently, volume upon volumes of poems, songs, play, novels, and films have been produced about love.

God's Word concurs that love is the greatest virtue, but the love which it elevates as supreme is of a much deeper and more substantive kind than that which the world understands and admires Jesus declared that *agapē* love is the supreme divine requirement of men, both in regard to Himself and in regard to other men. (MacArthur 1988, 335)

MacArthur further states that “genuine love for one's neighbor is of the same kind as genuine love for God. It is by choice purposeful, intentional, and active, not merely sentimental and emotional” (MacArthur 1988, 341). “Put simply, Jesus tells us that the first and foremost law of life is to love God. Flowing out of and motivated by our love for God is a love for others. There is a vertical dimension to our life (that is, loving God) and a horizontal dimension to our life (that is, loving our neighbor)” (Frazee 2001, 71).

John Broadus notes that while Jesus quotes the two commandments from different books, (the first coming from Deut 6:5 and the second coming from Lev 19:18), the Lord's answer declares them similar and places them in close relation.

Some religionists incline to dwell on the first and neglect the other, some unbelievers eulogize the second and care nothing for the first. But there is no earnest and intelligent love to God without love to our neighbor; and the love of our neighbor derives its fundamental and necessary sanction from love to God. The second precept cannot stand alone, even in theory

Why should I feel it my duty to sacrifice my interest or inclination for the benefit of others? The true and only sufficient answer is, that supreme duty to God includes and authenticates duty to man. (Broadus 1990, 458)

“The Lord does not lay down mechanical rules; he does not compare the commandments with one another, and estimate their comparative importance. He states at once a great

principle, 'Thou shalt love.' Selfishness is the bane and curse of our nature. Love is the refining, elevating power" (Spence and Exell 1950B, 374).

All other commands. Jesus goes on to state that "all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt 22:40). When these two are observed in true totality, all others are fulfilled. When these two are not genuinely fulfilled, all others are left lacking.

Obviously emphasis falls on the authority of the Old Testament and Jesus' teaching of it We need not dispute whether "hang" means that all the other commandments can be deduced from these two or whether these commandments summarize all the others, for what summarizes the others also provides a starting point for deduction. Either way, love for God and neighbor must permeate obedience to all the other commandments. (Gundry 1982, 450)

Jesus' statement signifies that upon the foundation of love for God and love for man rests all other "moral and religious, ceremonial and judicial precepts contained in the Law Scripture enunciates the duty to God and our neighbor, shows the right method of fulfilling it, warns against the breach of it, gives examples of punishment and reward consequent upon the way in which the obligation has been treated" (Spence and Exell 1950B, 366).

For a local church today the implications of this passage are many. The writer does not suggest that the command to love God and love others is adequately fulfilled through expressions of welcome and hospitality. However, he does insist that a hospitable welcome is one small dimension of a many-faceted approach to fulfilling these commands. Love for God and love for people is hardly demonstrated to guests if they arrive, attend, and depart a worship service, leaving with a feeling that no one was happy

to see them or cared that they were present. A genuine welcome will not produce love, but genuine love should produce a warm welcome.

The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 records the account commonly known as “The Parable of the Talents” in which a master departs for a time, leaving to the care of his servants a portion of his wealth. One servant is entrusted with five talents and upon his master’s arrival returns to him the original five plus five more that have been earned. Likewise, to another servant is allotted two talents and in time he returns those two plus two more. The response of the master (recorded in Matt 25:21; 23) is “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”

The unfaithful servant. In contrast, however, a third servant is depicted in whom is trusted one talent of his master’s wealth. Upon his master’s arrival the servant returns the talent with nothing more to show for his service. The explanation given by the servant is “I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground” (Matt 25:24b). Unlike the response to the first two servants, the master’s response to this servant is not one of commendation but condemnation. “You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest” (Matt 25:26-27).

It is sobering to realize that the judgment declared toward the servant was not in response to having done a blatantly evil thing, but he was judged as wicked and lazy as a result of having done *nothing*. “It is to be observed that he is punished, not for fraud, theft, malversation, but for omission. He had left undone that which ought to be done” (Spence and Exell 1950B, 480). It begs a reminder to believers and churches today that the Master has entrusted them with blessings in order to be a blessing. It heralds an admonition to not only avoid what is evil but to be faithful in what is good.

Speaking of the unfaithful servant in the parable John MacArthur says,

This slave does not represent an atheist or even an agnostic, because he recognized the master as his legitimate owner and no doubt made a pretense of honoring the master while he was away. He did not misuse the talent on immoral and selfish pursuits like the prodigal son or embezzle it like the unmerciful servant of Matthew 18. He simply disregarded the stewardship he had been given. (MacArthur 1989, 105)

It is interesting to note that the servant’s own words became the basis for his rebuke. He acknowledged his recognition that the master was a man of high expectations, but attempted to make that his defense. “He wickedly misjudged and slandered his master, and tried to make that an excuse for his slothful failure to do as he had been commanded. The master retorts that his own excuse established his guilt” (Broadus 1990, 505). The master repeated the servant’s words, “*So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed . . .*” (italics added). This frail attempt at an alibi revealed the inconsistency of his actions. Recognizing his master’s expectations the servant should have made wise use of that with which he had been entrusted. Robert Gundry states, “The parable closes on a threatening

note concerning the punishment Jesus will mete out to disciple who falsify their profession by failing to do good works” (Gundry 1982, 510).

Caution for the church. The question merits pondering, “is the church not often guilty of similar failure?” Within the context of most churches the “servants,” (pastors, teachers, members), acknowledge the Master’s expectation that they love others. Most would give a nod of agreement to a message on the aforementioned Great Commandment to love God and love others. Is that commandment lived out and demonstrated consistently, however, or does the church’s understanding of that truth become the basis for the guilt of not fulfilling it?

Is the blessing of guests a “talent” which is too easily ignored? No church would knowingly do things to intentionally treat guests poorly, but perhaps they are often “not treated at all.” Will the Master be pleased if He directs the path of those outside the church to come into its presence – a place where one should find love, welcome, warmth and care – but instead those guests walk away feeling disregarded or unacknowledged?

Most believers would argue that the resources which the Master entrusts to the church should be utilized faithfully. These may come in the form of money, facilities, talents and giftedness of members, or any number of other modes. May the church be faithful to not overlook the most precious of things entrusted to them – that for which the Master died – people.

Instruction from Paul

Among his many missionary endeavors Paul, along with his companions, Silas and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1), labored together in the founding of the church in

Thessalonica. This was no simple undertaking and met with extensive challenges (1 Thess 2:1-12; Acts 17:1-10). In this epistle to the Thessalonians Paul commends the people for their “work produced by faith (and their) labor prompted by love . . .” (1 Thess 1:3). He reminds them of the toil and hardship that he (Paul) and his companions had endured during their work among the people. Paul reminds them that during his work with them he and his companions strove not to be a burden, but to deal with a kind of parental love and compassion (1 Thess 2:7; 11-12).

1 Thessalonians 2:8

“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thess 2:8).

The motivation for love. This verse of Scripture is said by some to communicate a classic understanding of biblical love. “To Paul, love is always a verb, it is doing. Feelings may accompany love, but they do not define it . . .” (Anders 2000, 24). Another writer suggests that there may be a bit of irony in Paul’s words. He had been accused by some of preaching and teaching with false motives, seeking to get something from others for personal gain. The author says it is “as if Paul wanted to say, ‘Those who slander us are saying that we were out to get you; well they are right, we were indeed yearning for you, but the purpose was not to take something from you but to share something with you’” (Hendriksen 1955, 65).

The local church must maintain that motivation as well. The incentive behind a warm welcome is ultimately not for personal gain or what the guest might potentially be able to give or offer. Rather, the incentive is a demonstration of concern, love and

welcome is the understanding that this person might be one with whom the Good News of Christ can be shared. The message of Jesus' love is tarnished if it is not accompanied by an authentic demonstration of that love. "It is easier to teach theology than to love, easier to share lists than time. Paul gave not only the message of the gospel, but the example of it as well" (Anders 2000, 24). Such words provide a stirring challenge for the church.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

"May the Lord *make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else*, just as ours does for you" (1 Thess 3:12, italics added).

The necessity of love. In response to this passage Donald Barnhouse says,

Don't forget, doctrine never impresses the unregenerate world. Those who do not know Christ couldn't care less if you and I cross our theological t's and dot our existential i's properly. This is important in the church, sure! But if we want to let the world outside know what Christianity is all about, we need to show them the love of Christ among us. (Barnhouse 1977, 50)

When Paul told the Thessalonians to love "each other" and "everyone else" he left no escape clause. "For those who try to find excuses, or exceptions, there simply are none. This command applies not only to fellow believers, but to all outside the community of faith This love should be constantly increasing and overflowing" (Anders 2000, 46).

The verbs to "*abound* and to *overflow*" (NIV, "increase and overflow") are close synonyms. Together they express *one* idea, namely, that the Thessalonian believers may not merely *increase* in that most eminent virtue, namely, love – as the outward evidence of their living faith, but may actually *abound* in such manner that this ocean of love, being full, reaches to the top edge of its borders *round about* . . . and even overflows, so that it reaches not only fellow-Christians, in fulfillment of Christ's 'new commandment' (John 13:34, but even outsiders (5:15; cf. Gal. 6:10; cf. Matt. 5:43-48), being a love "toward one another *and toward all*. (Hendriksen 1955, 91)

Daniel Akin states simply, “Christians are called to live lives of love toward others” (Akin 2007, 814). Bob Russell says, “One of the keys to advancing the gospel is for the church to be made up of individuals who consider it their task to do the work of the ministry, rather than having a congregation of people who expect the paid staff to minister to them” (Russell 2000, 175). The writer suggests that this same principle is portrayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:12. Paul already assured the people of his love for them, (1 Thess 2:8), but now he turns the table to command them to love one another and all others. It was not enough for Paul and his companions to love. It must be a part of the “work” carried out by all believers.

In the church today, who is commonly expected to welcome the guests? Who is expected to offer a handshake and a smile and follow up afterward? While this is not true in all settings, in many contexts the answer to those questions would be “the pastor” or “paid staff.” The writer does not suggest that the pastoral leaders relinquish this responsibility. Rather, he suggests that some mindsets must change to recognize that while the pastor exercises this role (just as Paul exercised the role of loving the people) the people must rise up to share in this duty (just as the Thessalonians were called to love others).

Instruction from Peter

As a leader in the early church, Peter was well acquainted with dramatic highs and lows that came with that role. He knew the thrill of proclaiming the message of Christ and seeing thousands respond (Acts 2:41) and he knew the trials of persecution on account of his faith (Acts 5:29-40; Acts 12:3-4). Peter issues to believers in Christ a

message of encouragement and instruction. Peter writes with the perspective and conviction that the time is short and “the end of all things is near” (1 Pet 4:7).

D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “As human history moves alongside the edge of the eschatological future, the line of separation at times seems razor-thin. Only God’s longsuffering holds back the impending manifestation of that day That consciousness should have its impact on present Christian living” (Hiebert 1984, 253). In light of the conviction that the end is near, Peter offers this admonition:

1 Peter 4:8-9

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet 4:8-9).

Above all, love. In looking toward the anticipated return of the Lord, Peter begins this exhortation with “Above all.” At the risk of stating the obvious, it is easily observed that this indicates instruction that is not only important but essential.

It is introduced by *above all*, which indicates the supreme importance of love as the controlling factor in all relationships in the church (see 1:22; 2:17; 3:8) It has to be a ‘deep’ love, but the English word doesn’t adequately convey the sense of the Greek ‘at full stretch.’ Why at full stretch? Because this love will be stretched to the limit by the demands made on it. (Marshall 1991, 143)

Hiebert concurs that “the words ‘above all things’ make clear that the duties set forth are of prime importance” (Hiebert 1984, 255).

The topic of love for others has been examined previously so the writer will not devote lengthy attention here except to again acknowledge the fundamental importance of such love. Love toward others fulfills the command of God, blesses the one to whom the love is shown, blesses the one from whom the love is given, and serves

as a compelling witness to others. “Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community is the final apologetic” (Frazee 2001, 85).

Offer hospitality. In a general sense, hospitality has been defined as “the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers . . . receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.” It is interesting to note that the word has roots in the Latin word *hospitālis*. The same word from which is derived “hospital.” The writer does not suggest that churches offer surgical procedures and medical prescriptions, but does suggest that the church should be a place of care, reception, healing and hope – a place of *hospitālis*.

Hospitality can take many forms. It may include the offering of food and shelter, it may include a warm welcome into one’s home, or it may include offering a seat in a crowded sanctuary. Whatever form it may require, “Christian love may be displayed through . . . offering hospitality (*philoxenoi*, lit., ‘being friendly to strangers’)” (Walvoord and Zuck 1983, 853).

Hospitality (*philoxenoi*) . . . describes one who has an affectionate concern for strangers The practice of hospitality was highly valued in the early church, and it is frequently mentioned in the New Testament (Rom 12:13; 16:1-2; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:2; 3 John 5-8; Matt 25:35) Without its practice the early missionary work of the church would have been greatly retarded. (Hiebert 1984, 257)

Without grumbling.

Hospitality was to a large extent a presupposition for Christian mission and for the realization of Christian fellowship, especially when Christians gathered for worship, which took place, of course, in private homes. This hospitality brought with it considerable burdens Therefore, the realistic comment is added that

hospitality should be offered ‘without grumbling’ (Phil. 2:14), i.e., willingly out of love (II Cor. 9:7; Prov. 15:17). (Goppelt 1978, 299)

Peter’s instruction to offer hospitality without grumbling gives recognition to the fact that hospitality could be costly, burdensome and inconvenient. Such a spirit would negate the value of hospitality and lessen (or eliminate) the blessing it provided the recipient. (Hiebert 1984, 258). “The words are a reminder that hospitality can be an exasperating chore, to be shouldered cheerfully, if it is to be worthwhile” (Kelly 1981, 179). While its forms may be many, the fact remains that Christian love and hospitality are expressed through unselfish concern for others. This is certainly a contradiction to the proverbial – though not fictitious – accounts of guests at church being informed that certain seats are off limits due to the unspoken but understood reservation of certain members! May the church of today be a place that welcomes, loves and offers hospitality without grumbling.

Conclusion

J. I. Packer says, “It must never be forgotten that the enterprise required of us in evangelism is the enterprise of love: an enterprise that springs from a genuine interest in those whom we seek to win, and a genuine care for their well-being, and expresses itself in a genuine respect for them and a genuine friendliness toward them” (Packer 1961, 88). This enterprise of which Packer speaks is a process, not an event. Such interest, care, respect and love are to be cultivated, nurtured and grown, not simply demonstrated once and discarded. With that in mind the writer does not intend to insinuate that a hospitable welcome at church is the end-all event. On the contrary, he suggests that it is but an initial step in the process. A warm welcome does not assure that

the lost will be saved and the backslidden will repent. But likewise it must be acknowledged that a cold, uncaring reception can easily become an obstacle that is difficult to overcome in the task of reaching people with the message of Christ. “Deeds of love aren’t enough on their own to bring someone to Christ, but they do create “phone wires” for transmitting the spoken message Deeds of kindness get people’s attention” (Sjogren 2003, 23).

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul states, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” Implied in his words “is the notion of . . . a process, a sort of spiritual continuum” (Sjogren 2003, 25). A church’s task of reaching people, loving people, and ultimately seeing people come to faith in Christ is a similar process. It is well viewed as a continuum in which every person plays a role. Bill Hybels says, “On some occasions, the Spirit asks me to be an opener. I have a hoe and I’m supposed to break up some really hard soil in someone’s heart so that the next person to come along might have some influence in planting a seed or two along those rows” (Hybels 2006, 41).

A kind welcome shown to guests is an obvious tool that helps bring others into church and increases the likelihood of visitor retention. That is a good thing, but it is not the supreme factor motivating such hospitality. The ultimate motivation for such actions is obedience to the Word of God. Put simply – to love God and love others. “Love for God and love for others go hand in hand. Followers of Christ just can’t help expressing their love for God through loving others. What is growing in their hearts *must* find an external outlet” (Frazee 2001, 199).

If any group on the planet should model love, care, and hospitality, it should be the church. “[The church] should encourage mutual caring . . . intergenerationally, irrespective of gender, marital status, and socio-economic standing. The church is not a community of lonely people” (Demarest and Lewis 1987, 275). As God’s people love Him that love should overflow to others, and as God’s people love others they demonstrate their love for Him (Matt 25:40). In the words of Reggie McNeal, “God is in the people business” (McNeal 2006, 161).

CHAPTER 3

THE NECESSITY OF HOSPITALITY

Someone has wisely observed that when it comes to a church's worship service, the sermon begins in the parking lot. Before a pastor stands to preach or a musician sings a song, first impressions are being formed in the minds of guests. What those impressions communicate may very well be the loudest message of the day. Churches must never think that the spiritual nature of their mission gives them an exemption from the truth of the old adage: "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

Church leaders, and subsequently church members, need to be consistently reminded that the impressions given to guests are not for the sake of show, but may serve as a valuable tool that will help accomplish the purpose of reaching people for Christ. Bob Russell says, "Don't just tell the greeters to be friendly – remind them to be friendly because they are doing it to the glory of God and are a part of the evangelistic process. Don't just ask your facilities people to clean the grounds . . . remind them that we're doing everything with excellence so that people will want to come back" (Russell 2000, 264).

The Element of Customer Service

At first glance "customer service" may seem to be a concept that is misplaced

when discussing the church. In an age when a consumerism mentality seems to prevail and “what’s in it for me” seems a popular question, should leaders in the church really give consideration to the element of customer service? Perhaps it is important to understand that in this context the topic of customer service should not be viewed from a perspective of entertaining or wooing an individual in hopes of profiting from them. On the contrary, this discussion of customer service must be viewed from the basis of seeking to engage and welcome the guest in hopes of facilitating further opportunity to minister, bless, and ultimately present to them the magnificent message of God’s love. The writer suggests that, when seen through this lens, not only should customer service be considered in the church, but failure to do so may be nothing short of irresponsible stewardship. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Henson say, “We would be smart to take some cues from the customer-conscious service world Shouldn’t churches be the ones teaching the business world about embracing and serving those who walk through our doors? This is where biblical hospitality meets the business concept of customer service” (Searcy and Henson 2007, 60). The authors go on to observe that, in many settings, the customer service aspect of ministry has been too long neglected.

The Constant Presence of Customer Service

It can be persuasively argued that every enterprise which involves interaction with people has an element of customer service woven into its tapestry. Whether the business is that of a luxury car dealer selling expensive automobiles, a fast food chain selling hamburgers, a recreation department seeking volunteers to coach little league, or a church striving to do an effective job welcoming guests, all of them involve a critical

thread of customer service. That service may be carried out effectively or poorly, but wherever it falls on that spectrum its existence is undeniable. The writer insists that the work of the church is the most critical of all ventures. Its profitability is not measured by income and expense reports, market share or stock prices. Its competition is out of this world (Eph 6:12), and the consequence of its work is eternal (2 Cor 4:18; Eph 3:10-11). If any organization is a shining star in the arena of customer service, may it be the church of Almighty God! “The head of our organization is the greatest server of all time. Doesn’t it follow that we should be the ultimate example of such service to our guests?” (Searcy and Henson 2007, 43).

