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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTATION OF A GUEST RETENTION PROCESS IN THE  
LOUISVILLE FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
FOR MAXIMAL EVANGELISM EFFECTIVENESS

by

Timothy E. Madding

Adviser: Stephen Currow

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: IMPLEMENTATION OF A GUEST RETENTION PROCESS IN THE LOUISVILLE FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH FOR MAXIMAL EVANGELISM EFFECTIVENESS

Name of researcher: Timothy E. Madding

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Stephen Currow, DMin

Date completed: July 2012

Problem

The Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church attracts approximately 250 first-time guests through its doors each year. Of these approximately 5% are actually connecting to the church through membership. The local church has no organized, effective means of connecting these guests to the church and Christ, therefore great growth potential is being squandered.

The intention of this project is to increase the evangelistic impact of Louisville First and other Seventh-day Adventist churches in metropolitan areas by increasing the number of first-time guests to membership ratio.

## Method

A guest retention process was developed and implemented in 2010 at the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, which consisted of: (a) a training of the church leadership to provide awareness and authorization, (b) a four-part sermon series to introduce the biblical foundations and details of the guest retention process to the whole congregation, (c) a training seminar to give basic hospitality training to the members of the hospitality team, and (d) a training for the follow-up of guests at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. The guest retention process was then tested to measure its effectiveness.

## Results

The overall guest retention process training brought greater awareness of biblical hospitality and the attendance of guests at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. The pre- and post-evaluation instrument also showed that the guest retention process was perceived to be more successful at evangelism effectiveness.

## Conclusion

The guest retention process project proved to be a valuable training resource in the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. This resource might be a valuable training tool for other locations as well.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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LOUISVILLE FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
FOR MAXIMAL EVANGELISM EFFECTIVENESS

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Timothy E. Madding

July 2012

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For Andrea, who has shown me what is true biblical hospitality.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

Over 20 years ago, as a new Seventh-day Adventist and excited about my newfound faith and church, I invited my brother and his family to accompany me to a worship service over the Christmas weekend at the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. Believing that if they could worship in a Seventh-day Adventist church on Sabbath, their faith would be strengthened and they would want to join the church and begin a journey of discipleship as I had.

Sadly, it did not go well. Their experience was not an inspirational encounter. Because it was over the Christmas holiday, a number of the regular people were gone. In addition to the pastor, the greeters, head elder, and social members were absent. When we entered the church, there was no one there to welcome or greet us, the quality of the sermon was poor, the worship service was disorganized, and no one even spoke to my brother and his family. What I had hoped to be a spiritual experience turned out to be a great disappointment.

As we stood in the parking lot after the service, I asked them if they would be interested in returning on another Sabbath. Kindly, they said no. Needless to say, they have not been back to a Seventh-day Adventist Church since.

I realized that day that God works on people's hearts and draws them to himself. Yet if the church is not ready to receive them, they miss out on ministry opportunities. I began learning everything I could about the local church's application of biblical hospitality through various published materials and my personal experiences visiting other churches hoping that someday I would be able to assist the local church in connecting with those that God brings them; that maybe I could prevent someone else's brother from having a bad experience at church; that the church would not repel others, but be a warm, inviting place where seekers of God are connecting with His people and growing in discipleship.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church (hereafter referred to as Louisville First Church) attracted approximately 250 first-time guests through its doors each year. Of these potential members,<sup>1</sup> approximately 5% were actually connecting to the church through membership. Since the local church had no organized, effective means of connecting these guests to the church and Christ, great evangelism growth potential was being squandered.

Louisville First Church struggled with three distinct dynamics that contributed to the epidemic of evangelism effectiveness as it related to reaching its guests. First, the church was not prepared to receive the guests that arrived each week. The facilities and people were not anticipating the gift of people God was bringing to them by planning for them. The facilities were not prepared for guests. They were ill-equipped for providing

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<sup>1</sup>This study recognizes that some of the guests are from out of town and are not potential members.



directions to key locations, such as restrooms, classrooms, and children's departments. If someone did come with a desire to connect with the church, there was not a way for him/her to take the next step in discipleship. Resources for further growth were not provided or available. The membership was not trained in reaching guests when they did come. Greeters did not know how to communicate with guests, so as to best serve them properly; members did not know how to look for guests and what to say when they did see them; worship leaders were ill-prepared for speaking in such a way that allowed the guests to understand what was happening during the service and no one was prepared to follow up guests with an interest in growing more.

Second, because the membership was not expecting guests, they often heeded them little attention when they did come. In general, Louisville First Church members ignored guests; attending church with the motive of receiving a spiritual blessing instead of being a blessing to others by connecting with guests. Church members were friendly to each other, thus giving a perception of friendliness, but were deficient when it related to guests. Observation in the lobby and communications received told us that guests were often ignored.

The third dynamic that affected Louisville First Church's inability to connect guests was its lack of a system. The church had no formal means of training and equipping greeters, no process to receive their contact information, or method of following up those interested in connecting with the church.

### **Statement of the Task**

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a strategic guest retention process at Louisville First Church. The effectiveness of the guest retention

process was evaluated to determine its value in connecting guests to Christ and transitioning them into participating members of the congregation.

### **Justification for the Project**

This project was crucial to the church's evangelism effectiveness as one part of the overall evangelism process. There were a number of reasons a guest retention process was vital to evangelism.

#### Lost People Matter to God

First and foremost is because lost people that enter Louisville First Church's doors each week matter to God and apart from Christ, these guests will experience eternal death (John 3:16; 2 Pet 2:9; Rom 6:23; 1 John 5:11-13). Therefore, God commands His disciples to join Him in His work of seeking and saving the lost (Matt 28:19, 20; Luke 15; 19:10).

Since evangelism and discipleship is a process of spiritual growth that occurs over time in the heart of a person through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the church's role is to work in cooperation with that spiritual development, then a guest retention process is an organized means of cooperation with God in reaching these lost people.

#### God Uses the Church to Reach Lost People

In order for a guest retention process to be effective in evangelism, members at Louisville First Church must connect with these guests in a personal way. God reveals His character to the world through the people in His church by their character development. God uses His church, which is reflecting Him, as a means of drawing

people to Himself (Ezek 36:23-33; 2 Cor 2:15; Eph 3:10). This is why God is encouraging believers to connect with others through hospitality (Heb 13:2).

### Every Guest Represents Potential Kingdom Growth

Because Louisville First Church has no formal means of connecting with guests that attend each week and is only reaching a small percentage of them, a guest retention process will increase the retention rate and provide a better opportunity for the church to experience kingdom growth.

An important fact that most know but rarely think of as it relates to evangelism and a guest retention process is that no one joins Louisville First Church before first visiting it. Therefore, every guest that comes to visit Louisville First Church represents potential kingdom growth. A guest retention process understands the need to care for these guests as prospective members of God's Kingdom and the local church.

### God Entrusts Guests to the Church

Because a guest retention process considers the biblical principle of stewardship that God entrusts others with the care of His possessions and that God is drawing people to Louisville First Church each week, it should intentionally seek to connect these guests to Christ and the church. For the church to recognize that God is bringing these people to the church as a means of adding to His Kingdom and to cooperate with Him in that process is to be good stewards of His grace.

### **Description of the Project Process**

The Bible and writings of Ellen G. White say a great deal about the subject of hospitality, therefore these sources were examined to discover the importance of a system

of biblical hospitality as it relates to evangelism and church membership and served as a primary source in developing a theological reflection of the Old Testament principle for the care of “strangers” and “aliens.”

In order to develop a well-rounded understanding of this subject, current literature on Christian hospitality and guest connections was reviewed with additional attention paid to secular hospitality as it relates to church ministry. Sadly, there is very little within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it relates to a guest retention process. Most literature will come from other Christian and church growth sources.

Unfortunately, the church did not record attendance data, either by members or guests. This prevented the project from measuring results compared to previous years. In order to best determine the effectiveness of the guest retention process that was implemented as a result of this project, data from Louisville First Church was collected.

A training curriculum was developed for training and equipping a hospitality team. This process contained three components: a four-week sermon series on biblical hospitality that was delivered to the church as a whole in order to bring awareness to the subject and provide details and reasons for the changes as a result of the project. Second, an intensive guest retention process seminar was offered for those serving on the hospitality team providing them with a biblical and philosophical background and practical application as it related to the project. Finally, a follow-up accountability system was developed and those serving in this capacity received the necessary training.

The hospitality training process was implemented at Louisville First Church over a period of eight months. Two months were devoted to the sermons and seminar, and six

months were given to utilizing the guest retention process in a controlled accountability system.

The guest retention process was then be evaluated to determine if it had increased the evangelistic impact of Louisville First Church in the Louisville community by seeing whether the number of first-time guests to membership ratio had increased and the evaluation process included evaluations from new members who joined the church during the course of this study, giving their feedback on how hospitality effected their decision to join the church.

### **Expectations of This Project**

When moving forward in a project such as this, it was my hope that it would advance kingdom growth in Louisville First Church by adding to its membership those who had been attending the church and seeking to grow in Christ.

I also expected that this project would transform the greeter ministry at Louisville First Church by moving it from merely providing a handshake and offering a bulletin to making guests feel comfortable and welcomed; from a position held by those who cannot serve elsewhere to a key ministry of evangelism and from conversations only with church members and friends to connecting with guests. My hope was that the church would begin receiving e-mails and letters from guests that communicated how they enjoyed their visit rather than how they did not because not one person spoke with them.

I anticipated that this project would transform Louisville First Church's evangelism effectiveness by creating a culture of hospitality among the members. Church members would see that by taking time to talk with someone that they do not know, they

not only would make new friends, but also play a vital role in the conversion and discipleship of others.

This project would create a training process consisting of a sermon series, seminar, and implementation guide, which would equip Louisville First Church members to employ a guest retention process. Future church members seeking to serve in the ministry of hospitality could use this tool.

Since the role of pastoral ministry is to equip and train church members in fulfilling the mission of the church, I anticipated that this project would help me develop my leadership and equipping skills as a pastor.

There is very little in the area of hospitality and guest retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As such, there has been only a minimal amount of training offered to church members at Louisville First Church and throughout Adventism. This project would provide potential strategies for other pastors to lead their churches to greater hospitality and evangelism effectiveness.

### **Limitations of the Project**

A key limitation to the project is that an evaluation of an effective guest retention process requires a great deal more time—for the guest as well as the church. Evangelism, as it relates to hospitality, is a process of spiritual growth and occurs over a longer period of time than was allowed for in this project. To attempt to confine a person's spiritual receptivity to Christ by a church's hospitality in a six-month period would be improper and would not reveal the growth in the heart. Six months is also an inadequate length of time for a church to learn and implement an effective guest retention process. The process included the effectiveness of greeters, communication from a variety of

individuals from the pulpit, a system of follow up and the church's atmosphere, and friendliness during the weekend services. Six months was hardly enough time to adequately change the course of a church.

Another self-imposed factor that limited the outcome of the project was the choice of software used for follow up. There is a variety of software choices that are designed for assimilation into a church but typically cost a great deal. The church, during the "experimental phase of this project," was not willing to invest the resources until it could better see and understand its value.

The project process itself had two clear imposed limitations that prevented an acceptable outcome—both of which related to an evaluation of a person's heart. The project assumed that a church's evangelism effectiveness increases when a church has a system of hospitality and retention. However, the project methodology is challenged when attempting to evaluate people's feelings. Though some guests would likely communicate with the church how their visit was, most people would not share that information with us preventing the project from sufficiently evaluating its effectiveness.

The same can be said for evaluating the church's friendliness. The project methodology was limited when attempting to clearly evaluate whether the project had increased the friendliness of the church. Though a survey could be provided at the beginning and end of the project, evaluating the church's perceived change in friendliness, a survey has difficulty assessing feelings.

A full treatment of a guest retention process included another consideration that was not addressed in the study. Hospitality also occurs outside the church facility. How

church members show kindness to neighbors, co-workers, and friends outside church gatherings are part of the biblical hospitality ministry, but was not part of this project.

### **Definitions of Terms**

This study contains only a small number of technical terms. Although each is defined in its context, attention to the meaning of these terms here may prove helpful to the reader.

First among these is the term *guest*. This study defines a guest as a non-member (Seventh-day Adventist or otherwise) who visits the local church.

A *first-time guest* generally represents someone who attends the church for the first time. However, for the sake of this project, it refers to guests that fill out the communication tool, providing their contact information for the first time.

The term *hospitality* is defined as the friendly reception and treatment of guests. Two theological terms summarize the Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenos*: *philo*, meaning love, and *xenos*, guest or stranger.

The term *evangelism* has a variety of meanings within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, yet for this project it is defined as the process of bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, restoring in them the image of God, and preparing them for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

A *mega-church* is defined as a church with an average weekend attendance of over 1,800 people. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research provides an online database indicating that there are over 1,400 Protestant mega-churches in North America.



## **Summary**

The present study is laid out as follows: Chapter 1 discusses the need for a guest retention process, reviews Louisville First Church's present reality, and previews the other chapters. Chapter 2 explores the theological foundations of hospitality, offering justification for a guest retention process. Chapter 3 examines relevant literature to further explore the justification and content of a guest retention process. Chapter 4 outlines the curriculum formation and field test. Chapter 5 provides a report for the outcomes to the project. Chapter 6 offers suggestions for further exploration, and presents recommendations for broader application of these findings.

Finally, the purpose of this study was to develop and test a curriculum that would inform and equip church members in the value and means of showing biblical hospitality and following up on guests at Louisville First Church. The following chapters document this process.

## CHAPTER 2

### A THEOLOGICAL MOTIVATION

About a year into my ministry as pastor of the Louisville First Church, I received an e-mail from a woman who had attended a previous Sabbath as a first-time guest. She was new in the community and was looking for a local church at which to worship. Her experience caused me to very seriously consider the need for the implementation of a guest retention process. In the e-mail (Madding, personal communication, June 10, 2008) she said,

Hello Pastor, I recently moved to Louisville, and I visited your church for the first time this past weekend for Sabbath School and 11 o'clock service, and I was very disheartened that only ONE person in the entire congregation spoke to me. A VERY few others (maybe two or three) made eye contact, but no greeting. Only one person walked up to me, extended her hand and welcomed me to the service. I smiled as I commonly do, but it was like they all were intent on looking through me, and by the end of the service, I was actually very uncomfortable.

After reading this, I began to notice the number of guests at church and how the church membership often reacted to them. There was no formal means of connecting with guests and little was being done to encourage interaction with them. It was clear to me that we needed to implement some kind of assimilation strategy into the church—some way of better connecting with guests at church. I began to postulate that if we did have some kind of guest retention process we would be more effective at evangelism. God was bringing people to the church and it was our responsibility as His stewards to connect with these people and help them in their spiritual journey.

This problem of not connecting or being hospitable with others is not unique to Louisville First Church, but is a struggle in many churches. White (1901) talked about how in her day there were a number of churches that lacked in showing hospitality.

These admonitions have been strangely neglected. Even among those who profess to be Christians, true hospitality is little exercised. Among our own people the opportunity of showing hospitality is not regarded as it should be, as a privilege and blessing. There is altogether too little sociability. (p. 343)

Churches with a guest retention process have shown to be more effective in evangelism and church growth. Through the years a number of studies (Bast, 1988; Oswald, 1987; Schaller, 1978) have been conducted and books written on this subject. Barna has cited many studies on the subject. In one case Barna (2000) says,

A great ministry to the unchurched doesn't just happen. Such a ministry is not only the result of a clear, thoughtful and well-articulated philosophy, but also a commitment to adequate preparation of the congregation to accomplish the daunting but rewarding task at hand. (p. 135)

McIntosh (2006) agrees with this assessment when he talks about how churches with planned and strategic hospitality ministries are growing churches:

Growing churches also spend a significant amount of time getting ready for their company- visitors. For them it involves such things as preparing an attractive worship service, organizing teams of greeters, cleaning the church facility, offering refreshing snacks, and, most important, creating a welcoming environment. These churches believe they have only one chance to make a first impression, and they want the visitor to experience a friendly welcome. (pp. 7-8)

A guest retention process (also known as an assimilation strategy, hospitality ministry, greeter ministry, and host/hostess program) can easily be reduced down to tasks without any real, significant meaning or can become gimmicks to persuade guests to return or chores with no real purpose. However, when properly understood from a theological perspective, a guest retention process will breathe new life into the evangelism strategy of the church and assist in fulfilling the gospel commission.

## The Drawing Heart of God

According to 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”<sup>2</sup> His character is love. He does all things in and through love including the creation of humankind—whom He loves. When defining love, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says, “love is kind.” The Greek word used here to define love as kind is *chresteumai*, meaning to show oneself by acting benevolently, to help or assist. God exists to show His love by helping or assisting. Since the creation of humankind that love or kindness has been revealed through His attempt to assist humanity in the restoration of a fallen relationship with Him. He longs to be with His people and is doing everything He can to accomplish this.

More than anything else, God desires to be with His people because of His love for them. It is within the heart of God to have a real, personal relationship with humanity and it is His mission and purpose to draw everyone to Himself. It is His character; He will do everything possible to save fallen humanity.

Because God loves humanity and desires to be with them, He is actively drawing them to Himself. God is the one who draws, bringing the hearts of others to Himself (Jer 31:3). Because God is love and His desire is to be with humanity, He draws them to Himself (Hos 1:4; John 6:44, 65; 12:32; John 14:6). The Bible is a living illustration that recalls His efforts throughout salvation history to be with His people.

### With Humanity in the Garden

When Adam and Eve were enjoying the benefits of their new garden home, the greatest part of that new life was being personally with God (Gen 2:15, 22). Nothing

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are quoted from the New American Standard Bible.

separated them from God. With no sin to separate them, our Edenic parents enjoyed personal fellowship with their creator. Sadly, this did not last long. As a result of sin, Adam and Eve (and humankind as a whole) were not only excommunicated from the Garden of Eden but from a personal acquaintance with God (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Since then, God has used every heavenly resource to bring His people back to Him. Because of His love for them God desires to once again be with His people.

#### With Humanity in the Sanctuary

After the fall, God provided a means to be with His people. God instructed them to build a sanctuary so that He might dwell with them (Exod 25:8). The sanctuary constructed by God's people at His instruction was not only an illustration of salvation but the means provided humankind to be with God (Exod 40:34-35). "A solemn awe rested upon all. But the gladness of their hearts welled up in tears of joy, and they murmured low, earnest words of gratitude that God had condescended to abide with them" (White, 1890, p. 349). "God commanded Moses for Israel, 'Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them' (Exod 25:8), and He abode in the sanctuary, in the midst of His people" (White, 1898, p. 23). If someone wanted to be with God, they were required to go to the sanctuary.

#### With Humanity in the Flesh

Later, the Son of God laid aside His divinity and became a man so that God could be with His people in an even more personal way (John 1:14; Phil 2:6-7). To better illustrate the character of God and supply the means of salvation through His death upon the cross, Jesus came to live among people in the sin-sick world. "So Christ set up His tabernacle in the midst of our human encampment. He pitched His tent by the side of the

tents of men, that He might dwell among us, and make us familiar with His divine character and life” (White, 1898, p. 23). When Jesus came, He was given the name, Immanuel, which translated means, God with us (Matt 1:23). White (1898) says, concerning the first Advent of Christ:

From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was “the image of God,” the image of His greatness and majesty, “the outshining of His glory.” It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,--to be “God with us.” Therefore it was prophesied of Him, “His name shall be called Immanuel.” (p. 19)

#### With Humanity in the Heart

Jesus Christ’s ministry here on earth only lasted a few decades and then He returned to heaven. Once again, God was no longer physically with His people. Jesus looked forward to the day His people will be with Him in heaven, and informed the disciples that He is spending this time now preparing a place for them (John 14:1-3). So that humankind is not alone in the meantime, He has sent the Holy Spirit to be with them (John 14:16). God no longer dwells in a temple made with hands, but now resides in the hearts of His people (John 14:17-18; Eph 3:17). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the God-head, works *with* all people until they surrender to Him. Once they surrender, the Spirit of God dwells *in* them as a holy temple (1 Cor 6:19). Humanity can be with Him whenever they desire because He resides within the human temple of His people (1 Cor 3:16).

#### With Humanity in the New Earth

Revelation says that when the earth is made new God will dwell with His people once again here on this earth (Rev 21:3). After the earth is made new, there will no longer be a need for a temple because God will physically be with His people (Rev 21:22).

God's people are used to reveal His character and fulfill the plan of salvation (Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 5:17-20). It is God that draws a person to Himself, but when He does so, He draws that person to His people so that they might work in cooperation with Him in reaching that person. God longs to be with His people and He uses His church, the place that He is currently dwelling on earth, to accomplish this.

### **Stewards of the Mysteries of God**

The church has been entrusted with the Word of God and thus an understanding of His character and plans for humanity (Col 1:26-28; 4:3). As God draws people to His church, His people are stewards of the His Word and those whom He draws. In many ways, when someone walks into a church, they are a gift from God and someone that the church should carefully look after as a steward (Searcy, 2007, p. 27).

According to *HarperCollins' Bible Dictionary* (1996), a steward is someone responsible for "overseeing the possessions, business affairs, property, servants . . . of an owner or master" (Achte-meier, p. 1065). Both the Word of God and those He is drawing are God's. He draws the person to the church so that the church can love or show kindness to that person in His behalf and share that Word with them. Speaking to the church, God says (Ezek 36:23) that He is going to vindicate (make holy) His name (reputation or character) through the church (His people). People will come to understand the heart of God by Him revealing it through His people, where He dwells.

In her book describing the life and ministry of the early Christian Church, White (1911) says,

The Church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of

darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to the ‘principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10. (p. 9)

The church should be anticipating people coming to the church, whether to the facility, or in their lives individually. When they come, the church shows Christ-like love and kindness to them by helping or assisting them in their continued journey to be with God.

The church exists to be used by God to encourage others in their faith journey. When the church is assembled together, they are to encourage each other (Heb 10:24-25). When people come to church, the church is to encourage them. This is why a number of writers throughout the Bible encourage the spirit of hospitality.

### **Biblical Hospitality**

Biblical hospitality comes from the Greek word, *philoxenos*, which is actually a combination of two words: *philo*, meaning love and *xenos*, guest or stranger. Hospitality is defined simply as the “love of strangers” (Vine, 1941, p. 235).

There is a reason that many church members feel apprehensive toward a guest visiting their church and a reason that the guest feels an anxiety about visiting a new place. There is a natural tension between the two sides when a stranger arrives in a new environment. The linguistic evidence implies an expected conflict that occurs with the *xenos* and within those the stranger is near. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Friedrich, 1967) expands this:

Between the stranger and those around him there is reciprocal tension. He is a man from without, strange, hard to fathom, surprising, unsettling, sinister. But to the stranger his odd and different environment is also disturbing and threatening. There thus arises a mutual fear, especially of the magical powers of what is foreign. (vol. 5, p. 2-3)



On the other hand, *xenos* is a friend or guest who is associated with the other in the context of hospitality. “This overcomes the distance of strangeness and the tension of being a foreigner” (Friedrich, 1967, p. 5).

Therefore biblical hospitality is showing love toward a stranger as a guest or as friend. Foster (2008) says, “Christian hospitality, as given to us in the Bible, is a sacred process of 'receiving' outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests” (p. 2). For a church or believer to practice biblical hospitality, love must be shown to a stranger, someone they might naturally feel a distance or apprehension toward and creating a guest or friendship. “Thus *xenos* means ‘guest-friend,’ as Ariaeus was the guest-friend of Menon (Xenphon, An. 2.4.15)” (Spicq, 1994. p. 557).

### **The Apostle Paul and Hospitality**

#### **Paul’s Experience Vital**

The Apostle Paul speaks a great deal about hospitality in a variety of places. He seemed to think that it was a vital component to church ministry. Could it be because hospitality was shown to him when he was converted on his journey to Damascus? Note how the book of Acts records Paul’s experience and how it follows God’s leading in a person’s life—drawing them closer to Him through the church. Paul’s conversion and experience with hospitality provide a framework for the implementation of a guest retention process in the church today.

#### **God Draws the Guest**

Paul, a zealous Pharisee (Acts 22:3, 4), was traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians when Jesus Christ appeared to him and after being struck blind, told him to go into the city of Damascus for he would receive further instruction upon arrival.

One moment Paul is determined to persecute the Christians, believing that God ordained his cause. The next moment, he finds himself face to face with Christ and the realization that he had not only been living outside of God's will but also had actually been persecuting Christ Himself. "No wonder that the man who had been planning fresh assaults on the disciples ten minutes before, was crushed and abject as he lay there on the road, and these tremendous new convictions rushed like a cataract over and into his soul!" (Maclaren, 1942, p. 266).

This encounter with Christ becomes the catalyst for Paul's conversion and new perspective on salvation. "In this supreme revelational encounter, Saul received a new perspective on divine redemption, a new agenda for his life, and the embryonic elements of his new Christian theology" (Gaebelein, 1981, p. 371). Often times, before a guest comes to church, they have an encounter with Christ who is drawing them.

### **God Prepares the Church**

In the city of Damascus was a man named Ananias, a disciple in the new Christian church. God speaks to him and says, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay hands on him, so that he might regain his sight" (Acts 9:11-12).

Ananias was not emotionally ready to receive Paul and God had to prepare him for the meeting. Understandably, he was hesitant to go and meet with Saul. For Ananias and many of the Christian believers, Saul was an enemy that was not to be trusted and as such, was reluctant to go to him. Yet, Christ prepares Ananias for the experience through

vision and he chooses to obey. “He accepts the Lord’s assurances, and render instant obedience” (Nichol, 1957, vol. 5, p. 233).

Ananias shows us how believers can be apprehensive toward unbelievers that God is bringing to the church. A guest retention process today must recognize this natural fear and address it. The church, understanding its calling, must be willing to let God prepare it for guests.

### **God Ministers to the Guest Through the Church**

Interestingly, Paul is struck blind and it is the believer Ananias that helps to give him his sight back. God is the one who gives sight to the blind, but God chooses to use the believer in the process. Elsewhere (Acts 22:14) Paul identified this blindness as not just physical, but spiritual blindness. White (1911) adds,

The marvelous light that illumined the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples. Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction, and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach the truth. (p. 121)

Just as God through Ananias healed Paul, so the church today is being used by God to bring spiritual healing to those He is drawing. An effective guest retention process is intentional about ministering to the guest.

### **God Disciples the New Believer Through the Church**

After His conversion, God begins discipling Paul through the church that continues to love and encourage him (Acts 9:19). Acts 9 continues telling his conversion story by reciting his discipleship through baptism, the proclamation of Jesus in the

synagogue, the protection of his life by the church, and Barnabas' connecting him with other believers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27).

Speaking more about Paul's conversion and its impact upon the Christian church White (1911) concludes that members of the church have a vital role in the conversion of the lost as Christ draws the seeker to the church where they can grow more in His grace:

Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His recognized followers on earth. Jesus is the friend of sinners, and His heart is touched with their woe. He has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world. (p. 122)

#### Paul's Teaching Vital

Because hospitality was such a key element in his conversion, Paul spends a great deal of time throughout his writings talking about its significance in the church. This is so important in the church that Paul identifies it as one of the vital character traits of someone serving in the office of an elder (1 Tim 3:1-2; Titus 1:7-8a). One of the key qualities of an elder is being hospitable.

