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Hospitality: Areas That Are Effective in Creating a Desire for a Visitor to Connect to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

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HOSPITALITY:
AREAS THAT ARE EFFECTIVE IN CREATING A DESIRE FOR A VISITOR TO
CONNECT TO OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
Brent M. Hartwig
February 2023

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Soli Deo Gloria.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Growing up, I fell in love with the hospitality industry. Like Mr. McDermott from the television show *Hotel*, I wanted to be the General Manager of a hotel, and I wanted to live every day in the world of vacation. I realized I loved the industry that desires to welcome the stranger. Still, I give glory to God that he has called me to Pastoral Ministry, where God has gifted me with unique skills from the hospitality industry that I can use in the church. Thank you to the hotels and the industry that trained me.

Second, I am grateful to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for the doctorate experience. Our Redeemer directly benefited from each class with a sermon series or a Bible study. I also could dig deeper and then even deeper into this Bible theme of hospitality. I know I have been blessed, and I believe this work will be a blessing to the church. Thank you to the many professors who poured into me and taught me, guiding and leading me.

Third, I am thankful that Our Redeemer has called me as their pastor. This congregation has supported me prayerfully, emotionally, and financially for a decade as I pursued this doctorate of ministry. Congregational leaders and individual members have regularly offered their support. I am especially grateful for those who edited. Their desire for a pastor with a doctorate and their ongoing encouragement pushed me through this program.

Fourth, for all of the sacrifices, I am appreciative of my family. The kids understood when I was away taking classes, and Kara bore the burden as a temporary single parent. Never once did my wife or children question the importance of this endeavor, but they stood ready to encourage me to finish this program. A simple thank you seems insufficient.

Finally, to God, my heavenly father, and my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I thank God that while I was yet a stranger, He showed me hospitality.

ABSTRACT

Hartwig, Brent, M. "Hospitality: Areas that are Effective in Creating a Desire for a Visitor to Connect to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church." Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2023. 158 pp.

This major applied project explores hospitality offered by the local congregation. Biblical hospitality is implicitly and explicitly commanded in both the Old and New Testaments of scripture. Balancing the *Missio Dei* and two kinds of righteousness will keep us on the straight and narrow theologically when pursuing hospitality.

When churches offer hospitality, we are feeding, clothing, visiting, providing, and welcoming our neighbor. Our Redeemer wants to continue serving the community as a family-oriented, mission focused, hospitable congregation. We are doing the feeding, clothing, and providing through many efforts in the community. We are active with the local homeless shelter and crisis center. Our Redeemer is an active congregation, but for the MAP we wanted to discover what areas of hospitality are effective in creating a desire for visitors to have a further connection to the congregation. Through this particular study, we want to better understand our hospitality of welcoming and visiting. Both secular and sacred sources are explored as resources. To offer hospitality means preparation on our part.

Secret shoppers were utilized to measure the effectiveness of Our Redeemer's hospitality. Through secret visits by individuals that fit the prescribed criteria and follow-up personal interviews, an image of Our Redeemer's friendliness and expression of hospitality has been formed. As a result of this MAP the congregation will address facility issues and continually build a culture of hospitality. At Our Redeemer, we are about "Equipping Disciples to Make Disciples for Jesus!" Since that is true, it can be said that at Our Redeemer, we are about hospitality! As Christians, we all need to practice hospitality!

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

Every Sunday morning millions of church doors are unlocked, and pastors stand prepared to preach, organists and other instrumentalists have their sheet music in order, ushers stand holding bulletins they are eager to hand out as they are ready for the members of the church to arrive. With all this preparation, we are compelled to ask, how much preparation has gone into receiving the stranger? How much thought has gone into welcoming the stranger in their midst? How will the local church standing on a busy street corner on Main Street of America or the local church that is surrounded by amber waves of grain in the countryside welcome the stranger? Hospitality is a Biblical practice and demands the attention of the local church.

The congregation I serve, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church¹ in Iowa City, is known as a welcoming congregation. Yet in what ways does it stand ready to welcome strangers? Two encounters reinforce Our Redeemer's generally welcoming demeanor. After visiting multiple times, Lynne and her husband Jack expressed a desire to become members of Our Redeemer, and their membership was subsequently transferred. They had moved from Illinois because of a job promotion and were searching for a church home in the Iowa City area. They may have searched multiple churches, denominations, or even cities, or they may have restricted their search. In any case, sometime after they became active and involved members, Lynne expressed that she had never met a more welcoming and friendlier congregation than Our Redeemer. This sentiment has often been expressed by visitors and members alike. Even outside of its own membership and regular visitors, Our Redeemer is known by community members as a

¹ Instead of saying Our Redeemer Lutheran Church each time, from this place forward the shortened name of Our Redeemer will be used.

hospitable congregation which reaches out to its community. Recently, I heard this expressed while welcoming the Iowa City Chamber Singers to our sanctuary. They are a community group that uses our sanctuary for their weekly practices. During the welcome, one of the members, an ELCA hospital chaplain, stood up and expressed how much she appreciated Our Redeemer's friendly and welcoming spirit. She went on to say that Our Redeemer is one of the most outreach-oriented congregations in the town. The comment was unprompted and unexpected. Internally and externally, it appears that we are known for being friendly and welcoming. Lynne and the member of the Chamber Singers saw a certain amount of hospitable character in Our Redeemer. But do the members of the congregation realize what they did that outsiders would come to this conclusion?

Many might call this welcoming and friendly trait identified by Lynne and the ELCA chaplain "hospitality." Hospitality is generically defined in today's culture as "hospitable treatment, reception, or disposition"² and sometimes narrowly defined as "the activity or business of providing services to guests in hotels, restaurants, bars, etc."³ We use the word hospitable to describe people who exhibit exceptional kindness or at least the opposite of blatant rudeness. The etymology of "hospitality" comes from the Latin *hospes*,⁴ meaning "host," "guest," or "stranger," thus the root for the English words host, hospitality, hospice, hostel, and hotel. The word hospitality is not new. We receive and give hospitality with regularity; we host and are hosted. We know when we have been received warmly and when we have felt left out even though the marks of hospitality, food, drink, and comfort were provided. We speak of

² Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "hospitality," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hospitality>.

³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "hospitality."

⁴ C. Lewis, *Elementary Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 371.

southern hospitality and we understand when businesses provide good hospitality. Yet, much of what we associate with hospitality has to do with a surface level of friendliness or with the commodification of hospitality.

Hospitality should not be understood merely commercially as a career choice or degree that you can earn from some university,⁵ nor should hospitality be reduced to hosting parties of frivolity and fun or hosting family and friends. Historically, hospitality has been viewed as critically important.⁶ In these modern times, hospitality has become specialized and society has left it for the experts and professionals. Hospitality in our modern, secular realm has been a viable career, but it seems to have gained attention and broadened its reach in the last couple of decades. In the secular community, the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics retained Disney Institute to train them on hospitality. *The Des Moines Gazette* reported:

University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics made news several years ago when it worked with the Disney Institute to improve patient satisfaction. Initially, the university received backlash when it wanted to send a team to Walt Disney World for the training, but the university shifted gears and brought a training team to campus.

USA Today published an article in 2011 about how a number of hospitals were turning to Disney, and USA Today reported Iowa's patient survey scores increased from about 20 to 67.⁷

Since then, Disney Institute has not only offered subsequent training sessions at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics but has also offered training sessions to various local businesses through the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce. In places that were once mostly institutional in

⁵ Cornell University, School of Hotel Administration in Ithaca, New York, has been consistently ranked the best school for a hospitality degree in the United States for decades. Many of their professors author the industry's textbooks and many of their professors are industry leaders. Iowa State University is currently ranked 10th best school in the United States for a degree in the hospitality industry. Best Schools Staff, "The 30 Best Hospitality Programs in the US," *Best Schools*, <https://thebestschools.org/rankings/best-hospitality-degree-programs/>.

⁶ See the discussion concerning the Early Church Fathers' emphasis on hospitality in chapter two.

⁷ "Bringing Disney Approach to Iowa City," *Des Moines Gazette*, June 10, 2014, <https://www.thegazette.com/2014/06/10/bringing-disney-approach-iowa-city>.

appearance and approach, now creating an environment that welcomes and procedures that show hospitality has become important. Simply put, we live in a world where people expect hospitality from all places and at all times.

The hospitality shown in the secular industry may still be lacking something when one explores the deeper meanings of hospitality. Pushing to a deeper theological definition, Letty Russell describes hospitality as “the practice of God’s welcome by reaching across difference to participation in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis.”⁸ Missing in the secular definitions, here God is given the primary focus. Hospitality begins with God’s action. Russel emphasizes it is “God’s welcome” and “God’s action.” Furthermore, hospitality in this sense is not something commodified, but rather something that reaches out to those who are not paying for it; it reaches to those who are different. In the work of Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager, they offer several changing, evolving definitions of hospitality. They settle upon this succinct definition: “Hospitality involves recognizing the presence of Christ in family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and complete strangers. It means responding to others as we would respond to the presence of Christ in our midst.”⁹ Clapp, Bernhard, and Bontrager approach hospitality from another angle, but again God is the center of their definition. Instead of understanding God as the origin of hospitality, they see Christ as the recipient of hospitality. Combined, God as origin of hospitality and as the recipient of hospitality, we find a more complex and complete definition of hospitality. Hospitality is God’s welcome to family and friends, fellow citizens, and foreigners as if the family and friends, fellow citizens and foreigners

⁸ Letty M Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 19.

⁹ Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager, *Deep & Wide: Hospitality and the Faithful Church* (Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest, 2008), 22.

were Christ in our midst. This is the goal of Our Redeemer: to offer the hospitality of God to the stranger and to see Jesus in the stranger. This definition is broad and comprehensive. Alexander Strauch in *The Hospitality Commands* summarizes what is communicated and demonstrated in the Bible about hospitality in fourteen points. The complete list of the “Doctrine of Hospitality” is in Appendix One, but these two points hit at the heart:

1. Christian hospitality is an effective medium for sharing the gospel message with relatives, friends, and neighbors (Acts 5:42; 20:20; Luke 5:29).
2. Christian hospitality helps to advance the gospel by providing an indispensable service for the Lord’s messengers (Luke 10:7–8; 3 John 5–8).¹⁰

Research Problem

Many congregations feel at a loss for how to welcome others and how to implement hospitality. They do not always know what works. This uncertainty is also true of Our Redeemer. Despite both an external and internal reputation for friendliness, the congregation of Our Redeemer does not know for sure what it is doing right or what is effective in connecting visitors to the congregation.

It was on April 30, 1957, that Our Redeemer was formed. At that time, only one The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation was in the Iowa City area. It was downtown, adjacent to the University of Iowa, and served the students of the university. As an ever-growing mass of townsfolk joined the student chapel, it became apparent that a family-oriented congregation was necessary.