Customer Service in the Church

From a traditional perspective “customer service” is often considered to be a business practice which seeks to serve others for the purpose of gaining or retaining their patronage. Often it entails an effort on the part of the merchant to recognize or anticipate the needs of the customer, or even a willingness to be personally inconvenienced in order to serve the customer well. How well attuned are churches to this concept? Some would suggest many churches are lacking in this area. Those who attend church are not, nor should they be viewed, as “customers” in the traditional sense. They should be viewed, however, as honored guests. Just as one might welcome a guest into one’s home and carry out at least basic courtesies to help them feel comfortable and welcomed there, so a church family should be cognizant of and consistent in providing similar courtesy to help guests feel welcomed in the church. While it could be argued that it is simply a matter of

semantics, perhaps in the context of the church this discipline of customer service is more clearly articulated as “guest service.”

The Importance of Guest Service in the Church

Lee Strobel speaks specifically of potential guests who are presently unengaged in church. He represents this category of people with fictitious but stereotypical characters whom he names “Unchurched Harry and Mary.” Strobel says, “Most Christians underestimate the tension and anxiety that Unchurched Harry and Mary experience when they walk through the church door. To a Christian, church is a comfortable home, a place populated by like-minded people who share a love for Christ. But for unchurched people, it’s a foreboding place of the unexpected and unusual” (Strobel 1993, 171). The writer agrees with Strobel’s assessment, but would suggest that its implications can be broadened to encompass many Christians as well. While the tension may be different, even many who profess to be followers of Christ would acknowledge a level of anxiety when walking into a “new” church for the first time. How these guests are welcomed and served, and the first impressions they receive upon visiting the church, are factors which can prove tremendously influential in their receptivity to the message and openness to the possibility of future visits.

George Barna conducted a two-year study of people who were presently unchurched. His findings suggest that when such a person attends a church their likelihood of returning to that church depends largely upon the welcome of the people in that particular congregation. Barna says that according to this study, “Theology matters, but in the minds of the unchurched (and, quite frankly, most of the church), the friendly

and caring nature of the people matters more” (Barna 2002, 91). Barna notes a specific example of an individual that he portrays as a “veteran of the Church” who had dropped out of church and was considering a return. He quotes the individual as saying,

I probably wouldn’t know good religious teaching from bad, or a great sermon from one that breaks every rule in the preaching manual. But I sure know nice people from jerks, and real people from hypocrites. I would stay at a church with lousy teaching but genuinely friendly people . . . before I would stay at a place with perfect teaching and lousy people. (Barna 2002, 91)

If such a testimony is deemed credible, then those in the church must acknowledge the necessity of effective guest service. Gary McIntosh says that “we must gusterize our church.” He goes on to offer the following definition: “**Guest•er•ize** (gest’-er-ize), vt: to make a church more responsive to its guests and better able to attract new ones. **Syn** see service, care, love, acceptance” (McIntosh 2006, 107).

Why Does It Matter

Someone might question whether adamant attention to guest service is really essential, or is it not simply an option for each individual church to consider. Often churches, like individuals, have unique personalities. Should it not be acknowledged that some are just more naturally given to hospitality than others? Should a church be challenged to diligently seek to improve this area of ministry if the members of that church feel that it is not in the scope of their natural comfort zone? The writer insists that this question must be answered with a thunderous “yes”; churches must be challenged to diligently seek excellence in this area!

There are times that an individual shows wisdom in acknowledging their natural strengths and weaknesses and choosing to invest their time and attention in the

development of the strength rather than attempting to “shore up” the weakness. Contrarily, there are times when an acknowledgement must be made that an area of weakness needs to be improved. In such instances one may have to choose to fight against what comes naturally. Paul spoke of such a battle in Romans 7:14-25. He launches into an almost head-spinning discourse as he acknowledges that the good he wants to do is not what he does, but what he does not want to do he finds himself doing despite the fact that he knows it is contrary to what he ought to do! He does not conclude the matter by saying, “oh well, it’s just natural for me to go on sinning, therefore, I will just accept it.” Heaven forbid! He concludes the matter by proclaiming that it is through Jesus Christ our Lord that victory can be attained. In such instances what comes naturally must submit to what comes supernaturally.

In the life of a church, even if hospitality is not the natural bend of the congregation, its necessity must be addressed and its presentation must be enhanced.

Christianity isn’t a merely individualistic decision to come to church to see what I can get out of it [Christianity] has very much to do with your reactions to the people sitting around you. The care and concern you take as a covenanted group, your willingness to make a commitment to God fleshed out in your commitment to each other – that seems to be the issue as we look at the New Testament. (Dever 2004, 235)

Jesus Christ charges His church with the task of persuasively communicating the truth of His love. “He asks us to become contagious Christians and to build contagious churches that will do everything necessary, through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, to bring more and more people to him” (Mittelberg 2000, 21). Why does guest service matter in the church? The most simple and truthful answer is this: Because people matter to God. G. K. Chesterton says, “All men matter. You matter. I

matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe" (Chesterton 2010, 409). Mark Mittelberg echoes this when he says, "When you hear the words 'People Matter to God' you're tempted to say, 'I've got this one down But hear me: This belief is the hardest one to fully absorb into our value system. It's also the most difficult value to build into those around us People matter to God'" (Mittelberg 2000, 35).

If the church accepts the idea that God loves people enough to allow Jesus Christ to die for them, this truth should profoundly impact the way people are viewed and the effort that is invested in welcoming them into the church. If a church does not embrace this idea of God's unfathomable love for people, it must be honestly acknowledged that they have likely slipped into spiritual arrogance at best and absolute heresy at worst. People matter, therefore, hospitality in the church matters.

A Common Misperception

Someone has jokingly quipped, "The older I get, the better I used to be." It is easy for one's assessment of one's self to exceed reality. A common peril exists that may ensnare the church in the arena of guest service. Far from a joking matter, however, it is a trap that can lull the church into a mode of guest service mediocrity. The danger is that many churches perceive themselves as friendly, warm and welcoming. The longer an individual is in a particular church, and consequently the greater the level of comfort, acquaintance, personal friendships and involvement, the greater the tendency to view the church as extraordinarily friendly. Unfortunately, often the church's assessment of itself exceeds the reality when compared to the perspective of new attendees.

Guests who attend a church service enter with their own biases, expectations, and personal subjectivity. A church that is serious about the task of reaching new people shows wisdom when efforts are made to see things through the filter of a typical guest's experience at church. "When we invite people to church, we typically invite them to the church service. Much of our mission lives and dies with how they interpret that experience" (Henderson and Casper 2007, 149). The "experience" of which these authors speak is a reference to the total of all things absorbed during one's visit to a church. It includes that which happens between the beginning of a service and the "final amen," but it also includes the broader matter of everything from the time a guest arrives to the time they depart.

"We're A Friendly Church"

Such a statement is often made when describing one's own church. It is no doubt rare to find a person who would describe the church to which they belong as "unfriendly." Gary McIntosh reports having consulted with over one thousand churches. He observes that in every one of them someone either wrote or verbalized the opinion that their church was friendly. Interestingly, these churches represented a spectrum ranging from those who were in danger of closing down, to those bursting with growth, and others who were in the midst of a twenty-year plateau. McIntosh says,

Apparently, regardless of the state of their health or their size, most churches consider themselves to be friendly

Often church visitors report (these same) churches are cold, unwelcoming, and not very friendly. How is it that two people can experience the same event and feel so differently about it? How can members believe their church is friendly, while newcomers experience an unfriendly atmosphere? The answer is perception People who attend a church regularly look at the issue of friendliness from the

inside out In contrast, visitors view the issue of friendliness from the outside in. (McIntosh 2006, 8)

At the risk of stating the obvious, growth will not occur without guests. When guests arrive, the reception they receive will be instrumental in their decision whether to return. Church members regarding themselves as a friendly fellowship is good, but the perspective of guests may prove even more valuable.

Thom Rainer, in speaking about the many churches with which he has consulted asks, “Do you know what almost all of these churches have in common? They think they are friendly churches” (Rainer 2001, 87). Rainer recounts the story of one church he was asked to help. He reports that he arrived five minutes before service. He made his way to the sanctuary where he was handed a bulletin and given a half-hearted greeting by five gentlemen who were talking with each other. He tells that all of the seats in the middle and back of the building were full so he made his way to the front of the sanctuary. Following the service he says that he approached a number of people but no one took notice of him and he states that he left without a single word being spoken to him. Rainer says, “Upon returning to my hotel, I reviewed my notes from the interviews conducted the day before with some fifteen church members. The most common remark given to me by those members? ‘We’re the friendliest church in town!’” (Rainer 2001, 88).

Small Steps of Improvement

The challenges which face churches when guest service is lacking can be numerous and widely varied. To think they could all be addressed, much less remedied, in a few brief pages would be presumptuous. Concerning the fundamental first-

impression factor of friendliness, however, some general steps may prove helpful. Three suggestions are offered, not with the thought that they will provide the end-all cure, but simply with the hope that they can provide any church an achievable starting point.

Greeter ministry. People who accept the ministry of welcoming others can often prove very valuable. These greeters can be strategically stationed to include areas such as parking lots, entry doors, worship area, and education hallways. Such people can help foster an atmosphere of warmth and welcome for both regular attendees as well as newcomers. Rainer says, “As strange as it may seem, our research does indicate that an effective greeter ministry enhances the assimilation process. The ‘front door’ issue of greeting guests has profound implications for the ‘back door’ issue of retaining members in active service” (Rainer 1999, 88).

Never should one make the mistake of thinking that the assignment of designated greeters alleviates the responsibility of all church members to play their role in welcoming others. A greeting team should be viewed as a front line in welcoming others, but not as the church’s proxy in doing so. Each person must be challenged to play his or her part.

Jim Henderson and Matt Casper tell about a project in which they went to various churches throughout the country. They observed in many settings that the official greeters would welcome them and no one else ever did. “The fact that we were ‘officially greeted’ and then very rarely unofficially greeted was what captured my attention” (Henderson and Casper 2007, 155). They go on to observe that the experience often left them with the perception that the “regular people” did not care whether or not

they were there. The authors do not present that as a jab against greeter ministries, rather as a reminder that the job of hospitality may begin with those individuals but it must not end there.

Just say hi. That statement sounds so elementary it may seem more in context if found in a kindergarten classroom, but it is a simple truth that is valuable on the playground, corporate settings, and especially the church. McIntosh speaks of the importance of it when he says, “If you want to gusterize your church, I suggest that you follow the ‘Ten-Foot-Rule’ and the ‘Just Say Hi’ policy. Teach your people, whenever they come within ten feet of a person they do not know, to just say hi. While this will not totally gusterize your church, at least it will let newcomers know they are noticed” (McIntosh 2006, 109). Perhaps this suggestion was borrowed from the retail legend Sam Walton, the founder of Wal Mart. Walton gave this charge to his employees:

I want you to take a pledge with me. I want you to promise that whenever you come within ten feet of a customer, you will look him in the eye, greet him, and ask him if you can help him I want you to repeat after me: From this day forward, I solemnly promise and declare that every time a customer comes within ten feet of me, I will smile, look him in the eye, and greet him. (Walton and Huey 1992, 223)

Colossians 4:5 says, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” It hardly seems like a heroic leap beyond the call of duty to apply that charge to help church members, at the very least, give a simple greeting to guests. The writer of this paper suggests it is safe to assume that it will be a rare guest who will leave a church disappointed and irritated because too many people acknowledged their presence. (This is not intended to encourage the practice of pointing out guests during the course of a service. The writer wholeheartedly acknowledges many

guests will take issue with this practice). Adam Hamilton says, “Most visitors in worship do not wish to be recognized, but they do want others to be friendly and welcoming” (Hamilton 2002, 38).

Henderson and Casper, speaking of their visits to the churches in the course of their aforementioned study say, “In all our church visits, hardly anyone had voluntarily spoken to us. This was the norm, not the exception.” Speaking of one church specifically they note, “Not only had no one spoken to us at the end of the service, not one person voluntarily spoke to us the whole time we were inside their building” (Henderson and Casper 2007, 58). This is a sad testimony to the poor state of hospitality that exists in many churches. A congregation of people who are committed to the practice of “just saying hi” will not necessarily achieve instant perfection in the field of guest service, but it will likely not be said that people attended and left and were never acknowledged. This discipline does not require higher levels of education, it does not require unique skill sets, and it does not even necessitate intense training. It simply demands that one be willing to look outside oneself and acknowledge the existence of another. Surely it is not too high a price to pay in striving to serve others.

Look outward. Individuals and organizations of every kind (including churches) have a tendency to become focused on their personal routine and can easily lose track of the bigger picture of those things they desire to accomplish. Most churches would agree that they want to see people influenced for Christ, lives changed, eternity altered and great things accomplished. How ironic then, that as previously stated, the reception that guests receive at many churches teeters somewhere between poor and non-

existent. Is that because churches do not care? Perhaps in some cases that is the ugly truth. But the writer suspects more often the case is a matter of having not consciously chosen to care.

As a general rule mankind does not naturally migrate toward others-centeredness. The gravitational pull of man's nature is toward self-centeredness and personal comfort. For that reason, if the people in a church are going to make strides of improvement in the area of hospitality toward guests, it will be a result of a conscious decision to look outward. This might be manifest in a simple "hello." It might be shown in offering a seat to another, looking away from a conversation with a friend to greet a stranger, helping a single parent who arrives with small children and bags hanging from each arm, or it might be shown in any other countless number of ways. Simply put, it requires that attention be turned from inward to outward.

C. Peter Wagner coined a term "koinonitis." He uses this term to describe the condition when the fellowship among believers (*koinonia*) has turned inward and become unhealthy. A group suffering from koinonitis has lost their outward focus and the primary concern becomes the preservation of the existing group. A danger, Wagner says, is that such groups generally do not know they are "sick" and that they have grown unfriendly to outsiders (Wagner 1979, 87). It is important again to note that groups such as this generally do not consciously choose to be unwelcoming; they have simply allowed their routine to draw them toward this condition. To overcome such a snare necessitates a conscious choice to look outward, not to discard the fellowship shared within, but rather to see others who might be welcomed into that fellowship.

Small Things Can Make A Big Difference

“If it bears his name, it’s worth our best” (Russell 2000, 107). This, says Bob Russell, is a slogan of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The Apostle Paul gives a similar admonition in Colossians 3:23 when he insists “In whatever you do, do it with all your heart as working for the Lord” In the ministry of the church it is easy to apply such motivation to things that might be viewed as overtly spiritual such as the preaching of the Word, the teaching of a class, or the leading of music, just to name a few. But does such counsel have application when it concerns other, seemingly less spiritual, details? Does the condition of the parking lot, the cleanliness of the facilities, or the condition of the lawn really matter? The writer believes that question should be answered with an emphatic yes!

First Impressions

Thom Rainer and his research team conducted a study with people who were regarded as unchurched but were taking strides to engage in church. The research team interviewed these individuals to gather information regarding their thoughts and experiences after attending a church. Rainer says that one issue which surprised him was “the intensity with which the formerly unchurched spoke of their first (or second) impressions of churches Ninety percent of the formerly unchurched indicated that some factor about the people or the facilities impacted their decision to return for another visit” (Rainer 2001, 93). Rainer goes on to further observe that most of these people indicated that their decision was made within a few minutes after their arrival at the church. It was not only the message of the pastor but also (and perhaps even more

persuasively) the message of the first impressions that determined their intentions regarding a future return to the church. Such information further communicates the necessity of striving to see the church through the lens of a guest. This filter must be applied to matters that are both tangible (for example, the cleanliness of the restroom) and intangible (for example, the friendliness of the greeters).

Evaluate the details. It is important to continually evaluate the various facets of a church's environment to identify areas that might need improvement. Most people seem to agree that specific elements that need ongoing attention are things such as the condition of the building and grounds, the nursery and the restrooms. Lyle Schaller suggests having teams of people designated to inspect such items. He warns, "do not ask five men, all born before 1925, to constitute the inspection committee for the nursery" (Schaller 1988, 94). Seeking input from individuals who are in a position to see things from the perspective of a guest is invaluable, even going so far as to ask non-attenders to provide such insight.

Ken Blanchard observes that "washrooms will always tell you if a company cares about customers" (Blanchard and Bowles 1993, 18). Such a message is amplified in the church as it will often be viewed as not only telling what the church thinks of "customers," but often the condition of "the Lord's house" will be taken to communicate what the church thinks about God. Thom Rainer insists, "A lost person should be able to walk into our church and see that Christians care about their facilities. An unkempt church may convey a lackadaisical attitude about other matters to the unchurched" (Rainer 1993, 276).

In *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* Rainer recounts an interview with a young lady who had come into a church with a young child. The lady was not a Christian, but the attention given to details in the children's ministry ("Wee Care") so impressed her that she continued to return, eventually committing her life to Christ. In the interview the young lady says, "I now realize I was hell-bound until I came to Lakeview. And I never would have returned to Lakeview without the great ministry of Wee Care Do you think churches realize that good childcare may make an eternal difference in someone's life? Do they really understand?" (Rainer 2001, 92).

Details matter. First impressions can be profound. Excellent guest service is essential. It may be through things such as these that a trail is blazed which helps a person in their journey to faith in Christ.

Examples from the Corporate World

It has been thoroughly noted that in churches there is often a disconnection between the perception of those inside the church and those who are outside. When filtered through the opinion of those within a church there may be a perception of warmth and overwhelming friendliness, though often the opinion is much different when sifted through the filter of those outside the church. Interestingly, the same scenario exists in the business world. "A Bain & Company survey of more than 362 companies concluded that 80 percent believed they delivered 'superior experience' while their customers only rated 8 percent of them as delivering that 'superior experience'" (Ford, McNair and Perry 2009, 8). The authors note another study which examined why customers choose to leave one company and do business with another. The findings determined that the

number one reason for such a change, by more than a fifty point margin, was that customers were “turned away by an attitude of indifference on the part of the service provider” (Ford, McNair and Perry 2009, 7).

Businesses which achieve exceptional levels of performance and reputation in the arena of guest service will resolutely declare that such results do not happen by accident. It requires purposeful strategy and ongoing training. Outstanding guest service is not to be viewed as a single grueling workout, but as a perpetual fitness routine. More than an independent facet of the business which is addressed on occasion, excellent customer service is engrained into the company culture.

Jesus declared in Matthew 20:28 that He had come, not to be served, but to serve. With Jesus as the supreme example it should certainly be engrained in the culture of the church to be a serving group. An environment and culture of hospitality should be a fundamental element of such service. If people visit the church and determine not to return, may it not be said that such a decision was influenced by an attitude of indifference by those in the church.

An analysis of guest service on behalf of the church can benefit greatly from lessons gleaned in the business world. The examples (both positive and negative) are virtually limitless, but for the purpose of this study will be refined to four specific companies. Each of these, while operating in different niches of the corporate world, are widely regarded as exceptional examples of customer service and have received industry awards confirming such opinions. Inclusion of a company in this list should not be regarded as an endorsement of all business practices of that company. In some cases the writer would be pleased to be associated with the principles for which a company stands,

and in other cases the writer would differ widely with a company's position. Inclusion in this analysis is simply an acknowledgement of the company's general success in the area of guest service and an attempt to gain helpful insight into this topic.

Walt Disney World

The Disney entertainment empire is vast. Walt Disney World, while only one piece of the large puzzle that composes the Disney tapestry, boasts to be the largest single site employer in the United States, utilizing approximately 60,000 employees (<http://corporate.disney.go.com>).

