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### Developing Intentional Hospitality In First Baptist Church Lenoir, North Carolina

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DEVELOPING INTENTIONAL HOSPITALITY IN  
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LENOIR, NORTH CAROLINA

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOSHUA DAVID HUGHES

MAY 4, 2023

APPROVAL FORM

DEVELOPING INTENTIONAL HOSPITALITY IN  
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LENOIR, NORTH CAROLINA.

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

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## ABSTRACT

The project's purpose is to reveal how hospitable First Baptist Church Lenoir, North Carolina currently is, and how that can be improved by instilling a commitment to hospitality in both the Sunday morning volunteers and the church congregation. Mystery guests attended worship and their initial experiences were assessed. The Hospitality Team underwent training, and an intensive Bible study was conducted for the Wednesday Night congregation. The mystery guests worshipped again, and their responses were assessed to see if their worship experiences had improved. In conclusion, the hospitality training was successful, and the worship experiences of the mystery guests improved significantly.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality.”<sup>1</sup>

I received a phone call the week I began my new job as Senior Pastor of The Oaks Baptist Church in Lyons, Georgia. It came from one of our elderly members, Mrs. Laura Kate Jones. She invited me to her home for lunch to get to know her better, and if all worked out, I would get to meet her daughter, who had been attending the church with her family but had yet to join. Being new to the area, I was eager to meet all my church members, and I readily accepted the invitation for later in the week. The last thing Mrs. Laura Kate asked was, “Do you like country cooking?” “Of course,” I replied; “that’s the food I grew up on.” Then she hung up.

I made my way to Mrs. Laura Kate’s home on the appointed day, but there was nowhere to park; cars lined both sides of the street. When I finally arrived at her door, she greeted me warmly. I walked into her den, and I was surprised to see twenty of her extended family members already there. They each took turns introducing themselves, shaking my hand, and hugging my neck. They were so excited about me joining them for lunch and coming to be their pastor.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 47.

The lunch turned into a family reunion of sorts, and I became the honored guest. When we sat down to eat, Mrs. Laura Kate said, “I didn’t know what you liked, so I cooked three different meats, eight vegetables, and four desserts.” I had never seen such a spread of food. I spent the afternoon listening to family stories, laughing, and eating until it was impossible to take another bite.

What stands out about the day, all these years later, was not just the abundance of the entrees, but rather, how welcome I felt among that group of strangers. Though their ages varied from their early twenties to their late eighties, everyone had a place at the table, and everyone played a part in connecting with me in that community. Hospitality like that did not begin when I entered Mrs. Laura Kate’s home. Instead, hospitality began when Mrs. Laura Kate taught her children and grandchildren years before to be kind, considerate, generous, and loving toward a guest.

As I consider the welcome I received that day, I wonder if churches could be trained like Laura Kate’s children were taught. In our fellowships, people are often friendly, but they are not necessarily hospitable.<sup>2</sup> Instead of being fully prepared for a guest’s arrival, they seem surprised when they see someone different, and sometimes, they respond in such a way that the guest does not feel comfortable enough to return.

What is the answer to meeting and retaining guests as church attendees and members? How do we meet the biblical mandate to be hospitable and welcoming in a time when our culture is anything but? These questions are at the heart of my Doctor of

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Becoming a Welcoming Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 7.

Ministry project, which I've entitled, "Instilling the Discipline of Intentional Hospitality in First Baptist Church Lenoir, North Carolina."

## CHAPTER TWO

### PROJECT DETAILS

#### Definitions for Consideration

There are several essential words that will serve as signposts for this work. First and foremost, the term “hospitality” must be clearly understood. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*. It is made up of two words, *Philos* often translated, “friend,” and *Xenos*, often translated “stranger.”<sup>3</sup> So, in its most wooden form, hospitality can be understood as being a “friend to the stranger.” Amy Oden, editor of *And You Welcomed Me*, broadens that understanding when she demonstrates that “hospitality responds to the physical, social, and spiritual needs of a stranger.”<sup>4</sup> In Biblical times, meeting physical needs might mean sharing food and offering “foot washing or bath, medical treatment, shelter, clothing, supplies for the journey and even care of animals.”<sup>5</sup> Meeting social needs might mean, “helping the outsider or poor [person] feel welcome, which at times means a recasting of social relations.”<sup>6</sup> An important aspect of hospitality is meeting spiritual needs, which “acknowledges [the] common dependence of both host and guest on God for everything. Sometimes hospitality means including the stranger in worship, Eucharist, or other liturgical acts.”<sup>7</sup> Oden describes hospitality in a broad way when she says the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew E. Arterbury, “Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1, (2010): 67.

<sup>4</sup> Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Hospitality is not so much a singular act of welcome as it is a way, an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honoring. The hospitable one looks for God's redemptive presence in the other, confident it is there if one only has eyes to see and ears to hear. Hospitality, then, is always a spiritual discipline of opening one's own life to God's life and revelation.<sup>8</sup>

As such, for the purpose of this project, the emphasis of hospitality will be placed not only on the physical act of making someone feel welcome, but in challenging the misconceived notion that hospitality is only that singular act. Hospitality, especially in the life of the church, must be understood as a broader paradigm that welcomes the stranger as one welcomes Christ.

A second word that must be defined for this project is "visitor." This word simply means someone not affiliated with the local church who attends a service. Often, a visitor comes to worship God and to gain more information about the individual fellowship. A visitor is an individual who may come once or who may come more frequently as he/she ascertains his/her desire to make the fellowship home or a central part of his/her faith journey. In many instances, visitors come and go from a worship service much like mist, fading away never to be heard or seen again. The emphasis for churches today needs to be meeting and connecting with the visitor and giving them a hospitable welcome so that they might feel encouraged to return and participate in the Christian fellowship more fully. For this paper, the words *visitor* and *guest* will be used interchangeably.

### **Statement of Problem**

If you have ever visited a new church, then you know the feeling of anxiety that can go along with such an experience. Simple questions such as, *Where is the sanctuary*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14-15.



*located? Who will watch the children in the nursery? Where do I park?* And most pertinently, *Am I sitting in someone's seat?* come to the forefront of one's mind almost immediately.

Though many worshippers in such an environment are entirely comfortable with their surroundings, first-time visitors at the church often feel like fish out of water. They stand out because they are new, and sadly, many regular church attendees never welcome them warmly. Whether they find themselves too anxious to reach out, or perhaps they consider connecting with a guest someone else's job, many church members fail to make any significant effort to interact with first-time guests. In doing so, they inadvertently become stumbling blocks for the guest to overcome when considering whether he/she will visit again or perhaps join at a later date.

Furthermore, it has been my experience that members of established churches are friendly to the people they know, but they may not leave their comfort zones to "reach across the aisle" to those they don't know.<sup>9</sup> The irony of such action is that if the congregants are only friendly to those who regularly attend the church, they are often unwittingly unfriendly to guests. Gary McIntosh makes it clear that though most churches feel that they are friendly places, the key is in the "perception of those who come as guests."<sup>10</sup> Logically, those on the inside are fundamentally unable to see clearly how outsiders perceive their church. In essence, insiders unknowingly overlook critical issues within their fellowship. It is much like how someone might not notice a particular odor in

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<sup>9</sup> Rainer, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 8.

his/her home because they are used to the smell, putrid though it may be. How do we in church leadership overcome these struggles? Is there any way to teach our regular attendees to be hospitable towards guests who worship with us?

Another reason this project is necessary, especially at this time, is that the world is emerging from the Coronavirus Pandemic. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic, the first-ever sparked by a Coronavirus.<sup>11</sup> On March 14, 2020, the Governor of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, issued an executive order that included no mass gatherings.”<sup>12</sup> As a result of this order, First Baptist Lenoir, and many churches throughout the state, closed their doors to inside worship. Over the remainder of 2020 and into early 2021, churches reopened at various times. Some were successful in not having a coronavirus outbreak; others were not so fortunate. Led by its Coronavirus Task Force, First Baptist Church Lenoir’s sanctuary remained closed to the congregation for one full year (March 2020-March 2021). Outdoor services were held weekly, and a second service was live-streamed from the sanctuary with only staff attending. First Baptist Church Lenoir reopened its doors for the congregation to participate in worship (in a limited capacity and following strict protocols) on March 13, 2021. This decision was met with great anticipation and excitement.

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<sup>11</sup> “WHO characterizes COVID-19 as a pandemic,” *World Health Organization*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen--accessed 4/5/21>.

<sup>12</sup> Lucille Sherman and T. Keung Hui, “NC Governor Cooper issues executive order: No mass gatherings, no school due to coronavirus threat.” *The News Observer*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/article241199286.html--accessed 4/5/21>.

Though the effects of the pandemic are easy to quantify in one way by studying the numbers of those sickened, the number of those hospitalized, the number of those who died, the number of jobs lost, etc., it is unclear how to properly quantify the effect the pandemic has had and continues to have on the Church. Will crowds return to normal? Will people feel comfortable returning to inside worship, or will they still be ambivalent about the unknown? Will giving return to pre-pandemic levels, or will the church have to adjust to a “new normal?” While these questions are unanswered now and will most likely remain so for some time, recognizing that some people have probably left the church due to the pandemic makes this project even more essential. How the church greets and welcomes visitors will significantly impact retaining those visitors as church members going forward. Extravagant hospitality could ultimately be the difference between a church rebounding and thriving after the pandemic or dwindling and dying after the pandemic.

Furthermore, this project is essential because, as we have seen it played out on the nightly news and even in our neighborhoods, our world is full of suffering, violence, and exclusion. In a time of great division, political turmoil, corporate malfeasance, fear, bitterness, anger, and loss, Corneliu Constantineanu writes, “the reality of ‘welcome’ may indeed become the greatest piece of good news.”<sup>13</sup> Sadly, our society, which has become so technologically advanced, has lost the deep sense of connection and community that once held sway. Though social media is one of the easiest ways to communicate with

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<sup>13</sup> Corneliu Constantineanu, “Hospitality and Welcome as Christian Imperatives in Relation to ‘the Other,’” *Transformation* 35, No 2 (2018): 111.

neighbors and people around the world, people remain desperate to connect with others in a personal way. Constantineau concludes:

This represents a great opportunity and a call for Christians because offering welcome is both an integral part of Christian identity and an imperative for the mission. In a world like ours, where exclusion and hurt and suffering is the order of the day, the church has a great opportunity to offer a different way of understanding relating to and welcoming the other. Christians can and must make a difference, but for this to happen, hospitality must become a priority.<sup>14</sup>

As one can see, the necessity for a project like this is easily discernible across several levels. Whether it be the anxiety from guests connecting to a local church, the church's desire to return to "normal" in a post-pandemic world, or the brokenness of the world that calls Christians to be more Christ-like, the problem is real and is certainly not going away. So, the question remains, what can be done to alleviate these issues churches and individual Christians face today?

### **Project Setting**

The city of Lenoir is located in Northwestern North Carolina. Lenoir sits in the foothills, bordered to the west by the Blue Ridge Mountains and to the east by the Brushy Mountain Range. Lenoir is the county seat for Caldwell County, North Carolina. According to the 2010 Census, 18,228 persons called Lenoir home; more recent estimates place that number near 17,973.<sup>15</sup> The 2010 census shows that Caldwell County had

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "City of Lenoir Quick Facts," *City of Lenoir*, <https://www.cityoflenoir.com/354/Quick-Facts>. Accessed August 6, 2019.

80,720 people; more recent estimates place that number closer to 79,409.<sup>16</sup> The average household income is \$55,263, though 58.3% make less than \$50,000.<sup>17</sup> The racial distribution is 87.1% White, 4.9% Black, 5.4% Hispanic, while all other races/ethnicities make up the remainder.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 78.3% of the population has a high school degree, but only 13% has a Bachelor's Degree or greater.<sup>19</sup>

Lenoir was once the mecca of furniture in Western North Carolina, hosting names such as Broyhill, Bernhardt, and Fairfield Chair. However, due to cost-cutting measures in the 1990s that included shipping jobs overseas, many furniture factories closed. This loss of employment was devastating to the local economy. Later, during the Great Recession, when the remaining furniture plants laid-off workers, unemployment reached 17%! From 2009 until the present, the community has been steadily rebuilding. New corporations such as Google, Blue Ridge Electric, and Exela have moved to the area bringing many jobs and hope for the future.

First Baptist Church Lenoir resides at the corner of Main Street and Ashe Avenue; its steeple keeps watch over downtown. The church is a stately, ivory-colored, four-story brick building built in 1925 and added onto in 1951 and 1992.<sup>20</sup> Incredibly, the church has had a remarkable run of stability because of its leadership. Since 1968, the church has had three pastors. Rev. Fred Barnes served for twenty years, and Dr. David Smith served

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<sup>16</sup> "Demographics of the Community: 2018 Demographic Snapshot of Caldwell County." *Caldwell UNC Health Care Community Health Assessment 2019-2020*. Adopted September 10, 2019, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia Vickory ed., *Citadel of Faith*, (Lenoir: Forbes Printing, 1989), 61-63.

for twenty-five years.<sup>21</sup> I began my pastorate in December 2015. Dr. Thomas Hinton has served as the Associate Pastor of Music and youth for the past thirty-two years. As mentioned above, having solid and steady leadership has allowed First Baptist to withstand difficult days.

In many ways, First Baptist Lenoir is the flagship church of our area, with approximately eight hundred members on the roll. Though the community around it had been shrinking, the church grew substantially from 2016 to 2019, gaining 128 new members. Pre-pandemic, the average attendance was more than three hundred for Sunday morning worship. The tithes and gifts of the people have grown steadily, with our largest budget to date of \$833,288 for 2022. By all estimates, the general budget receipts will surpass this number handily.

Post-pandemic, however, things have changed. Attendance has sunk dramatically. At the time of this writing, we are off some 30% to 40% of those who regularly attended Sunday morning activities. Our Wednesday night activities have likewise been deeply affected. We are down about 20% from pre-pandemic levels, and many of those missing are families with children. While some remain anxious about returning due to the Covid-19 variants, others have simply faded away. Unfortunately, we did lose a number of members to other churches who refused to adhere to the state mandate of restricting large gatherings. As such, First Baptist Church is actively seeking to rebound from the pandemic's toll. One of the best ways to do this is to bring in new members seeking fellowship with a church like ours. However, the question remains: will First Baptist

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 76-84.

Church Lenoir become the hospitable church it is called to be, welcoming strangers as one welcomes Christ, or will it remain complacent in its dealings with visitors?

### **Project Goals**

The overarching goal of this project is two-fold. First, I want to test how First Baptist Church Lenoir greets and welcomes its guests. As stated above, due to waning church attendance and a sense of complacency that has permeated certain aspects of the fellowship, it is imperative to get our hospitality right so that the church might resume its growth trajectory. We must smooth all roads that might lead someone to join our church and remove any impediments that might discourage guest from returning.

The second overall goal is broader: I want to raise congregational awareness within First Baptist Church Lenoir of the high calling to become a hospitable fellowship, welcoming our neighbors as Christ would welcome them. I want our congregants to recognize that hospitality is not only the responsibility of the greeters or the ministerial staff, but that each member is responsible for welcoming others. By growing the awareness of the individual members to be on the lookout for guests, it is much more likely that a visitor will be greeted warmly and that they will be more likely to return.

### **Literature Review**

I read many articles and a significant number of books on this topic as evidenced in the Bibliography. With that said, there are several sources that need to be highlighted as playing a significant role in the development of this research. One of the most influential books on this project was *And You Welcomed Me*, edited by Amy G. Oden. In this seminal work, Oden not only defines hospitality more broadly, transforming it from a

singular act of welcome to an awareness of otherness, but she uses primary sources to demonstrate the significance of hospitality throughout Christian history. She draws from the works of great Christian leaders such as Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Benedict, and Gregory the Great. This book, in her words, is an “ingathering of the resources the tradition has to offer” and is a must-read for anyone doing historical research on this topic.<sup>22</sup>

The most critical article that serves as the foundation of this project is “Hospitality and Welcome as Christian Imperatives in relation to ‘the Other,’” written by Corneliu Constantineanu. In this article, the author argues “from a Biblical perspective the imperative for Christians to practice hospitality and welcome the other.”<sup>23</sup> Written in a way that is understandable for academics, clergy, and laity, Constantineanu invites the reader to see that welcoming the other is in fact the mission of God for all Christians and churches today. He brings to the fore the impact the local church can have on its community when welcoming the other and reminds the reader of this indelible truth: all of us as creatures were welcomed by God in the beginning. Therefore, the impetus to welcome the other falls us on us as the most loving response to the Creator.

Another book that demands special attention is one that was met with great acclaim some years ago. Written by Jim Henderson and Matt Casper, *Jim & Casper Go To Church* was important to this project because it brought a visitor’s perspective of the modern church into relief.<sup>24</sup> Jim Henderson, a former pastor, and Matt Casper, a self-

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<sup>22</sup> Oden, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Constantineanu, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Henderson and Matt Casper, *Jim & Casper Go To Church*. (Carol Stream: Tyndale Publishers, 2007).



proclaimed atheist, set off across America to visit some of the most well-known churches in the country. The book provides honest and frank conversations about how an insider perceives a worship experience and how an outsider perceives a worship experience. While both funny and thought-provoking, this book is not an academic treatise or a theological work. It is a behind-the-scenes look from a visitor's perspective, and it challenges churches across the globe to examine what they do and how they do it. It challenged me as a local pastor to do the same.

Finally, Gary McIntosh, in his book, *Beyond the First Visit*, demonstrated the importance of the practical side of how to connect with guests on their first visit to a church. He speaks about how to create an environment of hospitality by working on the facility as well as the greeters. McIntosh offers simple, yet profound suggestions that many in the local church have overlooked because they are in their comfort zones as insiders, not outside their comfort zones like guests would be. This book helped me make some necessary changes to our fellowship, and it continues to serve as a guide that I have referred to often to see if we are still on track with how we are connecting with visitors.