Splitting off from St. Paul’s Chapel, in a friendly and joyful way, Our Redeemer was born. The newly formed congregation met in the basement of St. Paul’s while land was purchased and a building built. The first Vacation Bible School program was held at the local elementary school

¹⁰ Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth), 47–48.

prior to the church being built, thus demonstrating the congregation's eagerness and focus on outreach. Their vision of the surrounding community as the mission field opened the doors, literally and figuratively, to hospitality opportunities. The vision of being a "mission" church remains today. Through various groups—such as The Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) and the Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL)—and committees (Mission, Outreach, and Human Care), Our Redeemer keeps the mission alive. Fifteen percent of the annual operating budget and door offerings go for various mission opportunities that visit the congregation—missionaries, Christian musicians, and mission agencies (i.e. Feed My Starving Children or Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch), which feeds a missional mindset where members give of their treasure. In addition to a financial mission focus, this congregation, at least a core population of the congregation, has a desire to serve missionally with their hands and feet. This congregation has led missional trips all over the world—from Central America (Guatemala) to South Africa (Swaziland). Several trips to Bishkek, which lies in the north of Kyrgyzstan,¹¹ have been made by congregational members. Domestically, trips have been made by youth and adults to help the Indians of the Southwest and the Alaskan Indians of the Northwest. Closer to home, we have served in Kansas City and Chicago. Up to forty members, youth, and adults, serve LCMS congregations in the Chicagoland area. These congregations are suffering from falling attendance and failing facilities. The mission trip walks alongside the congregations to encourage and aid the congregations. Following Hurricane Katrina (2005), six missionary trips were executed over three years. Annual mission trips domestically and internationally, a local mission house focused on serving Alcoholics Anonymous with twenty-three meetings a week, sponsored

¹¹ Robert Pfeil, who served as a vicar and pastor at Our Redeemer, was the Missionary Pastor in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

missionaries around the world, and support for seminaries and seminarians, are missional projects that abound at Our Redeemer. The founding pastor, Reverend W. H. Niermann laid the groundwork. He is quoted as saying, “We are a mission church, and we will be a mission church.” The congregation has lived up to this aspiration to the present time, as is demonstrated by the many activities discussed here.

With their time, talent, and treasure, Our Redeemer is a mission-focused congregation with a focus on the whole family that opens the opportunity to give hospitality. If I were to describe Our Redeemer in three words, they would be: missional, family-oriented, and hospitable. These words are true in our history and in our present context. However, our problem is that members of Our Redeemer are unsure what areas of hospitality are effective at connecting visitors to the congregation.

It is important for Our Redeemer to address this problem. Built into the DNA of this congregation is the importance of continuous improvement. After major events and programs, we hold recap meetings to capture notes of improvement. Minor and major points are developed to improve the program or event for subsequent years. Members expect that we are concerned about offering the best we can offer. The culture of Our Redeemer does not accept mediocrity but is always striving to do things better. While the congregation is naturally caring toward outsiders, they have not taken time to assess how they can improve upon their hospitality activities. The same people greet with only minor adjustments. Resources are always limited, and there is only so much time in a day. Resources and finances are overextended, and we want to be as effective at offering hospitality as we can be. We know we regularly have visitors. We know that each fall there is an influx of families. Iowa City is a transient town because of the University of Iowa, the medical centers, and industry. We also know that we have visitors who

are not converted to members. As the pastor I am left wondering, “Why?” Is it because we have not extended hospitality to them? Therefore, we want to stand ready to offer the best hospitality that we can offer.

Research Question

I want to answer: What areas of hospitality are more or less effective at connecting visitors to the congregation such that they desire further contact with the congregation? When it comes to hospitality, we do not know what we are doing right, but we know we do a lot:

- We have greeters at the doors.
- We have welcoming and directives signs at the doors.
- We have a staffed welcome center in the Narthex.
- We have a staffed name tag table.
- We have ushers handing out bulletins and welcoming visitors at the doors to the sanctuary.
- We have a moment of welcome after the pastor’s welcome and before worship.
- We share the peace of Christ with worshippers just prior to Holy Communion.
- We have individual members who go out of their way to greet visitors.
- We have the pastor and vicar greet at the doors as people leave.
- We have an Assimilation Committee that is always looking for ways to help people get to know one another better.
- We have a coffee bar with breakfast treats.

Our Redeemer therefore touches on many of the aspects the commercial industry uses such as a welcoming smile, food, and other conveniences in an organized way while also showing

hospitality on a deeper level as members spontaneously greet people and look for ways to help visitors on a more personal and individual level.

Our Redeemer is intentional with offering hospitality in various ways, but we do not know which of these are more or less effective.¹² Which of these connects the visitor to the congregation? Furthermore, are there other components that visitors identify that make us hospitable? There may even be components of which we are unaware. It is therefore important that we answer the research question in order to increase awareness and effectiveness of the hospitality that is offered at Our Redeemer.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the research, therefore, is to discover what areas of hospitality are effective in creating a desire for visitors to have a further connection to the congregation. I learned as a manager that employees should know what they are doing right.¹³ If the employee does not know what they are doing well when they are provided constructive criticism, they might stop doing a good thing to fix a bad thing. The employee should know what is more or less effective so that they are hesitant to change the good things. Our Redeemer needs to know what they are doing correctly in order to keep doing what is beneficial. We want to offer the best hospitality that we can offer.

When we offer hospitality, many things are going on simultaneously. First, God is offering hospitality to the stranger. Through His Word, God is inviting the stranger into His kingdom.

¹² It is unknown and outside the parameters of this study to measure the strength or weakness of one's faith and the ability to show or deny hospitality.

¹³ Important for the reader to note is that I worked for Walt Disney Company at Walt Disney World for twelve years plus internships. I completed the management training program in the sales organization and developed my own department called *On-Property Sales & Communications*. We were responsible for increasing theme park ticket sales and ancillary products across all Walt Disney World properties through sales training, product knowledge, and incentive programs.

Second, when we offer hospitality, we are feeding, clothing, visiting, welcoming, and providing for our neighbor. When we do this, it is as if we are extending the hospitality to Christ himself for scripture informs, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:40)¹⁴ Therefore, we want to expand upon what we are doing right while taking away some things that are not effective or even offending. Our Redeemer wants to continue serving the community as a family-oriented, mission focused, hospitable congregation. We are doing the feeding, clothing, and providing through many efforts in the community. We are active with the local homeless shelter and crisis center. Through this particular study, we want to better understand our hospitality of welcoming and visiting.

In order to get an outsider and fresh perspective, this research project used secret visitors to experience the hospitality of Our Redeemer. Through LCMS pastors in the general area, secret visitors were identified and sent to Our Redeemer. Set criteria were shared with the pastors for the secret visitors to participate. There were no quantifiable benefits for the secret visitors (e.g. cash or product), but there were—through the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s Word and the

¹⁴ Among scholars, there are various interpretations of the “least of these my brothers.” Following an interpretation by Sherman Gray, Jeff Gibbs emphasizes, “This reading begins with the understanding that the ‘brothers’ of Jesus (25:40) in this unit are the same sort of people to whom Jesus’ ‘brother’ always refers in Matthew, namely, Jesus’ own disciples. The ‘brothers’ are people whose familiar relationship to Jesus is established through faith rather than through biology; Jesus has redefined his own family in terms of such faith.” Jeffrey A Gibbs, *Matthew 21:1–28:20*, ConcC (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2018) 1347. Gibbs emphasizes a very narrow interpretation of “brothers” because he is concerned a wider interpretation could emphasize a social-gospel focus. R. C. H. Lenski emphasizes the “brothers” is everyone. You might consider this a wide interpretation. He writes, “The least of the brethren (the addition of the adjective by means of a separate article making ‘least’ emphatic, Robertson Greek New Testament Grammar. 776) are mentioned merely because kindness done to them would not be highly rated among men. Of course, all the good done to the greatest of his brethren such as the apostles, the great confessors, and the martyrs, the King will also regard as having been done unto him. But if he had mentioned these great brethren, we might have thought their greatness made our deeds precious. By naming the least of the brethren the King really includes all brethren. Usually the greatest is regarded as including the less, but here we have a clear case where the very least include even the very greatest.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1943) 995. Leon Morris gives a nod to the wider interpretation and emphasizes, “In either case the test is the way people behave toward needy people whom they do not suspect of having any great importance. To act in this way shows what they are. What they did to those needy ones they did to Jesus.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 639. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

Sacrament—spiritual benefits.

During the field research, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. First, secret visitors completed a written survey. The survey contained questions that were neutral and quantifiable. A mixture of close-ended questions with set responses was used. Second, random selections of secret visitors were interviewed. The personal interviews were guided by open-ended questions, and the same questions were used with all interview participants. The personal interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes.

I expected that my research would reveal that the hospitality of a congregation has a far greater importance than most congregations ever give it. I also believe this MAP will reveal that hospitality is far more complex than placing greeters at the entrance to the church. Hospitality has been given to us from God, and as his followers we give hospitality. As we give hospitality, we are giving it as if Christ were in our midst. I expect the bibliographic research to inform and support these beliefs.

As a result of the research, I will answer the problem: it is unknown to Our Redeemer what areas of hospitality are more or less effective at connecting visitors to the congregation. I expected to learn which areas were useful and which were not. I expected the smiles and initiation of conversation by members to the visitors to be extremely important. I also expected that providing the visitor some distance is important. It is a fine line between a visitor feeling welcomed and feeling smothered. Through this research, I will be able to guide Our Redeemer to offer hospitality that is deep and wide.

Overall, I expected to learn that Our Redeemer is a friendly and welcoming congregation, and that the hospitality practiced here is very good. However, I was open to any results from the research. I know that during this journey and from the results of this journey, we will find ways

to improve the hospitality at Our Redeemer in these four ways:

- Our Redeemer will learn which intentional efforts are more effective.
- Our Redeemer will learn which intentional efforts can be stopped because they are less effective.
- Our Redeemer will learn which unintentional efforts are more effective and need to be kept, fostered, and grown.
- Our Redeemer will learn ways in which we can intentionally grow our hospitality.

Ultimately, even though Our Redeemer is already known as extremely friendly or hospitable, we can become more aware of what we are doing well so that we can capitalize upon what we are doing right and learn new abilities that will enhance what we are already doing. By improving our hospitality we will be better able to serve the stranger and the community who comes to worship at Our Redeemer. Through hospitality, God shares His hospitality, and through hospitality the members of Our Redeemer will be able to serve Christ in our midst. Hospitality is a Biblical practice and demands the attention of the local church, for in showing hospitality, we are serving our neighbor and ultimately serving the Gospel.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Hospitality is often underappreciated in Christian circles because it is misunderstood and reduced to a secular career choice or a degree that you can earn from a university. Simply put, many in Christian circles reduce hospitality to something that is less important, something that they do not need to participate in or be concerned about. Yet standing before us is the importance of hospitality. When looking at the work of God through his Son Jesus, as well as the theological emphasis on hospitality throughout church history, the Christian finds that hospitality is essential. After all, hospitality is an aspect of living out the Christian life in love of the neighbor, a mandate and exhortation from the Lord. With the doctrinal focus of *Missio Dei* (the Mission of God) and *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, hospitality becomes important. Furthermore, we see the historical importance of hospitality given by the church. It is ultimately about loving the stranger as an outgrowth of the hospitality shown to us by God when we were strangers. Hospitality is twofold—God’s hospitality and our hospitality. God shows hospitality by inviting the stranger into the Kingdom of God. When we offer hospitality, God is showing hospitality for God works through people to naturally provide for His people, and we are showing hospitality by welcoming, feeding, clothing, visiting, and providing. Additionally, when we offer hospitality, it is as if we are extending the hospitality to Christ himself, for Jesus says, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:40) Unequivocally, this makes hospitality important, foundational, and necessary. To better understand the depth and breadth of Biblical hospitality, we will use a two-pronged approach—the Biblical and theological foundations and the historical context.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

When reading through the Bible, many themes become apparent. Theologians and students of the Bible oftentimes focus on themes of grace, covenant, and prophecy at the sacrifice of the theme of hospitality, but both the Old Testament and the New Testament are steeped in hospitality. It is a theme that is carried throughout the Bible. Kent Burreson, arguing for the importance of biblical hospitality, summarizes it well, saying,

The Scriptures bear witness to this by accenting that God is hospitable, that Israel always lives as a stranger needing hospitality, that Christ and the New Testament make hospitality an identifying act of the new Christian community, and that in being hospitable to strangers the children of God in fact are receiving the hospitable God himself.¹

The hospitality of God in Christ to a lost world is the Biblical story, the overarching metanarrative. The Bible is supersaturated with the imagery of hospitality. Hospitality from God to Israel and to us who were strangers, as well as hospitality extended from us as to Christ himself. Therefore, hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith... hospitality is closely connected to love.² God's activity, his love for the stranger in the salvation of Israel, and pre-eminently, his love for the stranger in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, demonstrates hospitality. This hospitality is not to be thought of as a Theology of Glory.³ It is not only about making people happy, which is often the accusation of those denouncing the importance of

¹ Kent J. Burreson, "Hospitable Hosts: Forming an Inviting Liturgical Community," in *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins, (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 94.

² Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

³ As Luther puts it, the theologian of glory "does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil." Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation, 1518," in *Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold Grimm, vol. 31, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1957), 53. In other words, hospitality is not extended to make others feel good and church seem like a happy place. If that was the goal, then hospitality would be a Theology of Glory.

hospitality. Hospitality is primarily about loving the stranger by welcoming, feeding, clothing, visiting, and providing. Both the Old and New Testaments command care of the stranger and command God's people to offer hospitality. In the Old Testament, hospitality in the sense of love for the neighbor is usually couched in the language of caring for the foreigner and sojourner. Often this command is connected to the care the Israelites themselves received from God when they were sojourners. God commands them, "Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19).⁴ The people of the Old Testament are commanded to love the stranger and through their love God provides.

The New Testament does not differ. The Apostle Paul encourages, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Rom. 12:13) and the author of Hebrews reminds, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). Lest we are confused, the Apostle Peter emboldens, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Pet. 4:9), and the Apostle John encourages, "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth" (3 John 1:8).⁵ These passages explicitly use some form of the word hospitality or *philoxenia*. Etymologically, this word can be broken into two parts—*philo* and *xenia*. Here are two independent words that are combined and connected together. *Philo* means "to love," and *Xenia* means "stranger." The word hospitality woodenly means "to love the stranger," but synergistically, the whole word is greater than the two parts. To love the stranger is to provide by welcoming, feeding, clothing, and visiting. Hospitality is providing for the stranger a place of rest and temporary needs of life.

⁴ For other passages concerning care of the stranger see Exod. 23:9 and Lev. 19:34.

⁵ The New International Version. The NIV translation is used to demonstrate the clarity of "hospitality." The ESV translation says: "Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 1:8).

Furthermore, the New Testament talks about offering hospitality couched in the language of loving one another. Therefore, as Christians, we love one another when we love the stranger. Our Lord has commanded us to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Mark 12:31). Then our Lord challenges us even further to love our neighbor as he has loved us (Mark 12:30–31; John 13:34, 15:12). His love for us was sacrificial. While we were yet strangers, God loved us (Rom. 5:8). God demonstrated loving the stranger sacrificially as his greatest love is demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His one and only Son. Jesus came as a stranger, and as a stranger, Jesus died, rejected by his own people. Jesus’ identification with the stranger was not merely theoretical but actual. It was indeed the way he conducted his ministry and life. Oden notes that “Jesus’ own ministry and teaching is grounded in the radical character of God’s hospitality.”⁶ Conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus came into this world as a stranger and lived as a stranger while embracing societal strangers. Jesus lived out hospitality, for this is the mission of God. All of scripture instructs us to engage in hospitality.

Missio Dei

Jesus’ life and death extends God’s hospitality to us and demonstrates how hospitality delivers and demonstrates the *Missio Dei* (the Mission of God). Klaus Detlev Schulz defines the *Missio Dei* as

the Trinitarian redeeming and reconciling activity in history, motivated by his loving will for the entire world, grounded in the atoning work of Jesus Christ and carried out by the Holy Spirit of Christ through the means of grace, by which God justifies man, delivers him from rebellion, sin and death, subjects him under his reign and leads him, with the redeemed community, to the final goal in history.⁷

⁶ Amy G. Oden, *God’s Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 36.

⁷ Klaus Detlev Schulz, “Tensions in the Pneumatology of the ‘Missio Dei’ Concept,” *Concordia Journal* 23 (1997), 102–3.

Schulz's definition can be summarized by saying that *Missio Dei* is hospitality. The heart of God is that God loves the stranger so much, so he reveals himself as God, creator, redeemer, and sanctifier of all people and his desire to make all one in Christ. Amos Yong emphasizes three interrelated themes in the *Missio Dei*:

(1) Christian mission belongs first and foremost to God rather than the church; God is the principal protagonist of missionary activity and the church participates in the mission of God. (2) The mission of God is fully trinitarian in shape: God the Father reconciles the world to himself by sending the Son by the power of the Spirit; the focus is on universal fatherhood and spiritual presence of the first and third divine persons rather than on the Sonship of the second as proclaimed through the body of Christ. (3) The presence and activity of God's mission are to be found throughout the created order, even in the "secular" and "non-Christian" realms, and the goal of the *Missio Dei* is ushering in of the kingdom of God rather than the enlargement of the church.⁸

These themes highlight the complexity of the *Missio Dei*. It is God's act of hospitality to love a stranger and make the stranger his own people the *Missio Dei*. Additionally,

because the mission is God's activity, it is inappropriate to suggest that God needs us to accomplish his purposes. He takes pleasure in us serving him and working with him. But we must never suggest that God is somehow weak and constrained and unable to reach the nations without our help.⁹

So, the tension between God's mission and our participation in the *Missio Dei* should be balanced. Therefore, David Bosch paints this image: "The classical doctrine of the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit is expanded to include yet another 'movement:' Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."¹⁰ So God sends the church to deliver the message of His grace and mercy in Christ.

⁸ Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 131.

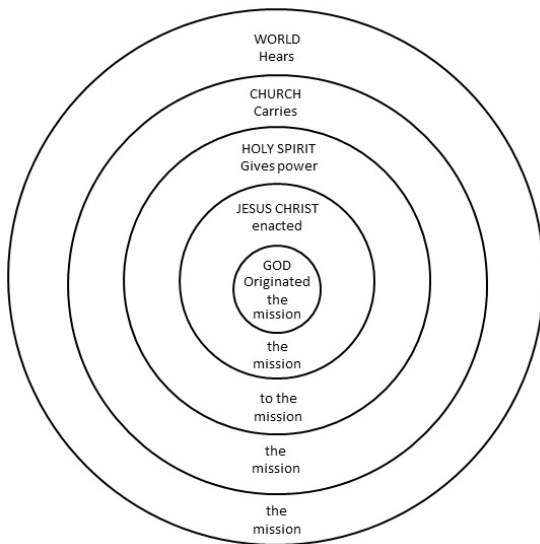
⁹ Eddie Arthur, "Missio Dei: The Mission of God," *Academia*, (September 2019), https://www.academia.edu/2282856/MISSIO_DEI_THE_MISSION_OF_GOD.

¹⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390.

Hospitality is part of the church’s toolkit for loving, serving, and delivering this message to the stranger. Gailyn Van Rheenen builds upon this extension of the image of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church to the stranger with this focused image and illustration:

The mission of God, as illustrated in figure [1], originated in the mind of God. He is its source. The mission flowed from him to Christ, who proclaimed God’s kingdom and in his death enacted God’s kingdom plan. He prayed that the Father would send the Spirit. This Spirit empowered the church for mission. God’s mission flowed, then from God to Christ to the church, who empowered by the Spirit, carries the mission to the world. Mission, therefore, is derived from the very nature of God who sends and saves finite humans who doubt and struggle along the journey.¹¹

Figure 1. The Mission of God



This hospitality to love the stranger and save them, this mission that is the heart of God, is for all to be saved as 1 Tim. 2:4¹² implores. God’s mission is carried out through God’s acts of hospitality. Therefore, the mission of God is not abstract, but it is concrete. God’s hospitality is incarnational. When Jesus became man, he entered humanity as a stranger to bring hospitality to

¹¹ Gailyn Van Rheenen, “From Theology to Practice: Participating in the Missio Dei,” *Missio Dei* 1 (August 2010), 26.

¹² “[W]ho desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

the strangers of this world. The mission of Jesus extends to the cross, into the tomb, and beyond death. Then, to bring the benefits of the *Missio Dei* to the whole world, Jesus sent his disciples, bestowing on them the Holy Spirit (John 20:21) to equip the disciples for their mission.

***Missio Dei* and Hospitality from God**

God is the commissioner: he is the one who sends; it is his mission. It is God's hospitality! "Here, Christian mission is the embodiment of divine hospitality that loves strangers (*philoxenia*), to the point of giving up our lives on behalf of others as to be reconciled to them, that they might in turn be reconciled to God."¹³ First and foremost, he sends Jesus to demonstrate that his hospitality is for all. This hospitality is seen throughout the ministry of Jesus as he fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, the saint and sinner, the Pharisees, Sadducees, prostitutes, and tax collectors. In Jesus' ministry he visited the sick, even healed the lame, blind, and deaf. These specific actions demonstrate hospitality. As we have seen in Jesus' ministry, God's hospitality was not societally nor geographically bound. The hospitality of God extends beyond societal norms to the questionable, beyond the Jews to include the Gentiles.¹⁴ Often times the religious leaders—the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the elders and scribes—would be troubled and question Jesus about his interaction with the undesirables. After all, Jesus interacted with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. John 4 demonstrates that God's hospitality is for all as Jesus enters the Samaritan town. This alone would bring great concern. Then, as a stranger, Jesus approaches a woman at the well in the middle of the day. This would again cause concern as a man should not approach a woman, but once again Jesus demonstrates that God's hospitality is for all. During the first century, the woman at the well would not be worthy, as she

¹³ Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 131.

¹⁴ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 36.

is a woman of ill repute socially and religiously, but Jesus as the stranger becomes the host offering her living water—offering her hospitality.

Jesus' preaching and healing demonstrated that God's [hospitality] cannot be constrained by age, status, illness, sex, wealth, or sin. Jesus' own ministry and teaching is grounded in the radical character of God's hospitality. He intentionally seeks "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15), those outside the community of faith, the ritually and socially unclean, the sick, the demon-possessed (Matt. 10:5-8), proclaiming to them the nearness of God's realm, God's [hospitality]. Jesus welcomes all these outsiders into God's life. His ministry is defined by this welcome, and ours is also.¹⁵

God's hospitality is always for all people of all places. Societally and geographically, there is no boundary and there are no limits.

The author of Luke and Acts further demonstrates that God's *Missio Dei* is for all people through several accounts which especially center around meals. Luke examines occasions that are full of guests, hosts, and meals. Each of these uniquely Lukan stories—Zacchaeus, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, and the road to Emmaus—carry a strong hospitality theme where hospitality is extended through table fellowship.¹⁶ For Luke, meals serve as occasions that give way to moral and spiritual discussion. Meals provide a vulnerability where such issues as the inclusiveness of the gospel and ritual cleanliness versus uncleanness are played out. Jesus routinely offers hospitality to and accepts hospitality from those who are viewed as unclean, strangers, or outsiders. Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus the chief tax collector in Jericho and Lazarus hungered to eat the dog scraps from the table of the rich man. In this framework of hospitality, the saving work of God, his *Missio Dei*, is played out for those considered outsiders.