As a leader in the church, the pastor or elder sets the tone for the remainder of the congregation. Notice that among the many characteristics of an elder, he/she must be hospitable, loving strangers. "As the organization of the churches became more perfected, the exercise of hospitality grew to be an official duty of the ministry and a reputation for hospitality was a prerequisite in some cases" (Orr, 1925, p. 1433). It is so important to the ministry of the church that the church leaders must practice hospitality.

"A lover of hospitality" is among the specifications given by the Holy Spirit as marking one who is to bear responsibility in the church. And to the whole church is given the injunction: "Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1 Peter 4:9, 10 (White, 1901, p. 342)

When speaking to the church in Rome Paul identifies a number of character traits that should be manifested in the church, among them is practicing hospitality (Rom 12:13).

When speaking to Hebrew converts, Paul says that we should not only love the members of the church, but strangers too (Heb 13:1-2). Paul says that hospitality has significance in the church because of its historical and supernatural implications. There have been times in the past when angels have been shown hospitality by believers. Paul tries to show the importance of hospitality by warning them that it would not be good for an angel to show up and not find hospitality. “The use of this idea in Heb. 13:2 attracts attention, not to the reward, but to the possibility of contact with the metaphysical world which hospitality gives, and, of course, the equally great possibility of throwing away this good fortune” (Friedrich, 1967, vol. 5, p. 22).

The specific incident that Paul is referring to is not entirely known, but there are several accounts in the Old Testament where angels have been shown hospitality by the people of God.<sup>3</sup>

As the Apostle Paul encourages the church to practice hospitality, he reminds them that angels had at one time appeared to others. Paul is not saying that if we entertain strangers that we will have the good fortune of receiving the angelic host. “The Old Testament incidents are too exceptional to admit of such generalization. It is sufficient to say that, as some were unexpectedly blessed by receiving strangers, so we, too, may be

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<sup>3</sup>These experiences of entertaining angels will be examined in greater detail in the Old Testament survey of biblical hospitality.

thus blessed” (Lenski, 1966, p. 477). Therefore it is vital to the ministry of the local church that the follower of Christ shows hospitality to others.

## **Hospitality in the Old Testament**

### Stranger Motif in the Old Testament

As a constant reminder that they were once strangers in a foreign land, as seen in the experience of the patriarch Abraham as a pilgrim (Gen 15:13; Heb 11:9) and the children of Israel in the wilderness 40 years after their deliverance from Egypt (Exod 18:3; Lev 19:34), God instructs His people to treat other strangers with hospitality. They were not to forget what it was like to be a foreigner or stranger and to show kindness to others (Friedrich, 1967). There are a number of regulations given to encourage the hospitable treatment of guests or strangers. The Theological Lexicon of the New Testament (Spicq, 1994, p. 558) elaborates:

Already in the OT God loved and protected the ‘sojourner,’ who was in a way integrated by the law into the chosen people (Exod 12:48; 20:10; Duet 14:29; cf. Ezek 47:22). This people had been a ‘stranger’ in Egypt (Exod 22:20; 23:9) and was obligated to show hospitality to the stranger and love him as one of its own (Lev 19:34).

The standard of the law applies the same to the stranger as it does the children of Israel (Lev 24:22). In regards to the ordinances concerning the celebration of the Passover, the law applies the same to the stranger as it does the native (Num 9:14). If a guest in the home of an Israelite desires to worship God by participating in an offering by fire, he is permitted to do so just as the Israelite does (Num 15:13-16). If a stranger unintentionally sins and desires to find forgiveness from God, he too can go to the priest that can offer a sacrifice as atonement for sin just as an Israelite (Num 15:27-29). When someone is in need of legal protection, the judges were to offer fair rulings, even if it was

given to the stranger (Deut 1:16); the stranger's justice must be guaranteed (Deut 24:17). If the stranger is not given justice, the judge would be cursed (Deut 27:19).

Even as it relates to the weekly Sabbath, the stranger is promised the blessings of God (Exod 20:8-10). When a guest resides with a follower of God, the guest is provided the blessing offered in the Sabbath.

These laws and rituals were designed to allow the stranger in Israel the ability to worship among and integrate within God's people. An effective guest retention process will understand that the church does not exist for the exclusivity of itself. It must be designed to allow the unbeliever the ability to worship with them, understanding what is happening and integration within the community.

### Hospitality Extended to Angelic Beings

#### **Abraham Shows Hospitality**

The first known (and most popular) account of hospitality from a follower of God being shown to a heavenly being is with Abraham (Gen 18:1-8). Abraham sat just outside his tent when three men appeared not too far from him. Once he noticed the strangers, he quickly made haste to greet them and after a brief salutation, invited them to stop on their journey and find refreshment from the heat of the day. White indicates that accompanying these two angels was Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1890, pp. 138-139). Little did Abraham know that at his tent sat two angels and the Son of God.

His humble and pressing invitation, his modest description of the meal, his zeal in its preparation, his standing by to serve those who were eating, are picturesque traits of the life of faith as it here reveals itself, in an exemplary hospitality. (Lange, 1901, vol. 1, p. 433)

Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, is seen here practicing hospitality and entertaining Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### **Lot Shows Hospitality**

The second known interaction with heavenly beings as it relates to hospitality is with Abraham's nephew, Lot (Gen 19:1-3). These same angels that appeared to Abraham were on a journey together to the city of Sodom to destroy it for its wickedness. The two angels left Abraham's tent and the Son of God stayed by with Abraham (White, 1890) to talk further of the plans for Sodom. Without knowing who his guests were or why they had come to Sodom, Lot prepared a meal and provided water to drink. White (1890) indicates that because hospitality was a part of his religion, Lot was saved from destruction.

Lot did not know their true character, but politeness and hospitality were habitual with him; they were a part of his religion--lessons that he had learned from the example of Abraham. Had he not cultivated a spirit of courtesy, he might have been left to perish with the rest of Sodom. Many a household, in closing its doors against a stranger, has shut out God's messenger, who would have brought blessing and hope and peace. (p. 158)

White asserts that not being open to strangers by showing them hospitality can shut out the blessings from God. As God draws the heart of others to Him and brings them to the church, the church has a wonderful opportunity to be blessed by showing hospitality to the guest.

God is displeased with the selfish interest so often manifested for "me and my family." Every family that cherishes this spirit needs to be converted by the pure principles exemplified in the life of Christ. Those who shut themselves up within themselves, who are unwilling to be drawn upon to entertain visitors, lose many blessings. (White, 1901, p. 343)

### **Gideon Shows Hospitality**

Gideon is a third person noted in the Bible as entertaining angels (Gen 6:11-24). As Gideon was working in the wine press, an angel approached Gideon and gave him



words of encouragement. When the angel identified himself as an angel of the Lord, Gideon asked that the angel stay by and share in his hospitality.

When Gideon brought a meal for the angel to receive, the angel instructed him to place the meal upon a rock. The angel stretched out his hand and with his staff, he touched the food. Immediately fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the food as a sacrifice. To further encourage Gideon, the angel then said, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die” (Judg 6:23).

### **Manoah Shows Hospitality**

Manoah, the father of the great judge Samson, was another patriarch of old that was privileged to share his hospitality with heavenly beings. An angel appeared to Manoah and his wife and not only told them that they would have a child, but how they were to raise him. As had with Gideon, the meal was consumed by fire to encourage Manoah and his wife that the message had come from God. The angel left them by ascending in the flames of the fire before their eyes.

In all four of these experiences, believers were not only willing to extend hospitality to strangers that turned out to be angelic beings, but all provided some kind of refreshment. An effective guest retention process recognizes the value of food in hospitality. When people take time to stop for a refreshment conversation develops.

### **Other Examples of Hospitality**

Aside from those who entertained angels, the Bible is filled with examples and lessons of hospitality. Since hospitality had become a vital part of their lives, God’s people, throughout the Old Testament, demonstrated hospitality in the lives of many people.

When Jacob flees from his brother Esau, he travels to the home of his uncle Laban who showed him kindness and allowed him to live with him (Gen 29:13).

After Moses fled Egypt he journeyed to Midian where Jethro welcomed him into his home and eventually gave one of his daughters to Moses as a wife. So grateful for the hospitality shown him, that Moses named his firstborn “Gershom, for he said, ‘I have been a sojourner in a foreign land’” (Exod 2:22).

On the banks of the Jordan River at the border of the Promise land, Joshua sent two spies into the city of Jericho to canvass the city. When they entered and were in need of refuge, Rahab, a prostitute who lived in the city, showed them hospitality by not only giving them a place to stay but hid them when the officials came looking. Because of her hospitality and bravery, she and her household were the only survivors when the city was later destroyed (Josh 6:17).

After the prophet Elijah communicated God’s disfavor with King Ahab and that there would be a great famine in the land, Elijah made his way to the home of a widow who was preparing to die from the famine. When he approached, she was gathering a few sticks for a fire to prepare what she believed to be the last meal for she and her son. Elijah asked her for some water and bread.

Hospitality was such an important factor to their religion and faith that the woman was willing to give Elijah what little water she had, but the amount of flour for bread was so small that it would only serve as a little morsel as their final meal before dying. Elijah encouraged her to make the bread for him by faith and that there would still be enough for her and her son. By faith she made the bread and there was not only enough for the

three of them, but enough oil and flour to last until the famine was over. God honored her spirit of hospitality.

As so many others throughout the Bible, God blesses those who give to others in hospitality. Later, when her son grew ill, God miraculously saved him through the ministry of the prophet Elijah. Her faith act of hospitality not only blessed her and her son with more food, but later saved the life of her son. Expounding on this, White (1917) adds,

The widow of Zarephath shared her morsel with Elijah, and in return her life and that of her son were preserved. And to all who, in time of trial and want, give sympathy and assistance to others more needy, God has promise great blessing. He has not changed. His power is no less now than in the days of Elijah. No less sure now than when spoken by our Saviour is the promise, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." Matthew 10:41. (p. 131)

Elisha also was shown kindness through the hospitality from a couple living in Shunem. The wife noticed the prophet as he was passing by and she encouraged him to stop, enjoy a meal, and rest a while. As the prophet relaxed, the wife recognized that he was a man of God so she spoke with her husband, persuading him to build another room onto the house so that whenever he passed through, he would have a place to stay and rest.

So blessed by her hospitality, Elisha desired to bless her in return. As a gesture of thankfulness, he promised her that she would conceive and give birth to a son. Once again, God rewards His followers as they give to others in hospitality. White (1917) asserts that God was not "unmindful of the woman's kindness. Her home had been childless; and now the Lord rewarded her hospitality by the gift of a son" (p. 237).

Sadly, there is even an experience where the abuse of hospitality might have even resulted in the extinction of the entire Benjamite tribe (Judg 19:20).

These examples of biblical hospitality in the Old Testament reveal two powerful themes that help us articulate a guest retention process in the church today. The various patriarchs and prophets revealed through their actions that hospitality was part of the culture of the community. When a foreigner or stranger passed through their midst, God's people went out of their way to extend hospitality to them by providing comfort, generosity and almost always food. Food was an integral part of showing hospitality among God's people.

These occurrences also reveal that when the followers of God in the Old Testament extended hospitality, no matter how difficult it might appear, God blessed them for giving it. Because they were willing to put others before themselves, often sacrificing for the sake of others, God returns a blessing.

### **Hospitality Extended in the New Testament**

The New Testament has a great number of accounts where God's people either extended or received hospitality. In fact, it has been argued that the New Testament relied almost singularly on hospitality as means of forwarding the Gospel:

In the days of primitive Christianity the spread of the Gospel took place almost exclusively by word of mouth, and the evangel was carried by wandering messengers who were sustained by the hospitality of the brethren. Jesus Himself counted on this when He first sent out the disciples, and both His own work and that of the apostles rested on it. In fact, whenever the hospitality of Christians is mentioned in the NT, the reference is primarily to that extended to apostles and missionaries. (Friedrich, 1967, vol. 5, pp. 22-23)

Because of his profession as a tax collector, Matthew (Matt 9:9-13) was despised by the other Jews. However, after Jesus had called him as a disciple, Matthew left his business and in a desire to make things right with others and to introduce his own friends to Jesus, he hosted a gathering in his home. When the religious leaders made comments

about Jesus' willingness to socialize with tax collectors and sinners, He defends His actions by indicating that He cares for everyone, including the outcast (Matt 9:12-13).

Martha, the sister of Lazarus, was someone who had the gift of hospitality (Luke 10). She was always fixing food and showing kindness to others. Unfortunately, Martha seems to be looked at negatively because of her hospitality and Jesus' apparent rebuke, but Foster (2008) believes that Jesus was teaching her that true hospitality is caring not only with the extravagant, but also giving proper respect and attention to one's guest.

This is a tough passage, and it is often assumed that Martha gets something of a bum rap from Jesus here. But John 11 is most instructive in showing that it is Martha who ultimately utters two of the most marvelous professions of faith found anywhere in scripture (John 11:21-22, 27). Martha learned the lesson that Jesus teaches her here in Luke 10. (p. 14)

Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) was another tax collector that entertained Jesus in his home. As with Matthew, the religious leaders began grumbling amongst themselves because Jesus socialized with tax collectors and sinners. Sadly, God's people had lost focus of the purpose of hospitality. For them, it was an occasion to entertain themselves—excluding those that were less desirable. Jesus, on the other hand, desired to minister to everyone, including the outcast. Which is why He said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:9-10). As had always been the intent, as Jesus well understood, hospitality is a means of reaching the lost.

Jesus Christ makes His way to the city of Samaria where He meets a woman at the well of Jacob (John 4). When He first addresses her, He asks her to extend hospitality to him by providing Him a drink of water. Jesus offers her spiritual water that will quench her spiritual thirst, lasting for eternity. Amazed at His words, she opens up to Him about her life and He reveals even more to her. Jesus returns her act of hospitality with a

blessing and the entire town is blessed. The people then invite Jesus and His disciples to come into the city where they might show them hospitality and He might teach them more about the Word. Jesus and the disciples stayed in the city of Samaria two days with the hospitality of the city.

After Jesus returned to heaven, the new Christian church began to grow rapidly. In addition to preaching the prophetic fulfillment of the Messiah in God's Word and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, hospitality played a large role in the ministry of the church. After Peter and the disciples preached to thousands on Pentecost about 3,000 people joined the church. Becoming part of the church was not just an intellectual decision; it was a lifestyle change that involved hospitality. The Bible tells that "they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). In addition to meeting together on a regular basis for worship, Bible study, and prayer, the church extended its hospitality to not only the occasional religious gathering, but a life of sharing everything they had with each other (Acts 4:32-38).

When the Apostle Paul traveled to the city of Philippi, he met a woman named Lydia. Her heart was so touched by the Spirit of God through the ministry of Paul that after she and her family were baptized, she invited him to stay at their home (Acts 16:14-15). And she prevailed upon them.

When Paul was a prisoner on his way to Rome via the sea, the ship he was sailing in ran aground and was wrecked. The guards and prisoners swam or took smaller boats to shore and were met by the natives of a small island called Malta with hospitality (Acts 28:2).

These examples of biblical hospitality in the New Testament reveal two powerful themes that help us articulate a guest retention process in the church today. The various apostles and believers revealed through their actions that hospitality was a primary means of revealing the character of God and His love for the downtrodden.

These incidences also reveal that the principal method of evangelism in the New Testament church was the practice of hospitality. As the apostles traveled from city to city, believers opened their homes so that they could preach the gospel. As new believers joined the movement, they connected with the growing Christian community by being welcomed into each others homes for prayer, bible study, food, fellowship and worship.

### **Eschatological Implications of Hospitality**

There is much to say about hospitality in the Bible as it relates to eschatology. In fact, Jesus said a great deal about hospitality with Him in heaven—about those who will be with Him there and those who sadly will not.

#### **Jesus Identifies With Strangers**

Jesus cares so deeply for the sinner, outcast, and stranger, that He actually identifies Himself with the stranger or foreigner in the context of hospitality. The entire chapter of Matthew 25 is about preparation for the second coming of Jesus Christ and His setting up His Kingdom. Jesus explains that when He returns from Heaven in all His glory, He will come for His people. In this case, His people are identified as those that minister to others in hospitality in verses 35-36. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes that “the great final test is concerned with the extent to which the principles of true religion (see Jas 1:27) have been applied to daily living, particularly in relationship to the interests and needs of others” (Nichol, 1957, vol. 5, p. 512).

In these six Christian attributes of compassion, feeding the hungry (*peinao*), giving water to the thirsty (*dipsao*), inviting in a stranger (*xenos*), clothing the naked (*gymnos*), visiting the sick (*astheneo*), and imprisoned (*phylake*), they do not require the supernatural elements of ministry such as healing, setting captives free, speaking in tongues, etc., which only a few could accomplish, but sympathy, attention, visitation, which all can bequeath (Lange, 1901, p. 449). Any believer, despite his or her gifts, can show hospitality to others. Each component of hospitality here mentioned,

Is the faithful discharge of humble duties pertaining to day to day living, that is given as the reason for the words of congratulation and approbation, and for the cheering invitation to come in and take possession of the blessing of the kingdom in its final stage. (Hendriksen, 1973, p. 888)

This list of good deeds is not new to those Jews gathered around for similar lists appear often in biblical and early Jewish texts: Isaiah 58:7 (hungry, homeless, naked); Ezekiel 18:7, 16 (debtors, hungry, naked); Job 22:6-7 (orphans, naked, poor, innocent, strangers); Tob 1:16-17 (hungry, naked, dead); 4:16 (hungry, naked); Sirach 7:34-35 (mourning, sick); 2 Enoch 9:1 (hungry, naked, fallen, sick, orphans); 42:8; 63:1 (naked, hungry).

As Jesus was sharing this message with those gathered around, He hypothetically asks a question that others might be asking in their own minds. Most felt that they would do anything for Jesus. If they had known of a time when he was hungry, thirsty, or needed a place to stay they would have shown him that hospitality. So when did they minister to His needs and show Him this kindness? He answers by saying that “to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (Matt 25:40). The followers of Christ respond with a humble response, not knowing when it was that they had ministered to Jesus. “The astonishment expressed by the



followers of the Lord was that borne of service spontaneously, gladly, gratefully, and humbly rendered, and then completely forgotten” (Hendriksen, 1973, p. 889). As a result of their kindness, they are considered one of the sheep that are gathered into the Kingdom of heaven prepared for them.

Jesus continues to dialogue by indicating that those that are set aside as the goats are those that did not show kindness through hospitality. They did not give Jesus water to drink, food to eat, visit with Him, or a place to stay. Those that missed the opportunity to serve Him asked when it was that they neglected Him? Jesus responds by saying, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matt 25:40). These people are not kept out of the kingdom because they fulfilled some great sin, but neglected to show something as simple as hospitality. The *New Testament Commentary* (Hendriksen, 1973) elaborates:

It should be noted that all these sins are negative. Not a single sinful deed—such as idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, etc.—is mentioned. Only sins of omission are enumerated, sins of neglect. This neglect proves that these people have not believed in the Son of man. For their unbelief, thus demonstrated, they are condemned. (p. 891)

Sadly, the penalty given to those that do not practice hospitality to those in need is eternal loss. One of the characteristics of the redeemed, those that have the heart of Christ within them and live to serve Him in the last days, is a spirit of hospitality.

### Hospitality in Heaven

The Bible says much about the day that the redeemed enter into eternity. In addition to leaving this sin-sick world and going to the place Jesus has prepared for them (John 14:1-3), it talks about the reception offered them when they enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells a parable about the Kingdom of heaven being compared to the

reception of a wedding that is offered to the redeemed (Matt 22:1-14). Jesus also compared eternity to a banquet planned in a parable in which everyone, including the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, was invited to come and partake of the man's hospitality (Luke 14:15-24). Sadly, not everyone chose to attend that reception and they missed out on the blessing. Jesus is saying here that only the saved shall partake of His banquet in heaven.

Most often the hospitality of God offered to the saved as they enter into eternity by hosting a banquet is explained through the wedding motif—God as the groom and the church as the bride (Rev 19:9; 22:14).

In the message to the seven churches, the Bible describes what the redeemed will receive as their reward. A number of the messages to the churches indicate that there will be food in heaven (Rev 2:7, 17; 3:20).

### Jesus Desiring Hospitality

Imagine if angels were to come to the church today. Would they be entertained? Would they be greeted and shown hospitality? Would they be ignored or treated the same way Abraham, Lot, Gideon, and Manoah treated them? What would happen if Christ came to the church? Would He be welcomed or turned away? Would those standing in the church lobby notice Him or would He be ignored?

Interestingly, the book of Revelation gives a clue as to how the church today might respond if Christ were to come to the church. Revelation chapters two and three prophetically depict the church throughout the ages, beginning with the church of Ephesus or the Christian church up to about AD 100. It moves through the centuries to the church of the last days, known as the church of Laodicea.

The message to any of the seven “churches” is specifically applicable to the Christian church at a particular time in history only on the basis that the seven “churches” represent seven consecutive periods of time spanning the Christian Era, and that each message has a specific application to but one period of time. (Nichol, 1957, vol. 7, p. 764).

The Laodicean church represents the church just preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ—the church of today. When describing the last day church, John not only describes it as lukewarm, wretched, poor, and blind, but unwelcoming to Jesus. Jesus is pictured as standing outside the church, knocking on the door, wishing to come in, and be shown hospitality by dining and fellowshiping with the believers of the church. Yet the church does not let Him in (Rev 3:20). “The third-class condition with *ean* and the two subjunctives, leaves the question as to whether any one will hear and open the door in doubt” (Yeager, 1985, p. 597). Jesus is outside the church of the last days, knocking and calling out—hoping that someone would hear Him and invite Him in.

If the church today were to increase its evangelism effective through a guest retention process and be welcoming to guests, it must first experience spiritual renewal by showing Christ hospitality by inviting Him in.

### **In Conclusion**

It has always been God’s intent to spend time with His children, His creation. As a result of sin, the connection and relationship with humankind has been distorted. God is now using every divine resource available to draw each person back into a real, personal connection with Him.

As God draws the lost closer to Him, He brings them to His church, His people, where they have the privilege and blessing of sharing the truth about God with others through the Word of God and through their lives. God dwells in His church and as He

wants to reveal Himself further, He brings people to the church, whether to a central worship location (a church building) or their lives individually.

The church then must recognize that it is working in cooperation with God in restoring lost humanity into eternal salvation. One key aspect of working with God is through hospitality—loving strangers. The church, knowing how God works, must expect Him to bring people to the church and though this interaction with “strangers” may be challenging, they must anticipate guests coming that God is drawing. No guest that arrives at church is there by mistake—that person is a gift given to the church to encourage in spirituality and the church must take stewardship of this gift seriously. According to the Bible, hospitality is a manifestation of the character of God in His people and if they do not live lives of hospitality, they do not have the heart of God in them. It is also clear that missing out on opportunities of showing this kindness to others can result in the eternal loss of those that God is drawing and those He is drawing them to.

One key way of being ready to receive those that God brings to the church is to have a system ready and in place to assure that guests are properly noticed and cared for. This takes pre-planning and an understanding of the local community and culture.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Literature relating to assimilation and hospitality in the local church is diverse. The majority of literature written on this subject seems to focus primarily on four areas. Therefore, this chapter will be structured around an assimilation process as it focuses on methodology, consumerism, post-membership, and discipleship.

Most of what is written is directed toward providing a systematic methodology, trying to explain in practical applications how to connect with and follow up on guests who visit a church. These publications are directed toward an assimilation process with little time given to explain why it is important.

Other works attempt to address the motive for the application of biblical hospitality and they seem to primarily focus on the guest as a consumer. These tend to take a more market-driven approach where the goal is making the guest feel comfortable at church as they would be visiting a hotel, restaurant, or shopping center.

The Adventist approach, as reflected in the publications, is to begin assimilating someone once he/she has become a member. This literature seeks to connect the new church member to the rest of the congregation, a process where people have joined the church by Bible studies or a prophecy series and now integrating them into the life of the church so that they do not become inactive.

There is some literature that recognizes the need for a guest retention process as a part of mission or evangelism. These works recognize that a guest retention process is more than a systematic approach to greeting guests and begins long before someone joins the church.

### **Methodology**

Most of what is written on guest connections is works that are focused primarily on a methodology of connecting people to the church. These works prove to be incredibly valuable tools for assisting churches in the process of connecting guests with the local church. Some of these works are research projects that share findings of successful churches with assimilation programs. Some assume the reader understands the importance of connecting with guests and shares what they have found to be effective in connecting with guests in their churches. These works say, “If you want to be effective in church growth, you must have an effective assimilation process. Here’s what we have found to work.”

Schaller (1978) seems to be the first to have written on the process of effective assimilation (nearly half of the references in the book are from his other works). Schaller attempts “to provide an overview of both the process and the problems encountered in assimilating new members into a congregation” (p. 8). His book *Assimilating New Members* seems to be the work most often quoted by others in understanding and developing a system of connecting new members to the church. Heck (1988) seems to agree: “The only full-length book in print on the subject of assimilation is the volume by Lyle Schaller, a book to which this author is deeply and gratefully indebted” (p. 7).

In addressing members that become inactive, Schaller is the first to identify the key reason that new members are not connected with others in the church. He identifies four primary methods of connecting new members to the congregation:

1. Individuals who become part of a group before formally joining the church.
2. Individuals who become part of a group after formally joining the church.
3. Individuals who accept a role in the church.
4. Individuals who accept a task or job in the church

In an attempt to better understand how people become part of and stay connected to a local church Oswald (1987) conducted a study of 16 congregations with the Alban Institute. This research project provided insights into the reactions of new members and offered “things that have been useful to leaders in developing processes to assist newcomers as they discover, explore, and then join a local congregation” (p. 2). This study seems to be one of the first to provide a practical assimilation process with an understanding of the local context.

Bast (1988) identifies three types of evangelism (personal witnessing, public proclamation, and the attraction of the Christian community) in the New Testament church. Though all are effective and essential in the church, he attempts to focus on an assimilation process as the key element of the overall evangelism strategy. Bast seeks to explore “ways in which churches can attract new members and bring them into the family” (p. 9). This book, building on the works of Schaller (1978), Oswald (1987) and church growth principles from Arn (1982, 1986, 1987), provides the most comprehensive assimilating process to date including elements of attraction, connection, follow up, and retention. Most assimilation resources focusing on the implementation of a guest

retention process are based on ideas and principles set forth here.

Building on the works of Schaller and Arn, McIntosh (1992) separates the discipleship process into two phases, evangelism—five strategies that will “enable a church to reach new people for Christ, and assimilation—five strategies that will “enable a church to assimilate new members” (p. 13). This is one of the first works written that seems to separate out the process of discipleship into two phases: pre-membership—effective methods of evangelism that bring people to Christ and the church, and post-membership—methods of assimilating those who have just joined a church into the life and culture of the congregation so that they might stay connected.

