

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

A STEP BY STEP APPROACH TO GUEST AND NEW MEMBER ASSIMILATION

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By

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LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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ABSTRACT

CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER: A STEP BY STEP APPROACH TO NEW MEMBER AND GUEST ASSIMILATION

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This project was born out of frustrating experiences at assimilating new members into church life, and disheartening statistics proving this is a common problem in Kentucky Southern Baptist churches. After reviewing literature pertaining to the topic, it became apparent there was a need for a simple, workable program for churches to use in assimilation. This project highlights the CONNECT strategy, a small group Sunday School program, which this author created to put into place at a model church. After gathering statistics from this model church since the program's inception, it is evident that this CONNECT strategy does work for assimilation.

Abstract length: 100 words.

*This project is dedicated
to my lovely wife, Jessica.
Thanks for sticking so close by my side
as we walked through this journey of a thousand miles,
step by step together.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In February of 2006, the Kentucky Baptist State Evangelism Director Dan Garland presented an “Assimilation Analysis” of Kentucky Baptist Churches over a five year period (2001-2005). This analysis included five year total additions to KBC churches, resident member growth, Sunday School attendance growth, worship attendance growth, Sunday School attendance assimilation, worship assimilation and average assimilation. As these statistics were unveiled for the first time, conference attendees sat in awe at the contrast of new members versus overall membership growth over the last five years in Kentucky.

According to the statistics, 152,677 new members had been added to Kentucky Baptist churches from 2001-2005. However, during that time, overall average worship attendance had grown by only 13,684, and Sunday School attendance had declined to a negative 418.¹ Furthermore, resident membership had declined by 4,909.²

These statistics are disheartening. It is clear that the Kentucky Baptist Convention is losing as many people as it is gaining. While it is true that some of these numbers reflect Southern Baptists leaving one Southern Baptist church in order to join another, the main problem, according to Garland, is that the “back door of our Baptist churches is way too big.”

During this conference, Garland went on to explain that people give their life to Christ and never get involved in the life of the church in a significant way. He said

¹ Appendix A

² Dan Garland, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference* (Beacon Hill Baptist, Somerset, Ky. February 7, 2006).

that, even though they are a member, they never take ownership in the church through a small group or ministry team. The result is that, inevitably, tough times come to the new member, and no one from church is aware. The new member needs godly encouragement from the church body, but those needs have gone unnoticed by the church. It is not that the church does not care; it is that there is not a suitable support group in place to learn of these needs. Before long, these new members grow disillusioned with the church. They either look for another church, or worse, quit attending church altogether.

Charles Arn, a church growth enthusiast, has determined through research that 80% of the people who leave church do so within the first six months of joining.³ This research has been confirmed by others and indicates that those who leave a church seem to do so soon upon joining. The reality is that something must be done quickly upon a member's joining a church in order to keep this from happening.

Thom Rainer, former dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and the current president of Lifeway Books, has concluded through his research that "If a new member does not discover new friends, get involved in a small group, and find a place of ministry, 80% will drop out within one year."⁴ In joining these two discoveries, it is clear how important it is for people to find a small group and do so fast.

³ Charles Arn, "How to Assimilate New Members Into Your Church," available from <http://www.netresults.org/workshops/arn.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 September 2006.

⁴ Darryl Wilson, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference* (Beacon Hill Baptist Church, Somerset, Ky. February 7, 2006).

In successful member retention, the idea of quickly connecting the new member to a small group and ministry team seem to be the best answer. In support of this, Rainer found that over the course of five years, only 16% of those who never became part of a small group, such as a Sunday School class, remained an active member of the church. In stark contrast, 83% of those who did get involved in a small group, such as a Sunday School class, remained active in that church after five years.⁵

Based on these statistics, it is evident that the topic of assimilation must be seriously addressed. For the purpose of this project, interviews were conducted with Senior Pastors, Discipleship Pastors, State and Regional Discipleship Directors, and lay ministers across the state of Kentucky. It was found that the majority of churches have no intentional plan to assimilate new members into Sunday School and ministry teams. Of the 61 surveys collected for this thesis from churches across Kentucky, not a single church is currently implementing every facet of this particular project.⁶ Kentucky Baptist churches need an intentional process in order to connect with and assimilate guests and new members into the life of the church. People are too important to be losing them as fast as they are gained. The “back door of the church” cannot be ignored any longer.

This thesis project is being pursued for this purpose. For the purposes of this project, an original, step-by-step, assimilation program and plan has been created and developed by the author in an attempt to move guests to church membership and involve these new members in Sunday School and ministry teams as soon as possible. The thesis is driven by the aforementioned Kentucky Baptist Convention five year research results,

⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 45.

⁶ Appendix B

showing that Kentucky Baptist churches are losing new members through the “back door,” and the research that proves that assimilation helps to prevent this problem. Since it is evident from interviews that most Kentucky Baptist Churches do not have a specific, easy to follow and effective way to retain new members, this project has been developed to help KBC churches close the “back door.” Within the paper, data will prove the positive impact that this new, original program has had on the model church.

The Statement of the Problem

Acknowledging the apparent problem in Kentucky Baptist churches, the question must be asked, “What could be done in those first few months to keep the new member from walking out the back door?” This thesis has been developed to answer that question. Within these pages, a plan to quickly and effectively connect the new member into the life of the church will be presented. Using Beacon Hill Baptist Church (BHBC) of Somerset, Kentucky, as a model, a process beginning with outreach to the community and ending with dedicated, committed new members will serve as an example to other Kentucky Baptist churches of how to effectively assimilate new members into the life of the church. Prior to this project, BHBC did not have a plan such as this to assimilate guests and new members, making it an ideal church to use as a model. Since the implementation of this original program in August of 2004, statistics showing retention and growth has proved this thesis.

Definition of Terms

The “*back door*” of churches is an abstract way to refer to the surprisingly silent exit from the church by many church members. These are people who join the church and then turn up mysteriously missing with no good-bye or explanation. The

initial joining of the church is referred to as the “front door” and the idea is to get and keep them involved so that they never find a way of escaping (through a “back door”) from the commitment of being involved in the life and ministry of the local church body.

Assimilation refers to the process of drawing guests into membership and new members into active participation in the life of the church. Thus, they are “assimilated” into the local church body. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church in California, further defines assimilation as “the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church.”⁷

Garland takes it a step further by stating, “Assimilation is connecting people to the body and mission of Christ through relationships, small group involvement, expectations, and ministry involvement in order to lead them to become fully devoted followers of Christ.”⁸ Another good definition of assimilation comes from Truman Brown and James E. Hightower, authors of *After They Join: 10 Ways to Assimilate New Members*, who believe it is “the meaningful incorporation of individuals into the body of Christ so that they have a sense of belonging and are thus involved in the ministry of that community.”⁹

It is also important to define the word “congregation,” as this word will be differentiated from the word “church” in chapters three and four. In this project, specifically in chapters three and four, the word “congregation” will refer to a group of

⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 309.

⁸ Garland, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference*, February 7, 2006.

⁹ Truman Brown and James E. Hightower, *After They Join: 10 Ways to Assimilate New Members* (Convention Press: Nashville, 1994), 9.

people who generally gather for church services.¹⁰ While the word “church” will, in some places in this paper, be referring to the physical place that God’s people come to worship, in chapters three and four specifically, “church” will be used in the strictly biblical sense to refer to the “called out ones” of God (1 Pt 2:9). In the congregation there are many who have never committed publicly to be identified as a member of the “church.” Thus, for the purposes of this paper, “church” will refer to those who have emerged from the anonymity of the “congregation” to publicly join with the “called out ones.”

The Statement of Limitations

For this project, a model church, Beacon Hill Baptist Church, Somerset, Kentucky, was used. While this project could be used in any size or type of church, this project is limited to the experiences and statistics derived from this particular church. The demographics of BHBC are as follows: Resident membership, 996; Sunday School enrollment, 1219; Average weekly worship attendance, 550; Average weekly Sunday School attendance, 500.

Another limitation of this project is that the statistics used to drive it come from the state of Kentucky only. Due to the apparent problem in Kentucky, and the author’s interest, experience and future work based strongly in Kentucky, it appears advantageous to limit the focus to the said state. Other states may or may not experience the same problems; however, this particular project could easily be adapted to help any church with the issue of closing the “back door.”

¹⁰ Catherine Soanes, *Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Also, for the purposes of this project, the small group that is focused on will be Sunday School. In the Kentucky Baptist context, and BHBC, specifically, Sunday School serves as the most powerful and vibrant small group atmosphere. It is here that needs are discussed and cared for at a small and intimate level that simply cannot occur in the church as a whole. While this project could be used in other small group settings, for the purpose of this paper, only Sunday School will be addressed.

This thesis paper also will not detail the components of a healthy new member's class. Although the new member's class is a vital component of any assimilation process and will be included in the process of this personal assimilation strategy, this project will only briefly mention what the class should consist of without going into detail concerning all that will be covered in the class.

It is also important to note that the assimilation strategy presented here will not be an exhaustive strategy. There will be practices followed in the model church that will not be included in this thesis. The purpose of this program is to research and then include those components that are deemed to be the best practices to put to work in the local church for assimilating and retaining new members in the life of the church. The effort of this project is to make this process as effective *and* simple as possible.

The Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis of this project corresponds to our biblical call to care for one another. As a newborn baby is dependent upon daily care and nurturing in order to grow and develop into an adult, the new member is dependent upon others to come alongside him/her and care for them as well. Much of this thesis project will center on the responsibility to care for one another.

The Biblical basis for our accountability and responsibility to care for “one another” is widespread (Jn 13:35; Acts 1:8; Eph 5:21; Col 3:16; 1 Thes 3:12, 5:11; Jas 5:16; 1 Pt 4:10, 1 Jn 1:7). Where appropriate (particularly in the Sunday School organization section), portions of this project will include the breakdown of these passages and how they relate to the care of a new believer/new member. The theoretical aspect of this project will be covered in the explanation of Scripture on the many New Testament expectations to care for one another. Specifically, this project will focus on how it will look to be carried out in a small group such as Sunday School.

Concerning the theoretical importance of a ministry team, the Bible makes it clear that each Christian is given a spiritual gift by God (1 Cor 12). It is to be expected that the believer will use this gift in God’s church. The church that does not seek to guide each and every member in finding their gift is a church that is doing less than what God has called her to do. This project calls for the help of the Sunday School class in guiding members to find their spiritual gift and begin using them to further the Kingdom of God.

The Statement of Methodology

The title of this thesis project will be “Connecting With One Another: A Step-By-Step Approach to Guest and New Member Assimilation.” Small groups and ministry teams are the driving force in this project. It is highly likely that many people walk out of service in the local church because they never connect with any one in the church who is aware of their personal needs. The research by Rainer and Arn strongly suggests that there is no better way to effectively meet these needs than in the small group setting. If

new members are connected to a group such as this, then the great problem of the “back door” can be effectively addressed.

Based on the statistics presented in this thesis, it is imperative that a new member connects as soon as possible to a Sunday School class and a ministry team. If this occurs, the “back door of the church” may well be shut for that individual. After conducting numerous interviews with persons overseeing discipleship and church growth in Kentucky churches, it is obvious that a program such as this is absent. Thus, this “CONNECT” project was born, in an attempt to put a lock on the “back door.”

Along with this process, it will be important to organize Sunday School classes so that every member of the class can be involved in some kind of ministry in the class. As previously stated, God has gifted each member with a gift to be used in the church (1 Cor 12:7). The more a person is involved in the life and ministry of a particular church, the greater sense of significance he or she will experience in the work of God in that church.¹¹ The more significance a person senses in that church body, the more likely they will stay away from the back door of the church.

In assimilating new members into the church body, a church of any size is made small and personal. When a new member is involved in a small group (8-15 people), that person cannot come up missing without a wide knowledge of their departure.¹² The problem in many churches is that a new member can join and quickly come up missing without anyone knowing about it. In contrast, when the new member is assimilated into a small group, their departure will be more readily noticed. The hope is

¹¹ Please see footnote 1 in chapter 5.

¹² Thom Rainer, *Simple Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 153.

that, with this wide knowledge of their departure, much effort will be made by that individual's class to reach out and regain the member who has fallen away, making the likelihood of retention increase dramatically.

The positive results of this project will be identified by growth in Sunday School attendance over a two and one-half year period at the model church, and by retention of first time guests who eventually assimilate into membership and active church participation. The program designed for this thesis project was instituted at BHBC in August, 2004. Results have been measured by tracking first time guests and Sunday School enrollment. The percentage of first time guests who become new members has been recorded, as has the percentage of new members who enroll in a small group Sunday School class. Both growth and retention has been positively recorded since the program's inception.

The statistics presented in the introduction will form the thrust and passion behind why an assimilation method is so sorely needed in every church. Something must be done to encourage each and every individual who joins the church to find a small group and ministry team. The core of this project will be geared toward walking the church through a process in which it is more likely for new members to get involved quickly. The idea is that when this process is carried out in the life of the church, then a large part of new member assimilation will have been accomplished.

Summaries of each chapter will follow. These summaries will outline the specific plan that has been developed for this thesis project and will show how the solution to the assimilation problem will be reached.

Chapter 1: This chapter provides the introduction to this work and is entitled accordingly.

Chapter 2: “The Church Connecting With Her Community.” This chapter will begin by discussing ways in which the church can reach out to her community. Practices such as servant evangelism and community surveys will be mentioned in this chapter. It is practices such as these that will draw people to become first time guests at the church.

In this chapter the importance of issues such as church property, signage, greeters, ushers and everything that has to do with a person’s first impression of the church will be addressed. In reaching out to the community with the hopes that they will become guests, the church needs to be ready when they decide to come.

Chapter 3: “The Community Connecting With the Congregation.” This chapter will examine ways to reach out to first time guests so that they decide to come back again. Guest follow-up issues will be addressed. This duty will be shared by the pastor, staff, ministry teams, and Sunday School classes. This process will utilize mailings, phone calls, personal visits and e-mails in order to show the church’s interest in and appreciation of all guests. The results of this effort is that they do decide to come back a second time, as will be documented in the gathered statistics. This chapter will feature three years worth of personal records from the model church, BHBC, and how successful the process of reaching first time guests has been.

Chapter 4: “The Congregation Connecting With the Church.” This chapter will walk through a practical approach of how to connect every new member to a Sunday School class. This involves the commitment counseling team, Sunday School teachers and classes, and the education and senior pastor. This chapter will also detail the

importance of the new member's class. One of the primary functions of the new member's class will be to emphasize the importance of and help each new member in finding a Sunday School class. The components of this class will be overviewed to show what needs to happen in order to make the class a success.

Chapter 5: "The Church Connecting In Commitment to Christ." This chapter will discuss the importance of every member discovering and using their spiritual gifts and talents on a ministry team. In this particular program, the Sunday School class will provide help for each member of their class as they find what specific gifts, abilities and passions God has given them. This will be done through a spiritual gift test, formulated by Lifeway, the Southern Baptist Convention's personal resource center. Ongoing discipleship training courses will be discussed, as well as some creative ideas for new believers to be discipled in small groups by the pastor. Another important component of this chapter will be the subject of mentoring, including what it should and should not be, and how to begin a successful mentoring program.

Chapter 6: Beginning with this chapter, the Sunday School class organization will be overviewed. The name of this chapter will be "Sunday School: The Lock on the Back Door of the Church." This chapter will detail an organized approach of how a Sunday School class can be carried out to involve every member in ministry. An entire chapter will be devoted to this subject since small groups such as Sunday School are essential to the long-term retention of members.

For this thesis project, an acronym has been created and designed by this author for use by the Sunday School classes: C.O.N.N.E.C.T. Each letter will stand for an important class ministry function. The name of this Sunday School program will be

“Connecting With One Another.” Covered under this acronym are the critical themes of Prayer, Evangelism, Ministry, Missions, Discipleship, Fellowship and Mentoring. The idea is to involve every single Sunday School member on a particular ministry team. The role of the teacher will be to connect every Sunday School member to a class and church ministry team, using the results of the spiritual gift test.

The first C in the C.O.N.N.E.C.T. acronym stands for *Calling on the Lord in Prayer*. This emphasis will cover the aspect of prayer. The verse that corresponds to this letter is James 5:16 where believers are instructed to “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed (NIV).”¹³ Those who test high in the area of prayer can minister on this team.

The O in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Obeying God’s Call to be Witnesses to our World*. This covers God’s call to the church in the area of evangelism. 1 Thessalonians 3:12 says “and may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows.” Those who test high in the area of evangelism can minister on this team.

The two N’s in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stand for *Noticing and Ministering to the Needs of our Class and Community* and *Noticing and Ministering to the Needs of our World*. Both of these N’s share the same verse of Scripture. This verse is 1 Peter 4:10, which says “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.” Those who test high in the area of ministry or missions can serve on either of these teams.

¹³ All Scripture references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

The E in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Equipping God's people with the Word of God*. Colossians 3:16 says "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." Those who test high in the area of teaching or instruction may find themselves fulfilled on this class ministry team.

The second C in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Caring for Each Other in Fellowship*. 1 John 1:7 says "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." Spending quality time together as a class will in time develop a bond of fellowship that will last a lifetime. This love for each other can be a powerful witness to the world. John 13:35 says "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Those who test high in the area of fellowship or hospitality can serve on this class ministry team.

The T stands for *Training Others to be Fully Devoted Disciples*. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." This aspect covers the idea of discipling new believers/members or class members, so that they can grow and develop into all that God would desire for them. This might involve the teacher training another class member to start a new Sunday School unit. This may simply be someone on the prayer team training and involving a new member of the prayer team. The idea is that believers must take time to train and build others up in the Lord.

Chapter 7: This chapter will form the conclusion of this project and will be entitled "Yes, Something Can Be Done!" This chapter will pull everything together and call upon the church to begin caring immediately for all those whom God moves to join with the local church body. This final chapter will review the role of prayer in the

incredible problem of the “back door” in churches. It will also review God’s expectation for believers to care for another so that the back door will be shut. This chapter will close by emphasizing that all believers are called and accountable for the well-being of one another. A review of the research will be presented and it will be shown how the program has positively impacted the model church.

In Southern Baptist life the topic of assimilation is a monumental issue. This thesis does not pretend to address a problem of which others have not been previously aware. It has been covered through the ministries of men such as Thom Rainer in *High Expectations* and Chuck Lawless in *Membership Matters*. With that in mind however, it does seem that a simple and effective assimilation program is a great need in all churches of all denominations today. There is still much room for a step-by-step program that is simple enough for a church to absorb and put into practice. Perhaps this thesis project has created one.

The Review of the Literature

The review of literature pertaining to the subject matter of this thesis project has come from books, magazines and internet articles, and interviews with discipleship pastors. While this section will briefly address these resources, it is important to note that more extensive review of the literature is integrated throughout the paper.

The bookstores visited have included Lifeway, Amazon, Barnes and Nobles and Christian Book Distributors. The books obtained and read include, but are certainly not limited to, *Finding Them, Keeping Them* by Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin; *Beyond the First Visit* by Gary McIntosh; *Assimilating New Members* by Lyle Schaller; *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People Are Leaving the Church* by William D.