Furthermore, Luke demonstrates that God's hospitality is not only for those outside, but for

¹⁵ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 36–37.

¹⁶ Arthur Just makes a major point of table fellowship and hospitality in his commentary and especially his excursus "Jesus' Table Fellowship." Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:51*, ConcC (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1996) 231–41.

all who are lost. Examine Luke 15, often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus begins his parable with a father who has two sons, each of which has become lost. Both sons knew the hospitality of their father, and both rejected their father's hospitality. One is lost to the world and sinful self-indulgence as he squanders his inheritance on reckless living. The other son is lost too. He is lost to his own obedience as he squanders his inheritance on his self-righteousness.¹⁷ Both sons once knew the hospitality of the father and through their own actions, they found themselves looking in from the outside. They were lost, but that is the thing about God's hospitality—it never ends. Two lost sons receive two welcomes as God's hospitality invites those who were once welcomed and then forfeited God's hospitality back into his hospitality.

This on-going, continuous hospitality is good news for Christians who are *Simul Justus et Peccator*, that is sinner and saint at the same time. Luke 15 demonstrates the vast and pervasive hospitality of God that parallels his forgiveness. As Jesus tells Peter to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22), forgiveness endures. Likewise, the hospitality of God endures. Those who have wandered from God's hospitality, he invites back in. Look at how "God welcomes the wayward Israelites back into covenant again and again throughout the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]. God's hospitality is not predicated upon our faithfulness or obedience."¹⁸ God's hospitality is based upon his desire that all are to be saved. His hospitality is not only for those on the outside, but it is even for those who have previously been welcomed in and who are lost.

It is an enduring mission, this *Missio Dei*. The mission of God is extended from the Father to Jesus Christ, and in the ministry of Christ we see that God's hospitality is not just for the Israelites, the chosen people, but his mission is for all. God's hospitality is not societally nor

¹⁷ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 31.

¹⁸ Oden, *God's Welcome*, 36. Examples of disobedience of unfaithfulness can be found in the history of the Israelites living in the promised land (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings).

geographically bound. God's hospitality is not limited but is renewing, as His hospitality is extended repeatedly to all people. The Mission of God is to love the stranger and to extend hospitality. However, the mission does not end with Jesus.

Extending God's Hospitality (*Missio Dei*) through the Church with Our Hospitality

In the *Missio Dei*, the Father sends the Son, and God the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, and God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit send the church into the world. The disciples of Jesus Christ, including the twelve apostles of the first century and the faithful followers throughout the first and subsequent centuries, are the extension of the *Missio Dei*. To extend the *Missio Dei* beyond his earthly ministry, Jesus proclaims the good news to his followers and then sends them out with that same proclamation.

From the Sea of Galilee, he calls fishermen from their nets to "follow me" (Matt. 4, Mark 1, Luke 5). Transforming fishermen to fishers of men is a demonstration of God's hospitality because God invites these strangers in, and they will in turn invite other strangers into God's hospitality. The call to the disciples is not based upon the merit of the disciples. The call to "follow me" is based upon the hospitality of God. In the forgiveness of Peter, you see the enduring hospitality of God. Despite Peter's denial of Jesus before the cock crows, Jesus still tells Peter and all the disciples to "follow me." If their invitation to follow was based upon their worthiness, the invitation would have been rescinded. Despite failings and flaws, the apostles are invited to follow and lead others to follow. For Jesus commanded them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19–20a). The apostles become the vehicle for offering God's hospitality to the strangers of this world.

For first-century Christianity, the hospitality of God expanded from the twelve apostles to a broader group. The world of mobility and travel had a twofold significance upon the spread of the Word of God and His hospitality. In the first place, itinerant preachers and teachers were able to travel and spread the Gospel. Safety prevailed and Roman roads provided the avenue to get to far and foreign places. As even a hasty glance at Paul's missionary journeys would reveal, these house churches were formed along the main travel routes of the Roman Empire. For example, "Ephesus was situated at the end of the Royal Road, the chief thoroughfare of the Roman East,"¹⁹ which was the western end of the East-West trade route. It was no coincidence that a formidable first-century church was formed at Ephesus, and that both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John lived there at different times. Freedom of travel throughout the Roman world allowed the church to spread in ways other than mere close geographical proximity. It was not long before Paul's three missionary trips and the subsequent letters would be well-known throughout the entire world. God's hospitality spread because the itinerant preachers and teachers were able to travel and spread the God's Gospel. As the Word spread, so did God's hospitality. Through the missionary trips of the Apostle Paul, not only did the Word of God spread to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, many other townspeople and ultimately the Romans, but so did the hospitality of God. In this first significance we see God's hospitality.

The second way in which the mobility of the New Testament world impacted first-century Christianity was the formation of local church to provide, show, and pursue hospitality. When the itinerant preachers and teachers visited a town, they developed a house church. From town to town along the missionary path of the Apostle Paul, you would find a string of house churches. As John Elliott states, "The church spread across the Mediterranean world from household to

¹⁹ UNESCO, "Ephesus," Silk Road Program, <http://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/ephesus>.

household.”²⁰ Each of these local churches had the opportunity to share hospitality to the itinerant preachers and teachers in the form of food and lodging. They could feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. Each of these house churches provided warm welcome to the stranger and the returning friend. In this second significance we see the churches’ hospitality, that is our hospitality.

The *Missio Dei* of God as his hospitality does not end in Rome with the death of the Apostle Paul, but it endures. The old saying goes, “All roads lead to Rome.” Likewise, the roads radiate out of Rome to the ends of the earth. Jesus commanded that we are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Since the first century, the church has grown and spread to the ends of the earth. The Apostolic mandate has continued, and the church has been the vehicle for continuing the spread of God’s Word and extending His hospitality throughout the centuries. In addition to preaching and teaching the Word of God, the church throughout the centuries has cared for the widow and orphaned. The church has found a need in the community and extended the hospitality of God by fulfilling the need, by offering hospitality from the church. Therefore, the church has offered hospitality by feeding, clothing, visiting, providing, and welcoming. Pohl explains the shift from this hospitality offered by the church from the church building to community hostels and hospitals:

During the fourth century the locations of Christian hospitality expanded in several different directions. In addition to hospitality provided by church and family households, hostels provided care for strangers, hospitals were established for the sick, the poor, and strangers, and monasteries welcomed pilgrims.... Hospitality as care for the needy came to be viewed a “public service,” and by the middle of the fourth century outsiders recognized Christian institutions of care as exemplary. A significant testimony to the importance of charity and hospitality, both within and

²⁰ John H. Elliott, "Household Meals vs. Temple Purity: Replication Patterns in Luke–Acts," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 104.

beyond the Christian community, came from a hostile source—the Emperor Julian (A.D. 362).²¹

Hostels and hospitals were Christian organizations that grew out of hospitality in homes and churches. Many of the civic organizations who fulfill today's community needs began in the Christian church as one specific extension of the church's hospitality.

There is a symbiotic relationship between *Missio Dei* and hospitality. As the mission of God extends from the Father to the Son to the Apostles and ultimately the church, there is a constant extension of hospitality. There is God's hospitality and there is the church's hospitality. To understand this unity and separation of God's hospitality and the church's hospitality, the doctrine of the Two Kinds of Righteousness will help. This doctrine will ensure we do not confuse humanity's role with God's role in the *Missio Dei*.

Two Kinds of Righteousness

We are to love all, even the stranger. One way we do this is to pursue, practice, and show hospitality in this world. Theologically, we say *coram mundo*,²² which is the righteousness before the world in which we love our neighbor, in which we provide hospitality.

There are many kinds of righteousness as Martin Luther concedes in his Galatian lectures:

There is political righteousness, which the emperor, the princes of this world, philosophers, and lawyers consider. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which human traditions teach, as, for example, the traditions of the pope and other such traditions. Parents and teachers may teach this kind of righteousness without danger, because they do not attribute to it any power to make satisfaction for sin, to placate God, and to earn grace...Over and above all these there is the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness.²³

²¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 43.

²² This Latin theological phrase simply means “righteousness in the eyes of the world.” As Luther wrote about the two kinds of righteousness, this righteousness is before the world. This same righteousness can be theologically referred to as active righteousness.

²³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 4.

Luther understands that there are many kinds of righteousness, and yet in his theology, Luther narrows the discussion to two kinds of righteousness. One kind of righteousness Luther calls alien righteousness meaning that it is a righteousness that comes from outside of us. Specifically, this righteousness is brought by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace as we are declared righteous and justified before God. The theological term most often used for this righteousness is *coram deo* because before God we can do nothing. Therefore, it is also referred to as passive righteousness as we the recipients of the righteousness are passive. We can do nothing to earn or deserve salvation. It is simply given to us who are strangers. Salvation is God's hospitality for us. We were enemies of God (Rom. 5:10), and his hospitality invites us in. Because this alien righteousness is *coram deo*, we can do absolutely nothing to obtain it.

However, Luther illuminates another kind of righteousness. Luther preached at St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on March 28, 1518, on the topic of two kinds of righteousness. In this sermon Luther explains:

The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to self, of which we read in Gal. 5[:24]: "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." In the second place, this righteousness consists in love to one's neighbor, and in the third place, in meekness and fear toward God.²⁴

Luther explains this second kind of righteousness proceeds from the first kind of righteousness, but it is different. This righteousness is *coram mundo*, that is before the world. The first righteousness was alien and passive, but this righteousness is natural and active. In the first righteousness we have no part, but in this second kind of righteousness we have an active part. That is, we do something. *coram mundo*, we show love to our neighbor. One aspect of this *coram*

²⁴ LW 31:299.

mundo love is the hospitality we extend.

Because there are two kinds of righteousness, we need to be careful that we do not confuse the two kinds of righteousness. Robert Kolb and Charles Arand assert:

The crux of the Lutheran reformation rested on maintaining the distinction between divine righteousness (which is salvific before God) and the human righteousness (which is good for the world). In the Lutheran view, the medieval church failed to distinguish between these two kinds of righteousness. It had confused the two by giving human righteousness an ultimate significance before God that it does not and cannot possess. It disparaged faith as insufficient for salvation and for our relationship with God. But we need to distinguish them: the active righteousness dare never become the basis for our righteousness *coram deo*.²⁵

We need to be careful about confusing the two kinds of righteousness because historically the two kinds have been confused. Hear Luther's voice as he also insists:

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits. Christian righteousness applies to the new man, and the righteousness of the Law applies to the old man, who is born of flesh and blood.²⁶

In heaven, we stand naked before God. No works or virtues of our own aid or assist us before God. Only Christ aids us. This is the righteousness *coram deo*. However, on earth, "we actively pursue a life of works and virtues in accordance with God's will for creation and his reclamation of creation in Christ."²⁷ This is the righteousness that is *coram mundo*.

As Lutherans who focus on Christ crucified and what God has done for us, we tend to overlook the good works that are necessary for our neighbor. "Thus, before God we live a 'receptive' life and experience a passive righteousness. However, at the same time, Luther saw that the counterpart to such passiveness before God is our active, energetic engagement with the

²⁵ Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 30.

²⁶ LW 26:7.

²⁷ Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 31.

world.”²⁸ Luther stressed that we have not only been created to be in a relationship with God but in a relationship with each other. God created us for life in this world. Therefore, we offer hospitality *coram mundo*. We do not want to confuse the two kinds of righteousness and see that hospitality is anything beyond loving and serving the neighbor. Scripture demonstrates—implicitly and explicitly—that we are to pursue, practice, and show hospitality as one way to love and serve our neighbor.