Most works written after this are various denominational attempts at providing relevant methods of assimilating people into the church. Greeter and hospitality resources are made available to assist churches in being receptive to guests. The North American Division Church Ministries Department, a division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, produced a resource to assist churches in their greeter ministries. What was unique about the methodology provided was the four general categories of guests who attend church. These four groups,

Has its own set of expectations, fears, hang-ups, and preconceived ideas. . . . Your congregation, and especially your greeters/receptionists, need to have a general idea of how to approach each group:

1. Unchurched people who for one reason or another visit your church.
2. Adventists who attend occasional or very seldom.
3. People brought to church by friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
4. Adventists from out of town or from other churches. (Zackrisson & Ratcliffe, 1992, p. 4)

While dean of the of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Thom Rainer has conducted a number of research projects into the effectiveness of Baptist and other



churches effectiveness in church growth. *High Expectations* (1999) was the result of a study on the subject of assimilation in 287 evangelistically effective churches. Rainer concluded that the secret to attracting and keeping members in the church was for churches to have higher expectations of those who join. “Regardless of the methodological approaches of the effective assimilation churches, all demonstrated clearly stated expectations in all their ministries” (p. 22). These expectations were given through a variety of methods, the most “significant findings in this study was the vital importance of a new member class” (p. 5).

Since most assimilation and hospitality ministries are based on the works of Schaller, Arn, and Bast, most material is focused on refining the methodologies used. Pastors of various denominations each focus on a process and adapt their techniques for their local context. If the church becomes a successful church, the methods are put into presentation or word form and made available to others. Because the process of assimilation as a means of discipleship is assumed, many authors no longer focus on the why, but the how.

Mega-churches began to rise on the scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These churches have spent a great deal of time working on systems of church structure and discipleship. Pastors Andy Stanley and Ed Young, mega-church pastors worked together in writing a book (Stanley & Young, 2002) sharing innovative practices that they have found successful in their churches. Recognizing that the vast majority of people that can be reached are friends and family, Stanley invests a great deal of time into reaching them. Their assimilation process is built on the assumption that church members are going to bring their friends. Stanley assumes “that every Sunday morning hundreds of our

people are going to show up with that friend, neighbor, or family member with whom they have been cultivating a relationship” (p. 3).

As a professor at the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and having worked closely with Rainer in two previous projects (Rainer, 1996, 1999), Lawless noted in both these studies the rising significance of the membership class in effective assimilation. This book (Lawless, 2005) is the result of another study looking exclusively at the importance of the assimilation class. After surveying 71 churches (primarily Baptist), with 52 indicating they had a membership class, Lawless shows how churches can move both new and old members into ministry by implementing effective new member classes.

These works have proved to be powerful tools for equipping the local church in developing effective assimilation strategies within the context of church growth. They have each asked, whether through a formal research study or experience in their churches, what is working and what is not at connecting with those that visit the church? What is most effective in encouraging people to come back to the church? What have we found that brings the greatest number of people to membership? What are the essential ingredients to making new members stick and not drop out?

This focus has been very helpful to evangelism effectiveness in the church, but what has also occurred in asking these questions is a direction in assimilation processes that focuses less on a progression of discipleship and more on a consumer fixated approach.

## Consumerism

Though consideration of the needs and feelings of guests at church are important, recognizing that we must do all we can to make them feel comfortable and at ease, these mega-churches are primarily driven on the concept that the guest is a consumer looking for a product. In this case, the commodity is a spiritual or religious experience and guests are the customers looking to consume. These churches tend to emphasize the guests and their needs by adapting the ministry of the church around what they are looking for; what will provide the best opportunity for the guests to choose this church as their home church?

In response to the church growth movement's desire to be more effective at reaching people, churches began to alter their focus in doing church to make the worship service more sensitive to those seeking a church or religious experience. While most denominations experienced a drastic decline in membership after the sixties, churches today that are "experiencing growth, in defiance of the national downward trends, are usually located in new suburban areas. They are acutely market-sensitive and base their strategy on attracting the non-churchgoer into 'seeker-sensitive' worship experiences" (Gibbs, 2000, p. 17).

In addition to being identified as "seeker sensitive" churches, they are given a number of other titles. Schaller (1995) calls them the "New Reformation," Miller (1997) terms them "New Paradigm," Wagner (1998) and Hunter (2009) describes them as "New Apostolic," each employing the phrase with a distinctive emphasis.

In writing about the beginnings of their church, Hybels (1995) shares how her husband Bill was a young pastor who began their church with the intent to be more

“seeker sensitive.” His desire at Willow Creek was to offer “a weekly seeker service that would provide a safe and informative place where unchurched people could come to investigate Christianity further” (p. 41). As a result, Hybels’ church became known as one of the first mega-churches.

Like Willow Creek, other churches began altering their worship experiences based on the perceived wishes of the unchurched. Logan (1989), while noting other church planting peers, followed Hybels approach and found success in growing his church by seeking the advice of the unchurched community and organizing it around their responses.

These churches quickly grew. According to Hartford Institute for Religion Research<sup>4</sup>, there are over 1,400 churches in this country that have reached the “mega” category, with over 1,800 in weekend attendees. As a result of this contemporary model of church, where the focus was on the desires of the unchurched, church itself unintentionally became a commodity and guests the consumer. “In this light it’s easy to see how ‘church shopping,’ ecstatic worship experiences, and even Christian spirituality can come to reflect the consumerization of faith” (Hirsch, 2006, p. 109).

Looking back on their growth, some today are questioning the premise of these churches. Cauley (2010) asserts that

while this model of church should be praised by followers of Jesus for calling Christians to excellence in worship, urging Christians to meet the needs of their neighbors, and leading thousands of people to Jesus Christ it has also caused an increasing secular North American society to question the church’s attempt to maintain its place in the center of society. (pp. 36-37)

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<sup>4</sup> [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megastoday\\_profile.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megastoday_profile.html)

After decades of implementing these techniques, Barna (1998) now asserts that “these elements have failed us; in our efforts to serve God, we have crowded out God Himself” (p. 99). Most who question this approach believe that the growth has been primarily transfer and that few churches truly experience kingdom growth. Hirsch (2006) says that most evangelical churches adhere to this contemporary church growth model in an attempt to grow their congregations, “in spite of the fact that successful applications of this model remain relatively rare” (p. 36). Sadly, the focus has been on the numbers and marketing—not discipleship. Guinness (1993) believes that the church’s mission is being driven by marketing consideration rather than by its missional calling.

Hybels himself is now recognizing that their emphasis was wrong. The results of a multi-year study by Willow Creek have been released in a book entitled, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Hawkins, 2007). Speaking at Willow Creek’s Leadership Summit shortly after the book’s release Hybels laments:

Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn’t helping people that much. Other things that we didn’t put that much money into and didn’t put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for. . . . We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become “self feeders.” We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.<sup>5</sup>

Church assimilation strategies, as part of the overall evangelistic strategic plan, assumed the same premise in providing an atmosphere for the unchurched based on what was perceived as their needs. Research projects (such as Barna, 2000) that were looking

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<sup>5</sup>This quote is taken from a video recording of Bill Hybels addressing attendees at Willow Creek’s Leadership Summit in the summer of 2007. The video was online at [www.revealnow.com](http://www.revealnow.com) but has recently been removed. This quote by Hybels can be viewed online at [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow\\_creek\\_re.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html)

into effective assimilation strategies were judging effectiveness by the level of guests' comfort and the growth of the church; not whether true biblical discipleship was taking place. Rainer (2001) when revealing traits in effective churches agrees:

Some churches . . . have taken seeker friendliness to another extreme. Fearful that factual biblical teaching will offend the scripturally uninitiated, the message is compromised and the method becomes sovereign. Such churches have a consumer-driven mentality. A church that totally disregards the needs of the unchurched will reach few in any for the kingdom. But a church that makes most of its decision based on the perceived needs of the same group is in danger of losing its biblical identity. (p. 89)

Certainly the friendliness of church members is an important factor that any church should encourage but we must not view them as consumers. Waltz agrees: "When we see our guests as consumers, we reinforce their self-centered lifestyle. The local church is not about catering to the cultural expectations established in the marketplace; the church's job is to lift up Jesus so seekers can see him" (2005, p. 14).

The Gospel message is experienced in the life of the guest or stranger (*xenos*) through the life of the believer in which Christ resides. Churches must then struggle with the reality that the friendliness of the church dramatically effects the guests receptivity to both returning to the church and ultimately responding to the gospel presentation.

This process of discipleship begins at the first visit. Sadly, many churches wait to implement a system of assimilation until after the person has officially joined the church.

### **Post-Membership**

A large portion of material focusing on the assimilation of people into the church attempts to connect new members to the existing congregation. These works separate the front door ministry (greeters, hospitality, etc.) from the assimilation ministry in that they focus on people who have just joined the church, new members, and endeavor to

integrate them into the life of the church. The emphasis of their material is to close the proverbial “back door” of the church by implementing a program that increases the likelihood of new member retention rate through friendships, church groups, church involvement, or programs. In this case, assimilation is defined as the process of making a new church member an active church member (Peterson, 1999).

### The Need for Assimilation

Churches have struggled with the assimilation of new members into their congregations. Some figures indicate that upwards to 80 percent of new members leave the church within the first six months of joining (Arn, 2012; Milburn, 2007). For the most part, it is because the churches have no real assimilation strategy at all; no means of connecting the new members with the existing church community. Savage (1990) says:

Assimilating someone into the life of the church is different than helping them become a member. Rounding up bodies and getting them to join the church doesn't finish the task. People who join a church may well drop out a few months later. The church needs to incorporate them into the life, the emotion, the ministry of the congregation. People need to become a part of the church body rather than be merely attached to it. (p. 30)

Church leadership often does not recognize the different steps of assimilation. According to Engel's research (1975), an individual's decision to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the choice to officially become a member of the local church and assimilation into the congregation's life are three distinctive stages in discipleship. When a church feels that it has accomplished the Gospel commission by ceasing the assimilation process once the new members are added to the church registry, it sets these new members up for failure.

In his dissertation, Williams (1997) noted that churches have the conceptual desire to grow, but when he surveyed them, he found that the vast majority of the

members affirmed the concept of reaching people and bringing new members into the congregation, but that there is often a resistance among the membership to doing the things necessary to fully assimilate new members. However, in relation to church growth, desire and reality are often not in alignment. Concerning this, Mead (1993) writes:

Congregations . . . have paid little attention to socialization. We are told that half the new members who join a congregation disappear within two years. From a strict system's point of view, that is terribly costly. . . . But beyond a systems point of view, the congregation has also violated its own beliefs and values. They have failed to receive and give hospitality to one of God's children who was seeking to make a home in the community. (pp. 78-79)

In reality, not everyone who joins the church is fully welcomed as a part of the community, regardless of how well they might have been treated as visitors (Oswald, 1992).

### Barriers to Assimilation

There are a number of barriers that make it challenging for new members to be fully assimilated into the church community. As already noted, one of the greatest barriers to new members' assimilation is the attitude of the church itself. Sadly, "it is easier to join most churches than it is to be accepted and to be assimilated into the fellowship of that congregation" (Schaller, 1978, p. 126). Heck (1988, p. 14) asserts that congregations can repel new members because they perceive that assimilation is the responsibility of the new members.

New members also have a challenge of assimilating into the new congregation because of a lack of friends in the church, the pull of the former life, conversion shock—where the initial reaction of euphoria and joy wears off (Hiebert, 2008, p. 331), the ethnicity or demographic of the church, and the unspoken expectations of the congregation.



## Assimilation in Adventism

Literature in the Seventh-day Adventist Church focuses its attention on an assimilation process that connects the new members to the congregation. White (1896), one of the founders of the movement, shares:

Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake, and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed. The church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them. (par. 2)

In his review of *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, Weeks (1969) states that “the Seventh-day Adventist Church was born an evangelistic movement” (p. 11) and the primary method of evangelism has been a proclamation approach, where the “blending of mass media, personal contact, and the public platform” (p. 307) is used. In his doctoral project, Peterson (1999), when discussing the need for the assimilation of new members into the Lexington Seventh-day Adventist Church, shares the disconnect between the method of bringing people to membership and connecting them to the congregation. “Many of them came into the church because they attended a prophecy crusade, but they have not grown since they were baptized. I wanted to develop a system of assimilation that would enhance spiritual growth” (p. 1).

When working with a focus group of Seventh-day Adventist pastors in an attempt to ascertain the challenges and needs of new members in the church, Thayer (2010) shared:

New members' expectations may set them up for disappointment. During an evangelistic meeting, they were the center of attention, but once they join the church, they may feel “neglected”. . . . For people who come into the church through an

evangelistic series, the transition from the evangelistic meetings to the regular church may bring a difference not only in personal relationships but also in worship styles, meeting location, and other matters.

As a result, members often join a church where they have had very little connection to the actual church membership and assimilation becomes the process of connecting the new members that embrace the message of the church with the long standing members who have a culture of church life.

### Methods of Assimilation

To increase the retention rate of new members in the church, the assimilation process is designed to connect the new member to the church by focusing on five primary methods of closing the “back door.” McIntosh (1992) summarizes these five strategies as assimilation through friendships, tasks/roles, small groups, identification, and spiritual growth.

#### **Assimilation Through Friendships**

Research has been clear about the importance of friendships in the church as it relates to new member retention. McIntosh (1992, p. 75) says that “many churches are inclusive in outreach, yet exclusive in fellowship. People can be reached, baptized, and brought into membership and not be incorporated into the friendship structure of a church.” In order to increase the likelihood of retention, a new member must develop at least seven friends in the church within the first six months of joining (Arn, 1986a; Sahlin, 1991; Schaller, 1978).

### **Assimilation Through Tasks/Roles**

New members have a desire to belong to the church, and research (McIntosh, 1992; Schaller, 1978) has shown that if they are plugged into ministry with a task or role in the church, they are more likely to be assimilated into the church community. White (1900) affirms this when she says that “the best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. . . . Especially should those who newly come to the faith be educated to become laborers together with God” (p. 49).

### **Assimilation Through Small Groups**

One of the most effective means of connecting new members to the life of the congregation and developing meaningful relationship is in small groups. Referring to the New Testament church, McIntosh (1992) says “it was in the small groups that people found a strong sense of bonding that resulted in effective ministry” (p. 17). Burrill (1997) agrees: “Small relational groups are the heart of Christianity, and it must be the heart of the Adventist church if we are serious about being the church of Jesus--for Jesus’ church is a relational church” (p. 55).

### **Assimilation Through Identification**

Essential to the assimilation of new members into the church is their ability to identify with the meaning of the church. Most have a basic familiarity with the doctrines of the church, but require a deeper motivation to their faith by understanding the church’s purpose, vision, and how they relate to fulfilling the Gospel commission personally. Most today believe that the most effective way of connecting the new member to the mission

of the church is through a combination of biblical community and a new member orientation class. McIntosh (1992) says, “Effective assimilation must include defined expectations so that the body can be unified in its vision” (p. 126). Lawless (2005, p. 77) and Rainer (1996, p. 172; 1999, p. 103) both discovered that growing churches have high standards for membership and these expectations are emphasized in a new member class.

### **Assimilation Through Spiritual Growth**

The final factor that McIntosh believes helps new members stay connected to the church is their spiritual growth. This may be seen in conformity to the lifestyle of the church (Savage, 1976, p. 31), belief in the doctrines of the church (Crowe, 1987, p. 67), and experiencing the spiritual disciplines (Thayer, 2010, par. 17).

Are these strategies happening? Sadly, in most cases it is the pastor that is primarily responsible for seeing to it that new members are connecting to the church community. However, some assert that it might be more effective to employ the use of spiritually mature leaders in the church. White agrees:

Men of the best ability should be chosen to help in the effort. They should enter heartily into the work of visiting and holding Bible readings with those newly come to the faith, and with those who are interested, endeavoring to establish them in the faith. The new believers are to be carefully instructed, that they may have an intelligent knowledge of the various lines of work committed to the church of Christ. (1905, par. 10)

### **Discipleship**

The final group of material written on the subject of assimilation or hospitality is from the perspective of discipling the guests. “Assimilation is the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church” (Warren, 1995, p. 309). Assimilation is seen as the process of discipleship;

something that begins on the very first visit. It is not only a more biblical approach to discipleship, but research has shown that it is also more effective.

Schaller (1978), when identifying traits of those who stay connected to a church, shares that members that are least likely to become inactive are those who have been assimilated with a group before they officially join the church. “The distinctive characteristic of these groups is that membership is open to and includes people who are not yet formally members of that congregation” (p. 76). An effective guest retention process understands that the process of church growth, or becoming a member of the church is more than just an official decision to join, but part of an overall discipleship process that begins before the person becomes a member.

The early assimilation strategies stem from the church growth movement’s attempt at helping churches become more effective in reaching the lost and growing their churches. “The assimilation into the church actually begins before conversion. The friendships of non-Christians with other members of the church will be much more important to their eventual assimilation than the commonality of belief” (Wagner, 1986, p. 62).

W. Arn and Arn’s *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples* (1982) is the source most often referenced by works on assimilation. This book was written to reclaim the member and the church’s role in effective evangelism as a process of discipleship.

The Master’s Plan is a strategy of disciple-making to help lay church members identify and reach people in their web, or *oikos*, for Christ and the church. It is a process that works within natural characteristics of human behavior and relationships, and relates the unique needs of friends and relatives to Christ’s work in their lives. (p. 56)

Though not directly written for assimilation processes, this book identifies the process of discipleship that all effective guest retention processes are based.

This intentional process of moving new and existing church members into church ministry is also the subject of Langford's (1999) doctoral project where he implements not only a strategy to reach guests by bringing them to membership but further in the discipleship process where they are serving in ministry within the church.

Warren popularized the discipleship process by breaking it down into five tasks of the church as summarized in its purpose statement: "To bring people to Jesus and *membership* in his family, develop them to Christlike *maturity*; and equip them for their *ministry* in the church and life *mission* in the world, in order to *magnify* God's name" (1995, p. 107). For Warren, assimilation is seen as the process of moving people throughout the entire discipleship process:

Use the Circles of Commitment as your strategy for assimilating people into the life of your church. Begin by moving the unchurched from the community to your crowd (for worship). Then move them from the crowd into the congregation (for fellowship). Next, move them from your congregation into the committed (for discipleship), and from the committed into the core (for ministry). Finally, move the core back out into the community (for evangelism). This process fulfills all five purposes of the church. (p. 138)

In 1975, Engel wrote a book, *What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest?* Engel revealed a way of representing discipleship as the journey from no knowledge of God to spiritual maturity as a Christian believer. The model is used by assimilation systems because it emphasizes the process of conversion, and the various decision-making steps that people go through before they become Christians (see figure 1).

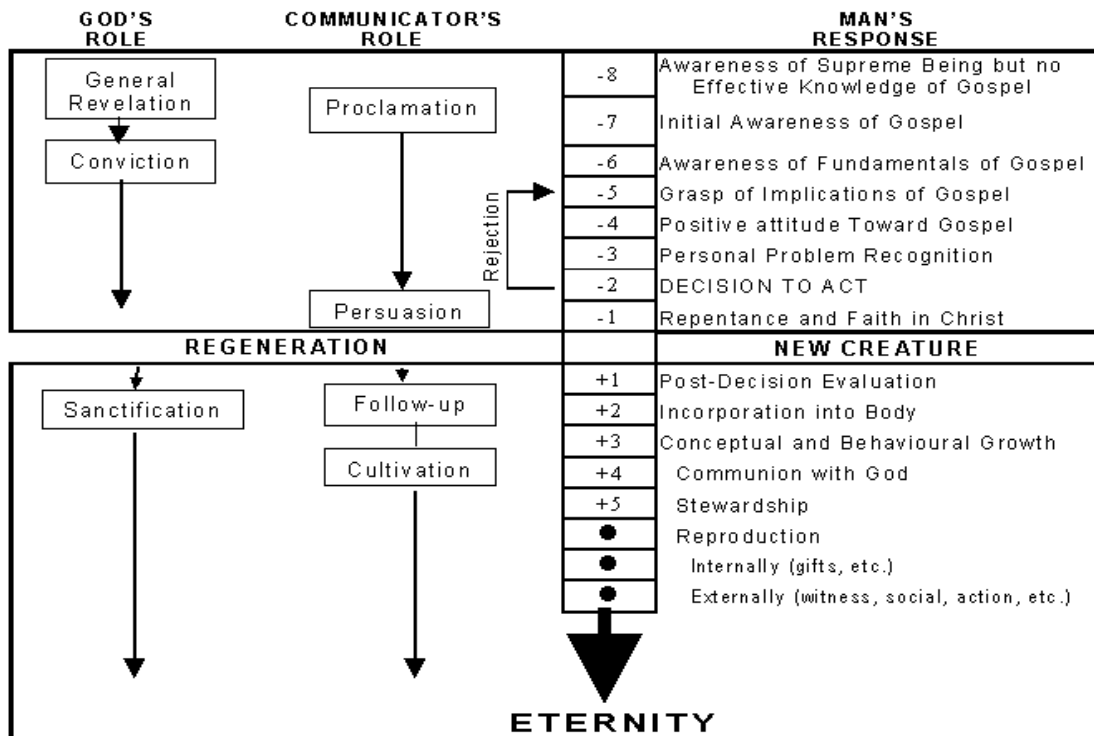


Figure 1. James F. Engel's Scale of Spiritual Receptivity.

Cress, as leader of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association, in a book written for Seventh-day Adventists, defines an assimilation process as

the whole process by which an individual in North America moves through the various phases of the Engel Scale from the initial knowledge of Christianity through personal application and acceptance toward mature discipleship and personal ministry within the body of Christ. (2000, p. 6)

It is interesting to note that after defining an assimilation process as a progression in discipleship, Cress alters his definition, for the intent of his Seventh-day Adventist audience, as “the incorporation of new members into the life of the local congregation” (p. 6).

## **Conclusion**

The above works do not represent an exhaustive review of assimilation and hospitality but summarize the major implications in recent history as it relates to this course of study.

There is a plethora of material focusing on the methodology of assimilation and hospitality. Workshops, seminars, books, and websites are dedicated to resourcing the local church in ways of assimilating new people into the church community with the latest ideas and tools. These works are helpful and very practical when evaluating the effectiveness of an assimilation system, but I must caution new students of assimilation and biblical hospitality to gain a clear foundation as to the purpose of an assimilation system in the local church.

Without a clear purpose and focusing only on the perceived needs of guests, an assimilation system may unintentionally become a force for altering a church's mission from discipleship and full surrender to the Lordship of Christ to a consumer driven religious experience where attenders are catered to.

The greatest portion of material written on assimilation (and especially in the Seventh-day Adventist Church) sees assimilation beginning at baptism. Sadly, because the church waits to begin connecting with the members at the point of joining the church, the congregation, in many ways, is behind in the assimilation process and it should be no surprise that they lose most of them by the sixth month.

If we view an assimilation system as a means of accomplishing the discipleship process, we will recognize that it begins the moment an unchurched person first connects with a follower of Christ or the day a visitor first comes to the church and continues until



Jesus comes again for His church. When the assimilation begins on day one, the retention rate goes up dramatically because guests feel part of the church before they actually join.

The visitor came because of a pre-existing personal relationship with someone who was part of the church, and he/she returned because of the emotional safety and security visitors experience, facilitated by that initial relationship. Visitors immediately feel they are actually part of the church because they are relationally tied in to the church. (Barna, 1999, pp. 79-80)

The collective wisdom of the works compiled here demands that we have a specific assimilation strategy in the local church that is viewed as one aspect the church's mission of preparing disciples for the second coming of Jesus Christ that begins on day one of a visitors experience and is intentional about developing relationships with those who are established members of the congregation.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

When developing and implementing a methodology for increasing guest retention effectiveness, one must keep in mind that a ministry of hospitality is not a church program looking to market church hopping religious consumers, but rather a ministry of the church that seeks to co-operate with God and the discipleship of others that He is drawing. For evangelism and discipleship to be effective, the local church must be intentional about connecting with the guests that God is drawing. White (1901), when stressing a deliberate process of retaining guests says that the church should, “never allow the interest to flag” (p. 85). This is a colorful way of saying that the church should not allow those that God is drawing to lose interest and stop attending. She continues by encouraging the church to

devise methods that will bring a deep and living interest into the new churches. All connected with the church should feel an individual responsibility. All should work to the utmost of their ability to strengthen the church and make the meetings so full of life that outsiders will be attracted and interested. All should feel it a sin to let the interest wane when we have such sacred, solemn truths from the living oracles to repeat over and over again. (p. 85)

The purpose of this study is to develop and test a system of hospitality at Louisville First Church that would best assist guests in their spiritual development. This study is limited to the specific step of discipleship that begins when the guest first comes to church through the decision to join the church.

## **Project Context of Church and Community**

### **Profile of Louisville, Kentucky**

Louisville is the major metropolitan city of Kentucky with 741,096 residents, located in northern central Kentucky along the border between Kentucky and Indiana. The settlement that became the city of Louisville was founded in 1778 by George Rogers Clark and is named after King Louis XVI of France, making Louisville one of the oldest cities west of the Appalachian Mountains. Located on the Ohio River between the northern and southern states, Louisville grew quickly as a major shipping port.

Louisville is the nation's 16th largest city because in 2000, residents in Louisville and Jefferson County approved their own ballot measure to merge into a consolidated city-county government named Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government (or Louisville Metro for short; hereafter referred to as Louisville). Between 2000 and 2010 the population of Louisville increased from 693,604 to 712,619—a 2.7% growth rate. That compares to a national average of 9.7 during the same time period.

According to the Greater Louisville Chamber of Commerce (2010),

Louisville is home to a dynamic, diversified economy, which outperformed the U.S. in job and income growth in the last decade. The community has developed an economic vision to capitalize on emerging opportunities in fast-growth niches where the community enjoys a competitive advantage, such as logistics and health/biomedicines, as well as in traditional strengths such as financial services and manufacturing, particularly automotive.

More than 65% of the residents ages 16 and over are employed with a median family income of \$49,161. Sixty-five percent of the population own their own homes rather than renting.

Statistics show that the median age of the community is 36.7, compared to the U.S. median age of 37.3%. Population under 20 years of age is 26.8%, 36.7% is between

the ages of 20-44, 22.8% is between the ages of 45 and 64 and 13.6% is 65 and over. The racial and ethnic composition of Louisville is primarily made up of Caucasian with 82.77% compared to the U.S. as 87.8%. The others represent Black with 13.29%, Hispanic with 2.15%, Asian/Pacific Islander at 1.26%, American Indian/Alaska Native with .26%, and others with the remaining .27%.

### Profile of Louisville First Church

The Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church is an old congregation originally planted in the early 1900s with a long and detailed history. For many years, it was the only church in the Louisville community and many of the current Seventh-day Adventist congregations were planted from it. The church's history has had many wonderful and tragic moments that have shaped its current context. Older members speak about the "good ole' days" when everyone attended the one church on Fourth Street, when Joe Crews was pastor, and when the choir loft was filled with choir members each week. The membership also speaks about the experiences that have scarred the congregation, such as pastors who have had affairs or misused money, church plants that eventually turned against the church and pulled out of the school constituency, and groups forming in the church pooling their agendas together to influence the church in the wrong direction through "church politics." Many of the decisions made by the membership and leadership are done so through the lens of these prior experiences.

Louisville First Church membership over the past 10 years has fluctuated some, slowly growing. Beginning in 2000 the membership was 340 and ended the 2010-year

with a membership of 357.<sup>6</sup> Though the membership has gone up and down over the diagnostic period, the ending result is an increase of only 17 in membership.