Hendricks, *Membership Matters* by Chuck Lawless, *The Inviting Church* by Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas, and *Reach: A Team Approach to Evangelism and Assimilation* by Scott Wilkins. Each of these books, as well as the countless others researched for this project, gave a strong basis and proof of the need of each of the various components in this project, although no single book included every component of this project.

Also included in this research are articles from journals such as *Christianity Today* and *Church Central*. Bible commentaries such as *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* and *The NIV Application Commentary* were used in the interpretation of scriptures. Audio messages from leaders such as John Maxwell and Nelson Searcy were beneficial as well, as they provided personal insight into various assimilation programs, and stories of what these programs look like in real life.

Overall, the literature that was consulted consisted of studies dealing with assimilating new members into the life of the church, and involving them as active members. Many of the books provided statistical evidence, while others shared and expounded on new ideas for assimilation and how to make this work in the local church. From this literature, several ideas were born, as the various books and articles provided a starting point for brainstorming. However, it also became apparent, through extensive research, that there is no program that incorporates every aspect of this program.

These resources served quite valuable in both acknowledging and addressing the problem of the “back door” in churches. Through the literature reviewed, the basis of this project was validated, and helpful ideas for solving the problem were presented.

After thoughtful review of this literature, this original project was born, as a need for this type of system was apparent.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHURCH CONNECTING WITH HER COMMUNITY

Perhaps a great place to start in better assimilation is to be honest with God that the church has failed in this area. Based on the statistics shown, it is apparent that most churches do not assimilate well. The question that is tied closely to the Christ-exalting mission as a church, then, is - how can more visitors be retained?¹⁴ This chapter will look specifically at how the first impressions team and community servant evangelism can be used to positively impact visitor retention.

Kingdom consequences depend on the church. The following questions should be asked by individual churches: How does this church need to improve assimilation and retention? What strategies can be designed to insure that needed improvement happens? How can better visitor retention take place? What are the individual members willing to do, say, or spend to increase retention? With these questions firmly in place, the process of successful assimilation will begin.¹⁵

First Impressions Team

The process of guest and new member assimilation begins long before the guest enters the church building. In fact, most guests begin subconsciously forming opinions of the church as they pull into the parking lot. Darryl Wilson, Kentucky Baptist Adult Sunday School Director, recently shared with Kentucky Baptist conference attendees that a person often makes up their mind as to whether or not they will return to that church during the first seven to ten minutes of their visit.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bob Nelson, "How to Increase Visitor Retention" available from http://www.freechristianleadertraining.org/4-3-13-visitor_retention.htm; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Ken Johnson, a Church Central Consultant Trainer, agrees with Wilson and says, “While most pastors devote countless hours to sermon preparation and delivering their “Sunday Best,” most guests decide whether or not to return in the first 10 minutes after they enter the parking lot.” Johnson believes that the ultimate question is “Are guests welcome at your house? Do you spend time preparing for them? Conversely, how much time do you spend getting ready for guests at church?”¹⁷

With this reality in mind, there are some issues that must be dealt with from the start. Each church must realize how important the first 7-10 minutes are to first time guests. It cannot be ignored that guests are forming opinions of the church before they ever hear a sermon or worship song.

The first issue, and one of critical importance, is that of the condition of the church facilities.¹⁸ A well kept church can communicate that “we care about our church and we care about you.”¹⁹ It is widely recognized that the church facilities can be an obstacle when there are no signs to direct people to entrances, the nursery, or the rest rooms.²⁰ It has been well-documented that the condition of the church facility and parking lot may even communicate broadly to the guest as to how the church feels about them.²¹

¹⁶ Wilson, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference*, February 7, 2006.

¹⁷ Ken Johnson, “How to Make Visitors Guests and Extend Hospitality to the Hurting,” available from <http://www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/article.html/id/24375>; Internet; accessed 13 June 2006.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference*, February 7, 2006.

¹⁹ Gary McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 45.

²⁰ Calvin Ratz, *A Welcoming Church Assessment Pack: From Friendly to Connecting* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Leadership Resources Publishing, 2003), 2.

²¹ Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas, *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation* (New York City: The Alban Institute Publications, 1987), 91.

Rick Ezell has aptly commented on the importance of church property in an article entitled “4 Keys to Welcoming Guests in the Smaller Church.” He writes:

Cracked mirrors in our homes, if left that way over time, are often overlooked and ignored. (The mind plays a trick on us and we don’t notice the crack any longer.) Show that same cracked mirror to someone, seeing it for the first time, and the crack is glaring and obvious. Churches have cracked mirrors that have become overlooked and ignored by its members. The cracked mirror may be something as simple as the frayed carpet in the foyer or the hollow sound system in the sanctuary to something more complex as the kind-hearted person who is overbearing and obnoxious to new people or the music leader who sings every song at the same tempo. Cracked mirrors need to be repaired or replaced or removed. To a first time guest these “cracks” are glaring. They cause the newcomer to question, “Why doesn’t someone do something about this? Doesn’t the church care? How could this church be so blind?”²²

In examining the church property, churches must ask themselves, are the lawn and shrubs attended well, is the paint peeling or the mortar crumbling, is there trash on the floor, is a church sign or window broken?²³ These questions may seem petty, but they are of enormous importance when people are making decisions within the first 7-10 minutes on whether or not to return as a guest for a second time.

Concerning the parking lot, Chris Forbes of Church Central has written an excellent article entitled “Is Your Church Parking Lot Driving People Away?”²⁴ In this article he details five keys to a well run parking lot. By putting these keys and principles into practice, churches can make sure that the parking lot does not dissuade persons from returning to the church.

²² Rick Ezell, “4 Keys to Welcoming Guests in the Smaller Church,” available from http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/lwc_cda_article; Internet; accessed 14 March 2007.

²³ McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, 45-48.

²⁴ Chris Forbes, “Is Your Church Parking Lot Driving People Away?” available from <http://www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/id/24222/template/article.html>; Internet; accessed 14 March 2007.

The first key is to provide adequate space for all the people who come to the church. Most church architects recommend one space for every 1.8 people attending the church. The second key is to make sure there is clear signage with easy to follow instructions. The third key is to recruit and train parking lot greeters. The fourth is to designate specific parking for guests. The fifth key to a well run parking lot is to provide easy access from parking lots to buildings.²⁵

In addition to the outside shape of the church is the attractiveness of the inside as guests enter the facility. Rainer has shared his findings concerning the importance of guests and the church building in an article he wrote entitled “15 Ways to Reach the Un-churched.” He writes:

The formerly un-churched spoke cogently of the necessity of having neat, clean and updated facilities to reach people. "I saw a lot of things through un-churched eyes before I became a Christian a few months ago," one participant responded. "What surprised me was how many churches let their facilities and their landscaping go to the dogs. It was as if they were advertising 'we don't care' by the way they looked. I sure didn't go back to those places." Have an outsider look at your facilities honestly and objectively. Ask her to go to the restrooms, kitchen, sanctuary and offices. Let her look at classrooms and preschool space. Ask her opinion about the grounds and landscaping. In my consultation ministry, I have discovered that most eyesores can be remedied with a few donations and volunteer labor. And it is amazing to see how such projects can be tasks of church unity. Realize that one of the most critical areas for cleanliness, attractiveness and modern equipment is the preschool. Dozens of formerly un-churched people told us that the quality of the preschool was one of the key issues that attracted them to a church.²⁶

In researching this particular thesis project, it has become obvious that the condition of the church building (inside and out), property and parking lot is important

²⁵ Chris Forbes, “Is Your Church Parking Lot Driving People Away?” Internet.

²⁶ Thom Rainer, “15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched,” available from http://www.churchexecutive.com/2005/07/15_proven_ways_to_reach_the_unchurched.asp; Internet; accessed 14 March 2007.

enough to devote a ministry team to this issue alone.²⁷ At BHBC, the model church, a Buildings and Grounds Ministry Team has been created. This team is responsible for quarterly evaluations and improvements of the property in order to better reach people for Jesus.

On occasion, this ministry will discover needs that will require a large amount of money to satisfactorily address. If any major cost items are necessary, this team brings all recommendations for improvement to the church body in a business meeting. A committee such as this, made up of individuals with an eye for detail, knowledge of landscaping and building maintenance, and a heart to reach the community, is very important to the overall goal of drawing new people to the church.

It is incredibly important not to underestimate the power of first impressions. In fact, Prism Leadership recently uncovered the importance of the five senses when it comes to first impressions of a building. They have translated these realities into how well churches connect with their many first time guests each week.

The truth is that every guest is applying their five senses to what they experience in church. This application is likely subconscious, yet the five senses play an incredibly valuable part in whether or not they return. It is wise to take the five senses and create a mental checklist of how the church is performing in each area. The five senses with application are:

Sight – Is the building(s) attractive and well lighted, or cluttered and unclean?
Do guests see church members who are happy?

Sound - Does the guest hear happy sounds and welcoming voices or unsmiling faces and unhappy voices?

Smell - Are there clean and sweet smells or musty odors?

²⁷ Oswald and Leas, *The Inviting Church*, 91-92.

Taste - This is not a sense a person has in their mouth, rather it is a perception or experience. Is there a good spirit in the church, a good relationship between the congregation and pastor, and is it a warm friendly place to be?
 Touch (feel) - Do newcomers feel welcomed? Accepted? Excited? Involved? Remember that there is only one time to make a good first impression. It is important that the church and its members present an attractiveness and warmth to help newcomers feel welcomed.²⁸

The second issue that needs to be addressed before a person enters the building is the importance of greeters. It is likely that the greeter will be the first face that the guest sees. With this in mind, the greeter should be warm and friendly, with a welcoming smile. These persons are normally the first ones to have contact with first time guests.²⁹

Wilson recently shared with conference attendees the reality that the greeter is one of the most important aspects in a person's first impression of the church. They are the first to welcome, guide, assist, answer, introduce and smile.³⁰ As the guest makes their way through the church it is important that they are treated to a warm and friendly atmosphere. This should be stressed from the pulpit over and over again. A smile, friendly handshake, and a "great to see you today" is enough to warm someone's day. In taking this position to the next level it would be helpful for the Greeter Ministry Team to have a fleet of umbrellas to escort in those who forgot their umbrellas on rainy days.³¹

Once the guest is in the door it is important that they be directed to the appropriate place. This is where the welcome center attendants and ushers come in handy. In the model church, BHBC, the welcome center has been staffed with church

²⁸ Prism Leadership Group, "A Church Makes It's Own Assimilation Checklist," available from http://www.prismleadership.org/inc/assimilation_checklist.doc; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

²⁹ McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, 113.

³⁰ Wilson, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference*, February 7, 2006.

³¹ Oswald and Leas, *The Inviting Church*, 92.

members who have a wide knowledge of where the restrooms are and where the Sunday School classes meet.

It is wise to team the welcome center volunteers with the ushers in case someone needs help in finding a Sunday School class. The welcome center should be well-stocked with a church map and a Sunday School guide for guests. All of these first impression areas are so important and yet, before the inception of this thesis project, little had been done at the model church, BHBC.

In light of these important issues, a ministry team has been created at BHBC for each of these first impression areas. Each team is made up of persons who are passionate about each of these areas of ministry. Once these ministry teams are comprised, they meet and select a ministry team leader. This leader is the person responsible for reporting back to the church or coaching any new person who wants to join this team in the future. This ministry team is called the “First Impressions” team. If it is true that most people make a decision as to whether they will return to the church or not in the first 7-10 minutes, then this team is one of the most important teams in the church.

Once the property is in a presentable manner and the greeters and ushers are ready to welcome guests, church members can go out into the community with confidence and compel guests to come into their particular church.

Community Servant Evangelism

With well kept property in place, the church is now ready to go out to meet the community. As the title of this chapter suggests, it is time to see “The Church Connecting with her Community.” This theme has been chosen to match the connecting

vision of the Kentucky Baptist Convention for reaching the world. This beginning wing of the assimilation program concerns the various ways that the community can be served so that the lost they might be drawn, and become interested in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

When it comes to outreach there are many ways to approach this. Many churches are engaged in “door to door” evangelism. There are questions as to how effective this approach may be. While there are churches that would testify to the positive effect of this form of evangelism, it has been this author’s experience that this method is rarely fruitful. In fact, in this day of terrorism, it is difficult to imagine answering the door as a lost person and hearing a stranger ask “If you were to die right now...”

With this in mind, perhaps the better way is through serving the community. This is called “servant evangelism.” The point of servant evangelism is that the church is both giving to and going into her community.³² As the community receives acts of love and service from the church, then hopefully they will open their heart to the Savior who is behind the acts of love and service.

In researching this thesis project, many good books and resource DVD’s were discovered to help churches who are ready to engage in servant evangelism. One of the best available is Steve Sjogren’s *Conspiracy of Kindness*. In his book he lists many examples of servant evangelism. Among those are giving cold cokes away, washing cars or raking yards for free, and feeding expired parking meters.³³ These gifts of service

³² Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 198.

³³ Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1993), 215-226.

should be done with a brief explanation of the love of God and which church is providing the service.

As BHBC, the model church, begins to focus on reaching the community through servant evangelism, it will rotate a several year plan in which many of the ideas presented in these books are carried out. A key is to vary the servant evangelism events so that as many different people as possible will want to participate. It is hard to go wrong in outreach when the focus is on serving and giving to your community.

This service may be more effective if the particular needs of the community are known. These needs can be discovered through community research. It is helpful for the church to know details concerning the community's educational and ethnic background, as well as the income level and number of people in the community.³⁴

One of the more helpful tools to the model church in getting to know her community has been the "Know Your Community" geo-demographic data study provided by the North American Mission Board.³⁵ This study is available in either a 15 minute or a 15 mile radius of any given church. This free community study can be requested on their website at www.namb.net.

One of the more unique aspects of this study is the Traffic Report and Map feature. This study represents the daily volume of traffic on major roadways within a selected geographical area. This feature was able to assist the model church in determining the future location of promotional items such as billboards, etc.

³⁴ John Mark Terry, *Church Evangelism: Creating a Culture for Growth in Your Congregation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 65.

³⁵ North American Mission Board, "Know Your Community: Somerset, KY" (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2007).

This demographic report also includes a multi-page report with graphics and maps in which 2007 and 2012 projected data is shown on population, population trends, age, race, Hispanic origin, household income, education, and household types. The tables and graphs section compares data for a requested area to the data for the United States as a whole.

Another helpful feature of this study is the ESRI Tapestry Area Profile. This is a one or two page report that examines the market or lifestyle segmentation of households in a given study area. This profile has 65 distinct segments and is grouped by both lifestyle and urbanization. The top 10 segments for the selected geography are listed, along with a brief description.

The model church found that their largest population belonged to the “Heartland Communities” and the “Midland Crowd.” The “Heartland Communities” consist of neighborhoods found mostly in small towns, primarily in the Midwest and South. More than 75 percent of the households are single-family dwellings, with a median home value of \$74,400. Most homes are older, built before 1960. The median age is 41.3 years, and almost one-third of householders are aged 65 years or older. The distinctly country lifestyle of these residents is reflected in their interest in hunting, fishing, and country music. They also enjoy playing bingo, and woodworking is a hobby.³⁶

The model church found the “Midland Crowd” to closely follow the “Heartland Community” in population as the lifestyle make-up of her community. The “Midland Crowd” is made up of those with a median age of 36.3. The majority of households are comprised of married-couple families, half with children and half without.

³⁶ Ibid.

The median household income is \$48,200. Housing developments are generally in rural areas throughout the U.S. (more village or town than farm), and are located mainly in the South. Home ownership is at 84 percent. Two-thirds of households are single-family structures and 28 percent are mobile homes. This is a somewhat conservative market politically. Those in the “Midland Crowd” take pride in their homes, lawns, and vehicles. Hunting, fishing, and woodworking are favorite pursuits. Owning pets, especially birds or dogs, is common. Many households have a satellite dish, and TV viewing includes various news programs, as well as shows on CMT and Outdoor Life Network.³⁷

In the model church, this geo-demographic data has been a great help. Knowing the community has enabled the model church to theme every special event, such as the Harvest Festival and High Attendance Sunday School day, in a way that is custom tailored to her lifestyle segment.

Another non-threatening and effective way that churches can reach out to their community is through door-to-door survey work.³⁸ This has recently been conducted by the model church and was quite a success. An example of this survey is included in the Appendix.³⁹

Survey work is a powerful time to show each individual home and neighborhood that the church cares for and values their needs.⁴⁰ Questions may include “How can we pray for you and your family,” or “If you do not attend church, may we ask

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ernest R. Adams and James E. Fitch, *Reaching People Through the Sunday School* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1979), 21.

³⁹ Appendix C.

⁴⁰ Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 197-200.

why?”⁴¹ A humble church can take these surveys and immediately begin praying for and assessing the needs of her community.

In the model church, the prayer concerns that are gathered from the survey are put on the church’s prayer list. This list is also placed in the prayer room, so that prayer warriors can be praying specifically for each and every need. As a positive testimony to the power of this practice, it should be noted that a recent survey produced a prayer request for the salvation of a young man. After just a few months of prayer by the church, this man became saved and is now in active attendance. He frequently expresses his thankfulness that the church prayed for someone that they did not even know at the time.

Some have objected that this community survey approach is too pragmatic. They have had a problem with receiving advice from non-church members, many of whom are lost. Those who object to surveys such as these have simply missed the point. For a church to conduct a survey such as this does not mean that they are going to cater to every possible need and whim that emerges from the survey. Each church can simply assess the result of the survey and process the data accordingly.

It is important to note that the results of the community survey are not to affect the theology of the church. The theology of the church is given by God and is never meant to be changed or altered based upon the opinion of the community. If the community survey reveals that many people are offended by the church’s teaching on the

⁴¹ Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 244.

reality of hell, then the church is not in a position to change this concrete biblical doctrine based upon the results of the survey.

In fact, the church must not be surprised to hear such criticism when she goes door to door to engage in survey work. The Bible clearly warns that there will come a day when “they will turn their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Tm 4:3-4). The results of the survey should only have an effect on the things that can rightly be altered and still allow the church to be faithful and obedient to her Master.

In considering the importance of the church standing strong on the theology that God has clearly revealed, Thom Rainer has commented.

It must be said without hesitation that churches that reach the un-churched are theologically conservative. They have a high view of Scripture. And their convictions about their beliefs are obvious. A church can attempt many good contextual efforts to reach the un-churched, but if it does not have the foundations of a high view of Scripture, the efforts are either futile or transient. I have yet to discover a church that consistently reaches the un-churched over a several-year period that is not conservative in its theology.⁴²

Thus, rather than being turned off by a church that takes a strong stand on God’s Word; the lost are actually impressed with it. Those in the world are used to those who have no absolutes and do not know what they believe. The church that stands strong on what God has revealed can be a strong influence in the community that she has a faith that will stand strong during the many trials of life. This strength is what the world is missing. This strength is what the church offers.