The narrative of Genesis 18–19 contains a striking early example of hospitality within the Abrahamic cycle of stories.²⁹ The stories in these chapters loosely form a narrative unit that serves to highlight hospitality *coram mundo* and what results when hospitality is extended or withheld. In Genesis 18, Abraham welcomes three strangers to his home. Their presence provides Abraham an opportunity to extend hospitality, placing Abraham into the role of host, and this was not uncommon:

Seminomadic life in the country would often bring people from different families into contact with one another, and the character of Canaan as a natural land bridge between Asia and Africa made it a popular trade route. In the absence of a formal industry of hospitality, people living in cities and encampments had a social obligation to welcome strangers.³⁰

²⁸ Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 54.

²⁹ “Throughout the history of discussions on hospitality, Abraham has served as the exemplar of biblical hospitality. His encounter with three 'men' who turned out to be angels is cited repeatedly in Jewish and Christian literature, including Jubilees, Philo, Josephus, 1 Clement, Testament of Abraham, Apocalypse of Paul, Origen, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Genesis Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud. The Testament of Abraham (20:15) exhorts, 'Let us too, my beloved brothers, imitate the hospitality of the patriarch Abraham.' The writer of Hebrews, probably alluding to Abraham's experience, admonishes his hearers, 'Do not neglect hospitality (φιλοξενίας), for by this some have unknowingly hosted (ξενίσαντες) angels' (Heb 13:2). This focus on Abraham likely stems from three factors, (1) the status of Abraham in the biblical tradition, (2) the divinely ordered circumstances of Abraham's story and its resultant benefit to Abraham and (3) the completeness of the hospitality model that is displayed in the narrative.” Lee Roy Martin, “Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality,” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 35 no. 1 (January 2014): 1–9, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2074-77052014000100004&lng=en&tlng=en.

³⁰ Theology of Work Project, “Abraham and Sarah’s Hospitality (Genesis 18:1–15),” <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-12-50-and-work/abraham-genesis-121-2511/abraham-and-sarahs-hospitality-genesis-181-15>.

Even though he does not know who these strangers are, Abraham's response to the strangers is an exemplary display of hospitality as he runs to greet the three strangers and bows down before them. Abraham and Sarah welcome three strange travelers under the oaks of Mamre, serving them. Scripture will definitively say a calf, tender and good, along with the finest bread, curds, and milk, and rest. Here we see the welcoming, feeding, providing, and visiting aspects of hospitality. We get a glimpse into how hospitality was practiced.

In much the same manner, this encounter of Abraham extending hospitality is seen in the following encounter of Lot. Lot, seated at the city gate, welcomes the strangers in much the same manner as had Abraham. Despite being a sojourner in the city, Lot invites the strangers to his own house. Sometime after the strangers arrive at Lot's house, the men of Sodom demand that Lot bring the strangers outside, "that we may know them." The significance of the narrative is the contrast between the hospitality shown by Lot and the lack of hospitality shown by the people of Sodom. Lot provides hospitality by protecting and defending the visitors while giving them a place to rest. The general implication is that hospitality is characteristic of a life of righteousness and that the lack of hospitality is a characteristic of unrighteousness. In Gen. 19, Lot welcomes visitors and protects them from the threats of the people of Sodom. Sodom is destroyed; Lot and his family are spared. Literally, hospitality offered *coram mundo* is a life and death issue in this world because the appropriate hospitality that should be extended preserves life.

Loving your neighbor by welcoming the stranger is not about conversion or justification. That is *coram deo*. Welcoming the stranger is about showing God's hospitality *coram mundo*. It is easy to confuse the two kinds of righteousness. Serving the needs of our neighbor is enough, and we need to guard against the perception that we are giving hospitality to "save" the stranger

as this would be a clear confusion of the two kinds of righteousness. To avoid this confusion, Kolb and Arand explain the importance of keeping the two kinds of righteousness separate:

To use Luther's language, Christians live in two worlds, one heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place the two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separate from each other. Both kinds of righteousness are God's will, and both kinds are necessary for us to live as fully human creatures restored in Christ. A whole, healthy human being must exist fully in both!³¹

Thus, we offer hospitality in the earthly realm serving our neighbor, and as a result we live out our vocation in both realms. Abraham and Lot served the stranger by showing hospitality without expectation of reward or merit before God. They did it because that was living out the Christian life *coram mundo*.

Biblical and Theological Foundation Summary

Hospitality is prevalent in the scriptures. It is not the theme that theologians usually focus upon, but it is prevalent. Furthermore, hospitality is important, foundational, and necessary because hospitality is God providing for his people. Through His hospitality God invites the stranger into His kingdom where he provides for them: welcoming, feeding, clothing, visiting, and providing. He provides their daily bread, and we get this intuitively because "daily bread" is Lutheran language. In the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer in Luther's Small Catechism it says:

What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout

³¹ Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 128.

workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.³²

The provision of our God is expanded in the explanation of the first article of the Apostles’

Creed:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.³³

God provides our daily bread through various sources, and one source is the hospitality of the church that welcomes, feeds, clothes, visits, and provides for others.

Furthermore, when we offer hospitality, it is as if we are extending the hospitality to Christ himself, as Christ has said, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). Hospitality as a part of the Christian life of loving the neighbor, serves the Mission of God, the *Missio Dei*. That mission then flows from God the Father to the Son, then the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, and ultimately from the Triune God to the apostles, early disciples, and the church throughout the centuries. The hospitality of God is to invite the stranger into his kingdom. However, we should carefully differentiate the two kinds of righteousness. Our role in extending hospitality is *coram mundo*, our role is to be the instrument through which God provides daily bread for his people. So, it is that hospitality is the mission of humanity and an embodiment of the hospitable *Missio Dei*.

³² Robert Kolb, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 357.

³³ Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 354–55.

Historical Theology

As clear as the biblical witness has been, the testimony of the leaders of the church throughout the centuries echo that in clarity. Scripture is the formative and normative text for the Christian community, and scripture forms and norms the Christian community's hospitality. For centuries Christian communities have found ways to put hospitality into practice. Uniformly, throughout the centuries, the church has proclaimed the importance of offering hospitality. We will sample two periods to see this focus of hospitality throughout the past two millennia, namely the Early Church Fathers and the Reformers.

The topic of hospitality was evident in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. In their reflection and in their practice, the Early Church Fathers wrestled with important issues of hospitality. Scores of documents implore the earliest of Christians to offer hospitality. Hospitality is part of the culture and traditions of the church. Burreson notes, "Historically Christian hospitality serves as a fundamental practice in the church when the ecclesial institution and Christian households and individuals interconnect to create a community that welcomes strangers and those in need."³⁴ The goal of the Early Church Fathers was to engender their hearers to show hospitality. Throughout the early centuries of the church, they identified the essence of Christian hospitality as duty and love, and explicitly stated that Christian hospitality is not about the worthiness of the recipient or salvific gain on the part of the giver.

Not only were Christians to offer Christian hospitality out of duty and love, but furthermore, the Early Church Fathers taught their catechumens to not withhold hospitality because of the unworthiness of the recipient. Specifically, John Chrysostom warns about risk of withholding hospitality because of the worthiness of the recipient. Chrysostom appeals,

³⁴ Kent J. Burreson, "Hospitable Hosts," 95.

It is tempting when offering hospitality to judge the worthiness of the receiver. Does this person deserve my hospitality? Is this person truly in need? Chrysostom reminds Christians that they can never know another's need. If we tried to first judge another's need or worthiness, we would never offer mercy or hospitality. Instead, says Chrysostom, recognize that it is Christ we are attempting to judge.³⁵

When we see past worthiness and see the recipient as Christ coming to stay, we will see our homes and lives in a new light. No longer is it about the worthiness of the recipient, for none of us would question the worthiness of Christ. Instead, it is about the opportunity to extend hospitality. In Homily 30 on Romans, Chrysostom describes the results from knowing we are welcoming Christ:

Knowing all this then, let us receive the Saints, that the house may shine, that it may be freed from choking weeds, that the bed-chamber may become a haven. And let us receive them, and wash their feet.... And don't focus on the fact that in appearance the Saints that lodge with you are but poor, and as beggars, and in rags many times, but be mindful of that voice which says, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).³⁶

Given this focus of Christ as the recipient of hospitality, Chrysostom naturally preaches extensively on Gen. 18 and Abraham's hospitality. In Homily 41 on Genesis, Chrysostom ties both concerns—treating all strangers as worthy and the virtue of offering hospitality—together. "Let's discover and emulate the just man's virtue.... So don't pay attention to the status of the visitor nor despise the person on the basis of what you can see, but consider that in the visitor you are welcoming the Lord."³⁷ The concern of worthiness remains today among laypeople. Hospitality cannot be offered based upon worthiness as this is in its own unique way a

³⁵ Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 62–63.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homily 30," in *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*, Documenta Catholica Omnia, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0345-0407,_Iohannes_Chrysostomus,_Homilies_on_The_Epistle_To_The_Romans,_EN.pdf

³⁷ John Chrysostom, "Homily 41" in *Homilies on Genesis 18–45*, translated by Robert C. Hill. The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 1988), 406, 408–09.

commoditization of hospitality. Similar to requiring money like McDonald's and Marriott, the worthiness of recipients becomes a "payment" for hospitality. Instead, as has been argued all along, hospitality is extended as to Christ himself. Furthermore, hospitality is extended as a part of the *Missio Dei*. The Early Church Fathers made it abundantly clear to their catechumens that the worthiness of recipient did not negate their Christian duty and love to extend hospitality.

Jumping several hundred centuries, the Reformers also implore that offering Christian hospitality is our Christian duty for those in a time of need. Luther frequently calls Christians to show hospitality and to love every neighbor. In his Deuteronomy commentary, Luther reminds everyone that God's Word and Law "commands hospitality to strangers."³⁸ In his 1 Timothy commentary, Luther says, "Whoever has the means should be hospitable."³⁹ Writing on Romans, Luther clarifies: "Moreover, he understands the term 'hospitality' here (Rom. 12:13) in terms of something freely given and not the mercenary or commercial kind....Therefore, those who are hospitable out of free love and not out of mercenary desire are the ones who are commended in this passage."⁴⁰ The bulk of Luther's discussion argues that the church should be a refuge for those who are needy. This responsibility is of great importance to Luther: "There is hospitality wherever the church is... Therefore, let those who want to be true members of the church remember to practice hospitality, to which we are encouraged not only by the example of the saintly patriarch but by very important testimonies of Scripture."⁴¹ Luther was not just waxing

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 9, *Luther's Works*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), 229.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Timothy*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 28, *Luther's Works*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 285.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 25, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 463.

⁴¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 3, *Luther's Works*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 178.

eloquent as it was common practice to have a steady stream of guests either coming or going from Luther's home. Showing hospitality, as demonstrated by Luther, is a Christian duty.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Hebrews, concurs. Calvin specifically comments on the history of hospitality and his culture's practice of hospitality:

This office of humanity has also nearly ceased to be properly observed among men; for the ancient hospitality, celebrated in histories, is unknown to us, and Inns now supply the place of accommodations for strangers. But [the Hebrews' author] speaks not so much of the practice of hospitality as observed then by the rich; but he rather commends the miserable and the needy to be entertained.⁴²

Directed by scripture and as a result of his historical setting, John Calvin encourages the pursuit of hospitality, which he sees as the Christian duty. The Bible, as he points to Abraham and Lot, witnesses that it is a Christian duty to offer hospitality.