Despite the years where there is an indication of dramatic loss, Louisville First Church has indeed experienced some additions to the membership. Over the diagnostic period the church has added to its number an average of 1.7 people per year. Throughout the ten years, Louisville First Church has had regular baptisms and professions of faith (POF) per year with an average of seven baptisms and POF per year. Though the differentiation between biological baptisms and conversion baptisms are unavailable we are still able to note from the data that the average increase of members has roughly been 50/50 between transfers and baptisms/POF.

Just as the number of increases has had spike years, so are the years with dramatic member losses. The average number of members lost each year over the diagnostic period was 16. On average, the church seems to be growing at a very nominal but progressive rate. Louisville First Church has done a powerful work for God in the Louisville area and many churches across North America would be excited with the numbers of additions.

### **Assumptions**

This guest retention process was developed with several assumptions that were based on the theological reflection and specifically Paul's conversion experience as outlined in chapter 2.

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<sup>6</sup>This data comes from the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference of Seventh-day Adventists membership records.

## God Draws the Guest

First, there are guests who come to the church because they are drawn by God (Jer 31:3, John 6:44). When someone has a personal spiritual experience, God often places within the heart a desire to know Him more and He draws him or her into community with the church. Referencing 1 John 1:7, Burrill (1997) says: “Fellowship with Christ is impossible without fellowship with other Christians. John has declared that if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the result is that the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin” (p. 83).

Since God has chosen His church to reflect His image here on earth and uses the community of faith to bring others into deeper fellowship with Him, a relationship with the church is critical in their discipleship.

Biblically . . . we need community to fulfill our pull in the direction of reflecting the image of God. This awareness of and interdependency with others is part of our creation format. We will never be whole apart from giving ourselves away to others and receiving from them their uniqueness. For believers, to be in Christ is to be in relationship with others in His body. (Gorman, 1993, p. 107)

## God Prepares the Church

The second assumption of this guest retention process is that God will need to prepare the church for guests.

Many guests coming to the church are looking for community. Gallup concluded in his studies and polls (1989) that Americans are among the loneliest people in the world. Frazee (2001) believes that though Americans might be the loneliest people in the world, the church is best equipped to address this need. “In this postmodern age, the church is truly the one institution that has the function of community as part of its

strategy to achieve its mission-which is the development of people who follow Jesus Christ” (Frazee, 2001, p. 35).

Though some people come to church because they are coerced or desire to receive some kind of religious product as a consumer, many come searching for a biblical community. Quoting a personal interview with Neil McGlohon (November 19, 2009), on the friendly environment in a church as opposed to what seekers were really seeking:

True spiritual seekers are looking for relationships. Church shoppers are looking for friendly. One reason church shoppers are satisfied with friendly is because their relationship space is already full. What does a true spiritual seeker want to know after the first visit to a church? They want to know if there is space for new relationships to help them along their journey. Most church people have no space to offer seekers, so seekers will simply ‘bounce off’ the local church. (Rainer, 2010, p. 109)

When guests attend a church service, often more important than the sermon given or the style of worship, they are looking to see how friendly the church is and whether they can fit into the existing community. Richardson (2000) asserts that “today people are looking for a community to belong to before a message to believe in. Evangelism is about helping people belong so that they come to believe” (pp. 99-100). The church will need to be prepared to receive others into its community.

### God Ministers to the Guest Through the Church

The third assumption of this guest retention process is that God ministers to the guest through the church. Because God dwells in His people, the church must recognize that God is working through them to restore fallen humanity. To some degree the church’s ministry effectiveness can be evaluated by guests’ experiences.

Though guests will typically not communicate with the church how they perceive their visit, their experience is crucial in setting the tone for the hospitality ministry

effectiveness. Any attempt at gaining access to their experience will help the church improve the ministry.

What visitors perceive in our welcome will influence their feelings and response to church and the Lord for years to come. Their viewpoints and perceptions must be considered valuable. What do visitors think about our church? How friendly do they perceive us to be? What steps can we take to welcome them better than we presently do? We must learn to attract, welcome, and follow up on guests so that they stay!  
McIntosh (2006, p. 10)

When obtained, the guest's perspective will greatly help in evaluating the church's ability to minister to the guests.

### God Disciples the New Believer Through the Church

The final assumption of this guest retention process is that God disciplines the new believer through the church. Each aspect of the process is intended to move the guest in discipleship from a first-time visit to a growing relationship with Christ as part of the community in the local church.

### **Guest Retention Process**

The guest retention process is neither a ploy to manipulate the guest or feed into the American religious consumerism epidemic. The purpose of the guest retention process is to improve the evangelism effectiveness of Louisville First Church so as to best connect with those that the Lord is bringing to the church through hospitality into authentic biblical community and cooperation with Christ in their spiritual journey of discipleship.

Discipleship is the process of bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, restoring in them the image of God, and preparing them for the second coming of Jesus Christ through biblical community. The church understands that this is a process of



spiritual growth and development in the life of the individual and as the church seeks to be used by God as a tool of achieving discipleship, it must be set up to help in this process by establishing a ministry of moving people into a deeper spiritual experience. This process is best understood in the context of a series of intentional, strategic steps.

When you think steps you start by asking, “Where do we want people to be?” That question is followed by a second, more strategic question, “How are we going to get them there?” The result is a ministry that works as a step—it has been created to lead someone somewhere. This way of thinking makes a lot of sense in the light of what the church is called to do. (Stanley, Joiner, & Jones, 2004, p. 89)

This spiritual discipleship process begins when the individual first visits the church. For many churches, however, a discipleship track or assimilation process does not begin until a person becomes a member of the local church. This guest retention process, on the other hand, understands that discipleship begins long before people join the local congregation through baptism and continues throughout their lives. Burrill (1996), in his study of discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is right to conclude:

Preparation for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be in harmony with the call of Jesus for people to be made disciples first and then baptized. After baptism, they must continue to be taught, so that they are self-sufficient in their spiritual lives and not dependent on a paid clergy person for spiritual sustenance. (p. 105)

Burrill seems to be echoing White (1885) and her concern for people joining the church as members without having connected to the church community and how this affects their ability to continue growing.

After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing--watchful attention, help, and encouragement. The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do. God requires His church to nurse those who are young in faith and experience. (pp. 68-69)

When thinking of the guest retention process in the context of discipleship and the first step in a series of spiritual steps, “there is a fundamental difference in your perspective. Now the primary goal is not to meet someone’s need, but rather to help someone get where they need to go” (Stanley, et al., 2004, p. 89). The purpose of the steps in the guest retention process is to ease the individual’s nervous and anxious feelings about visiting the church as some place new and connecting them to the biblical community in order to begin the process of discipleship. This is what McIntosh (2006) means when he describes a church with an intentional hospitality ministry. “Healthy churches take responsibility for welcoming guests, which includes helping new people understand and become involved in the life of the church” (p. 19). The goal of this process then is to move guests closer to a decision for Christ and membership in Louisville First Church.

Following are the steps in the methodology and strategy of a guest retention process at Louisville First Church as it seeks to ease the tension related to visiting an unknown place so that the guest is not hindered in connecting with the church through discipleship.

### Hospitality Training

Louisville First Church has had little to offer in the area of any formal hospitality ministry. As such, it will require a great deal of training so that members not only know what it is that the church is attempting to do, but more importantly, why it is seeking to do it. An effective guest retention process will necessitate that training be done for the church leadership, church membership, and the hospitality team.

### **Training Church Leadership**

When attempting to change a ministry in the church, it is important that the church leadership, representatives of the church, understand why it is needed. In preparation for the implementation of this doctoral project in Louisville First Church and in hopes that it will be an ongoing ministry, the church board will be provided with necessary information and data to assist them in understanding the importance of a guest retention ministry. After presenting the methodology and strategy for the guest retention process at Louisville First Church, the leadership will formally vote to approve its implementation knowing that it may continue the hospitality ministry in whatever form they deem best after the completion of the project.

### **Training Greeter Coordinator**

It will also prove valuable to have the current coordinator of the “Greeter” ministry on board by meeting with him/her one-on-one, explaining the details of this project.

### **Training Church Membership**

Because the guest retention process relies a great deal on the hospitality of the church, the church membership will need to have some instruction on the philosophy and practical application of biblical hospitality. This instruction will be provided primarily through a four-part sermon series entitled, *Hospitality: Opening Our Doors to Others*. This series will cover much of the information provided in the project’s theological reflection with attention given to practical application in the church. An outline and sample manuscript of the series is provided in the appendix.

## **Training Hospitality Team**

Members of the current hospitality team, presently known as greeters, will receive instruction provided in the sermon series, but will require a far more practical training in the guest retention process. Several sessions will be offered on Sabbath afternoons giving attention to how to treat guests and follow-up. Key to this hospitality team training is learning how to treat the different people that attend church on Sabbath morning.

Zackrison and Ratcliffe (2003, p. 4) identify four different groups that enter the church facility each Sabbath:

1. Unchurched people who for one reason or another visit your church.
2. Adventists who attend occasionally or very seldom.
3. People brought to church by friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
4. Adventists from out of town or from other Adventist churches.

The hospitality team will receive practical training, including suggestions on what to say to the various people attending church because each enter with their own set of needs and expectations.

In addition to being able to identify the various people attending the church service, the members of the hospitality team will need to know how to effectively communicate with them. There is far more required of the hospitality team than just greeting with a warm smile, providing a hand-shake and saying, “Happy Sabbath.” When talking about customer service in a business, Willingham (1992) suggests six key elements of communication. The hospitality team will need to be trained on how to greet, value, ask how to help, listen, help, and invite back.

## **Training Follow-Up Team**

Those members of the hospitality team that are facilitating follow-up for the guest retention process will require more individual training on how to use the software, collect and enter data from the attendance notebooks, note the number of times guests have attended, and provide regular communication with the pastor.

There are a variety of software solutions available that cater to the follow-up phase of a guest retention process. For the sake of this project, *Disciples*<sup>7</sup> will be used.

### **The Physical Plant**

It is important that a guest retention process recognize that guests will often judge the church by their first impressions and that the church's physical plant is the first impression most often given to them. A church can help guests feel more comfortable about their first visit by addressing certain aspects of the church's facility.

Newcomer anxiety causes new guests to form the bulk of their impressions about a church within thirty seconds of walking in the front door. All impressions are subconscious, but they are being made quickly nonetheless. Contributing to their subconscious thoughts are such things as sounds, smells, signs, pictures, bulletin boards, colors, lighting, and the general décor. (McIntosh, 2006, p. 35)

In order to improve the church's hospitality focus and assist in relieving the guests' tension, there are a few areas of the physical plant at Louisville First Church that will need to be addressed. In addition to the general cleanliness of the physical plant, the church will also need to focus on the signage, adding a resource center and attention given to available space in general.

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<sup>7</sup>Tracking software *Disciples* is available online at [www.getdisciples.com](http://www.getdisciples.com). A comparison of various software solutions considered is made available in chapter 5.

## **Church Signage**

Church signage, both inside and out, is very important to the guest retention process. Signs give direction by helping people know where they are and how to get to where they want to go.

When guests arrive at the church for the first time, there is a possibility that they do not know where the church is, having never been there before. According to Barna (2000), when speaking of a national survey among the unchurched he “found that only half of them (51%) claimed that they could remember the name of even one church within a fifteen-minute drive from their house” (p. 98). Therefore, when guests are arriving at the church for the very first time, they may not know where it is. To help them find the church building, it is important that a well-placed, attractive sign identify the church by name.

Though Louisville First Church updated its exterior sign four years ago, it is in need of a good cleaning. Since it is the first thing that identifies the church, it is important that it looks attractive and welcoming.

In addition to a sign identifying the church, others signs outside would prove very helpful to guests. Since the church has a number of entrances, guests may not know which door to enter and since the church does not equip each entrance with members of the hospitality team, it would be very beneficial for signs to be placed on all entrances giving direction to the main entrance. Members may choose to enter the back door, but it is crucial to the guest retention process that guests enter the main door where they will be properly greeted.

There are a number of signs that would need to be placed throughout the interior of the church facility to provide direction to guests. Once a guest enters the building, they are often wondering where they need to go for various services. To alleviate any uneasiness, signs should be strategically placed throughout that give direction to the various restrooms, classrooms, fellowship hall, resource center, and offices. If placed strategically in the lobby and hallways, these signs could provide immediate direction to guests after entering the church facility.

### **Resource Center**

Church members and guests alike would greatly benefit from a central location where they can access additional information about the church and its ministries and upcoming programs. Research concerning the unchurched by Rainer (2001) indicates, “one-third of the formerly unchurched told us that they were impressed with a church’s greeter ministry or welcome center. A helpful hand, a friendly smile, and good directions make an eternal difference” (p. 104).

There is an empty space in the lobby for a resource center, where a custom counter could be placed, literature rack installed on the wall, walls painted with a warmer color, and modern lighting installed. This addition could really brighten up the lobby and help in making it more inviting.

In addition to being helpful to church members, the resource center provides a key component for the guest retention process. The resource center is a very visible location in the church lobby for the guest to go if they desire to get more information about the church. Resources, including a church brochure, free DVDs, upcoming programs, and

literature about the church are to be placed for easy accessibility. An illustration of the resource counter is provided in the appendix.

### **Available Space**

Rainer (1993) says that the amount of space a facility has will affect its ability to foster an atmosphere of growth. “An often-heard principle of church growth is that when eighty percent of any facility is in use, it is time to make provisions for more room” (pp. 271-272). This 80 percent rule is most often applied to five main areas of the church’s facility: parking, sanctuary, land, nursery (preschool), and education space (Sabbath school classes).

The reason given for this principle is that once a facility has reached this 80% capacity, people no longer feel as comfortable attending. Though exceptions are often understood, as it relates to special events such as holiday concerts and programs, in general people do not feel comfortable sitting close to others they do not know. To best prevent this from hindering guests’ receptivity to returning, changes should be made in response to an inventory of current space used. The primary need at Louisville First Church, as it relates to the 80% rule, is in the adult Sabbath school classes. Aside from one classroom, they are all full. Additional classes should be added and creative locations found so that there is enough space for guests to join in community.

### **Before the Worship Service**

Though much of the guest retention process has already been functioning, the key moment is when the guest walks into the church. As they pass through the church entrance, the guests are evaluating the church and, whether they consciously think it or not, are determining whether they will return again. According to Rainer (2001), a high



percentage of the unchurched who visit a church decide whether they will return very quickly after entering the church building:

Ninety percent of the formerly unchurched indicated that some factor about the people or the facilities impacted their decision to return for another visit. Most of those indicated that their decision to return was made within a few minutes after they arrived at the church. (p. 93)

Because most unchurched guests evaluate and decide whether they will return for a second visit based on a first impression made within a few minutes, it is vital to an effective guest retention process that members of the hospitality team be prepared for them. Describing his home church, Church of the Resurrection, Hamilton (2002) explains how they view every first-time guest.

Often visitors come only after a friend has invited them five or six times. If this is the case, we want to do everything in our power to help the visitor feel the welcome of Christ through our church and to motivate him to want to return the following week. (p. 42)

A church practicing biblical hospitality will be expecting guests to visit, view each one as a gift from God, and will be sure to make them feel welcome.

Though we do not want to become a consumer driven church, it is important to understand the needs of those who are brought to the church by God and are looking for a new church home. Though they do not drive us as a church, we can learn from principles within the business and consumer worlds as it relates to the needs of people visiting. According to Willingham (1992), when talking about customers at a local business, people sense a need to be valued, feel comfortable and nonpressured. These values are also applicable in the local church. Guests who visit a church, often for the first time, feel the same way. Willingham goes on to say what those visiting your establishment desire:

Your undivided attention, for you not to judge their ability to buy whatever you're selling, for you to focus more on them than on your work activities, rules, or

schedules, and for you not to ignore them in favor of someone who you may think will buy more. (p. 9)

When a guest walks in the door the hospitality team should be there to notice them and seek to make them feel “valued, feel comfortable and nonpressured.” The church and hospitality team of the Louisville First Church will need to be trained on how to treat guests when they visit; what they can do and should not do to show hospitality.

#### During the Worship Service

An effective guest retention process also understands hospitality continues throughout the worship service. In a typical Seventh-day Adventist church, when we learn that a guest has come to visit, the temptation arises to either ignore or overwhelm them by giving them as much information about the church’s theology as possible in an attempt to quickly convert them. Though the unique Adventist message is vital to discipleship and an understanding of God’s plan for the life, as an introduction to the discipleship process, it is important to connect the guest through community first. In the context of community, discipleship has its best chance of developing. Evangelism best occurs within the context of community. People come to Christ today primarily in the context of community. “Belonging comes before believing. Evangelism is about helping people belong so that they can come to believe” (Richardson, 2006, p. 54). So our communities need to be places where people can connect before they have to commit.

The church service is about connecting everyone present, member and guest, to God in worship and since God works through people to reveal His will, it is important that the worship service allow an opportunity for people to not only connect with God, but with each other.

## **A Welcoming Time**

Early on in the worship service, the elder, who is the one who leads the worship service, will welcome everyone from the pulpit with a general greeting, making special mention of the guests and communicating with them ways to further connect with the church that are available at the resource center. However, it is key that the elder never single out the guest from up front. As Barna (1991) states, “Successful church did not humiliate visitors” (p. 177). Though the intentions might be well meaning, to do so is most often embarrassing for the guest and can affect their choice in returning.

In today’s society it is good to welcome people from the pulpit but not to have them stand to be recognized. Give guests freedom to relax and enjoy the worship service. Whatever you do, take great pains not to embarrass the newcomer. Among other things this means you should not identify new people by placing a ribbon, flower, or nametag on them. Do not ask visitors to stand and speak before the entire congregation. (McIntosh, 2006, p. 110)

## **A Greeting Time**

Another helpful way of allowing Louisville First church members and guests an opportunity to connect with each other is by providing a time in the worship service for people to stand and greet each other. This is a very useful way of introducing the guests to members without making the guests feel uncomfortable. Because a large number of members and guests are not present following the general welcome and greeting time at the beginning of the worship service, for the sake of this project, the Louisville First Church will provide a time for those present to greet and mingle later in the worship service. The best place for this connecting time is just preceding special music and the sermon—thus giving everyone present an opportunity to stand up about half way through the service.

The hope is that during this greet and mingle time church members and guests will have been given the opportunity to begin connecting so that after the worship service, they will connect further. This connecting time during and after the worship service gives the guests a chance to see whether this could be a church they could connect with. Barna (2000), when talking about how to connect the unchurched, says that “the unchurched are looking for evidence of real Christianity. To them, that is manifested in people within the church who truly love each other” (p. 100). If they can see a genuine, caring Christian attitude, they will most likely return. Barna continues to assert that two-thirds of the unchurched “said that is either extremely or very important to them when they evaluate whether or not they would like a church” (p. 100).

### **Obtaining Contact Information**

Key to an effective guest retention process is the ability to follow up on the guest after the service. In order to do this, the guests must be given an opportunity to provide their contact information. Without their contact information, there is virtually no way of following up. According to Barna (2000), this is imperative:

Frankly, everything hinges on the unchurched individual somehow identifying herself, usually by filling out a visitor’s communication card during a service. Once that contact information is provided, the church springs into action, employing an intentional and strategic process designed to inform, encourage and motivate the visitor to move forward in the spiritual quest. This process usually includes a series of letters and postcards, one or two telephone calls, and an invitation to attend a one or two session class for newcomers. The key to success is not the actual steps but the tone of the process. (p. 124)

There are a variety of ways to obtain this contact information. Options for acquiring this information include a registration card placed in the bulletin, encouragement to fill something out at the resource center or a notebook passed out during the service. At Louisville First Church, the “Guest book” has been utilized—a

small guest registration book placed in the lobby where greeters encourage guests to sign in. However, because only the guests are encouraged to sign in, they are singled out. This can make them feel uncomfortable. Rainer's research indicates that churches with effective follow up programs aggressively ask for this information and that it is important that everyone present, including the members, provide it. He asserts that

well over half of the study churches asked everyone present in the worship service to fill out a registration card. . . . The visitors present are thus not singled out; everyone is writing on a registration card. From the data we received, this method of recognizing guests is growing in popularity. (Rainer, 1999, p. 92)

The "Guest Book" then can be viewed as an inappropriate means of guest registration.

Explaining what he perceives as the most effective method of obtaining contact information, Hamilton (2002) uses the attendance notebook. "In order to have effective follow-up with first-time visitors, you must acquire the person's name, address, and phone number: We have found that the most effective way to get this information is through the use of attendance notebooks" (p. 44). In response to Hamilton's method, and for the sake of this project, Louisville First Church will use the attendance notebook to acquire guests contact information.

A folder, placed in each pew will have two separate colored sheets and a pen enclosed—one sheet is labeled "member" the other "guest." Later in the worship service, during the children's story, the elder in charge, when announcing the children's story, will ask everyone to fill out the registration folder and pass it down the pew. Church members and guests are each encouraged to fill out the side appropriate for them. After the service someone from the hospitality team will follow up with the information.

### After the Worship Service

Once the service has ended and people have been dismissed, guests and members have an opportunity to connect with each other. This is a key time for guests, when evaluating the church and whether they will return for another visit. It is during this time that guests are viewing the church as it really is. Guests are assessing the church to see if the members as a whole, not just those on the hospitality ministry, are truly caring by being friendly and whether they could connect to these people. When guests returned to a church after an initial visit and were asked why they came back, Durey (2002) relates that, “over 77 percent of those interviewed responded in the combined categories of friendliness and caring, or small group involvement. Fifty-three percent of the responses specifically indicated the importance of the church being friendly and caring” (p. 3).

Members will be trained to use this time to find and connect with someone they do not know and to show them hospitality by saying hello and getting acquainted. To encourage an environment of hospitality and connecting, refreshments will be made available each week in the lobby at the resource center.

### After the Weekend

According to Rainer (1999), “99.1 percent of the high-assimilation churches has a systematic plan for visitor follow-up” (p. 93). Once the weekend is over, the guest retention process continues by remaining in contact with the guests and encouraging them to return by following up their visit with an appropriate form of communication.

Follow-up in a guest retention process is not designed to be a manipulative means of encouraging the guest to return, but rather to remain in contact with them. Hamilton (2002) says that effective follow-up is designed to

offer encouragement and motivation for the visitor to choose to return for a second, or third, or fourth visit. This is among the most important things a pastor or leader will do if she is seriously interested in reaching the unchurched and revitalizing the congregation. (p. 43)

As explained earlier, the purpose of a guest retention process is to encourage the guest in the course of discipleship. The follow-up strategy of the hospitality ministry is intended to encourage those interested in spiritual growth to return and helps outline how they can connect deeper. According to Searcy (2007, p. 44), the intent then is to encourage the first-time guest to return a second time, a second-time guest to return a third time, a third-time guest to become a regular attender and a regular attender to become an active member. Studies have shown that the more a person returns, the greater his or her likelihood of choosing the church as a church home.

The most effective retention of guests occurs when follow-up is focused on prospects rather than suspects. Church growth studies have found that the average growing church in the United States keeps 16 percent of all first-time guests. In contrast, the average church keeps 85 percent of its second time guests! Thus a follow-up plan must focus on helping first-time guests return for a second visit. (McIntosh, 2006, p. 121)

### **Communication With Guest**

Within a couple days of the worship service, the guest retention process at Louisville First Church will communicate with guests who have provided their contact information through regular mail, electronic mail, or a personal visit—depending on how many times they have attended. Research (McIntosh, 2006) seems to indicate that the preferred method of communication is through regular or electronic mail.

Most churches send a personal letter or email to newcomers thanking them for attending church. Further information about the church is often enclosed along with times of service, ministries of interest, and special events. A good letter or email thanks the guests for attending, outlines the times of service, offers general help, and is signed by the senior pastor. (p. 123)

The first-time guest receives a note from the pastor via electronic mail and a card through regular mail. The nature of this communication is thanking them for attending and encouraging them to attend again.

The second and third-time guests receive communication from the pastor via electronic and regular mail again thanking them for attending the worship service but also giving them further information on how they might connect with the church such as Sabbath school classes, the membership class, or an upcoming event.

### **A Personal Visit**

Once someone attends a fourth time, they will not only receive communication as they did after their previous visits, but will also receive a personal visit from the pastor, assuming their home address is provided. If the home address is not provided, the pastor will attempt to arrange a visit at their next visit to the church.

Some people may feel that a personal visit may seem intrusive and old-fashioned, but Rainer (1999) seems to indicate in his study of growing churches that it is still an effective means of follow-up.

In a day when personal visits are deemed archaic, offensive, insensitive, and ineffective, almost every church in our study had either the pastor, other staff member, or a layperson visit the person or guest who came to the church. . . . Clearly the day of home visitation is not dead in evangelistic churches. (pp. 93-94)

### **Membership Class**

Schaller (1978) says that “there is considerable evidence which suggests that at least one-third, and perhaps as many as one-half, of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation of which they are members” (p. 16). He continues: “They have been received into membership, but have never felt they have been



accepted into the fellowship circle” (p. 16). How tragic that there are potentially so many members that attend a church yet do not feel a connection to others in the church. Especially since being a part of biblical community is such an essential part of God’s method of accomplishing spiritual discipleship.

In order for the guest retention process at Louisville First Church to effectively accomplish its purpose of discipleship, people need to belong to the fellowship of the church when they join it. In addition to developing friendships and community, it’s important for them to know what it means to join the local congregation. A membership class seems best able to address these issues. The class is the perfect place for those who are considering joining the church to connect with others and gain a clearer understanding of the expectations of membership.

Lawless (2005), talking about the expectations of church membership, indicates that church leaders value the membership class because “strong church membership begins with the front door process. People tend to be much more committed if the church publicly expects them to be committed up front—and a membership class provides a place to communicate these expectations” (p. 32).

By clearly communicating the expectations of church membership upfront, before someone officially joins the local congregation, we increase the likelihood that they will continue in their spiritual development. There have been too many times churches have focused on providing doctrinal information and then added the person to membership thinking it was enough. Research seems to indicate that it is not. People need to not only know what the church believes, but what the mission and vision is and how they might be able to connect with it. If people join the church without a clear understanding of

discipleship and what it means to them, then what the church ends up having is, “membership roles that are often two to four times our actual average worship attendance” (Hamilton, 2002, p. 53).

Lawless (2005) found that “churches in our study used their membership classes to emphasize concisely and clearly what matters to the church” (p. 33). Churches that utilized the membership class as a means of communicating with potential members had stronger churches. He continues to indicate that “fifty-one of the fifty-two churches surveyed asserted that their churches are stronger because of their membership classes, and the same high number told us that the work of planning and executing classes is well worth the effort” (p. 33).

The Louisville First Church guest retention process will offer regular membership classes for guests that have been regularly attending as a means of encouraging them in the process of discipleship. There are a few essential ingredients to a successful membership class including who leads out and what is covered. The handout used for the class is provided in Appendix C.

### **Lead Out by Pastor**

Because guests “prefer a pastor’s class,” as Rainer claims (2001, p. 66), “like a Sunday school class, as their introduction to the pastor,” and because, “they strongly desire to see or hear the pastor in a setting where they can interact with him,” the pastor will be the one to lead out in these membership classes.

### **Offered After Church With Meal**

Offered after the worship service in the fellowship hall, the class will be held while a meal is provided. Weeks beforehand, guests who have attended more than three

weeks will be encouraged to stay by after church for lunch and attend the membership class. The class will be entitled, *Discover Louisville First*.