With the above in mind, however, there may be issues raised through the survey that need to be addressed. For example, if the survey shows that a number of

⁴² Thom Rainer, “15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched,” Internet.

people in the community have visited their church and found it to be cold and indifferent, then that is certainly something that the church should address. In the end, the church will have had an opportunity to hear what the community thinks about them. With this valuable knowledge each church can decide what can and cannot be changed based upon the survey.

When all is said and done, at the very least, the church will have communicated to the community that “we care.” “We care enough to knock on your door. We care enough to listen to you. We value your opinion.”

Beyond gathering a list of issues on which the church could improve, there are many valuable benefits to a community survey. In the model church’s survey, a place is reserved for the name and number of the person who would welcome another visit to their home. In this invited visit the church member is freer to share the gospel along with some more information about the church. This second and invited visit into the person’s home can often provide a much more welcomed opportunity to share the message of hope about Jesus Christ.

Another benefit of the community survey is the opportunity to communicate to the community that the church cares. Going door to door communicates that “the church cares enough to spend an afternoon in your neighborhood.” In fact, the model church has personalized gift bags that say “We came to your door because we care about the people who live behind it.” When the people in the community know that the church cares about them, then maybe they will come to church and learn about the hope that is dispensed each week in the services and small groups.

As this chapter closes, it is important to remember some key ideas: A church must reach out to her community, and the church property and members must be ready with a warm, friendly environment when the community decides to visit. These beginning steps to assimilation are of great importance, as the remainder of this thesis project depends upon attention to these details.

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTING WITH THE CONGREGATION

Hopefully, as the church reaches out to the community in survey and servant evangelism, the hearts of the community will be touched. As God touches their heart in this way, the hope is that they will visit the church for the first time. With the “First Impressions” team firmly in place, and community evangelism drawing people in, the church is now ready to welcome these guests.

The next phase of this assimilation program will be called “The Community Connecting with the Congregation.” This portion of the program is in place to move guests into public identification with Christ and the church. This chapter will address topics such as making the worship service worthy of a second visit, following up with first time guests, and sharing the passion of assimilation with the church.

In this second phase of assimilation, someone from the community has decided to visit the congregation for the first time. At this point the person is just a part of the general gathering. It is critically important for these individuals to eventually emerge from the congregation and be numbered with the church.⁴³ The church members can be used by God to participate in this vital process.

It is important for every church to place a high value upon those who are first time guests. John Maxwell says, “A visitor is the most important person that attends church on Sunday. His attendance has been motivated by a friend or a deep need. He

⁴³ Please see pages 5 and 6 in chapter 1 for this project’s distinction between congregation and church.

brings his hurts, questions and apprehensions. He looks for warmth, acceptance and smiles.⁴⁴

Is Your Worship Service Worth Coming Back To?

To begin with, it is important that guests are given a meaningful worship experience when they arrive at the church. This does not mean that every week must be a Hollywood production, but it does mean that it is worth taking the time to make a lasting impression on those who are visiting the church as a first time guest. This time devoted to quality should impact the music, message, invitation and general flow of the service.⁴⁵

In regard to the importance of giving people an impressionable worship experience, Charles Arn has aptly commented, “The best follow-up strategies in the world will be useless if the message is irrelevant, the music inappropriate, and the experience unpleasant.”⁴⁶ Make sure everything in a service is understandable to the unchurched. Many people dislike church because they feel the sermons are boring and not relevant to their lives, too much time is spent talking about money, and the services are too long.

The above hindrances are well worth the church’s attention in correction. In fact, a well-planned service where guests experience the genuine presence of God is a significant factor in their decision to return. The church must do all she can do to be certain that the services are not just meetings, but times of encountering the living God.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ John Maxwell, “Ushers and Greeters,” Audio seminar students workbook (El Cajon, CA: Injoy Ministries, 1999), 23.

⁴⁵ McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, 54-55.

⁴⁶ Charles Arn, “Seeing Visitors Return,” *Growing Churches*, Winter 1998, 26.

⁴⁷ Melvin J. Ming, “Helping Outsiders Become Insiders,” available from http://www.ag.org/enrichment/journal/199903/042_outsiders.cfm; Internet; accessed 27 March 2007.

Christian Leader Training recently posted an article on this subject. They say, in a section entitled “Make Sure Your Service Is Worth Coming Back To:”

Exciting worship is a significant key to increasing visitor retention. I call it “celebrative worship.” By that I propose that every part of a service encourages exaltation of God and contributes to spiritual needs of the individual. True worship must be holy, refreshing, and awe-inspiring - it must make people aware that they are in the presence of God. Everything we do in that worship service must be significant, and we cannot allow it to fall to the level of entertainment or mere performance. Real worship is a unique encounter with God that people cannot experience anywhere else. Authentic worship helps people meet God among His family. Nothing cheap or shallow is worthy of this holy meeting. The Father seeks worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23-24) - that's a sobering expectation given us by our Lord.⁴⁸

This same article mentions several areas which need attention when it comes to quality. Following each area is a suggestion for making the worship service incredible and awesome. They are:

Environment - Is the atmosphere inviting and accepting?
 Seeker friendly - Does the service speak to the needs that people feel?
 Music - Is the music inspiring, and does it connect with the people?
 Time - Is the time invested in the service well spent, productive, and helpful?
 Excellence - Are all parts of the service done with excellence?
 Sermon - Does the sermon communicate relevant biblical truth?
 Experience - Do the people genuinely experience God's presence?
 Scripture - Does Scripture have high impact?
 Prayer - Is the prayer time well thought out and meaningful?
 Logistics - Are lighting, sound, and visuals pleasing to the senses?⁴⁹

Guest Follow-Up

Once a guest has visited a church, hopefully with a memorable experience, it is necessary to follow up with them after the service. The immense preparation in providing relevant and meaningful services is lost if there is no way of reaching out to the

⁴⁸ Bob Nelson, “How to Increase Visitor Retention,” Internet.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

guest after the visit. There must be some way to make contact with them concerning their worship experience.

It is highly important at this stage that they leave some kind of evidence that they were at church. It would be tragic to have done the work of community outreach, had the guest come in the church, only to have them leave with no evidence and no way to contact them about their time at the church. This is where a good guest or communication card comes in.

Every church must have a method in place to collect information on guests. Without collecting information on guests, it will be impossible to perform any kind of follow-up. Each church may approach this aspect differently. Much of this process will depend upon the context and there is certainly flexibility as to how each church might collect the information.

In the model church, BHBC, there is a communication card in the bulletin. An example of this can be found in the Appendix. This card provides an opportunity for the guest to record their name, address, e-mail and indicate any decision they have made in the service.⁵⁰ This card also allows the guests to indicate whether they are visiting for the first, second, or third time.

It is important to note at this stage that a more favorable impression will be left upon first time guests if they are able to visit with us and avoid being embarrassed. Based upon this author's personal experience, many churches still welcome guests by having them raise their hand, stand to their feet or remain seated while the rest of the church shakes their hand. It is important for each church to identify their first time guests in a way that does not make the guest uneasy. Many first time guests are anxious enough

⁵⁰ Appendix D

without the church adding to their anxiousness. Todd Rhoades of Monday Morning Insight has aptly commented as he quotes another author on the subject of appropriately welcoming guests. He writes:

I was recently reading a series of articles by David Zimmerman on how first time visitors view church. One line struck me as having a lot of truth to it. David writes, first time visitors care most about not embarrassing themselves. As I think about that statement, I immediately realized that if I were looking for a church, this would be my first priority: not looking foolish. It's the reason I hate going to an auto mechanic. I know nothing about cars, engines, and maintenance. I feel totally out of my comfort zone when the mechanic shares that my differential is going out or my tie rods have a problem. I just want to tell them to fix it and get out of there fast. I have the same feeling whenever I travel to a new airport, visit a new restaurant, or do anything out of my general routine. My general feeling is, 'let's get this over with.' I'm uncomfortable when my surroundings aren't familiar. If I'm not extremely peculiar (some would argue that), then this is the same way that many first time visitors feel when they walk in your church's door for the first time. They are probably feeling very self-conscious. Maybe they dressed up or dressed down more than others. Their children might embarrass them. David notes that they may even worry about when to sit and when to stand in the service. Ever been in a service where the church asks visitors to stand? Please don't do that! For most people, it just causes embarrassment to the person you're trying to make feel welcome.⁵¹

In the model church guests are welcomed by the pastor or staff during the welcome and announcement time. This special time to welcome guests is an important part of each and every service. At this time, the guests are directed to the communication card in the bulletin. The guests are encouraged to fill out the card and place it in the offering plate as it is passed. This allows the model church to effectively gather first time guest cards without providing an uneasy experience for the guest.

⁵¹ Todd Rhoades, "What's Really Important to Your Church's First Time Visitors;" available from http://www.mondaymorninginsight.com/index.php/site/comments/whats_really_important_to_your_churches_first_time_visitors; Internet; accessed 30 October 2007.

Thus far, BHBC has only made special contact with those who are visiting for the first time, which will be addressed later in this chapter. The church has not begun a process for making special contact with those who are visiting for the second or third time. However, during research for this thesis project, a church from outside New York City was found that is especially targeting those who are back for a second or third time. The Journey Church, pastored by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, sends out a special gift, such as a \$5 Starbucks certificate, to those who visit for the second time.⁵² The Journey Church provides an excellent example of a church that is going above and beyond to reach guests who visit for the second and third times.

Other ideas that have surfaced for the purpose of this project include sending guests a free meal coupon to the Wednesday night fellowship meal once they have visited BHBC for a second time. Who doesn't want a free meal? This coupon would likely lead them to come and try the Wednesday night Bible study. In the process, they may make the decision to join the church and grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

In interacting with The Journey's assimilation process, it was also discovered that they offer a free gift to all first time visitors who turn in a communication card. Obviously, they have discovered that this increases the number of people who turn in a card. The more communication cards that are turned in – the more people the church has an opportunity to reach through follow up attempts.

Good ideas for gifts include Andy Stanley's book *How Good is Good Enough*. This book can be received for nothing more than the cost of shipping.⁵³ Lee Strobel's

⁵² Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *The Assimilation Seminar: From First Time Guests to Long Time Members* (New York: Church Leader Insights Publishing, 2006), 11.

⁵³ Ibid.

book, *The Case for Faith* can be bought in bulk for no more than \$3 a copy.⁵⁴ Both of these books are perfect for seekers and the faithful as well. A free gift such as one of these books could work wonders in moving people to fill out and turn in a communication card. The above examples show that an inexpensive gift can be given to guests at churches of any size budget.

The more cards that people fill out, the more people can be connected with the exciting work that God is doing in the church. The more people that are connected with the exciting work that God is doing in the church, the more people will likely join the church in becoming a part of that exciting work. The ratio of the people who eventually join will likely be increased according to how many people actually fill out a communication card and begin the process of follow up work.

Once the communication cards have been collected, it is important to have a process by which they are followed up.⁵⁵ Upon first coming to the model church, BHBC, this author came upon a collection of communication cards dating from the years 2000-July 2004 that had not been touched. This seems to be the case in many churches. Recently, a pastor of one of the largest churches in the state of Kentucky confessed that he had too little time to do anything more than make a phone call to guests. If Kentucky churches want to do better in the area of assimilation, this problem is unacceptable.

For the purpose of this thesis project, a process has been put in place at the model church.⁵⁶ This project began in August of 2004 and has been carried out, tracked, and evaluated up to the present time. The plan is to involve lay ministry teams within the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, 121.

⁵⁶ Appendix E

Sunday School classes to begin the process of assimilation. Every aspect of the assimilation process can be carried out by lay persons in the church.

With that in mind, the topic of guest follow up will now be addressed. While this thesis deals specifically with how the plan has been implemented at the model church, the plan would, however, work for any size church with any size of staff. Adjustments would have to be made, but the basic plan would be the same.

First time guests are contacted in several different ways within the first month. First of all, they receive a phone call from both the senior pastor and evangelism pastor. The evangelism pastor makes a call the day of the visit. The senior pastor makes a call within the first week. This phone call is simply to say thanks for being a guest at the church. At this time, the pastor might also find out a little more about the nature of the visit. Were they just visiting with family or are they looking for a good church?

If the person visiting provided an e-mail address, they receive an e-mail on Monday. The e-mail should be brief and yet warm and friendly in expressing joy for the person(s) taking the time to visit. An example e-mail is as follows:

Dear Dave and Nancy,

Thank you so much for visiting with us at ABC Church this past week! We hope you were inspired and encouraged during your time with us. If you happen to have any questions, please contact me – I would love to share with you all that God is doing in our church. If you are looking for a church home, we would love for it to be us!

May God Bless You!
Name of Pastor, Name of Church

During the first week, the first time guest also receives a letter from the pastor.⁵⁷ This letter, hand-signed by the pastor, again says thank you for joining with the

⁵⁷ Appendix F

church for worship. This letter also includes a few key events and ministry opportunities in the near future. Most visitors are sincerely touched to receive a letter and phone call from the senior pastor shortly after their visit.

In this program, the first time visitor also receives a hand-written postcard from a member of the Write Ministry Team. The Write Ministry Team is a group of volunteers that meet each Sunday night, an hour before the evening service, to write special cards to those in the church who are having a birthday, lost a loved one, or who simply need a little encouragement. They also send out a personal hand-written post card to guests to say “Thank you for joining with us for worship.”

It is likely that a large number of contacts, rather than being bothersome, will communicate to the guest that they are cared about. In a recent interview conducted by Thom Rainer, Henry, a new believer, was impressed with the number of contacts he received after visiting a church. Henry said “I knew that being a Christian and belonging to this church meant that something would be expected of me. I learned this lesson when I received seven different contacts from church members when I first visited the church.”⁵⁸ Apparent in this quote is Henry’s positive impression that these contacts were made by members of the church and not just staff people who were simply doing their job.

It is so important to include lay people in making follow up calls to guests. Paul Sorenson from Community Church of Joy reports “Thirty-four percent of first time

⁵⁸ Thom Rainer, *High Expectations*, 24.

guests who get a call from the pastor within 2 days will return next Sunday. But if they receive a call from a layperson, 68 percent will come back.”⁵⁹

These statistics are arresting. Evidently, people seem to respond better to lay people than ministers. It may be that while they perceive a call from a minister to be a part of their job, a call from a layperson seems to be more heartfelt. This reality has been further confirmed by “Christian Leader Training.” Their studies found that the visitor return rate doubles when laypersons follow up on guests. The truth is that when people visit a church, they expect to hear from the pastor or ministerial staff. But a follow-up visit or phone call from a layperson is “flattering and novel, maybe even surprising.”⁶⁰

It is likely that guests will begin to immediately think the church must be a great church if laypersons are involved in ministry and believe in it so much.⁶¹ It is at this point that the laypersons can brag on the pastor and the ministry of the church without being suspected of being a prejudiced paid witness. Elton Trueblood made this statement, "Laypeople are not the passengers of a ship, but members of the crew."⁶² Great churches cannot be built without thoughtful, intentional, and efficient involvement of laypersons. They obviously have incredibly effective outcomes in follow-up efforts.

Once the first time guest has been touched in several different ways during the first week it is important that they are not dropped to the wayside after the first week. In order to keep this from happening, there are several steps that are taken after the first

⁵⁹ Paul Sorenson, “Assimilating Newcomers at Community Church of Joy,” available from <http://www.leadnet.org/assimilate/newcomers>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2007.

⁶⁰ Bob Nelson, “How to Increase Visitor Retention,” Internet.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

week. It is likely that the more contacts the guest receives within the first month, the greater the possibility that they might eventually join the church.

One of the things instituted at BHBC for the purpose of this project is the sending out of detailed Sunday School information to our guests. Along with this information, the guest also receives an invitation to Sunday School and a church map.⁶³ This is a great time to briefly explain how important Sunday School is and that the best way to get to know the church is through participation in one of the many Sunday School classes. At BHBC, individuals can enroll in a Sunday School class before they actually join the church, so this is an excellent front door into membership in the church.⁶⁴

Another phase of post first week contact is a brief home visit. This is only necessary for those who express interest in the church through the pastor's phone conversation. The evangelism pastor puts these guest names in the hands of volunteer laypeople from age appropriate Sunday School classes. These persons then visit the guest in their home with a gift bag within two to three weeks. This is a great time for the one doing the visiting to invite the guests to come and try their Sunday School class.

The last contact that is made is a phone call from another Sunday School member. This is a simple phone call to determine whether or not the guest still has any questions about the church. At this point, with so many contacts, the guest might very well simply want to know how to join the church.

Even at this stage, the contact between the guest and the Sunday School class is not over. The Sunday School member would stay in contact with this person

⁶³ Appendix G and H

⁶⁴ Appendix I

periodically throughout the year. A follow up call would be made after one, three, six months and then a year after the guest's visit. During that time, this guest will either join the church, become very involved in the church, make it known that they are attending church elsewhere, or simply make it known that they are no longer interested in the church. Regardless, effective work will have been accomplished by keeping in regular contact with the guest.

Even when the preceding steps have been carried out, the first time guest contact information work is not completely finished. These persons go into a database and are mailed information from time to time concerning events such as Vacation Bible School, New Member classes, etc. Because this person's contact information was secured while they were in the congregation, the church forever has a connection to these incredibly valuable guests. Once in the model church's database, the person is not removed from the mailing list until they request to be removed.

Statistics From the Model Church

The model church does not have records of reaching first time guests before January of 2000, but there has been a marked, dramatic improvement in reaching first time guests since this author put this project in place in August of 2004. Below is a list of the percentages of persons that have successfully been reached through the guest outreach plan as presented in this thesis project. (By the term "reached," this author is referring to guests who have made a decision for Christ, are now a member of our church, have enrolled in Sunday School, or are involved in a discipleship class or home Bible study.) The lowest percentage of any single year since the program's inception is 2006. This was a year that some trial-and-error took place. This author tried to turn the majority of guest

outreach to lay-ministers. The slight dip proves that more vigilant oversight of the laypersons efforts by the evangelism pastor would be beneficial. Here are the percentages of those first time guests reached by year:

2000	1 of 33	3%
2001	1 of 14	7%
2002	4 of 31	13%
2003	5 of 44	11%
2004	0 of 9	0% (Jan - July)
2004	3 of 5	60% (Aug - Dec) ⁶⁵
2005	14 of 24	58%
2006	11 of 24	46%
2007	8 of 10	80% ⁶⁶

Sharing the Passion for Assimilation with the Church

These statistics are staggering and speak for themselves. A specific guest follow up plan is of utmost importance. As this chapter closes it is important to note that there is no substitute for a pastor who is passionate about assimilation. Assimilation works best when the lay people can clearly see its value communicated from the church leadership. The vision and goal of the church to fully move every member deeper in their commitment to Jesus Christ must always be held high before the people. Allen Ratta has dealt with this subject brilliantly in an article entitled “The Seven Laws of Member/Adherent Retention.” He writes:

Pastors need to communicate clearly and often to their congregations. Three formidable monsters live in the realm of poor communications. They are called *assumptions*, *intentions* and *expectations*. Say *what* you will do, *when* you will do it and *how* you will do it. Then do it that way. Be predictable. Jesus put it this way, “Let your yes be yes.” Accept the consequences of your words especially when circumstances make it uncomfortable to follow through. When the pastor communicates clearly, in a timely fashion, and always follows

⁶⁵ 2004 statistics have been divided to show the difference in the model church since the implementation of this thesis project.