Disney is well known for paying meticulous attention to detail. Employees are referred to as "cast members" and whether their individual job is portraying a character or serving a meal, they are regarded as "on stage" in any setting where they will encounter guests. "In Disney-speak, your setting is wherever your customer meets you The setting that customers experience plays a critical role in how they perceive their encounter with your organization. The importance of managing the effect of setting on the guest experience can be summed up in two words: Everything speaks" (Disney Institute 2001, 33).

In the Disney culture practices such as smiling, greeting, and thanking guests are considered fundamental, but such things are not intended to become mere mechanical behaviors. Such courtesies are regarded simply as minimum expectations in striving to serve guests. Something such as indifference toward a guest, a frown, or a discarded gum wrapper is viewed as an intrusion on the magic world that the parks are designed to create. All of the dynamics of the experience, from the presentation of the facilities to the

contribution of every cast member, is regarded as an important part of the integrative process in which quality service is achieved.

Walt Disney World reports an amazing customer retention rate of over seventy percent. “One of the most often-stated reasons why guests return for another visit? The cast” (Disney Institute 2001, 31). Simply stated, Disney credits their people with being one of the most influential factors in repeat visitors.

This observation bears an undeniable similarity to findings in the realms of repeat visitors to church. Rainer states it this way: “One issue of first impression stands clearly above others in importance. The formerly unchurched told us that one of the key reasons for their returning to a particular church was the friendliness of the members” (Rainer 2001, 95). The church, unlike Walt Disney World, is not in the entertainment industry. The lesson, however, merits learning: People make the difference.

Chick-Fil-A

In 2010 Chick-Fil-A posted sales of over \$3.5 billion. This represented a staggering forty-three consecutive years of sales increase since the business opened its first store in 1967 (<http://www.chick-fil-a.com>).

Chick-Fil-A is regarded by many to establish the standard of excellent customer service in the fast-food industry. One franchise owner from Texas says, “When customers come in, we insist on great customer service, with polite team members who make eye contact with their customers and treat them with respect” (Cathy 2002, 91). One need only to visit different Chick-Fil-A locations to determine that this priority of customer service is an expectation in the franchise’s culture. Whether visiting a

restaurant in Texas, Kentucky, Arkansas, or anywhere else the franchise is located, one will be greeted with a statement such as “I’ll be glad to serve the next ready guest.” Should the customer thank the employee for their service the likely response will be – “It’s my pleasure.” Some might argue that such “canned statements” can become simply rote, mechanical responses. Perhaps that is a danger, but they seem to provide unquestionable evidence of a high and consistent commitment to excellent customer service.

In the book *Hug Your Customers*, Jack Mitchell says that customers value things such as a friendly greeting, personal interest, and a business that makes them feel special (Mitchell 2003, 60). It certainly seems that Chick-Fil-A leadership has embraced such thinking and attempted to incorporate it into the fabric of their company. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A says,

If you were working in a restaurant and suddenly the President of the United States showed up, your voice and facial expressions would change. You’d be eager to serve the President well, make sure he had a clean table, then go up and see if everything was all right, or if he needed anything. If we’re willing to do that for the President, why not treat every customer that well? (Cathy 2002, 26)

On an even grander scale, that statement has biblical precedent. In Matthew 25:31-45 Jesus addresses a matter of those who serve others and refuse service to others. He says in Matthew 25:40, “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’.” In Matthew 25:45 He states the negative side of the coin when He says, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Truett Cathy’s challenge to serve customers as if serving the president can be magnified in the church. Those in the church should show hospitality and a welcome to guests as if that hospitality were being shown to the Lord.

In October 1982, Cathy and other leaders of the Chick-Fil-A drafted their Corporate Purpose Statement. It reads, “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-Fil-A” (Cathy 2002, 124). Such a commitment to honor God and bless others provides a stirring challenge to churches to expect no less.

Starbucks

Starbucks opened its first store in 1971 in the Pike’s Place Market in Seattle, Washington. After twenty years the company had opened a total of 116 stores. By the end of the next twenty years that number had skyrocketed to almost 17,000. Among their more recent industry awards are 2009-2010 “No. 1 Best Coffee” in the fast food and quick refreshment categories, and 2009-2010 “No. 1 Most Popular Quick Refreshment Chain” (<http://assets.starbucks.com>).

Starbucks takes pride in being considered a “third place.” In addition to the customer’s home and work place, they attempt to position themselves as an important place in the customer’s life. They say, “We’re a neighborhood gathering place, a part of the daily routine – and we couldn’t be happier about it. Get to know us and you’ll see: we are so much more than what we brew” (<http://www.starbucks.com>).

There is no doubt that a significant share of the Starbucks success belongs to the quality of the product, but those who have studied the organization are quick to point out that the story goes well beyond that. Much of what contributes to the phenomenal success of Starbucks can be categorized as customer service. Store managers are tasked with the job of constantly putting themselves in the shoes of customers, striving to see

every detail from the other side of the counter. Their philosophy says, “Even when customers don’t consciously track the details, those details – whether managed well or overlooked – often result in the lingering impression that customers have of a company” (Michelli 2007, 57). Rainer echoes a similar charge to churches when he says, “In everything we do, we try to put ourselves in the place of first-time guests and ask ourselves if we are really a friendly, welcoming church” (Rainer 1993, 277).

Mitchell argues that in the corporate world, “Businesses have lost sight of the idea that customers, not product, are the most important priority It’s how you treat customers that determines your long-term success” (Mitchell 2003, 20). It seems that Starbucks embraces this idea, insisting that not only does everything matter, but everyone matters. “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring . . .” (Michelli 2007, 47).

The church can find very pertinent help in evaluating an organization such as Starbucks. Attention to detail is important in everything from the condition of the facility to the quality of printed material. And while those things are critical, through it all there must be the remembrance that people matter more. Those seeking to welcome guests in the church must likewise remember the inestimable value of things such as a smile, a kind word, and a listening ear.

The Ritz-Carlton Hotels

In both 2010 and 2011 The Ritz Carlton received the J. D. Power and Associates award for guest satisfaction among luxury hotels (<http://www.jdpower.com>),

and over the years of its existence has accumulated virtually every award the hospitality industry bestows. While operating outside a price range that is approachable by many consumers, the fact remains that The Ritz Carlton is an organization that is renowned for and committed to outstanding guest service.

A fundamental principle upon which The Ritz Carlton operates is, “You can’t put the veneer of quality on a business that lacks a sound foundation” (Michelli 2008, 19). This is valuable insight that has merit in virtually any arena. The most important thing is not an impressive facade, but stability at the core. This is true in the character of an individual, the business practices of a company, or the anchor of a church.

The Ritz Carlton introduces itself as a company with “an unshakeable . . . corporate philosophy of un-wavering commitment to service” (www.ritzcarlton.com). In describing the commitment to customer service, leaders at The Ritz Carlton say that it largely boils down to the principle that, “we treat people with the same respect we would desire” (Michelli 2008, 154). Such a goal sounds remarkably similar to the words of Matthew 7:12 – “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”

The leadership at Ritz Carlton strives to weave three basic things into the core of their culture:

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest’s name.
2. Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest’s needs.
3. A fond farewell. Give a warm good-bye, and use the guest’s name.

Such principles are so easily transferrable to a church context. Each guest should receive a warm greeting. Workers should strive to anticipate a guest’s needs. For example, a family with small children may need to know the location of the nursery, or an elderly

guest may need an escort to a seat. Such items should never be forced on an individual or family, but should certainly be immediately accessible. And when departing, guests should be acknowledged and given a warm farewell. In the setting of one's home, failure to at least acknowledge a guest's existence upon arrival or departure, or failing to offer help with obvious needs would be unconscionable. Should it be regarded as any more acceptable in the setting of church?

The Ritz Carlton demonstrates another model that is beneficial for the church to emulate in their seeking of information from outside sources. Evaluation from outside observers is seen, not as a threatening intrusion, but as a helpful tool in maintaining a customer focus and designing effective processes and improvements. They consider "a process of inquiry essential to excellence" (Michelli 2008, 256). At times such information helps them discover new things that need to be in place, and at other times it may reveal something which needs to be eliminated. One leader at The Ritz Carlton says, "Often, it's as simple as asking yourself why you have done something the same way for 10 years. You may be surprised that the only answer is 'Because that is the way we've always done it'" (Michelli 2008, 56). The writer suspects that statement rings familiar to many with long histories serving in the church. As with a luxury hotel, many churches could benefit greatly from inviting input from "outsiders" to help grasp the benefit of perspective through fresh eyes.

Summary of Corporate Examples

As stated previously, the number of guest service examples which could be drawn from the corporate world is virtually limitless. The preceding companies are

highlighted for two primary reasons. First, they represent a sampling of those who have been recognized for excellence in the field of guest service. Second, because of their distinctiveness. They are all similar in the commitment to serving customers, but they are widely varied in their products. It is the hope of the writer that by selecting these four specific examples that one can readily see that whether an organization deals in entertainment (Disney), fast food (Chick-Fil-A), coffee (Starbucks), or luxury (Ritz-Carlton), they all require effective customer service. Additionally, whatever the context, most principles of organizational hospitality are transferable.

John Dijulius says, “Every business begins and ends at the front desk. When people talk about terrible customer service, nine times out of ten it’s based on a misstep at the front desk” (Dijulius 2003, 53). The truth is practically universal when dealing with people: The front line matters. First impressions are powerful. To disregard this principle is simply faulty leadership.

Where Doctrine Meets Practice

The hospitality shown to guests should never be viewed as a substitute for proper doctrine, but neither should proper doctrine be seen as an excuse to accept anything less than excellence in the arena of guest service. Going to an extreme on either side of that road can land a church in a ditch, but recognizing the value and compatibility of both can help bring balance. Ken Hemphill addresses this tension when he says at one point, “Targeting the unsaved is not the first issue of worship; adoring and praising sovereign God is the first issue” (Hemphill 1994, 51). Yet he says at another time in the same book, “If we are not interested in numerical growth, we are not interested in

fulfilling the Great Commission, and we are not in harmony with the Word of God” (Hemphill 1994, 12). Are these statements contradictory? No more so than to say that a car needs tires on both the right side and the left. The two do not contradict each other, but rather work in harmony and balance to accomplish the proper function.

Can Hospitality and Doctrinal Purity Coexist

The writer regards it as essential that this question be clearly answered: Can a commitment to guest service and hospitality coexist with a commitment to doctrinal purity? The writer insists that the only acceptable answer is that not only can they coexist, but it is imperative that they do so. To claim excellence in one at the negligence of the other discredits them both.

“God in his wisdom asks that we first love him and then live in keeping with that core value Gratitude for the grace of God will always be found near the center of the biblical Christian’s most powerful motivations” (Anders 2002, 139). The writer agrees with this statement and suggests that its truth may have no greater relevance than in the setting of love for others. Gratitude for the grace of God should stir the Christian to pursue the glory of God in every facet of life, and gratitude for that grace will certainly motivate one to extend grace to others. The church that is so inwardly focused that it loses sensitivity to others has taken a dangerous step in the direction of callousness toward that for which Christ cares the most – people.

Alvin Reid observes that “the love of God and the holiness of God must be held in balance” (Reid 1998, 88). So also must a commitment to welcoming others be

held in balance with a commitment to doctrinal purity. The former does not preempt the latter, but rather flows from it.

George Barna uses the term “user friendly churches.” He says,

This expression does not connote any form of spiritual compromise, which would not please God, nor indicate a genuine Christian ministry. The term reflects the steadfast determination of these churches to remain theologically pure while adapting their ministry methods to the needs of the audience and to the tenor of the culture. (Barna 1993, 111)

Demarest and Lewis state, “Christians express the shared values of their ‘partnership in the gospel’ in a local church (Phil 1:5).” They go on to further say, “The church is not a community of lonely people” (Demarest and Lewis 1987, 275). Similarly, those outside the church who are not a part of the membership and perhaps are not a part of the family of the redeemed, upon entering a church building should receive an offer of hospitality that conveys the message clearly that they have entered a welcoming, loving place. Just as Jesus Christ has modeled, the church should be uncompromising in truth and unwavering in love.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the case that every organization that deals with people consists of some element of customer service. The church is not exempt from this truth. On the contrary, the church should exemplify excellent hospitality. A critical element of this hospitality is the matter of first impressions. Often the first impressions are the messages that communicate most prominently in the mind of a guest.

Examples of customer service have been drawn from some organizations in the world of business. Such examples present valuable lessons from which church leaders can learn.

Furthermore, the writer has attempted to state clearly the truth that doctrinal purity and guest service do not stand in opposition to other. When properly practiced the two should function hand in hand.

In chapter 2, biblical and theological foundations were established in regard to the necessity of hospitality in the church. In chapter 3 the importance of hospitality and guest service has been considered from a somewhat pragmatic perspective. The following chapter will compose a project which emerges from these two that will seek to address such issues in the context of Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas.

CHAPTER 4
EVALUATING THE VISITOR RETENTION PROCESS
AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

“Research reveals that we form dozens of impressions about a business and its employees within the first few minutes of our service experience” (Ford, McNair, and Perry 2009, 81). Understanding the significance of such a truth, it was the writer’s intention to undertake this project with the purpose of evaluating the visitor retention process at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas, specifically as it is influenced by two factors: (1) the first impressions a guest receives upon attending a Sunday morning service, and (2) the initial follow-up efforts.

Goals of the Project

Three goals were stated in relation to this project:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of hospitality at Antioch’s weekend ministry from the perspective of those outside the church.
2. Motivate and train the members of Antioch to foster a warm, welcoming attitude toward newcomers.
3. Implement a strategic plan for visitor follow up.

It has been previously stated that often a church’s perception of itself in regard to hospitality can be quite different from the perception of those outside the church. This project did not disregard either perspective, but rather sought to gain and compare input from both vantage points.

Methodology of the Project

To gather an *inside* perspective a survey was conducted within the church. In order to ascertain opinions from those *outside* the church a group of “mystery worshippers” was utilized. Much akin to what businesses often undertake with mystery shoppers, these mystery worshippers attended a Sunday morning service for the purpose of evaluating and providing feedback relative to specific areas.

In regard to follow-up efforts, the first half of the project was conducted using only the present methods of follow-up with guests, such as a letter from the pastor and a visit by a staff member or visitation team. By the midway point of the project a web-based mapping tool was developed. The purpose of this tool was to add the dimension of intentionally and strategically using church members in follow-up efforts by connecting members and guests who live in close proximity to one another. The second half of the project was conducted utilizing this tool.

Mystery Worshippers

One filter pertaining to the mystery worshippers was the hope that these individuals would be first time guests at Antioch. Ideally the groups of mystery worshippers would be made up of people who had never visited Antioch, or at least had not done so in the previous ten years. The purpose of seeking individuals who had no recent history of attendance at Antioch was to reduce the likelihood of preconceived opinions (either positive or negative) adversely influencing the objectivity of input provided.

Mystery worshipper process. Mystery worshippers were divided into two groups. Group 1 visitors attended one of Antioch’s Sunday morning services and completed a visitor evaluation prior to the church’s awareness of the project. Following the completion of this initial phase a period of teaching relative to hospitality was conducted within the church. Included in this process was a member evaluation which was conducted with everyone (adults and youth) in attendance at Antioch on a specific Sunday morning. The purpose of this evaluation was to gather input as to church member’s opinions about the hospitality shown to guests. This data was compared to the input provided by the first group of mystery worshippers to determine whether a discrepancy of opinion existed between the church and the mystery worshippers. Following this period of teaching, a second group of mystery worshippers (again unbeknownst to the church at large) attended a service and provided a visitor evaluation. Input compared from the two groups of mystery worshippers allowed an analysis to be made considering whether any measurable change in regard to the first impressions visitors receive occurred following the time of teaching.

Moments Of Truth

Gary McIntosh defines a “moment of truth” as “any occasion in which a person comes into contact with and forms an impression of your church” (McIntosh 2006, 28). A moment of truth results in the guest formulating an opinion or feeling – either positive or negative – about the church. Examples of such moments of truth relative to Sunday mornings include items such as (1) arriving in the church parking lot; (2) walking to the front door; (3) entering the building; (4) meeting people; (5) the

condition of facilities such as restrooms or nurseries; (6) entering the sanctuary; (7) experiencing the service; (8) leaving the worship service; (9) attending a small group Bible study; (10) contacts during the following week. Such moments of truth are some of those for which this project sought input.

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson challenge church leaders to “Take off any blinders and take a long look at your church Take a hard look at the way things really are” (Stetzer and Dodson 2007, 28). That was the objective of this project. By utilizing the element of mystery worshippers it was the writer’s hope to gain input from a perspective without the filter of “blinders” that can so easily influence those within a particular church.

The Project

The process by which this project was carried out is presented in the following 15 phases.

Phase 1: Recruitment of Mystery Worshippers (Group 1)

The primary avenue through which efforts were made to recruit mystery worshippers was a variety of acquaintances of the writer and his family. These included merchants with whom he has conducted business (such as a dry cleaner, barber, and C.P.A.), neighbors, and others with whom he has become acquainted through means such as children’s schools (for example, a principal and others with whom the writer’s wife serves in parent / teacher organizations), or extra-curricular activities (such as parents of children on ball teams). Input from another member of the church staff was utilized to

help recruit a small number of the mystery worshippers. However, it was intended that the number of people within the church who knew about this project in its initial phase would be limited so as to not influence the objectivity of the evaluative process; therefore, suggestions sought from other members were minimal.

It was not a binding requirement of the project, but it was the hope that the variety of participants secured would represent a wide range of perspectives in regard to factors such as age, race, and current involvement in church. Any “outside perspective” was viewed as valuable, but it was the writer’s belief that a multiplicity of perspectives would prove beneficial in seeking to assess the condition of the church’s hospitality efforts.

It was the writer’s hope to secure between 15 and 20 participants for each group of mystery worshippers, resulting in feedback from 30 to 40 first time visitors in the course of the project. Procuring participation from that many people outside the scope of church members seemed ambitious but achievable. Details pertinent to the number of participants are presented below.

Phase 2: Presentation of Instrument

A questionnaire was composed and given to each person who fulfilled the role of mystery worshipper. This instrument sought input specific to some of the aforementioned “moments of truth” which guests typically encounter. Broadly speaking, the instrument was used to gather input concerning:

1. Personal information. (Example: Age, race, current frequency of church attendance).
2. Arrival. (Example: Did you notice the grounds as being in good order or in need of attention)?

3. Impressions upon entering the building. (Example: Did anyone speak to you? Was it clear where you were to go for worship or Bible study)?
4. Information relative to the nursery, if applicable. (Example: If you used the nursery, was the check-in process orderly or chaotic)?
5. Interaction with others in the Worship Center prior to the beginning of the service. (Example: If you arrived before the service began, did anyone speak to you or offer you a seat)?
6. Interaction with others immediately following the service. (Example: Did anyone try to engage you in conversation following the service)?
7. Small group Bible study. (Example: Did you find information relative to Bible study classes? Did you receive an invitation to attend a class)?
8. Follow-up contacts received in the week following the visit. (Example: Did you receive any contact from the church in the following week? If so, by what manner)?

Through this instrument efforts were made to accumulate input from a quadrilateral perspective. Some questions asked for very “black and white” responses, such as a “Yes or No” answer. Other questions presented a multiple choice component that would have been influenced by individual opinion. Still others utilized a Likert scale system where participants gave an impression based on a 1-10 scale. Finally, an open response section was included that offered opportunity for input that might not otherwise be gained. (A sample of this instrument can be seen in Appendix 1.)