Furthermore, the Reformers see the importance of offering hospitality as an extension of the love we received when we were yet strangers. In his seminal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin exhorts the Christian to love his neighbor:

Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, 'He is a stranger'; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Is. 58.7). Say, 'He is contemptible and worthless'; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does not deserve even the least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.⁴³

In commenting on a Christian's love of neighbor, Calvin does not mention hospitality explicitly, yet he commends the love of a stranger, which includes hospitality. Recognizing the

⁴² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 340.

⁴³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 453.

human tendency to restrict love of neighbor to a close relationship, Calvin calls for one's love of neighbors to be inclusive, writing that

[God] has impressed his image in us and has given us a common nature, which should incite us to providing one for the other. The man who wishes to exempt himself from providing for his neighbors should deface himself and declare that he no longer wishes to be a man, for as long as we are human creatures we must contemplate as in a mirror our face in those who are poor, despised, exhausted, who groan under their burdens...If there come some Moor or barbarian, since he is a man, he brings a mirror in which we are able to contemplate that he is our neighbor.⁴⁴

Christians offer hospitality to all others despite their stage, state, or status in life because they have been loved by God. Having been loved, Christians offer hospitality. Concerning this truth, the Reformers are clear.

Historical Theology Summary

It is important to understand how hospitality has been expressed throughout the church's history. In their reflection and in their practice, the leaders of the church throughout the centuries are unified as they have wrestled with important issues of hospitality and how to practically extend hospitality. It is the Christian duty to extend hospitality, and the motivation for extending hospitality comes from God alone. As we have been loved, we love. As we have received hospitality from God, we extend hospitality to others.

Conclusion

To better understand the depth and breadth of Biblical hospitality, we used a two-pronged approach—Biblical and Theological Foundation and Historical Theology. Biblical hospitality is implicitly and explicitly commanded in both the Old and New Testaments of scripture.

⁴⁴ John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 186.

Balancing the *Missio Dei* and two kinds of righteousness will keep us on the straight and narrow theologically when pursuing hospitality. It ensures that hospitality remains Biblical and that hospitality is not misused or coerced to bring about salvation. It is not up to us to save or justify anyone. The passive righteousness is exclusively from God, and yet it is God who makes us a new creation that can actively serve others. This Biblical hospitality has been upheld and encouraged by the leaders of the church throughout the twenty centuries of Christianity. As Pohl astutely and accurately states, “Hospitality as a framework provides a bridge which connects our theology with daily life and concerns.”⁴⁵ Hospitality is simply loving the stranger by welcoming, feeding, clothing, visiting, and providing.

⁴⁵ Pohl, *Making Room*, 8.

CHAPTER THREE

RECENT RESEARCH

Emphasizing the urgency of hospitality, Mark Love implores, “The church’s life is making room for the other. It is a life of hospitality.”¹ The church's life is hospitality which includes feeding, clothing, visiting, providing, and welcoming. Our Redeemer has various programs and initiatives that tend to feeding, clothing, visiting, and providing for the stranger. The purpose of this MAP is to discover the areas of hospitality that will more or less connect visitors to Our Redeemer.

Hospitality, as all things, begins with God. The hospitality of God in Christ to a lost world is the Biblical story, the overarching metanarrative. The heart of God is that God loves the stranger so much that he sent his one and only son that whoever believes will have life everlasting (John 3:16). Jesus came into this world as a stranger and lived as a stranger while embracing societal strangers. Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus the chief tax collector and he also fed the 5,000 plus women and children near Bethsaida, close to the Sea of Galilee. The mission of Jesus extends to the cross, into the tomb, and beyond death. The benefits of the *Missio Dei* are brought to the whole world through the disciples of Jesus.

Therefore, the church’s life is to extend hospitality as scripture explicitly encourages, “show hospitality” (Rom. 12:13b), “do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers” (Heb. 13:2a), “show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9), and “show hospitality” (3 John 1:8a). The church extends hospitality as demonstrated by Abraham and Lot in the Old Testament (Genesis 18-45) and by the inhabitants of the Island of Malta when Paul is shipwrecked in the

¹ Mark Love, “Missio Dei, Trinitarian Theology, and the Quest for a Post-Colonial Missiology,” *Missio Dei*, 1 (August 2010): 47.

New Testament (Acts 28). Both the Old and New Testaments command care of the stranger and command God's people to offer hospitality. Therefore, we welcome the stranger into our churches and into our worship services. When we welcome people into church and into the worship service they are exposed to the *Missio Dei* carried out through Word and Sacrament.

How can we best welcome those coming to worship? How do we embrace that life of hospitality with readiness? How do we live out that life open to the resources that will give best practices and improve the welcoming aspect of hospitality? Recent research on hospitality can help equip the church for hospitality work to further the *Missio Dei* while we fulfill our vocation *coram mundo*. We will explore hospitality's readiness and resources from a survey of secular and sacred resources. By so doing, we will prepare our congregations with best practices to participate in the *Missio Dei* and offer hospitality.

Readiness

Researchers show that readiness is essential in offering hospitality. However, several obstacles to readiness can prevent individuals and churches from offering hospitality. Following Abraham's example, early Christians understood the importance of being ready to provide hospitality. For they:

Read this story of the strangers at Mamre to mean that whether we are guests or hosts we need to be ready—ready to welcome, ready to enter another's world, ready to be vulnerable. This readiness is expectant. It may be akin to moral nerve. It exudes trust: trust that opportunities to welcome are just around the corner, trust that offering welcome will draw us closer to God, trust that participation in hospitality is participation in the life of God.²

The church's readiness to extend hospitality should be for everyone. To clarify, our neighbor is everyone around us (Luke 10). Hospitality should be extended to everyone in all aspects of life,

² Oden, *God's Welcome*, 18.

but for this MAP we are specifically looking at the welcome to worship. When people arrive for worship, the stranger is everyone unknown and known to us. To make the point lucid, Nouwen claims,

Although the word stranger suggests someone who belongs to another world than ours, speaks another language and has different customs, it is important, first of all, to recognize the stranger in our own familiar circle. When we are able to be good hosts for the strangers in our midst we may find also ways to expand our hospitality to broader horizons.³

The stranger is everyone around us, and, instead of expanding hospitality, it is within our sinful nature to think it is someone else's responsibility to offer hospitality and to make an excuse as to why we cannot show hospitality. In contrast, the early Christians sought hospitality. "In a number of ancient civilizations, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which all morality rested; it encompassed 'the good.'"⁴ In today's world, people say hospitality is someone else's job—"Let them do it!"

We become the biggest obstacle to showing hospitality with our sour attitudes, but our attitudes are not the only obstacles to our readiness to offer hospitality. The current culture and societal structures contribute to our lack of readiness. As society modernized and developed, the practice of hospitality has become increasingly institutionalized. Because of risk, it is not always possible or even desirable to host strangers in our homes. Therefore, in our world today the hospitality industry extends hospitality. The hospitality industry accounts for 10.3 percent of the world gross domestic product (US\$9.6 trillion) and employs 333 million people.⁵ Yet, the prevalence and pervasiveness of the hospitality industry does not remove our involvement or

³ Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 80.

⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 5.

⁵ World Travel and Tourism Council, "Economic Impact Reports," <https://wttc.org/research/economic-impact>.

responsibility. There is a wide-ranging assortment of ways to offer hospitality:

If you want to offer hospitality and your home is too small or your cooking skills too limited, you might take someone to a restaurant or hotel and enjoy camaraderie and deepening relationships there. Hospitality workers would assist you in offering hospitality. Moreover, hospitality workers have in their own right the opportunity to refresh people, create good relationships, provide shelter, and serve others much as Jesus did when he made wine (John 2:1—11) and washed feet (John 13:3—11).⁶

So the hospitality industry not only extends hospitality, but this industry enables each person to extend hospitality. For example, those seeking to offer hospitality can join the stranger at the restaurant for dinner or socialize with the stranger in the lobby of the hotel. So, the institutionalization of hospitality answers the concern about safety, security, and other risks to offering hospitality. Therefore institutionalization is not in and of itself bad. While institutional forms of hospitality, such as hotels, hospitals, hospices, food shelters, and homeless shelters, may be necessary, personal involvement cannot be sacrificed.

Readiness is critical when it comes to offering hospitality. It means being prepared. The concern addressed by Chrysostom and others was the delegating of personal responsibility and personal involvement. Such delegation often distances the Christian from the one in need, but it does not remove the Christian from the urgency of readiness. The Christian needs to stand ready to offer hospitality to anyone as “[h]ospitality lives in the margin, in the unexpected moments when we release our own agenda to the One who’s greater. It’s in that margin we find inexhaustible grace for this exhausted and overachieving world.”⁷ Furthermore, that same level of hospitality should be present when entering into the church and attending the worship services. In the divine service God is at work in his *Missio Dei*.

⁶ Theology of Work Project, “Abraham and Sarah’s.”

⁷ Jen Schmidt, *Just Open the Door: A Study of Biblical Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 2018), 98.

Resources

As children of God, we should overcome the challenges of readiness to pursue hospitality. The literature now explores resources for hospitality, or sometimes they are called best practices. How are “best practices” defined? Will Kenton defines best practices as “a set of guidelines, ethics or ideas that represent the most efficient or prudent course of action, in a given business situation.”⁸ Another source emphasized, “Best practices are important for processes that you need to work correctly. They are simply the best way to do things and have been worked out through trial and error, and are found to be the most sensible way to proceed.”⁹ Therefore, ensuring our readiness, best practices will enable Christians to pursue hospitality effectively and efficiently. Best practices can evolve internally through a continuous improvement process, and you can import best practices from outside sources and those performing the skill well. Best practices for the church can come from secular lines of business. We can learn best practices from businesses in the world around us, and there are times that other churches and religious organizations can provide the church with the best practices too. We will survey both secular and sacred resources to improve our ability to extend hospitality.

Secular

Hospitality has been an area of focus in the secular realm for many decades. “The hospitality industry is a multibillion-dollar industry that depends on the availability of leisure time, disposable income, and complete customer satisfaction.”¹⁰ The hospitality industry has

⁸ Will Kenton, “What You Should Know About Best Practices,” *Investopedia*, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/best_practices.asp.

⁹ “What Are Best Practices and Why Are They Important?,” *THAT! Company*, <https://www.thatcompany.com/what-are-best-practices-and-why-are-they-important>.

¹⁰ Peter Novak, “What Are The 4 Segments of The Hospitality Industry,” *Hospitality Net*, <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4082318.html>.

organized four segments of hospitality: food and beverage, travel and tourism, lodging, and recreation. Through academic pursuit and entrepreneurial efforts, hospitality has grown into an industry. Through the standardization of the industry, the public has come to expect, even demand, friendly customer service in all business interactions. In line with cultural norms, society expects all lines of business to cater to their needs, anticipate them, and make them feel special. Two organizations—Disney and Chick-fil-A—continue to be touted as premiere examples of hospitality, well known within the industry and understood by the general public. They strive to fulfill the needs of people by offering hospitality. We will explore their examples of hospitality as we determine best practices for the local congregation.