⁶⁶ This statistic represents 2007 through the month of July.

through, it builds trust and confidence in leadership which greatly increases member retention. Pastors are generally gifted at oral communications. Yet regular written correspondence from the pastor is an indispensable channel of meaningful communication. Be positive in everything you say or write. The effort to formalize one's thoughts into writing invariably adds to the clarity and breadth of thoughts shared. Letters, newsletters, e-newsletters, emails and website postings are all effective. Make your intentions, plans, priorities and your vision clear by repeating them over and over using every available means at every opportunity.⁶⁷

Thom Rainer has concluded in countless hours of research that "one of the primary means of accomplishing His will is through the words, deeds and leadership of pastors." Rainer personally believes that "much *does* rise and fall on pastoral leaders."⁶⁸ There seems to be no substitute for a pastor and staff that is personally passionate about seeing people assimilated and moving closer to God's will for their lives.

Without the constant attention to the importance of discipleship and assimilation from the pastor and staff, it is unlikely that the church will ever accomplish the task of successful assimilation. The pastor who sees the importance of his role in the assimilation process will lead a church that is passionate to join him in this pursuit.

Rainer has said regarding the importance of the worship service and the pastor:

Rarely does one hear that the worship service can function in the assimilation role. We read about the service as the front door, but this study indicates that it can also close the back door. Two important elements, we were told, must be present for the worship service to be an assimilation factor. First, expository preaching, mentioned earlier, equips Christians for ministry and service. This facet of the worship service is the teaching and equipping time for church members. Second, the pastor and other leaders use the worship time to communicate high expectations to the congregation. One worship and music leader told us that high expectations can be communicated in parts of the service other than preaching. "Every hymn and chorus we sing should inform

⁶⁷ Allen Rata, "The Seven Laws of Member / Adherent Retention," available from [http:// www.connectionpower.com](http://www.connectionpower.com); Internet; accessed on 23 March 2007.

⁶⁸ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 67.

the believer of the demands of discipleship," he said. "Even the offertory should be handled in such a way that the members realize that giving is a natural and expected part of the Christian life."⁶⁹

With this mind, it stands to reason that if a pastor and staff unite to lead a church into assimilation, then they will watch an entire church following them in zeal. However, this vision must be continually focused upon and championed by the leadership team with each passing day. If the pastor and staff let the purpose of assimilation fall by the wayside, it is not likely that the church body will stop themselves to pick it up.

⁶⁹ Rainer, "15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched," Internet.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONGREGATION CONNECTING WITH THE CHURCH

With the plan to reach guests firmly in place, attention will now be focused upon keeping these guests if they do decide to become members of the church. This section of the assimilation program will be called “The Congregation Connecting with the Church.” This phase will deal with issues such as how to effectively connect new members to Sunday School classes, and the importance of a new member’s class.

As previously mentioned in chapter one, this project differentiates between the terms “congregation” and “church.” The word “congregation” refers to a group of people who generally gather for church services.⁷⁰ Many of these people are anonymous, having never committed publicly to identify as a member of the church. The “church” refers to those who have emerged from anonymity to publicly join with the “called out ones (1 Pt 2:9).”

It is not a final success even when the guest has officially joined the church. The marching order of Christ in Matthew 28:19 is for believers to make “disciples” and not just converts. Efforts are not completely successful until the guest is assimilated and involved in the life of the church.

Churches sometimes spend too much time gathering guests and not enough time keeping them. Allen Ratta, CEO of Connection Power, has spoken well regarding this problem. He writes:

Member retention is far more significant than visitor volume. Depending on your church’s visitor assimilation rate, it takes a lot of visitors to make one church adherent. Know the math. Member/adherent retention is somewhere between 10 to 20 times more significant, in terms of church growth, than visitor volume. Yet churches tend to put huge investments in visitor volume

⁷⁰ Please see footnote 10 in chapter 1.

through advertising and large events and a disproportionately low amount of their resources into retaining their members/adherents. There are a number of reasons for this. Adherents slip out the back door largely unnoticed in the first few months of their attendance, making this a silent enemy of church growth. Few churches have adequate systems in place to monitor back door attrition. Very few churches indeed have a proactive member/adherent retention ministry that identifies early symptoms of attrition and mobilizes interventions in time to make difference. Balance the church's investments to provide adequate resources for member retention.⁷¹

The importance of assimilating each new member cannot be overstated. Brian Magnuson of Church Growth Ministries has written insightfully on why assimilation is so vitally important. He writes:

The goal of an assimilation ministry is to help new members move from simply attending to belonging. It is the difference between renting and owning. As leaders, we want our members to accept responsibility and ownership for the church's ministries. Research shows that if assimilation does not take place in a relatively short time, the new member will begin to pull away and leave the church. Therefore, a deliberate ministry of assimilation is crucial to the local church.⁷²

Connecting New Members to Sunday School Classes

In this step of the assimilation program, the goal is to connect every new member to a Sunday School class. The relationships formed in small groups such as Sunday School form a unique bond between the new member and long time member. This bond will increase the likelihood of the new member staying away from the back door of the church.

William Crabb and Jeff Jernigan, in their book, *The Church in Ruins*, have written, "The closest thing to Heaven, while living life this side of the grave, should be

⁷¹ Allen Rata, "The Seven Laws" Internet.

⁷² Brian Magnuson, *Assimilating New Members Into Your Church*, available from <http://www.4churchgrowth.com/chur4202.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

the fellowship of Christians living in community.”⁷³ While this is true, many churches never encourage new members to find this kind of community. In fact, Lyle Schaller, author of *Assimilating New Members*, suggests at least one-third, and perhaps as much as one-half, of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging to the church of which they are members.⁷⁴

It is important to realize the power of relationships for retaining members. The church has the opportunity to utilize this in the structure of small groups. Perhaps no other methodology is as powerful for closing the back door of the church as that of the small group structure.⁷⁵ In the model church, this small group structure is called Sunday School.

Flavil Yeakly, author of *Why Churches Grow*, has researched and further proven the importance of friendships in the assimilation process. In his interviews with 50 active new members, all 50 could identify at least three friends within their first six months of placing membership (45 of the 50 listed six friends or more).

In contrast, Yeakly also interviewed 50 inactive new members and his findings showed almost the exact opposite pattern. They simply did not establish new friendships in their church in sufficient number to build the relationships necessary for effective assimilation.⁷⁶ Without important friendships in place these members soon became inactive in their church involvement.

⁷³ William Crabb and Jeff Jernigan, *The Church in Ruins: Foundations For The Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 45.

⁷⁴ Lyle Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 16.

⁷⁵ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 23.

⁷⁶ Flavil R. Yeakley, *Why Churches Grow* (Broken Arrow, OK: Christian Communications, Inc., 1979), 53-55.

This fact has been confirmed in numerous other studies. In *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation*, Roy Oswald and Speed Leas found the effect of friendly people and meaningful relationships to be a key component to retaining church guests. In fact, the friendliness of the people proved to be *the* single most important reason people commit themselves to a certain church.⁷⁷

Long time assimilation expert Kirk Hadaway has written, “When asked, ‘Why did you join this church?’ the most frequent response is ‘The people seemed friendly.’” Hadaway further writes, “Of the many things people expect from a church, the possibility of forming relatively close relationships with other members apparently is one of the most important.”⁷⁸ It is clear that humanity has been made by God to need personal relationships (Gen 2:18). It is no surprise that people would naturally desire to stay in the context in which these personal relationships take form.

In a speech given by George Gallup, Jr. entitled “The Healing of America,” he states, “One survey reveals that 7 out of 10 people do not know their neighbor. Americans move around more than most people and hence find it more difficult to sustain intensive friendships and bonds among neighbors. . . . In an average year, some 40 million Americans move. Put another way, every 10 years, between 40 and 60 percent of an average American town's population leaves.”⁷⁹

In a fragmented society, churches must provide a context for its members to develop significant relationships. This will not come easy. A church must be proactive

⁷⁷ Oswald, Leas, *The Inviting Church*, 25.

⁷⁸ C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact From Fiction* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 139.

⁷⁹ Stu Weber, *Locking Arms: God's Design for Masculine Friendships* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1995), 215.

in this aspect. As Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin have noticed in *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, while many churches are inclusive in outreach, they are exclusive in fellowship.⁸⁰ Churches must commit to being inclusive in both outreach and fellowship.

A goal for any church should be helping its members move from superficial relationships to a sense of personal belonging and mutual accountability. It is this author's belief that the atmosphere in which deep personal relationships form occurs best in a small group structure such as Sunday School. With all of the aforementioned in mind, the small group structure of Sunday School is a primary component to any successful assimilation strategy.

In the context of the model church, BHBC, Sunday School enrollment is not a requirement, but it is highly encouraged. As has been discussed in the previous paragraphs, nothing can take the place of friendships. The church is in an incredible position to make a difference in a fragmented society through the power of Sunday School.⁸¹ Due to the disciple making nature inherent in Sunday School, it is of utmost importance that each new member enrolls in a Sunday School class as soon as possible.

In the model church, a big part of this emphasis is evident to the new member on the very Sunday they join. One key to the model church's success has been to make certain that all Sunday School information is part of the new member packet. This information is explained to the new member by a member of the commitment counseling team, which counsels the members at the altar as they join the church.⁸²

⁸⁰ Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 75.

⁸¹ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 29.

Also included in this new member packet is a Sunday School enrollment form with a list of classes.⁸³ This form can simply be filled out and dropped off in the church office. This has been designed to make Sunday School enrollment as simple as possible.

The second thing is that every new member is contacted by one or two Sunday School classes. The new member information is passed on to the appropriate age Sunday School class by the commitment counseling member.⁸⁴ Sunday School enrollment numbers increase dramatically when every new member receives a phone call and an invitation from a Sunday School class.

A third step, of utmost importance, is the continual emphasis of the importance of Sunday School by the pastor. The importance of connecting must be stressed over and over again. There are plenty of places in God's Word to find application for the importance of involvement in small groups (Mt 4:18-22; Acts 2:42-47; Gal 6:2; Heb 10:24-25; 1 Pt 4:10). The pastor or teaching team that emphasizes this on a regular basis will find the Sunday School numbers increasing.

The New Member's Class

The last step to be taken in involving new members into the life of the church is the new member's class. Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay resources, has found this to be the second most frequently mentioned methodology for assimilation among effective evangelistic churches.⁸⁵ The importance of the new member's class in successful assimilation finished second only to small groups in closing the back door.

⁸² Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur: A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 121-122.

⁸³ Appendix I

⁸⁴ Appendix J

Rainer has said “The relationship between assimilation effectiveness and a new member’s class is amazing. Churches that require potential members to attend a new member’s class have a much higher retention rate than those who do not.”⁸⁶ The reality is that many members join without any sense of the importance of spiritual disciplines such as personal Bible study, prayer, giving and small group involvement.

Rainer also believes that most new members are, indeed, very interested in an orientation session such as a new member’s class. He further states:

The formerly un-churched, for the most part, gladly attended an inquirers' class prior to their becoming Christians. By the time they were courageous enough to visit a church, they were eager to learn more about the church. Most of the effective churches in our study combined the inquirers' class with a new members' class. We need to remember that an un-churched person who visits our churches typically has an insatiable appetite to learn more. That's the reason they desire strong biblical teaching and preaching. And that's the reason they eagerly attend an inquirers' class.⁸⁷

At the current time, the model church only encourages participation in a new member’s class rather than making it mandatory. In the rural setting of BHBC, any kind of “requirement” for membership, other than salvation and baptism, would not be taken very well (although this attitude does seem to be changing in much of the country).⁸⁸ It has been helpful; however, to offer a short (1 hour) class and give away free gifts and a good lunch in order to have a large number of new members participate.

⁸⁵ Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, 178.

⁸⁶ Rainer, *Simple Church*, 158.

⁸⁷ Rainer, “15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched,” Internet.

⁸⁸ Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 22.

After looking at several options for when to offer a new member class, the model church has chosen Sunday afternoon. A free lunch is served, and a gift is given (such as a tote bag or coffee mug with the church logo). Free childcare is also provided.

The contents of this class include the church's history, vision, mission, important essential Christian doctrine and disciplines, ordinances of the church, spiritual gifts, ministry involvement and the importance of Sunday School.⁸⁹ The majority of time is spent on practical things such as spiritual gifts, ministry teams and Sunday School. If the new member can be connected with a Sunday School class that is involving members and reaching out to those who miss, much will have been accomplished in retaining that member for the long haul.

In discussing the importance of a new member's class, Steven R. Mills, director of the Division of Church Ministries for the Northwest District, has offered some keen insight. He believes that the new member's class must be a part of any successful attempt to assimilate new members. He believes that such a class contributes in three ways. These ways include the opportunities to inform, interact, and involve.⁹⁰

It is important that a new member's class inform participants on pertinent information regarding church membership. People are looking for a church that has a clear vision and a strong sense of mission. Their hesitancy to become involved is often overcome when a church has a clear, challenging and motivating mission.

Communicating such things as the church's history, vision, goals, beliefs, and worship

⁸⁹ McIntosh, Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, 136-137.

⁹⁰ Steven Mills, "The Pastor's Class," available from http://www.sundayschool.ag.org/03Pastors/p_evng_0302pastorclass.cfm; Internet; accessed 12 March 2007.

style helps newcomers understand a church better. If this information is not shared formally, it is often shared informally, and this can be undesirable.

The class can also be a great time of interaction. Relationship is the core of Christianity. Interaction helps participants build relationships with others in the class, within the church, and with Jesus Christ by creating an informal, warm, friendly atmosphere. In the model church, the fellowship lunch serves to help generate this kind of environment.

During the new member's class, it is important that involvement be stressed. Each person should be expected to become involved in a Sunday School class and on a ministry team. By informing people about the ministries of the church and helping them find a place of service, the chances of their staying will be increased.⁹¹

When it comes to actually starting a new member's class, it cannot be entered into haphazardly. Mills recommends considering several things. First of all every newcomer, including transfers, should be encouraged to attend the class. Every person needs to know the vision, goals, beliefs, style, expectations, and ministries of the church. This helps eliminate future problems. People who want to join the church need to know what the church's vision and goals are.⁹²

The last important element of a successful new member's class is to be certain that either the pastor leads or plays a vital role in the class. This gives newcomers the opportunity to get acquainted with the pastor and allows the pastor to get to know his new

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

members.⁹³ Many times this proves to be a valuable time for the new members to clarify any misunderstandings they may have about the church or even the pastor.

It is worth noting that a new member's class needs to be open to prospective members as well as new members. A new member's class is an ideal time for someone to ask questions and find out more about the church before they join.⁹⁴ This author has even known of unbelievers who have made the decision to follow Christ during a new member's class.

Christian Leader Training has found that many pastors also use this class to find out how well they are doing. After getting acquainted with people, some pastors have started the class with two questions: "What brought you to this church?" and "Why did you come back?" The answers to these questions can communicate volumes about what is being done right and what might need to be improved. As George Hunter says, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."⁹⁵

Bob Nelson of Christian Leader Training gives some basic advantages of the pastor's class.

It provides entry points to the church, it gives opportunity for a person to make a commitment to Christ, it helps people connect to the church as the Body of Christ, it encourages people to get involved in ministries and relate to a small group, it provides a way to assess how assimilation is going, it helps the pastor share the vision, doctrines, and ministry of the church, and it allows people to discover their spiritual gifts and introduces them to ministry opportunities.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 26-27.

⁹⁵ Bob Nelson, "How to Increase Visitor Retention," Internet.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

In the model church, the new member's class has been an important time to communicate the importance of and facilitate the enrollment into a Sunday School class. When a new member commits to a small group, then he or she is well on their way to successful and long-term assimilation. The nature of small groups provides a dynamic atmosphere to keep members involved long-term. According to statistics cited in this project, the church staff can know that when a person becomes involved in a small group then they are more likely to stay involved in the life of the church.⁹⁷

Statistics from the Model Church

Since beginning this project at the model church, each stage of the process has been put into place piece by piece. The primary goal has been to encourage voluntary enrollment of every new member into a Sunday School class of their choice. As the statistics record, this effort is clearly making a difference. Below is the percentage of adult new members who have joined a Sunday School class for each of the last ten years.

	Members to Join	Members Enrolled in Sunday School	%
2007 ⁹⁸	11	11	100 %
2006	61	56	92 %
2005	82	73	89 %
2004	32	24	75 %
2003	41	31	76 %
2002	42	33	79 %
2001	42	34	81 %

⁹⁷ Please see Thom Rainer statistics referenced in footnote 5 on page 3.

⁹⁸ 2007 numbers are those reflected through June 10, 2007.

2000	52	31	60 %
1999	30	20	66 %
1998	23	11	48 %

The above results speak well of themselves. It is obvious that Sunday School enrollment by adult new members has risen dramatically since August 2004 when assimilation efforts were begun. It is also obvious that assimilation percentages increased in a church that was already doing very well over the last several years. These statistics make it clear what an intentional and focused effort in assimilation can accomplish.

It is also encouraging to note that during this period of time in which Sunday School involvement was a focus, total Sunday School enrollment numbers rose dramatically. These numbers increased from 807 in September of 2004 to 1,219 in September of 2007. This is an increase of 412. Previous to this thesis project, the highest three year Sunday School enrollment increase had been from September 1972 to September 1975. During this three year period the Sunday School enrollment numbers increased by 194. The total increase of Sunday School enrollment numbers during the three year period of this thesis project was twice the number of any other three year period in the church's history. It is encouraging that the largest amount of people in the history of the church found a place in Sunday School during the time frame in which this thesis project in assimilation was conducted.

Conclusion

As this chapter closes, it is important to state why enrollment in a Sunday School class is such a primary goal. A large part of the reason why Sunday School

enrollment is considered such a success is due to the unique structure of the Sunday School class in this assimilation program. As will be shown in chapters 5 and 6, every class is organized to assist new members in finding a perfect place of ministry involvement in that class and in the church body as a whole. With the small groups set up to assist in involving each new member in ministry, then a large part of the church's goal has been accomplished once that new member is enrolled and connected to a small group Sunday School class.

As has been cited throughout this thesis project, studies show that the most effective means of assimilating new members involves relationships and ministry responsibilities. Both of these are easily facilitated through the small group Sunday School class. In a recent study of growing and evangelistic churches, Thom Rainer found that over 90% of the assimilation methods were tied directly or indirectly to Sunday School. One Ohio pastor told Rainer, "We have tried closing the back door a dozen different ways, but it seems like we always come back to Sunday School."⁹⁹

In addition to the ministry involvement that is facilitated through this Sunday School model, it is also in this small group atmosphere where many close relationships are formed. This intimate small group aspect makes a large church small. Leading experts in assimilation say that if you do not get to know 7 people by a first name basis within six months, then it is likely that you will not remain a faithful church attendee.¹⁰⁰

Experts also say that of those who join a small group, 83% will still be attending church faithfully in five years. In contrast, of those who do not join a small group, only 16% will still be faithfully attending that church within the same time

⁹⁹ Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Kentucky Baptist Assimilation Conference*, February 7, 2006.

period.¹⁰¹ It is evident that the forming of relationships that naturally takes place in small groups such as Sunday School has a dramatically positive effect upon successful new member retention.