Phase 3: Attendance of Group 1 Mystery Worshippers

Over the course of four months the first group of mystery worshippers attended one of Antioch’s three Sunday morning services. Services are conducted at 8:30, 9:45 and 11:00 each Sunday morning. The content and style of the services are consistent. Multiple services are offered simply as a means of providing adequate seating, not as a

means of varying any of the elements of the service. Mystery worshippers were given freedom to choose which service they would attend, just as any other guest would.

A four-month period of time to complete this portion of the project might seem lengthy but was due, in part, to the reality that the writer was somewhat at the mercy of participants. Unlike a series of classes to which members commit, or a project which utilizes people within the church who can be held accountable to some degree, this project was dependent on individuals who had no obligation to the church. Their agreement to serve as a mystery worshipper was voluntary and in no way binding. Their intentions could be (and were on occasion) altered on the basis of anything from sickness to simply a change in plans.

More important than spanning only a few weeks, it was regarded as most valuable that an adequate number of participants take part in the project. The aforementioned target of 30 to 40 participants seemed to the writer to constitute an ideal number as it would equate to roughly 10 to 15 percent of the number of households typically represented in Sunday morning services. It was further believed that a wide range of time would prove worthwhile by contributing to a more accurate appraisal, as it would provide a broader base of perspective. It was also preferable that the attendance of these visitors span a long enough period of time so as not to create an unusual swell in the number of first time guests. Guests were free to choose the week that was most convenient for them, but were asked to notify the writer which week they would be attending.

Eighteen mystery worshippers. As stated previously, the writer's goal was to involve 15 to 20 people in each of the two groups of mystery worshippers. More than 20 agreed to participate, but some did not follow through on this commitment. The writer made efforts to follow up with those who did not attend and reasons given included such things as "I got sick," "An unexpected conflict came up," "I forgot," and "My plans changed." However, at the end of the four-month period, the goal regarding group size had been realized as 18 mystery worshippers had attended a service and completed the feedback instrument. One or more of these 18 individuals attended a service on 12 different weeks during the four months, providing a broad base of perspective.

The number of mystery worshippers attending each service was as follows: 8:30 service – 3 mystery worshippers; 9:45 service – 4 mystery worshippers; 11:00 service – 11 mystery worshippers. Achieving this breakdown by which feedback was given in regard to all services was not a mandatory requirement in the scope of the project but it was advantageous, as the aim was to conduct an evaluation that encompassed the whole, rather than only specific services.

Interestingly, though mystery worshippers were not assigned specific services to attend, the final distribution of their attendance aligned with the general practice of attendance by those within the church. The fewest number attended at 8:30, the most attended at 11:00, with the middle number attending the middle service. While the breakdown of percentages would not be a precise reflection, the pattern is consistent with member attendance.

The questionnaire asked mystery worshippers to indicate if it were their first time to attend a service at Antioch in at least ten years. All but one affirmed that it was, with that individual indicating she had attended one service at Antioch in the previous decade. Though the questionnaire did not ask this specifically, all other mystery worshippers indicated informally to the writer that it was their first time to ever attend a service at Antioch.

Phase 4: A Grade from Group 1

Responses from the first group of mystery worshippers were utilized to establish a numeric grade. This was based primarily on the responses to those questions that were answered using the Likert Scale. Questions that were answered using the Likert Scale were intended to provide a summation of each category. For example, one section of the instrument asked for input relative to first impressions between the time one entered the building and subsequently entered the Worship Center. (There is a relatively large atrium / fellowship area between the main entrance of the building and the Worship Center entrance.) This section of the instrument concluded with the question: "Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience from the front door to the Worship Center? Circle one." Following this question a 1 - 10 scale was provided in which "1" represented "very poor" and "10" represented "very good." The numeric value given in answer to those questions was used to arrive at an average "grade" that each guest awarded the church.

Phase 5: A Grade from the Church

Following the attendance of all group 1 mystery worshippers a questionnaire was presented to the church on a Sunday morning seeking the “insider’s perspective.” This tool provided an opportunity for the church members (still unaware of the mystery worshipper’s participation) to give their opinions concerning the hospitality of the church. The questionnaire was distributed to the entire congregation (adults and youth) on a Sunday and completed during the context of each of the three morning services. The number of people completing this questionnaire was 690.

Questions on this evaluation were predominantly answered using a Likert Scale measurement, and responses were averaged to arrive at the grade which the church presented itself. (A copy of this questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 4). The number of questions was fewer than that posed to the mystery worshippers. This was intentional for two reasons: (1) It was intended to ascertain the *first response* of the members. The objective was not to ponder the questions at length, but to capture the *initial impression* of what manner of reception they believed a guest to Antioch would receive. (2) These questions were to be answered in the context of a few minutes during a service, thus it had to be completed in short order. The questions presented, though brief in nature, were designed to address the same areas that mystery worshippers had evaluated in order to provide a comparison between “insider” and “outsider” perceptions.

Making it personal. The questionnaire presented to the church dealt primarily with the matter of “general” hospitality – how they believed a guest would be welcomed by the church as a whole. However, a final question sought to personalize the issue,

asking members to give the score they felt would accurately represent their *own* efforts in welcoming others. The writer believes this question may have been the most significant of those posed to the church as it helped move the focus of responsibility for hospitality from a matter of *everybody's job* to an understanding that it is *my job*. The old adage admits that “everybody’s job is nobody’s job.” This principle certainly has application concerning efforts of hospitality in the church. The average grade given as it pertained to individual effort in hospitality was markedly lower than the average grade given as it related to corporate effort. Following the service in which the church survey was conducted, one individual stated to the writer, “I enjoyed answering that questionnaire until I got to the question that asked me to score myself. I hated that question! It made me feel convicted because I realize I’m not doing all I should.”

Phase 6: A Time of Teaching

A month-long series of Sunday morning sermons was devoted to the topic of hospitality. These messages composed a series entitled, “*Welcome?*” The series title word was intentionally posed as a question, suggesting that consideration be given to whether or not guests are truly welcomed as they should be when attending Antioch.

An outline of these messages can be seen in Appendix 7, but in brief the messages encompassed these four topics:

The debate. A correlation was drawn between the Shema (Deut 6:4-5) and Jesus’ response when questioned as to the greatest of all the commandments (Mark 12:28-34). Jesus harkened back to the commandment of Deuteronomy 6 to “love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,” and then harmonized this teaching

with the commandment of Leviticus 19:18, to “love your neighbor as yourself.” When those two are lived out, all other matters of the law are fulfilled. In fact, when the first is lived out, the second emerges from it. Antioch must be content with nothing less than fulfilling these.

Welcoming like Jesus. In Luke 15:1-2 the Scripture records the disgust of the Pharisees and teachers of the law because of Jesus’ practice of “welcoming sinners and eating with them.” It is interesting to note that the Pharisees *repelled* “sinners,” but Jesus *attracted* them. He did not compromise by condoning their sin, but the genuine love He displayed was magnetic. Which example should the church model today? (It was at this point in the series that the questionnaire referenced in Phase 5 was conducted within the church).

What really matters. A study was made of the three parables Jesus presented in Luke 15: The parable of the lost sheep; the parable of the lost coin; the parable of the lost son. In each story something of great worth was lost and when that which had been lost was found, a celebration ensued. Twice (verses 7 and 10) Jesus clearly announces that in the same way there is celebration in heaven when a lost person repents. From that passage followers of Christ can gain clear understanding that lost people matter to God. If the passion of the church is in step with the passion of its Master, there can be no mistake that people must matter to the church.

First impressions. In 1 Peter 4:7 Scripture declares, “The end of all things is near. Therefore . . . love each other deeply . . . offer hospitality.” In light of the truth

that the time is short, the church must be faithful in carrying out God's charge to reach out to others. Included in that must be an uncompromising commitment to show love to those God brings through the doors of the church. The church must be aware of the volume with which first impressions communicate to guests. It can hardly be said that the church is committed to reach others if the church is not committed showing hospitality to those who come seeking. (At this point Phase 7 was entered into, revealing the initial portion of the project).

Phase 7: Initial Project Revealed to Church

As the "Welcome?" series concluded, the project was made known to the church. This was carried out as a portion of the final message of the series. It was explained to the church that, just as businesses employ the input of mystery shoppers, Antioch had enlisted the help of mystery worshippers.

The process was explained how, over a period of four months, guests had attended a service at Antioch for the specific purpose of providing input relative to the church's hospitality and follow-up efforts. It was further explained that these guests had given input, suggestions, perceptions, and responses from the position of those who were not already firmly entrenched in the fellowship of the church body.

Having summarized the results from the evaluation conducted within the context of a Sunday morning service (as presented in Phase 5) the "grade" that was given to the church by those *in* the church was compared to the scores that had been given by the mystery worshippers. This provided an opportunity to "pat the church on the back" for areas that were excelling, and bring to light other matters which were lacking. For

example, mystery worshippers actually graded the church slightly *higher* than the members graded themselves in regard to the welcome a guest receives upon first entering the building. By contrast, when asked what percentage of guests they thought would receive at least an *invitation* to attend a Bible study class following a service, the number that church members speculated was almost three times higher than the reality experienced by the mystery worshippers.

Phase 8: Enlisting Members for Follow-Up

The plan to utilize church members in follow up contacts with guests was presented at the conclusion of the “Welcome?” series. It was explained that volunteers were being sought who would be willing to make a personal visit to guests during the week following their initial attendance. The purpose of this visit would be to simply express appreciation for their visit and extend an invitation to return. The plan was that one who would be asked to follow up with a guest would be one who lives in close proximity to the guest. The concept is that of *neighbors greeting neighbors*. A total of 378 individuals signed and turned in an enlistment card indicating their willingness to be called upon if a visitor in the vicinity of their home needed to be contacted. This number represented 236 households in Conway and the surrounding communities.

Michael Zigarelli asks, “Isn’t it the case that we’re more receptive to the ideas of those who are like us in many ways . . . ? At the department store, don’t we see women selling cosmetics to women? On TV, don’t we see seventy-year-olds selling low-cost life insurance to senior citizens” (Zigarelli 2008, 44). Capitalizing on a similar concept, this portion of the project sought to use proximity as the common connecting

point. While that was the first filter used in selecting which member to have contact a guest, other filters were needed on occasion. For example, if five members who have volunteered to help with follow up each lived within a half-mile of a guest, who would be asked to make a visit? Multiple members were not asked to make an immediate contact, as the purpose was not to overwhelm or become a nuisance to the guest. In such cases other connecting filters were considered such as age, presence of children in the home and their age(s), or marital status, just to name a few.

Some would argue that a personal follow-up is not appreciated in today's culture. While the writer acknowledges that in some cases this might be true, he believes that a majority of the time it is not. Thom Rainer supports this writer's opinion when he says,

Though some church growth pundits have indicated that visitor follow-up is not welcome in today's culture, our research indicates that it is critical for both growth and ultimately retention. While a few churches can boast of dynamic growth with little follow-up outreach, their example are rare. And, unfortunately, many church leaders have followed those examples with disastrous results in their own churches. (Rainer1999, 92)

Rainer goes on to indicate that the method of outreach deemed most effective by church visitors that they interviewed was *a visit from a layperson*. This aligns perfectly with the aim of using lay people to help conduct follow-up with their own neighbors.

Phase 9: Development of Mapping Tool

This tool utilized the name, address, and other pertinent information provided by church members who volunteered (in phase 8) to be used in guest follow-up. These member's homes were pinpointed on a web-based map in order to show the precise

location of their residence. From that point forward when guests attended Antioch, if they provided their home address, those addresses were entered into the mapping tool program to generate a list of nearby members and the distance from their homes to guests' homes.

This tool was developed in consultation with The Gadberry Group, an information systems company headquartered in Little Rock, Arkansas. This organization describes itself as one that “provides location-based services and information data products for clients who demand the most current, accurate, and precise household and population data” (<http://www.gadberry.net>). Leadership at The Gadberry Group expressed an interest in partnering in such a project for two reasons:

1. They are Christian business people who desire to see the ministry of the church enhanced.
2. They viewed it as a test having potential value for the company. Their work is presently in the corporate arena, and this project generated some interest concerning the possibility of such a product to serve ministry needs and perhaps fill a market niche on a broader scale.

Phase 10: Recruitment of Mystery Worshippers (Group 2)

The writer, at this point, secured a second group of mystery worshippers. The intention was for the size of this group to be comparable to the number participating in the first segment of mystery worshippers. The same methods and filters were used for recruitment. Details specific to this group and a comparison to the original group of mystery worshippers is provided in the following phase.

Phase 11: Attendance of Group 2 Mystery Worshippers

Following the month of teaching (as outlined in Phase 6); the enlistment of church members interested in assisting with follow up efforts (Phase 8); and the development of the mapping tool (Phase 10); another four month period of time was utilized during which the second group of mystery worshippers attended a morning service at Antioch. Following their attendance they were asked to complete the same questionnaire that had been given to those in the first group of mystery worshippers.

Eighteen mystery worshippers. As previously stated, 18 people attended a service and completed the survey instrument in the first group of mystery worshippers. The writer did not set out with an intentional goal to have the *exact* number in each group, but that is precisely what transpired. At the end of the four months, 18 new mystery worshippers had attended a Sunday morning service at Antioch and completed the survey. In this phase of the project mystery worshippers were present on 10 Sundays, as opposed to 12 Sundays in the original group.

Once again, as with the first group of mystery worshippers, participants were given freedom to choose the service they wanted to attend just as a “normal” guest would do. Again, the distribution that occurred between the services was a welcomed enhancement to the project. The number of mystery worshippers attending each service was as follows: 8:30 service – 5 mystery worshippers; 9:45 service – 7 mystery worshippers; 11:00 service – 6 mystery worshippers.

As with the first group, these individuals were asked if this represented their first time to attend a service at Antioch in at least a decade. Corresponding identically to

the first group, all but one indicated it was, with that one stating that she had attended one other service in that time.

One additional note of interest was the fact that each group contained members who represented a perspective of those actively involved in church as well as others less involved. In the first group 10 participants indicated their personal church attendance was less than weekly. Five of those acknowledged their church attendance was best described by the statements “I attend church occasionally, but not regularly (less than once a month),” or “I rarely or never attend church.” None of the participants in the second group of mystery worshippers indicated their church attendance as that sporadic, though 6 acknowledged their church attendance pattern was less than weekly. From that perspective the first group seemed to be “less churched,” but each group contained a broad perspective of both those who acknowledged they were, as well as others who acknowledged they were not, very actively involved in church.

Phase 12: Utilizing Members In Follow-Up

At this point the process of utilizing members who volunteered to help in follow up (phase 8) and the mapping tool (phase 9) was put in motion. When a guest visiting Antioch provided their home address, this information was entered into the mapping tool and a church member was given the assignment of making a personal contact within the following week. Members making such visits were asked to provide a response to the church office following the visit (or attempted visit). The purpose of this response was twofold: First, it served to maintain accountability in the follow up

process; second it helped in providing any additional information that might be of value in serving the guest.

Phase 13: A Grade From Group 2

Responses from the second group of mystery worshippers were utilized to establish a numeric grade. The same method of scoring was used as had been performed with the first group of mystery worshippers (as recorded in phase 4). No changes were made in the grading process so that consistency would allow as accurate an “apples to apples” comparison as possible.

Phase 14: Analysis Of Data And Formulation Of Conclusions

Exercising a comparison of the data provided by the initial and subsequent groups of mystery worshippers, an analysis was made. The summary of these findings is provided in the subsequent chapter. Conclusions were drawn relative to the goals established at the project’s outset. Grounded on those matters revealed by the project, suggestions were formulated to help the church in ongoing efforts to enhance hospitality and follow-up.

Phase 15: Final Project Revealed To Church

As with the first group of mystery worshippers, the church at large was unaware of the second group which attended for the purpose of providing feedback. At this point the final project was presented to the church in the context of a Sunday morning service. This provided the opportunity to remind the church and reinforce the

understanding that hospitality and effective follow up are not matters that deserve attention only for a few weeks. Rather, they must be values that are engrained into the culture of the church and perpetually held in high regard. The conclusion of the project also provided an opportunity to invite participation of other members who would be interested in reaching out to neighbors who visit Antioch. It is exciting that this part of the project will now serve as an ongoing element of Antioch's follow-up efforts. An additional 30 members expressed a desire to serve in this way when needed.

Summary of Time

The time frame of the project encompassed 4 months during which the first group of mystery worshippers attended, another 4 months during which the second group of mystery worshippers attended, and a month of teaching that was conducted within the church. Additionally, there was approximately 1 month of time devoted to the details of developing the mapping tool in consultation with The Gadberry Group, and aligning data for proper execution within the tool. Thus, the full scope of the project spanned 10 months – the majority of 2011.

Conclusion

Jesus was a master of questions. Many times throughout the Gospel accounts He used a question to create a teachable moment, or responded to another's question with an inquiry of His own. The writer certainly does not regard himself to be anywhere near the plane of the Divine, but it was his intention to use a similar method in fulfilling this project.

Much of the substance of the project originated from answers to questions. The mystery worshippers responded to questions about specific areas of hospitality (“moments of truth”) and follow up. With the church at large, before being told what “outsiders” had to say of their hospitality, they were asked what *they* thought of their efforts, both collectively and individually. Some of the responses given by church members indicated that having to grapple with such questions caused some to acknowledge areas in need of improvement.

While perhaps speculative more than scientific, it is the writer’s belief that by approaching these matters from the basis of answers to the questions posed, a firmer and more persuasive platform was constructed from which to deal with the topic than if the launching pad had been simply instructive. The writer’s opinion of what was good, bad, needed, or lacking in regard to Antioch’s hospitality and immediate follow-up might have provided some merit, but the testimony of the mystery worshippers spoke with an even clearer and unbiased tone.

Thom Rainer says, “High expectation churches believe that assimilation actually begins well before someone decides to join a church” (Rainer 1999, 24). While the writer does not know with certainty if Antioch in Conway merits the honor of the title “High Expectation Church,” he agrees with Rainer’s assessment. He further believes that the Antioch family desires to achieve such distinguishment. It is his hope that this project has helped facilitate strides in that direction.

“Love of God’s people for one another remains the defining characteristic of Jesus’ church. Love continues to be the foundation of His church’s impact and reputation in the world” (Blanchard and Hodges 2008, 87). It is the aspiration of the writer that an

ongoing result of this project will be lasting inspiration for Antioch to scale greater heights in regard to love that is demonstrated through a hospitable church family. The motivation behind this aspiration is multi-faceted, but supremely it is driven by the hope that everyone who walks through the church's doors will see a witness of God's love in action through the church.

“To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph 3:21).

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATION
OF THE PROJECT

Having completed the project, attention now is turned to the matters of evaluation, conclusions, and an overall reflection in regard to the finished product. A purpose for the project and goals were established at the outset, and consideration will be given as to the progress achieved toward fulfillment of those goals and purpose. As with any project, the value of hindsight allows one to see strengths, weaknesses, and adjustments that would prove beneficial in future applications of the project. Closure of the project allows the writer opportunity for reflection from a multiplicity of perspectives including theological, pragmatic, and personal.

Evaluation of Purpose

The purpose stated at the genesis of the project was to undertake a study at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas, in which an evaluation would be made as to *“the warmth of reception offered to guests at weekend services and the effectiveness of follow up efforts.”* This purpose was achieved with the assistance of 36 individuals from outside the church body who voluntarily served as mystery worshippers. Each participant attended one of Antioch’s Sunday morning services. Following their visit each mystery worshipper completed a questionnaire that sought feedback relative to first impressions and hospitality.