Along with these books and many others, three D. Min projects made a significant impact on this project. In his work, "Daring to Welcome Angels: The Practice of Hospitality in the Small Congregation at Bethlehem Presbyterian Church," Dr. Paul Min stated clearly the problem facing many other churches across Christendom.<sup>25</sup> The local

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<sup>25</sup> Paul N. Min, "Daring to Welcome Angels: The Practice of Hospitality in the Small Congregation." (D. Min. Project, Drew University, 2012), accessed August 9, 2019. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1024819236?parentSessionId=GUtfcGJBaP0SZpm4u9DiAQC4opp3fsm9byLtvvOqIeM%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=11041>

church is friendly to people they are connected with but are a bit cold to those with whom they have no connection. While his setting in that church is different from mine, the reality of this truth affirmed what I was seeing in my own context some eleven years after his project was completed. And sadly, without intentional work, this attitude will continue to endure.

Coming from a different tradition and in a much larger setting, Dr. Morar Macfarlane Murray-Hayes' doctoral project, "As Christ Has Welcomed You: Hospitality and the Movement from Stranger to Member at Maple Grove United Church" focused less on welcome and more on assimilation.<sup>26</sup> While much of her work was unrelated to mine due to the different emphases, she brought forth the importance of both theological and sociological theory in Doctor of Ministry projects. Her use of John Koenig's work, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* led me to read his work and determine that partnership not only in the hospitality team, but partnership with the guests who come to our fellowship is essential.<sup>27</sup> Working together in an attitude of servanthood is God's call to Christians, and it is one that we should all adhere to as believers.

Finally, the most influential Doctor of Ministry Project that I researched is one that is very similar to this one. Dr. Timothy Forest Elmore's work, "Opening Wide the

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<sup>26</sup> Morar Macfarlane Murray-Hayes "As Christ has Welcomed you: Hospitality and the Movement from Stranger to Member at Maple Grove United Church." (D Min Project, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2006), accessed August 10, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/305282992?parentSessionId=KI40%2FPadxtUDVn68IB%2FovBYXYo4W52HCjIpgzmNnrNQ%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=11041>

<sup>27</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

Door: Moving Toward Godly Hospitality at Zion Baptist Church” was done at Gardner Webb University some fourteen years before.<sup>28</sup> While the research was conducted differently, I leaned into his work for guidance as I decided to use mystery guests and developed my surveys.

All of these books, articles, and Doctor of Ministry Projects helped me develop this project and bring it into reality. A future researcher would do well to use them and the included bibliography as a jumping off point for future research on the topic of hospitality. My prayer is that my work might benefit others who come behind me, just as these works have benefitted me in this experience.

### **Detailed Project Description**

This project seeks to reveal how hospitable First Baptist Church Lenoir, North Carolina currently is, and how that attitude can be improved by instilling a commitment to hospitality not only in the minds of our Sunday morning volunteers but in all who attend the church on an ongoing basis.

There were three important components in my project. First, I used my Wednesday night Bible study participants. I tested their Biblical understanding of hospitality by giving them a “quiz” (“Hospitality Awareness Test A,” Appendix

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Forest Elmore, “Opening wide the door: Moving toward Godly hospitality at Zion Baptist Church.” (D Min Project., Gardner-Webb University, 2009), accessed August 6, 2019. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/305124744?parentSessionId=E%2B7GzZCOQ%2FV6DNevyDXOJzBw4RsIGBiaP0jbHEwiZDw%3D&pqorigsite=su mmon&accountid=11041>

E) on Wednesday, September 7, 2022. After taking up their initial responses that were used as a baseline for any growth, I then conducted a focused Bible study that defined Biblical hospitality and I reminded the attendees of the high calling for all to practice it that evening (see Appendix D). I then gave them a second follow-up quiz (“Hospitality Awareness Test B,” Appendix E), two weeks later on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, about the Biblical principles of hospitality I taught them. Testing them in this manner allowed me to measure the growth of their theological understanding. Furthermore, this Bible study allowed me to teach the congregation the importance of being prepared to meet guests in our fellowship, and I reminded them of their responsibility to warmly greet and welcome guests.

For the second and more comprehensive component of this project, Dr. David Smith, our Associate Pastor, contacted other churches and requested that a total of 30 members attend our fellowship and serve as “mystery guests.” Having been the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church Lenoir for 25 years, and having served as an Interim Pastor in several neighboring communities, he has vast connections from the surrounding areas. With David personally enrolling such volunteers into this project, I did not know who they were, and thereby, did not compromise the integrity of the project. These people came from neighboring communities such as Boone, Morganton, Statesville, Valdese, and North Wilkesboro, as well as a few from Lenoir.

Dr. Smith asked those Mystery Guests to attend one worship service at First Baptist Church Lenoir in September 2022. They came on one Sunday that best suited their schedule (September 4, 11, 18, or 25.) These mystery guests were mailed a survey (“Mystery Guest Survey A,” see Appendix A) the third week of August along with a self-

addressed envelope to return their surveys once they had worshipped at FBC Lenoir. The survey was multiple questions based on the Belmont Model Questionnaire. It was based on a Likert-style continuum (1-5 Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with a number assigned to each value) based on the person's connection with our fellowship. It covered issues such as ease of parking, signage, friendliness of the greeters, the greeting they received from those sitting beside them in the pew, how comfortable they felt within the worship space, and their willingness to return in the future, etc. This survey allowed me to rate what they felt was the most important aspects of hospitality and what we were doing well or not so well in meeting those ends. The guests were asked to fill out the survey upon returning to their homes and place them in the self-addressed envelope and mail them back to the church on Monday, the day after their visit.

After all the visitors worshipped in September, I called a special meeting of our Hospitality Team on Sunday, October 2, 2022. After feeding them lunch, I taught them some of the most important practices of hospitality ("Teaching the Hospitality Team," Appendix F), with them filling out a handout ("Hospitality Handout," Appendix G) to ensure their full participation. I based this teaching on numerous books I had read about the best practices of hospitality and the Biblical examples mentioned above. If individual members of our greeting team were unable to attend that day, I asked that they attend a special meeting the following Wednesday night, October 5, and I did the training again. The primary purpose of this meeting was to lay before them a foundation for the hospitality ministry at FBC Lenoir, and for them to grow in their understanding of what a greeter is supposed to do. At the end of the teaching session, I gave the participants a survey assessing my training as well as their preliminary understanding of hospitality,

and how their understanding changed/grew after the initial training (“Teaching the Hospitality Team Training Session 1--Getting the Welcome Right Survey,” Appendix H).

On October 9, I held a second training session immediately following the worship service. Instead of a lecture-style teaching session, this training was a hands-on role-playing session (“Hospitality Training Session 2, Role-playing scenarios,” Appendix I). To begin, we all went outside and walked the church grounds. We visualized the church campus from the perspective of a guest. Looking critically at every stage of a visitor’s time at FBC helped us see several areas where we could improve. The Hospitality Team made several suggestions about what needed to be changed. These included better signage, specific parking spaces for visitors, and painting the ceiling of the front porch of the church. After making notes about what they suggested, I then led the groups in various role-playing scenarios from both the outside of the church and the inside of our sanctuary. These scenarios included what the parking attendants would do when a guest arrived and how to greet guests when they ascend the steps of the sanctuary. Once inside the sanctuary, what do we do if they have nursery-aged children? What do we do if they need a restroom? When do we give them a gift? How do we encourage them to fill out a visitor card? What do we do if someone does not really want to be approached by our greeters and prefers to be left alone? While we could not play out every conceivable scenario of a visit, adding this unique action component to this project gave the greeters much-needed experience in implementing our best practices from training session one. At the end of the training, I gave a brief survey (see Appendix J) to our Hospitality Team assessing my teaching, as well as their initial comfort in connecting with guests pre-training, and their comfort in connecting with guests post-training.

Beginning October 16 and running consecutively (October 23, 30, and November 6, 2022), the “mystery guests” who worshipped with us previously were asked to visit once more on the Sunday of their choosing. They were mailed a second survey October 6 along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for returns to FBC Lenoir. After worshipping with us a second time, the guests were asked to fill out the second survey (“Mystery Guest Survey B,” Appendix A) on the same day they visited and mail the survey back to First Baptist Lenoir. From these surveys, I was able to measure their responses to see how hospitable First Baptist Church Lenoir is and how our greetings had improved, if at all, from the first visit until the second visit. These conclusions not only informed the success of the project, but they also revealed what we will emphasize to our hospitality team and improve upon to better connect with our visitors moving forward.

Once all the surveys were collected and the data analyzed, I called a third meeting of the hospitality team on December 4. During this meeting, I went over the entire scope of the project and read some of the actual experiences of the mystery guests (see Appendix K). We discussed the Hospitality Team’s own feelings about their experiences welcoming the guests, and I asked them to consider how they have grown through the experience (“Hospitality Training Session 3—Responses of Mystery Guests Survey,” Appendix L). By following up with the people who greeted guests every Sunday with real-world experiences our mystery guests had in our church, I was able to see and hear right away what improvements had been made to the hospitality program at FBC Lenoir. Their experiences will continue to shape this program going forward.

On December 5, I was then able to reveal the entire scope of the project to our Wednesday night participants. They had no idea that mystery guests were involved in

worship services. It was fascinating to see and hear their responses when I read from the mystery guests' own experiences upon entering First Baptist Lenoir. Some were shocked that anything would be criticized, while others thought we fared well considering the task of the mystery guests. All in all, those in attendance talked about how important it was for us to learn from this experience and how the process had helped them grow in their understanding of their role as a congregation that greets guests appropriately.



## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Hospitality is a theme that runs consistently throughout the Bible, but it can be seen in Genesis, Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles most clearly. Careful study of selected passages found within these sections will not only demonstrate the Biblical rationale of this project, but will illumine the call that God compels all followers of Christ to extend Biblical hospitality to everyone they meet. Perhaps Henri Nouwen summarizes it best when he says, “The biblical stories help us to realize not just that hospitality is an important virtue, but even more, that in the context of hospitality, guest and host can reveal their most precious gifts and bring new life to each other.”<sup>29</sup>

#### **Genesis 18:1-8**

The preeminent example of biblical hospitality occurs in Genesis 18:1-8 when Abraham hosts the visitors under the Oaks at Mamre. Lee Roy Martin says that this episode, recorded in only a few verses, elevates Abraham to the role of “exemplar of biblical hospitality.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Jeffrey M. Cohen says that “this episode of hospitality is regarded as a hallmark value of Jewish tradition, as well as another example

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<sup>29</sup> Nouwen, 75.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Roy Martin, “Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1, (2014): 1.

of Abraham's character, namely his love for human beings."<sup>31</sup> What can be gleaned today by studying ancient texts such as this?

It should be noted that Abraham's hospitality has several characteristics that connect to modern-day circumstances. Terence Fretheim writes the following:

It extends to strangers, [following] a specific protocol: seeing, running to meet, honoring, inviting, refreshing, preparing, serving. Bowing, an everyday gesture, was appropriate for all visitors, not only important people. Abraham gives of the best he has (a calf!), makes and serves food, remains available to them and concerned about their welfare, and accompanies them on their way. Abraham depicts what the visitors may expect (vv.4-5), and he goes beyond what he promised.<sup>32</sup>

In this archetypal scene, the deep truths of seeing, honoring, inviting, preparing, and serving are hallmarks not only of that time, but of today's time as well. The question should be asked: Do modern churches follow the same pattern, or have these pillars of connectivity fallen by the wayside?

The text demonstrates that Abraham goes to extraordinary lengths to welcome these "visitors," who, at least at the outset, were not recognized as divine emissaries. Abraham's actions beg the question: Why would he go out of his way for hospitality such as this? There are two primary reasons. Andrew Arterbury notes the following:

In the Jewish Scriptures, the Israelites are commanded to extend generous hospitality to the stranger or sojourner in 'the Covenant code in Exodus (Exod. 22:21; 23:9), the priestly laws of Leviticus (Lev 19:33-34), and the Deuteronomic law code (Deut. 16:14; 26:12).' Therefore, given the diverse settings and authorship of these passages of Scripture, we can deduce that hospitality was

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<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey M. Cohen, "Abraham's Hospitality," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2006): 168.

<sup>32</sup> Terence Fretheim, "Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 461-465.

considered to be a meritorious custom throughout a significant portion of the Jewish people's history.<sup>33</sup>

As one can see, extending hospitality was not only a custom of the day, but it would become a Biblical mandate that would forever change the way Israel related to its neighbors.

The other reason for Abraham to act this way is that in Genesis 14:18 “Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High, comes forth with bread and wine to greet and bless Abraham as he returns from the battle against the four kings.”<sup>34</sup> Abraham had seen hospitality modeled by another, and he was blessed because of it. Cohen suggests that “this act of kindness to Abraham was the model and inspiration that motivate the latter to behave likewise.”<sup>35</sup>

With that said, however, it must be noted that even inviting a stranger to stop and join them, especially in Abraham's day in time, took on at least some inherent risk. T. E. Reynolds elaborates on this risk when he writes the following:

Space is made within the household for the stranger, and this act depends upon a presumption of goodwill and favor that could be abused or violated. There are no guarantees. The host simply welcomes another, trusting that—on the basis of a shared humanity—there is good at hand. Such trust places one in the hands of another, dependent on his or her goodwill.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew Arterbury, “The Custom of Hospitality in Antiquity and its Importance for Interpreting Acts 9:43-11:18.” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2003), p. 97, accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/305342391?parentSessionId=6T8gdJZZfpVSGDLAkQVzVzlh9N80urGAUJW19wkjuo0%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=11041>.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, 168.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> T. E. Reynolds, “Welcoming without reserve? A case in Christian hospitality.” *Theology Today* 63, no. 2 (2006): 197.

In the passage in question, the identities of the parties were undoubtedly unknown. What if they had hostile intentions toward Abraham and his people? What if they wanted to do him harm? Despite the inherent risks, a careful reading of the text shows no hint of anxiety from Abraham. Instead, he went directly toward them, even “running to greet them.” What makes this act even more significant is that he was an aged man who had just performed circumcision on himself a few days before. Yet, when the opportunity arose to connect with a stranger, Abraham would not be delayed physically or emotionally. As such, it can be reasonably inferred that modern-day readers should act with similar vigor when welcoming a stranger.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Abraham’s initial offer was for “water to be brought and a little bread given” so that the visitors might refresh themselves. The reason that only a “little” was offered was not out of selfishness or lack of generosity on Abraham’s part, but it was to make the guest “feel like they were not imposing upon their host.”<sup>37</sup> Once the initial offer is accepted, “the host is free to expand the level of hospitality both in quantity and in duration. The ‘little’ bread is enlarged to an elaborate banquet that included several loaves of fresh bread and an entire roast calf.”<sup>38</sup> As one can see, not only was the guest offered physical refreshment, but they were given the space to refuse the offering. Only when it was accepted did Abraham truly lavish his guests with generosity.

As mentioned above, Abraham was first given hospitality by Melchizedek upon returning from war. Consider what his host gave Abraham at that time. He was given

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<sup>37</sup> Martin, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

bread and wine, an interesting choice considering that Abraham had hardly had access to fresh water and a wholesome meal in his desert travails. Compared to Melchizedek's offering Abraham's becomes even more extravagant, for it was not only an extravagant amount of food shared, but it was also intensely practical.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps Abraham learned not only how valuable hospitality might be, but more importantly, how significant it is to give the right kind of hospitality to one's guests.

Once the three guests have eaten and rested, Lee Roy Martin notes, "they display their newfound relationship with Abraham (no longer strangers) by promising to return the following year for another visit."<sup>40</sup> By reacting in this way, B. J. Malina would deem this interaction "successful hospitality" for, in his understanding, "hospitality might be defined as the process by means of which an outsider's status is changed from stranger to guest."<sup>41</sup> While it is clear that Abraham and his guests are still learning about one another, inroads were made toward a more significant relationship. In fact, Abraham's kindness is returned from the strangers when it is revealed that Abraham's barren wife, Sarah, will indeed have a child within a year.

Abraham's excitement at meeting his guests, his attendance to their needs, and his apparent generosity set a standard not only for others in his party to act the same way but also for those who would follow God to act the same way. Abraham's hospitality became the paradigm to which Jewish and later Christian hospitality were compared. The importance of Abraham's hospitality in the Old Testament cannot be overstated, for it

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<sup>39</sup> Cohen, 169.

<sup>40</sup> Martin 3.

<sup>41</sup> B. J. Malina, "The Received view and what it cannot do: III John and hospitality," *Semeia* 35, (1986): 181.

demonstrates the love and care that all followers of Christ must exhibit in future generations.

### **Psalm 23:5-6**

Perhaps the most beloved words in the entire Old Testament are recorded in Psalm 23. This text has been used as a balm to comfort the brokenhearted for centuries. The familiar words of this text are first taught to the youngest children, and those words sustain many until their last breath. Psalm 23 is indeed some of the most eloquent words written in the Bible, but the images found therein refer not only to God's constant fidelity and faithfulness as a Shepherd, but also to a beautiful example of hospitality when God is described as the host. By studying these verses carefully, perhaps the lessons taught therein can impact how the church treats its guests today.

There are two distinct images of God found in this text, and they have led to much discussion about the form of the Psalm and the *Sitz-im-Leben*.<sup>42</sup> For the context of this work, however, my focus will not be on the first four verses that reflect the Lord as a Shepherd, but rather, verses 5-6, which describe God as a host. The metaphor of God as host likely would have drawn upon the common Israelite custom of hospitality in the minds of the hearers of this text.