The next chapter will explore ways in which the small group can take this assimilation even further through the power of one-on-one mentoring. The act of one-on-one mentoring is a lost art in many churches. The church that will actively participate in this discipline will see a powerful affect upon the assimilation process.

¹⁰¹ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 45.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHURCH CONNECTING IN COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

In making every Sunday School class even more effective in assimilation, it is important to involve each member of the class in a ministry role. This includes a role in that particular class as well as on a ministry team in the church body as a whole. Personal ministry involvement will give each member a sense of ownership in the church.

Donald P. Smith, in his book *How to Attract and Keep Active Church Members*, has written about the art and science of matching a member to a ministry position in which they are gifted. He writes:

The secret to involving members in significant service to others is to focus on gifts. God gives the church the gifts it needs to fulfill its mission in the world. Those gifts are not given to only a few persons. They are present in an amazing variety in all members of a congregation. If every member of the body is gifted, then every member has the capacity to carry out some helpful ministry. Members want to serve and to make use of their gifts. All they need is a good opportunity to do so. Recruiting fails when the church asks them to do jobs that do not match their interests, skills, or experience. The ardor of activists cools when we expect them to sit in committee meetings rather than to accomplish a task that uses their gifts. Give them jobs to do. On the other hand, some members are gifted in planning, organizing, and delegating tasks to others. Let those members chair committees and serve on them.¹⁰²

Through discovering and exercising their personal spiritual gift, the new member will begin to sense ownership in the church.¹⁰³ There are two specific ways to accomplish this goal. The first is to employ a spiritual gift test in order to involve new members on the ministry team with which they best fit. The other way is to facilitate a mentor relationship between the seasoned believer and the new believer/member.

¹⁰² Smith, Donald, *How to Attract and Keep Active Church Members* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1992), 63.

¹⁰³ McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, 137.

In speaking on the subject of giving each and every member ministry opportunities, Thom Rainer has said:

The formerly un-churched told us in many ways and many times, “We don't want to sit on the sidelines.” These new Christians are incredibly eager to get involved, and their enthusiasm is contagious. Unfortunately, some churches do a fair job of reaching the un-churched only to see them leave within a few months. Many of these churches have rigid and antiquated rules that prohibit ministry involvement of new members. I understand that new Christians should not be made Bible teachers immediately. But why not get them involved in a greeter ministry? I promise their smiles will not be forced. Why not get them involved in an evangelistic ministry? They probably know more un-churched people than anyone else in the church.¹⁰⁴

This phase of the assimilation program will be called “The Church Connecting in Commitment to Christ.” The point of this phase of the project is to take the Sunday School member into deeper commitment through the faithful use of their God-given gifts in ministry. The new member who recognizes and begins using his or her gifts will soon feel a sense of fulfillment and ownership in their church.

In their book, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin have commented insightfully about the spiritual satisfaction that occurs in a believer's heart when they find and use their spiritual gifts. They write:

Members are satisfied. The use and expression of spiritual gifts is but the beginning of this aspect of retention and assimilation. All humans need to contribute. Those who contribute manifest a much greater desire to stay while those who choose not to volunteer drop out more frequently. People need to feel fulfilled in their tasks. Ample evidence has been accumulated to support this concept. James G. Hougland and James Wood conclude that people who definitely feel that they are having an impact on their social structure will not only sense more satisfaction but also desire to continue their efforts. George Barna put it this way, “Unless you become involved in the activities of your church, you will never truly feel satisfied with that church.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Rainer, “15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched,” Internet.

¹⁰⁵ McIntosh, Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, 89.

The Spiritual Gifts Test as a Means to Fill Ministry Teams

The Bible makes it very clear that each Christian has been given a spiritual gift by God. 1 Corinthians 12:7 reads “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” It is also clear in this passage that God gives the believer a spiritual gift so that they can use it for the common good of all.

Elsewhere, the Bible compares the church to the human body (1 Cor 12:12-31). The point of the analogy is clear. God has gifted and made each part of the church body to serve Him in different ways. Just as the human body requires all its various parts to function in the way they were made, so God’s body, the church, functions best when each member is doing what they are made or called to do.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11, God makes it clear that each member of the church is expected to know and use their spiritual gifts so that they can serve one another. Verse 10 reads “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” This verse teaches that God has ordained for the church to serve and minister to each other through the spiritual gifts He has given. Verse 11 reads “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” God gives each Christian a gift, but that gift is given so that others can be served.

In Romans 12:6-8, the Bible goes so far as to command the church to allow members to use their gifts in order to worship God and serve His church. It reads “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him

teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” The discovery of one’s personal spiritual gifts can be critical to getting a member involved in a ministry area in which they are particularly passionate. Many times, the key to a church member remaining satisfied is their ownership and pride in the ministries and programs of their church. Involvement in church ministry can be the perfect way for many members to sense that they are needed.¹⁰⁶

If a member begins to sense ownership and fulfillment in the church, then there is a greater probability that they will remain committed to the church long term. Kirk Hadaway has noted “The more an individual has been absorbed into the life of a church, the less the likelihood that he or she will desire to withdraw.”¹⁰⁷ Instead of feeling threatened, as is the case in many churches, the church should be incredibly excited when new members get involved because they bring freshness to the church.¹⁰⁸ Hopefully, this excitement will be a catalyst to motivate long standing members to allow new members to do ministry soon upon joining. This does not mean that they become a deacon the first week, but if the new member is truly saved, then according to God’s Word they are gifted and ready to serve (1 Cor 12:7). Perhaps the new member can begin by putting a smile on their face and greeting guests or holding an umbrella for members and guests as they trudge through the rain and snow in the parking lot on Sunday.

¹⁰⁶ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 116.

¹⁰⁷ Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles*, 143.

¹⁰⁸ Magnuson, “Assimilating New Members into your Church” Internet.

In mobilizing new members to do the work of the ministry Thom Rainer has written encouragingly. He writes:

Are we as church leaders giving our laity “permission” to start and become involved in ministries? Or is involvement in the church limited to redundant committees, where the committee members are chosen by a select group? Do we encourage or require spiritual gift assessments to involve people in ministry according to their giftedness? Or are we choosing June or John for the kitchen committee because they are not doing anything else? Do we teach, preach, and show that ministry is done by the people of God, rather than by some artificial ecclesiological hierarchy? Ministry involvement, real ministry involvement, is a key to assimilation.¹⁰⁹

When it comes to empowering and training new believers and guests for personal ministry, this is where the small group or Sunday School class can be utilized. Each Sunday School class can assist new members in walking through the various ministry functions in their class. Finding the right ministry team for the new member can often be done through the spiritual gift test.¹¹⁰

Once the spiritual gift test is completed then the teacher or a member of the training team (more details on this team in chapter 6) can assist the class member in finding the specific ministry team in which they desire to serve. It is important to phrase the question “On which class ministry team would you like to serve?” This question is better than “Would you like to serve on a ministry team?” The difference is expectation. One of the key ingredients in involving new members in ministry is expectation.

Without an atmosphere of expectation, many new members will conveniently decide not to serve. In the model church, BHBC, expectation has been the key to this project’s success. This expectation has been led from the staff down. The teachers and ministry leaders have caught the vision. They have shared the expectation. As a result,

¹⁰⁹ Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 283.

¹¹⁰ Appendix K

record numbers have enrolled in Sunday School and become personally involved in ministry.¹¹¹ Because of the expectation factor spurred by this thesis project, many new members have joined a Sunday School class or a ministry team before they found out that they could choose not to if they so desired.

At the model church, BHBC, every teacher is trained each year by a staff member in helping new class members to discover their gifts and get involved on a class and church ministry team. This ministry training takes place in the fall of each year, before the new Sunday School year begins. This ministry training time involves a free dinner for all who attend. The training provides an incredibly valuable time for Sunday School teachers, ministry team leaders and church staff to discuss vision, goals and questions pertaining to the upcoming year.

In the model church, this time has been well attended by the members. The training time has provided an increased sense of communication and cooperation among the staff and church membership. One of the favorite aspects of this training time is the opportunity that Sunday School teachers and ministry team leaders have to communicate with the senior pastor in regards to how things are going and in what areas they may still need additional help and training. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to review the Sunday School class structure, assimilation focus and overall vision of the church. This annual training event is vital for the future of assimilating new Sunday School members into active service through the assistance of our Sunday School teachers and ministry team leaders.

¹¹¹ Please see enrollment figures on pp 60-61.

Mentoring New Members

Another key component of the process of assimilation is the lost art of mentoring. Mentoring is a God-given relationship in which one growing Christian encourages and equips another believer to reach his or her potential as a disciple of Christ.¹¹² Mentoring has always been at the heart of making disciples. From Moses and Joshua to Jesus and the disciples, God has always used well-seasoned saints to train those who are just beginning their journey with Jesus.

Each year many new believers come into the church without any background knowledge of the Christian faith. They are unaware of Christian doctrine or Christian discipline and they do not know how to take the next step. This is where mentoring comes into play. In this fourth phase of the project, someone with the gift and desire to train and mentor others would take a new believer/member of the Sunday School class and spend time with them for the purpose of mentoring.

If a new believer or new member is to be ready and willing to discover their gifts and fully involve themselves in the life of the church, then it will take time. This time will hopefully be given by the Sunday School class teacher or another member of the class training team. The new believer/member may need one-on-one time with a growing Christian in order to have many of their questions about the Christian faith answered. In this phase of the project that one-on-one mentoring takes place through the Sunday School class.

¹¹² Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 122.

This mentoring time can be as formal or informal as is desired by both parties. The mentor can teach Christian doctrine to the new believer or simply spend regular time in a coffee shop, or over lunch. The key is to connect every new believer/member to a Sunday School class. Each class is notified when a new believer has joined that class. At this stage the teacher and the class begin looking for an opportunity for the new believer to be trained in what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Depending on how much this person needs (this will differ between a new believer and a new member (who has previously been a believer), the teacher or class mentor can create a time plan to effectively involve, teach and disciple this new person. This will sometimes be a commitment of a year or two and at other times (as in the case of a new believer) this relationship may develop into a one-on-one mentoring relationship that lasts for many years.

In today's world, mentoring means different things to different people. It is possible that many of our most mature church members may not have an idea of what healthy and successful mentoring may encompass. Bob Biehl, in an article for Lifeway, has explained the role of the mentor in a new believer's life. He believes that a mentor "enters into a lifelong relationship with the mentored, makes the mentored a friend whom they like, enjoy, believe in, and want to see win in life, intentionalizes a relationship with the one being mentored, and commits to seeing the mentored reach God's full potential for their life."¹¹³

One of the key ingredients involved in the mentoring relationship is a mastery of the art of encouragement. Just like a new baby who is learning to walk, the new

¹¹³ Bob Biehl, "Mentoring," available from http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page; Internet; accessed 21 March 2007.

believer may fall down at times. In these times it will be important for the mentor to step in and simply encourage the new believer to not give up¹¹⁴ Positive reinforcement in the life of the new believer will go a long way in driving them to a deeper commitment in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

With this in mind however, it is also important that the new believer learn to walk for themselves. Their hand may need to be held at times, but there are times when the mentor has to turn loose and let go. Earl Palmer has commented on the necessity of letting new believers learn to walk on their own. In an article entitled “Mentoring that Makes a Difference” he writes:

As a mentor I don't want to tell people what God's will is for them; I want them to discover it for themselves. And that happens best, I've noticed, when I affirm what's going right with a person. Express encouragement regularly. A young lawyer in a class I taught recently wrote a paper on 1 Corinthians 15. He didn't just parrot back my lectures, however. He went beyond what I had taught, doing his own study and making his own breakthroughs. He grappled with issues we hadn't discussed in class; he dared to draw his own conclusions. It occurred to me as I read his work that I was learning from this student. So on his paper, along with his grade, I wrote a note saying his ideas had inspired me. Sometime later he told me that little note had bolstered his confidence to work through his own thoughts and draw his own conclusions. I had confirmed that his thinking was sound, that his ideas were exciting and helpful to me. He began to have the confidence that he could teach. I didn't plan for that one note to have that impact, but when I regularly encourage, some of my notes and words will.¹¹⁵

Palmer's words encapsulate the importance of encouraging others. This encouragement is a necessary component of any successful mentoring relationship, but what about the one being mentored? It is likely that they are entering this one-on-one

¹¹⁴ Richard Meyer, *One Anothering: Building Blocks for Small Groups* (San Diego: Lura Media Publishing, 1990), 77.

¹¹⁵ Earl Palmer, “Mentoring that Makes a Difference,” available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bcl/areas/shepherding/articles/>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2007.

discipleship relationship for the first time in their life. Perhaps they are asking the question “How can I be successful as the one being mentored?”

Fred Smith, a pastor who was mentored by Zig Ziglar, has written an article on the subject of mentoring and offers sage advice to the man or woman being mentored. He believes that one of the key ingredients is the determination to be a great student. In describing the five keys to being a great student, he writes:

1. Admit your ignorance. I never tried to impress a mentor with my knowledge. I always exposed my ignorance. To hide ignorance from a teacher is as foolish as hiding your sickness from a doctor. The wise person is always more aware of his ignorance than his knowledge. My knowledge brought me into contact with my greater ignorance. The arrogant are proud of their knowledge; the humble are acquainted with their ignorance.
2. Work to ask the right questions. Right questions come from thought, analysis, and discernment. Idle or careless questions are demeaning to the mentor. There's power in a good question.
3. Do your homework. With my two mentors, I never called them unless I had written down what I wanted to talk to them about. Writing out your questions beforehand is helpful to minimize verbiage. When we met I had organized my questions; I knew it was not a social situation. If we later wanted to spend some social time, that would be up to them, not to me. I never walked into their office and sat down until I was invited to sit down. They had to know I was not going to waste their time.
4. Never try to "use" your mentor. A person with a well-known mentor can be tempted to refer to him in ways that really use him, particularly in quoting him out of context. A mentor is for progress, not ego satisfaction.
5. A good student grows. Progress is the pay the student gives the mentor. Currently I spend at least 50 percent of my time mentoring talented individuals. I make no charge. But I get amply paid by the vicarious accomplishment of these individuals.¹¹⁶

If mentoring is to be successfully established in the church, then there will need to be a way in which progress can be measured. As with any program, it is important to know whether or not mentoring is making a difference in the lives of those

¹¹⁶ Fred Smith, “Mentoring That Matters” (*Leadership Journal*, Winter 1999, Vol. XX, No.1), 94.

being trained and coached in the faith. Smith, one who has benefited enormously through a mentoring relationship, believes that there are some signs we can look for in order to determine whether successful mentoring is taking place.

Smith believes that the first sign of a fruitful mentoring process is when trust and confidence is being shared. If anything is shared in confidence, it is kept in confidence. A mentoring relationship must be comprised by two who can be very direct. Smith says “My two great mentors never had to preface the truth or hedge their statements with me.”¹¹⁷

Smith also believes that successful mentoring is marked by climbs and plateaus. He says “We progress by climbing, then plateauing for assimilation, then climbing again, plateauing again—repeating the process as long as we live. Don't stop when you reach a comfortable plateau.” It is this process that brings the fruit of character development. Smith says “Although I've been mentoring actively for over 40 years, I cannot claim any success in improving character in adults. Character improves only through spiritual experience.”¹¹⁸

The last fruit of successful mentoring is that the mentor takes enough joy in the process that he or she is glad to encourage continued contact. Smith believes that if a mentoring relationship becomes completely unproductive then it may be time for it to end. In speaking of the joy a mentor should rightfully have, he writes, “A mentor has accomplished great good when he has taught the individual the joy of accomplishment. That has become so much a part of my life that when I get low, I immediately start to do

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

something that I feel will be worthwhile. The joy of living returns.¹¹⁹ This joy must be a factor if successful mentoring is to continue long-term.

Keeping the Focus

In conclusion of this chapter it is helpful to encourage the mentor to not become bogged down with the long process of mentoring life-change in a new believer. The discipleship process takes time. There will indeed be snags along the way. The key to successful Christian living is perseverance and this applies to the mentoring relationship as well.

In keeping this in mind, Bob Biehl has some excellent advice on retaining focus. He writes: “Focusing on maturity in mentoring is helpful and healthy. The bottom line is simply this: all you have to do is help your protégés grow into full adult maturity over a lifetime. You may want to ask your protégés, ‘If you could only accomplish three measurable priorities in the next ten years that would make a 50 percent difference by the end of your life, what would they be?’”¹²⁰

The goal of this fourth phase of this thesis project is to create fully developing and assimilated believers. This may look a little different for every disciple. With this in mind, in the model church, there are certain things that we desire to see as characteristics of every person who decides to call BHBC their home. They should:

1. Identify with the goals of the church
2. Attend worship services regularly
3. Experience spiritual growth and progress
4. Become a member of the body
5. Have 5-10 new friends in the church
6. Have an appropriate task or role that matches spiritual giftedness

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Biehl, “Mentoring,” Internet.

7. Be involved in meaningful fellowship in a small group
8. Regularly tithe to the church
9. Participate in the great commission by spreading the Good News to friends and relatives¹²¹

When these things are accomplished in the life of each member over time, then full assimilation has been achieved. This full assimilation is God's will for every believer. God truly does love us as we are but His plan is to make sure that we do not stay where we are. The nine characteristics listed above are vitally important to the model church. Yet how will the new believer/member know that these things are important unless someone shares this with them? This is why the mentor, teacher, and Sunday School class are so incredibly valuable in the life of this new child of God.

In conclusion of this chapter, it is important to remember that by mentoring new believers and new members, and by having them become active in the life of the church through their spiritual gifts, this very important step of assimilation will have been reached. The goal behind this project is to encourage each and every person to reach their full God-given potential in Jesus Christ.¹²² The good news is that God has promised to help and guide the church in this process (Mt 28:20).

¹²¹ Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1989), 109.

¹²² Biehl, "Mentoring," Internet.