### **Overview of Fundamental Beliefs**

The membership class will offer a brief overview of the fundamental doctrinal beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Whether the guests are Seventh-day Adventist, come from another faith-group, or have no religious affiliation at all, most people want to know what a church believes before they join. “A consistent theme among the nearly one hundred formerly unchurched we contacted to help us with this project,” Rainer (2003, p. 199) says, “was that doctrine really matters. Churches that attempt to reach unchurched people by compromising or diluting the teachings of Scripture are counterproductive.” A handout outlining the church’s doctrines will be made available. If someone is not familiar with the church’s theology, an option will be provided to begin Bible studies or attend a class where these beliefs can be explored in greater detail.

### **Overview of Church Mission**

When explaining the nature of those who had made decisions to join a church and have connected with it in its mission, Rainer’s research (2001) says that “seven out of ten of those interviewed provided comments that indicated they understood the direction and purpose of the church” (p. 121). Therefore, the membership class will also provide a clear understanding of the church’s mission and vision—outlining the purpose for the church and the strategy that she seeks to accomplish it. This helps the prospective members understand the church, where it’s going and how they can plug into it.

## **Expectations of Membership**

Research (Lawless, 2005, p. 77; Rainer, 1999, p. 103; Schaller, 1978, p. 39) has shown that in addition to making friends in the church, a clear understanding of the expectations of members before joining is vital to retaining new members. Therefore the membership class will present what is expected of members at Louisville First Church. These expectations include Sabbath worship attendance, participating in activities to strengthen faith, service in ministry in the church, stewardship, and support of the church's teachings. An outline of the material covered is provided in Appendix C.

### **Evaluation of Project Success**

The challenge of evaluating a project such as this is the ability to ascertain the feelings of church members toward guests, how guests feel when they visit the church (whether they felt welcomed), and how the guest retention process assisted in the guests' decision to return and eventually join the church.

This project does not allow the opportunity to evaluate guests' experiences. It would seem quite unwelcoming or intrusive to pull guests aside in the parking lot after the church service to discover their feelings about the experience. Though I will follow up with guests who provide their contact information and give them an opportunity to share how their experience went, an official Institutional Review Board process, requiring a consent form seems a bit much for a first-time guest.

I will also survey the church membership before the implementation of the training to discover their perception of the church's hospitality effectiveness. Any members that join the church through baptism or profession of faith during the implementation period will also be given the survey to measure their perception of

hospitality effectiveness at Louisville First Church and how this hospitality effected their decision to join the church.

I will then compare the church membership survey results taken before the implementation of the guest retention process with those who join during the implementation period to assess the change in hospitality effectiveness and its impact on new members. A copy of this survey is provided in Appendix B.

#### Implementation Period

The implementation period for the guest retention process at Louisville First Church will be for six months following the approval of the church leadership, training of the church membership through the sermon series, and the equipping of the hospitality team.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

#### **Introduction**

Because of the interpersonal and church culture altering dynamics, a study of this nature requires more than six months to adequately implement and then evaluate for evangelism effectiveness; however, it has certainly clarified its value and impact on the church's ability to accomplish its mission through the implementation of a guest retention process. The following represents the outcomes and evaluation of a guest retention process at Louisville First Church.

#### **The Training**

There were several facets to the guest retention process training at Louisville First Church including instruction for the church leadership, general church population, elders, and members of the hospitality team, including the greeters and follow-up staff.

##### Training Church Leadership

I met with Louisville First Church's leadership team (the church board) on December 14, 2009, to present all aspects of the project and ask for the approval for its implementation. That evening, the church board (Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2009) voted,

To allow Pastor Tim Madding to use Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church as an off campus site to conduct his Implementation of a Guest Retention Process

research project towards his degree in Doctor of Ministry through Andrews University. Included in this motion is a review and approval of the Hospitality Audit Survey to be administered to 63 members of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church and all new members six months after the implementation of a Guest Retention Process.

The church board seemed a bit apprehensive with some of the changes, mostly with the alterations in the worship service but saw the need for change and was willing to move forward with the project for its six months duration and choose afterwards to either abandon the process or move forward with perceived improvements. After the project was completed and seeing the early results of the study, the church board chose to continue with the guest retention process.

#### Training Greeter Coordinator

I met with the greeter coordinator (now known as the hospitality team leader) and went over the entire process project in great detail with her. She was very excited about the guest retention process and liked the idea of transforming the current greeter ministry to a more comprehensive hospitality team ministry. Throughout the various aspects of training, we met for clarification and evaluation to ascertain the project's implementation.

Though I did all of the initial training, the hospitality team leader was actively coordinating the various persons involved in the hospitality team. This made the project implementation and ministry transformation go very smooth.

#### Training Church Membership

To best educate and inform the members of Louisville First Church concerning the implementation of a guest process in the church, I mailed a special invitation card (see Appendix C) to all church members inviting them to attend the four-part sermon series on the subject of biblical hospitality, providing the biblical and philosophical

motivation for the process, and enlightening the church to the new procedures. This series entitled, *Hospitality: Opening Our Doors to Others* contained four parts. These sermons, delivered in February and early March of 2010 were entitled Part One: Before the Front Door, Part Two: Opening the Front Door, Part Three: Closing the Back Door, and Part Four: Jesus at the Door.

### **Part One: Before the Front Door**

The first message of the series explained that in order for a church to practice biblical hospitality the members need to be prepared for the guest before they even come to the front door of the church. The sermon explains what biblical hospitality is, how God draws people to the church and identifies some practical ways of being ready for the guests.

### **Part Two: Opening the Front Door**

The second message of the series follows that since God is drawing people to Himself and that He is using the church in that process, it is crucial that the church expect guests. This is further elaborated on by sharing biblical examples of hospitality as an encouragement to allow Christ to live through us.

### **Part Three: Closing the Back Door**

Often times, people that have been drawn to the church do not stay—for some reason, they do not connect. This third message of the series reveals that a church practicing biblical hospitality increases its effectiveness in retaining those making decisions for Christ. The details of the project process are introduced as means of connecting guests who attend church.



## **Part Four: Jesus at the Door**

The final message of the series shows the relevance of biblical hospitality as it relates to the last days and looks into eternity and the hospitality of God in the new kingdom. It reveals the apocalyptic picture of the Laodicean church with Christ standing outside of the church knocking and wanting in.

These messages were well received by the church with church members quickly recognizing the need for change and beginning to connect with guests before the project evaluation period began.

Shortly after the message series was completed, I received a card in the mail from a guest that had attended the week of the final message. He (Abraham, 2010) commented on the friendliness of the church. Notice how God is drawing Abraham to Himself by calling him to be with God's people:

Dear Pastor Tim: A while back I awoke on a Sabbath morning with a keen desire to participate with others in worship that day. So my father and I visited you and your congregation. Your subject was "Hospitality" and in as much as this topic is dear to my heart, I was especially grateful for you and the generous friendliness of your parishioners. (personal communication, April 7, 2010)

Church members, aware of the need to connect with guests, were taking time before, during, and after the worship service to welcome and speak with them. Whereas before, there was only a small handful of church members that would take time to do so, I now found it challenging to get in amidst the church members and guests.

### **Obtaining Contact Information**

One key element to church member involvement is the filling out of the communication card. Each Sabbath, during the worship service, church members were encouraged to pass a notebook through the aisles. This notebook, containing the

communication card, is the primary tool used for obtaining the guest's contact information. Church members were informed that guests are more likely to fill out the communication card themselves if they see others doing it. If the person next to them does not fill it out, they are less likely to do so.

There were a number of church members who felt that the notebook was not relevant to worship or was a tedious task and chose not to fill it out. If they were on the end of the pew with the notebook, they would not pick it up. If it was passed their way, they would just pass it on, heeding it no attention.

Since the acquiring of guest's contact information is vital to follow up of the guest retention process, a better method of obtaining this is needed. If the notebooks were going to be used, it would be best if deacons or ushers walked down the aisles passing them out to each pew. This would not change the heart of uncooperative church members, but might help draw the attention better to the guests. If the church were willing to alter the order of service, communication cards could be placed in each bulletin and used as part of the response to the sermon; they could be filled out and collected with the offering at the conclusion of the worship service.

Church members, for the most part were more than willing to oblige with the changes, recognizing their need to show hospitality to guests. I also think that the connectedness of the church improved as well.

## **Elders**

Because elders at Louisville First Church organize the worship service and serve on the platform, welcoming everyone present and encouraging the filling out the communication card, time was given with the elders as a group to explain this essential

part of the guest retention process. Time was also allocated for training elders in platform communication as it relates to being sensitive to guests being present.

Elders were informed of the attendance notebook, containing the communication cards. Though they were all on the church board that voted to move forward with the project and had attended the church services that explained even further their importance, this training took time to detail the significance of obtaining guests contact information and how the attendance notebook was the means of doing so. As elders in charge of the service, it was imperative that they remembered the notebooks and clearly explained what they were and how to use them with the congregation.

The elders agreed as members of the church board and as a group to utilize the notebooks throughout the six-month project process even though there were several problems that emerged. To begin with, because the calling for the notebooks was a new part of the service, and not something written into the order of service in the bulletin, there were a number of times the elders failed to remember. So as to not publically embarrass them, I would either whisper a reminder later (if I sat near the elder) or would not say anything at all. As a result, there are several days that data was not collected, even though I would always remind the elder before walking onto the platform that he/she was to draw attention to the notebook.

Another factor that negatively influenced the notebooks effectiveness was when I was absent from church. Because I was not there to remind the elder in charge, the notebooks were often forgotten and data was not collected. Sadly, it was perceived by some of the elders that this was my school project and was dependent upon me to make it happen. There was not a full buy-in of all the elders.

This leads to the final challenge of the elders training. There were some elders that did not support the idea. Even though the church board, including the timing of their distribution, had voted the use of the notebooks one elder would either forget or intentionally change the timing—often before all of the guests were present.

In retrospect, I think that if the notebooks were to be used before the sermons, it would be best if the pastor of Louisville First Church called for the notebooks. Though it does not foster a cooperative spirit among the church leadership, it does provide consistency. As mentioned before, if the order of service could be altered and an offering taken up at the conclusion, a response card could be used and collected, called for by the pastor/speaker.

### Training Hospitality Team

Because the bulk of the process is based on the ministry of the hospitality team, a training class was offered on February 20, 2010, to provide some of the rationale for the process with the volume of the time spent on the practical application involved in the research project. The curriculum was built around the four competencies that emerge as most essential to guest retention success. Previous chapters detail this research. Those four competencies are theological foundation, preparedness, people skills, and follow up.

#### **Theological Foundation**

Time was provided in the class to give both the theological foundation for the hospitality ministry and how it fits into the mission of the church in seeking and preparing people for Jesus' return. Though most of the theology has been provided in the four-part sermon series, time was given to bridge the philosophical with the practical. It helped to answer “why” do we do what we do.

## **Preparedness**

Once the theological and philosophical foundation was laid, time was provided to explain the importance of being prepared for the serving opportunities God will provide. An effective hospitality ministry begins before the first church member or guest arrives. Understanding the overall process and all its elements, what guests are looking for when they come, and things needed before people arrive are some of the elements discussed. This helps to answer the question, “when” do we do what we do?

Time was spent sharing what guests coming to a church are looking for, how to be prepared as a member of the hospitality team, and knowing who it is that is coming on Sabbath morning.

## **People Skills**

The bulk of the time was spent on people skills, training members of the hospitality team how to communicate with people, especially guests. The curriculum identifies the various people who attend church, how to identify them, and how to specifically serve them based on who they are. Time for practicing was even given with sample conversations. This helps to answer the question on “who” do we do what we do for?

To help in discerning who was attending the church and how best to minister to them as individuals, the hospitality team was taught how to engage people in a conversation with the acronym, HELLO.

H—Hello. A general welcome, acknowledgment, and recognition.

E—Engagement. Moving to a personal conversation that might include introductions.

L—Listen. Stop, make appropriate eye contact, and focus on the moment.

L—Listen Some More. Asking questions and restating what you think you heard.

O—Offer Assistance.

The training seminar went well, with members of the hospitality team excited about how their ministry of welcoming and connecting with guests could have an impact on someone's eternal salvation. They were eager to learn and ready to begin the implementation. There were a few members of the team that had only been serving on the hospitality team as an excuse to connect with their friends and when they were encouraged to reach out to everyone, specifically to the guests, they felt uncomfortable and resigned after the training. Others, excited about the ministry as a result of the sermons, quickly and eagerly filled their places.

The hospitality training seminar is a good seminar, but I feel that it requires more than one session and regular follow-up meetings. The material, especially on how to communicate and minister to guests, was new to most of the hospitality team and though time was given to practice, few members were able to remember how to assist guests as taught. One workshop on the other elements with an introduction to communication would be good for one meeting and the second for providing skills and practice in hospitality conversation. Follow-up meetings would be good to evaluate how people are doing and how they might be able to improve the hospitality ministry. It would be good to schedule regular hospitality team meetings for this purpose.

#### Training Follow-up Team

Finally, time was provided to train specific members of the hospitality team in follow up of the guest retention process. One member of the hospitality team volunteered

at the general training and we met together to go over the details where he was acquainted with the tracking software, communication card, and taught how to collect input and track guest contact information.

I looked at a number of software solutions that varied in features and pricing and reviewed four popular programs (Church Community Builder, Church Growth Software, Church Trac Software and Fellowship One) and three programs developed by Seventh-day Adventists (Disciples, Gospel Harvest, and Track 'em for Jesus).<sup>8</sup> A chart comparing these features and pricing is provided in Appendix C.

Because the church did not want to invest a large sum of money into elaborate and expensive assimilation software that was specifically designed for following up and tracking guests, a simpler tool was used. The computer program *Disciples* was purchased and used during the implementation of the project. The software, though much cheaper than other more common computer programs used, was designed by Seventh-day Adventist Bible workers as a tool for following up on Bible study interests and attendees to a prophecy series, not guests in an assimilation process. However, because it was economical and only for the duration of the project, it was chosen.

The *Disciples* software program allows you to enter specific contacts, both church members and guests, and allows you to identify them accordingly. It provides attendance tracking for various church events and will print out reports for evaluating.

However, because the guest assimilation process used in this project provided a variety of communication methods to guests with varied attendance numbers, the

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<sup>8</sup>In addition to these church management software solutions, there are a growing number of programs available, including those created by Seventh-day Adventists.

software was unable to successfully track this information in an efficient way. Keeping in mind that this was not the designer's intent for creating the software, it was a reasonable compromise for the project. It saved the church money and allowed us the ability to track information.

One aspect of the tracking software that was important to follow up was the ability for a hospitality member to collect the communication cards and enter the data in his/her own home and then later, I (or someone else) could access that information for personal follow up. Several weeks into the project, the online data transfer feature of the program failed to work thus preventing me from being able to access the guest information and follow up appropriately.

After countless attempts with technology support from the creators and fumbling through a solution ourselves the problem was remedied after a month by the emailing the data back and forth. This cumbersome process prevented me from altering the data information (tracking progress of follow up with guests) but at least provided me with the information needed. After several months its creators fixed the problem.

Because the tracking of guest information is so important to the project, because the software was failing to accomplish its purpose, and because more effective software known to me was considerably more expensive, I pondered whether to halt the project and begin again fresh with new software. After counseling with my project coordinator, I chose to continue, making sure that this information is reported in the evaluation.

The tracking software allows the church to follow up and minister to various guests in a timely manner. It is important that when choosing to utilize a computer



program for guest retention, that ample consideration be given to the requirements of the software, especially its tracking ability since that will be its main purpose.

Trial and error, as it relates to technology, is a part of the guest retention process, though it certainly affected the results of this six-month project in a negative way. I feel that the inability to follow up on guests in a timely manner stifles their decision to begin and continue in the process of discipleship at Louisville First Church.

### **The Physical Plant**

One key element of the guest retention process was the adaptation of certain aspects of the physical plant for providing a guest friendly environment. Signs were produced and located throughout the facility, both inside and out, to provide direction for the guests and a resource center was built, equipped, and staffed.

#### **Church Signage**

On the outside of the church, the existing sign with the church's name on it was cleaned, and a sign was placed near the back entrance providing direction to the church's main entrance so that guests would enter the front door where greeters were positioned to greet and serve them.

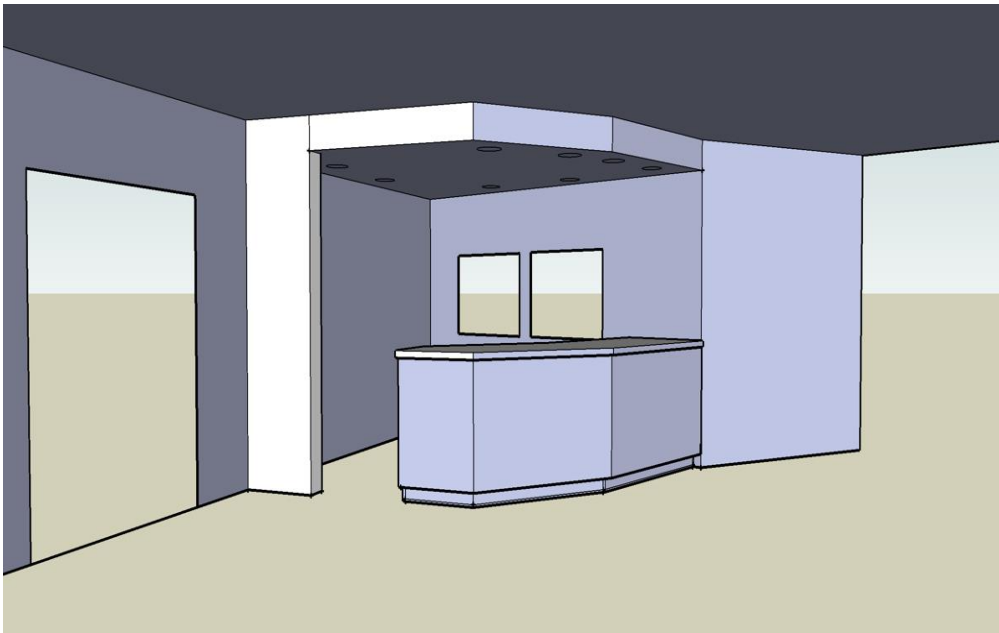
Signs were also manufactured and located throughout the interior giving direction to key locations in the church. Because of the nature of the layout, a guest could stand in the church lobby, look down either hallway and see all of the rooms located there.

Though all of the signage was clearly explained to the church family in a number of ways, one person asked when she saw them, "Why do we need to have signs to the bathrooms? I know where they are," revealing a lack of understanding as to their purpose and providing me a better opportunity to explain that these were for our guests. Most

church members understood and appreciated their purpose. Nevertheless, when someone walked into the church lobby for the first time, they could quickly find directions to where they desired to go, making them feel more comfortable.

### Resource Center

In addition to signage, a reception desk was built and installed in the corner of the lobby. The desk was specially designed for the unique shape of the corner of the lobby and keystone to the newly entitled Resource Center. The resource center included the desk, vivid lighting, new paint, display racks for literature and attractive decorations. An artist's architectural rendering is provided in figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Resource Center Sketch.

After the worship service, simple refreshments were provided at the resource center as a means of encouraging people to stop, linger, and talk. Food has a way of encouraging conversation.

This resource center has become the hub of activity following the worship service. Before the implementation of the guest retention process, it was not uncommon for church members and guests to quickly leave the church following the worship service, spending little time connecting together. The resource center now serves as a central gathering location for people to stop and talk—church members and guests alike.

With the new directional signs and resource center, Louisville First Church's lobby is now warm, inviting, and welcoming. For the most part, church members appreciate the change.

The intent of the resource center was to be a place where church members and guests could stop for more information and thus mingle together. Though that has occurred as a result of this project, I believe that there are still a number of important aspects of the lobby that should be addressed that this project did not allow for. First, the carpet in the lobby is old and ragged and should be changed. When you walk into the lobby you are greeted by an outdated, heavily stained carpet. Though it would cost more than the project had, it would certainly add to the welcoming environment.

In general, the church lobby is poorly lit and dark, not an inviting place to stay and talk. Because the lobby is an important place for the guest retention project, an effort was made to alter the room's illumination by adding lighting above the resource table. However, because of the short-term nature of the project, lighting chosen for the resource center was temporary. I would recommend that a more permanent, brighter lighting be chosen and installed above the resource center and a more vibrant, welcoming color be painted on the walls throughout the entire church lobby.

It would also be a good idea to provide a nice, colorful throw rug or a different

colored carpet behind the resource center and a flat screen television installed that can display current and upcoming events. This helps set the resource center off from the rest of the lobby as a special place that people are drawn to.

Finally, though the refreshments served at the resource center draw people there to grab a small snack after the service, which often results in people connecting, I think that it would be best if refreshments were provided elsewhere in the church lobby. The purpose of the refreshments are to provide an opportunity for people to stop and talk, the purpose of the resource center is to provide a place for people to stop and gain additional information about the church. By combining the two, they both overshadow each other. The effectiveness of each dynamic could be strengthened if the refreshments were offered on another table on the other side of the church lobby.

### **The Outcome**

On February 6, 2010, before the guest retention process training or data collecting began, a survey was provided to willing adult church members (18 years and older). This survey, completed by 33 adult members of Louisville First Church, listed a series of statements related to a guest retention process, asking church members their opinions and rating its current effectiveness. Church members were given four options in conveying their feelings to each statement. They could rate the scale by answering No = 1, Somewhat = 2, Mostly = 3, and Yes = 4.

One comment on the survey stated: “Members go out of their way during the fellowship time to greet guests and introduce them to others.” As Figure 3 shows, just over half (55%) of the church membership answered “Somewhat.” Thirty percent of them

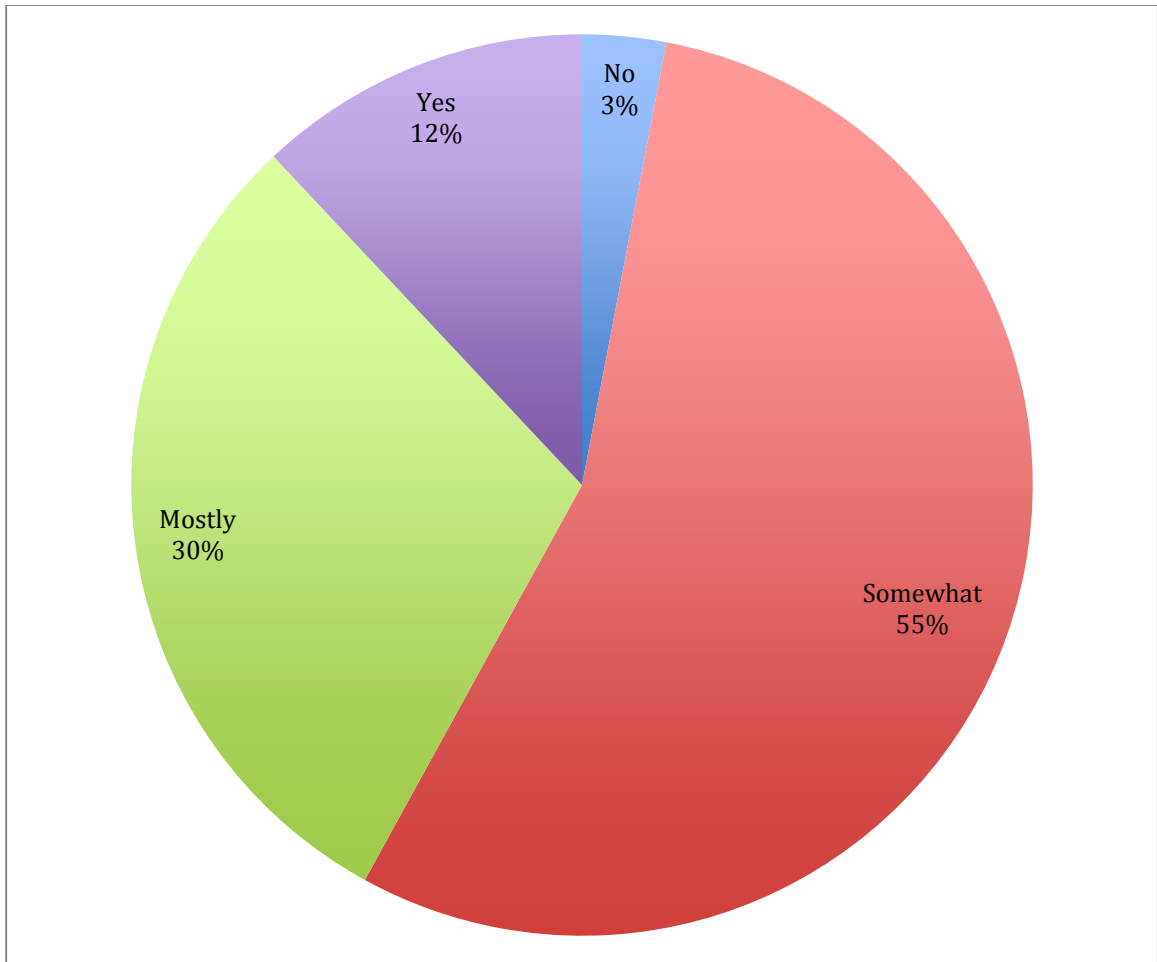
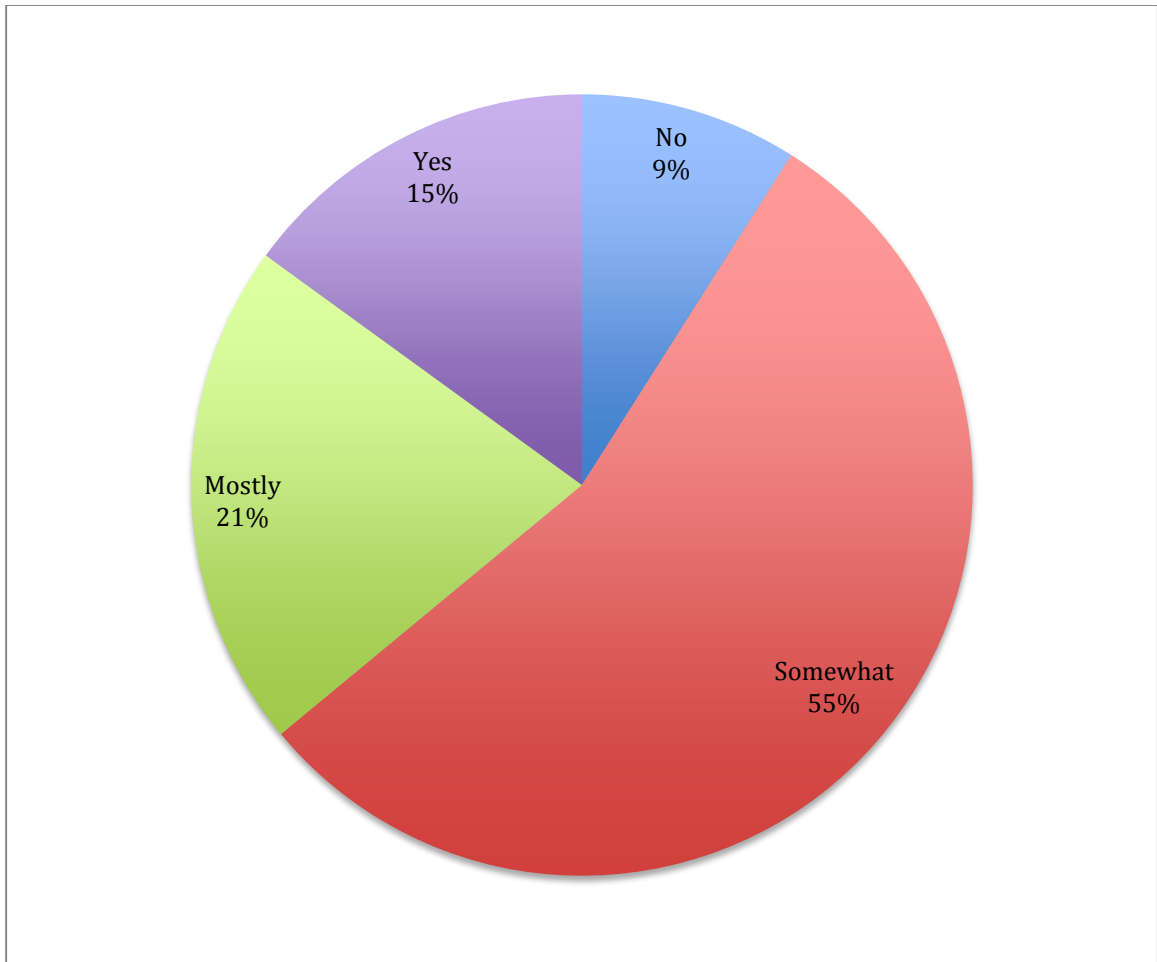


Figure 3. Members go out of their way during the fellowship time to greet guests and introduce them to others.

felt like the church members *mostly* went out of their way to greet guests at Louisville First Church.