Evaluation was approached from a three-dimensional perspective. First, the mystery worshippers were divided into 2 groups of 18 participants. Following the attendance of all those in group 1, responses were compiled to establish scores in 5 different categories, as well as a cumulative score that the church received. These scores established a baseline for future comparison.

Second, at the midway point of the project the congregation completed a questionnaire composed of Likert Scale responses. This instrument sought to gain an “insider’s opinion” as to the hospitality of the church. The questionnaire completed by the church was not identical to the instrument that mystery worshippers completed, but did seek input regarding similar areas of hospitality. Responses from within the church were used to arrive at a score in 4 categories. These totals provided data whereby a comparison could be made between the perception of those within and outside the church.

Third, the second group of 18 mystery worshippers attended and completed the same questionnaire that had been utilized with group 1. The same process was used whereby scores were assigned. The categorical and cumulative scores of group 2 were assembled and compared to the scores of group 1 to determine whether any change had occurred.

Evaluation of Goals

Three goals were stated at the outset of the project. An evaluation of these goals is offered.

Goal 1

The first goal was to “*evaluate the effectiveness of Antioch’s weekend ministry from the perspective of those outside the church, with specific attention given to the warmth of welcome extended to guests at Sunday worship services.*” Imperative to the fulfillment of this goal was involvement and evaluation by a group that could offer the perspective of those “outside the church.” Approximately 55 individuals who were believed to have little or no prior history of involvement with Antioch were invited to serve as a mystery worshipper. As previously stated, 36 participants filled this role. The writer’s ambition was, at the conclusion of the project, to have a range of 15 to 20 participants in each of the two groups of mystery worshippers, for a total range of 30 to 40. This number was realized, and the goal of gaining an analysis from an outside perspective was achieved.

All but 2 of the mystery worshipper participants verified it was their first time to attend a service at Antioch within at least ten years. The 2 who indicated having attended a service at Antioch in the prior ten years noted that they had only attended one other time in that period. Of the 34 who responded that it was their first time to attend a service at Antioch in at least ten years, it is believed that only 1 of these had *ever* attended a service at Antioch, and that 1 individual indicated that the previous attendance had been more than twenty years prior. The writer believes these details contribute to the fulfillment of the project’s first goal. Without the influence of excessive preconceived opinions relative to Antioch, these individuals were well suited to provide feedback regarding first impressions communicated by the hospitality and follow-up efforts (or lack thereof) that they received.

The questionnaire which mystery worshippers were asked to complete sought feedback relative to a broad range of hospitality issues. These included matters such as:

1. The first impressions communicated by the condition of the grounds and facilities.
2. The first impressions communicated by the welcome received upon entering the building.
3. The first impressions communicated by the interaction with others prior to and following the service.
4. The first impressions communicated by one's interaction with the nursery department, if utilized.
5. The first impressions communicated upon receiving (or not receiving) an invitation to attend a Bible study class.
6. The first impression communicated by the reception received in a Bible Study class, if attended.
7. The first impressions communicated through follow up contacts received (or the absence thereof) during the week following the initial visit to a service.

(A sample of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1.) The writer believes that these variables were valuable in the fulfillment of the project's evaluative goal in that they provided a wide base from which the mystery worshippers were able to respond regarding the church's hospitality efforts.

The writer asserts that fulfillment of this evaluative goal was additionally enhanced by virtue of the timeframe that the project spanned. Each group's participation involved approximately four months. Thus, the total time for the attendance of the 36 mystery worshippers spanned roughly eight months. This detail is significant as it allowed for a more thorough and accurate evaluation than might have been accomplished in a shorter time frame. This broad track of time helped assure that feedback (and consequently, final evaluations) would not be disproportionately influenced (either

positively or negatively) by unusual “highs or lows” during the project period, such as holiday weekends or special events.

The instrument through which the mystery worshippers provided feedback did not ask for details concerning the number of people in the mystery worshipper’s family. Informally, however, the writer estimates that these individuals represented approximately 100 immediate family members. It was not in every case that all family members of the mystery worshipper attended the service, but in many cases they did. The writer suspects that in such cases the perceptions of and discussions with these family members would have influenced the feedback provided by the mystery worshipper, thus practically speaking, significantly broadening the base from which input was received. Again, the instrument did not seek out such details; therefore, the writer does not offer it as verifiable data, but rather as a point of interest in regard to the fulfillment of the project’s first goal.

Goal 2

The second goal stated at the beginning of the project was to “*motivate and train the members of Antioch to foster a warm, welcoming attitude toward newcomers.*” Attitudes are intangible and, consequently, can prove challenging to measure. Training could certainly be provided in an endless number of ways, but how could the writer determine in the context of this project whether the goal of fostering a healthy attitude had been achieved? This goal is best viewed, not as one to which the church arrives, but one toward which the church should constantly strive. Any church or church leader

would be naïve (if not utterly foolish) to suppose that their church had reached perfection in terms of the spirit of hospitality demonstrated to guests.

With that stated, it should be understood that the goal was not to arrive at a final destination in regard to hospitality, but to make strides forward in that ongoing journey to be better at offering hospitality to (and thus, hopefully retaining) visitors. This goal was accomplished.

Training. As stated in the goal, the intention was to train and motivate the people of Antioch to foster a warm, welcoming attitude toward guests. Training occurred in the context of a four-part Sunday morning sermon series that was presented between the first and second groups of mystery worshippers. Outlines of these sermons are presented in Appendix 7.

In the course of this series, a questionnaire was presented to the church. All adults and youth present on that Sunday morning who were willing to do so completed this survey. Six hundred and ninety people completed this questionnaire. Church members were asked to give the score they thought would reflect the level of hospitality a guest would receive. The purpose of this exercise was to determine whether a discrepancy existed between the opinions church members had regarding the church's hospitality and what had been revealed by the first group of mystery worshippers.

Comparisons were drawn in four areas: (1) impressions communicated upon arrival; (2) hospitality extended in the Worship Center prior to the beginning of a service; (3) hospitality expressed immediately following a service; (4) the church's estimate of what percentage of guests they thought would receive a personal invitation to a Bible

study class. Additionally, members were asked to give a score that they believed to be indicative of the job they were *personally* doing in welcoming others. Results of this comparison are noted in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of scores from mystery worshippers (group 1) and Antioch members

Category	Mystery Worshipper (Group One) Score	Church Survey Score	Difference Between Mystery Worshipper and Church Score
Upon Arrival	81%	78%	(3)
In Worship Center (prior to service)	54%	72%	18
Following Service	69%	65%	(4)
% Receiving Invitation to Bible Study	11%	28%	17
Average self-evaluation score when members were asked how they thought they were personally doing in welcoming guests			45%

As seen in Table 1, the church projected itself slightly lower in two categories (Upon Arrival and Following Service) than the scores assigned by the mystery worshippers. In the other two categories (In Worship Service and % Receiving Invitation to Bible Study) the church scored itself higher.

While a comparison between the mystery worshippers' scores and the church's scores did reveal some discrepancy, the writer was pleased that the church seemed to present a sober judgment. Though the writer would consider the areas of discrepancy significant, he would not consider them dramatic.

Perhaps the most telling of all the questions posed to the church was the one which asked members to consider their personal efforts in welcoming guests. Members were asked to give the score that they felt their own efforts merited. The average score members assigned to themselves was 45%, on a 100 point scale. The writer was somewhat surprised by this score. He had expected that people would tend to score themselves on the upper end of the scale. The honesty with which people assessed themselves provided a persuasive platform from which to motivate and train members to recognize hospitality as a *personal responsibility*, and not merely something that *someone* should do.

Prior to completion of this survey, church members were unaware that a group of mystery worshippers had been engaged. One week following the in-church questionnaire, the first portion of the project was revealed to the church. The comparison between the *insider opinion* and *outsider opinion* was demonstrated to the church body. The church was challenged to strive for improvement and excellence in the arena of hospitality.

Following this time of training, the second group of mystery worshippers was utilized. Significant improvement in hospitality efforts was demonstrated following the training. The basis on which this assertion is made is a comparison of data from the first and second groups of mystery worshippers.

Comparison of group responses. Seven categories were considered in comparing scores between the two groups of mystery worshippers: (1) impressions upon arrival; (2) impressions upon entering the building; (3) interaction with others upon

entering the Worship Center; (4) interaction with others immediately following the service; (5) was an invitation to attend a Bible study class received during the course of the visit; (6) was a follow-up contact(s) received during the week following the service; (7) impressions from the follow-up contact.

As displayed in Table 2, improvement was demonstrated in 5 of the 7 categories. One category (impressions upon arrival) showed no significant change, decreasing by 1%. Impressions from interaction with others in the Worship Center prior to the beginning of a service showed a decline of 8 points. All other categories revealed improvement. Additionally, the cumulative score awarded by group two increased 18 points over that from group 1, improving from a score of 54 to a score of 72.

Table 2. Average score comparison between group 1 and group 2

Category	Group One Score	Group Two Score	Difference
Upon Arrival	81%	80%	(1)
Entering Building	79%	86%	7
In Worship Center (prior to service)	54%	46%	(8)
Following Service	69%	86%	17
% Receiving Invitation To Class	11%	56%	45
% Receiving A Follow Up Contact	44%	78%	34
Follow Up Score	39%	72%	33
Total Cumulative Score	54%	72%	18

Goal 3

The third goal stated at the outset of the project was “*to implement a strategic plan for visitor follow-up.*” This goal was achieved. Fulfillment of the goal is best understood by considering both the general means and the specific method.

The *general means* by which this goal was approached was an effort to mobilize the church body to help carry out follow-up efforts. During the period of training within the church, members were invited to make themselves available, when needed, to make a personal contact with a guest during the week following the guest’s initial visit to Antioch. The primary criterion used to determine what member would be asked to contact the guest was proximity. The concept was that of neighbors engaging with neighbors. Members who wished to be available for such an assignment indicated their willingness by filling out a card with their name and address. The number of individuals who signed up, indicating their willingness to serve in this way, was 378. This represented 236 households.

The *specific method* by which this plan was implemented was the development of a mapping instrument. As described in chapter 4, in consultation with The Gadberry Group, locations of member’s homes were plotted on a web-based map. Beginning with the second group of mystery worshippers, when a guest attended Antioch and provided their home address, this information was entered into the mapping system. The system was used to generate a report indicating the church members who lived in closest proximity to the guest. A member would be selected for the assignment of a follow-up visit and would be provided with the guest’s contact information.

The number of attendees in the first group who indicated having received a follow up contact was 8. This number represented 44% of group 1 mystery worshippers. The contacts received were from a pastoral staff member or a volunteer, though not a neighbor, as the mapping tool had not yet been activated. The number of group 2 mystery worshippers who indicated a follow-up contact (after the implementation of the mapping tool) was 14. This number represented 78% of group 2 participants. Thus, the percentage of guests receiving a follow-up contact increased (improved) from 44% to 78%. Consequently, the categorical score given to the church in relation to impressions communicated by follow-up efforts improved from a grade of 39% by group 1 to a score of 72% given by group 2. This constituted an improvement of 33 points.

The goal of implementing a strategic plan for visitor follow-up was achieved. There was no formal avenue through which church members who participated in follow-up provided reflections pertinent to their contacts, but the writer would informally note that feedback from members was overwhelmingly positive. The writer would further offer a note of interest, that this plan of follow-up has transcended the scope of the project, and has now become an ongoing method of follow-up efforts with guests.

Strengths of the Project

The project displayed several strengths. Four are noted specifically.

Outside Perspective

The first strength was that the project drew significantly from the perspectives of those *outside* the church. The purpose was not to consider whether the church *thought* she was hospitable toward guests, but to seek input from guests who could verify or rebut

such opinions. Thirty-four of the 36 mystery worshippers were attending Antioch for the first time in at least ten years (most for the first time ever) making them wonderfully qualified to offer an outside perspective. George Barna speaks of a study he conducted involving churches he deemed to be “user friendly.” Barna says, “Gaining reliable feedback was an ingrained part of the ministry process at the user friendly churches I surveyed. They were persistent in their search for answers to questions about the impact of the ministry” (Barna 1991, 60). Utilization of individuals who were able to genuinely view matters through the eyes of guests (since they were themselves guests) was invaluable and an obvious strength of the project.

Attention to the Topic

A second strength of the project was that it allowed focused attention to be brought to a topic that is often overlooked in the church. As presented in chapter 2, the Bible is far from silent on the topic of hospitality and God’s concern for people. Often, however, the church does not devote concentrated attention to such matters. The writer acknowledges that this is not always the case, and no doubt shining exceptions could be found, but he does assert that the simple topic of welcoming guests is often neglected. Perhaps it is regarded as too simplistic and not “weighty” enough to merit attention from the pulpit. It seems that church members are often told that they should go out and show the love of Jesus to others, as well they should! However, how often is the church guilty of charging members with the challenge to “go out” and show such love, never pausing to consider the responsibility to literally “look around” and show that same love to guests

who may be in their midst? This project presented a wonderful opportunity for attention to be devoted to such things.

Mobilization of Laity

Most church leaders would agree that the percentage of church members involved in some area of service in the church and outreach to others is often far below what should be deemed acceptable. Perhaps it is simply an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the writer, but is it not possible that often a significant contributor to the lack of those serving is the absence of a challenge or equipping to do so?

A third strength of the project was the invitation and challenge given to church members to serve. One such role of service was the opportunity for members to make themselves available to provide a follow-up contact with guests who live in close proximity to them. As already noted, 378 individuals enlisted to serve in this way when needed. This represents approximately 40% of the number of adults and youth typically present on a Sunday morning. That number leaves obvious room for improvement, but the writer suggests that 40% of membership enrolling in one day to serve in a specific way certainly constitutes a positive contribution of the project.

Two Independent Groups

A fourth strength of the project was the involvement of two completely separate groups serving as mystery worshippers. The responses provided by the first group of mystery worshippers were completely unknown to those in the second group. In fact, many of those in the second group were not aware that there had been a previous group. The project could have been executed with one group, asking them to attend once

before the time of teaching with the church, and attend again *following* that teaching to indicate if they thought any improvement had been made. However, had such a methodology been practiced, upon their return visit the mystery worshippers would no longer be offering an assessment from a *first impression* perspective. Having a second group serve allowed the most accurate possible comparison of first impressions to determine whether any improvement had been achieved.

Weaknesses of the Project

With the benefit of hindsight, a few weaknesses of the project are acknowledged. These include the following:

Lack of Nursery Participants

The writer believes that one of the most critical areas to evaluate in terms of hospitality demonstrated to guests is that of childcare. The instrument utilized did present questions relative to the nursery (impressions regarding the sign in process and interaction with childcare staff, for example). However, the number who utilized the nursery was low, with only 4 participants indicating having done so. This represents only 11% of mystery worshippers. The writer regarded this percentage as being too low to constitute inclusion in a summary of the project findings, as it would not represent an adequate base of opinion.

Lack of Bible Study Participants

Similar to the previous weakness, only 5 mystery worshippers attended a Bible study class, representing 14% of mystery worshippers. One of the topics about which the

instrument sought feedback was the hospitality offered and the first impressions communicated through participation in a Bible study class. Such a small portion of the mystery worshippers was not considered adequate to merit inclusion in the summary of data.

Though the lack of those attending a class limited the information that could be gathered in regard to classes specifically, a question posed to mystery worshippers asking if they at least received an *invitation* to do so proved valuable. Through this question the fact was revealed that, in the first group of mystery worshippers, only 2 of the participants received an invitation to a class. This represented just 11% of the group. Following the time of training with the church, information gathered from the second group of mystery worshippers revealed 10 participants (56%) received such an invitation. While this number still reflects ample room for improvement, it did represent a significant improvement.

Member Information for Follow-Up

When members were invited to participate in follow-up efforts with guests with whom they were neighbors the only information gathered from the member was name, address, and contact information. More attributes should have been attained to use in helping determine what member would be assigned to follow-up with each guest. For instance, if a guest's family has young children and multiple families from the church live approximately the same distance from the guest, a family which also has young children might be the best representative. If a guest is a senior adult and a nearby neighbor from the church is in the same stage of life, this would likewise be good

information to have available. Most of the church members are known, at least casually, by the pastor or staff members, but as the church grows this could become less and less the case. Looking forward, additional attributes of members entered into the system could prove helpful.

Subjectivity

While the involvement of mystery worshippers who would share their opinions and first impressions was invaluable, it also is undeniably subjective. Some questions sought concrete answers such as “did you receive an invitation to attend a Bible study class.” Others sought to simply see through the filter of the individual’s opinion with a question such as, “overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality . . . based solely on your experience from the front door to the Worship Center?” The subjective nature of such a question as the latter was intentional, and the subjective input from participants was desired. However, caution must be exercised to not swing the pendulum too dramatically and too quickly in response to subjective input.

For instance, as seen in Appendix 11, participant number 31 graded the church with a cumulative score of 31. This was 41 points lower than the average score given by the group as a whole. Was the hospitality extended to participant 31 that poor? Perhaps. But perhaps it is also true that on the morning of her visit other factors had contributed to her frame of mind that negatively influenced her responses. By contrast, participant number 28 graded the church with a perfect score of 100. This was the only participant to award this score, and it exceeded the average of the group by 28 points. Was the hospitality extended to this guest that impeccable? Perhaps. But perhaps it also says

something about the optimistic nature of the individual or other variables that might have positively influenced the frame of mind that morning.

Such examples represent the reality that exists with “normal” guests who attend any church. Some will arrive with a “glass half full” mentality and see the best in things, while others will arrive irritated by factors completely out of the church’s control. No insinuation is intended that the input of such individuals is not of value, rather the suggestion is to not allow one’s self or one’s church to overreact in response to either extreme. In the case of the mystery worshippers who scored the church at its highest and lowest, if either instance were examined individually, an inaccurate and unhealthy assessment could result. The conclusion could be, “*We’re doing perfectly,*” or “*We’re doing horribly.*” The reality, when considered in context of the bigger picture, is that neither extreme would be correct.

Modifications

In considering future applications of the project, two modifications would be suggested. First, a small team of people would be assembled on the front end of the project to assist with mystery worshipper recruitment. Striving to draw primarily from acquaintances of the writer proved challenging when seeking this many individuals who would commit to such an effort. With a small team of people charged with the job of each recruiting a few participants, this facet of the project could be more efficiently fulfilled.

A second modification would be to intentionally seek out more individuals who would accept the responsibility to attend a Bible study class and/or utilize the

nursery services. Mystery worshippers were given very few parameters. They were informed of the service schedule and asked to attend in a given time frame, but other details were not specified. This was intentional, as the writer wanted the experience to be as reflective of a typical guest as possible.

Participants were told that they were welcome to attend a class, but not required to do so. Information regarding classes was not provided in advance. One question posed to mystery worshippers following their visit was whether they found clear information about the classes. This was deemed important, since other guests attending are faced with the task of locating information pertinent to classes if they desire to attend. So, permitting complete flexibility in what the mystery worshipper attended arguably provided the best representation of a typical guest's experience, but it did result in limited feedback in other areas that would be valuable to assess.