CHAPTER 6

SUNDAY SCHOOL: LOCKING THE BACK DOOR OF CHURCH

At this point, it will be helpful to discuss Sunday School ministry team organization. Small groups such as Sunday School are widely considered to be one of the best ways to assimilate guest and new members. Thom Rainer writes concerning the importance of developing an effective and comprehensive small-group ministry. He says:

The formerly un-churched told us they were attracted to small groups for two reasons: they desired further biblical teaching and training, and they sought to develop relationships with other Christians. Small groups dramatically impact the effectiveness of a church's outreach and assimilation. And in the churches we studied, Sunday School was the dominant expression of small groups. What does this information say to churches that desire to reach the un-churched? It tells us that a comprehensive and effective small-group strategy is imperative. I regret that in the churches I pastored before becoming dean of a seminary, I provided little leadership to the Sunday School organization. Because of my ignorance and immaturity, I allowed the Sunday School to exist without any aggressive leadership and input on my part. Now, because of 11 years of research, I see the utter stupidity of my failure. The work required to develop any kind of comprehensive small group organization is massive. Such work demands senior pastor involvement and leadership. Without it the church will not be nearly as effective in reaching the un-churched.¹²³

When considering Sunday School structure, it is important to provide a wide variety of ministry opportunities and responsibilities in the Sunday School class. This provides expression for the variety of gifts and abilities which God has given to His children. In *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin suggest four key ingredients that groups such as Sunday School provide when assimilating new members. They are:

Sharing - being able to move beyond surface level conversation to a genuine relationship of knowing and being known by others

¹²³ Rainer, "15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched," Internet.

Study - each person in a small group learns to study with anticipation so that in the group there will be participation and outside the group there will be application

Support - an opportunity to share with others the joys, pains, and discoveries that each one experiences

Service - ministering to one another in the group and sharing resources with those in need outside the group¹²⁴

In developing this particular Sunday School program, these four small group elements have been essential. It has also been important for the program to be simple so that it can be remembered easily for better class practice. The simpler the structure and the easier it is to remember, the better likelihood that it will be practiced by each and every Sunday School class.

C.O.N.N.E.C.T. with One Another

This project has been organized around the acrostic C.O.N.N.E.C.T. The letters in the C.O.N.N.E.C.T. acrostic each stand for an important class ministry function. The idea is to involve every single Sunday School member on a particular ministry team both in the class and in the church as a whole. This is the role of the Sunday School teacher. This is done through the spiritual gift test.

At this point, it will be helpful to break down the responsibilities under each letter of C.O.N.N.E.C.T., as the name of this program is entitled “Connecting With One Another.” Covered under this acrostic are the critical themes of Prayer, Evangelism, Ministry, Missions, Discipleship, Fellowship and Mentoring. Each letter will also correspond to a New Testament biblical reference to the Christian’s responsibility toward “one another.”

Howard Snyder has written an insightful article in *Christianity Today* concerning his discovery of the many “one another” passages in the Bible. First, he says

¹²⁴ McIntosh, Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, 95-101.

that most of these passages imply behaviors, not just attitudes. He says “The New Testament writers are less concerned with how believers feel about each other than they are about their actions — their living together as community and publicly as disciples.” The church sometimes has a tendency to do the exact opposite. Many times the attitudes are focused on, but the conduct is forgotten.¹²⁵

The second thing that Snyder found was that all of the "one another" passages imply that they fit best within a social context. This provides the most appropriate structure in which these behaviors can be lived out. He writes, “In the New Testament, of course, the early church was essentially a network of home fellowships and this happened more naturally.”¹²⁶

Finally, Snyder says that nearly all the “one another” passages are imperatives. The instructions given around the New Testament “one another” passages are about actual behaviors, not reminders of abstract spiritual truths to enjoy meditating upon. He believes that the New Testament is full of these “one another” injunctions “because early Christians needed to be reminded of them.”¹²⁷ The same is true for today. The church still needs to be reminded.

The first C in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Calling on the Lord in Prayer*. The Bible regularly emphasizes the importance of prayer. The verse that corresponds to this letter is James 5:16 where Christians are instructed to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would

¹²⁵ Howard Snyder, “Authentic Fellowship,” *Christianity Today*, October 2003, Vol. 47, No.10, 102.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

James makes two very important points about prayer in these verses. The first is that it is powerful and effective. There is ample wisdom in the statement “Be careful what you ask for when you pray because you are likely to get it.” The second point that James calls attention to is the interdependence of Christians. Many times certain things will not happen in another’s life if we do not pray for them.¹²⁸

The critical theme of connecting in prayer is aptly pointed out in *The Life Application Commentary* on James. It says, “It is not God’s plan that His people be alone. Members of Christ’s body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick and suffering...we are often not only guilty of hesitating to lean on each other in our sicknesses and weaknesses, [but] we are even more liable not to confess our sins to each other.”¹²⁹ There truly is no substitute for the community that is found in small groups.

It is often only in a small and intimate setting such as Sunday School that prayer and confession can take place. It is the power of prayer and confession in these small settings that often allow people to break free from the sins that bind them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.”¹³⁰ It is prayer and confession that can bring destruction to the danger of being

¹²⁸ Meyer, *One Anothering*, 32.

¹²⁹ Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman and Neil Wilson, *Life Application Commentary: James* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishing, 1992), 141.

¹³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 112.

alone. “It pulls down the barrier of hypocrisy and allows the free flow of grace in the community.”¹³¹ John Ortberg has further commented on the power of confession. He writes:

We all wear masks. We hide from each other. It's part of our fallenness. That is why one of the most formative practices in a small group is confession. Confession is the appropriate disclosure of my brokenness, temptations, sin, and victories for the purpose of healing, forgiveness, and spiritual growth. Without confession we are a community hiding from the truth.¹³²

Each Sunday School class should have a specific group of people who form the class prayer team. This is a team of individuals who are gifted toward prayer. This is their passion and they are excited to remind others of its importance. Those who test high on the spiritual gifts test in the area of prayer can minister on this team. Their responsibilities would include:

1. Collect e-mail addresses and phone numbers from class to develop prayer chain
2. Gather and compile prayer requests from class members during class on Sunday morning
3. Lead class in prayer each week and communicate with class when prayers have been answered
4. Encourage class members to develop the personal discipline of prayer

The O in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Obeying God's Call to be Witnesses to our World*. This covers God's call to the church in the area of evangelism. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12, the Bible says “and may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows.” The phrase “and for all people” is a strong indicator that the Christian's love should extend to those that are currently not among their own local church body. This would also include those

¹³¹ R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 265.

¹³² John Ortberg, “No More Mr. Nice Group” *Christianity Today*. Summer 2005, Vol. 26, No. 3, 35.

who have not yet made a commitment to Christ. The church and Sunday School classes must accept responsibility to love all people and therein reach the lost of the world.¹³³

Paul was concerned that the love of the church flow to everyone and not just those inside the church.¹³⁴ The fact that Paul's prayer views love for "all people" in addition to "one another" indicates that this love for unbelievers is no less important to Paul.¹³⁵ If the church does not genuinely love the world with the love of God then who will?

This Scripture can be a reminder that Christians are to love and share the good news of Jesus with those who still do not know Him. This divine love is born from the heart of God and should be a desire of all God's children.¹³⁶ Those who test high on the spiritual gifts test in the area of evangelism can minister on this team. Their responsibilities would include:

1. Discover and collect class prospects for class to visit or call
2. Follow-up and invite new members and believers to their class
3. Lead the class in a follow up visit to first time guests
4. Train the class in how to effectively share the good news of Jesus Christ
5. Coordinate follow-up efforts

The first N in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Noticing and Ministering to the Needs of our Class and Community*. The second N stands for *Noticing and Ministering to the Needs of our World*. Both of these N's share the same verse of Scripture. This

¹³³ Harry M. Piland, *Growing and Winning Through the Sunday School* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1981), 18.

¹³⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 700.

¹³⁵ Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 115.

¹³⁶ R. Othel Feather, *Outreach Evangelism Through the Sunday School* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1972), 4.

verse is 1 Peter 4:10, which says “God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.”

This verse is a reminder that God has not given gifts, passions and abilities to His children so that they might selfishly serve themselves.¹³⁷ They are given so that they might serve or “minister” to others.¹³⁸ Scot McKnight of the *NIV Application Commentary* has captured the flow of this context. He writes, “Loving one another enables one to put up with others (4:8), instigates hospitality (4:9), and means using one’s gifts to help other people.”¹³⁹

Even though this verse with the familiar “one another” likely refers to other believers, one could also take the application to minister to and serve those who still do not know the Lord. In citing a previous paragraph in this paper, it is clear that love and concern should always extend well beyond those who are already a part of the community of faith (1 Thes 3:12).

In distinguishing the two N’s in relationship to the community and world, the intention is to emphasize the Acts 1:8 challenge to be “witnesses in Jerusalem, *and* in all Judea *and* Samaria, *and* to the ends of the earth.” When it comes to ministry and missions, many in the church take an either/or approach. Some think that the focus should be on home missions, while others believe that the emphasis should be on international efforts.

¹³⁷ Ken Hemphill and Bill Taylor, *Ten Best Practices to Make Your Sunday School Work* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2001), 168.

¹³⁸ Walvoord, Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 85.

¹³⁹ Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 239.

It is important to give proper respect to each of these positions. The truth is that Christians are not called to go *either* to the community *or* to other parts of the world. According to the Scripture, Christians are called by God to go *both* in their own community *and* to the world as a whole. The two N's in this acrostic address this sometimes controversial church debate with the hope of bringing unity around the clear calling of God's Word.

When attention is turned to the needs of the community and world, with intentions of making a difference, it requires sacrifice.¹⁴⁰ The word "serve" in this verse seems to convey the fact that God has called Christians to such a sacrifice. In ministering to the community and world, it is necessary to give money and time. This requires a sacrificial servant's heart.

The word "serve" helps focus on the challenge of reaching the community and the world through ministry and missions. Those in the Sunday School class who test high on the spiritual gifts test in the area of ministry or missions can serve on either of these teams. It is true that some may have a greater passion for home missions, while others may have a greater passion for international missions. The church must simply make sure that these never compete. Christians are called to do both. Those who have a passion for missions and ministry can serve on either or both of these teams. The responsibilities on each of these teams are as follows:

Class and Community Ministry

1. Send encouraging cards to class and makes phone calls to those who have been missing
2. Visit the hospital of those in the class and organize meals for class members who have lost loved ones

¹⁴⁰ Jim Phillips, *One Another: How the One Another Principles of the Bible Can Transform a Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 92.

3. Lead the class in noticing and addressing class and community needs
4. Lead the class in servant evangelism projects in the community
5. Lead the class in a regular class love offering to effectively meet community needs

World Missions

1. Lead the class in noticing and addressing world needs (World Hunger Day, Annie Armstrong, Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, Gideon's International Bible Society, etc.)
2. Lead and encourage the class in going on home and international mission trips

We now turn our attention to the E in our Sunday School class C.O.N.N.E.C.T. acrostic. The E stands for *Equipping God's People with the Word of God*. In Colossians 3:16 the Bible says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." The New American Commentary points out that admonishing here is different from teaching. Admonishing really carries the idea of a strong encouragement. This is generally practical and moral, rather than abstract and theological.¹⁴¹

This Scripture reference should be a constant and healthy reminder that Sunday School and small group teaching is of utmost importance.¹⁴² The teaching should not only address the theological (what God says), but it should also address the practical (how I can practice in my life what God says). The role of the Sunday School teacher is both practical and theological.

¹⁴¹ Richard R. Melick, *The New American Commentary: Philippians / Colossians / Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 304.

¹⁴² Elmer Towns, *What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 128.

The “Word of Christ” refers to the revelation that He has brought to us in the Bible.¹⁴³ David Garland of the *NIV Application Commentary* aptly points out that this Word “contains the wealth of God’s wisdom, which should guide the church’s teaching and admonishing. Believers do not need special visions to enhance the wisdom they already have in the word of Christ.”¹⁴⁴

In application of the words of Garland, it is important that every class take time each week to actually study the Bible. Small talk and topical conversation is not the most important thing to discuss when the class gathers each week. Each class needs to spend significant time in God’s Word if they are going to be “admonished” in the way God desires.

In focusing on teaching, it is helpful to turn attention to the words of John Ortberg as he discusses the practical training that takes place in small groups such as Sunday School. He writes:

What we desperately need are small groups to be schools of life. Imagine someone has a problem with anger—a small group leader should ask them: “What kinds of situations tend to get you angry, and how do you respond?” Give them some alternatives to sinful patterns of anger – role play these situations in the small group. Then next week ask, “How did it go?” If they got it right, celebrate it. If they didn’t, investigate what happened, and encourage them to do it differently next time.¹⁴⁵

This is a powerful reminder of the training ground that small groups can provide in the life of the disciple of Christ. Having brothers and sisters to help us through life’s journey can sometimes be the difference maker in those who stick around long term

¹⁴³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 159.

¹⁴⁴ David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 212.

¹⁴⁵ Ortberg, “No More Mr. Nice Group,” 35.

and those who exit through the back door. Sometimes a friend who will listen during a difficult time can keep someone coming back to church week after week.

Those who test high in the area of teaching or instruction may very well find themselves fulfilled on this class ministry team. The people on this team are generally the teacher and assistant teachers of the class. The responsibilities of this team are as follows:

1. Prepare and teach the weekly lesson
2. Encourage class discussion
3. Periodically attend teacher training

The second C in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. stands for *Caring For Each Other in Fellowship*. It is important for Christians to spend time together outside of church. This can be an incredibly encouraging time as friendships are deepened. Trust and love seem to naturally form in a group of people when they get to know each other better. As love grows for one another then biblical community and fellowship are created.¹⁴⁶ Many Sunday School classes grow from the power produced in fellowship outings.¹⁴⁷

The Bible speaks of the special bond that believers in Christ have with one another. 1 John 1:7 says “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” We find here that as we walk in God’s light, then we are able to develop fellowship with each other.¹⁴⁸

It is obvious in these verses that John sees an intrinsic connection between the Christian’s relationship with God and their relationship with others. One of these does

¹⁴⁶ Meyer, *One Anothering*, 15-17.

¹⁴⁷ David Francis, *The Five Step Formula for Sunday School Growth* (Nashville: Lifeway Resources, 2005), 27.

¹⁴⁸ John R.W. Stott, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary: The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 80.

not seem to be possible without the other. John is saying that fellowship with one another is the most obvious consequence of having fellowship with God.¹⁴⁹

It is true that spending quality time together as a class will in time develop a bond of fellowship that will last a lifetime. The Bible also states that this love for each other can be a powerful witness to the world.¹⁵⁰ John 13:35 says “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Those who test high in the area of fellowship or hospitality can serve on this class ministry team. The responsibilities of this team are as follows:

1. Plan quarterly fellowship events
2. Warmly welcome all class guests
3. Send birthday and anniversary cards to class members
4. Make and hand out class name tags
5. Organize meals for class members who are sick or who have lost loved ones

The final letter in C.O.N.N.E.C.T. is the T, which stands for *Training Others to be Fully Devoted Disciples*. The persons on this team would be those who have a passion to see new believers grow and mature in discipleship. They are willing to meet one-on-one with new believers in order to disciple them in Christian growth.

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 that Christians are to “encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” It was as if Paul were saying that his own encouragement and edification in this letter were not enough.¹⁵¹ The pastor’s edification and encouragement is not enough each week. Nor is the weekly

¹⁴⁹ Gary Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 69.

¹⁵⁰ Carl F. George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 1997), 105.

¹⁵¹ Walvoord, Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 707.

instruction of a Sunday School teacher. This edification and encouragement is to be practiced by all.

Also prevalent in this verse is the fact that all believers need to be trained and instructed. This is especially true for new believers or new members to the church and Sunday School class. This new instruction needs “constant repetition and reemphasis.”¹⁵² The people on this team can become a mentor to any new believer in their class or in the church as a whole. This mentoring could also be practical help in guiding the new believer or new member in discovering their spiritual gifts.

Ken Hemphill defines a spiritual gift as “an individual manifestation of grace from the Father that enables you to serve Him and thus play a vital role in His plan for the redemption of the world.”¹⁵³ Peter Wagner defines a spiritual gift as “a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God’s grace for use within the context of the Body.”¹⁵⁴ These are excellent definitions of spiritual gifts and are simple explanations for every member of this training team to know.

The people on this team can take the time to share these definitions with the new member so that they will completely understand what spiritual gifts are. Those who test high in the area of training and instruction would be a perfect fit for this ministry team of building others up in the Lord. The responsibilities on this team are as follows:

1. Train and disciple members of the class who are new believers
2. Provide instruction on C.O.N.N.E.C.T. teams to new members of the class

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ken Hemphill, *Serving God: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts Workbook* (Dallas: The Sampson Company, 1995), 22.

¹⁵⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Grow Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 42.

3. Help new members discover their gifts and find a place of ministry in the church and class

The Importance of Involving New Members in Ministry

When it comes to involving members in ministry, Allen Ratta, CEO of *Connection Power* has said that we must “use them or lose them.” He further believes that it is essential to the spiritual health of every believer that they develop into a functional member of the Body of Christ. When Allen says “functional,” he means “that they are not just passive consumers of Kingdom resources but they become active in service which in turn makes them a valued Kingdom resource.”¹⁵⁵

Allen points to the fact that this very principle is taught in nature. He writes:

Nature teaches that members of a body that cease to function atrophy and become a burden to the whole system. When this reaches critical mass congregational morale plummets in the few who feel they are “doing all the work.” This is an environment that leads to member attrition. There is no greater thrill for the Christian than to discover that God created them for a specific purpose in life. Purposelessness is the bane of hopes, dreams, joy, and contentment. Want a happy and contented church with high levels of member retention? Help your congregants find a place of meaningful Kingdom service and experience the incredible fulfillment that comes from making a difference for eternity. Help them to discover their God-given gifts and where they can best fit in the ministries of the church. Work ceaselessly to create new ministries and ministry positions that provide an ever increasingly rich environment for Kingdom service. Develop marketing channels and a strong competency to market ministry opportunities to your congregants.¹⁵⁶

Allen makes an incredibly valid point. Why does it seem that so many in the church today lack contentment? Could it be that members are not involved in the ministry of the church in the way that God has called them to be involved? When we are

¹⁵⁵ Rata, “The Seven Laws of Member / Adherent Retention,” Internet.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

not investing in the church we tend to be critical. When we are investing in the church we seem to take ownership and thereby become protective and committed.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps a healthy level of ministry involvement in the church is just the thing needed for the discontented membership that seems to plague so many churches. The Sunday School C.O.N.N.E.C.T. structure is designed to involve every single member in ministry. When that is successfully accomplished, perhaps everyone will be too busy to be very critical.¹⁵⁸

As this chapter draws to a close it is fitting to mention the importance of recognizing and affirming those who do give their time in sacrifice and service to the ministry of God's church. Each and every church may show their appreciation different. The important point is that the people who sacrifice their time and money for the work of God should be shown that they are appreciated.

The following list is helpful for providing ideas for showing appreciation to volunteers. This list was first promoted by a Sunday School worker in the Assemblies of God USA:

1. Give simple gifts, like a note, a card, a homemade muffin, or a candy bar
2. Give workers name tags on a recognition day so the church will see how many people are currently serving
3. Create a bulletin board or a multimedia presentation that shows workers in action
4. Surprise workers with a continental breakfast or pizza lunch
5. Print testimonies of lives changed through the ministry of church workers¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 29.

¹⁵⁸ Ratta, "The Seven Laws of Member / Adherent Retention," Internet.

¹⁵⁹ Sharon Ellard, "Value-Based Affirmation," available from http://sundayschool.ag.org/02Administration/a_tapr_0302valubased.cfm; Internet; accessed 5 November 2007.