Arterbury and Bellinger suggest that each line of Psalm 23:5-6 "correlates with standard Israelite hospitality."<sup>43</sup> Verse 5a, which begins, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," alludes to the two most prominent components of hospitality. Hosts in that time were expected to provide food for their guests and protect

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew E. Arterbury and William H. Bellinger, Jr., "'Returning' to the Hospitality of the Lord: a Reconsideration of Psalm 23:5-6," *Biblica* 86, no. 3 (2005): 387.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 391.

them from enemies.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, this is precisely what the shepherd would do for the sheep, as seen in verses 1-4. J. Clinton McCann points out that the host “provides food, drink, shelter, and protection.”<sup>45</sup> These verses would have resonated with the Near East sojourner, who would have been dependent on the goodwill of others as they walked from place to place in unknown territory. There are textual echoes back to Genesis 19 when Lot protects his guests, as well as to the Israelite spies who find safety under Rahab’s watch in Joshua 2.

Psalm 23:5b: “You anoint my head with oil” is an image of refreshment. The host would have given oil to rub over the sunbaked skin of someone he/she would have encountered during his/her journey.<sup>46</sup> Not only would this have been received as a healing balm, but the host also pouring out oil on another signifies liberal lavishness. Oil was used for many purposes in that time, and pouring it out haphazardly would not have been done easily. Yet, in this context, pouring it out for the purpose of hospitality would have been an honor not only to the receiver but to the host. Perhaps that is why Jesus “criticizes his Pharisaic host for not anointing his head with oil (Luke 7:46).”<sup>47</sup>

Psalm 23:5c: “My cup overflows” speaks to the abundance of God’s provision for the guest.<sup>48</sup> As noted in the discussion of Abraham’s hospitality toward his unknown visitors above, he asks them to stay while he provides a small amount of bread and water, and once the invitation is accepted, he lavishes them with a goat and milk. In this

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr, “Psalm 23” found in “The Book of Psalms” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. IV, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 768.

<sup>46</sup> Arterbury and Bellinger, Jr., 392.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

passage, the Lord as host provides the psalmist with more provisions than he actually needs. Perhaps a textual echo can be seen when Jesus provides not only the abundant amount of wine, but also the incredible quality of wine for the wedding at the miracle of Cana in John 2.

Psalm 23:6a: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me [pursue] all the days of my life,” is a poignant phrase with a wealth of meaning. Throughout the scriptures, the good and faithful hosts often “pursue” their guests in hospitality encounters. They do not wait until the traveler stops and asks for assistance. Instead, they seemingly go out of their way to stop the traveler and offer their passersby an opportunity for rest.<sup>49</sup> This can be seen not only in Abraham’s pursuit of the three travelers, but also in Lot’s invitation to his guests in Genesis 19:1-3, as well as the Shunammite woman persuading Elisha to eat in her home in 2 Kings 4:8. Being proactive in hospitality suggests that the ideal host “should go out seeking strangers to be his or her guests rather than simply waiting for strangers to approach him or her.”<sup>50</sup> Modern-day readers of this passage should also recognize their calling to act in the same manner.

Psalm 23:6b: “And I will dwell [return]to the house of the Lord forever.”

Arterbury and Bellinger argue forcefully and persuasively that the word rendered “dwell” in this verse should be the word “return.” Their central premise is that it is the most literal translation of the Masoretic Text and “return” fits the theme of hospitality more clearly in this context.<sup>51</sup> As seen in many of the hospitality encounters throughout the Bible, the guests usually do not stay with the hosts but return to the hosts from time to time if they

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 392-3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 393.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 393-4.



are in the region again. That is what happened with Abraham and his guests, as well as with Elisha and the Shunammite woman.

In summation, while verses 1-4 of Psalm 23 describe the lengths to which God acts as a Shepherd to His people, verses 5-6 relate the extent to which the Lord is committed to being a host. The question then arises as to what length a local church should go to as a host to connect with guests in this day and time? Would a church offer not only physical sustenance but spiritual sustenance to one who came by? Should a church be lavish in its invitation, offering a guest even more than he/she asks for? Must a church pursue guests, as God pursues the Psalmist?<sup>52</sup> And will a church be open enough to allow the guest to return as frequently as they like in the hopes of becoming one with the community? These questions must be answered, for they are at the heart of hospitality not only in the ancient world, but also in the modern world.

### **Matthew 25:1-13**

In his well-known commentary on the parables, George Buttrick relates the following story: “In May 1780, the famous Dark Day descended on New England. Men felt the Judgment Hour had come, and senators rushed from the Senate Chamber to the meeting-house to pray. They were stopped when Senator Abraham Davenport prevailed over them.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> McCann, 768.

<sup>53</sup> George A. Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1973), 236. This is a reprint from Harpers and Row Publishing, 1928.

Bring in the lights: let us be found  
 Doing our duty's common round  
 Bring in the candles: keep to the task:  
 What more can Judgment Angels ask?

These poetic words share some insight into the meaning of Matthew's "Parable of the Ten Virgins." This parable, found in Matthew 25:1-13, has continued to challenge scholars, commentators, and preachers with its complicated context for centuries. However, the moral principle driving this pericope is straightforward: be prepared, for one does not know the hour of the Bridegroom's arrival.

This text, much like Genesis 18, focuses on the central theme of this project. How can the churches be made ready for guests to arrive? What arrangements need to be made? How can churches keep their lamps trimmed and burning so they do not miss the opportunities before them? By studying the Parable of the Ten Virgins, we might come to some conclusions that could prevent fellowships from finding a locked door and strong words of "I never knew you" from those who decided not to return.

To truly understand the essence of this passage, one must have some understanding of wedding customs found in the Near East during Jesus' time. First, the ages of the participants are intriguing because the parties were typically quite young. Klyne Snodgrass says, "Young women of marriageable age could be anywhere from age twelve on up. The groom typically would have been eighteen to twenty years old."<sup>54</sup> After a period of betrothal that could have lasted from one to several years, the wedding day would arrive. Snodgrass writes:

After the bride was suitably adorned, she would be taken in a festive procession to the groom's home (or that of his parents if the couple were to live there.) About nightfall,

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<sup>54</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 316.

the procession would begin and the bride would be escorted to the groom's house by an entourage with torches or lanterns. The groom would go out to receive the bride and bring her into his home where blessings and celebration would last as long as seven days.<sup>55</sup>

As one can see, the customs found within the context of the parable were very consistent with the Jewish traditions of the day. Carla Works makes it clear that perhaps the most significant takeaway from these logistical considerations was that “the procession of the bride and groom would begin the events.”<sup>56</sup> Nothing began without the procession; as such, everyone had to wait on their arrival.

The parable opens with a very curious phrase: “At that time,” or “Then,” Interestingly enough, “this is the only parable to begin with the Greek word *tote*, then.”<sup>57</sup> While some scholars believe that it is a mere connective because they frequently happen in Matthew, others believe that it holds weight “referring to the coming of the future kingdom, which was alluded to in Matthew 24:50-51.”<sup>58</sup>

In verses 2-4, one can see an internal juxtaposition clearly: “Five of them [virgins] were foolish and five were prudent.” Here, the hearers of the parable or later, the readers of the text, would first identify with the characters. What makes them specifically wise or foolish? The wise carried extra oil for their torches, while the foolish took none whatsoever. It is important to note that being considered “wise or foolish” has nothing to do with intelligence. Eduard Schweizer suggests, “perhaps the narrator still hears an echo

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Carla Works, “Commentary on Matthew 25:1-13” Working Preacher, November 6, 2011, accessed 9/16/20, [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentaryid=1017](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentaryid=1017), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Snodgrass, 316.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

of the Hebrew terminology where ‘wise’ means ‘seeing’ or ‘with eyes open.’ Those who are wise are those whose eyes are open to what is yet to come and do not live simply for the day.”<sup>59</sup> The adjectives *wise* and *foolish* are used similarly to contrast the wise man who built his home on the rock and the foolish one who built on sand at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27).<sup>60</sup> Regardless of how they are used, it is essential to understand that the focus of the parable is the simple matter of preparedness versus unpreparedness and the tragic character of the latter.”<sup>61</sup>

Verse five reveals two important facts: The bridegroom is delayed and the women fall asleep. Why the delay? There is no reason given. Some scholars propose that the groom had to travel a long distance between the homes of his and her parents.<sup>62</sup> Arland J. Hultgren suggests that it took an unusual amount of time for him to settle financial matters with the bride’s parents.<sup>63</sup> Regardless of the exact reason, the delay serves as a literary device that heightens the tension in the story. Snodgrass clarifies that the delay is significant when he writes the following: “The parable is framed on the fact of the delay, and without the delay, there is no parable. A delay is required for the lamps to go out and for time for the young women to go to sleep. It is the delay that demonstrates the wisdom or foolishness of the participants.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 467.

<sup>60</sup> Donald Senior, “Matthew,” in *Abington New Testament Commentaries*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 274.

<sup>61</sup> Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew 14-28,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 728.

<sup>62</sup> Snodgrass, 320.

<sup>63</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 174.

<sup>64</sup> Snodgrass, 320.

The other intriguing aspect of verse five is that the women who were supposed to watch and wait for the bridegroom went to sleep. Snodgrass writes, “There is no reason to think sleep carries any negative connotation, for both the wise and the foolish sleep.”<sup>65</sup> The wise and the foolish both were asleep when the cry came that the bridegroom was nearing. What does this mean? It means that the parable’s focus is not on the watching but on the preparation.<sup>66</sup> None of the women watched when the bridegroom drew near, but the wise were prepared. Ulrich Luz suggests that it is here that the allegorical understanding of the text is important because “the delay and the sleeping of the young women illustrate that the Parousia comes completely unexpectedly.”<sup>67</sup>

Beginning in verse six, the story starts to take shape. There is a cry that the bridegroom is approaching. Finally, at midnight, or when least expected, the sleepers awake to hear the groom coming. Schweizer says, “The hour of midnight is merely to suggest a long vigil.”<sup>68</sup> With the bridegroom’s arrival, the women rise, trim their lamps (torches), and prepare to meet him. In verses 8-9, a sharp interchange ensues between the women. The foolish women ask the wise women for some of their oil. The wise refuse and tell the others to go to the merchant and buy their oil. While it may seem strange that someone would be selling oil at midnight, it is actually not farfetched. There would be dealers awake in a rural village because the entire village would be celebrating the marriage ceremony.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ulrich Luz, “Matthew 21-28,” trans. James E. Crouch in *Hermeneia*, ed. by Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 234.

<sup>68</sup> Schweizer, 467.

<sup>69</sup> Hultgren, 174.

In verse ten, the foolish women go away to make the purchase. By doing so, they miss the arrival of the bridegroom. The text says, “And those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut.” This sentence best illustrates the meaning of the parable. If one is ready when the bridegroom comes, one will be invited to eat at the banquet. It is important to note that the “shutting of the door indicates finality.”<sup>70</sup> As one can see, this wedding feast is linked, allegorically at least, to the wedding feast in Matthew 22:2-14.<sup>71</sup>

In verses 11 and 12, one comes to the “decisive turning point of the story.”<sup>72</sup> It is decisive because the sovereign actor, the Bridegroom, has appeared. The Greek word used here is fascinating. The women “finally” (*hysteron*, later) arrive, find the door locked, and beg to enter. Why were they refused entry? “The refusal to let them in is based not on whether they possess oil and have lamps burning, but on their having missed the grand moment of the groom’s arrival.”<sup>73</sup>

Their cry of “Lord, Lord” resembles the appeal of Matthew 7:21. Here, the hearers of the parable would recognize that something is different from a traditional wedding procession. No one would address the bridegroom in a typical wedding as “Lord” (*Kurios*). What truly gives the identity of the bridegroom away is the refusal of entry.<sup>74</sup> A bridegroom would traditionally open his doors to everyone for this festive occasion, but this refusal lets the readers know that the Bridegroom is not whom they

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Luz, 234.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hultgren, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Luz, 235.

think he is; the bridegroom is the Son of Man. Ironically, the very women who were supposed to meet him are undeniably refused with the phrase, “I do not know you.” It is here that the allegory is palpable. With that door being shut, and the refusal to be allowed in, the judgment of God is pronounced. Schweizer says that indeed the judgment “will be equally unequivocal and irreversible.”<sup>75</sup>

Verse 13 says, “Be alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” It is essential to understand what the Greek word *gregorete* means. It is an imperative and the best understanding of this word is not necessarily “stay awake, but rather, be prepared.”<sup>76</sup> “To be ready in this instance means to have oil ready from the very beginning because the Bridegroom can come at any time, and the door can close at any time.”<sup>77</sup> In a broader sense, being ready is an essential aspect of hospitality. Amy Oden says the following that summarizes this understanding: “Hospitality is characterized by a particular moral stance in the world that can be described as readiness. Early Christian voices tell us again and again that whether we are guest or host, we must be ready: ready to welcome, ready to enter another’s world, ready to be vulnerable.”<sup>78</sup>

Through it all, the overarching crux of the parable is to prepare today for what may come tomorrow. When reading this text with the understanding that it was Jesus who said it, “The Parable of the Ten Virgins” is a call for awakening. It is an exhortation to faithful Christians to be watchful and to be prepared for the second coming of Christ. If one interprets the text through the eyes of the Matthean community to which this text could

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<sup>75</sup> Schweizer, 467.

<sup>76</sup> Hultgren, 175.

<sup>77</sup> Luz, 235.

<sup>78</sup> Oden, 15.

have been addressed, then the emphasis shifts to not only being prepared for the calling of Christ, but to being faithful to the bridegroom while He is delayed by doing the things Jesus called His followers to do. In both interpretations, one must also recognize that when the bridegroom comes, one will either be prepared and be invited into the great banquet of heaven or be found unprepared and be separated from God by the locked door. Ultimately, the readers (or hearers) of this passage would have understood that what one does or does not do today has a profound impact not only upon tomorrow but upon eternity.

In the context of this project, these verses serve as an alarm for the malaise that has covered much of Christendom. It is time for the church to wake up and recognize not only that Jesus is coming back, but more specifically for this context, that visitors are coming in the door seeking the hope of the risen one. What happens, far too frequently, is that much like the foolish virgins in the text, many church folks are simply unprepared to meet those seekers where they are. As such, when the service ends and the visitors depart from the worship gathering, the door is shut and the visitors reply, "I never knew you."

Therefore, the time to prepare is now. The time to make ready for the guest's arrival is yesterday. While one does not know the specific date and time of their arrival, we know that they are on the way. And if we are to be wise, we will meet and greet them with open arms, doing everything in our power to welcome them hospitably.



**Hebrews 13:2**

Two of my favorite questions to ask older people when I visit them are these: Do you have any words of wisdom you can share with me? Do you have any advice that you live by that might help me live better? While some are quick to dismiss such questions, many others have taken them seriously and have shared words that have impacted me daily for many years after they were originally uttered.

In much the same way, as the author of Hebrews is coming toward the end of his message, he begins to give certain advice to live by. Though different in style from the rest of the book, chapter 13 should be recognized as a resource of exhortations that challenge not only the church to which this letter was written, but the modern church today.<sup>79</sup> What is it that the church people are supposed to do? What is expected of Christians in a community faced with growing hostility and persecution? What advice does the author have for the hearers of yesterday and today to impact the way they live tomorrow?

Perhaps most importantly, when studying Hebrews 13:2, one must recognize that faithfulness is not a theoretical ideal, but rather a lifestyle demanded of all Christians. More specifically, Christine D. Pohl strengthens this statement when she articulates that “Hospitality [found in the epistles] is a concrete expression of love---love for sisters and brothers, love extended outward to strangers, prisoners, and exiles, love that attends to

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<sup>79</sup> Fred B. Craddock, “The Book of Hebrews” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XII, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 161

physical and social needs.”<sup>80</sup> As one can see, especially in Paul’s writings, hospitality is more than an ideal; it is a way of life.

From the outset, it should be mentioned that Chapter 13 of the book of Hebrews has long presented scholars with literary problems: specifically, “the relationship between this chapter and chapters 1-12, and the internal unity of 13:1-25.”<sup>81</sup> This chapter is radically different from the preceding chapters found within the book. Instead of having a sermon-like feel, these verses read more like an epistle, with traditional marks of paraenesis and a farewell. Some scholars have even said it was written by a different author, for the shift in style from oration to epistle is quite telling. Yet, regardless of where one falls on the argument, the more profound truth revealed in the first two verses of this text is significant for this project and warrants further study.

Hebrews 13:1-2 in the NRSV says, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Fred Craddock writes, “This set of twin injunctions join the love of the brothers and sisters (in Christ) with that of the love of strangers.” The Greek word *Philadelphia* relates to the Greek word *Philoxenia*, roughly translated, as brotherly love, and the love of the stranger respectively.<sup>82</sup> Though the specific circumstances of the author’s letter are lost to history, F.F. Bruce opines, “If a weakening of faith and resolution among the recipients of this epistle led to a weakening of the bonds that united them to their fellow Christians, this would add urgency to the plea that brotherly love

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<sup>80</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

<sup>81</sup> Craddock, 162.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

should continue among them.”<sup>83</sup> As one can see, loving the brothers and sisters in the faith is pivotal to maintaining a vibrant faith.

Immediately following that exhortation, the reminder is given that the love of Christians is not a "closed circle; the love of strangers is not to be 'forgotten' (NIV; 'Neglected,' NRSV).”<sup>84</sup> Showing love was more than a virtue practiced within the immediate church setting. In some instances, it was indeed a matter of life and death to those traveling Christians outside the church in question. In a time of Roman oppression and hostility, hospitality, especially from one Christian to another, meant safety, comfort, and peace.

These injunctions, both to love one another and to provide for strangers, are so interwoven that they must not be separated. One cannot love the Christian community properly if one does not love the stranger. One cannot love the stranger if one does not love his/her Christian community.