Disney

Throughout the world, Disney is renowned for its hospitality. Disney University¹¹ has studied behaviors and identified ways to teach welcoming, friendly, and hospitable behaviors. With the opening of Disneyland, Walt Disney laid out three requirements: keep the park clean, keep the park well maintained, and keep the park friendly. The book, *Be Our Guest*, affirms, “You build the best product you can. You give people effective training to support the delivery of exceptional service. You learn from your experiences. And you celebrate success. You never stop growing. You never stop believing.”¹² Disney offers this definition of quality service: “Quality Service means exceeding your guests’ expectations by paying attention to every detail

¹¹ “In essence, the Disney University makes certain that every employee is properly introduced to the company and understands the importance of the brand: Disney values, Disney history, and Disney traditions. This context further enriches the specific on-the-job training (OJT) sessions conducted by the operations team which employees attend immediately after orientation.” Doug Lipp, *Disney U: How Disney University Develops the World’s Most Engaged, Loyal, and Customer-Centered Employees* (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2013), 34.

¹² Disney Institute, *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service* (Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2011), xv.

of the delivery of your products and services”¹³ We see this characteristic demonstrated by Abraham in Genesis 18 as he exceeds his guests’ expectations. Abraham invited his visitors for a little water and a morsel of bread, but he killed the fattened calf and served a banquet.

Realizing a need to train cast members (employees) on the art and science of being a friendly park, Disney University taught the formula. In priority order, the Disney quality standards or the four keys are: Safety, Courtesy, Show, and Efficiency. Local congregations would most especially benefit from Disney by looking through the lenses of Courtesy and Show. Local congregations naturally use the other two keys, namely Safety and Efficiency. Still, if the local church explored Courtesy and Show as standard, then apparent successes or failures would be seen.

The first Disney standard or key that we will examine is courtesy. To help their cast members to replicate courtesy repeatedly and consistently, Disney teaches these Seven Service Guidelines: (1) make eye contact and smile, (2) greet and welcome each and every guest, (3) seek out guest contact, (4) provide immediate service recovery, (5) display appropriate body language at all times, (6) preserve the “magical” guest experience, ¹⁴ and (7) thank each and every guest. Most of these guidelines are common sense, yet most are not commonly done in our church environments. We do not always smile, greet, say thank you, or seek contact. Members

¹³ Disney Institute, *Be Our Guest*, 13.

¹⁴ Let me expand upon and further clarify service guideline number six as it has caused some confusion and concern in many Christian circles. In the Disney organization the word “magic” is thrown around a lot, and it is not a sin against the second commandment; it is not the promotion of satanic arts. Rather, magic is the WOW factor, the unexpected delivery, and it can be seen by watching the guests. The Disney Institute explains: “Observe the toddler whose turn has come to meet Mickey Mouse, life-size and in person; the teenager who has just emerged from The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror’s thirteen-story free fall; or the parents who get back to the hotel after a long day and find a Winnie the Pooh plush doll with cookies and milk patiently waiting on the bed for their child. Each is a magic moment in which the bond between the customer and company is forged and strengthened.” Magic is the WOW factor, and the magic moments are both organic and orchestrated, some happen naturally and some are carefully planned out.

hide behind excuses like “I am an introvert” and “I do not have the spiritual gift of hospitality.”

Excuses to relieve ourselves from extending hospitality are not only in the church. Seven years after Disneyland opened, Van France, the founder of Disney University stated:

The trouble with people is that we get hardening of the mental arteries, cirrhosis of the enthusiasm, and arthritis of the imagination, along with chronic and sometimes acute allergies to supervision, subordinates, the whole darn system. Is it possible that what we have gained through experience, we have lost through habit, and that what we have gained through organization, we have lost in enthusiasm?”¹⁵

Members in the pews are no different. Through apathy and indifference, many church members ignore their responsibility to greet, welcome, thank, interact, and provide hospitality to everyone in the sanctuary or church property. These simple, common sense actions are often forgotten, as the average church members focus on themselves instead of pursuing hospitality. Disney’s approach to courtesy teaches cast members to provide hospitality. Likewise, the church can use these guidelines to pursue hospitality. Just imagine the church service where everyone greeted everyone, where we all sought out contact, and where everyone thanked everyone for attending worship.

Disney’s Courtesy standards go hand in hand with their philosophy of Show which sets the stage for delivering hospitality. People do not feel welcome if the facility does not look Show ready. Show ready is the Disney term to express the condition of the physical facility people will be entering. Show ready means that the place is prepared for the show. Like a show on a stage, is the stage ready for the curtain to go up? Is the church building ready for the curtain to be drawn open and the guests and members enter the space? The focus of Show is the physical location where hospitality happens. Another set of Show terms that Disney uses is “onstage” and “backstage.”

¹⁵ Lipp, *Disney U*, 71.

‘Onstage’ is all public areas of the park, where guests roam freely and service is delivered. “Backstage” is all of the behind-the-scenes areas where guests don’t go, a place where all the mechanisms and technologies that run the property (and all the people that run them) reside and where cast members can move freely and prepare themselves to go onstage.¹⁶

The church needs to examine its onstage areas. Is the facility Show ready? To say the facility is Show ready does not just mean clean or in good condition. At Disney, the facility is prepared with the utmost attention to detail. “Bumping the lamp” has become a short-hand phrase to remember the extreme attention to detail that Disney puts into the facility. The Disney Institute affirms, “There is a corporate-wide obsession to detail at Disney. Walt was famous for his eye for detail, and he made sure that everyone paid the same attention that he did.”¹⁷ The attention to detail provides a Show ready environment that is almost always beyond anything else a competitor could dream up.

This same extreme attention to detail often goes into our church building design. The facility, especially the sanctuary, aims to tell a story through attention to detail. The sanctuary points us to Christ crucified and risen, but poor show distracts from the storyline. A cardboard box of Bibles or uncoordinated arrangements of hymnals, wrinkled paraments, faded carpeting, or peeling paint would distract from a hospitable environment and create an uncomfortable and unwelcome feeling. On the other hand, congregations that have good signage, that are well maintained, well lit, and that have a clean welcoming entry display good Show that sets the stage for delivering hospitality. Adhering to this Show standard could significantly impact our churches because many congregations are content with “allowing” areas to become unsightly or

¹⁶ Disney Institute, *Be Our Guest*, 115.

¹⁷ Disney Institute, *Be Our Guest*, 15.

aged. Show is an important factor, and it has a direct impact on hospitality. Show effects our ability to offer hospitality.

Both Courtesy and Show are important standards for the church. Looking beyond greeters, welcoming congregations should engage every member in the art of showing courtesy. Every member needs to seek out guest contact offering a friendly face to old members and new visitors alike, offering Courtesy. Furthermore, the church facilities, the building, and the surrounding grounds matter. Complacent attitudes and deferred maintenance of church buildings and facilities harm a congregation. The Show standard impacts the effectiveness of hospitality. Fast food chains and local banks are renovated, inside and out, with regularity because the Show standard impacts the effectiveness of hospitality. The Show standard is essential. Disney, though a secular institution, has helpful practices, Courtesy and Show standards, from which churches can learn to improve hospitality.

Chick-fil-A

Disney does not stand alone as a best practice of secular hospitality. We look to these secular hospitality practices to improve the congregation's ability to extend or improve their hospitality. Therefore, congregations can also learn from Chick-fil-A, a fast-food restaurant known for its chicken sandwiches and consistently leading the fast-food industry in customer satisfaction.¹⁸ Since Truitt Cathy opened the restaurant in 1967, the restaurant has grown in both size and reputation. According to President and COO Dan Cathy, even though they are closed on

¹⁸ "Customers savor their chicken sandwiches, but where Chick-fil-A really shines is customer service. It leads the industry in customer satisfaction, scoring the highest among restaurant chains in both full- and limited-service categories. Customers rave about the restaurants' quick, convenient service, friendly employees and cleanliness. The franchise realized early on that if customers had an enjoyable experience they would return again and again, to willingly spend a little more on the menu." Deep Patel, "8 Success Lessons Entrepreneurs Can Learn from Chick-fil-A," *Entrepreneur*, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/8-success-lessons-entrepreneurs-can-learn-from-chick-fil-a/322793>.

Sundays, Chick-fil-A surpasses McDonald's in sales annually.¹⁹ Reportedly, Chick-fil-A does "\$4.4 million in sales annually. By comparison, McDonald's generates about \$2.5 million per restaurant, and KFC about \$1.1 million per restaurant."²⁰

What is the secret sauce that has brought about phenomenal financial and cultural success to Truitt Cathy's Chick-fil-A? The company claims their purpose is clear.

From the beginning, Truett based his business on Biblical principles that he believed were also good business principles, and since 1982, our Corporate Purpose has guided all that we do. We keep our Purpose front and center because it helps us to steward our business and our work to positively influence everyone we meet.

"To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A."²¹

With a clear, articulate purpose, Chick-fil-A knows their strong, caring culture is key to their success. Kevin Purcer, Chick-fil-A's director of customer digital customer experience, illuminated, "If you can be dependable, polite and create a way for people to connect with each other, success will follow, even with the high demands of an always-on, instant-gratification-seeking world."²² He freely admitted, "We're not trying to change the world. We're a fried chicken business. But if we can show up in small ways every single day, we believe we can have an impact on the world."²³

The company derived from its stated purpose these core values: "We're here to serve. We're better together. We are purpose-driven, and we pursue what's next."²⁴ And there is not

¹⁹ Statistical Analysis System, "A Lesson in Customer Service," https://www.sas.com/en_us/insights/articles/marketing/a-lesson-in-customer-service-from-chick-fil-a.html.

²⁰ Deep Patel, "8 Success Lessons."

²¹ Chick-fil-A, "Culture & Values," <https://www.chick-fil-a.com/careers/culture>.

²² The Customer, "There's a Reason for Chick-fil-A's Customer Service Obsession," <https://thecustomer.net/chick-fil-a-customer-service-obsession/>.

²³ The Customer, "There's a Reason."

²⁴ Chick-fil-A, "Culture & Values."

just lip service to these stated values. Chick-fil-A has learned how to take its purpose and values and apply them to its daily business as they live them out. Francisco Banuelos points out, “Although every company has some sort of mission statement and corporate purpose, few live by those values like Chick-fil-A does. Although some (values) may be polarizing and politically incorrect in some circles, it is admirable how the company has stuck to them through decades.”²⁵ Knowing and living out its purpose, values, and mission is what Chick-fil-A does, and this is precisely what the church is called to do. We are called to offer hospitality, and with their emphasis on customer service and their culture of hospitality, Chick-fil-A is well known for its hospitality.

A quick internet search will reveal the corporation’s employee training video detailing hospitality's importance. In the video Mark Cathy, Senior Consultant, Hospitality and Service Design, explains the expectations of every Chick-fil-A employee. Like Disney’s Guest Service Guidelines, Chick-fil-A directs the employees to: (1) know the name of your guests, (2) learn the preferences of your guests, (3) discover each guest’s story, (4) go above and beyond what is expected, and (5) offer a fond farewell.²⁶

Most of these customer service guidelines compare to Disney and other organizations. Greeting and thanking are industry standards, but guideline number three stands out—discover each guest’s story. Chick-fil-A asserts that “Every life has a story, and often our customers and our employees, need a little grace and a little space when you deal with them because they are either experiencing a problem, just finished having a problem, or are about to have one.”

²⁵ Francisco Banuelos, “Lessons from Chick-Fil-A’s Second Mile,” *P Magazine*, <https://pregelamerica.com/pmag/articles/lessons-from-chick-fil-as-second-mile/>.

²⁶ Dee Ann Turner, “Chick-fil-A VP: Here Are Five Hallmarks of Outstanding Hospitality,” *Fox News*, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/chick-fil-a-vp-here-are-five-hallmarks-of-outstanding-hospitality>.