Reflections

As the writer reflects on the project he acknowledges that it was both challenging and beneficial. He offers a reflection from three perspectives:

Personal

Like many people who are charged with the responsibility of leading some kind of organization, the writer admits that it is easy to become focused on the urgent and lose sight of the most important. Certainly at the top of this "most important" list must be one's personal relationship with the Lord, followed by one's relationship with family. To neglect these matters will eventually prove detrimental in all other areas of leadership.

Also on the list of important things must be other people. People matter, thus, loving and reaching people must be a passion, not only of the church, but also of the leader. This does not mean that the leader must fall victim to the mentality of “*I have to do it myself.*” Far from it! Just as the apostles modeled in the sixth chapter of Acts, there are times that the most spiritual, effective, loving thing a leader can do is delegate so that the ministry does not suffer, but rather is enhanced.

This project reminded the writer that the people who live in communities that Antioch Baptist Church can reach, matter. The people who walk through the doors of Antioch Baptist Church matter. As a leader in the church, the writer must faithfully do his part in showing love to people and must faithfully sound the call for the people of Antioch to do likewise.

In the course of the project the writer had conversations with approximately 55 people, inviting them to attend church and participate in the project. It serves as a humbling reminder that he should be no less diligent in reaching out to others when the completion of a project is no longer at stake.

Collective

There are some areas which this project exposed that the church as a whole can improve in seeking to enhance the impact of first impressions and hospitality.

First, as shown in Table 2 (p. 103) the lowest categorical score that the second group of mystery worshippers awarded to the church was in reference to the hospitality shown to guests in the Worship Center before a service begins. (The average score was 46 on a 100 point scale.) In considering this, it was realized that no greeters have been

assigned the responsibility of serving in the Worship Center. Ushers are available if assistance is needed to locate seating, but they have not been challenged to mingle with people and intentionally welcome worshippers. This will make a good place of service for additional greeters.

Second, the Hospitality Team has begun efforts to prepare and staff a more visible and user friendly welcome center. A welcome desk has been present in the church atrium, but its location is such that it tends to “disappear” once a crowd begins to gather. Providing a table nearer to the entry point that is easily visible and accessible will serve guests better by allowing easier and clearer access to needed information and guidance.

Third, the church must recognize that hospitality is not only a *corporate responsibility*, but also an *individual responsibility*. If *nobody* does what *everybody* thought *somebody* would do, the church will fail at the important job of showing hospitality to others. One mystery worshipper provided some words of advice in completing the questionnaire instrument. The suggestion was, “You may even consider educating your entire church to be the welcome staff.” The mystery worshipper, though unaware of it, had captured the heart of the project.

Theological

At the risk of oversimplifying the spiritual profundity of this topic, the writer simply acknowledges the truth that Jesus died for people. He did not die for programs, He died for people. The business of Christ’s church involves needed and valuable matters such as budgets, activities, meetings, and buildings. But it must be remembered

that those things are secondary tools in the primary tasks of (1) worshipping God, for He alone is worthy and (2) reaching people with the love and message of Christ.

In Matthew 22 Jesus trumpeted the command to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one's neighbor as one's self. Speaking through Peter in 1 Peter 4 God issues the order to love deeply and offer hospitality. The pages of Scripture are heavy with instructions to love as Christ loves and do as Christ would do. The example of Jesus recorded throughout the gospels leaves little room for dispute that if Jesus were a member of a church today, He would model a picture of hospitality. May the church be found faithful in doing so as well.

Conclusion

In the opening line of his book *Practicing Greatness*, Reggie McNeal says, "Deliberate mediocrity is a sin" (McNeal 2006, 1). In the opening line of the widely renowned book *Good To Great*, Jim Collins states, "Good is the enemy of great" (Collins 2001, 1). Thom Rainer voices the third part in a trio of agreement when he says, "It is a sin to be good if God has called you to be great" (Rainer 2005, 15). None of these writers advocates arrogance, but excellence.

It is the hope of this writer that the fulfillment of this project has served to stir Antioch Baptist Church, and will serve to stir any future readers, to strive for excellence in regard to hospitality in the church. It should be acknowledged that excellence in this field, as with excellence in any other endeavor, will likely not be achieved without intentional effort. Chip Ingram says, "Training yourself in good habits requires stern self-discipline at first. But once those habits become second nature, the payoff is

considerable” (Ingram 2007, 206). That observation certainly has application for churches striving to develop good habits of hospitality.

Be it in the arena of welcoming guests or any other scope of service, one need not measure their success with the question of whether they are the best. A question of far greater merit is whether one has given their best. The Leader whom we serve deserves no less.

APPENDIX 1

MYSTERY WORSHIPPER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Date of your visit: _____

Service you attended: 8:30 9:45 11:00

Did you attend a small group Bible Study class?

Yes No

Was this your first time to attend a Sunday service at Antioch in at least 10 years?

Yes No (If no, how long since your last visit? _____)

Age group (circle one)

19 or under 20-39 40-59 60-79 80 or above

Race (check one)

___ Caucasian ___ African American ___ Hispanic ___ Other

Which of the following statements best describes your pattern of church attendance?
(check one)

- I attend church on a weekly basis
- I attend church regularly, though not weekly (1-3 times per month)
- I attend church occasionally, but not regularly (less than once a month)
- I rarely or never attend church

Please answer the following questions to the best of your recollection or knowledge.
When you are asked to rate your impression "from 1-10", a rating of 1 indicates a very poor impression and a rating of 10 indicates a very positive impression.

Arrival

When you drove into the parking lot, was it clear to you where you should enter the building?

- Yes No

Once you parked, how many times were you greeted before entering the building?

- None 1 time 2 or 3 times 4 or 5 times more than 5 times

Did anyone greeting you introduce themselves by name or ask your name?

- Yes No

Did you notice the lawn / grounds as being...

- Well kept and attractive
- Fairly well kept, but in need of some attention
- Poorly kept and unattractive
- Did not notice

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the first impressions you received between the time you pulled onto the parking lot and the time you entered the building, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience from the parking lot to the front door? Circle one:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

Upon entering the building

When you entered the doors, were you greeted personally by anyone?

Yes No

As you walked through the main atrium, how many times were you greeted?

None 1 time 2 or 3 times 4 or 5 times more than 5 times

Did anyone introduce themselves by name or ask your name?

Yes No

To your knowledge, did you meet a member of the pastoral staff?

Yes No

Did anyone offer to introduce you to a member of the pastoral staff?

Yes No

When you entered the building, what did you need to locate first:

The Worship Center The Nursery Other (specify)
 A Bible Study Class A Restroom _____

Was it easy to locate what you were looking for?

Yes No

Did you see anyone(s) that seemed to be available for the specific purpose of providing information or directions?

Yes No

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the first impressions you received upon entering the building, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience from the front door to the Worship Center? Circle one:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

Nursery / Children

If you DID NOT utilize the nursery or take a child to a children’s class, skip this section. If you DID take a child to nursery or class, please provide feedback.

What age(s) is your child: _____

Was it clear where you could take them?

Yes No

Were you comfortable leaving your child in their class / nursery?

Yes No

Were there workers present when you arrived at the appropriate room?

Yes No

Did the workers greet you and introduce themselves to you?

Yes No

Did the workers greet your child, introduce themselves to your child, and learn your child's name?

Yes No

Was it explained to you how you would be located should your child need you?

Yes No

When you returned to pick up your child did a worker meet you and help you get your child?

Yes No

Did a worker thank you for bringing your child?

Yes No

Did you feel that the sign in process and pick up process provided adequate security measures to ensure the safety of children?

Yes No

Did you feel that there were any security requirements that were unnecessary?

Yes No

If yes, please specify / explain:

Overall, would you describe the process of dropping off and picking up your child as:

- Well organized, easy and personal
- Well organized, but a bit impersonal
- Somewhat disorganized
- Chaotic

Would you describe your child's experience at church as:

- Pleasant and comfortable
- Not bad, but not particularly "warm"
- Scary and uncertain

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the impressions you received having taken your child to a nursery or class, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your (and your child's) experience with nursery or children's class?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience in the Worship Center before the service began? Circle one:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the impressions you received in the Worship Center before service began, please share it here.

Following the Worship Service

As you departed the Worship Center, were you greeted by any individuals?

Yes No

Did anyone introduce themselves by name or ask your name?

Yes No

At any point after the service (while leaving the Worship Center, in the atrium, or at any other time) did anyone try to engage you in any conversation beyond a simple “hello”?

Yes No

Did anyone learn that it was your first time attending?

Yes No

If yes, did they offer to introduce you to the pastor or any member of the pastoral staff?

Yes No

Did anyone speak to you between the time you exited the building and the time you got in your vehicle and departed?

Yes

No

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the impressions you received between the conclusion of the service and your departure, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience between the conclusion of the service and your departure?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

Small Group Bible Study

Did you attend a small group Bible study during your visit?

Yes

No

If yes, what class? _____

Did you, at any point during your visit, receive an invitation to attend a class?

Yes

No

Whether or not you attended a group, did you find clear information about classes available for you to attend?

Yes

No

If yes, where / how did you locate or receive this information?

If you DID attend a class, were you personally greeted by anyone upon entering the classroom?

Yes No

Did anyone introduce themselves to you by name or ask your name?

Yes No NA (did not attend)

If you DID attend a class, how many people greeted you personally?

None 1 2 or 3 4 or 5 more than 5

Did the teacher introduce himself/herself to you?

Yes No

Overall would you say the reception of the class was:

___ warm and welcoming

___ folks tended to stay in their own circles, but were courteous

___ people basically ignored me and seemed disinterested that I was there

___ NA...did not attend a class

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the impressions you received having attended a class, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience in the class you attended?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

Follow Up (The Week Following Your Visit)

In the week following your visit, did you receive any kind of follow up contact from the church?

Yes

No

If yes, can you specify what kind of contact you received, (letter, phone call, email, personal visit, etc.) and what day you received it?

Type of contact(s)

Day(s) contact received

What was your personal impression from the contact(s) you received?

- It seemed like a genuine expression of interest in me and would encourage me to visit Antioch again.
- It was a nice gesture but would not necessarily encourage me to return.
- It seemed more like a formality and not a genuine expression of concern.
- It was a bit of a nuisance and I would have preferred to have not received the contact.
- I did not receive a follow up contact.

If you have any suggestions or feedback concerning how to improve the impressions you received from follow up efforts, please share it here:

Overall, how would you rate your impression of the warmth and hospitality of the church based solely on your experience with the follow up contact(s)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very poor.....Not good.....Not bad.....Pretty good.....Very good

APPENDIX 2

MYSTERY WORSHIPPER GROUP 1

Table A1. Personal data

Participant Number	1 st Time at Antioch?	Age Range	Race	How Often Do You Attend Church?
1	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Rarely or never
2	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
3	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
4	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
5	Yes	20-39	African American	Weekly
6	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
7	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
8	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
9	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
10	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Less than once a month
11	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
12	No	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
13	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
14	Yes	40-59	African American	Weekly
15	Yes	19 or under	Caucasian	Less than once a month
16	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
17	Yes	60-79	Caucasian	Rarely or never
18	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Rarely or never

Table A2. Summary of personal data
group 1

Number indicating this was their first time at Antioch in at least ten years	17
Number indicating they had previously attended Antioch one time in the previous ten years	1
Number in age range: 19 or under	1
Number in age range: 20-39	11
Number in age range: 40-59	5
Number in age range: 60-79	1
Number in age range: 80 or above	0
Number of African American participants	2
Number of Caucasian participants	16
Number indicating they attend church weekly	8
Number indicating they attend church 1-3 times per month	5
Number indicating they attend church less than 1 time per month	2
Number indicating they rarely or never attend church	3

APPENDIX 3

MYSTERY WORSHIPPER EVALUATION SCORES – GROUP 1

Table 5 demonstrates scores that were awarded by the first group of mystery worshippers. Categories include a score in response to the first impressions received in seven categories: (1) Arrival to the church; (2) entering the building; (3) in the Worship Center prior to service; (4) immediately following the service; (5) whether an invitation to attend a Bible study group was received; (6) whether a follow-up contact was received in the week following the visit; (7) a score in response to the follow up contact, if received.

Two of the categories (“Invitation to class received” and “Follow-up contact received”) asked for a “yes / no” response. A “yes” response received a score of ten and a “no” response received a zero. The other five categories were scored by a Likert Scale response. If no follow-up contact was received, this was regarded as a missed opportunity and the score for “follow up contact” was assigned a zero.

Table A3. Summary of mystery worshipper group 1 scores

Participant Number	Upon Arrival	Entering Building	In Worship Center	After Service	Invitation To Class Received	Follow Up Contact Received	Impression Of Follow Up Contact	Total Score Average
1	6	7	2	7	0	0	0	31%
2	8	9	6	7	0	10	9	70%
3	7	9	7	3	0	10	10	66%
4	9	3	2	7	0	0	0	30%
5	9	9	5	9	0	0	0	46%
6	7	5	6	5	0	10	9	60%
7	7	5	2	3	0	10	9	51%
8	9	8	7	3	0	0	0	39%
9	9	9	6	9	0	0	0	47%
10	9	9	6	9	0	0	0	47%
11	10	10	7	10	0	0	0	53%
12	8	9	8	8	0	0	0	47%
13	10	9	8	10	10	10	10	96%
14	5	6	5	5	0	10	7	54%
15	8	9	3	6	0	10	10	66%
16	7	8	2	7	0	10	7	59%
17	9	10	8	10	0	0	0	53%
18	9	9	7	7	10	0	0	60%
Average	81%	79%	54%	69%	11%	44%	39%	54%

APPENDIX 4

CHURCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. When a guest arrives at Antioch their first impressions may be influenced by things such as:
 - The condition of the grounds and building
 - Whether anyone greets them and welcomes them personally
 - How easily they can find what they need (Worship Center, Restroom, Nursery, etc.)

How do you suppose a first-time guest would score us based on their initial impressions? (“1” represents very poor and “10” represents very good).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Once a guest arrives in the Worship Center their first impressions may be influenced by someone greeting them . . . learning their name . . . offering a seat if needed Based on the hospitality a guest receives in the Worship Center before a service begins, how do you suppose Antioch would score?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Immediately following a worship service a guest’s impression may be affected by someone acknowledging them or introducing themselves. Based on a guest’s experience from the conclusion of a service to the time they leave the building, how do you think we do?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. We offer a lot of Bible Study classes on Sunday morning. What percentage of guests do you think receive an invitation to attend a class? (NOT counting an invitation from a pastor on the platform).

_____ 0 – 10%

_____ 25 – 50%

_____ 75 – 100%

_____ 10 – 25%

_____ 50 – 75%

_____ more than 100%
(are you paying attention?!?)

5. What score would you give YOURSELF on the job you do personally to try to help others feel welcomed at church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you have any suggestions as to how to do a better job in giving guests a warm welcome to church? If so, share them here, (or on the back if space is needed).*

** Responses provided by church members are provided in Appendix 6.*

APPENDIX 5

SCORES PROVIDED ON CHURCH
QUESTIONNAIRE

Table A4. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
2	4	0	0	0
9	6	0	0	0
8	9	6	4	5
8	7	6	1	5
7	8	7	3	3
3	3	0	2	0
9	7	8	2	6
9	7	8	3	3
6	8	6	4	7
8	6	6	2	4
9	9	8	4	6
7	2	2	1	2
8	9	10	2	1
10	10	5	2	9
9	10	9	3	8
8	7	9	4	9
8	9	9	5	6
9	10	9	5	5
7	8	7	3	7
7	8	4	2	3
8	7	8	2	7
5	7	7	4	2
8	5	4	1	1
5	8	4	1	3

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	6	6	1	5
6	7	5	3	8
2	3	5	2	9
8	4	6	3	5
8	5	2	1	1
8	7	6	2	1
10	8	6	3	5
8	4	4	2	1
8	8	5	3	3
8	8	9	4	4
10	5	5	2	2
10	10	9	2	3
9	8	6	2	7
4	1	2	4	1
8	7	6	2	4
8	6	7	2	4
8	8	7	2	1
10	10	8	2	3
5	7	7	2	1
8	6	6	2	1
6	2	2	2	5
8	9	5	2	1
4	4	4	1	3
8	8	7	3	5
8	3	4	1	5
8	8	9	4	4
9	8	8	2	5
8	7	7	2	2
7	6	8	2	4
9	10	9	4	7
7	7	6	2	7
7	7	6	2	7
6	6	5	3	4
8	7	8	2	5
7	7	5	3	6

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	5	6	3	1
8	7	8	2	6
7	5	7	2	3
8	7	7	3	5
7	8	5	3	7
8	7	0	0	9
8	7	8	4	7
8	7	7	2	5
7	6	8	3	5
7	6	5	2	5
8	7	6	3	4
7	7	0	0	0
8	5	0	0	0
8	8	7	3	3
6	4	3	1	6
8	7	6	2	2
10	8	7	2	3
6	6	5	1	2
8	8	7	1	1
9	7	5	5	3
7	6	5	2	4
9	9	9	1	7
9	8	6	2	6
8	8	9	4	2
8	8	8	4	5
8	8	7	3	6
8	7	7	3	5
7	5	6	3	4
9	9	8	4	5
9	8	8	4	6
9	8	8	2	5
9	6	7	2	6
10	3	3	2	8
3	5	7	4	9
5	5	7	3	2

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
9	7	6	3	7
10	10	10	5	4
10	10	10	5	4
10	10	10	5	4
5	4	6	4	5
6	7	4	3	3
8	7	7	3	7
9	10	7	3	5
8	9	0	0	0
9	7	6	3	8
8	9	8	2	4
6	3	4	3	2
8	9	6	1	6
8	8	0	0	0
9	5	6	1	6
10	10	10	4	4
5	5	5	0	0
7	8	7	3	4
8	8	8	1	5
8	6	5	2	2
9	7	7	2	5
6	7	6	3	8
8	8	6	2	1
8	8	7	4	8
7	7	6	0	7
8	8	8	0	0
7	8	7	2	5
8	5	6	2	5
7	7	3	1	6
8	7	7	3	3
6	7	8	1	7
7	7	7	4	8
9	3	4	2	2
8	4	6	2	1
8	8	8	2	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
8	8	9	5	4
8	6	6	1	7
8	5	7	2	3
7	5	8	3	1
6	5	4	2	3
5	5	4	2	4
7	7	7	4	7
8	6	6	1	1
9	8	8	1	2
8	6	8	1	2
7	8	5	3	6
8	9	8	3	3
7	6	6	3	3
4	7	6	3	3
7	7	7	5	6
8	7	8	4	1
5	10	9	5	8
8	9	5	4	5
8	7	7	2	7
9	7	6	3	5
7	9	7	5	4
7	5	8	2	7
9	9	10	2	5
8	6	6	3	3
8	9	7	3	7
8	5	5	1	2
9	7	5	1	3
7	7	7	2	7
7	7	7	1	0
10	10	10	5	6
9	10	8	3	5
9	8	7	2	3
10	10	8	1	3
7	10	8	1	6
10	10	8	2	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
8	9	8	5	4
7	7	6	4	6
8	7	8	2	9
10	9	8	5	5
7	7	6	2	4
5	3	3	2	3
8	10	5	4	1
10	9	7	3	4
9	8	8	5	5
9	8	8	5	8
8	9	9	4	1
8	7	7	2	5
8	5	3	2	4
9	7	6	3	0
5	7	6	1	4
10	8	8	3	7
10	7	4	3	6
7	10	7	4	5
8	7	5	3	8
8	8	7	3	7
7	5	2	2	7
9	5	4	2	8
8	8	7	4	3
9	8	7	2	4
8	10	5	1	5
8	8	7	4	5
10	10	10	5	8
9	9	8	3	8
7	8	8	3	5
8	4	4	2	5
10	8	8	4	5
7	6	6	2	1
9	8	7	4	4
6	9	8	4	1
7	5	7	4	5