Beyond the exhortation is a comment made by the author that supports such righteous action: “For by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.” The idea of “entertaining angels” was found in ancient Greek mythology and the Biblical narrative. In Greek mythology, Zeus was “the patron of strangers.”<sup>85</sup> On occasion, Zeus or one of the other gods was believed to have assumed the disguise of a wayfarer and brought great blessing to those who treated him hospitably, not realizing whom they were entertaining.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of this scenario was found in the story

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<sup>83</sup> F.F. Bruce, “The Epistle to the Hebrews” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 387.

<sup>84</sup> Craddock, 162.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce, 389

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

of “Philemon and Baucis,” in which Zeus and Hermes come as guests, and are treated well by Philemon and Baucis, but are rejected by the rest of the community. There is a textual echo of this story in Acts 14:8-13 when Paul and Barnabas heal the lame man in Lystra. Acts 14:11 says, “When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’ “Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.” As one can see, hospitality was a cornerstone of the first-century world, not just the Christian church.

Furthermore, there is an apparent textual echo back to Genesis 18 where Abraham and Sarah welcomed the three visitors. One of the three “men, was in fact, Yahweh,” who blessed the couple with news of an heir for Abraham.<sup>87</sup> As recorded in Genesis 19, the other two men, who were angels, traveled to Sodom and were provided safe shelter by Lot, who was spared from the catastrophe that fell upon the city the following day.<sup>88</sup> So, these examples from the first-century world bring forth a question in today’s time. Should we assume God appears as the stranger that comes our way? Perhaps it is best to recognize the possibility, but more importantly, to realize that hospitality is an opportunity to meet the needs of others, and in doing so, find out that there is a deeper need within all of us to be welcomed and to have community. Regardless, hospitality is more than a theoretical ideal; it is a lifestyle demanded of all Christians.

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<sup>87</sup> Bruce, 390-391.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## The Theological Foundation of Biblical Hospitality

Even more profound than these individual examples of Biblical hospitality is recognizing the theological foundation on which they stand. Hospitality did not originate between human persons. Instead, the foundation of all hospitality began with God in the dawn of creation. John Navone writes the following:

God is the Host Exemplar of all his guests. Creation expresses God's hospitality. In the creation account in Genesis (2:8-9), God creates an entire universe prior to creating human beings. God is creating, working, and designing long before people are brought on the scene. And when God creates humans, he breathes his life into them and endows them with the freedom to enjoy or to decline his friendship. In his boundless hospitality, God welcomes all humans into his creation, excluding no one from the realm of his all-encompassing love. And just as God has welcomed us into his life, he calls us through the gift of his Son and Spirit to welcome one another as fellow guests with the same spirit of hospitality.<sup>89</sup>

Beyond God's work in creation, one can see the heart of God's desire for welcoming the stranger within the life of Israel.<sup>90</sup> Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." Strangers in that day were essentially anyone outside of Jewish heritage, who were often maligned by those from within. Why would God be so insistent that God's people would be different? The answer is found in the second part of the verse from above: "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The Israelite people knew the difficulties of being on the outside looking in. They knew the pain and sorrow of being alone and mistreated, so God

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<sup>89</sup> John Navone, "Divine and Human Hospitality," *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 997 (2004): 329.

<sup>90</sup> McIntosh, 11.

commanded the Israelites to give the kind of treatment to the foreigner that they had so longed for while in Egypt for over 400 years.

Finally, throughout much of the New Testament, Jesus “modeled the welcoming nature of God by accepting sinners.”<sup>91</sup> Jesus repeatedly took in those that were deemed as outcasts in society. For example, consider Jesus’ acceptance of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), or the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11). Beyond that, he would be accused of “welcoming sinners” in Luke 15:1-2. In essence, Jesus’ ministry involved constantly welcoming those who were forsaken and opening His arms to those who found themselves alone and without. As God incarnate, Jesus’ actions reveal God’s own heart for those who are often forgotten and abandoned. Jesus’ actions demonstrate God’s love for the foreigner and the forsaken.

After understanding that hospitality begins with God, grasping God’s command to treat the outsider as an insider, and locating the frequency of hospitality in the ministry of Jesus, Pohl says the believer is left to recognize the following:

Hospitality is not first a duty and responsibility; it is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us. Although it involves responsibility and faithful performance of duties, hospitality emerges from a grateful heart. This is especially important because when hospitality is not shaped by gratitude, it is often offered grudgingly. Grudging hospitality exhausts hosts and wounds guests even as it serves them. Our hospitality both reflects and participates in God’s hospitality. It depends on a disposition of love because, fundamentally, hospitality is simply love in action.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, such a realization leads to a pointed question at the heart of this proposal.

Why is it so important that Christians be hospitable to others who come our way?

Constantineanu states unequivocally:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Pohl, 172.

The implication for Christians is crystal clear: if we want to be faithful to God's call, if we want to follow the gospel and be Christ's disciples, we have to model in our own lives the same hospitality and welcome we have ourselves benefited from. The practice of hospitality and welcome is not optional, but an imperative. Christian faith is not about an ethical theory or abstract principles but about *life* in its abundance—a life which Christians have experienced and which they must embody in concrete manifestations of love, peace, reconciliation, harmony, tolerance, and consideration for the other. A genuine Christian life is a life of hospitality, welcome, and concern for the “other.”<sup>93</sup>

In conclusion, hospitality is not a theory; instead, it is an imperative that echoes across time and space. My hope is that it is not only heard but acted upon at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

### **Prominent Examples of Hospitality Throughout Christian History**

Hospitality has been a significant pillar on which the Christian church has rested for centuries. From the Early Church through today, caring for the stranger has been an important signpost of authentic faith for Christians and for churches. By considering a few examples of hospitality in Christian history, one might gain not only an appreciation of what has been done in the past, but a renewal of spirit that might compel faithfulness to this Christian discipline into the future.

One of the most powerful voices in early Christian history was John Chrysostom. A priest in Antioch, and later the Archbishop of Constantinople, “Golden-mouth” frequently used the pulpit to speak out against the excesses in life, and to speak towards better treatment of the poor, the widows, and the stranger when he used his influence to encourage the church to be hospitable. In Homily 26 using a text in Matthew, John speaks about the centurion receiving Christ under his roof (Matthew 8:5). John makes it

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<sup>93</sup> Constantineanu, 114.

clear that Christ's presence is not simply a historical event of the past, but that it can occur in their day in time as Christ can be seen in the stranger. He says, "Let us pay attention, as many as are to receive Christ, for it is possible to receive Him even now. Let us pay attention and emulate, and receive Him with as great zeal. For indeed, when you receive a poor person who is hungry and naked, you have received and cherished Him."<sup>94</sup>

In Homily 45 on the Acts of the Apostles, John speaks about the lodging of visitors based on Acts 21:16-17. He becomes quite forceful in addressing the church when he claims that the congregation would happily accept Paul and extend hospitality to him, and reminds them that it is Paul's Master who knocks on their doors. John says the following:

Perchance some one of you says "Sure, if it were given me to entertain Paul as a guest, I readily and with much eagerness would do this." Pay attention! It is in your power to entertain Paul's Master for your guest, and you refuse. For whoever receives the great, often does it from vainglory also, but the one who receives the small does it purely for Christ's sake. It is in your power to entertain even the Father of Christ as your guest, and you refuse! Though it may not be Paul, yet if it is a believer and kindred, although the least, Christ comes to you through that one. Open your house, and take him in.<sup>95</sup>

As one can see clearly, John Chrysostom was adamant that believers must live out their faith by extending hospitality to strangers. His powerful preaching no doubt impacted the lives of thousands of people, and it would have most certainly changed the lives of the many poor and needy throughout the area who were cared for by the congregants in John's charge. Perhaps John's faithfulness stands as a stark reminder to preachers today to use their pulpit to speak about the necessity of hospitality and to cast off the anxiety and fear of doing so.

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<sup>94</sup> Oden, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 61.



Another prominent example of hospitality in Christian history comes from St. Benedict. Born in 480, Benedict committed himself to a life of asceticism when he was twenty years old. He became a leader of individuals who were seeking a more faithful life and soon he established a series of monasteries. The most famous was at Monte Cassino, where he wrote “The Rule,” which would shape Western monasticism for centuries.<sup>96</sup> The rule was essentially a daily “how-to” guide on living the monastic lifestyle. The Benedictine Rule, chapter 53, verse 1 says, “Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, because He will say: ‘I was a stranger, and you took Me in’ (Mt 25:35). And let due honor be shown to all, especially to those ‘of the household of the faith’ (Gal 6:10) and to wayfarers.”<sup>97</sup> Within these guidelines, a guest must be treated as one would treat Christ. This directive governed the way all guests to monasteries were to be treated for centuries. The impact of such a statement must not be dismissed. Benedictine goes further when he writes in verse three the following commands:

When the guests have been received, let them be accompanied to prayer, and after that let the Superior, or whom he shall bid, sit down with them. Let the divine law be read to the guest that he may be edified, after which let every kindness be shown him. Let the fast be broken by the Superior in deference to the guest, unless, perchance, it be a day of solemn fast, which cannot be broken. Let the brethren, however, keep the customary fast. Let the Abbot pour the water on the guest’s hands, and let both the Abbot and the whole brotherhood wash the feet of all the guests. When they have been washed, let them say this verse: “We have received Thy mercy, O God, in the midst of Thy temple” (Ps 47[48]:10). Let the greatest care be taken, especially in the reception of the poor and travelers, because Christ is received more specially in them; whereas regard for the wealthy itself procureth them respect.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*. Vol 1., (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 238-242.

<sup>97</sup> “Chapter 53: The Reception of guests,” *The Rule of Benedict*. WCCM Mediation and Community, June 30, 2021, <https://theruleofbenedict.com/2021/06/30/chapter-53-1-the-reception-of-guests>.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

As one can see, it was not enough to welcome the guest with kind words; action was required not only by the monks but by the Abbot himself. They were to wash the feet of the guests and give the greatest care they could to those who came their way. Perhaps we in the modern church would recognize the significance of such acts and see that both words and actions are needed to become the people God intends us to be.

There have been countless others throughout Christian history who have championed the cause of hospitality. Even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a groundswell of movement toward reconciliation with a significant emphasis on hospitality. “The Beloved Community,” first conceived by Josiah Royce in 1913, and later made popular by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr., contends that all people are loved by God, and that all people around them are loved by God too. That simple recognition, that each person has value, a spark of the divine within himself/herself, is the foundation for the right treatment and care for others, regardless of class, creed, gender, or social status. According to Dr. Marcus Goodloe, the four tenants of the Beloved Community are justice, freedom, equality, and love.”<sup>99</sup> In essence, Dr. King thought that authentic connection could be had by all people regardless of race, because of their higher calling as followers of Jesus Christ. Even now, churches, are working towards these ends by focusing on what unites people rather than what divides people. The Episcopal Church in Minnesota is working on such issues as immigration. The foundation of their beliefs both in the church and politically is centered on loving the stranger, and more specifically,

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<sup>99</sup> Marcus Goodloe, “The Beloved Community: The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday and our reality,” The Institute for Global Engagement, Dallas Baptist University, January 18, 2021, <https://www.dbu.edu/ige/resources/2021/01/the-beloved-community-the-martin-luther-king-jr-holiday-and-our-reality.html>.

seeing God in the eyes of another.<sup>100</sup> Christian hospitality is the driving force for their work, and though it may be a long time coming, there has already been a significant change in the hearts and minds of people regarding immigrants and refugees.

What should be clear in citing these few examples is that hospitality has been a core tenant of the Christian faith from its outset. The emphasis on hospitality can be found within the preaching of the early church, within the monastic movement, as well as within the modern-day push toward a beloved community. Therefore, it is time for the local churches to take up this mantle of Christian hospitality and continue what has been done in the past in the hopes of a brighter future.

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<sup>100</sup> “Immigration, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers,” Beloved Community, The Episcopal Church in Minnesota, July 15, 2019, <https://creatingbelovedcommunity.org/immigration/>.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

To determine the success of this project properly, three primary means of assessment were used. First, the Wednesday night attendees of First Baptist Lenoir were invited to participate in determining their current theological understanding of hospitality as well as recognizing their responsibility to greet guests of First Baptist Church by taking “Hospitality Awareness Test A” on September 7, 2022, followed by an intentional Bible study on hospitality. On September 21, 2022, the Wednesday night attendees were invited to participate again by taking “Hospitality Awareness Test B.” The survey data gathered was analyzed to determine what, if any, growth took place in the participants’ understanding of Biblical hospitality as well as their personal responsibility in greeting guests of First Baptist Church Lenoir.

Secondly, mystery guests were recruited to determine just how hospitable First Baptist Church Lenoir currently is. After visiting once over a designated four-week period, the mystery guests filled out a survey entitled “Mystery Guest Survey A.” Following those visits, I taught our hospitality team over two sessions some very practical steps that we could take to improve the welcome. Those same mystery guests visited First Baptist Church Lenoir again during a second designated four-week period and filled out “Mystery Guest Survey B.” The survey data gathered was analyzed to determine how hospitable First Baptist Lenoir was before the teaching, and what, if any, improvement was made in the experiences of the mystery guests that followed the

teaching. It should be noted that no one at First Baptist knew I was using mystery guests for this project.

Finally, the hospitality team filled out surveys entitled, “Teaching the Hospitality Team Session One, Session Two, and Session Three” after each training on October 2, October 9, and December 4. The purpose of these surveys was to judge both the preparation of the instructor as well as the material covered in each session. At the December 4 session, the Hospitality Team learned the entire scope of this project and that mystery guests had participated. The reactions of team members were gathered and then analyze to determine how effective the teaching had been and the impact it made on those who oversaw greeting the guests. Future Hospitality Team members will benefit from such an analysis.

### **Congregational Awareness Test Evaluation**

I consulted with Dr. David Carscaddon, Director of the School of Psychological Science and Counselor Education at Gardner-Webb, about helping me with the statistical analysis related to this project.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, there was a mistake made in my research survey that greatly affected my results. In setting up the “Congregational Awareness Tests A and B,” I failed to use enough direct qualifiers to conduct pre/post-test research adequately. I used age and gender as qualifiers, but not something more specific such as an identification number to identify the individual participants in that survey. As a result, I am unable to draw statistical conclusions about my congregation’s responses because I am not able to determine an individual participant’s growth in a pre-test/post-test manner.

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<sup>101</sup> David Carscaddon, Zoom interview by the author, November 30, 2022.

However, I was able to use descriptive analytics to draw conclusions that will inform the results of this project.

The Wednesday Night Participants took “Hospitality Awareness Test A” on September 7, 2022. A total of 60 people participated: 22 men and 38 women, and they ranged in age from their 20s to their 80s. The first ten questions on the test were Biblical questions related to hospitality (see Appendix E). The mean score of the correct answers was 6.85 with a total number of five people receiving perfect scores (8% of respondents).

On September 21, 2022, the Wednesday night participants took “Hospitality Awareness Test B.” Unbeknownst to the participants, “Hospitality Tests A and B” were the same tests (see Appendix E). A total number of 56 participated: 27 men and 29 women and they ranged in age from their 20s to their 80s. The mean score of the correct answers was 7.71 with a total number of nine people receiving perfect scores (16% of respondents.) See Tables 4.1 and 4.2 for further analysis.

**Table 4.1****Age of Wednesday Night Participants who Took Hospitality Awareness Test A/B**

Age	Test A	Test B
20s	1/ 1.66%	2/ 3.57%
30s	2/ 3.33%	2/ 3.57%
40s	8/ 13.33%	4/ 7.14%
50s	8/ 13.33%	8/ 14.28%
60s	6/ 10%	8/ 14.28%
70s	24/ 40%	19/ 33.92%
80+	11/ 18.33%	13/ 23.21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60/ 100%</b>	<b>56/ 100%</b>

**Table 4. 2**  
**Wednesday Night Hospitality Awareness Test A and B Results**  
**from Biblical Knowledge Component**

	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Perfect Scores</b>
<b>Test A September 7<sup>th</sup></b>	60	22 Men 38 Women	6.85	5 8% of respondents
<b>Test B September 21st</b>	56	27 Men 29 Women	7.71	9 16% of respondents
<b>Total Percentage Difference</b>			12.55%	

As one can see, the mean score of the group who participated on September 21 was higher than the mean score on September 7. The percentage difference was 12.55%. The total number of perfect scores of those who participated on September 21 was higher than of those who participated on September 7. Though I cannot determine the statistical significance of such a change, anecdotally, the group that took “Hospitality Awareness Test B” on September 21 scored higher on the Biblical knowledge component of “Hospitality Awareness Test A/B” after the Bible Study was taught following the “Hospitality Awareness Test A” on September 7.



The second half of “Hospitality Awareness Tests A and B” was twenty statements related to the congregational awareness of the hospitality currently practiced at First Baptist Lenoir. These statements were based on the Belmont Model Questionnaire. I used a Likert-style continuum from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with a number assigned to each value where 1 was Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Neutral, 4—Agree, 5—Strongly Agree. The congregation rated their awareness of hospitality currently practiced at First Baptist Lenoir and their personal responsibility to connect with guests who attend worship (see Appendix E). The responses were then tabulated and a mean score was found. A percentage increase/decrease was determined. Please note that several of the statements were negative in nature, meaning that the lower score showed improvement.