As part of this thesis project the model church has hosted an annual appreciation banquet for all Sunday School workers and ministry volunteers. This annual banquet is held in September and is a time to provide a meal and small gift to each and every person who has volunteered their time in Sunday School or on a ministry team. It is during this time that the model church sets aside a special time to say thank you to those who have served sacrificially.

Chuck Lawless, in his book *Membership Matters*, found that churches that create an atmosphere of affirmation increase the willingness of others to serve. Jack Allen, pastor of Cottonwood Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, told Dr. Lawless: “We make heroes out of our members. We invite them up front. We talk about their personal and spiritual growth. We celebrate their commitments to serve. We make heroes out of the people we want others to emulate.”¹⁶⁰ In commenting on Allen’s words, Lawless says, “I suspect that it is fun to serve at Cottonwood, where service is publicly recognized, and more members serve there simply because they know they are appreciated.”¹⁶¹ Robert Dale, author of *Pastoral Leadership*, describes this truth well: Members who serve well are those who are “well paid in ‘thank-yous’ and positive reinforcements.”¹⁶² Again, when the appreciation and affirmation is evident, then the result is that more people are willing to serve.

¹⁶⁰ Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 105.

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Ibid.

Conclusion

When a Sunday School class structure is in place then there is a powerful and simple method for involving members in the ministry. In the C.O.N.N.E.C.T. approach to Sunday School, members are assisted in finding their spiritual gifts and are guided into an understanding of how to use those gifts in the church. With this organization in place in each Sunday School class to encourage participation, the hope is that overall assimilation rates will increase. As demonstrated by the survey work compiled from discipleship pastors across the state of Kentucky, there is evidently a need for this type of program. As demonstrated by the growth in retention and assimilation in the model church, it is evident that this program can and does work for Kentucky Baptist Churches.

The goal of this Sunday School C.O.N.N.E.C.T. structure is to involve all Sunday School members in faithful class and church involvement. The organization is simple and easy to memorize. If each class can remember the acrostic then they can be well on their way to connecting with one another in authentic biblical community.

CHAPTER 7

YES, SOMETHING CAN BE DONE!

As demonstrated in chapter one, the growing number of people exiting the back door of the church makes it clear that something must be done to increase assimilation efforts. The key is intentionality. This project has been an attempt to incorporate some of the most proven, effective assimilation practices in order to intentionally make assimilation efforts stronger in the church.

This program has especially benefited the model church, BHBC, as there was no intentional assimilation method in place when this program was begun in August 2004. The results of increased guest retention, increased percentages of new members enrolling in Sunday School and the overall record growth of the model church's total Sunday School enrollment numbers, testify to the fact that an intentional assimilation strategy works. When the church works together as a team to accomplish the goal of discipleship and assimilation of new members, God truly does bless the effort.

As stated previously, one of the keys is intentionality. This intentionality will require focus. No church does everything perfect. But even in imperfection, the church that stays focused on the mission of involving God's children in His work will see a fruitful reward for their labor.

Important Keys to Assimilation

In limiting our focus to the key objectives involved in successful assimilation, Thom Rainer has wisely advised the church. He emphasizes four aspects in assimilation that churches must focus upon. These are expectation, ministry involvement, relationships, and small-group involvement. He calls these the "four legs of the stool of

assimilation.” Rainer does not claim that any one of these principles is more important than the others, but he does say that without all four of these a church will have assimilation problems.¹⁶³ In Rainer’s understanding, assimilation is like a stool. The stool of assimilation must have all four legs to function properly.

Concerning the first principle of expectation, Rainer’s research team revealed its importance in a two-year study of churches with effective assimilation rates. He says “We were surprised to learn that one of the key commonalities among the churches was a sense of expectation of members and prospective members.” In these churches, Rainer found that church membership was not the placement of a name on a roll, but rather the clear expectation that the member was to make a difference through the ministries of the church. Giving, also, was not touted as optional but expected among church members. Membership or inquirer classes were often the place where these expectations were most clearly articulated.¹⁶⁴ Again, the churches that expected its members to get involved in the church had higher rates of those who remained active in church.

The second principle Rainer has found to be critical to assimilation is ministry involvement. Rainer says, “If a church member does not become meaningfully involved in some type of ministry in the church, his or her drop-out chances increase dramatically.” Rainer goes on to say in this article that “the church leadership cannot delay in moving new members to places of ministry. If more than six months lapse between the points of new membership to ministry involvement, the person will likely be already moving toward inactivity in the life of the church.”¹⁶⁵ As has been stated

¹⁶³ Thom Rainer, “Four Principles to Membership Retention,” available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bcl/areas/community/articles/012705.html>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

previously in this project, there seems to be a certain connection between personal involvement, ownership and long term church fulfillment and activity.

The third principle confirming much of this assimilation project is the importance of relationships in successful assimilation. Rainer says that this seems to turn up as the most important aspect of successful assimilation in study after study. Often, the development of these relationships with new members takes place before the member even joins. Sometimes a small group such as Sunday School can be the front door of church membership.¹⁶⁶

Not only can small group relationships be the front door of the church, but they may also serve to keep people from exiting the back door of the church. Rainer says “If the new member has no relationship with a church member when he or she joins the church, it is exceedingly difficult to create relationships. Such is the reason why it is critically important for church members to become highly intentional about developing relationships with un-churched persons before that person ever visits the church.”¹⁶⁷

The last of the four principles that Rainer has found to be a critical leg on the stool of assimilation is small group involvement. In the model church, this takes place in our Sunday School classes. This may also take place in discipleship groups, home cell groups, ministry teams, and choirs and praise teams, to name a few. Rainer says, “Our research shows that the most effective assimilation group is the Sunday School, which is the open-ended small group that typically meets on the church campus. A person

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

involved in a Sunday School class is five times more likely to be active in the church five years later than a person who attends worship services alone.”¹⁶⁸

Rainer concludes his article with these words of challenge:

These principles are not mutually exclusive. Indeed they often complement or even support one another. But they are all critical to the assimilation and discipleship health of the church. How is your church being strategic about keeping each of the four legs balanced and strong? What is taking place with intentionality to monitor progress in these four areas? Conceptually, the process looks simple. In reality, it is often laborious and never-ending. But, in God’s power, these four principles have been used by thousands of churches across America to close the back door.¹⁶⁹

The truth is that it is much easier to assimilate members than to reclaim members. In studying Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, it is evident that the Lord rejoices when one of His children returns "home (Lk 15:11-32).” When Christians seek to assimilate new members, they are attempting to keep the children of God from leaving their home. Though inactive members should never be forgotten, prevention is much easier than reclamation.

It is this author’s contention that a multilevel ministry of intentional assimilation from the day a person expresses interest in the church will dramatically reduce the number of those on the inactive member roll. Sadly, most churches today are cumbered with a bureaucracy that hinders assimilation and excludes newcomers.¹⁷⁰ It is believed that this project has provided a helpful resource to aid the church’s attempt at both reclaiming the inactive church member and early activation of those who are just beginning a relationship with Christ.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 283.

At this juncture it is worth noting that leaders must accept the fact that at times they will lose some church members to other churches. This will be the case even when the leadership is doing their job to keep members involved. In fact, many times when a vision becomes clear and a style of ministry established, membership transfers will be inevitable. Rather than becoming burdened over the loss, it is important to praise God that His children are in another church with which they can identify and best make a contribution. On other occasions, some members will leave the church and become inactive because a clearly cast vision shakes them from their comfort zones. Such losses are reasons for sorrow and persistence in reclaiming; for many of those people have considered the cost of discipleship and decided that the cross was just too heavy to carry (Mk 8:34).¹⁷¹

The Importance of Prayer

As this thesis draws to a close, it is of utmost importance, more than anything else, to bathe the entire assimilation process in prayer. Thom Rainer has commented on the power of prayer in God's work of reaching the lost. He writes:

Prayer is the key to reaching the un-churched. I rarely heard from an effective church that did not have a strong emphasis on prayer. Evangelizing the un-churched is spiritual warfare. Satan and his demonic horde will do anything they can to hinder someone from becoming a believer. Only prayer can effectively break the bonds of complacency, tradition and nitpicking that keep a church's focus off evangelism. Most of the effective churches in our study not only had pervasive prayer ministries; they made certain these prayer ministries included a specific focus on lost and un-churched persons. The leaders of churches that reached the un-churched were people of prayer. And while an average of 45 minutes per day in prayer may seem small, the effective church leaders' prayer lives were more time-consuming than the anemic level of most Christians. Prayer is powerful. And prayer is a requisite to reach the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

un-churched.¹⁷²

Finally, one word of caution must be noted about any effort at assimilation.

While seeking to assimilate every member we must realize that every child of God is moving at a different stage in their relationship with Him. One would certainly not want to be a discouragement to those who are simply not comfortable to move closer in their commitment in the present. While we realize that God's ultimate will is for them to be continually moving closer and closer to Christ, we must be patient at times.

The church must avoid creating an environment where members are critically judged based upon what ministry they are performing or in which class, or how many classes they are involved. *Christian Leader Training* has commented on this issue. In fact, one of their follow-up assimilation principles is called "Allow Freedom to Determine Intensity." They write:

This principle simply means that your church is ready to respond whenever a guest takes a step toward you. The idea - when they take a step forward, you take a step to meet them halfway. This principle means you give people freedom to be left alone if that is what they want, but if they want to be known, you get to know them. You must recognize that people are at different places in their willingness to go public about their interest in your church. Win Arn, the church growth specialist, reminds us, "Ministry in the purest and simplest form is love. Ministry is, in fact, doing love!" And such love allows people to move into church involvement and spiritual development at their own pace.¹⁷³

Is Assimilation Really So Important?

As this chapter and project closes, let us summarize why this issue of assimilation is so important. The first reason is because there are many who have never

¹⁷² Rainer, "15 Proven Ways to Reach the Un-churched," Internet.

¹⁷³ Nelson, "How to Increase Visitor Retention," Internet.

heard the good news that Jesus loves them and that His church is for them.¹⁷⁴ In Luke 14:23, Jesus said, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.” Jesus made his mission clear in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Jesus is clearly concerned with insiders reaching outsiders.

Studies indicate that when a church does not have an intentional strategy for assimilation, 91 percent of visitors will not return and become part of the church. Many of these will also be lost to Christ’s kingdom. The Christian Life Center in Aloha, Oregon, demonstrated this statistic with a study conducted in their church. When they implemented an assimilation strategy, guest retention went from 12 percent to 49 percent and the church grew from 330 to over 650 in 2 years.¹⁷⁵

Another reason why an intentional assimilation strategy is needed is because too many, after hearing and accepting the good news of Christ, are leaving the church through the back doors. A study by *Servant* magazine indicated that every week over 53,000 people leave the church and never return. These people are not only lost to the church, but possibly for eternity.¹⁷⁶ The church is reminded in the Word of God to “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds (Prv 27:23).” God’s people would do well to pay heed to the care and diligence of the Shepherd in Luke 15.

¹⁷⁴ Ming, “Helping Outsiders Become Insiders,” Internet.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

The third and final reason that we must have some kind of intentional assimilation approach is that there are many former church attendees and un-churched Christians in our communities.¹⁷⁷ The truth is that when people move, they often do not join a church in their new community. Many people in every community are just waiting to be invited to church. These are people that are used to being involved in the church, but simply need a little encouragement to motivate them to engage in church life again. They are ready to move from the community to the congregation from the congregation to the church and from the church to commitment to Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, the need for increased assimilation in Kentucky Baptist Churches is evident. This project is an attempt to address and perhaps even solve this problem in the aforementioned churches. It is this author's hope that, through reaching out to the community, they will be moved to become a part of the congregation.

As the community steps out of anonymity and into identification with Christ and the church, it is this author's hope that they will be connected to a Sunday School class where they will discover and use their gifts and be disciplined and mentored through the dynamic small group process detailed in this project. Hopefully, as the focus and intentionality called for in this project is carried out by the church, then new members will be increasingly assimilated and a lock will be applied to the back door of the church.

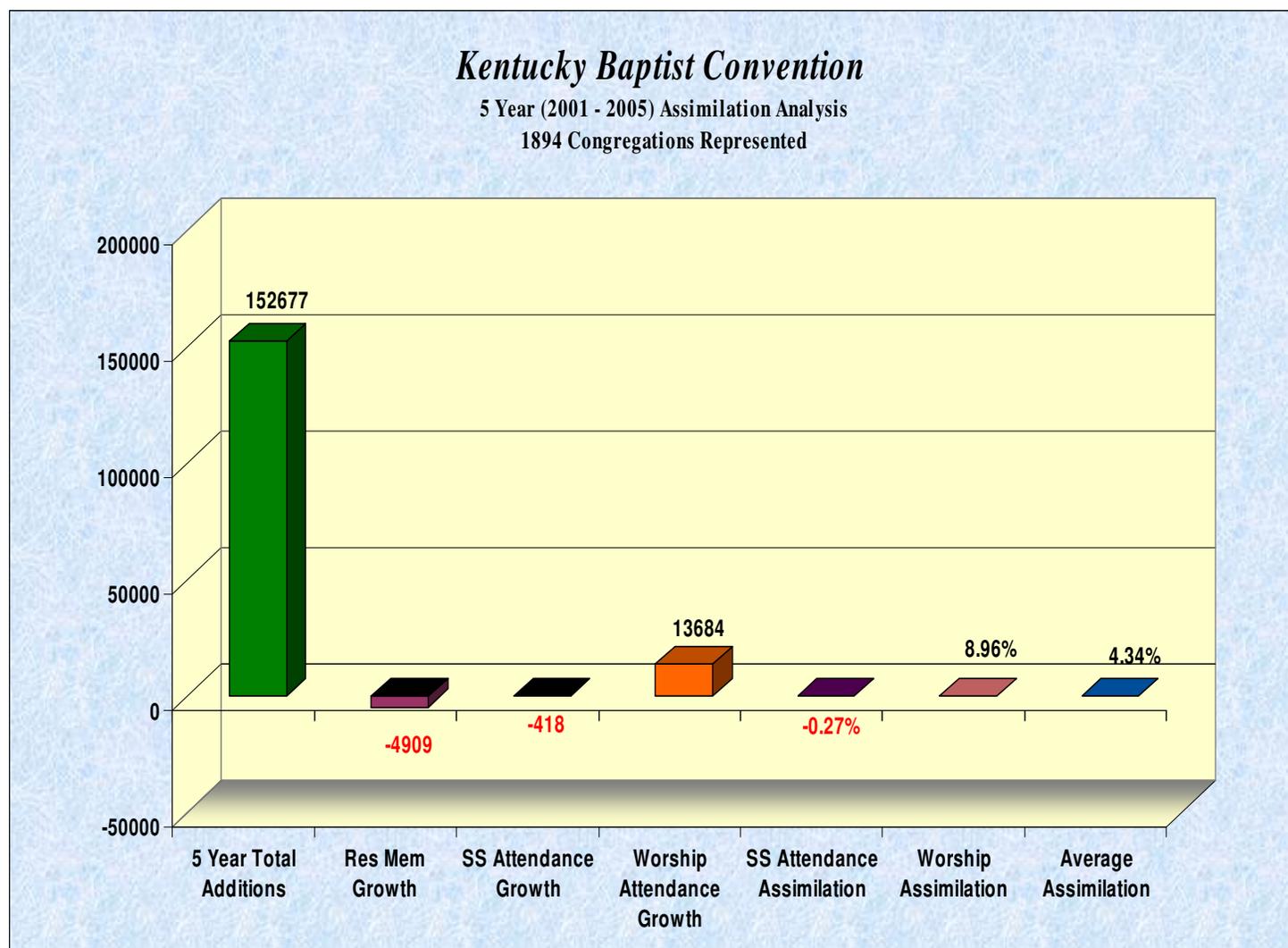
The only question that remains is, "Will churches invest the effort to assimilate and develop new members into all that God would have them to become?" They must. Anything less will surely fall short of obedience to God's command upon the lives of His children to "Go, and make *disciples* of all nations... (Mt 28:16)."¹⁷⁸ As this command is

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

carried forth, may God richly bless the efforts of His children as they connect with one another for the purpose of making God's name known as great throughout all the earth! It is this author's hope that this project will be used by God in this most worthwhile cause.

¹⁷⁸ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 130.

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B
SURVEY

This survey is being conducted by a doctoral student at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to reporting the survey results in a dissertation, the results will be used by the KBC for the purpose of bettering our Sunday School programs here in Kentucky. Please complete this brief survey and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. Answers do not need to be elaborate. A simple yes/no and a brief explanation is sufficient. Your response is kindly requested before August 15, 2007. Thanks in advance for your participation!

1. What is the average weekly Sunday School attendance at your church?
2. What is the average weekly worship attendance at your church?
3. Does your church have a specific committee or ministry team of people who oversee the church property for the purpose of ensuring a good first impression from guests? (attractive grounds, signs, greeters, ushers, etc.)
4. Do you designate with a sign special parking spaces for guests?
5. Does your church conduct community door to door survey work in order to identify the needs of and produce a list of prospects from your community? If so, how often?
6. Does your church engage in servant evangelism (i.e. free car wash, cups of cold water during community events, etc.) in the community? If yes, briefly explain.
7. Does your church utilize a guest registration card?
8. Do you call attention to the guest registration card in your worship service and encourage guests fill it out and turn it back into you?
9. If you answered yes to question 6, who is responsible for the follow-up contact? How soon after the visit do you make the follow-up contact?

10. Does your church give a gift to first time visitors? If so, how does the visitor receive the gift? (i.e., Guest is told to pick one up from the welcome center, individual from the church personally delivers one to the guest's home, etc.)
11. Do you have a staff person or ministry team (i.e., GROW or FAITH Team, etc.) that makes a home visit to follow up on guests?
12. Does your church have a specific prayer team or individual who focuses specifically on praying for recent church guests?
13. Does your church have a specific plan for connecting with a first time guest in order to move him/her into a Sunday School class? If so, who is responsible for this?
14. Does your church offer a new member's class? If so, how many times is it offered each year?
15. Does your church offer a formal or informal discipleship or mentoring program for new believers? If so, briefly explain.
16. Does your church offer a specific class for discipling new believers?
17. Does your church have a procedure for using a Spiritual gift test to determine the specific gifts and abilities that God has given each member?
18. Do you use the results of the spiritual gift test in order to find the best placement in Sunday School class and ministry teams?
19. Are your Sunday School classes intentionally organized so that each and every member has a specific ministry role in that class?
20. Does your church currently have an intentional assimilation strategy (process to involve new members in deeper commitment to Christ) in place? If so, on a scale of 1-10 (With a 10 standing for wide knowledge), how well do your members know this strategy and how they might use their gifts to support it?

APPENDIX C
FOX HILLS COMMUNITY OUTREACH SURVEY

Names of Surveyors: _____

Address of Home Surveyed: _____

At the Door Say:

“Hello, I’m _____ and this is _____. We are with Beacon Hill Baptist Church and we are out today in your neighborhood spreading the word about our Vacation Bible School on June 4-8. Do you have any children in your home from Kindergarten to 12th grade who might be interested?” (If so, hand them the Vacation Bible School Flyer and emphasize that bus transportation will be provided if needed). Then say “We are also trying to help our church effectively meet the needs of our community by conducting a brief survey.”