When asked whether the “members of the congregation are prepared to welcome guests,” Louisville First Church members felt about the same with 55% of them feeling that they were prepared (note Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Members of the congregation are prepared to welcome guests.

The Hospitality Audit of Louisville First Church revealed that church member's perception of their hospitality effectiveness, as it related to guests, was low. Yet after the training, message series, and implementation, the church developed a better awareness of and desire for connecting with guests.

Throughout the six months of data collection, the project was able to collect contact information from guests 22 of the 26 weeks. As stated previously, there were several inhibitors to obtaining the contact information on a consistent basis.

Nevertheless, results reveal that a guest retention process, when implemented can increase a church's evangelism effectiveness.

During the six months of data collecting, there were 133 first-time guests. Those separate guests filled out the communication card during the six months of the project. That is an average of six new people that showed up each week. This figure does not count the total number of guests each week, only the number of people that filled out the communication card for the first time. Also keep in mind that four weeks (a month's worth or 1/6th) of contacts were missed.

This information confirms that God is bringing people to the church on a regular basis. I propose that if you were to ask church members how many first-time guests came to Louisville First Church each week, they might say very few. However, research shows that Louisville First Church is getting on average six people each week. This is astounding.

Of these guests that came to Louisville First Church, 11 of them joined the church, giving Louisville First Church a first-time guest retention rate of 8%. It would appear that the project has shown that there is a large resource of people that visit Louisville First Church each week and of those that end up joining the church, hospitality has an important role.

Of the 11 people who joined the church during the implementation period of the guest retention process, six of them joined by either profession of faith or baptism and five by membership transfer from another Seventh-day Adventist Church.

To compare the evangelism effectiveness of the guest retention process, the six members that joined the church by baptism or profession of faith during its

implementation were given the same hospitality audit survey. When asked whether “members go out of their way during the fellowship time to greet guests and introduce them to others,” five of the six felt that they “Mostly” did. One answered “Somewhat.” Church members averaged a score of 2 (Somewhat) before the implementation. When asked whether “members of the congregation are prepared to welcome guests,” all of the new members said “Mostly” (a scoring average of 3), compared to the church members that said “Somewhat” (an average score of 2).

In most churches, the members have a higher esteem for their friendliness or hospitality than do the guests that visit. However, these results seem to indicate that after the guest retention process was implemented, the guests felt that the church was friendlier than what the membership felt they were before its implementation.

Cooksey (2011) was one guest who began attending the church during the project and was baptized. In a videotaped interview he recalls God leading him to the church and the church’s hospitality influencing his growth. He said,

The Lord touched my heart. He wanted me to . . . I felt He wanted me to come back to the church—and to the fold. So, when we first moved here ten years ago, I attended this church a couple times and didn’t feel comfortable for a number of reasons but I felt like when He called me back this time—this was the church that He wanted me to attend. So I came back. And it was a great blessing the way I was treated, the way I was welcomed. It’s been a great blessing the way everyone in the church has helped me to grow to this point where I’m at now; to where I want to be baptized. The people in this church have made a huge difference upon my perception of the way things should be. . . . I feel like I’ve come home to family. (personal interview, January 12, 2011)

Notice several things Irvin points out: God drew Him back to Himself. God drew Him to the church. Ten years ago, the church was not ready to receive him, showing it through their lack of hospitality and he did not return after a couple visits. It was 10 years later that he returned when God was drawing him again. The church was learning about



biblical hospitality and was a blessing to him, treating him nice, helping him grow to the point of wanting to be baptized. He felt like the church was family. This is the implementation of biblical hospitality and its evangelism effectiveness.

Gabriel Long (2011) was another person who was reached by the church's hospitality as God drew Him back to Himself and into fellowship with the church. Gabriel had attended the church the year before; before we had begun the guest retention process of training in biblical hospitality and stopped coming. He didn't connect. He recalls,

I just felt that I needed to go back and visit you all again. . . . The majority of the people I met were very welcoming and even the year I was gone and came back, a lot of people still remembered who I was. And a combination of that . . . I felt impressed to come back here and plus the welcoming I got from people—it felt like home. (personal interview, January 12, 2011)

### **In Summary**

The dynamics of an effective guest retention process requires a great deal of time to coordinate and effectively implement. It takes time to adequately train church members, leadership, and hospitality team members. It takes time for a church to transition from being inwardly focused, thinking that they are friendly because they take time to talk to each other each week, to intentionally looking for guests to welcome and connect with. This culture of hospitality takes time to change. It takes time to learn a new system of greeting, collecting and importing data, and follow up guests in a functional way. These systems require time to adjust, modify, and learn. It takes time to find and learn the right interest tracking software.

If a guest retention process is perceived as a valuable part of a church's overall evangelism strategy and takes the necessary time to invest in it, I believe that the results

will clearly overshadow those of this project. My hope is that Louisville First Church will choose to invest in this guest retention process, altering it from time to time to make it more effective in fulfilling the church's mission and bringing more people into the Kingdom of Heaven.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Louisville First Church attracts over 250 first-time guests through its doors each year. Sadly, without a specific plan of discipleship, the church had been failing to connect with them and the opportunity for kingdom growth was lost. Some of those people are now being reached. This chapter provides a summary of the Guest Retention Process implemented in Louisville First Church and draws some concluding observations and recommendations so that this church and others might be more effective in the fulfillment of the Gospel commission.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of the guest retention process was to design, implement, and evaluate a discipleship process utilizing a ministry of hospitality focused on guests in order to mobilize members of Louisville First Church for maximal evangelism effectiveness. The training process consisted of five integral parts: (a) a meeting with the church board to introduce and explain the need for a guest retention process, (b) a meeting with the hospitality ministry coordinator in order to explain the details of modified ministry and to encourage support of the changes, (c) a four-part sermon series to introduce biblical hospitality to the whole congregation, (d) a training session with the hospitality team explaining the biblical, philosophical, and practical applications of a guest retention

process, and (e) a meeting with the person in charge of follow up in order to train in the organizing and collecting of notebooks, and use of the computer software.

The church spent considerable money in making the physical plant more guest-friendly with signage and a new resource center. They also began implementing a new member's class entitled, *Discover Louisville First* as a means of explaining the expectations of the church, preparing people for membership, and calling for decisions.

After the Guest Retention Process was designed and implemented at Louisville First Church for six months, it was evaluated for effectiveness. Survey results tallied from church members taken before the implementation of the guest retention process were compared with those from new members that joined during the process. Results indicate that the church experienced a more positive and uplifting atmosphere among the membership at church, where people connected more with guests and each other. The church was able to track the first-time attendance of 133 different people that came to Louisville First Church, revealing an average first-time guest attendance of 6 people per week or 312 for the year. Of those 133 people that attended, the church was able to move 11 of them to membership: six by transfer and six by baptisms or profession of faith. However, these results are representative of a church that was beginning the guest retention process and still working out the details.

### **Conclusions**

The results of the implementation of a guest retention process at Louisville First Church reveals that it was effective for discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I plan on modifying and sharing this resource with others who want to improve their

hospitality effectiveness. This resource might be a valuable training tool for other locations as well.

I learned that it is imperative to a successful guest retention process to implement such a comprehensive training process. The greatest hindrance to new member assimilation is the attitude of the existing congregation. Most people who join the church end up dropping out within the first six months because of their inability to integrate into the church community. By taking a great deal of time in training, it brought greater awareness to the congregation and altered their perception of guests.

One of the greatest challenges to the implementation of a guest retention process at Louisville First Church was the use of computer software designed for tracking attendance. Most effective software available is very expensive and is used for more than tracking attendance. Other features may include tracking financial information, membership records, and updating church calendars and website, features that the Seventh-day Adventist Church provides in other formats. A software comparison chart looking at multiple attendance tracking options, including Adventist features, is provided in Appendix C.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations that follow were arrived at as a result of implementing this guest retention process over a six-month period at Louisville First Church. They are as follows:

1. Because of the nature of evaluating people's attitudes, the ability to evaluate the guest retention process's evangelism effectiveness proved to be challenging.

Established church members do not provide an adequate survey of hospitality to guests

and guests rarely provide feedback of their experiences. To best evaluate a church's hospitality effectiveness, I would recommend that an agency such as Faith Perceptions<sup>9</sup> be hired. Faith Perceptions provides a Mystery Guest Program that tells church leaders what first-time visitors think and feel during the worship experience. They hire primarily "unchurched" individuals to attend church services and they provide numerical and written feedback on their experiences.

2. Ongoing training of the hospitality team and church membership is needed. The hospitality team should meet on a regular basis to evaluate effectiveness and make modifications as needed to improve the system's effectiveness. It must continually be kept before the church membership so that they might be encouraged to continue practicing biblical hospitality. One idea might be to produce a one page anonymous summary of a recent guest's experience at church with specific highlights toward key connection points.

3. Provide an opportunity, whether online or via return mail, for first-time guests to provide feedback on their experience at church. This will greatly assist the church and hospitality team in making the guest retention process more effective.

4. More time needs to be spent in training those who are leading out in the worship service. Since most of them are not on the platform every week, it is easy for them to forget the changes. There are also others who are on the platform only for special occasions (such as special music, children's story, announcements, etc.) that need to be educated in how to lead out on the platform with sensitivity to guests.

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<sup>9</sup>Go to <https://www.faithperceptions.com/MysteryGuestProgram.aspx> for more information about guest program features and options.

5. Most churches have a greeter ministry, however since this ministry is part of an overarching discipleship process, there is a need for a more exhaustive ministry for guest retention. I would recommend that a new team be developed in association with a guest retention process known as the Hospitality Team. This team would consist of a coordinator, greeters, resource table personnel, follow-up team including data collection, visitation and mailing, the pastor, and maybe others as needed.

6. The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to develop a comprehensive ministry tracking software that monitors the progress of guests and members in the discipleship process. This program should have the ability to (a) track the real-time attendance of guests and members at all church events, (b) provide reports on an individual's decision required for baptism, (c) report ministry involvement, (d) records results of ministry profile, spiritual gifts, and interests in ministry, (e) track attendance and membership in various church groups, such as committees, Sabbath school classes, teams and ministries, (f) allow for custom reports, and (g) multi-person, online access over a number of platforms. It might be helpful to begin with an e-Adventist online platform and add features to it.

7. This guest retention process only focuses on a discipleship strategy that is limited to the moment a guest first arrives at a church event and chooses to become a member. Church leadership will need to take time to process other evangelism strategies that bring people to the church as well as a system for further integration of new members. To coordinate this, the hospitality team should work in cooperation with the evangelism and member care team.

8. Another important study would be to compare the effectiveness of pastor and

church member visitation. Some studies say that it is more effective for the pastor to visit prospective members and others say it is best for a church member to go. More study should be given to determine which is more effective.

9. The Seventh-day Adventist Church would greatly benefit from a comprehensive guest retention process that covers its details and allows anyone to train his/her church members.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is struggling with its assimilation process, its understanding of the concept and its methodology. This struggle is typified when a former ministerial director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists recognizes that assimilation is the process of fulfilling discipleship in the life of a person through fellowship with the church that begins with the first visit and culminates in spiritual maturity yet acknowledges that its application must be modified to connecting new members to the church because of the system of evangelism that it employs.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church spends hundreds of thousands of dollars every year in an attempt to attract people to its evangelistic events and we have seen over the past couple decades that we are not only seeing a lower response to these mass mailings but a large number of those brought into the church through these means often become inactive or “drop out” because of their inability to integrate into the fellowship of the local church community. We must return evangelism to the people in the church.

God desires to draw people to the local church so that His people might connect with the lost in fellowship and be used by Him to accomplish His purpose of discipleship in them. Unlike those whom we attract through a colorful brochure, these people are

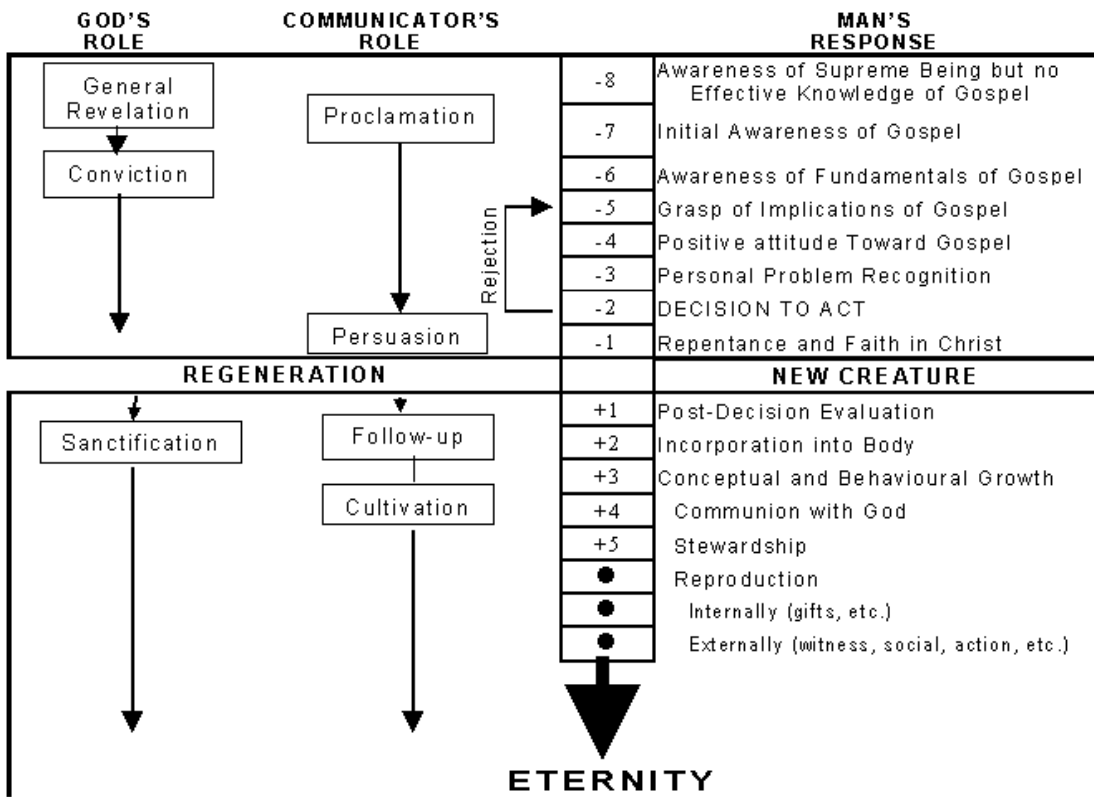


coming to the Seventh-day Adventist Church knowing its denominational affiliation, desiring to grow in Christ and wanting to connect with the church community. If we were as intentional about evangelism and discipleship with those that visit our church each week as we are with our evangelistic meetings, we would reach more people that are less likely to drop out and do so in a more cost effective way.

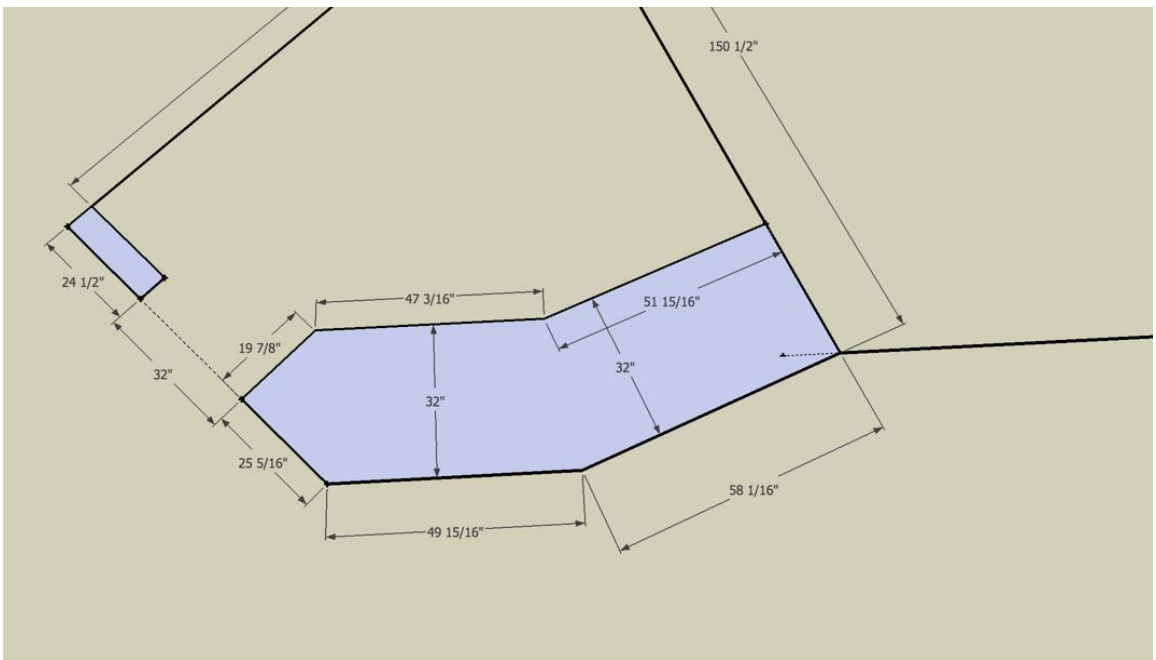
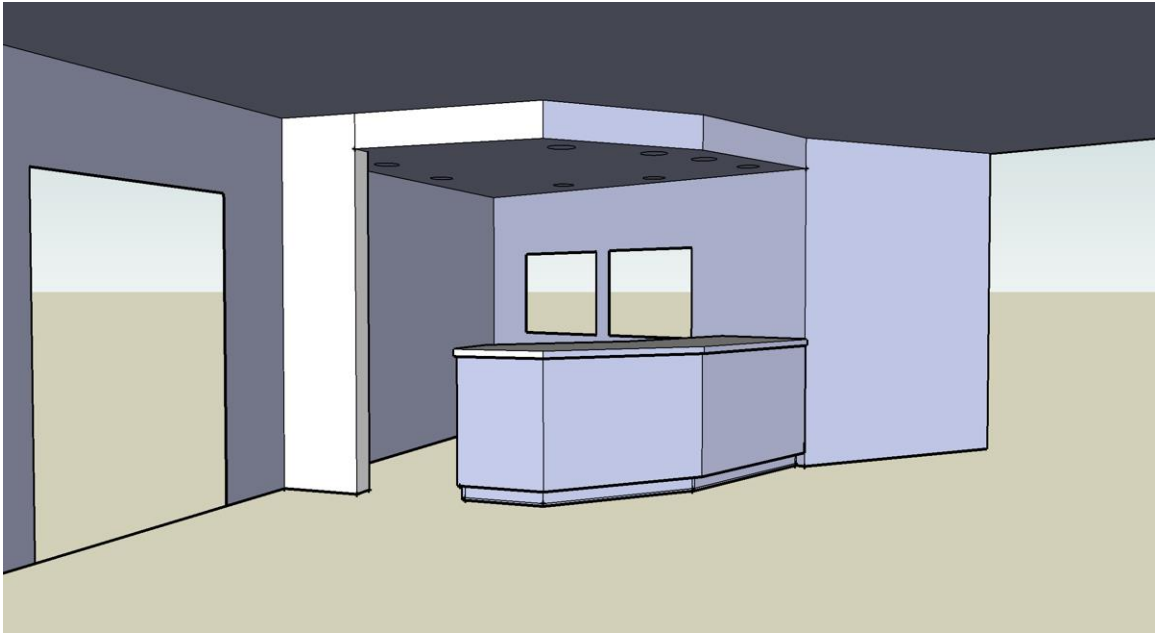
This project, as implemented in Louisville First Church, reveals to us that if we practice biblical hospitality and love the stranger that God brings to us, we will be more effective in fulfilling our mission of preparing people for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

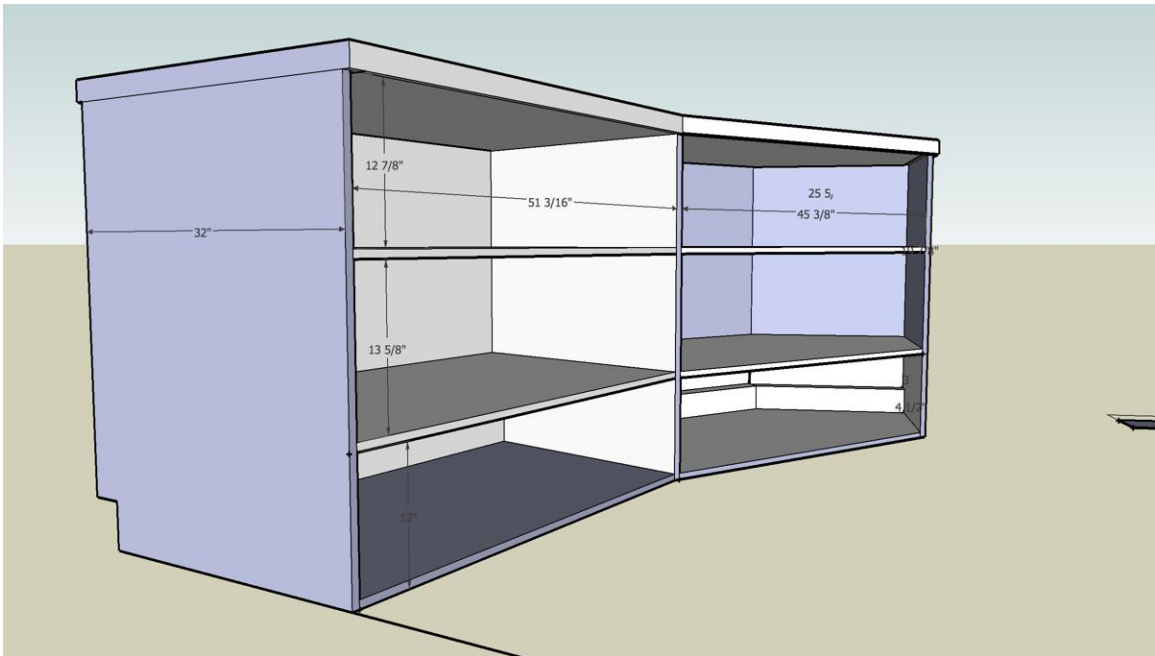
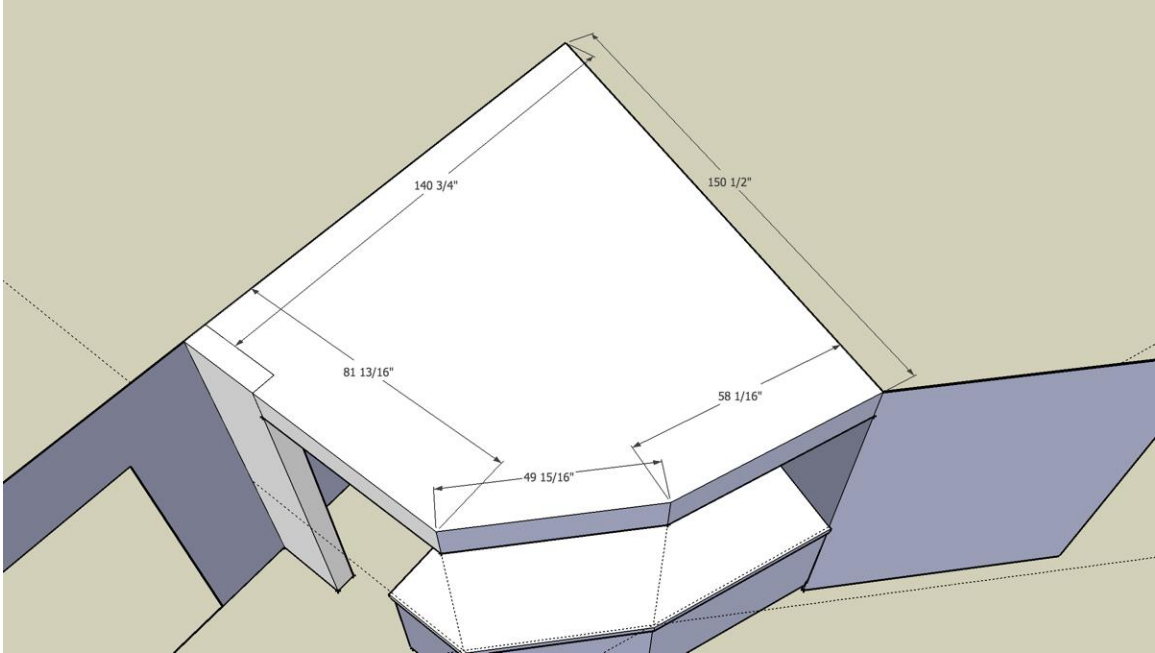
APPENDIX A  
ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

**Engle's Spiritual Receptivity Scale**



# Louisville First Resource Center





APPENDIX B  
HOSPITALITY SURVEY

A Hospitality Audit  
of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church

*I have read and recognize that by completing and returning this survey, that I am giving my informed consent to participate.*

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 - 4.

|       |             |           |        |
|-------|-------------|-----------|--------|
| 1= NO | 2= Somewhat | 3= Mostly | 4= Yes |
|-------|-------------|-----------|--------|

- The church is easy to find.
- The church's name is easy to read from the road.
- Is it easy to tell which entrance to use for the church of fice.
- Is it easy to tell which entrance to use for Sabbath school and worship programs.
- The exterior and overall appearance of the church looks well maintained and attractive.
- There are parking spots close to the building which are reserved for the disabled.
- There are parking spots close to the building which are reserved for guests.
- The restrooms are clean.
- All rooms in the church are clearly marked.
- There are clear directional signs to classrooms.
- There are current, attractive handouts or brochures to give information about the church which would be helpful to guests.
- There is adequate lighting in hallways, classrooms, and the worship center .
- The rooms for infants and toddlers are both attractive and clean.
- Teachers are prepared and trained to welcome guests.
- The instructions in the bulletin and worship service are clear to guests.
- Greeters are positioned at the entrances to the church.
- Greeters and ushers are prepared to welcome guests.
- Greeters are adequately trained in how to respond to guests.
- Members of the congregation are prepared to welcome guests.
- Members go out of their way during the fellowship time to greet guests and introduce them to others.
- Members of the church are prepared to extend brunch or dinner invitations to your guests.
- Members of the church are adequately trained in how to respond to guests.
- A system is in place to respond to guests within 48 hours of their attendance.