Table 4.3

## Hospitality Awareness Test Results from Awareness Portion Excerpts

Statement	Test A Mean	Test B Mean	Percentage Difference
“It is my responsibility to personally welcome guests in our worship services.”	4.63	4.79	3.39%
“I am aware of the specific Biblical examples in the Old and New Testament that specifically emphasize the importance of hospitality.”	3.79	4.43	15.57%
(Negative question) “By saying ‘Good morning’ to the people on my pew, I have fulfilled my role in welcoming people to FBC Lenoir.”	2.32	2.07	11.39%
“If we want to grow as a fellowship, then we must get the welcome right.”	4.5	4.79	6.24%
(Negative Question) “I do not feel adequately equipped for greeting guests personally.”	2.28	1.86	20.28%
(Negative Question) “Connecting with our guests should not be a part of our budget planning at First Baptist Lenoir.”	2.18	2.04	6.63%

These statements demonstrate that the Participant's Awareness of the importance of hospitality as reflected on "Hospitality Awareness Test B" taken on September 21 was higher than the Participant's Awareness of the importance of hospitality as reflected on "Hospitality Awareness Test A" taken on September 7. One of the most interesting statements made was, "By saying 'Good morning' to the people on my pew, I have fulfilled my role in welcoming people to FBC Lenoir." The mean of people who disagreed/strongly disagreed in responding to that question on "Hospitality Awareness Test B" was higher than those who disagreed/strongly disagreed in responding to that statement on "Hospitality Awareness Test A." That will prove significant later in the conclusion section of this project.

### **Mystery Guest Evaluation**

I was able to use quantitative and qualitative analysis on the most important part of the project, the mystery guest component. Twenty-five mystery guests initially agreed to participate in the study; however, only twenty-two were able to both attend and return the surveys provided. There were fourteen women and eight men. They ranged in age from their thirties to their eighties. See Table 4.4 to see the breakdown of the groups by age and gender.

**Table 4.4**  
**Mystery Guest Survey Statistics of Age and Gender**

<b>Frequencies for Age</b>				
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent Valid</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
30s	2	9.091	9.091	9.091
40s	1	4.545	4.545	13.636
50s	4	18.182	18.182	31.818
60s	6	27.273	27.273	59.091
70s	8	36.364	36.364	95.455
80s	1	4.545	4.545	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.000</b>		

<b>Frequencies for Gender</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent Valid</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Female	14	63.636	63.636	63.636
Male	8	36.364	36.364	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.000</b>		

As one can see from Table 4.4, the mystery guests tended to be older, and they tended to be female. In many ways, the mystery guests reflect many of those who attend worship at First Baptist Lenoir regularly.

Before determining the results of the study, a Cronbach Alpha Analysis was run on the “Mystery Guest Survey A and B” to see if the survey itself was reliable. According to Dr. Carscaddon, any number that is above .7 is considered reliable. “Mystery Guest Surveys A/B” were found to have a Cronbach Alpha score of .85.<sup>102</sup> That means that the surveys are trustworthy and that they measure what they are intended to

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<sup>102</sup> Carscaddon, 2022.

measure, which is the total guest experience as they worship at First Baptist Lenoir. See Table 4.5 for more details.

**Table 4.5**  
**Reliability of Mystery Guest Survey**  
**Frequentist Scale Reliability Statistics**

<b>Estimate</b>	<b>McDonald's <math>\omega</math></b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>Sd</b>
Point estimate	0.870	0.856	64.545	8.760
95% CI lower bound	0.791	0.740	60.885	6.739
95% CI upper bound	0.949	0.927	68.206	12.518

After tabulating the surveys from the “Mystery Guest Survey A” (Pre-Test), filled out before the first and second Hospitality Trainings, and “Mystery Guest Survey B” (Post-Test), filled out after the first and second Hospitality Training, the results suggest an arithmetic difference between the two sets of data. See Table 4.6 for further explanation.

**Table 4.6**  
**Mystery Guests Pre- and Post-Total Scores Descriptive Statistics**

	<b>Mystery Guest Pre-Total Score</b>	<b>Mystery Guest Post-Total Score</b>
Valid	22	22
Missing	0	0
Mean	64.545	68.136
Std. Deviation	8.760	7.698
Skewness	-0.657	-0.636
Std. Error of Skewness	0.491	0.491
Minimum	41.000	54.000
Maximum	78.000	78.000

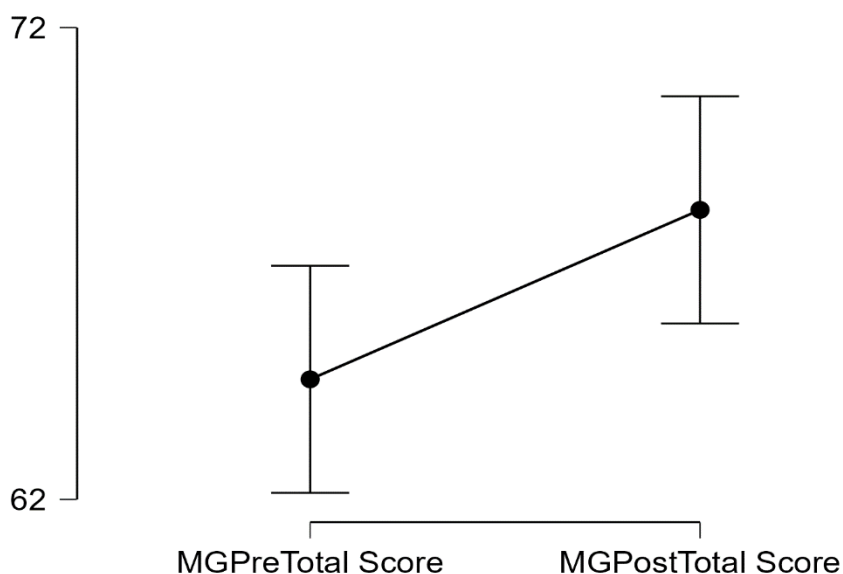
As one can see, the mean of the Mystery Guest Pre-Total (Survey A) was 64.545. The Mystery Guest Post-Total (Survey B) was 68.136. That means that the total mean difference between Survey B and Survey A was 3.591. That indicates that the Mystery Guests had a better worship experience the second time they visited, after the Hospitality Team Training, than they did the first time they visited. But the greater question is this: Is that difference statistically significant?

Table 4.7 is a plot that demonstrates how the means would look if this test was run 100 times. As noted above, the mean for the pretest (Survey A) was 64.545. The mean for the post-test (Survey B) was 68.136. Two things should be noted. First, the line from the Pre-test compared to the Post-test is rising, which indicates that the guest had a better experience after the Hospitality training. Secondly, because there is very little

overlap between the two bars, there will likely be a significant statistical difference between Mystery Guest Survey results from A and B.

**Table 4.7**

**Mystery Guest Pre- and Post-Total Score Shown in Arrow Bars**



The best way to determine if there is a significant statistical difference between a pre/post-test is to conduct a T-Test, which compares means against each other. See Table 4.8 for further clarification.

**Table 4.8**

**Paired Samples T-Test of Mystery Guest Survey A Mean and Mystery Guest Survey B Mean**

**Paired Samples T-Test**

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% CI for Mean Difference		Cohen's d	95% CI for Cohen's d	
							Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
MGPPreTotal Score	MGPostTotal Score	2.194	21	0.040	-3.591	1.637	-6.994	-0.188	-0.468	-0.904	-0.022

There are two numbers that demand attention to truly understand if there is a significant statistical difference between Pre/Post Test in “Mystery Guest Survey A and B.” The P. Value is .040. According to Dr. Carscaddon, that means that if one was to say that there is a significant statistical difference between the test results, there is a 96% chance one would be right, and only a 4% chance of being wrong. That means that the hospitality training is having a real effect on the guests.<sup>103</sup> The other number that is important to recognize is the Cohen’s D. Cohen theorized that numbers .2/.3 are a small effect, .4/.5 is a moderate effect, and .8 or larger is a significant effect. So, with a Cohen’s D of .468, it can be concluded that the training given to the hospitality team between the two samples of surveys (A/B) is having a real but moderate effect on the guest experience.<sup>104</sup> The percentage difference between the two mean scores of “Mystery Guest Survey A” (64.545) and “Mystery Guest Survey B” (68.136) is 5.3%. The numbers make it clear: The project was a success because the hospitality training received on October 2 and 9 helped the guests have a better worship experience.<sup>105</sup>

### **Hospitality Team Evaluations**

Over the course of the project, 25 Hospitality Team members participated in all three sessions. There were fifteen females and ten males and they ranged in age from their forties to their eighties. See Table 4.9 for a breakdown of the group.

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<sup>103</sup> Carscaddon, 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



**Table 4.9 Demographics of Hospitality Team Participants**

Age	Male	Female	Total
40s	2	4	6/25=24%
50s	4	4	8/25=32%
60s	1	0	1/25=4%
70s	2	4	6/25=24%
80s	1	3	4/25=16%
	10	15	25/25=100%

The participants were broken down into three groups of eight, (A/B/C) and they rotated Sundays serving as greeters during the months of September, October, and November. These participants were the ones responsible for greeting everyone entering First Baptist Church Lenoir. As part of their agreement to participate in this project, they were also asked to attend two training sessions on hospitality held on October 2 and 9, and then to attend a debriefing session on December 4 where the full scope of the project would be revealed. They did not know mystery guests had been used during this project.

After the mystery guests all visited the first time in September, the greeters were trained using the information found in Appendix F. This training was specifically for the greeters and covered the theological importance of hospitality, as well as the practical information needed to complete their tasks as assigned. In this training, the hospitality team helped brainstorm ideas on how best to connect with guests, and they even made suggestions to make the building seem less intimidating to guests as they arrived. After completing the initial training session, the Hospitality Team was given “Teaching the

Hospitality Team Session One—Getting the Welcome Right Survey” (Appendix H). It was eight statements long. These statements were based on the Belmont Model Questionnaire. I used a Likert-style continuum, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with a number assigned to each value where 1 was Strongly Disagree 2--Disagree 3--Neutral 4—Agree 5—Strongly Agree. After the scores were tabulated, the mean was found. Three statements and responses stand out on this test (see Table 4.10.)

**Table 4.10 Teaching the Hospitality Team Session One  
Getting the Welcome Right Survey Responses**

Questions	Mean
“As a greeter, our primary goal is to create connection with our guests.”	<b>4.8</b>
“After attending session one, I have a deeper understanding of the Biblical mandate to be hospitable.”	<b>4.64</b>
“After attending session one, I have a deeper understanding of my responsibilities as a greeter at First Baptist Church Lenoir.”	<b>4.72</b>

As one can see from the responses, the training was successful. After attending session one of the hospitality training, the participants overwhelmingly understood that the greeter’s primary job was to create a connection with the guests. Furthermore, the participants responded that they had a deeper understanding of the Bible’s mandate to be

hospitable, as well as their personal responsibilities as a greeter. Also, as a part of the survey, I gave the participants an opportunity to write comments in response to the session. One said, “The session was very detailed and very informative.” Another said, “Excellent session. I look forward to making the suggested changes. It will help me be a better greeter.” Another summed up what I would consider the spirit of the participants by saying, “We do good, but we can and will do better.”

On October 9, a second session was scheduled. This training was not lecture-based, but rather, a more hands-on training that consisted of two parts. The first part was that the participants met outside the building and walked around with a critical eye, trying to see the facility as a visitor would see it. The second part of the training was a role-playing session where the participants acted out several scenarios that they would likely face as a greeter (see Appendix I). After completing the session, the Hospitality Team was given “Teaching the Hospitality Team Session Two—Role- playing Scenario Survey” (Appendix J). It was eight statements long. These statements were based on the Belmont Model Questionnaire. I used a Likert-style continuum, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with a number assigned to each value where 1 was Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Neutral, 4—Agree, 5—Strongly Agree. After the scores were tabulated, the mean was found. Four statements and responses stand out on this test (see Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11**  
**Teaching the Hospitality Team Session Two**  
**Role-Playing Scenarios Survey Responses**

“Before the Role-playing scenarios, I felt adequately trained as a greeter at First Baptist Church Lenoir.”	3.64
“After walking through the hospitality training, I feel prepared to be a greeter during worship services at First Baptist Church Lenoir.”	4.76
“The exercise of viewing the outside grounds as a first-time visitor was beneficial.”	4.8
“Having the opportunity to play both the role of greeter and guest was beneficial in these role-playing scenarios.”	4.56

As one can see from Table 4.11, before the hospitality training given in session two, the participants were ambivalent about their preparedness to be a greeter. Their mean score of 3.64 was just barely above neutral, which demonstrates the significant need for hands-on training. Hospitality training cannot just be theoretical; participants must walk through real-life scenarios to feel more comfortable. The numbers bear that out. After the training, the mean number was 4.76 when the participants stated that they felt prepared to be a greeter at First Baptist Church Lenoir. That is significant growth and it proves that the

teaching was effective, for it gave the Greeters confidence to do the job as they have been called. Furthermore, the responses to both walking around the building and looking at it as a first-time visitor were significant. Also, the participants responded very strongly to the role-playing scenario aspect of the training. As in session one, the participants had a chance to respond to the training by writing comments. One summarized the feeling of the participants in response to session two when she wrote, “Very eye-opening. Familiarity hampers welcoming. Fresh eyes and observations seen today are very helpful.”

After the training, the mystery guests returned to worship at First Baptist Lenoir again. The last mystery guest visit was made on November 6<sup>th</sup>, and the surveys were then analyzed and studied. The Hospitality Team met again on December 4<sup>th</sup> where the full scope of the project was revealed (see Appendix K). The Hospitality Team was informed of the mystery guests’ participation and comments made from the “Mystery Guest Surveys A/B” were read to the Hospitality Team. After completing the session, the Hospitality Team members were given “Teaching the Hospitality Team Session Three—The responses of Mystery Guests Survey” (Appendix L). It was eight statements long. These statements were based on the Belmont Model Questionnaire. I used a Likert-style continuum, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with a number assigned to each value where 1 was Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Neutral, 4—Agree, and 5—Strongly Agree. After the scores were tabulated, the mean was found. Three statements and responses stand out on this test (see Table 4.12.)

**Table 4.12**

**Teaching the Hospitality Team Session Three  
The Responses of the Mystery Guests Survey**

<p>“I am happy that mystery guests were used in this project because they give honest feedback about how well they were greeted at First Baptist Lenoir.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4.8</p>
<p>“The hospitality team would benefit from yearly training on getting the welcome right.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4.8</p>
<p>“Rev. Hughes has helped First Baptist Church Lenoir become a more welcoming church by conducting this Doctor of Ministry Project.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4.92</p>

Though minor deception was used during the project because the Hospitality Team was not initially made aware of the presence of mystery guests, the appreciation from the Hospitality Team for the mystery guests was overwhelming. The mystery guests provided invaluable insight and none of the Hospitality Team was hurt or offended by their comments. Furthermore, it is apparent from the numbers that the Hospitality Team members believe that they need yearly training to maintain their skills as a greeter. The final statement was perhaps the most meaningful in that it defines the success of the project from the Hospitality Team’s perspective. They fully believe that First Baptist Church Lenoir has become a more welcoming church because of this project.

### **Greatest Strength of the Project**

The greatest strength of this project was something that could not be scientifically measured. As part of the “Mystery Guest Surveys A & B,” there was a place for reflections and/or suggestions for improvement that the guest would write if they felt led to do so (see Appendix B). The greatest wisdom gathered during this project was not measured from 1-5 on a scale, but rather, in reading those comments. The guests rarely held anything back. Some were overwhelmed at the welcome they received while others were disenchanted because the person next to them on the pew did not speak to them for the entire service. There was one guest who was grateful that the signage was hanging in the center of the hallway and was easily legible. There was one guest who counted the number of light bulbs that were out of the chandelier and reported six were burned out. Each mystery guest responded and wrote about their experience (see Appendix M and Appendix N). What made this part of the project so strong was that I was then able to read word for word the experience that the mystery guests had at our service to both our Hospitality Team as well as to the Wednesday night congregation. While some of our people were shocked that anyone would find flaws in our fellowship, the vast majority of listeners from our church appreciated the comments and recognized that these comments give us a basis from which to grow.

It was in these written responses that I determined the most important factor that led a visitor to have a good experience or not while worshipping at First Baptist Lenoir. Ironically, it was not in the greeting by the Hospitality Team, or the welcome given by the church staff as I expected. Repeatedly, the mystery guests spoke about the importance of the connection felt between themselves and the congregational members around them.

Many wrote what I had long feared: The members of the First Baptist Lenoir congregation spoke to the guests they knew, but were a bit cold, or even apathetic, to the ones they did not know. Despite the best efforts of the staff/greeters to give a warm welcome, many of the mystery guests felt that they were not properly welcomed at First Baptist Church Lenoir because the congregants sitting near them did not try to connect with the guests personally. What makes this realization even more painful is that on the “Hospitality Awareness Tests A and B,” one of the questions specifically asks, “who is responsible for greeting a guest?” The answer given by almost all who participated in the study was “all believers all the time.” What this response tells me is that the congregants know what to do, but they fail to follow through when it matters most. What this project revealed was that helping the congregation realize their role in connecting with guests is paramount to a guest having a good visit. If the congregation fails to participate as they should, then most likely, the guest will not return.

On the other hand, if the congregation members next to the mystery guests connected with them, then the mystery guest was likely to have had a great experience. The mystery guests felt that it was important for the congregation not just to say, “Good morning,” or even, “Hello,” but to engage with the guest, introducing themselves and asking questions of the visitor. When the congregant/s near a mystery guest did this, then it was written about in the response section on Mystery Guest Survey A and B in every instance. So, instead of the Hospitality Team playing the most important role in greeting the mystery guests, it was actually the congregation that played the most vital role. This conclusion would not have been reached without the mystery guests responding as they did. As a result of this revelation, I contend that a future Doctor of Ministry project could



be based on teaching a congregation how to welcome and connect with guests properly who attend worship. The results would be informative to all ministers and congregations.