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	8	6	4	5
6	7	6	3	5
8	7	7	3	3
6	7	5	3	2
8	6	7	3	5
7	6	8	2	4
7	8	7	2	0
9	7	7	3	5
7	7	7	3	7
7	5	5	3	4
6	4	2	2	2
5	5	4	5	4
8	8	7	3	5
5	10	3	1	1
8	7	7	2	4
9	10	8	3	4
8	7	7	3	3
3	3	4	2	7
3	3	0	0	0
8	6	6	3	4
9	9	9	4	6
6	7	7	2	3
5	5	5	1	7
7	7	6	1	4
8	7	7	3	5
6	7	7	3	4
7	4	6	4	3
9	7	5	5	4
8	6	7	2	7
8	8	8	2	5
7	6	7	4	4
10	10	8	4	9
8	7	6	1	2
9	8	7	2	2
8	5	4	2	3

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
8	8	8	3	5
9	6	7	2	8
8	5	7	2	8
10	2	5	1	0
8	9	8	3	5
7	4	4	2	4
7	8	7	4	4
7	7	7	3	5
7	7	6	3	5
0	7	7	3	5
7	7	7	3	5
8	5	2	2	2
9	9	8	2	2
4	5	5	2	3
6	5	4	1	3
7	6	4	3	2
9	9	8	5	5
8	9	10	3	8
9	7	10	3	6
10	3	3	1	1
8	9	5	1	5
9	9	5	2	5
7	1	1	1	1
8	7	5	2	5
7	7	7	3	5
9	5	6	4	8
9	6	5	4	6
9	7	7	4	7
8	8	4	2	4
7	6	8	4	0
7	5	7	3	0
6	8	7	2	2
7	8	7	3	1
10	6	6	1	1
8	8	8	4	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
8	10	8	3	4
8	6	6	3	4
8	4	4	3	2
6	6	5	3	3
9	5	5	4	5
8	7	6	3	5
8	5	5	4	5
8	5	5	4	5
10	10	7	2	1
8	8	10	3	7
9	8	6	2	2
7	7	7	4	7
8	7	5	2	2
7	6	6	2	7
8	7	8	2	6
5	4	3	4	3
9	7	7	3	4
6	4	7	4	6
8	10	5	4	7
4	4	4	1	5
7	6	8	3	4
7	5	4	2	1
6	5	5	4	3
7	7	6	4	5
6	5	6	2	7
8	5	5	2	0
7	7	7	2	5
8	8	6	0	1
8	7	5	4	6
8	5	7	3	6
7	6	8	4	4
9	8	8	4	2
8	8	7	4	4
10	7	7	4	7
10	10	10	5	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
10	9	8	1	7
0	10	10	4	5
8	7	6	4	6
8	10	7	4	4
7	7	7	4	6
6	7	8	3	7
8	8	9	2	5
8	8	8	3	4
7	9	8	2	2
6	3	3	2	1
7	6	6	3	0
8	4	5	2	3
8	6	5	2	4
7	6	8	2	5
7	9	8	4	6
7	7	6	0	0
10	7	8	3	3
9	10	9	3	5
10	10	10	5	4
8	8	7	3	9
8	8	8	2	1
9	9	6	3	6
9	8	5	3	3
6	5	7	4	5
7	5	6	3	5
10	5	5	3	3
10	5	5	3	3
10	5	6	2	9
10	9	9	4	4
7	7	0	5	4
10	10	8	3	4
8	5	5	4	5
5	8	1	1	4
10	8	8	0	1
10	10	8	4	6

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
6	7	5	2	5
10	9	9	2	2
8	6	4	2	4
8	3	4	2	4
8	5	4	2	4
10	10	0	0	0
8	10	10	4	4
0	3	1	4	6
9	7	9	3	7
8	9	9	4	7
10	10	10	4	9
8	6	5	4	5
9	9	8	5	6
9	8	10	5	7
8	7	9	5	7
8	7	6	2	5
10	8	8	4	5
7	7	8	3	4
8	9	8	2	5
8	8	8	5	9
7	7	6	2	8
7	8	7	2	3
8	9	7	4	3
8	7	6	3	6
9	8	5	2	3
8	8	7	4	0
7	7	5	4	4
8	7	7	4	5
0	8	8	2	8
9	9	8	3	5
10	9	9	2	1
10	9	10	5	1
10	9	10	5	1
8	8	9	3	8
8	9	8	2	5

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
9	9	7	3	9
10	9	7	2	6
10	8	8	3	3
9	7	7	2	0
9	8	5	3	3
7	7	7	3	1
7	7	4	1	3
10	8	9	4	6
9	8	9	5	9
9	9	8	5	5
6	7	4	1	3
9	7	8	1	5
7	4	5	1	5
9	7	8	2	3
9	8	6	2	7
9	9	8	4	6
9	9	5	1	4
9	9	9	5	5
9	6	8	4	8
7	8	7	3	6
9	9	8	5	5
9	10	10	5	5
8	6	7	3	3
9	6	7	3	3
7	8	7	2	8
9	8	7	4	6
10	9	9	5	7
9	9	9	4	8
10	10	1	1	6
10	10	7	3	5
10	10	10	4	8
10	10	0	0	0
9	9	0	0	0
9	7	6	3	3
9	10	8	5	5

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
9	7	7	2	2
8	9	6	5	3
7	5	5	2	0
9	10	9	5	7
10	7	6	3	4
8	7	8	5	4
8	8	5	3	5
5	6	5	1	0
10	8	7	2	5
9	5	6	3	6
9	7	5	2	3
10	4	6	3	8
10	10	8	4	5
8	6	5	2	1
8	7	6	3	5
7	6	7	2	1
9	8	6	3	5
9	8	7	4	5
8	7	7	2	5
8	7	5	1	5
8	9	7	3	0
8	6	4	2	7
10	6	7	2	4
7	6	5	2	5
8	7	6	2	3
5	9	10	4	3
10	10	10	5	4
8	9	7	4	8
9	9	10	3	5
9	9	9	4	4
10	10	10	3	10
10	5	3	4	5
6	9	10	3	6
8	9	5	2	6
8	6	7	3	4

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
8	8	9	3	2
8	6	6	2	4
9	7	7	2	4
7	6	7	3	6
8	5	6	4	6
8	9	8	3	4
6	7	6	3	5
9	10	8	4	7
8	9	10	4	5
9	10	9	4	8
9	8	10	4	6
10	10	7	1	3
8	7	7	2	5
8	9	8	2	7
7	8	8	3	8
9	9	5	4	8
9	10	10	4	6
6	7	4	2	4
8	7	5	2	6
8	8	0	0	0
8	6	8	2	5
7	5	5	2	3
8	6	6	3	6
9	7	4	2	6
8	9	8	4	7
8	9	5	5	7
7	6	4	4	5
8	5	3	3	2
7	6	7	4	6
9	9	9	5	6
9	9	7	1	3
9	10	5	5	7
10	9	9	4	5
10	8	9	2	7
10	8	9	2	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
9	10	10	3	8
8	8	7	3	5
8	8	8	4	5
5	6	6	4	2
8	9	6	3	4
8	7	6	4	6
7	5	6	3	5
8	5	6	3	4
8	3	3	2	4
9	9	8	3	8
9	8	7	2	5
7	7	8	2	5
6	4	4	2	3
8	8	6	1	0
8	7	7	2	2
8	6	5	2	1
7	5	7	1	8
6	7	9	2	4
7	6	7	2	5
8	9	8	2	5
6	5	6	1	3
7	9	8	3	6
6	7	5	2	2
8	8	8	5	7
5	3	6	3	4
6	6	5	3	4
6	6	5	2	1
5	5	4	2	5
8	8	5	2	0
10	10	10	5	10
8	8	4	1	4
7	7	7	3	7
7	6	7	3	4
8	8	5	3	9
7	9	7	2	3

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	6	4	2	2
8	7	5	3	4
7	5	5	3	1
9	10	5	3	2
8	9	9	4	8
7	7	6	3	5
7	8	7	3	6
7	5	8	3	2
6	5	6	2	5
6	6	5	3	5
8	7	8	3	7
5	6	5	1	4
2	4	6	3	3
8	9	10	4	8
7	5	5	3	5
7	4	2	3	4
4	4	4	2	5
8	6	6	3	4
9	8	8	3	8
6	8	5	2	3
8	7	7	3	2
8	8	8	3	8
7	8	8	3	4
8	6	8	1	3
8	3	3	1	3
9	8	8	3	2
9	7	6	3	1
8	8	7	2	5
8	7	5	2	3
5	7	6	3	5
8	8	3	2	2
4	7	7	3	6
8	8	8	4	7
8	8	8	3	6
7	8	6	3	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	7	7	3	3
6	6	4	3	3
6	6	4	2	3
8	4	5	3	1
5	4	4	1	4
10	10	10	4	0
10	9	9	4	5
8	6	6	3	7
9	7	7	2	5
9	8	8	2	6
5	3	5	2	4
6	4	4	2	3
9	7	7	4	8
9	10	10	4	8
9	9	9	2	1
9	7	8	2	7
8	9	8	3	7
8	7	6	2	5
8	6	3	3	2
8	8	8	3	5
9	6	8	3	7
10	10	10	2	4
6	6	5	3	3
9	7	7	3	1
7	7	3	2	6
9	8	9	4	3
10	9	9	5	7
9	7	6	1	6
7	7	8	2	7
10	8	10	3	8
10	8	8	3	7
8	6	8	4	5
7	8	7	4	6
6	5	6	2	3
8	7	6	3	7

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	9	8	2	3
9	10	5	3	7
10	10	10	5	10
8	6	6	1	7
10	9	8	3	5
10	9	8	3	5
8	8	6	2	7
7	8	7	1	0
8	8	7	3	7
9	6	8	2	4
9	9	7	3	5
10	9	8	4	4
7	8	8	4	6
8	8	8	3	4
9	8	8	3	5
5	4	3	4	3
9	5	5	5	1
8	6	8	2	4
7	5	6	2	4
7	6	6	2	4
7	4	8	2	4
9	8	7	3	4
9	10	10	4	2
5	5	5	2	3
8	8	6	5	5
8	8	7	4	6
6	7	5	4	4
8	10	4	2	2
6	4	3	3	3
9	8	7	4	5
9	7	7	4	5
8	9	8	5	4
7	7	7	1	0
9	9	9	5	6
6	6	4	5	5

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
10	8	7	2	1
9	9	8	4	6
8	6	5	3	3
8	8	8	2	5
7	8	8	4	7
8	5	5	2	8
9	7	7	3	5
8	9	4	2	5
7	6	6	4	5
9	3	6	2	2
9	5	5	2	5
7	6	6	2	4
8	7	7	3	7
8	9	5	4	7
10	10	10	4	9
9	8	6	2	4
4	3	3	1	3
4	4	3	1	5
9	10	10	1	1
10	8	8	4	2
8	10	8	5	8
10	10	10	5	10
6	7	9	3	5
6	6	8	1	3
4	4	4	2	3
7	9	7	2	6
6	6	5	2	2
7	6	5	2	2
8	5	5	2	5
10	10	9	5	6
7	9	8	4	3
8	9	9	5	1
9	7	6	3	4
7	7	8	3	7
8	8	8	2	4

Table A4-Cont. Scores by Antioch attendees

Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive upon arrival	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive in the worship center prior to service	Level of hospitality I expect a guest would receive immediately following the service	The number of guests, (out of 10) that I believe receive an invitation to Bible study	Score that I believe most fairly represents the job that I am doing personally to extend a warm welcome to guests
7	7	6	2	2
8	7	5	1	2
9	8	6	3	3
8	8	5	3	4
6	8	7	1	6
8	8	7	2	4
7	7	7	4	1
8	6	7	5	7
8	9	8	2	5
8	6	8	1	7
8	8	7	3	4
8	6	5	2	3
7	7	6	2	7
10	8	10	5	7
9	7	6	4	5
9	8	7	3	5
9	9	8	3	2
10	10	9	4	7
6	8	6	3	4
6	4	6	3	1
7	8	7	4	8
10	10	10	0	0
10	10	10	0	0
8	7	6	1	6
7	5	7	3	7
8	6	7	3	6
10	8	9	3	6
8	7	7	2	6
9	8	8	3	4
8	9	9	5	5
(Number of respondents = 690)				
Average score based on "arrival"	Average score based on "in the worship center"	Average score based on "immediately after service"	Average score based on "invitation to Bible study"	Average score based on "self-evaluation"
78%	72%	65%	28%	45%

APPENDIX 6

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK OFFERED ON CHURCH QUESTIONNAIRE

On the survey instrument conducted with everyone present at Antioch on a Sunday morning, the last question invited any additional comments. Following is a compilation of the comments. The first section contains suggestions for improvement or addresses areas considered, by the individual completing the survey, to be lacking. The second section is composed of comments regarding matters that, in the opinion of the individual completing the survey, is considered a positive point in the church's hospitality efforts.

Grammar has not been adjusted, rather comments are recorded as presented by those offering them. The only exceptions are minor editorial privileges taken by the writer in instances where it provides clarity.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. I wish there was a way to identify visitors. With 3 services, it's hard to know who is visitors or members. I don't know everybody in the other services.
2. Have a certain amount of people to greet/challenge if you see someone standing alone go to them and introduce yourself
3. Our grounds need attention
4. Conditions of the grounds could use a lot of attention

5. Clearly communicate using a sign, badges for the greeters that say "Ask me about Antioch." When someone does ask, there needs to be documentation/packet (specific color). The packet provides info on Antioch. The color allows members to know who guests are.
6. A little confusing where to go. No one moves to give guests a seat, or at least rarely moves. I'm unsure of who is a guest and who is a member. If I know they are visiting, I approach 100% of the time. Just unaware. Might have visitor badges/tags ready? Just a suggestion.
7. Would be better if not so crowded between services.
8. Send them a goody bag. Send to their house.
9. Would help if we could know who is visitors without embarrassing them.
10. Have material or greeters at the doors at the end of each service.
11. Parking lot is a negative impression to me.
12. Possibly give prospects names to Bible study classes that might visit and invite.
13. Keep reminding us. I think we have plenty of opportunity to welcome others. Maybe name labels once every now and then.
14. Need to know who the visitors are.
15. Having 3 services makes it real hard to know who are visitors or just members attending another service. I just need to do better period.
16. Make visitors wear a party hat so I know who they are to welcome.
17. I don't know how to tell if a person is a guest. I've embarrassed myself by acting like someone is a guest who's not.
18. If we all focus on others then everyone gets taken care of. I am too focused on everyone making me feel welcome.
19. Don't single them out in Sunday school. I don't mind but it offends others.
20. Have people assigned to direct visitors.
21. Better ways to relieve service congestion.

22. Those welcoming in the worship center can sometimes group together with friends. This makes it difficult for a guest to approach. I think visitors would feel more welcomed if greeters didn't group together.
23. Offer coffee & donuts because of some of us work grave yard shifts and like to stay awake at church. And offer pick-ups.
24. Welcoming but crowded and a bit confusing. If there were any way to alleviate the crowding in the foyer, it would help.
25. Ask the person if they are a visitor and if they are take them to a location to get more info.
26. How do we understand who is a guest and who is a member?
27. To have it be somebody's job to go around saying hi.
28. Have a designated welcome center with a person staffing it.
29. Have more greeters who are trained.
30. Have a list of small groups & their details available
31. Maybe a welcome gift, brochure, pen, CD of sermon. Something simple, but that will help them remember Antioch.
32. I don't do well at all!
33. Make movements during service faster
34. It's hard to know who is new.
35. Too much confusion during the time between services.
36. Whatever regular attenders can do to make the atrium less crowded would help visitors feel more comfortable.
37. If those of us who attend regularly knew one another better, we would be more likely to recognize visitors.
38. Teach new habits to regular attenders. Maybe start a campaign for better logistics. If we can run thousands through at Bethlehem, we can move hundreds on Sunday.

39. Have regular attenders arrive early and fill up the front and sides first, leaving the middle/back for visitors. When the service is over, let new people file out first.
40. Give people something to do other than just blocking the way of the sanctuary. There has to be a way if we work together.
41. The way that the children's area is set up, parents never meet teachers. As a parent I never felt connected until my child was older.
42. Getting out of my comfort zone, reach out, show Jesus in life, words and actions.
43. Introduce guests during the service. It's hard to know who's new and who's not.
44. Offer Starbucks at the welcome desk.
45. Figure out how to identify guests. I don't know who is a regular. There are too many people and services to know. Give them a badge?
46. More energy.
47. Create other entrances/exits. Way too crowded in the foyer & more energy!!
48. I think the greeters do good but miss many because of the crowds.
49. Use right side of the atrium for "in" and left side for walking out. Saves confusion at entry.
50. I'm not sure who is a guest or not.
51. Since the church is so large, I don't always know who is a member and who is a visitor. Maybe if the greeters could give first time visitors a different color of bulletin, we would know they are a visitor.
52. Just invite them.
53. Make a sign that says "Question Center" and have someone stand by it and answer any needed questions.
54. We are in a hurry to get out so the next service can start. Traffic Jam. Welcome tags or t-shirts. Stand out like a Walmart greeter.
55. Greeters are great, but a follow-up with visitors needs to happen. On paper or with a phone call.

56. Row greeter, explain sign in book. Where to find out about classes, etc.
57. Not sure, we are so crowded in the foyer it is hard to greet people and tell them hello. If we could come in one door and out the other?
58. More general help from overall congregation.
59. Improve traffic flow in the foyer.
60. Have parking lot greeters with name tags identifying them as greeters or hosts, etc. They could lead newcomers or guests to the nursery, bible study, etc. The parking lot greeters could have umbrellas for rainy days, golf carts for those who may need assistance to/from their cars.
61. More greeters.
62. If members & regular attenders wore name tags, it would be easier to know who the visitors are.
63. Have greeters or people in the foyer the entire time (8:00-12:00).
64. Work on crowd control. When it's so crowded it's hard to welcome guests and not feel like you are in the way or hold up the crowd.
65. Sometimes it gets too crowded to find someone with a badge.
66. Bigger lobby.
67. This church is very unfriendly.
68. Be more friendly.
69. Since Antioch is so big, and a lot of times it's hard to tell members from visitors, maybe have a visitors station set up in the foyer so that visitors will definitely have a place to find out about classes, nursery services, etc.
70. When people join find out their age and have someone call and invite them to Sunday School class. Also give tours on where things are in the church.
71. By improving on the above. (Project writer's note: This comment is in reference to the questions posed on the questionnaire).

72. Needs greeters at desk to provide info in foyer. Need a way to communicate changes in normal routine.
73. Be more friendly, loving other and caring more for others.
74. Grounds/building (fair), Welcomes (good), Find worship center(very crowded).
75. So crowded between services.
76. Monthly potluck dinners for people to get together and fellowship and get to know each other.
77. Say welcome to them and shake their hand.
78. The lobby is over-crowded and could seem overwhelming to guests.
79. Let others know who is visiting like the leaders with the kids.
80. Expand the visitation team. Not necessarily on Wednesday nights.
81. Have greeters at the entrance to sanctuary but need to get traffic in and out under control. It's bad getting in and out.
82. Create first time guests sign in post and have trained greeters help guide people to nursery, classes, worship seating and give church info.
83. Have a Starbucks booth.
84. I don't have a suggestion, but I will say that in a church this size, it's hard to know who guests are.
85. Identification of visitors.
86. Tell members to sit next to the person on the row and leave no empty chairs between them so that visitors can more easily see available seats.
87. We need to encourage our people to move to the center and leave end seats available for the late comers.
88. Be their friend outside the church walls as well. Will we send them a personal note or a phone call or invite to get a cup of coffee or a coke. Will we open our homes to others?