APPENDIX C

SEMINAR MATERIALS

**Church Board Presentation**

# Guest Retention Process

Pastor Tim Madding's Doctoral Project



Louisville First Church  
November 15, 2009

## Pastor Tim Madding's Doctoral Project

*"Be hospitable to one another without complaint." 1 Peter 4:9*

*"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13:2*

*"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Romans 12:13*

*"Welcome one another, then, just as Christ welcomed you, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7*

*"Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse."*  
*Evangelism page 436*

### **The Need**

The Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church attracts approximately 150-250 first time guests through its doors each year. Of these approximately only five percent are actually connecting to the church through membership. Because the local church has no organized, effective means of connecting these guests to the church and Christ, great growth potential is being squandered.

### Letter from Guest:

Hello Pastor,

I recently moved to Louisville, and I visited your church for the first time this past weekend for Sabbath School and 11 o'clock service, and I was very disheartened that only ONE person in the entire congregation spoke to me. A VERY few others (maybe two or three) made eye contact, but no greeting. Only one person walked up to me, extended her hand and welcomed me to the service. I smiled as I commonly do, but it was like they all were intent on looking through me, and by the end of the service, I was actually very uncomfortable.

Now I have been Adventist all of my life, and I have lived and traveled extensively inside and outside of the country, and it is very discouraging to me that in our own churches the friendliness that used to be common place has evaporated.

I had a particularly difficult week that week, and visited your church because it is very close to where I live, and I was heading out of town directly afterwards to attend the funeral of a 19 year old girl who recently was killed in a car accident from my church in Chicago. Now I do not expect compassion from strangers, but in church, it should be different.

How do we expect to win others to Christ, when we don't show the outward love of Christ.

Respectfully,

page 2

### **Assumptions About Guests**

1. No one joins a church without first visiting. Guests represent 100% of your growth potential.
2. Guests won't tell you what they really think about your church. They might say nice things, but won't really let you know what they are thinking. Consider putting a feedback card in your guest packet.

You don't have a second chance for a good first impression. Therefore our strategy with first time guests is very important.

### **The Project Process**

The purpose of this project is to form and implement a strategic and productive guest retention process at the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. The effectiveness of the guest retention process will be evaluated by the the number of guests connecting to Christ and becoming participating members of the congregation.

#### **1. Church Survey**

Collect data of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church with an anonymous survey of members who will receive no compensation. Surveys will be completed at the church taking 30 minutes in a group setting, analyzed in statistical software to evaluate perceived hospitality effectiveness.

#### **2. Implementation of Project**

The project itself consists of a variety of elements for the leadership, church body, and hospitality team. These elements include training, a system of guest retention and more for six months.

#### **3. Evaluation of Project**

Results from the project will be evaluated.

#### **4. Written Report of Project**

The doctoral project includes a final written document, often referred to as a dissertation that will be made available to the general public after a defense and publication.

### **Elements of the Project**

#### **1. Facilities**

##### **A. Signage**

1. Outside: Directing to main entrance,
2. Inside: Restrooms, Classrooms, Fellowship Hall, Resource Center, etc

##### **B. Resource Center**

Table, Signage, Resources, etc



## **2. Sermon Series**

A four to Five week message series given to the church in January/February on the subject of Biblical hospitality with practical tips and implementation steps provided.

## **3. Hospitality Training**

A Training workshop for members of the hospitality team will be provided to provide spiritual, philosophical and practical guidance to the ministry. Training will likely be over a four to five hour period, whether on a given Sunday or weekly.

## **4. Six Month Implementation Period**

The church will implement the guest retention process for six months. The guest retention process will be evaluated to determine if it has increased the evangelistic impact of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Louisville community by seeing whether the number of first time guests to membership ratio has increased. The evaluation process will include evaluations from new members who join the church during the course of this study.

After six months, the church board can determine whether they wish to continue with the guest retention process whether in full or partially.

### **Elements of the Guest Retention Process**

#### **1. Facilities**

#### **2. Pre-Service**

The first impression a person develops of a church and of the people who make up the church is the most important impression. It's very difficult to shake a first impression.

#### **A. First Contact**

1. Training of Hospitality Team
2. Resource Center Set Up  
Table, Lights, Carpet, Supplies
3. Resources for Guests and Members  
Church Brochure, Free gift, Free DVD,

#### **B. During the Service**

1. Greeting/Welcoming Time  
Elders trained in welcoming for beginning of worship service  
Greeting time just before special music
2. Connection Folder  
Folder containing contact information for EVERYONE- both guests and members. The folder is passed down the pews (one folder per pew) during the worship service as

*page 4*

children's story is announced. This folder is collected and information is tallied. This folder serves the purpose of allowing guests to communicate their contact information (followed up by hospitality team), members to indicate their presence (this information would be helpful if member retention ministry were developed by deacon ministry). This folder also provides an opportunity for prayer requests to be indicated and given to the prayer ministry/team.

### **C. Post Service**

#### **1. Resource Center**

At the Resource Table in the lobby, a first time guest who made a decision during the service or who has questions about the church or Christianity can find a knowledgeable person to talk to, more resources, and information about the church. The table also displays free resources such as information on becoming a Christian, baptism, membership, the church's beliefs, and new believer's Bibles.

#### **2. Refreshments**

When there is not a potluck, simple refreshments will be provided to encourage interaction between guests and members. Refreshments supplied by hospitality team. Refreshments will be in the lobby off to the side.

### **D. Post Weekend**

#### **1. First Time Guests**

A. Response via Email. Follow-up first time guests by contacting him/her within 36 hours. This means that by the end of the day on Monday for a Sabbath service the guest must be contacted via e-mail.

B. Response via Mail. Follow-up first time guests with a second contact within 96 hours. This means the guest should receive a second contact from the church by Wednesday if he/she attended the church on Sabbath. This second contact is a hand-written card with an appropriate gift.

#### **2. Second & Third Time Guests**

A. Response via Email. Follow-up second & third time guests by contacting him/her within 36 hours. This means that by the end of the day on Monday for a Sabbath service the guest must be contacted via e-mail.

B. Response via Mail. Follow-up second & third time guests with a second contact within 96 hours. This means the guest should receive a second contact from the church by Wednesday if he/she attended the church on Sabbath. This second contact is a hand-written card.

Note: Second & third time attendance indicates an interest in getting more deeply connected. Be sure to offer second time guests opportunities to get plugged into the church beyond the Sabbath service.

1. Sabbath School
2. Fun Events
3. Service Teams

### 3. Fourth Time Guests

A. Response via Email. Follow-up fourth time guests by contacting him/her within 36 hours. This means that by the end of the day on Monday for a Sabbath service the guest must be contacted via e-mail.

B. Response via Mail. Follow-up fourth time guests with a second contact within 96 hours. This means the guest should receive a second contact from the church by Wednesday if he/she attended the church on Sabbath. This second contact is a hand-written card.

C. Personal Visit. Follow-up fourth time guests with a person visit by the pastor or a key church leader. An appropriate gift is also taken for the visit.

Note: In addition to getting better acquainted with the guest and assessing his/her spiritual history and interest, the goal of this visit is to encourage the guest to attend the upcoming membership class.

Needed: Tracking Software to track attendance and contact information. I currently have a simple system that can be used temporarily. If the church chose to move beyond the six months and continue with a guest retention process consideration for a more advanced tracking system should be made.

### **D. Membership Class**

A. Offered Regularly. Offered after church on a Sabbath other than the general church potluck. Lunch is provided and the presentation occurs during lunch.

B. Information Covered. Meeting some of the key ministry leaders in the church, such as the children's ministry leader, head elder, personal ministry director, church clerk, social leader and such. The pastor would share with the people his personal testimony, the church history and vision, what it takes to become a member and member expectations, answer any questions.

C. Response Card. Guests can indicate their interests in becoming a member of the Church. Seventh-day Adventists from another church, individuals who need to study the

*page 6*

Bible and be prepared for membership through baptism, and those ready for a decision can fill out the card. The pastor, head elder, personal ministry director and church clerk can then follow up with appropriate actions based on each persons circumstance.

## Bulletin Insert



# Hospitality Team

From The Parking Lot To The Cross!

*Saturday, July 14th*

### **After the Morning Service**

Wanting to connect others with our great church? Want to know how we can help those who regularly attend or come to visit our church for the first time discover Christ through the ministry of hospitality?

This training will begin to equip you to be effective hosts for our church. Whether you are already on the hospitality team or you're interested in joining this "front door ministry," plan on joining us during potluck on Saturday, July 14.



# Hospitality Team Training



1

## First Impressions Last

1. Taco Bell
2. Your last hotel stay
3. Your last airplane experience
4. Your bank
5. Your local church
6. Krispy Kreme's

2

## Our Mission

The Mission of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church is seeking and preparing a people for Jesus' return.

3

## Hospitality Process

1. Hosts
2. Hospitality Table
3. Discipleship Process
  - A. Discover Louisville First Class
  - B. Pastor's Class
  - C. Strategy Classes
  - D. Small Groups/Sabbath School
4. Inactive/Missing

4

## Assumptions About Guests

1. No one joins a church without first visiting. Guests represent 100% of your growth potential.
2. Guests won't tell you what they really think about your church.

5

## Most First time Guests Determine Whether They're Coming Back...

1. Based on the "friendliness" of the church.
2. Before they leave the first time.

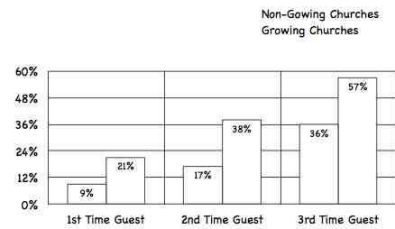
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## When Do Guests Determine the Friendliness of the Church?

The first ten minutes following the conclusion of the service.

7

## What Percentage of Visitors Become Active Within A Year?



8

## What Do You Call Them?

Visitor: A person who resides temporarily; one who goes or comes to inspect; one who makes a short stay at a place for a particular purpose.

Guest: A person welcomed into one's house; a person to whom hospitality is extended; a person held in honor who is due special courtesies.

9

## What Do You Call Yourself?

Greeter: One who meets or extends welcome in a specified manner; one who gives a formal salutation at a meeting.

Host: One who receives or entertains socially; one who opens his or her home for a special event; one who takes particular care and concern that guests are well accommodated.

10

## Where Are Your Hosts?

1. After-service hosts
2. Parking hosts.
3. Lobby hosts.
4. Class hosts.
5. Service hosts.
6. Refreshment hosts.

11

## What Are Guests Looking For?

1. The friendliness and warmth of the church
2. The character of the worship service
3. A place for children
4. The adult program
5. The church building

12



## How To Be An Effective Host

13

## Come On-Time & Prepared

1. Appropriate Attire
2. Name Badges
3. Review What is Happening
4. Check Resources
5. Stand Ready

14

## Know Who Comes Through The Door

1. Regular Members/Attenders
2. Adventists Who Occasionally Attend
3. Adventists From Out of Town
4. Unchurched
5. People Brought By Someone

15

## What To Say

HELLO

16

## H- Hello

A general welcome, acknowledgment and recognition.

17

## E- Engagement

Moving to a personal conversation that might include introductions.

18

## Someone Unknown To You

Have you been here before?

If Yes: "Welcome back. Do you come often? I'm still getting to know people."

If No: "Welcome, We're glad you're here today. How did you find out about us?"

"Let me give you some information so you'll know your way around."

19

## L- Listen

Stop, make appropriate eye contact and focus on the moment.

20

## L- Listen Some More

Asking questions and restating what you think you heard.

21

## O- Offer Assistance

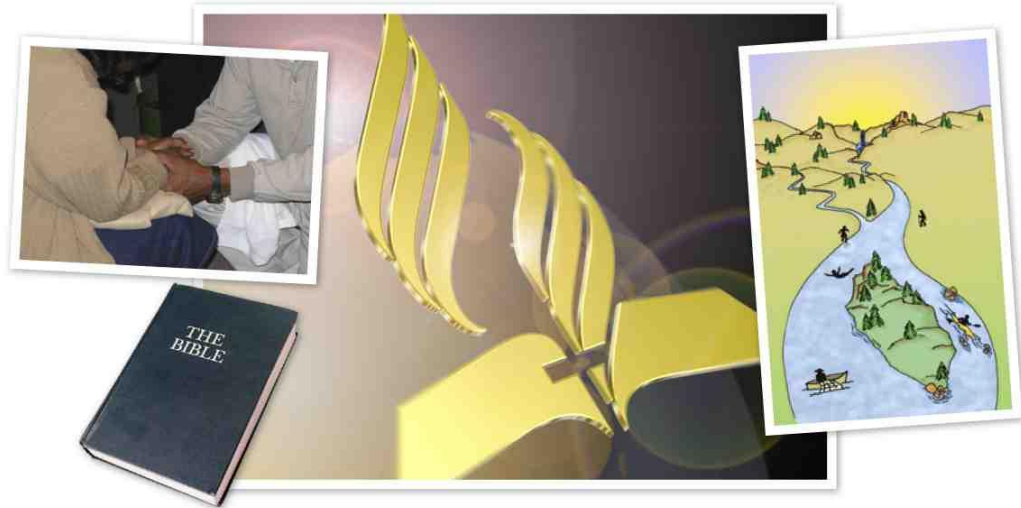
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## Effective Hospitality

From The Parking Lot To The Cross

23

## Membership Class



# Discover Louisville First

Consider Taking the Next Step!

*Saturday, January 24*

### **After the Morning Worship Services**

Been attending Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church and want to know what to do next? Discover Louisville First is an hour-long class that provides an overview of the mission and purpose of Louisville First Church and help you determine your best next step. You will hear the story and the "what and why" of Louisville First Church while you dine on a complimentary meal by Pastor Tim Madding.



DISCOVER  
*Louisville*



*First*

AN ORIENTATION TO LOUISVILLE FIRST CHURCH

# Key Ministries

## Worship Service

Worship service offered each week.  
11:00 AM

## Prayer Meeting

Prayer Meeting is:

A mid-week service on Wednesday nights designed toward encouraging you in your Christian walk in practical ways. Consider coming out and being part of prayer meeting. Spend time in prayer with others and discover some practical ways to apply your faith today. It's a great way to get connected with others in the church and experience personal growth.



## Sabbath School

It is our purpose to make disciples for Christ through the nurture of peoples in fellowship, biblical study, sharing and service. The Sabbath school is a school of Christian living, not just an event on Saturday mornings.

Acts 2:42-47 provides us with a blueprint for our time together. Verse 42 outlines the goals of the Sabbath school as "teaching and fellowship." Verses 43-45 illustrate the strong sense of togetherness, caring and support that we try to model in the Sabbath school in order to create a proper atmosphere for learning and growth.

If you are looking for a great Bible study group examining the basics of the Bible and want to get to know a bit more about the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church, consider attending the Pastor's class.

## Servant Evangelism

The Bible encourages service as a natural part of the Christian life. Jesus was always looking for opportunities to serve, whether by feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, or washing dirty feet. Here at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church, we are always looking for ways of reaching out to the people in our community with God's love and mercy. Everyone from young to old gets involved in service that shows God's love in practical ways.



On a regular basis we are involved in some kind of church-wide service project such as singing carols door to door at Christmas, giving away candy on Valentine's Day, gathering food for the hungry, washing people's car, sponsoring a community picnic or giving a bottle of water. Each time we proudly announce that "it's free, just like God's love." Members are always individually looking for service opportunities such as buying the dinner of the person behind them at the drive-thru, admission to an entertainment event or helping a neighbor with yard work.

Your more than welcome to join us for one of these upcoming Kindness Projects. It's a lot of fun and it makes other people's day a whole lot brighter. Be sure to ask us about our upcoming projects.

### Children's Ministry

Our Children are a vital part of the ministry of Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our desire is to reach out to children and draw them into a loving, productive and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ and with their church and to train, resource and support those who minister to children.

Our children's ministry recognizes that making disciples of children is a specialized work because children are special people. They have special needs, speak a special level of language and have their own special perspective on life, love and learning.

Be sure to keep posted on one of the many children's ministry events throughout the year such as our Saturday Bible Study Groups, Family Night, Vacation Bible School, and Fall Kids Fair. Kids have a great time as they discover and grow in Christ.



### Christian Education

The Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to Christian education and strives toward making it both affordable and convenient for families. As a dynamic ministry of the church, members of First Church receive subsidy discounts at Louisville Adventist Academy our Kindergarten through 12th grade school.

Louisville Adventist Academy family exists to show children Jesus, nurture their love for Him and others, teach them to think, and empower them to serve.

The Louisville Adventist Academy is operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide a spiritually oriented education for children. A belief in the existence of the Creator God is fundamental in the philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist schools. We respect His divine authority and recognize His intervention in human affairs. We believe that true education develops the spiritual, mental, and physical powers of each student; preparing them for the joy of service in this life and for the higher joy of service in the life to come. To achieve this goal, we encourage each student to:

- develop a personal relationship with God and his fellow men as stated in Matthew 2:37-39
- master the basic academic skills
- value labor, physical and mental, as the blessing God intended
- cultivate physical fitness, mental ability, and moral purity as the blessing God intended.

The Louisville Adventist Academy operated in harmony with the guidance and direction of the Office of Education, North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

You can get more information about the school at their website: <http://louisvillejracademy.com>



### Church Website

The website is a great place for current information about what is happening in the church. You can look at the upcoming events on the calendar, download a recent sermon and outline or view pictures from a recent event. Go to [www.louisvillefirstsda.com](http://www.louisvillefirstsda.com) to access our church via the internet.

# Mission & Strategy

## **Our Mission**

The mission of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church is to seek and prepare a people for Jesus' return.

## **Our Strategy- The River of Life**

The River is our Discipleship Track at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. What is a disciple? By definition a disciple is a student. In our case, we consider a disciple a student of Jesus' teachings.

The River is a curriculum that we are developing so that regardless where you are with God and your understanding of the Bible, there is a class specifically geared to meet you where you are. Here is the curriculum:

### **1. RIVER 101 = Membership: Stepping In The Water**

to see people converting their lives to Christ and becoming actively involved in the local church.

Goal: To lead people to Christ and active involvement in the local church. Once an individual has given her life to Jesus Christ and has come to an understanding of the basic teachings of the character of God and His will for the life, she will display this commitment through Bible baptism.

### **2. RIVER 201 = Ministry: Diving Deeper**

to see people contributing their lives to Christ by serving in the local church.

Goal: To equip and place people in ministry by contributing his life to Christ by serving in the local church. Once he has come to Christ and has become part of the church, discovering his spiritual gift and service in the local congregation is a vital part of his spiritual development.

### **3. RIVER 301 = Mission: Going Fishing**

to see people connecting their lives to Christ by sharing His love with others in their community.

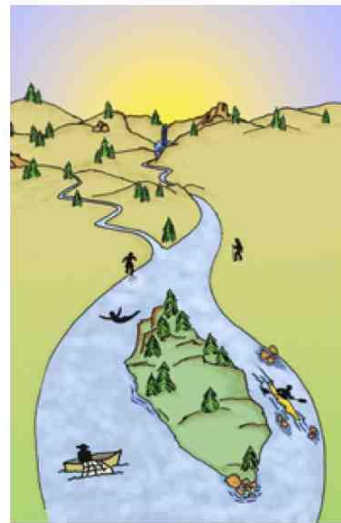
Goal: To equip people in participating in the privilege of bringing others into God's eternal family. Once a person has come to Christ he is called to reach those in his community of influence with the love of Christ.

### **4. RIVER 401 = Maturity: Riding the Rapids**

to see people committing their lives to Christ and growing in spiritual maturity.

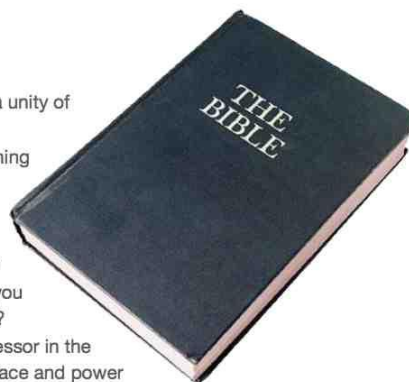
Goal: To help people become more like Jesus Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions in preparation for His second coming. This process begins when a person surrenders to the headship of Jesus Christ and continues throughout the rest of her life until His second coming.

Much like a college curriculum these various levels are designed to expand, for instance RIVER 201 will be a general class offered to show how to personally share your faith with others, whereas RIVER 202 will be a class on how to determine your spiritual gifts and abilities and how to get plugged into ministry. The bottom line is that we want to have new classes offered all the time so that we are all be challenged to grow spiritually.





# Statement of Faith



1. I believe there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons?

2. I accept the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary as the atoning sacrifice for your sins and believe that by God's grace through faith in His shed blood you are saved from sin and its penalty?

3. I accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Saviour believing that God, in Christ, has forgiven your sins and given you a new heart, and do you renounce the sinful ways of the world?

4. I accept by faith the righteousness of Christ, your Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary, and accept His promise of transforming grace and power to live a loving, Christ-centered life in your home and before the world?

5. I believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian? Do you covenant to spend time regularly in prayer and Bible study?

6. I accept the Ten Commandments as a transcript of the character of God and a revelation of His will? Is it your purpose by the power of the indwelling Christ to keep this law, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord and the memorial of Creation?

7. I look forward to the soon coming of Jesus and the blessed hope when "this mortal shall . . . put on immortality"? As you prepare to meet the Lord, will you witness to His loving salvation by using your talents in personal soul-winning endeavor to help others to be ready for His glorious appearing?

8. I accept the biblical teaching of spiritual gifts and believe that the gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church?

9. I believe in church organization? Is it your purpose to worship God and to support the church through your tithes and offerings and by your personal effort and influence?

10. I believe that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; and will you honor God by caring for it, avoiding the use of that which is harmful; abstaining from all unclean foods; from the use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages; the use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption; and from the misuse of or trafficking in narcotics or other drugs?

11. I know and understand the fundamental Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Do you purpose, by the grace of God, to fulfill His will by ordering your life in harmony with these principles?

12. I accept the New Testament teaching of baptism by immersion and desire to be so baptized as a public expression of faith in Christ and His forgiveness of your sins?

13. I accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and that people of every nation, race, and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship? Do you desire to be a member of this local congregation of the world church?

# Member Expectations

1. Attend worship every weekend unless you are sick or out of town.
2. Participate in at least one activity each year aimed at helping you grow in faith apart from the worship service.
3. Give of your time in christian service at least once each year through the ministry of the church.
4. Give financially in proportion to your income with the goal of tithing and systematic local church budget support.
5. Support the local and worldwide church and its statement of faith.

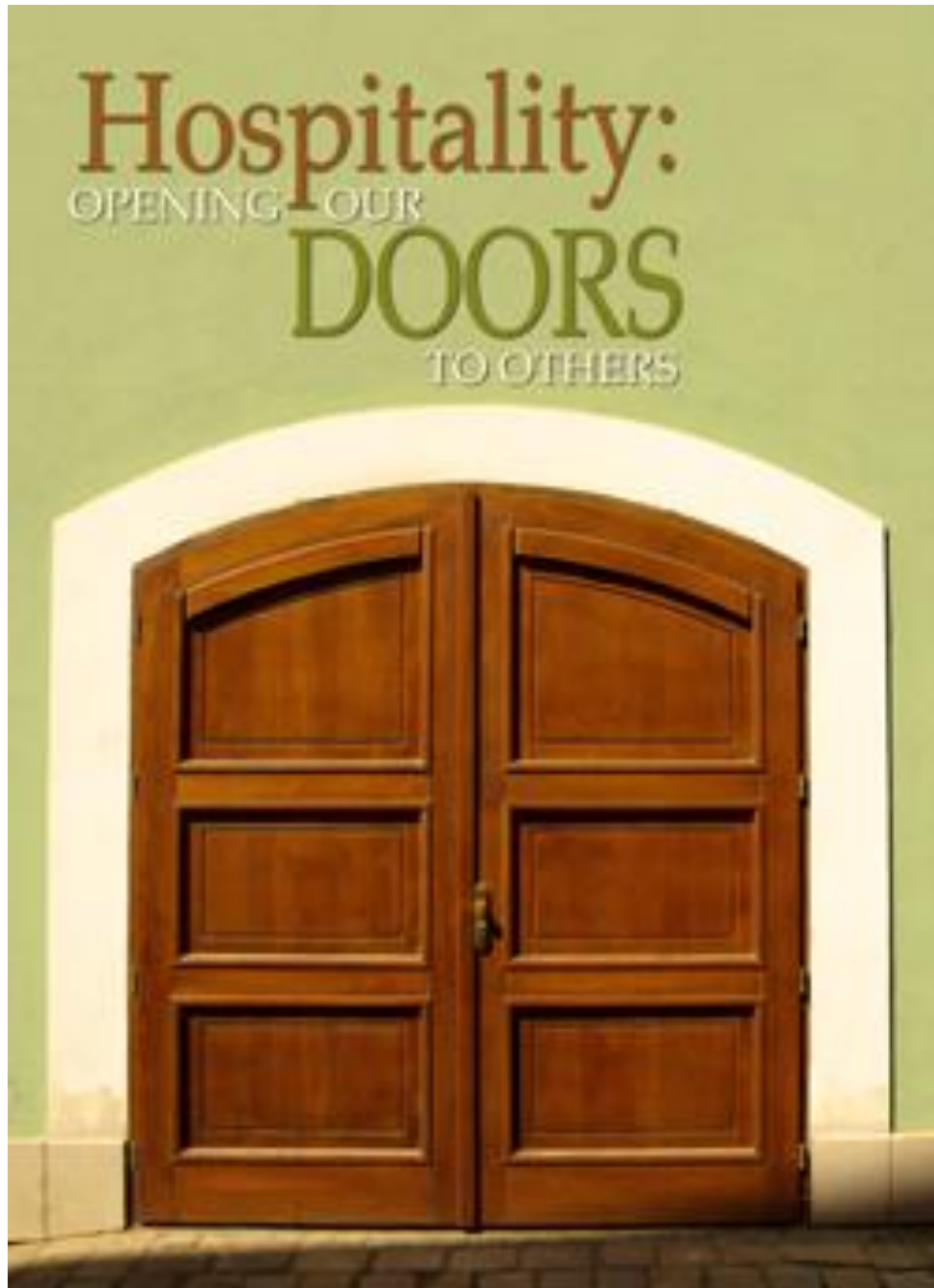




APPENDIX D

SERMON MATERIALS

**Sermon Series Mailer Front**



## Sermon Series Mailer Back

# JOIN US THIS SATURDAY

The heart of **God** is actively drawing people to Himself. In an effort to bring the lost into a saving relationship with Him, God often will **draw** that person to His church, the stewards of the mysteries of grace, where they might work in cooperation with God. In this series Pastor Tim Madding looks at the subject of biblical **hospitality** and how as a church, our doors should be open to those Christ is drawing to us.