### **Greatest Weakness of the Project**

The greatest weakness of the project was my failure to assign an identification number to the Wednesday night participants. If I had done so, then it could be determined whether the teaching received made a significant statistical difference in the life of the congregation. Even adding a few questions on Hospitality Awareness Test B would have made some of the conclusions gathered less opaque. One question I wish I had asked is, “Were you present for the teaching on September 7?” Knowing if someone was present for the Wednesday night teaching would have made it easier to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the teaching. Furthermore, if I had directly asked, “On a scale of 1-5, with one being none and five being great, how much of a difference did the teaching received on September 7 make in your understanding of hospitality?”, I would have been able to report that number and it could have made a significant difference in how I could have reported my results.

### **What I Would Do Differently if Conducting This Project Again**

First, I would start the project on a different date. The project began on September 4 which turned out to be Labor Day weekend. Only four of my twenty-two mystery guests came on that day. Obviously, many of the mystery guests had other plans. Asking mystery guests to participate over four weeks, with one being a holiday weekend, led to an inauspicious start.

Secondly, if conducting the project again, I would give the mystery guests more time to attend worship at First Baptist Lenoir. Instead of cramming twenty-two mystery guests over a four-week period, I would make the visiting period six weeks. More time would make scheduling easier for the mystery guests themselves.

Finally, if I was to do the project again, I would extend the time between the mystery guests' first and second visit further apart. I only gave our church two weeks between visiting groups. Such a short period not only made the Hospitality Team training feel rushed, but it did not allow for some of the suggestions made by the Hospitality Team to be put in place. For example, the Hospitality Team suggested having "visitor parking signs" made and put into place around the building. It was impossible to have this done in such a short period of time. In fact, it took almost two months for city approval and for the signs to be created. The second visits of the mystery guests were concluded by the time the change was made.

### **Plans Going Forward for First Baptist Church Lenoir**

We will continue the hospitality program with the changes made in our training. The training made a real difference that can be measured. In fact, the satisfaction of each guest's visit grew an average of 5.3% after the training. If this same study was run 100 more times with twenty-two new mystery guests each time, then the statistics show that the post-test would be significantly higher than the pre-test 96% of the time. The training works and those who greet at First Baptist Lenoir going forward will be taught from the best practices learned here. Furthermore, instead of training our Hospitality Team once a

year, we will do a refresher course every three to four months. Keeping the importance of hospitality before our greeters will make a difference in the experience of our guests.

To ensure that the congregation members themselves begin to participate in the greeting of the people around them, in the welcome time I do every Sunday, I will no longer say only, “Speak to the people around you.” Instead, I will say, “Speak and introduce yourself to the people around you.” This subtle change will remind our church about the importance of a personal connection with our guests. As stated above, the most important factor in determining if a guest had a satisfactory visit was if the guest felt connected with the congregants around them. Hopefully, taking this extra step will ensure more participation from the congregation.

Furthermore, I will ask the members of the Hospitality Team (who are not serving on a particular Sunday and who are attending worship), to make sure they speak to everyone in their immediate seating area. Much like a zone defense in basketball, having specific people speak to a specific group of people in their immediate area will make sure that no visitor slips through the cracks. My hope is that in making this change, the welcome will be more organic and that it will not come solely from the ministers on staff or from the greeters.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

All churches, especially in a time when every congregation is rebounding from the Covid 19 pandemic, must take responsibility to get the welcome right for the guests who attend. The plan to meet the needs of the guests must be well thought out and well executed. Greeters should be stationed in strategic places and trained to speak to the guests in a kind and loving manner. The facility must be well-maintained and clean. Clear signage to the worship area as well as the nursery, restrooms, etc. should be visible. Every step must be taken to prepare for the guest's arrival, and not just scramble haphazardly when they do come for worship. This is the bare minimum for each congregation.

Furthermore, each minister/staff member at a local church should strive to connect with people before and after the service. While greeters are essential in connection, the role the minister plays must not be missed. If the minister is actively engaged in creating a welcoming environment, then the hope is that the members will take notice and follow his/her lead. Leadership coming from the staff concerning hospitality is essential for a good visit.

A significant lesson learned from this project was the vital role the congregation plays in making connections with a guest. If the people in the pews are interested in building rapport and opening pathways for friendship, then the guest will likely return to worship again. Failure on the congregation's part to connect with a guest, regardless of

the type of welcome received from the minister or Hospitality Team, will often lead a guest to have a negative visit and they may not return.

The hard truth that each congregation must face is that while there are not mystery guests coming to worship evaluating the welcoming procedures by the greeting committee each and every week, every guest who attends worship in a new church evaluates that church from the moment they enter the parking area. The guests may not use a scale from 1-5 on a Mystery Survey, but they grade their experience of worship by making a second visit or choosing to worship at another church down the street. Getting the welcome right is essential, for it is not only a Biblical command from God, but it is also a practical imperative for the church to connect with those who enter the doors. Henri Nouwen said it best: “If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality.”<sup>106</sup> May we churches begin that journey immediately, for the future of the church depends on it.

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<sup>106</sup> Nouwen, 47.

## APPENDIX A

### First Baptist Church Mystery Guest Survey Test A/B

ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Age: (20-29), (30-39), (40-49), (50-59), (60-69), (70-79), (80+)

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Directions: Please read and respond to each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

1. Upon arriving at the church campus, I easily found a parking space close to the building.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I found the appearance of the grounds to be messy and uninviting.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I easily found the appropriate door to enter the building for worship.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I was promptly greeted, warmly welcomed, and offered help in finding a seat in the sanctuary.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. The person who assisted me asked appropriate questions and tried to connect with me personally.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. I received a genuine and warm welcome from others in the Sanctuary prior to the beginning of the worship service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I was not greeted warmly by a staff member of First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I was warmly welcomed by members of the church when the Pastor asked the congregation to greet one another after the service had begun.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. As I left the worship service, members of the congregation expressed their gratitude for my visit and invited me to return.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. As I exited the Sanctuary, a member of the church staff expressed their gratitude for my visit and invited me to return.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

### **Overall Experience**

11. Overall, I found the worship service to be inviting and welcoming.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. Overall, I found the appearance of the sanctuary to be warm and inviting.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. The signage, such as where to enter, restroom locations, and where to exit, was illegible or hard to find.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. I felt like First Baptist Lenoir valued my presence during the worship hour.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. My visit to First Baptist Lenoir was very positive.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. If I were searching for a church home, I would definitely return for another visit.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree



**APPENDIX B**

**Reflections on my visit to FBC Lenoir**

(Things that were done well, things that can be improved, and overall impressions of the visit)

## APPENDIX C

### Mystery Guest Letter

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you so much for agreeing to help me with my Doctor of Ministry Project by visiting First Baptist Church Lenoir twice and completing both of the “Mystery Guest Surveys (A and B).” I ask you to come on one Sunday in September for worship at 11 A.M. (September 4, 11, 18, or 25), and then when you get home, fill out the survey about your visit and return it in the provided self-addressed envelope provided the following Monday. The survey consists of sixteen questions, and there will be a blank page allotted for you to make personal comments and give your overall impressions of the visit. I ask you to return to First Baptist Lenoir on one of the following Sundays (October 16, 23, 30, or November 6.) Just as before, when you get home, please fill out the survey and use the blank page to make comments about your visit and return it in the self-addressed envelope and mail it on Monday, the day after you worshipped.

The purpose of this project is to enhance the level of hospitality at First Baptist Lenoir. Therefore, it is important that you provide open and honest feedback, which will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you again for not only assisting me personally, but in helping First Baptist Lenoir become the church God intends it to be.

Sincerely,

Rev. Josh Hughes

## APPENDIX D

### Hospitality Teaching for Wednesday Night Bible Study

This was taught September 7, 2022, after the attendees have filled out the “Hospitality Awareness Survey A.”

Do you remember the anxiety of visiting a church for the first time? It can be a frightful experience. Simple questions like, where is the sanctuary located? Who will watch the children in the nursery? Where do I park? And most pertinently, am I sitting in someone’s seat? come to the forefront of one’s mind almost immediately.

I will never forget going to a certain First Baptist Church for the first time. I was the new staff member, and it was my very first Sunday. That sanctuary will seat at least 1,000 people—it is huge. Now keep in mind, no one knew me outside of the search committee and staff. To them, I was just another name and face in a sea of so many.

As I walked in the doors, I was handed a worship guide by an usher, but he did not speak to me. The usher was too busy talking to his friend to do anything but hand me the piece of paper. I stood around for a few seconds taking it all in. And even though several people passed me, no one said, “good morning.”

As with many Baptist churches, the seats toward the front were open. I made my way over and sat down. There was no one within two rows of me in front or behind. I sat by myself and waited anxiously for the service to start. I was going to be introduced to the congregation, and I was to read the scripture and have a prayer. As I was sitting in the pew reading through the text once more, I sensed someone come up beside me. When I looked up, it was an older lady, frowning at me. “Good Morning,” I said. She scowled at me and replied, “You are in my seat.” “I’m sorry,” I replied, and I stood up. Now keep in mind...there is no one in front or behind me for several rows, but she was in no way going to let me get away with sitting in her seat. I stepped across the aisle and sat down just as the organ chimed the hour and the service began.

Now I must tell you. I was not impressed whatsoever by the welcome I received that first Sunday. In fact, I would have never returned to worship there if I was not on the payroll beginning the next day. Have you had a similar experience? Do you think anyone who has worshipped here has had a similar experience?

Tonight, I want to speak to you about a very important topic that is often overlooked in churches. I want us to consider hospitality. What does the Bible say about welcoming the stranger in our midst, and what, if any, is our individual role in welcoming someone we do not know to our fellowship?

The first thing we should do is define what hospitality means. What do you think it means?

The Greek word for Hospitality is “*philoxenia*.” It is made up of two words, “*Philos*” often translated, “friend,” and *Xenos*, often translated “stranger.”<sup>107</sup> So, in its most wooden form, hospitality can be understood as being a “friend to the stranger.” With that understanding in mind, are you a hospitable person? Are you one of those who has never met a stranger, or is meeting someone new intimidating for you? While I recognize that being hospitable is not always the most comfortable thing that we are called to do, it may just be one of the most important things we can do.

Think back throughout the Bible. Can you think of anyone who stands out for being hospitable? The best example comes from Genesis 18:1-8. Let me read that text to you.

In our text, God appears to Abraham while he was sitting near the Oaks at Mamre. He looks up from his tent and sees three strangers. At this point, does he know who they are? No.

So, what does Abraham do? Do the strangers come to him or does he go to them? Abraham goes to them and not only welcomes them with kind words, but he offers them food. What was it specifically? He offers them a little bread and water. Why?

Keep in mind, there was not a Chic-Fil-A on every corner back then. There was no place to buy food or water along the way. Any traveler would have been at the mercy of those whom they would have met. So, it became the custom of the day to always be kind to the stranger to help meet the needs of another. It is important to note that doing so took on at least some form of risk. What if they would have been hostile to Abraham? What if they would have tried to harm him physically? The need to be hospitable overrode those concerns.

Now Abraham tells them he is going to get them a little water and bread, but what does he do? He goes to the tent and tells Sarah to get the best flour and start cooking. He goes to the herd and gets a tender calf and has it prepared. When the food is ready, he brings it out to the guests. Don't you see? He doesn't do as little as possible to meet the needs of the strangers—he gives generously and was prepared to meet other needs if any arose.

Can we glean anything from that? Do you think that maybe, we have a responsibility not only to see the strangers who may come our way, but instead of being focused on ourselves, turn our attention to them? Abraham's excitement at meeting his guests, his attendance to their needs, and his apparent generosity set a standard not only for others in his party to act the same way but also for those who would follow God to act the same way as well. Abraham's hospitality became the paradigm to which Jewish and later Christian hospitality were compared. The importance of Abraham's hospitality in the Old Testament cannot be overstated, for it demonstrates the love and care that all followers of Christ must exhibit in future generations.

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew E. Arterbury, “Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1, (2010): 67.

Can you think of other examples of hospitality?

Being hospitable is a significant part of God's law. Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God."

Strangers in that day essentially meant anyone outside of Jewish heritage. Sadly, those outside the covenant were often maligned by those from within. Why would God be so insistent that God's people repent from this behavior and treat the strangers in their midst, well? The answer is found in the second part of the verse from above: "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The Israelite people knew the difficulties of being on the outside looking in. They knew the pain and sorrow of being alone and mistreated, so God commanded the Israelites to give the kind of treatment to the foreigner that they had so longed for while in Egypt for over 400 years.

In Psalm 23, God plays the role not only of the Great Shepherd, but of a host, taking care of the needs of the Psalmist. The scripture says, "Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anoints my head with oil—my cup runneth over." Though we often read this text as comforting words to those at a funeral, this text is much more than that. It describes God's generosity and the promise of His abundance poured out to those in times of need. It is a word of hope for a weary traveler. They are invited to abide in God's goodness.

Finally, throughout much of the New Testament, Jesus modeled the welcoming nature of God by accepting sinners. Jesus repeatedly took in those that were deemed outcasts in society. For example, consider Jesus' acceptance of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), or the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11). Beyond that, he would be accused of "welcoming sinners" in Luke 15:1-2. In essence, Jesus' ministry involved constantly welcoming those who were forsaken and opening His arms to those who found themselves alone and without. As God incarnate, Jesus' actions reveal God's own heart to those who are often forgotten and abandoned. Jesus' actions demonstrate God's love for the foreigner and the forsaken.

Why should we be hospitable? It is not only that it is God's law. It is not only that it is an imperative as mentioned in Hebrews 13:2— "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing, people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." The true reason we should be hospitable is this: it is our response to what God has done for us. You see, hospitality does not originate from humanity; it originates with God back in the dawn of creation.

John Navone writes the following:

God is the Host Exemplar of all his guests. Creation expresses God's hospitality. In the creation account in Genesis (2:8-9), God creates an entire universe prior to creating human beings. God is creating, working, and designing long before

people are brought on the scene. And when God creates humans, he breathes his life into them and endows them with the freedom to enjoy or to decline his friendship. In his boundless hospitality, God welcomes all humans into his creation, excluding no one from the realm of his all-encompassing love. And just as God has welcomed us into his life, he calls us through the gift of his Son and Spirit to welcome one another as fellow guests with the same spirit of hospitality.<sup>108</sup>

You see friends, hospitality is not just a duty or responsibility, “it is a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us.”<sup>109</sup> Our hospitality should come because we are grateful for the way God loved us and redeemed us through the blood of Christ.

So, what does hospitality look like today when someone we don’t know comes to First Baptist Lenoir? What should we all do to ensure that we are as hospitable as we are called to be?

1. **Be Active**—you can’t sit idly by and wait on a visitor to come up to you and introduce themselves. That won’t happen. We must be on the lookout for new faces. We must turn away from ourselves and fix our eyes on others.
2. **Be Personable**—Being hospitable is more than saying “good morning” and then going back to our conversation with our friends. Greeting someone is the bare minimum. If anything, we have seen that the minimum does not get it done. Do you go to a restaurant and expect only the bare minimum in regard to service, or do you want to be treated as an honored guest? The same applies to a church. We must be personally engaged with others. That means asking questions and offering to meet their needs. It means asking if they have a place to sit and if not, would they like to sit with you. This will take you out of your comfort zone, but, it is the only way to truly connect with others.
3. **Follow Through**--Hospitality is an invitation for further engagement. Some people may really like what we offer here and return. Others may not like what we offer, and they may walk away. But we want to make sure that those who enter these doors are not only welcomed well, but are invited back. We want to invite them to Sunday School, to future church events, and to another worship service. It will take several points of contact for a person to feel comfortable with joining a church.

So, who is responsible for getting the welcome right? **All of us.** Each one of us, because as God’s beloved children, we have received a beautiful invitation from God. And it is up to us to extend that kind of invitation to others. We must be ready every Sunday to meet

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<sup>108</sup> John Navone, “Divine and Human Hospitality,” *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 997, (2004): 329.

<sup>109</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

our guests where they are and connect with them as best as we can. The old cliché is right...we only have one chance to make a good impression. I'll leave you with this.

Constantineanu states unequivocally:

The implication for Christians is crystal clear: if we want to be faithful to God's call, if we want to follow the gospel and be Christ's disciples, we have to model in our own lives the same hospitality and welcome we have ourselves benefited from. The practice of hospitality and welcome is not optional, but an imperative. Christian faith is not about an ethical theory or abstract principles but about *life* in its abundance—a life which Christians have experienced and which they must embody in concrete manifestations of love, peace, reconciliation, harmony, tolerance, and consideration for the other. A genuine Christian life is a life of hospitality, welcome, and concern for the 'other'.<sup>110</sup>

And all God's people said, "Amen."

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<sup>110</sup> Corneliu Constantineanu, "Hospitality and Welcome as Christian Imperatives in Relation to 'the Other,'" *Transformation* 35, No 2 (2018): 114.

**APPENDIX E**

**“Hospitality Awareness Survey A/B”- Given September 7, and again September 21<sup>st</sup>**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Biblical Knowledge Component**

**Directions: Please read and answer each question carefully. Circle the best answer.**

1. The word hospitality means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Cooking a meal for someone
  - b) Being a friend to the stranger
  - c) Turning aside from a stranger
  - d) Being nice to someone else
  
2. One person known for their incredible hospitality in the Old Testament is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Moses
  - b) Jacob
  - c) Abraham
  - d) Jesus
  
3. One example of when Jesus was hospitable was when He \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Stayed at the home of Zacchaeus
  - b) Stood with the woman caught in adultery
  - c) Was accused of eating with sinners
  - d) All the above
  
4. One of the reasons God asked the Israelites to be kind to strangers was because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) They were taskmasters in Egypt
  - b) They were strangers in Egypt
  - c) They were taskmasters in Israel
  - d) They were strangers in Israel



5. The scripture in Hebrews 13:2 reminds us to “be hospitable, because some who have been hospitable have entertained \_\_\_\_\_unaware.”
- Angels
  - Demons
  - Jesus
  - Ancestors
6. Hospitality originates with \_\_\_\_\_.
- Jesus in the Desert
  - Jesus on the cross
  - God creating humanity
  - The Passover
7. In Psalm 23, The Lord is not only referred to as a Shepherd, but the Lord can be seen as a(n)\_\_\_\_\_.
- Angel
  - Visitor
  - Creator
  - Host
8. Abraham’s treatment of the visitors in Genesis 18 consisted of him \_\_\_\_\_.
- Seeing the strangers as friends
  - Cooking a meal
  - Attending to their needs if any arose
  - All the above
9. One of the tenets of Biblical hospitality is that the provider asks a guest to\_\_\_\_\_.
- Return
  - Never come back
  - Help someone else
  - All of the above
10. Biblical hospitality should be practiced by \_\_\_\_\_.
- The church staff members while at church.
  - All believers all the time.
  - The bereavement team when someone dies.
  - The Greeting team on Sunday mornings.