May we ask you a few questions?

1. Do you currently attend a church or Bible study? Yes No

If yes, how often do you attend in a month? _____

If no, would you be more likely to attend a church or Sunday morning adult Bible study if it was offered in a home in your neighborhood? Yes No

2. Our church would like to pray for you and your family. Are there prayer concerns our church family can pray for at this time ? (If the person is involved in a church then end with this question and thank them for participating in the survey)

3. Would you be interested in us coming back sometime in the future to share with you more about the ministries of our church? If yes, may we have your name and phone number? (Please thank the person for helping our church with this community survey)

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Additional Comments (Prospect?)

APPENDIX D

Information/Communication Card

Mr./Mrs./Miss: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail Address _____

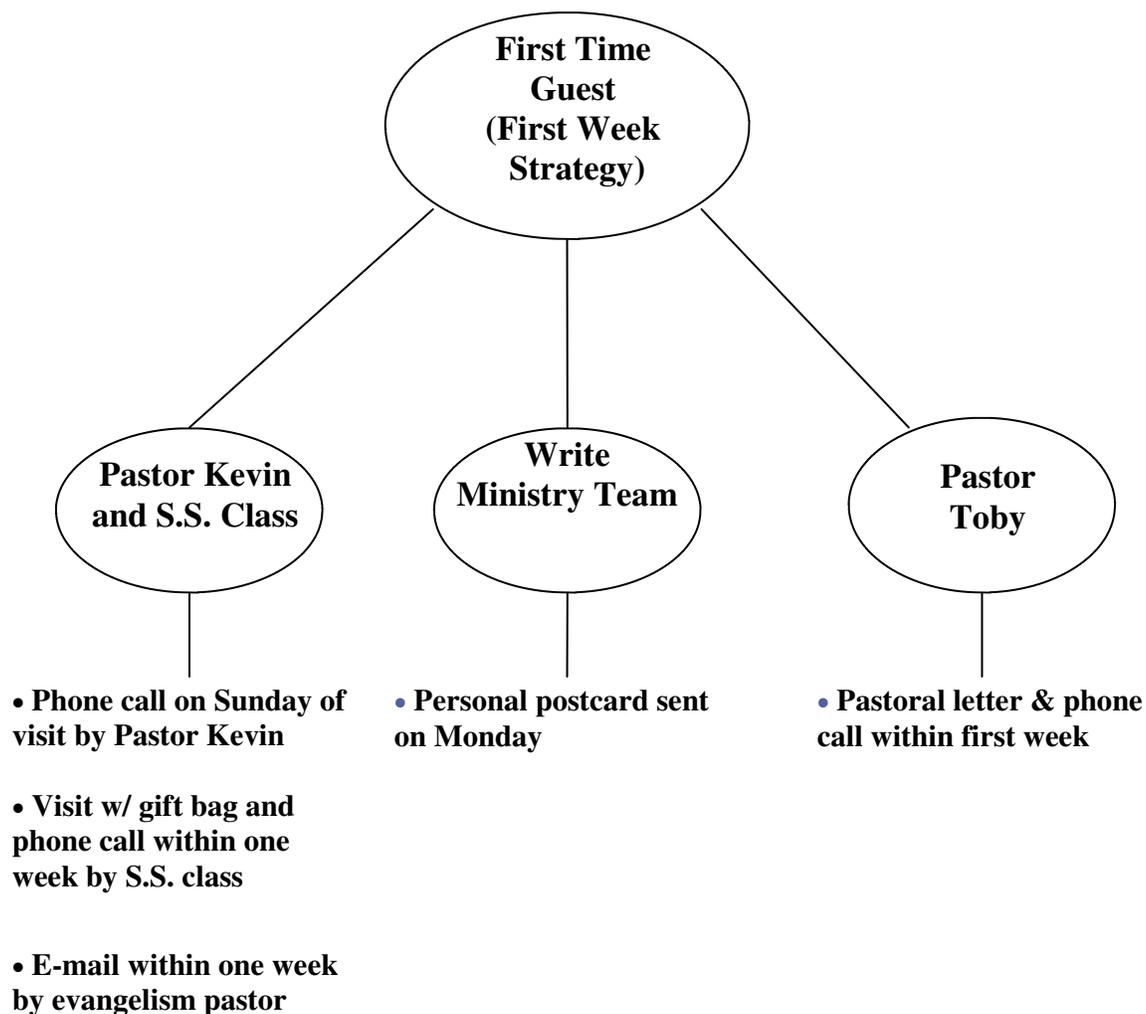
Age Group: 18-22 23-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-UP

Preschool _____ Children _____ Youth _____

Is This Your... First Time... Second Time **Are You A...** Attender... Member**Decision and/or Information** How to become a Christian I Prayed to receive Christ as my personal Savior I am renewing my commitment to Christ. I want to join this church. More information about church I'd like to talk to a minister. Hospital/Upcoming surgery I am a single parent. I will help wherever needed Address/Phone number update I need offering envelopes I would like a DVD of service _____ I would like a CD of service _____

Note: _____

APPENDIX E



APPENDIX F

Thank you so much for joining us for worship at Beacon Hill Baptist this past week! We know that you have many churches to choose from and we're glad that you chose to spend your time with us!

We hope you were inspired and encouraged during your time with us. Beacon Hill is a church that loves Christ and loves people. If you are searching for a church to call home, we sincerely hope that God will lead you to make Beacon Hill Baptist that place.

If we can answer any specific questions you may have about our church we would be glad to help. And please know that you can count on our prayers for you as you find the right church for your family.

Pastor Name

APPENDIX G



2006-07

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Directory

Your likelihood of remaining a committed follower of Jesus Christ rises ***dramatically*** when you make the decision to be involved in a small group such as Sunday School. It's this small group environment that connects you with the life of the church in a way in which nothing else can substitute. At Beacon Hill there are many classes to choose from. Try as many as you like until you find the class that's a perfect fit for you! Then stand back and watch as God transforms your heart each week through friendships with others and encouragement from His Word.

Pastor of Evangelism and Discipleship
Kevin Milburn

2006-07 Sunday School Classes

Preschool

Bed Babies	(# 201)
Crawlers/ Walkers	(# 205)
2 Year Olds	(# 213)
3 Year Olds	(# 215)
4 Year Olds	(# 214)
5 Year Olds	(# 206)

Children's

Grades 1 - 2	(# 305-307)
Grades 3 - 5	(# 311-315)

Youth

(Grades 6 - 12 meet in our activity center across the south parking lot)

Young Adults

College and Singles:	Steven Toby (# 310)
Co-Ed:	Scott Lawless (# 302-306)
Nearly/Newly Married:	Ryan and Amanda Davis (# 308)

Median Adults

Co-Ed Classes:	Eddie Epperson	(# 118)
	Larry Hansford	(# 312)
	Charlie Yonts	(# 117)
Men's Classes:	Dan Rogers	(# 103)
	Don Dykes	(# 107)
Ladies Classes:	Janice Harris	(# 104)
	Jeannie Reynolds	(# 114)
Singles Class:	Mildred Brainard	(# 115)

For All Ages

The Sanctuary Bible Class (Taught by Pastor Kevin Milburn in Sanctuary)

Senior Adults

Co-Ed Classes:	Jim Reynolds	(# W-4)
	Oris Stanton	(# 106)
	Carl Robbins	(# 114)
	Ray Ramsey	(# 210)
	Lois Wilson	(# 108)
Men:	Bob Baldwin	(# W-7)
Ladies:	Evelyn Wiley	(# W-8)
	Dena Henry	(# W-6)
	Gloria Stanton	(# W-9)
	Edith Singleton	(# W-2)
	Jimmie Brown	(# W-5)
	Mickey Malcolm	(# 102)

Off Campus Classes:

"The Neighborhood"
"Crestview"

Ray and Virginia Kinney
Bobby and Dot Hughes

APPENDIX H

Dwight, Karen and Emily,

Thank you so much for joining us for worship at Beacon Hill Baptist recently! We know that you have many churches to choose from and we're glad that you chose to spend your time with us !

Enclosed you will find a Sunday School guide and church map. The best way to get to know us is in one of our many small groups. So, simply find your age division and then try as many classes as you want until you find the right fit.

Beacon Hill is a church that loves Christ and loves people. If you are searching for a church to call home, we sincerely hope that God will lead you to make Beacon Hill Baptist that place.

If we can answer any specific questions you may have about our church we would be overjoyed to help. And please know that you can count on our prayers for you as you find the right church for your family.

Pastor,
Dr. John Mark Toby

APPENDIX I

Beacon Hill Baptist Sunday School Classes Enrollment Form 2006-07

Preschool

Bed Babies
Crawlers/ Walkers
2 Year Olds
3 Year Olds
4 Year Olds
5 Year Olds / Kindergarten

Young Adults

College/Singles
Nearly/Newly Married
Co-Ed

Children's

Grades 1 - 2
Grades 3 - 5
Grade 6

Median Adults

Couples
Men
Women
Singles

Youth

7th – 8th grade boys
7th – 8th grade girls
9th – 10th grade boys
9th – 10th grade girls
11th – 12th grade boys
11th – 12th grade girls

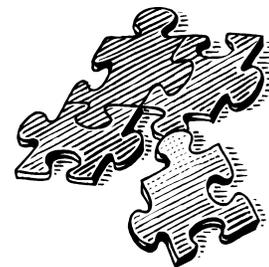
Senior Adults

Couples
Men
Women

For All Ages

The Sanctuary Bible Class

APPENDIX J

**“Sunday School Prospect Form”**

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Comments:

*** Dear Sunday School Teacher - This person has recently joined our church. Perhaps you or someone from your class could call this person and invite them to Sunday School. They have already received a church map and Sunday School guide, but they may need the extra encouragement and help in finding your class. Thanks so much for all you do to encourage and strengthen our church through Sunday School!**

“ SO, MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, BE STRONG AND STEADY, ALWAYS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE LORD'S WORK, FOR YOU KNOW THAT NOTHING YOU DO FOR THE LORD IS EVER USELESS (1 CORINTHIANS 15:58). ”

APPENDIX K

Spiritual Gifts Survey
 LifeWay Christian Resources
 Copyright © 2003 LifeWay Christian Resources
 SPIRITUAL GIFTS SURVEY

DIRECTIONS

This is not a test, so there are no wrong answers. The Spiritual Gifts Survey consists of 80 statements. Some items reflect concrete actions; other items are descriptive traits; and still others are statements of belief.

- Select the one response you feel best characterizes yourself and place that number in the blank provided. Record your answer in the blank beside each item.
- Do not spend too much time on any one item. Remember, it is not a test. Usually your immediate response is best.
- Please give an answer for each item. Do not skip any items.
- Do not ask others how they are answering or how they think you should answer.
- Work at your own pace.

Your response choices are:

- 5—Highly characteristic of me/definitely true for me
- 4—Most of the time this would describe me/be true for me
- 3—Frequently characteristic of me/true for me—about 50 percent of the time
- 2—Occasionally characteristic of me/true for me—about 25 percent of the time
- 1—Not at all characteristic of me/definitely untrue for me

- _____ 1. I have the ability to organize ideas, resources, time, and people effectively.
- _____ 2. I am willing to study and prepare for the task of teaching.
- _____ 3. I am able to relate the truths of God to specific situations.
- _____ 4. I have a God-given ability to help others grow in their faith.
- _____ 5. I possess a special ability to communicate the truth of salvation.
- _____ 6. I have the ability to make critical decisions when necessary.
- _____ 7. I am sensitive to the hurts of people.
- _____ 8. I experience joy in meeting needs through sharing possessions.
- _____ 9. I enjoy studying.
- _____ 10. I have delivered God's message of warning and judgment.

- _____ 11. I am able to sense the true motivation of persons and movements.
- _____ 12. I have a special ability to trust God in difficult situations.
- _____ 13. I have a strong desire to contribute to the establishment of new churches.
- _____ 14. I take action to meet physical and practical needs rather than merely talking about or planning to help.
- _____ 15. I enjoy entertaining guests in my home.
- _____ 16. I can adapt my guidance to fit the maturity of those working with me.
- _____ 17. I can delegate and assign meaningful work.
- _____ 18. I have an ability and desire to teach.
- _____ 19. I am usually able to analyze a situation correctly.
- _____ 20. I have a natural tendency to encourage others.
- _____ 21. I am willing to take the initiative in helping other Christians grow in their faith.
- _____ 22. I have an acute awareness of the emotions of other people, such as loneliness, pain, fear, and anger.
- _____ 23. I am a cheerful giver.
- _____ 24. I spend time digging into facts.
- _____ 25. I feel that I have a message from God to deliver to others.
- _____ 26. I can recognize when a person is genuine/honest.
- _____ 27. I am a person of vision (a clear mental portrait of a preferable future given by God). I am able to communicate vision in such a way that others commit to making the vision a reality.
- _____ 28. I am willing to yield to God's will rather than question and waver.
- _____ 29. I would like to be more active in getting the gospel to people in other lands.
- _____ 30. It makes me happy to do things for people in need.
- _____ 31. I am successful in getting a group to do its work joyfully.
- _____ 32. I am able to make strangers feel at ease.
- _____ 33. I have the ability to plan learning approaches.
- _____ 34. I can identify those who need encouragement.
- _____ 35. I have trained Christians to be more obedient disciples of Christ.
- _____ 36. I am willing to do whatever it takes to see others come to Christ.
- _____ 37. I am attracted to people who are hurting.
- _____ 38. I am a generous giver.
- _____ 39. I am able to discover new truths.
- _____ 40. I have spiritual insights from Scripture concerning issues and people that compel me to speak out.
- _____ 41. I can sense when a person is acting in accord with God's will.
- _____ 42. I can trust in God even when things look dark.

- _____ 43. I can determine where God wants a group to go and help it get there.
- _____ 44. I have a strong desire to take the gospel to places where it has never been heard.
- _____ 45. I enjoy reaching out to new people in my church and community.
- _____ 46. I am sensitive to the needs of people.
- _____ 47. I have been able to make effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group.
- _____ 48. I often am consulted when fellow Christians are struggling to make difficult decisions.
- _____ 49. I think about how I can comfort and encourage others in my congregation.
- _____ 50. I am able to give spiritual direction to others.
- _____ 51. I am able to present the gospel to lost persons in such a way that they accept the Lord and His salvation.
- _____ 52. I possess an unusual capacity to understand the feelings of those in distress.
- _____ 53. I have a strong sense of stewardship based on the recognition that God owns all things.
- _____ 54. I have delivered to other persons messages that have come directly from God.
- _____ 55. I can sense when a person is acting under God's leadership.
- _____ 56. I try to be in God's will continually and be available for His use.
- _____ 57. I feel that I should take the gospel to people who have different beliefs from me.
- _____ 58. I have an acute awareness of the physical needs of others.
- _____ 59. I am skilled in setting forth positive and precise steps of action.
- _____ 60. I like to meet visitors at church and make them feel welcome.
- _____ 61. I explain Scripture in such a way that others understand it.
- _____ 62. I can usually see spiritual solutions to problems.
- _____ 63. I welcome opportunities to help people who need comfort, consolation, encouragement, and counseling.
- _____ 64. I feel at ease in sharing Christ with nonbelievers.
- _____ 65. I can influence others to perform to their highest God-given potential.
- _____ 66. I recognize the signs of stress and distress in others.
- _____ 67. I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries.
- _____ 68. I can organize facts into meaningful relationships.
- _____ 69. God gives me messages to deliver to His people.

_____ 70. I am able to sense whether people are being honest when they tell of their religious experiences.

_____ 71. I enjoy presenting the gospel to persons of other cultures and backgrounds.

_____ 72. I enjoy doing little things that help people.

_____ 73. I can give a clear, uncomplicated presentation.

_____ 74. I have been able to apply biblical truth to the specific needs of my church.

_____ 75. God has used me to encourage others to live Christlike lives.

_____ 76. I have sensed the need to help other people become more effective in their ministries.

_____ 77. I like to talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him.

_____ 78. I have the ability to make strangers feel comfortable in my home.

_____ 79. I have a wide range of study resources and know how to secure information.

_____ 80. I feel assured that a situation will change for the glory of God even when the situation seem impossible.

SCORING YOUR SURVEY

Follow these directions to figure your score for each spiritual gift.

1. Place in each box your numerical response (1-5) to the item number which is indicated below the box.

2. For each gift, add the numbers in the boxes and put the total in the TOTAL box.

LEADERSHIP + + + + =

Item 6 Item 16 Item 27 Item 43 Item 65 TOTAL

ADMINISTRATION + + + + =

Item 1 Item 17 Item 31 Item 47 Item 59 TOTAL

TEACHING + + + + =

Item 2 Item 18 Item 33 Item 61 Item 73 TOTAL

KNOWLEDGE + + + + =

Item 9 Item 24 Item 39 Item 68 Item 79 TOTAL

WISDOM + + + + =

Item 3 Item 19 Item 48 Item 62 Item 74 TOTAL

PROPHECY + + + + =

Item 10 Item 25 Item 40 Item 54 Item 69 TOTAL

DISCERNMENT $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 11 Item 26 Item 41 Item 55 Item 70 TOTAL

EXHORTATION $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 20 Item 34 Item 49 Item 63 Item 75 TOTAL

SHEPHERDING $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 4 Item 21 Item 35 Item 50 Item 76 TOTAL

FAITH $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 12 Item 28 Item 42 Item 56 Item 80 TOTAL

EVANGELISM $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 5 Item 36 Item 51 Item 64 Item 77 TOTAL

APOSTLESHIP $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 13 Item 29 Item 44 Item 57 Item 71 TOTAL

SERVICE/HELPS $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 14 Item 30 Item 46 Item 58 Item 72 TOTAL

MERCY $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 7 Item 22 Item 37 Item 52 Item 66 TOTAL

GIVING $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 8 Item 23 Item 38 Item 53 Item 67 TOTAL

HOSPITALITY $\square + \square + \square + \square + \square = \square$
 Item 15 Item 32 Item 45 Item 60 Item 78 TOTAL

The results of this survey give a picture of your gifts. Gifts for which the numbers are high are the ones in which you appear to be strongest. Gifts for which the numbers are very low are the ones in which you appear not to be strong.

Now that you have completed the survey, thoughtfully answer the following questions.

The gifts I have begun to discover in my life are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

· After prayer and worship, I am beginning to sense that God wants me to use my spiritual gifts to serve Christ's body by

_____.

· I am not sure yet how God wants me to use my gifts to serve others. But I am committed to prayer and worship, seeking wisdom and opportunities to use the gifts I have received from God. Ask God to help you know how He has gifted you for service and how you can begin to use this gift in ministry to others.

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PROFESSIONAL

Senior Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, KY, 1998-99.

Youth Pastor, Gethsemane Baptist Church, Danville, KY, 1999-2000.

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Member, American Association Christian Counselors, 2004-present.

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