89. A red ribbon for guests to wear so members can identify.
90. Try and clear up some of the congestion in the foyer so guests don't feel overwhelmed.
91. Get out of cliques.
92. Signs with directions need to be higher.
93. I think members should feel as welcomed. Sometimes pastoral staff need to make members feel good too.
94. Have a new visitor information booth right near the front door with several people offering welcome and information.
95. No one greeted us or told us where to take our kids. No one welcomed us to the worship center.
96. If we knew who the guests were. Big church. Lots of people. Lots of members.
97. Show love.
98. For me, it is hard to know who is a visitor and who has been a member a long time.
99. Have coffee available easily.
100. Ask earlier arrivers to scoot to the middle, leave outside seats for late comers.
101. Learn to recognize the guest. Wish that during the greeting time during our service that we would have all church members stand and that would allow the guests to remain seated so that we would know who the guests are.
102. Questions one and two would be ten, but it can get so crowded that it's hard to stop and talk.
103. Say something to someone, especially to someone you don't know.
104. Attend church regularly enough to know new faces.
105. Have our minds focused on winning people for the kingdom.
106. Greeters should be real and not smug and fake. Some need to work on facial expressions.

107. I just have to step out of my comfort zone.
108. Not enough room or time! So chaotic, everyone is just trying to make it out.
109. Much bigger lobby and more time between services and at the start of the service to talk. Don't make everything so rushed.
110. Not only adults welcome but get the youth involved.
111. Change greeting desk to drinks station. Coffee, water, smoothies. Allow coffee in the sanctuary.
112. Being a shy/private person I have difficulty acknowledging who is a visitor and who is not. Visitors generally do not want a big acknowledgement as a visitor.
113. Doing our best not to be clickish.
114. People need to step out of their small comfortable groups and include new people.
115. Make the lobby a little bigger.
116. Talk to them. Genuinely show interest. Invite them to the events. Don't push them.
117. Maps, signage.
118. Need to be more consistent.
119. It is way too crowded to greet or try to carry on even a small conversation. Need more time between services to let people filter. Talk too stressful.
120. There are so many people. Can't keep up with new people.
121. Yes. Do your own part everyday.
122. Our church is so large it is hard to know who is a guest and who has been coming for a while.
123. The lobby is too crowded to welcome people and as a new person I would be very scared to walk through that crowd.
124. A welcome committee or more greeters.

125. Visitor. Don't wait for greeting part of the service to shake hands and meet people.
126. Man the visitors center.
127. Have a greeting area in the gym before and between services. Too crowded in the lobby.
128. Encourage the regulars to sit in different places from time to time.
129. Not enough time or space between services to do much greeting. Everything feels rushed.

Comments of Affirmation

1. I think the church has done a great job of welcoming others to the church. I need to work on me.
2. Everyone pitches in. I need to work on me.
3. Bro. Jason and Bro. Bobby are awesome. It would be great if all people were like them.
4. From their car to the sanctuary, the greeters do an awesome job! As a body, we drop the ball when it comes to doing our part.
5. I think y'all are doing great. This is my 2nd time here and I feel very welcome!
6. From our first visit at Antioch, we've always felt welcome and been invited numerous times to Bible study.
7. I have only attended for just over a month and feel very much at home.
8. The lady who registered our kids was very welcoming.
9. The worship leader was fantastic.
10. Jason came to our house. We didn't expect that at all and it really made us feel welcome.
11. Please keep making personal visits to the homes of newcomers. We were extremely impressed that someone from a church as large as Antioch took the time to visit us. That's rare these days.

12. I think everyone is friendly, it's just hard to know who is new and who have been here for a long time because of all the people.

APPENDIX 7

“WELCOME?” SERIES TEACHING NOTES

Sermon 1: The Debate

Intro: Sports fans can often be found debating.

What team is the best?

What athlete is the best?

Is offense or defense most critical to success . . . ?

There were groups of people described in Scripture who were often found debating as well. Not debating sports questions, but religious ones. Among the topics was this one: *What is the most important commandment.*

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34

The Question: *Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*

The Response:

I. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one (cf. Deut 6:4).

A. There is one Lord and He alone deserves our worship. Not one choice on a buffet of options.

B. **Exodus 20:2-3** – *I am the Lord your God.... You shall have no other gods before me.*

C. Worship is not the church’s gift to us...it is our response to God.

II. Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind and . . . strength (cf. Deut. 6:5).

Jesus doesn’t seek a routine of love, but a relationship of love. Scripture shows Him to have much more patience with those who knew they didn’t “have it all together” than with those who wanted to appear that they did.

III. *Love your neighbor as yourself* (cf. Lev 19:18).

- A. How are YOU doing with this command to love others?
- B. How are WE as a church doing?

Series Title: “Welcome?”

- Every church likes to *think* they are a warm, welcoming group, but it is not always true.
- People ought to be invited to church, and when they attend they ought to receive a warm welcome.
- In the coming weeks we will consider how we are doing with that task.

Conclusion

1. The Lord is one. He is THE ONE who is to be worshipped.
2. Love the Lord your God with your whole being.
3. Love others the way Jesus loves.

Matthew 22:40 – *All the Law and the prophets hang on these two.*

Sermon 2: Welcoming Like Jesus

Intro: The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John show us a lot of pictures of the earthly life of Jesus. It’s probably a picture different than the perception of many. Many might not want to admit it, but probably have an image of Jesus as being stuffy...so holy that He was untouchable. You really couldn’t be around Him and be yourself, could you?

Make no mistake, He was the epitome of holiness, but when you look at the Jesus the Bible presents, you see someone who was hospitable, welcoming, genuine and real. His influence spanned the gamut from the very poor to the very prominent. *Jesus loved people.*

Scripture: Luke 15:1-2

- Jesus welcomed those whom the religious upright regarded as “sinners.”
- The Pharisees repelled sinners, but Jesus attracted them.

Jesus did attract sinners because He condoned their sin. Never did He compromise the message. But His love and compassion were sincere and magnetic.

Question: How do you think churches today are doing at communicating that same love? More specifically, how do you think WE are doing?

Today we will conduct an out-of-the-ordinary exercise. I want your help in determining what kind of “score” you think Antioch deserves in one of the simplest of things – helping others feel welcome at church.

Church survey

- Does it really matter if people receive a genuine welcome at Antioch? Yes! Why?
 1. Jesus modeled it.
 2. Jesus commanded it.
 3. Many people will judge Christ according to what they see from those who claim to be His people.

Understand... We are not emphasizing the importance of welcoming simply so that we can influence people to join the church. We are emphasizing it because, (1) it is the model Jesus gave us, and (2) it will help point people to Jesus.

Conclusion

Ill. Many years ago D.L. Moody was directing a Sunday School program in Chicago. There was a boy who would walk several miles to attend, even though there were other, more convenient places for him to go. Someone asked him, “*Why don’t you go to a Sunday School closer to home?*” He answered, “*Because those folks love a feller over there.*” (From Warren Wiersbe’s *New Testament Commentary*, 2001, Vol. 1, p. 233).

Sermon 3: What Really Matters

Intro: Last week we looked at a passage of Scripture, (Luke 15:1-2), that described a scene where people insulted Jesus because He “welcomed sinners.” Going farther into that chapter, we see that Jesus responded by telling three stories – “parables.”

1. Luke 15:3-7 – The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A shepherd with one hundred sheep, and one gets lost. The ninety-nine do not cease to matter, but attention turns to that which is lost.

2. **Luke 15:8-10** – The Parable of the Lost Coin

A lady with ten coins, each representing something of tremendous value. One is lost. The lady lights a lamp and searches the house until that which is lost is found.

3. **Luke 15:11-31** – The Parable of the Lost Son

A man had two sons and one of them took his portion of the family estate and squandered it. When he came to his senses he turned toward home, intending to beg for a place as a slave. He received mercy and grace from the father, and was welcomed as a son.

At the conclusion of each of these parables, when that which is lost has been found, it is regarded as reason for celebration (v. 6, 9, and 22-24).

Notice something Jesus stated twice in the passage:

Verse 7 - *I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

Verse 10 - *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Conclusion

Luke 15 is not the account of an irresponsible shepherd, a disorganized lady and a rebellious child. It is a glimpse into God’s concern for that which is lost.

God loves the lost.
He seeks them and rescues them.
Jesus died for them.
May our hearts be passionate for them.

Sermon 4: First Impressions

Intro: Comical drama sketch, (involving ten cast members), is presented in which a guest arrives at church. She is “welcomed” by a preoccupied door greeter and then is passed by when others arrive seeking only familiar friends. She has to climb over others to find a seat and is ignored during a “meet and greet” time. She arrives, attends, and leaves without anyone genuinely taking notice of her.

The old saying: *You never get a second chance to make a first impression.*

When a guest arrives at Antioch, what do the *first impressions* communicate?

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7-11

Peter said, “the end of all things is near...therefore be clear minded, self-controlled, be a praying people.”

Many people have lost clarity when considering the end.

They become consumed with determining “when” it will be.

God has made it clear that the end is near, (James 5:8; Rev. 1:3), but He has given some instructions we are to follow in the mean time.

1. Love each other deeply (1 Peter 4:8).

Jesus told His disciples that the world would know they were His disciples by their for one another (John 13:35)

2. Offer hospitality (4:9)

In recent weeks we’ve questioned how we are doing in the area of hospitality, even giving ourselves a “grade.”

- Reveal the project and the fact that a group of mystery worshippers have been utilized.
 - Presentation of a comparison of scores as ranked by the church and by the mystery worshippers.
 - Present plans to assemble a team of people who are interested in welcoming neighbors through personal contacts. Explain the concept of the mapping tool and invite those interested in contacting guests to complete and turn in a sign-up card.
3. Use whatever gift he has received to serve (4:10).
 - Introduce upcoming elective series to be offered on the topic of spiritual gifts.

Conclusion

1. Love
2. Offer hospitality
3. Serve

Why does it matter?

1 Peter 4:11(b) – *So that, in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

APPENDIX 8

MEMBER SIGN-UP FOR GUEST
FOLLOW-UP TEAM

Count on me!

I would be happy to make a personal contact with a
neighbor of mine who visits Antioch.

My contact information is:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Figure 1. Member sign-up card for
guest follow-up

APPENDIX 9

GUEST MAPPING TOOL SAMPLE REPORT

Table A5. Sample report for guest follow-up*

Last Name	First Name	Address	City	Zip	Latitude	Longitude	Distance
Sherman	Bryan	535 Fieldstone Lane	Conway	72034	35.094826	-92.517149	.1
Richardson	Michael	225 Merlot	Conway	72034	35.090177	-92.505709	.5
Edwards	Bob	330 Esplanade	Conway	72034	35.090177	-92.505709	.5
Michael	Holly	1100 Kirkland Drive	Conway	72034	35.093601	-92.505008	.6
Forsythe	Berwyn	1160 Callaway Drive	Conway	72034	35.08023	-92.530129	.6
Wilson	Jonathan	4630 Graham Drive	Conway	72034	35.098998	-92.516388	.7
Gray	Beth	4600 Valiant	Conway	72034	35.094454	-92.502631	.8
Free	David	3735 Lane Cove	Conway	72034	35.098461	-92.5076	.9
Turner	Traci	5230 Shakespeare Drive	Conway	72034	35.095272	-92.502491	.9
Helms	David	794 Drake Drive	Conway	72034	35.090536	-92.499358	.9
Moore	David	4450 Oregon Trail	Conway	72034	35.090619	-92.49934	1.0
Lowry	Donnie	25 Eve Lane	Conway	72034	35.097948	-92.505052	1.0
Pinkett	Monica	4435 Utah Trail	Conway	72034	35.094826	-92.517149	1.0
Ledbetter	Karen	805 Teal	Conway	72034	35.090177	-92.505709	1.0
Hughes	Kim	810 Teal	Conway	72034	35.090177	-92.505709	1.0
Rogers	Steve	4615 Fugitt Street	Conway	72034	35.093601	-92.505008	1.0

Guest Name: Jason Aultman
 Address: 600 Bristol Lane
 Conway, AR 72034

** Table A5 provides a sample report of member information that would be generated following a guest's visit to Antioch. The guest's information (shown below Table A5) is entered into the program and the report is used to help determine what member will be asked to contact the guest. For demonstration purposes, the writer has used his own name and address as that of a hypothetical guest.*

APPENDIX 10

MYSTERY WORSHIPPER GROUP 2

Table A6. Personal data

Participant Number	1 st Time at Antioch?	Age Range	Race	How Often Do You Attend Church?
19	Yes	20-39	African American	Weekly
20	Yes	60-79	Caucasian	Weekly
21	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
22	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
23	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
24	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
25	Yes	60-79	Caucasian	Weekly
26	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
27	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
28	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
29	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
30	No	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
31	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
32	Yes	40-59	Caucasian	Weekly
33	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
34	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly
35	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	1-3 times per month
36	Yes	20-39	Caucasian	Weekly

Table A7. Summary of mystery worshipper group 2
personal data

Number indicating this was their first time at Antioch in at least ten years	17
Number indicating they had previously attended Antioch one time in the previous ten years	1
Number in age range: 19 or under	0
Number in age range: 20-39	10
Number in age range: 40-59	6
Number in age range: 60-79	2
Number in age range: 80 or above	0
Number of African American participants	1
Number of Caucasian participants	17
Number indicating they attend church weekly	12
Number indicating they attend church 1-3 times per month	6
Number indicating they attend church less than 1 time per month	0
Number indicating they rarely or never attend church	0

APPENDIX 11

MYSTERY WORSHIPPER EVALUATION SCORES – GROUP 2

Table A8 demonstrates scores that were awarded by the second group of mystery worshippers. Categories include a score in response to the first impressions received in 7 categories: (1) Arrival to the church; (2) entering the building; (3) in the Worship Center prior to service; (4) immediately following the service; (5) whether an invitation to attend a Bible study group was received; (6) whether a follow-up contact was received in the week following the visit; (7) a score in response to the follow-up contact, if received.

Two of the categories (“Invitation to class received” and “Follow-up contact received”) asked for a “yes / no” response. A “yes” response received a score of 10 and a “no” response received a zero. The other 5 categories were scored by a Likert Scale response. If no follow-up contact was received, this was regarded as a missed opportunity and the score for “follow-up contact” was assigned a zero.

Table A8. Summary of mystery worshipper group 2 scores

Participant Number	Upon Arrival	Entering Building	In Worship Center	After Service	Invitation To Class Received	Follow Up Contact Received	Impression Of Follow Up Contact	Total Score Average
19	9	10	2	9	10	10	10	86%
20	8	9	2	10	10	10	10	84%
21	8	9	5	8	0	0	0	43%
22	10	10	4	9	0	10	9	74%
23	8	9	5	7	10	10	9	83%
24	8	9	5	9	10	10	10	87%
25	5	9	2	7	10	10	10	76%
26	7	8	8	9	0	0	0	46%
27	6	8	3	10	0	10	9	66%
28	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	100%
29	9	10	2	10	0	0	0	44%
30	10	10	7	10	10	10	10	96%
31	5	2	2	3	0	10	0	31%
32	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	97%
33	7	7	3	7	10	10	7	73%
34	9	8	7	8	0	10	10	74%
35	8	7	4	9	0	10	8	60%
36	9	9	2	10	10	0	0	57%
Average	80%	86%	46%	86%	56%	78%	78%	72%

APPENDIX 12

COMPARISON OF MYSTERY WORSHIPPER
GROUPS 1 AND 2 PERSONAL
DATA

Table A9. Personal data comparison

	Group One	Group Two	Total
Number indicating this was their first time at Antioch in at least ten years	17	17	34
Number indicating they had previously attended Antioch one time in the previous ten years	1	1	2
Number in age range: 19 or under	1	0	1
Number in age range: 20-39	11	10	21
Number in age range: 40-59	5	6	11
Number in age range: 60-79	1	2	2
Number in age range: 80 or above	0	0	0
Number of African American participants	2	1	3
Number of Caucasian participants	16	17	33
Number indicating they attend church weekly	8	12	20
Number indicating they attend church 1-3 times per month	5	6	11
Number indicating they attend church less than 1 time per month	2	0	2

APPENDIX 13

COMPARISON OF MYSTERY WORSHIPPER
GROUPS 1 AND 2 AVERAGE
SCORES

Table A10. Average score comparison

	Group One	Group Two	Point Difference
Average score based on impressions upon arrival	81%	80%	(1)
Average score based on entering the building	79%	86%	7
Average score based on interactions in the worship center prior to service	54%	46%	(8)
Average score based on impressions immediately following service	69%	86%	27
Average score based on percentage of group participants receiving an invitation to attend Bible study	11%	56%	45
Average score based on percentage of group participants receiving a follow-up contact in week following visit	44%	78%	33
Average score based on guest's impression of follow-up contact	39%	78%	39
Cumulative Score Average	54%	72%	18

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ABSTRACT

EVALUATING THE VISITOR RETENTION PROCESS AT ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH IN CONWAY, ARKANSAS

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This project was designed to evaluate the visitor retention process at Antioch Baptist Church, with specific attention given to the matter of first impressions. Most churches feel that they do an effective job of extending hospitality to guests. But does this opinion coincide with the opinions of guests? In many cases the honest answer to such a question would be “no.”

Through the utilization of mystery worshippers the matter of hospitality at Antioch was evaluated from the perspective of those outside the church. Guests were enlisted to attend one of the weekend services at Antioch and then provide feedback relative to that experience. A few of the areas for which feedback was sought included first impressions upon arrival, interaction with church members prior to and following the service, and follow-up contacts received.

Comparisons were drawn from two dimensions in order to evaluate and measure the condition and progress of hospitality efforts at the church. First, a system was developed by which one group of mystery worshippers assigned a grade to the church on the basis of the hospitality extended to guests. Additionally, the church

attendees provided a grade they felt the church merited as it related to hospitality efforts. These two scores (the “insider” and “outsider” perspectives) were compared to evaluate the perception of church members in relation to the perception expressed by the group of mystery worshippers. This comparison was accompanied by a time of teaching within the church on the topic of hospitality.

Following the period of teaching and training, a second group of mystery worshippers was enlisted to attend a service and provide an evaluation using the same method as utilized by the initial group. Scores provided by the second group of mystery worshippers were compared to those of the first group to assess whether progress had been achieved in enhancing first impressions and initial hospitality efforts within the church.

The foundation upon which the project rests is the two-fold biblical mandate to love God and love others. Any church desiring to practice these two disciplines must recognize that neither can be fully accomplished at the exclusion of the other. Genuine love for God produces the overflow from which genuine love for others is fulfilled.

While the scope of this project is specific to the context of Antioch Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas, the process utilized may prove beneficial to any church wishing to evaluate and enhance hospitality efforts. In so doing it is the ambition of the writer that the church will be strengthened and the fame of the Lord Jesus Christ will shine ever brighter.

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