### Congregational Awareness of Hospitality at First Baptist Lenoir

**Directions: Please read and respond to each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

11. It is my responsibility to personally welcome guests in our worship services.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. Guests in our worship services always receive a genuine and warm welcome.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. There is a clear Biblical mandate to be hospitable to our guests at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. I do not actively seek out guests at our worship services.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. It is important for First Baptist Church Lenoir to have a plan to ensure our guests feel welcomed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. It is the responsibility of all members to welcome guests at our worship services.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. I support allocating money in our budget to ensure that guests feel welcomed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

18. I have been reluctant to invite guests to First Baptist Lenoir because I am concerned that they will not be warmly welcomed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

19. I am aware of Biblical examples in the Old Testament and the New Testament that specifically emphasize the importance of hospitality.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

20. It is ok if we fail to greet every guest at First Baptist Church Lenoir because they will probably return for a second visit anyway.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. By saying “Good morning” to the people on my pew, I have fulfilled my role in welcoming people to First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

22. Giving up my seat for a guest at First Baptist Lenoir is something I would happily do.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

23. If we want to grow as a fellowship, then we must get the welcome right.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

24. I would agree to be here 15 minutes early for worship and stay 15 minutes after worship to serve as a Greeter.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

25. Connecting with our guests should not be a part of our budget planning at First Baptist Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

26. The Greeters play an integral role in worship at First Baptist Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

### **Reflections on Rev. Josh Hughes' teaching about Hospitality.**

**Directions: Please read and answer each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

27. Rev. Hughes was adequately prepared for teaching this study about hospitality.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

28. Hospitality has been a frequent subject Rev. Hughes has preached or taught about while serving as pastor at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

29. I do not feel adequately equipped for greeting guests personally.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

30. Rev. Hughes strives to make everyone feel welcome at First Baptist Church

Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

## APPENDIX F

### Teaching the Hospitality Team Session 1 Getting the Welcome Right

October 2, 2022

Hello friends and thank you so much for coming today to discuss one of the most important aspects of our worship: hospitality. Now that is not what you were expecting, was it? When we think about planning for worship, we often think about the sermon, the choir anthem, the hymns, the scriptures, or the prayers. But might I suggest that we in the church, and even we as ministers, often forget one of the most crucial aspects—the people we meet. That is why I want us to do some serious thinking about our hospitality team, how we welcome our guests, and the impression we make on them.

Now before we get too “deep in the weeds” about how to greet our guests, please allow me a minute to remind you of why hospitality is so important for us as a fellowship.

Hospitality is a Biblical mandate that all believers should follow. The preeminent example of hospitality is Abraham, who greets three strangers in Genesis 18. Let me read it to you.

In our text, God appears to Abraham while he was sitting near the Oaks at Mamre. He looks up from his tent and sees three strangers. So, what does Abraham do? Abraham goes to them and not only welcomes them with kind words, but he offers them food.

And instead of giving the bare minimum of bread and water, he kills a young goat and brings milk for them to drink. Don't you see? He doesn't do as little as possible to meet the needs of the strangers—he gives generously and was prepared to meet other needs if any arose.

Can we glean anything from that? Abraham's excitement at meeting his guests, his attendance to their needs, and his apparent generosity set a standard not only for others in his party to act the same way but also for those who would follow God to act the same way as well. Abraham's hospitality became the paradigm to which Jewish and later Christian hospitality were compared.

Beyond Abraham, the best example of someone extending hospitality in the Scriptures is Jesus. He went out of His way to welcome even the “least of these.” He connected with the rich and the poor, he stood with the woman in adultery and was even known to eat with sinners. What does this say to us? It means that we are to have the same heart as Christ, welcoming all who come our way.

And do you know why it is so important for us to live like this? Because hospitality does not begin with humanity; rather, it began with God. In the dawn of creation, God created us as His guests to be in right relationship with Him. Everything God has done is a gift.

So, in response to God's invitation, we desire to extend the invitation to others to join us on this journey. We want to be hospitable to anyone we meet so that they might know God, and God's love for humanity as seen in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With that said, keep in mind: hospitality is more than being nice. It is more than growing a church. Hospitality is our response to God's love and welcome to us.

Now that you know some of the reasons why we are called to be hospitable, let's think about how we can improve a guest's experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir. Now I must warn you. Some of you might think I am stepping on your toes. But trust me when I say that there is nothing more important than getting the welcome right if we are going to grow as a church. There is nothing more important than making someone feel welcomed and valued if they are going to return to church once more. So, please understand that we are on the same team working for the same goal.

With that said, as you know, I have been working on my Doctor of Ministry Project. Part of that project is teaching this to you today. I've been reading and researching hospitality for several years now, and my hope is that we may work together to implement these changes I propose for the betterment of our church.

You are our worship volunteers. That means you not only greet guests, but you hand out bulletins, as well as answer all questions a guest might have. You are the first faces they will see, and you will likely be some of the last faces they will see when they leave our campus.

So, let's take this step by step and see what we can do to make a guest's experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir even more meaningful. Let's walk through someone's visit to our church and think about it critically from their eyes—not just our own.

#### **I. First Impressions/Atmosphere.**

- A. Do you know how long we have to make an impression on somebody? (Give me a number out loud)—Scholars tell us a church has 10 minutes before people decide if they are going to return to the church or leave.
  1. That means the sermon is not the deciding factor for people. That means the choir music, the Scripture reading, or even the prayers are not the deciding factor for their return.
  2. The deciding factor is how someone feels—how someone connects with those around them within the first 10 minutes. Therefore, it is imperative that we do the right thing each time, and every time.

#### **B. This whole concept of hospitality isn't just about being nice. Hospitality is essentially what kind of atmosphere we want to create.**

1. When you go on vacation, you know immediately whether you are in a 5-star hotel or a 1-star hotel. How do you know? It's not just the outside of the structure that gives it away—it's the feeling you get when you walk in the place.

2. When you go into someone's house, you know immediately if you feel like a guest, or if you feel like an intruder. How do you know that? It's not necessarily because of what someone says or does...it is how you feel.
3. For us at the church, what kind of atmosphere are we seeking to create? What kind of feelings do we want people to have? Talk to me for just a minute about what you want a visit to First Baptist Church Lenoir to feel like.
4. For me, I want the visit to feel warm and inviting. As a visitor, I don't want to feel anxious or forgotten. I want to feel noticed, valued, and appreciated. This is an essential part of getting the welcome right.

- II. Now that we have considered how we want people to feel, we need to take a good look around. When someone arrives at the church, what do they see?
- A. They see our building. They see our parking lot. In essence, they are seeing the grounds. Do you know that some people who visit a church never even go in the building because they are so disconcerted by the way the grounds look?
  - B. That's why it is imperative that we maintain the outside appearance of our facilities. That's why we have people cut the grass weekly and keep the flower beds looking nice. What about at night? Can people see our signs? Can people see to park? Do they feel safe about coming and going?
  - C. These are the questions we need to think about.
  - D. There are two things that I wish we could add to the grounds—I think they would enhance our visitor's experience.**
    1. **First, we need designated parking spots for visitors.** Stores often have handicapped parking as well as expectant mom parking. There is parking for veterans. But is there any parking for visitors? Not today.
    2. The reason I feel this would be vital is that it lets our guests know that we are expecting them. We are looking to have new people in our church every week. We are actively seeking people to worship with us and join us for our Bible studies.
    3. How do you think that would be received by the church? Would you be willing to park a little further away so that our guests might park a little closer?
  - E. Secondly, I suggest we add the job of parking attendants to our Sunday morning rotation.** Now while this will not be a paid position, this person (or people), would be the first person to greet those visitors when they come in. We would need one in the rear parking lot and one across the street from the front of the sanctuary.
    1. This person would simply say good morning and point our guests/members to the nearest entrance.
    2. They would be available if someone needed some assistance getting in/out of their cars, or they might be needed to bring a wheelchair out to assist someone in need.



3. These two simple things: adding some visitor signs and adding a parking attendant in the front and back would make a big difference.
  4. I want to hear from you on this. What are your thoughts? Is there something else we need to do to make our church look more attractive from the outside? Do you have any suggestions to add thus far?
- III. Now, let's move into the building. Our new parking attendant has just pointed me to the door. What do I see?
- A. If I come up to the front of our building, I see three heavy copper-colored doors and an imposing structure. Do you know what I don't see? Anybody else.
1. What kind of feeling does it evoke to walk into a building such as this—for some it can be reverence and awe...for others, it can create anxiety.
  2. **To remedy this, I would like a person willing to stand outside and open the door for people who enter.** That is an important role. You become a doorkeeper in God's house. We need one at the back door and one at the front door.
  3. When I was back in high school and early college, I worked in a funeral home. I learned so much about people, the good, the bad, and the ugly through that experience.
  4. Do you know that on those nights when we would have visitation, it was my job to open the door? Do you know why I did it? To make people feel welcome in a time of great pain and sorrow.
  5. Having a friendly face and a kind word put people at ease.
  6. That's what we can do here. So let me make sure you are with me so far. There is a parking attendant outside—they point people to the entrance.
  7. And then, standing on the outside of the church is someone whose sole job is to open the door for another. They are there to put a human face on the church building.
- B. Now that a guest has come in the door, what do we do then? Let's think about what not to do, and what to do. I will demonstrate this as I go along. I'm going to be acting it out so you can get the picture.
- C. **What not to do!**
1. **Do not be talking to your fellow greeters while people are coming in.** I recognize that it is wonderful to get to see your friends. But if you are too busy talking to one another, you are not talking to our guests.
  2. **Do not bunch up** with 10 other greeters causing our guests to have to walk around you to enter the building.
  3. **Do not have your hands so full of your own things that you are unable to help anyone else.** If you are holding your coffee cup, your phone, and your Bible while trying to hand out bulletins, you couldn't help that young mom with her hands full.

4. **Do not have a bad attitude or a sour face.** This seems obvious, but if you are grumpy and ill about having to greet, that will come through to those you speak with. A friendly demeanor goes a long way.

**D. What should you do as a greeter?**

1. **Be on the lookout for someone you may not know.** Actively search and take the initiative. Even if you introduce yourself to someone who has been a member here for 50 years, that's ok. It's better than letting a visitor go by because you were too worried about making a mistake.
2. **Spread out.** Having one or two in the back handing out bulletins is plenty. Having a runner, someone who is available to answer questions and help someone get where they are trying to go is plenty.
3. **Have open hands and an open mind to people who are coming here.** Whether they be rich or poor, old, or young, single or with a whole group of children, every visitor is vital. Every visitor should be treated like the Lord himself, for as you know, every person has the divine spark of God's handiwork within them.
4. **Finally, have a servant's heart.** You are not here for yourself. You are in this role to bless others. Being willing to sit down with those you don't know to make them feel more comfortable is what you are called to do. Being willing to walk a few extra steps and introduce them to the people sitting next to them on the row is what you are supposed to do. The key is connection and atmosphere.

IV. Before they leave...

- A. Once someone has sat down and the service has started, much of the greeter's work has been done—but not all of it. How do we help our guests leave well?
- B. **First, we try to get their names.** While some may fill out a guest card, many will not. If you can hand them a card as they sit down, that would be beneficial. If not, then at least ask a guest their name, where they are from, etc. I will do my best to connect with them afterward, but I can't do that if I don't know how best to reach them.
- C. **Next, can you introduce them to me or another staff member?** As you know, I like to walk around pre-service to speak to everyone. If there is someone I don't know, I will introduce myself to them. Would you help me? Would you find me and say, "Go speak to those people over there?" Their names are \_\_\_\_\_. If you have to have a little pad/pen to write down their names, that's okay.
- D. **Then, we thank them for coming.** A good beginning and ending are essential in preaching, and they are essential in hospitality. "Have a good week" or "thank you for coming" can mean so much to people.
- E. **Another thing we can do is give them a parting gift—**
  1. Do you know we have gifts for visitors? We do.
  2. What's in those gifts? A coffee mug with church info, a note pad, a pencil, a few peppermints, etc.

3. It's just something to let them know we are grateful for their visit and something that they might use that will lead them to think of us later. If we could give out a little gift on the way out, that would be great.
- V. All in all, I hope you recognize that hospitality is a vital part of the ministry of First Baptist Church Lenoir. Perhaps we as a staff have not emphasized it enough, and for that, I apologize. Let me leave you with this:
- A. Please know that what you do matters.
  - B. Please know that the impression you give to others matters.
  - C. Please know that your service here is not only noted here on earth, but in Heaven.
  - D. Ultimately, the reason we want to get the welcome right is not that we want to grow the church. It's not because it's a good idea. We have a Biblical mandate to love the stranger...love God and love our neighbor, and in so doing, we honor Christ.
- VI. Do you have any questions for me today, or anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX G

### Teaching the Hospitality Session 1 Getting the Welcome Right Handout

October 2, 2022

1. Hospitality means, “Being a \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. We have \_\_\_\_\_ minutes to make a good first impression.
3. Hospitality is not about being nice, it is about creating \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What kind of feelings do we want our guests to have when they arrive at FBC Lenoir?
5. To improve parking areas, Josh suggests we add \_\_\_\_\_ parking spots and \_\_\_\_\_ attendants.
6. To help ease the imposing nature of our facility Josh suggests putting someone \_\_\_\_\_ the doors to greet our guests as they enter.
7. What not to do as a greeter! We should not \_\_\_\_\_ to one another and fail to greet our guest. We should not \_\_\_\_\_ up. We should not have our \_\_\_\_\_ full. We should not have a \_\_\_\_\_.
8. What to do as a greeter! We should be on the \_\_\_\_\_. We should \_\_\_\_\_ out. We should have \_\_\_\_\_ hands and open \_\_\_\_\_ to all who enter. And most importantly, we should have a \_\_\_\_\_ heart.
9. Before a guest leaves our church, did we \_\_\_\_\_ them for coming? Did we give them a \_\_\_\_\_? Did we get their \_\_\_\_\_? Did we \_\_\_\_\_ them to a staff member?

10. Hospitality at First Baptist Lenoir is more than \_\_\_\_\_ the church. It is fulfilling the Biblical Mandate to welcome the \_\_\_\_\_ and fulfill the \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus gave.

## APPENDIX H

### Teaching the Hospitality Team Session 1 Getting the Welcome Right Survey

Age: (20-29), (30-39), (40-49), (50-59), (60-69), (70-79), (80+)

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions: Please read and respond to each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

1. Rev. Hughes was prepared to teach about Biblical hospitality today.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Before training session one, I felt adequately prepared to be a greeter at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Hospitality is not a Biblical imperative, so we do not need to emphasize it as a fellowship.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. As a greeter, our primary goal is to create a connection with our guests.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. First Baptist Church never makes a guest feel welcome.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. After attending session one, I have a deeper understanding of the Biblical mandate to be hospitable.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. After attending session one, I have a deeper understanding of my responsibilities as a greeter at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Rev. Hughes helped me become a better greeter through teaching during Session one.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Please use the space below for any comments or reflections on the training received today.**

## APPENDIX I

### Teaching the Hospitality Team Session 2 Role-Playing Scenarios

October 9, 2022

Welcome back friends to the second week of Hospitality Training. Today, I will not be doing any lecturing. Rather, I want us to do some hands-on training where we will walk through various role-playing scenarios that will come up when you are greeting. This is a critical component of our hospitality training and I appreciate your commitment to getting the welcome right.

So instead of beginning in the sanctuary, I want us to walk outside. We will start at the back door, and we will make our way around the building. While this will seem strange, I want you to look at this building in the way a first-time visitor would look at it. We will slowly move around the building to the front doors and look at that as well.

In the back parking lot...

1. What are your initial impressions of our building?
2. What do you see that stands out?
3. Are the grounds clean and inviting?
4. Is there anything that says where a guest is supposed to go?
5. Is there anything that says welcome?
6. What improvements, if any, do you suggest we make?

From the front of the building?

1. What are your initial impressions of the front of the building?
2. What do you see that stands out?
3. Are the grounds clean and inviting?
4. Is there anything that says where a guest is supposed to go?
5. Is there anything that says welcome?
6. What improvements, if any, do you suggest we make?

In Training session one, we discussed the use of a parking attendant. If we had someone standing across the street in the parking lot that is frequently used by our members, would that help our guests feel welcome? If there were special visitor parking, would that help our guests feel welcome?

Let's play out a scenario of a parking attendant. **What is the purpose of an attendant? To give a simple welcome, and to point the guests towards the entrance of our church.** If you can give them your name, or get their name, that is fine. But more than anything, people need to know they are welcome and where to go to worship.

Do I have a volunteer?



Now then, I'll play the role of the parking attendant and you play the role as the guest.

Attendant: Good morning! Welcome to First Baptist Lenoir.

Guest: Thank you.

Attendant: Is this your first time here with us?

Guest: Yes.