### **PART ONE: BEFORE THE FRONT DOOR**

*February 13: Fellowship Meal Following Service*

### **PART TWO: OPENING THE FRONT DOOR**

*February 20: Hospitality Team Training*

### **PART THREE: CLOSING THE BACK DOOR**

*February 27:*

### **PART FOUR: JESUS AT THE DOOR**

*March 6: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*

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For More Information, Visit:  
[www.louisvillefirstsda.com](http://www.louisvillefirstsda.com)



## Sample Sermon Series Outline

### Hospitality Part One: Before the Front Door



"Practice hospitality." Romans 12:13

Hospitality - philoxenos

\_\_\_\_\_ (philo) + \_\_\_\_\_ (xenos) = \_\_\_\_\_

#### Paul's Passion for Hospitality - Acts 9

##### 1. An **Encounter** with God

"The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.'" Jeremiah 31:3

##### 2. God **Draws** to the Church

"The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Colossians 1:26-28

##### 3. Church **Assists** in Growth

"Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25

"The marvelous light that illumined the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples. Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction, and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach the truth." White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 121

"Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His recognized followers on earth. Jesus is the friend of sinners, and His heart is touched with their woe. He has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world." White, E. G. (1911). *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122

#### Hospitality in the Church

"It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach" 1 Timothy 3:1-2

"For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good" Titus 1:7-8a

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Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church

## **Sample Manuscript of Hospitality Sermon**

### **Series Title: Hospitality: Opening Our Doors to Others Part One: Opening Our Doors**

Presented at Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church  
By Tim Madding on February 13, 2010

#### **Introduction:**

Most of you here this morning are familiar with my testimony. As a junior in High school, God called me back from a life following the world; from a life of a typical worldly teenager, and brought me back into a relationship with Him. It was through a family; through the Holloman family. My best friend at the time was Preston. His family was Joe, Adele and little sister Corina. It was through that family that God brought me back to Him.

One very important part of my coming back to God was the day I went back to church for the first time. It was my first time back in church. I had known the Holloman family for a little while. I'd thought about coming back to God. I felt God drawing me back, but I didn't know what to do or where to go. Preston's dad, Joe, extended me an invitation. He invited me to go to church with them the next day. Without really thinking it through, but knowing in my heart that God wanted me to go back to church, I said, "Yes, I'll go."

What I didn't realize at the moment when I said yes was that we would be going on Saturday. This seemed a bit odd to me because I thought everybody went to church on Sunday. I didn't quite understand what was going on. I quickly realized that this church was a little different than most other churches. They go to church on a different day and they eat differently. I had absolutely no idea what to expect when I walked into

that church that Saturday morning. I had no clue what to expect, no idea what was going to happen. Even if it was a normal church that, like I had been to before, I was still very scared because it had been years since I had gone to church. And knowing my life as a teenager in the world... I wasn't really the church going type.

But God was drawing me back. So I went because I felt that it was important to me- though I did not understand why. I felt it important to go to church. Somehow, My going to church was going to facilitate in my growing in a relationship with God. So I went.

That church has now grown so much that they sold that church and built a new building. It was a typical church- a little smaller than this congregation, with an aisle down the middle. There were pews on each side with an aisle down the middle and the platform up front. They had a very small lobby and only double doors in the back. I came waking into the church and I was scared. I was scared. I was in my best clothes. I hardly remember what I wore, but everyone else remembers that I wore wholly jeans and a ragged tee-shirt.

I came walking into church. And the first thing I noticed was that I was under dressed. Everyone else wore ties, pretty dresses and skirts. Everyone's hair was perfect, but mine had probably not been cut in a while. I immediately felt out of place. Now the Holloman family had brought me to church so it wasn't like I could have turned around and walked out. I probably would have, but they were my ride. I went into the lobby and then into the sanctuary. The service had not started yet. There were people standing here and there. People on the platform just about to begin the song service.



I just came into the double doors in the back and standing up in the front, right up toward the front, just before the platform, was this woman. This woman was a very large woman. Her name is Isabel Bidleman. She was a very large woman. As I am standing there, kinda looking around, the family was talking to their friends, I didn't know anyone. This woman turns around and sees me and she does exactly what I knew was going to happen. She made a Beeline right toward me. Now, at the time, I was pretty thin. And there is this large woman coming straight down the aisle toward me. I'm really scared now. She comes running right up to me and she throws her arms around me. I got buried in her. And she said, "Welcome to the Sedro-Woolley Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are so glad you are here today. Let me introduce you to my family." Then she introduced me to her husband, three daughters and son. One attended the local high school and one was home on vacation from academy. Then they began introducing me to other people.

At the time, though I was scared, I felt very at ease, and comfortable. After the service, the minister came up to me and introduced himself. His name was Leon Ringering. He shook my hand and took time to talk to me. There were other people talking to me, getting to know me, and asking my name.

That night there was a concert at the church. A singer was going to be singing for a vespers service, sharing his testimony. He was a tenor. I had been a tenor in choir so it sounded fun to me. The Holloman family asked if I'd like to come back and hear the singer, Rod Scherencel sing at this concert. I said, "Yes, I'd love to come".

Now, I tell you, I would have said no, if they would have asked me right after walking into the doors to begin with. But after the experience I had and the connection

that I made with people, I was drawn for more. That night and I gave my heart to Jesus Christ at that concert. Later, after beginning Bible studies with that pastor and then concluding with another, I was baptized. Not long after that, I felt called to the Gospel ministry.

My life was dramatically affected by the hospitality of a church. What I did not know at the time was that all of these people knew I was coming to church that day. They all knew that I was coming. When I first met the Holloman family, they weren't sure they wanted to develop a relationship with me. Remember, I was a worldly teenager. I was out partying like others teens. And their teenage boy was a good kid. They weren't sure that having this worldly kid hang out with their good kid was a good idea. So the first thing they did was call the pastor. The pastor prayed and counseled with them. Then, when they invited me to church, they called the pastor to let him know that I was coming to church. They also called their best friends in the church, the Bidleman's, and let them know I was coming. They called others saying, "Tomorrow at church there is going to be this teenage kid at church, let's make sure he feels welcome."

They knew I was coming. And because they knew I was coming, they received me. They welcomed me. They showed me hospitality. Which opened up the possibility for me to take the next step. God was drawing me. And because the church, where God was drawing me to, was open and hospitable, it helped me to take the next step in Bible studies, conversion, baptism, and full-time ministry. If I had walked into that church, was completely ignored or made to feel like a fool, or felt like I was some ugly kid that didn't dress right or wasn't appropriate, I tell you I would have never gone back- never gone back. And what would have happened to my life after that? I don't know, I'm not

God, don't claim to know. Maybe He would've taken advantage of another opportunity, Amen? But that is not what happened that day.

### **Hospitality Series Part One**

We are going to begin a four-part message series today. This four-part message series is entitled, Hospitality: Opening our Doors to Others. The first part of this series is entitled, Before the Front Door. Before people even walk through the front door. The reason the Sedro-Woolley church was so friendly to me was because they knew I was coming. Well, let me tell you, people are coming. People are coming to First Church. People are coming to this church that have never been to this church before. Whether you realize it or not, over the past month and a half, we have had every single week, first-time guests to this church; people who have never been to this church before. God calls them to come to this church. Do you know that? Can you, in your mind, think of the people over the past few weeks that God has brought? And there will be people next week and the week after.

Here's an amazing statistic. Think about this for a moment. On average, we get about 3-5 first-time guests every week. Every week, on average, sometimes it's one, sometimes, it is a whole family of five or six, but on average, four each week. Take four and multiply that by something easy, fifty. There are fifty-two weeks in a year but we'll take two off. Four times fifty is what? 200. 200 people on average come to this every church. 200 First-time guests, because God is drawing them here.

Do you know how much money we typically spend when we do a prophecy series to get almost 100 people to come? We can spend nearly \$20,000 to get nearly, but not quite, 100 people to come to a prophecy series. Yet God is drawing almost 200 people without even sending out one brochure. So, that family, the Holloman family, knew I

was coming and because they knew I was coming, they were prepared. So, here's the purpose of this message today: People are coming. Are we prepared for them? Are we ready for them?

### **Biblical Hospitality**

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:13 that we as a church should, "Practice hospitality." We should practice hospitality. Hospitality was a very important subject to the Apostle Paul. Something he spent a great deal of time talking about. But what is hospitality? What comes to your mind when you think of hospitality? Do you think of a restaurant and the host that is out front asking how many are in your party and the take you to your seat? Do you think of the person at the front desk at a hotel when you arrive that makes sure that you have all the linens you need and that you have extra towels for the pool? Do you think of when you invite people over to your home to eat? What comes to your mind when you think of hospitality?

Biblical hospitality. The word Hospitality actually comes from the Greek word, *philoxenos*. Which is actually a combination of two words, *Philo*, meaning love and *xenos*, meaning stranger. Biblical hospitality is showing love toward a stranger. God brings people that we do not know to church here literally every week. If Paul is saying that we need to practice hospitality, he is encouraging us to love these people.

The book of Corinthians says that love is kind. Kind is defined as assisting or helping someone. When we want to show love, we don't want to overwhelm them. I would not recommend that everyone do what Isabel Bidleman did by throwing your arms around people you do not know. She knew me. I didn't know her, but she knew me and she knew that that was exactly what I needed. I'm sure some of our guests would say, "Please don't give me a hug. I don't even know who you are." To be hospitable means

to know that they are coming. We're planning for them, expecting them to come and we are ready for them.

### **A Visitor or Guest?**

Think about the time you got a knock on your door. Who was on the other side? Who was on the other side of the door when someone knocked? Was it a visitor or a guest? A visitor might be the little girl selling cookies. She has interrupted your time. You're busy cleaning, or watching your favorite show or reading your favorite book. Then there's a knock at the door. Your first reaction is [sigh] "Who is it?" You go over, open the door and there you have the visitor. The visitor is there. And what do you want to do when the visitor arrives? You think, "What do I have to do to get you out of here as soon as I can? Let me here your plea, let me tell you I don't want any and you can leave." Is it a religious nut trying to push his agenda on you? What do you try to do? You say, "Yep, I'm already involved with a church. I'm happy, you can go on to someplace else." You are kind and respectful, but you're goal is to hurry up and sign for that package so that you can get back to what you want to do, right? That is what happens when a visitor comes.

A guest is someone that you are looking forward to; that you are planning on. Someone you're anticipating coming. You know that someone is coming to your door. And when that person arrives, there is a knock on the door. What is your attitude? [Excitedly] "They're here! They're finally here! I'm glad they're here!" Right? In just a few weeks, we will be doing a "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." You will have the opportunity to either host a dinner at your place or be guest at someone's home. I hope you take advantage of it. When that time comes, those who are hosts will be ready for the guests. People are going to decide today, "Yes, I am going to be a host." You are

going to decide how many people you want to have come to your home and you will know that that many people are going to come to your home that Sabbath afternoon. So when there is a knock on the door, “They’re here! They’re finally here!” You’ve been waiting, anticipating this for weeks, and now they are finally here. So what do you do? You show them hospitality.

And as a church, to show biblical hospitality means we are not expecting visitors, people who are just coming in and are in the way. We’re expecting guests. People God is drawing to the church. And we are looking for them to come. We are anticipating them coming. So that when they come, it’s no surprise. We’re ready for them. We’re ready for the guests when they arrive.

### **Paul’s Passion for Hospitality**

The Apostle Paul talked a lot about hospitality. And there is a reason he takes so much time to talk about hospitality. Because Paul, much like me, had hospitality as part of his conversion experience.

Turn your Bible to Acts 9. Here we have the conversion of the apostle Paul. And notice how hospitality had a dramatic effect on his life. Notice the outline to the important elements of hospitality. This is why hospitality meant so much to the apostle Paul and why he spent so much time talking about it.

#### **1. An Encounter with God**

Acts 9:1. “Now Saul [that’s his name before his conversion], still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way [that’s any of the Christian or followers of Christ], both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Saul is this religious person. He is on fire for God and wants to find every follower of Christ, take them captive back to Jerusalem (hoping that they will be imprisoned) change their ways or if necessary, be killed like Stephen just a short time ago.

Verse Three: “As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’”

Saul has an experience, an encounter with God. If we were to outline hospitality as it related to the Apostle Paul, the first part would be that he has an encounter with God. Before he does anything, he has some kind of experience with God. God does something to his heart.

Jeremiah 31:3: “The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’”

This is very important to understand because God, friends, is drawing people to Himself. This is so important to understand when it comes to biblical hospitality. Right now, God is touching the heart of people throughout the city of Louisville. Right now people are going through a “flash of light encounter” like the apostle Paul. Maybe they are going through a difficult time. Maybe they are going through a great time. Maybe they are getting to a transitional time in their life and God is drawing on their hearts and in their minds they are saying, “You know, I need to come back to God- I need to come back to Him. I need to grow in Him. I need to get back to where I was.” Or, “I need to get to a place spiritually I have never been before.” And the spirit of God is touching the

heart of that individual and that person is experiencing some kind of spiritual encounter with God. One on one, in the privacy of their home, or on their way to work they are having an encounter with God. At work, as they are having a conversation with a friend, spouse, or relative an experience with God is taking place.

## **2. God Draws to the Church**

Verse 5: “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.’ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’” But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.’ So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”



After Saul has an experience with God, we see that God then draws him to the church, to His people. God draws people to the church. Why? Why does He do that? Because the church, according to Colossians 1:26-28, possesses, “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

According to Paul, the church holds the mysteries of the character of God, the glory of God- that’s who God is. We possess the oracles of the character of God. God’s people know God. When God draws someone (who is doing the drawing? God is doing the drawing) He puts within their hearts a desire to know more, to learn more, and He draws those people to the church. He draws them to the church; whether the church- corporate, in a setting like this, or an individual who knows Christ. Because those are the people that know Him, that understand Him. God is dwelling within His people. God brings, He draws these people to the church. God is actively doing that here in the city of Louisville. Right now there are people that are growing in their relationship with God. They are having some kind of an encounter. God is putting within their hearts a desire to come back to God- to learn more. They do not know what to do or how, so He puts within their hearts a desire to go to the church. Every week, God brings people to this church. Every week He is doing that. Drawing people here so that they might grow more spiritually; so that they may grow in their experience.

That is what happens with Saul. God puts him in contact with Ananias so that he might help him. This is a beautiful story because not only do you see Saul with physical blindness but also spiritual blindness in the life of Saul. He is spiritually blind. It is through the church that God works to provide illumination- understanding as to who God is. Continuing on...

### **3. Church Assists in Growth**

Verse 18: “And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus.”

The third part of this is that the church participates or assists in the growth. A person has an encounter with God, God draws them to the church because they hold the “mysteries,” as Paul says, the oracles of God. God draws them to the church and the church works in cooperation with God. That is their mission. That is their purpose. That is why they are here- to encourage people in their faith. When God draws people to the church, the church is ready. The church is anticipating them. They are good hosts. They are ready to show hospitality because they know God is doing this and they cannot wait for people to come. When people come, they encourage them and they help them grow in their relationship with God. Some of them experience conversion. Some of them, having already done that, encourage them all that much more by teaching them more about God.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

The purpose of the church, our purpose for gathering together is for what? Our purpose is to encourage one another- to encourage one another to stay the course. To not give up. To not throw in the towel. If God is drawing people to His church, so that they might encourage them, then we need to be ready for it. We need to be ready every week for people that are coming to our door. Every week they are knocking. Every week, people are praying and they are scared. They are wondering, “What will happen when I walk through those doors? What will happen when I come? What will the people be like? Will they ignore me? Did I dress right? Will I know whether I should stand or sit? Will I know what they are saying? What will it be like?” When they knock on the door, what will our attitudes be? For the church, we should be excited. We know that it is one of our purposes for being here. To help other people grow in their relationships with God.

### **It's Not All About Me**

You see some might very well think that church is all about me. It's all about me, right? This is a huge problem that Christianity faces today. Church is all consumerism. I go to a church where I hear my kind of music, my kind of preaching, and my kind of worship. It's all about me. It's all about what I get out of it. I pay my money. That's my due, my admission ticket. I've turned in my offering so that I can get out of it what I want. That's not what church is about. We are to encourage one another. Sometimes I need encouragement. Sometimes others need encouragement. We encourage each other all that much more.

I want to share with you a couple of quotes. From the book *Acts of the Apostle*, a powerful book on the early Christian church. Notice what it says:

“The marvelous light that illumined the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples. Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction; and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach His truth.” Acts of the Apostles, Page 121.

God has done His work. Who is it that draws, friends? God draws. It is the spirit of God that draws. He is actively drawing people to Himself right now. As He draws people to Himself, He brings them here because it is our mission; it is our purpose to share the revelation of God with others- to share the good news with others. When God brings people here, we work in cooperation with God to accomplish that end.

Same book, a page later:

“Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience [so it’s really all about me, right? I go to church for me. I go to church to get out of it what I want to get out of it], independent of His recognized followers on earth [so it’s not about others, it’s about me]. Jesus is the friend of sinners, and His heart is touched with their woe. He has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world.” Acts of the Apostles, Page 121.

God is directing people here. God has entrusted us to help direct these people closer to Him. God can do it on His own, right? Who is the one that convicts? Who is the one that draws? Who is the one that changes the heart? God does it, friends. It’s not us is it? No, not at all. It’s not about us. But God in His wisdom has ordained a plan and

that plan is to work through you and me. So believe it or not, there will be people here over the next few weeks that will have never been here before. Right now, God is working on their hearts. God desires for you to connect with them when they come. You're having guests. There is going to be a knock on the door. Expect them to come. Be ready for them to come. God has ordained us for this purpose. He has set us aside for this purpose. People are coming to dinner and we need to be ready for them. When they come, we open up the door and welcome them in. "Welcome. We are so glad you are here."

### **Hospitality in the Church**

This was how Paul saw it. This was part of Paul's conversion and how God worked through his life, bringing him to Him. This is why Paul spent so much time talking about hospitality. Why it is so important to the church.

Notice what he says to the young pastor Timothy, when talking about the office of the elder. The qualities, the key characteristics, what it means to be a leader in the church:

"It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer [that is an elder or pastor in the church], it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach." 1 Timothy 3:1-2.

I've been a pastor for 16 years. And there have been times, sadly, when we have had to ask elders to step down because maybe they were not temperate or prudent. Maybe they didn't live up to the ideals of what it means to be a spiritual leader. But I have never in my life, ever heard of an elder being asked to step down because they were not

hospitable. Because they were not showing love to strangers. But according to Paul, that is an important characteristic of a leader in the church. They must show hospitality.

He says the same thing to Titus, “For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good.” Titus 1:7-8a.

It is so important to Paul that the church practice hospitality. That it anticipates and looks forward to the people God is bringing to the church. That it identifies it as one of the character traits of the leaders in the church. He wants the people that are leading the church to live lives of hospitality so that they are an example to those that they are leading.

Hospitality is not just occasionally inviting someone over to eat, though it includes that. Biblical hospitality is loving, embracing, encouraging or assisting a stranger- those whom we do not know; those who God is drawing to the church. Encouraging them in their spiritual growth. It is such a vital part of the ministry of the church. So important, that it is one of the character traits required for someone who aspires the office of an elder in the church.

Maybe we should look at that. Maybe that should become one of our characteristics we look for in our elders. Maybe at our next elders meeting, we should ask if they have said hello to a guest who has been visiting church. “How many of you have encouraged someone. How many of you have had one of the guests who have been visiting our church for four weeks over to your home?” Maybe that is something we should look into. It was important enough to Paul that he mentioned it several times

throughout his writings as an important part of church. It was an important part of leadership in the church because it is working in cooperation with God.

When you think about it, it's biblical stewardship. What is a steward? A steward is someone that is entrusted, as a manager, with something that belongs to someone else. You and I have been entrusted with the mysteries of the character of God in order to share with others. Then God brings people to church and if we do not follow up on that, if we are not ready for them, if we do not show them hospitality, as God desires us to, then maybe we are not good stewards. Maybe we are not the best stewards.

### **Conclusion**

When I think back to that first time I walked into that Seventh-day Adventist Church... I loved that church- I still love that church. It was the first Seventh-day Adventist church I walked into. It's a growing, vibrant church in that conference now because hospitality is such a huge part of that church. It is such an important part of that church. The Holloman family that invited me to church took time to call up others and say, "There is this teenage boy that is coming. He's a little rough around the edges. Pray for him. And when he comes, be sure to say hello." They did just that.

Friends, pray for the people that God is drawing right now. They are coming. They will come. When they come, say hello. It's what you have been entrusted with. Makes some new friends. God brings them every week.

Let's pray.

Gracious heavenly Father: Thank you so much that you love us and that you have, for some reason, (maybe for our own spiritual development) made us a part of your salvation plan. You have called us to work in cooperation with you in the conversion of others, the spiritual growth of other people's lives. Lord, forgive us if we have fallen

short of your plan. We humble ourselves before you. We repent of our selfishness. We ask that you give us hearts of hospitality and love towards others. Lord, we want to be good stewards of the message and people that you have given us. As you draw people, we want to love them, as you desire us to love them. Bring them here so that we can be a church that will fulfill your purpose in mission. I thank you in Jesus names, Amen.



APPENDIX E  
CORRESPONDENCE

## Institutional Consent Letter

### *Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist*

2988 Newburg Road, Louisville, Kentucky 40205

Tel: 502.459.0250 Email: info@louisvillefirstsda.com



#### INSTITUTIONAL CONSENT

On September 12, 2009 at the duly called Church Board meeting of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church, the members of the board unanimously approved the following action:

Voted: To allow Pastor Tim Madding to use Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church as an off campus site to conduct his Implementation of a Guest Retention Process research project towards his degree in Doctor of Ministry through Andrews University. Included in this motion is a review and approval of the Hospitality Audit Survey to be administered to 63 members of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church and all new members six months after the implementation of a Guest Retention Process.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Board Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Board Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Informed Consent Form For Members



Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary  
Doctor of Ministry Department

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER/FORM

**Purpose of Study:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to discover the effectiveness of a strategic and productive guest retention process at the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. The effectiveness of the guest retention process will be evaluated by the number of guests connecting to Christ and becoming participating members of the congregation.

**Inclusion Criteria:** In order to participate, I recognize that I must be an adult over the age of 18 and of sound mind, and must currently be an active participant in the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist congregation.

**Risks and Discomforts:** I have been informed that there are no physical or emotional risks to my involvement in this study.

**Benefits/Results:** I accept that I will receive no remuneration for my participation, but that by participating, I will help the researcher and the Seventh-day Adventist Church arrive at a better understanding of how the implementation of a guest retention process affects evangelism effectiveness.

**Voluntary Participation:** I understand that my involvement in this survey is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any pressure, embarrassment, or negative impact on me. I also understand that participation is anonymous and that neither the researcher nor any assistants will be able to identify my responses to me.

**Contact Information:** In the event that I have any questions or concerns with regard to my participation in this research project, I understand that I may contact either the researcher, Tim Madding at [tmadding@mac.com](mailto:tmadding@mac.com) (Tel: (502) 241-0334, or his advisor, Stephen Currow at [scurrow@newbold.ac.uk](mailto:scurrow@newbold.ac.uk) (Tel: +44 1344 407 487). I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

*I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.*

|                                  |                         |             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| _____                            | _____                   |             |
| <i>Signature of Subject</i>      | <i>Date</i>             |             |
| _____                            | _____                   |             |
| <i>Witness</i>                   | <i>Date</i>             |             |
| _____                            | _____                   | _____       |
| <i>Signature of Investigator</i> | <i>Telephone Number</i> | <i>Date</i> |

## Informed Consent Form for New Members



Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary  
Doctor of Ministry Department

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER/FORM

**Purpose of Study:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to discover the effectiveness of a strategic and productive guest retention process at the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist Church. The effectiveness of the guest retention process will be evaluated by the number of guests connecting to Christ and becoming participating members of the congregation.

**Inclusion Criteria:** In order to participate, I recognize that I must be an adult over the age of 18 and of sound mind, and must be a new member of the Louisville First Seventh-day Adventist congregation in the last six months.

**Risks and Discomforts:** I have been informed that there are no physical or emotional risks to my involvement in this study.

**Benefits/Results:** I accept that I will receive no remuneration for my participation, but that by participating, I will help the researcher and the Seventh-day Adventist Church arrive at a better understanding of how the implementation of a guest retention process affects evangelism effectiveness.

**Voluntary Participation:** I understand that my involvement in this survey is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any pressure, embarrassment, or negative impact on me. I also understand that participation is anonymous and that neither the researcher nor any assistants will be able to identify my responses to me.

**Contact Information:** In the event that I have any questions or concerns with regard to my participation in this research project, I understand that I may contact either the researcher, Tim Madding at [tmadding@mac.com](mailto:tmadding@mac.com) (Tel: (502) 241-0334, or his advisor, Stephen Currow at [scurrow@newbold.ac.uk](mailto:scurrow@newbold.ac.uk) (Tel: +44 1344 407 487). I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

*I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.*

|                                  |                         |             |
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| <i>Signature of Subject</i>      | <i>Date</i>             |             |
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| <i>Witness</i>                   | <i>Date</i>             |             |
| _____                            | _____                   | _____       |
| <i>Signature of Investigator</i> | <i>Telephone Number</i> | <i>Date</i> |

**Hospitality Folder Inserts**

**Guests**

*Welcome to Louisville First Church*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- CHECK ONE:     First Time Guest  
                     Second Time Guest  
                     Third Time Guest  
                     Regular Attender

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
First Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

How Did You Learn About Louisville First Church?

- I am interested in Membership, please call me.  
 Please have someone call me, I have questions.

- CHECK ONE:     First Time Guest  
                     Second Time Guest  
                     Third Time Guest  
                     Regular Attender

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
First Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

How Did You Learn About Louisville First Church?

- I am interested in Membership, please call me.  
 Please have someone call me, I have questions.

**Members**

*Welcome to Louisville First Church*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
First Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Change in Contact Information  
Comments/Prayer Requests: \_\_\_\_\_  
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VITA

**Timothy E. Madding**

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Born April 2, 1970 in Astoria, OR. Married Andrea J (Ward) Madding August 7, 1993

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**Ministerial Director, Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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**Ministerial**, Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2011 to Present

- Coaching and encouraging professional and volunteer pastors in Pennsylvania.
- Developing resources for church growth and evangelism.

**Pastor**, Kentucky-Tennessee Seventh-day Adventists, Louisville, KY, 2006-2011

- Revitalized church and school.
- Baptized 49 people.

**Pastor**, Washington Seventh-day Adventists, Renton, WA, 2001-2006

- Increased church attendance from 30 to 220 people.
- Baptized 34 people.

**Pastor**, Washington Seventh-day Adventists, Lacey, WA, 1996-2001

- Planted the South Sound Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Baptized 44 people.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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**Doctor of Ministry**, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2012

**Master of Divinity**, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1996

**Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Ministry**, Weimar College, Weimar, California, 1993