Attendant. We are so glad you are here. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. The sanctuary is right across the street. You will enter right through those big double doors. Thanks so much for coming.

How did that sound? Was it kind? Was it pushy? Was it over the top? We are looking for an authentic welcome.

This time let's switch it around. Who volunteers to be the parking attendant?

(We will repeat the scenario while I am the guest. We will run through with several people.)

I have a question for you friends. Where is the nearest handicapped entrance? It is at the entrance near the chapel instead of the sanctuary. If someone needs it, we must be able to show them how to get there.

Now we will move to the front steps.

Okay friends, now that we are on the front steps, let me ask you a question. What is more inviting, to have someone outside the door welcoming you in, or to have the door closed and require the guests to open it?

Let me demonstrate. (I will literally stand at the front door and say, "Hello, and welcome to First Baptist. Come right in.") Then, I will go inside, leaving the rest of the hospitality team on the porch, and just stand there for 15 seconds. Hopefully, they will see clearly that having a greeter outside is much more beneficial.

Okay, let's play out the scenario. **What do we want our door person to do? All we want them to do is say, "Welcome to FBC Lenoir, come on in."** That's it.

Who will volunteer to practice this part for me? I will ask several of those in attendance to play the role of doorkeeper and allow them to repeat our phrase, **"Welcome to FBC Lenoir, come on in."**

Now friends, how do we greet people once they have entered our doors? Our parking attendant has sent them in...our door person said good morning and opened the door, what do we do when we see someone come in?

First, we speak to them again. **"Good morning, welcome to First Baptist Lenoir. We are so glad to have you here."**

While this seems obvious, there is no substitute for being spoken to as a first-time guest. I would rather 50 people say good morning than for one person to attend and no one speaks to them. We are here to make sure that doesn't happen.

Once we say hello, it is then that we hand them a bulletin and ask, **“Is this your first time with us?” It may be. If so, we reiterate, “We are so glad you are here.” It is then that we ask them some basic questions to get to know them better. For example, “What is your name? Are you new to the area? We want to keep it light, but we want to try to connect.**

**It is then that we hand them a guest card (available on the back table and also in the pews) and simply say, “We want to have a record of your time with us. If you can fill this out, and hand it to me, one of our staff members, or put it in one of these offering boxes on the way out, we would appreciate it.”**

**Then, it would be appropriate to help them find a seat. As you are walking with them into the sanctuary, please introduce them to the people they sit next to if possible.**

I know that is a lot...so we will practice that. I will be the guest and you will be greeters.

At this time, I will let the people practice welcoming me. I will make sure they speak, try to get a name, and hand the guest a visitor card.

Ultimately, what we want to try to do is make a connection. **The keys here are “Welcome them. If this is their first time, try to get some information from them if you can, specifically their name. Please hand them a visitor card and walk with them into the sanctuary. If you can introduce them to someone else, that’s ideal.**

We will run through several times of doing this with our greeters. I will keep it simple at first, but I will challenge them with a couple of curveballs. For example, when they ask “Is this your first time with us?”, I’ll reply, “No. I’ve been a member here for five years.” What is the proper response for that?

I will encourage our greeters to simply say, “Well I’m new at this job. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. Glad to meet you.”

Another plausible scenario that will need to be addressed is if someone comes up with children, specifically, nursery-aged children.

I see the scenario playing out like this. “Hello Friends, welcome to FBC Lenoir. Who do we have here? My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is my child, \_\_\_\_\_. He/She is \_\_\_\_\_ years old.” Great, we have a nursery that is perfect for his/her age. All the children’s classes are on the second floor. If you will follow me down the steps, I will be happy to take you and introduce you to our nursery staff.”

I would run that scenario a few times so that people get a feel of knowing what to say and where to take the children.

If during the greeting, someone says, “Can you show me the nearest restroom?” Our answer will be sure. Right at the bottom of the stairs are restrooms for you to use. Please follow me and I will show you.”

What do we do if someone gives us the cold shoulder? If you can tell they are not really interested in talking? I think we give the same welcome, offer them a visitor card, and allow them to sit down.

For the most part, people will be good-natured. But what if someone has a bad experience? What if they are rude?

We will simply be kind and considerate...being careful not to be upset about anything. Rather, we will go out of our way to be accommodating.

When the people are leaving what do we do?

I want greeters to return to their original positions just as I begin the benediction. That way, you will be in place when the guests make their exit. At that time, I want you to go and get the visitor’s gifts (in the piece of furniture in the vestibule) and hand the guests of the day a gift.

We want to say, “Thank you for worshipping with us. We hope to see you again soon.” If we can call them by name, that will be even better. Or, if you can walk out with them and introduce them to the pastoral staff, that would be fantastic.

Let’s run that scenario so you can see what that is like.

Okay friends, can you think about any other scenario that we need to address that I might have neglected to mention?

Do you have any questions about what we have discussed?

Now that we have worked through what to do, let’s remember what not to do....

1. **Do not be talking to your fellow greeters while people are coming in.** I recognize that it is wonderful to get to see your friends. But if you are too busy talking to one another, you are not talking to our guests.
2. **Do not bunch up** with 10 other greeters causing our guests to have to walk around you to enter the building.
3. **Do not have your hands so full of your own things that you are unable to help anyone else.** If you are holding your coffee cup, your phone, and your Bible

while trying to hand out bulletins, you couldn't help that young mom with her hands full.

- 4. Do not have a bad attitude or a sour face.** This seems obvious, but if you are grumpy and ill about having to greet, that will come through to those you speak with. A friendly demeanor goes a long way.

If you have heard nothing else, please hear these things.

- 1. Being hospitable is imperative. We must be kind, loving, and considerate if we want someone to return.**
- 2. If you forget everything, just say this. "Welcome to First Baptist Church Lenoir. We are so glad you are with us today." Your genuine kindness will shine through, and people will be blessed.**

## APPENDIX J

### Teaching the Hospitality Team Session 2 Role-playing Scenarios Survey

Age: (20-29), (30-39), (40-49), (50-59), (60-69), (70-79), (80+)

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions: Please read and respond to each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

1. Rev. Josh Hughes was prepared to facilitate the “Role-playing scenarios” training.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. It is important for First Baptist Church Lenoir to have a plan to ensure our guests feel welcomed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Before the Role-playing scenarios, I felt adequately trained as a greeter at FBC Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. The exercise of viewing the outside grounds as a first-time visitor was beneficial.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. First Baptist Lenoir does not prioritize welcoming its guests.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Having the opportunity to use role-playing scenarios was helpful in my training as a greeter.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. After walking through the hospitality training, I feel prepared to be a greeter during a worship service at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I would benefit from having hospitality training at least once a year at First Baptist Church Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Please use the space below for any comments or reflections on the training received today.**

## APPENDIX K

### Revealing the Results of the Mystery Guests to the Hospitality Team of FBC Lenoir

Dec 4, 2022

Hello friends,

Thank you for being with me today. We have had a good meal, and now the time has come for me to reveal to you the full scope of my project, and what it means to FBC Lenoir. As you know, my D. Min project centered around hospitality. My goal was to determine how hospitable FBC Lenoir currently is, and how we can improve that going forward.

That was the goal...how did I test it?

As you know, I gave the congregation a survey that covered their Biblical knowledge of hospitality, and their initial awareness of their responsibility to be hospitable. After the quiz, I taught a study on hospitality, which answered all the questions asked on the test, and reminded them of the high calling to be kind to the guests around them. I then gave them the same test two weeks later and graded those scores. My hope was that their Biblical knowledge and awareness to be hospitable grew. Thank goodness, it did.

The other part of the test, that really reveals so much was the part you participated in. Unknown to you, mystery guests were invited to worship with us. They filled out a 16-question survey to determine how hospitable we are and how they were treated by our fellowship.

There were 22 participants in the study. They came once in the month of September: 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup>. They then filled out a survey about their experience.

We then met on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> for “training.” The same guests then came back on the 4 Sundays afterward, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>. They then filled out the same survey about their worship experience as before.

That’s why we had so many guests in that time frame...you were my guinea pigs. How do you think you did?

I can tell you the training was a success. There was a significant statistical jump between the first visit and the second visit. As part of their survey, they were given a chance to make comments on their experience.

I’m going to read you some of these responses. Now this is not to be taken as demeaning or ugly, but just to show you how people were treated.

Once I share with you some of these responses, I will then tell you what I have learned and what it means going forward for our fellowship.

Six from the first visit  
Six from the second visit

**Recurring Themes:**

1. You the greeters did your jobs. You were kind and welcoming!
2. In a broader sense, we, at FBC Lenoir, are friendly to the people we know...not as friendly to the people we do not. There was a dramatic difference in the experiences of the guests when they were somehow connected to FBC Lenoir.
3. To each guest, worship was meaningful—different aspects were recognized (organ, choir, children’s sermon, sermon, etc.) While they were here, they worshipped well which is truly what we are shooting for each Sunday.
4. Finally, it is not enough for the welcome to come just from us...we must empower the congregation to welcome others as well. That is what makes or breaks a visit.

**Things I would have done differently over the course of the project itself.**

1. I would have started the project on a different date. I started on September 4<sup>th</sup> (Labor Day weekend.) Only 4 of my 27 guests came on that day. Many obviously had other plans. Asking mystery guests to participate over four weeks, with one being a holiday weekend led to an inauspicious start.
2. Secondly, if conducting the project again, I would have given the mystery guests more time to come. Instead of cramming 25 mystery guests over a four-week period, I would have made the visiting period 6 weeks. More time would have made scheduling easier for the mystery guests.
3. In like mind, if I was to do the project again, I would have made the time between the mystery guests’ first and second visit longer apart. I only gave our church two weeks between visiting groups. Such a short period not only made the training feel rushed, but it did not allow for some of the suggestions made by the hospitality team to be put in place. For example, the hospitality team suggested having “visitor parking signs” made and put into place. It was impossible to have this done in such a short period of time.

**Initial reactions from reading surveys.**

1. Churches that are committed to growth, especially in a time when every congregation is rebounding from the Covid 19 pandemic, must take responsibility to get the welcome right. It must be well thought out and executed flawlessly. There need to be greeters stationed in strategic places and trained to speak to the guests in a kind and loving manner. The facility must be well-maintained and clean. Clear signage to the worship area as well as the nursery, restrooms, etc. should be visible. Every step must be taken to prepare for the guest’s arrival, and not just scramble haphazardly when they do come for worship. This is the bare minimum for each congregation.
2. The mystery guest surveys point out how important it is for the minister to take time and connect with people before and after service. While greeters are essential in connection, the role the minister plays must not be missed. Many commented



on how the church staff spoke and made the guests feel welcomed and appreciated. It is a significant benefit if the minister can make a connection with a guest, specifically in calling them by name or by having a minute to converse and to get to know them. While many ministers are rushed on a Sunday morning and do not have the time, perhaps other staff can fill the role. Leadership coming from the staff concerning hospitality is essential for a good visit.

3. So, with the understanding that the greeters are in place and ministers are trying to connect with guests personally, the mystery guest surveys pointed out what I long feared: that the congregation spoke to the ones they knew but were a bit cold (or even apathetic) to the ones they did not know. Despite the best efforts of the staff/greeters, many of the mystery guests felt like they were not properly welcomed at FBC Lenoir because the congregants sitting near them did not try to connect with the guests personally. What makes this realization even more painful is that in the Hospitality Awareness Tests (both A&B), one of the questions specifically asks who is responsible for greeting a guest. And the answer given, by almost all who participated in the study was all believers all the time. What this tells me is that they know what to do, yet they failed to follow through when it mattered most. Helping the congregation realize that every individual who attends must participate in hospitality. In fact, their role in connecting with guests is paramount to a guest having a good visit. If the congregation fails to participate as they should, then most likely, the guest will not return.
4. Ultimately, one must remember that Hospitality is a spiritual gift. The Spirit of God empowers the church with spiritual gifts so that the Kingdom of God may be furthered. Some people are simply not hospitable by nature. Some are effervescent and friendliness flows out of them. The key is to put our gifted people in the right places so that we might get the welcome right. With that said, just because something doesn't come naturally does not mean we are free from the responsibility to get better at it. For our church to continue to grow into a hospitable place, then everyone must take on that responsibility, even if it is more difficult for them personally.

#### **Plans going forward:**

1. I think we continue with our hospitality program with the changes made in our training. The training made a real difference that can be measured. In fact, the satisfaction of each guest's visit grew an average of 5.3% after the training. If this same study was run 100 more times with 22 new mystery guests each time, then the statistics show that the post-test would be significantly higher than the pre-test 96% of the time. The training works. Putting people inside/outside the church works. Having someone by the elevator makes a difference. Giving out gift bags is important, etc.
2. Furthermore, I think it will be important to do training for our next hospitality groups so that they may know what is expected of them. This is not a one-and-done—training needs to take place every 2-3 months so that we are putting our best foot forward.

3. When we think about recruitment to the hospitality team, it might be necessary to ask the congregation to join if “hospitality” is their spiritual gift or if they are happy to meet new people. We don’t want to put square pegs in round holes.
4. I will inform the congregation of these findings and seek to determine the best way forward for them—I’m thinking of doing what the Women on Mission began several years ago. It would be to have people in a designated area responsible for speaking to people in their area. If we divide the congregation up in sections and have certain people for certain sections (from the congregation), that might really help. That way it would be a more organic welcome, not one that is forced or expected, like from you or the ministerial staff.

After hearing all of this...what are your suggestions?

### Conclusion

The study was a success in that the training with the greeters and the improvements made to the facility significantly improved the experience of the mystery guests. With that said, however, the greater truth from the study was it brought into focus the preeminence of the congregation’s role in welcoming a visitor to a church. According to this research, nothing was more important in revealing the quality of the guests’ experience than the connections made by the congregation to the guest on a personal level. Getting church-wide buy-in is necessary for these changes to truly take root.

## APPENDIX L

### Teaching the Hospitality Team Session 3—The Responses of Mystery Guests Survey

Age: (20-29), (30-39), (40-49), (50-59), (60-69), (70-79), (80+)

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions: Please read and respond to each statement carefully. Circle the choice that best represents your experience at First Baptist Church Lenoir.**

1. Rev. Hughes was prepared to discuss the experiences of greeters at First Baptist Lenoir as well as the responses of the Mystery guests who have recently visited.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Rev. Hughes listened carefully to my experiences as a greeter at First Baptist Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I found the responses of the mystery guests to be helpful in getting the welcome right at First Baptist Church Lenoir

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I am happy that mystery guests were used in this project because they give honest feedback about how well they were greeted at First Baptist Lenoir.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. The training I received as a member of the hospitality team at First Baptist Lenoir was unhelpful in my role as a greeter.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Being a greeter at First Baptist Lenoir has been significant for me on my faith journey.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. The hospitality team would benefit from yearly training on getting the welcome right.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Rev. Hughes has helped First Baptist Church become a more welcoming church by conducting this Doctor of Ministry project.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Please use the space below for any comments or reflections on the training received today.**

## APPENDIX M

### Sample of Mystery Guest Responses from First Visit

- From ID 0729, a male, 70-79, visited on September 25, 2022:  
“The two pastors circulated among the congregation and certainly made us feel welcome. The only other folks who greeted us were the people sitting in front of us and that happened at the behest of the pastor when he asked folks to greet whoever was in front or behind us. A few folks said hello on the way out. I think I sensed a warmth among church members but not a particular warmth toward me as a visitor.”
- From ID 0817, a female, 70-79, visited on September 4, 2022:  
“Only the greeter and his wife, and the minister really spoke to me. During the greeting time, a lady in front turned around and said hello, but didn’t show interest in my presence. Most congregants only spoke to each other and weren’t interested in outsiders visiting.”
- From ID 0123, a male, 50-59, visited on September 18, 2022:  
“The greeters did their job handing out the bulletin. They were friendly enough. The members of the congregation seem to be welcoming to those they knew. Both pastors spoke to us. During the meet and greet your neighbor, the folks didn’t seem too friendly. The man in front of me didn’t even turn around to say hello. It was a sideways howdy.”
- From ID 0418, a female, 60-69, visited on September 18, 2022:  
“I was greeted by a person at the door and given a bulletin. I found a seat and sat there at least four minutes until I was greeted by the Pastor. A gentleman on my row introduced himself and we chatted. I was surprised the person in front of me never spoke until the congregation was asked to say hello to one another.”

## APPENDIX N

### Sample of Mystery Guests Responses from Second Visit

- From ID 0123, a male, 50-59, visited on October 16, 2022  
“My second visit was much more relaxed and welcoming. The people were more friendly during our return visit. The worship experience was spiritual and a blessing. We will most likely re-visit periodically.”
- From ID 0817, a female, 70-79, visited on October 23, 2022  
“First trip I was invisible. 2<sup>nd</sup> trip was much more friendly. Teach folks to be warmer and friendlier, to introduce themselves, not just a slight turn of the head with an obligatory, ‘Hello.’ If I lived in Lenoir, I would certainly consider joining First Baptist Church.”
- From ID 0803, a male, 70-79, visited on October 23, 2022  
“I have many good friends who attend First Baptist Lenoir. Being there is a comfortable feeling. One significant impression was that I never saw anyone who seemed unhappy about being there. I felt welcomed and if looking for a church, First Baptist Lenoir would be at the front of the line. Although the interactions were friendly, I never got the impression that anyone who did not know me made a deliberate effort to meet and welcome me. All in all, a very good experience. I would hope my church would do as well.”
- From ID 0923, a female, 50-59, visited on October 16, 2022  
“I enjoyed our visited to FBC Lenoir. The second visit seemed more receptive. It could have been the recognition of our first visit or something else. Whatever the reason, it was nice. I do not believe there is a perfect church, because we are an imperfect people; however, I do believe there are places of worship who strive to represent Christ and His teachings. I feel this at FBC Lenoir.”

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