Connecting to the story of the person you are showing hospitality goes beyond the industry standards. This is because the company realizes that

The word “restaurant” means place of restoration, and we think of Chick-fil-A as an oasis where people can be restored. We strive to treat people better than the place down the street. One way we do that is by remembering that we’re all people with a lot of emotional things going on that don’t necessarily show on the surface, so we try to offer amenities and kindness that minister to the heart.

Knowing the guest’s name, learning their preferences, and offering a fond farewell are industry standards. Chick-fil-A exceeds industry standards by appealing to the guest’s story and by going above and beyond. Dan Cathy calls this going the extra mile. The company’s goal is that every visit, every customer will experience at least one element of Second Mile Service, based on Matt. 5:41: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.” At Chick-fil-A, they have put that verse into action, going the extra mile

to provide amenities not common in a quick-service restaurant, like offering fresh ground pepper to patrons dining in, or staff offering to carry heavy trays for moms with small children, helping them get settled and coming back to check on them often.²⁷

From entrepreneurial conferences to leadership organizations, Dan Cathy touts Chick-fil-A’s second mile philosophy. “If you want to make a difference, step over the line and into that second mile, because magical things happen there,” said Dan Cathy. “There’s joy and fun and reward in that second mile.”²⁸

These customer service guidelines focus the employee’s interaction on the person that is in front of them.

Every part of the operation is crafted around human interaction. For instance, when a customer says "Thank you," employees respond with "My pleasure!" Employees deliver the food to your table with a smile, and they frequently circle the dining area,

²⁷ Statistical Analysis System “A Lesson in Customer Service.”

²⁸ Statistical Analysis System “A Lesson in Customer Service.”

asking patrons if they need their beverages refilled. Small touches like this elevate the dining experience.²⁹

And the focus of serving the guest in front of them is not limited to inside the building. The company works to ensure that drive-through guests, even during high traffic times receive the renown guest service. “Employees are stationed outside during busy periods to take orders and payments, speeding up the process by giving customers more face-to-face time with a cheerful employee.”³⁰

Increasing speed and accuracy, the development of Chick-fil-A’s drive through experience exemplifies their above and beyond philosophy, but it also explains their “Marry the mission, date the methods” catchphrase. What does this mean? The answer is straightforward for Purcer, “Whatever your purpose is as a brand, that can never change, but always be willing to challenge the methods in which you do that. And if you don’t have that mentality, you can get passed by in a world that changes around you.” The preeminent example is Chick-fil-A’s drive through procedures. No one in the restaurant industry compares to their speed and accuracy, let alone their focus on personal interaction and hospitality.

Truitt Cathy, his sons Dan Cathy and Mark Cathy, the whole leadership team and every employee of Chick-fil-A have created a culture that can be summarized with one word—hospitality.

Culture is the soul of an organization. And every company has a culture, whether leaders consciously mold it or not... Conceptual pillars such as purpose, mission and values will map the way to a compelling culture, but... points out it’s people who will live the culture out.³¹

²⁹ Deep Patel, “8 Success Lessons.”

³⁰ Deep Patel, “8 Success Lessons.”

³¹ Kevin Kruse, “How Chick-fil-A Created A Culture That Lasts,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2015/12/08/how-chick-fil-a-created-a-culture-that-lasts/?sh=42de47b3602e>.

Creating this intentional, compelling culture begins with understanding Chick-fil-A's purpose.

These concepts employed at Chick-fil-A can be copied by the local congregations. Concepts like learning the names of visitors and helping people find the Sunday School rooms demonstrate caring hospitality. Assisting people to understand the Divine Service and, more specifically, the meaning of the service parts helps the worshipper "step over the line" to an environment where something "magical happens." The value of the congregation understanding their mission, vision, and purpose statement cannot be understated. It is up to pastors and congregational leaders to set the culture of the congregation, and certainly generous hospitality is an aspect of the church's culture. The lessons learned from Chick-fil-A build upon the lessons learned from Disney, and combined, these secular sources help congregations envision more robust hospitality.

Sacred

Hospitality is not a topic without discussion behind sacred doors. In the past couple of decades, the focus has been on understanding the Biblical meaning of hospitality. Christine Pohl, who teaches social ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary, Amy G. Oden, a church historian at Wesley Theological Seminary, and Elizabeth Newman, a theologian at Baptist Theological Seminary, have worked to bring the topic of hospitality to the forefront of the theological agenda. These authors desire to make hospitality a theological issue as it was for the early church. We have already heard their voices many times in this paper. They defend the legitimacy of hospitality biblically, historically, systematically, and theologically.

Now, how do we implement hospitality into the local congregation? Three resources climb to the top of the list: First is a pair of books. Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay

Christian Resources, released two books during the spring of 2018 focusing on hospitality—*Becoming A Welcoming Church* and *We Want You Here*. Second, in his book, *The Welcoming Congregation*, Henry Brinton³² shares best practices for the local congregation that wants to be known as welcoming. Third, Greg Atkinson legitimizes a growing industry of church mystery visits and church hospitality teams in his book, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper: Reaching and Keeping Church Guests*. We will collect best practices from each of these recourses.

Thom Rainer

During the spring of 2018, Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, one of the largest Christian resource companies in the world, released two books focusing on hospitality – *Becoming A Welcoming Church* and *We Want You Here*. These books drive home the importance of hospitality local congregations needs to offer. His first book, *We Want You Here*, is dedicated to “You who honored our church with your visit. We are glad you came.”³³ This book aims to drive home the point that each visitor is genuinely wanted. Rainer clarifies in this book that we need to communicate to the visitor that they are wanted and we are thankful that they are here. In his second book, *Becoming a Welcoming Church*, Rainer confides in us, “Many churches need wake-up calls. I know. I have worked with hundreds of them on site, and thousands via phone, e-mail, and videoconferences. Many church leaders and members think their churches are healthier than they really are.”³⁴ The congregation needs to tell each visitor they are wanted and make the visitor feel welcome. Two specific points from the book I want to examine further to help the local congregation offer hospitality.

³² Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

³³ Thom S. Rainer, *We Want You Here* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2018), v.

³⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Becoming a Welcoming Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2018), 2.

First, Rainer warns against local congregations being too friendly. This almost seems counterintuitive, yet his research indicated that one out of seven guests said they would not return because the people were too friendly. He shared Justin’s story:

“I came away worn out from the visit to the church,” Justin told us. “The people were all over us. My wife and I and our two kids were one of very few young families there, and they seemed desperate to get us. We left asking ourselves, ‘Who are these people?’ We had seen some of them in town, and they sure weren’t friendly there. But they put on a good show when we visited.”³⁵

Rainer admits that the congregations exhibiting this over-friendliness trait were “older, established churches where the attendance has been declining and the median age has been increasing.”³⁶ The desire to be super friendly betrays the congregation’s motivation, and their efforts feel dishonest.

Second, Rainer points out the front door we often forget—the website. Seven out of ten guests visit the church’s website before visiting the church. He warns, “[I]f you aren’t focusing resources and time on your church website, you are thumbing your nose at the Great Commission. And that is not an overstatement. A church with a lousy website is committing the sin of Great Commission negligence.”³⁷ His website concerns include incomplete, disorganized, and outdated information on a poorly designed website. The website is often the first and primary threshold to a local congregation. We need to make sure the website offers hospitality.

From the research and guidance of Rainer, we take away two primary considerations regarding Best Practices. We cannot afford a poor online presence, just as we cannot afford a poor facility. That is to say, the Show standard applies to our physical facility and our online presence. Furthermore, Rainer warns that the congregation needs to strike the balance of

³⁵ Rainer, *Becoming*, 30.

³⁶ Rainer, *Becoming*, 30.

³⁷ Rainer, *Becoming*, 43–44.

appropriate friendliness, as being overly friendly seems ingenuine or forced. From Rainer we take away the reminder that “people in the community see Christ in the welcoming church members.”³⁸ Rainer, in many ways, echoes Disney with the importance of their keys Courtesy and Show and Chick-fil-A with Courtesy, and in so doing, the congregation is telling the visitor they are valued. As an employee at Chick-fil-A would say, “It’s my pleasure!”

Henry Brinton

Henry Brinton gives points to ponder for hospitality best practices in his book, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality*. He is convinced that, “The hospitality of a welcoming congregation is more than a good idea—it reflects the hospitality of the God who embraces all people with endless love and grace.”³⁹ Throughout his book, Brinton reiterates the Disney concepts of Show and Courtesy and Chick-fil-A’s concept of connecting to the guest’s story. Brinton says, “Make sure your building is an inviting place, and pay attention to things like lighting, seating, and signage.”⁴⁰ Likewise, Christine Pohl challenges congregations to build contemporary equivalents of the city gate so that church members start to build relationships with the visitors. She argues, “Hospitality begins at the gate, in the doorway, on the bridge between public and private space.”⁴¹ The physical site of the church matters—inside and outside. It is important to note as Erik Rees from Saddleback⁴² admits, “Of course, such physical

³⁸ Rainer, *Becoming*, 99.

³⁹ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 45.

⁴⁰ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 25.

⁴¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 95.

⁴² Saddleback Church is a prominent Baptist Evangelical multi-site megachurch, with the largest church in California, and one of the largest in the United States of America. Well known for their lead Pastor Rick Warren, based in Lake Forest, California and affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, this church has several campuses in California and around the world with an average weekly attendance of 30,000 people.

sites will have limited effectiveness unless they are staffed with hospitable volunteers.”⁴³ Brinton emphasizes the importance of the Disney and Chick-fil-A concept of Courtesy as he stresses that “the visitor is a guest because ‘guest’ implies that this is someone for whom you do everything you can to make them feel comfortable.”⁴⁴ Some might claim it is just semantics, but terminology impacts us differently. The concepts of Show and Courtesy are emphasized repeatedly by Brinton, but there are two guidelines we can pick-up from this book—anticipation and mindset.

First, hospitality is anticipation—anticipating the visitor’s needs. According to Brinton, anticipation is crucial to offering hospitality. Brinton highlights many practices of Saddleback, exemplifying their practices of hospitality.⁴⁵ Such considerations may seem pointless. So, let me share an experience I had. My family was visiting Little Rock, Arkansas, to attend a family wedding. On Sunday morning, my family found a local church just a few blocks away from our hotel. We had never been to this church before, and to make the experience even more foreign, it was another Christian denomination. We were foreigners in a foreign land. During the service, my son had to go to the bathroom. We stood up and slid out of our pew. Opening the doors to the narthex, I looked around for signage or some clue that would point me to the restrooms. Finding nothing, I heard a voice say, “Looking for the restrooms?” It was the greeter that morning. She worshipped in the sanctuary and noticed my son and I stepped out. She assumed I was taking him to the restroom and that I would need assistance, so she stepped out of the sanctuary also. I would never have found the bathroom. We had to go outside, and we had to have a code to get

⁴³ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 21.

⁴⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 260–61.

⁴⁵ Saddleback’s emphasis on being responsive to guests’ needs and not being intrusive or singling anyone out is a good insight.

into the restroom. Here is an example where the greeter went the extra mile as Chick-fil-A encourages. She anticipated my needs—anticipation yields hospitality.

Second, the congregation's collective mindset can attract or drive guests away. Local congregations should avoid a “club religion” mindset. This congregational mentality sends “the clear message that their primary purpose is to serve those who are already members.”⁴⁶ Jargon occurs within any line of business, and the church is no different. We easily talk insider language and forget to explain what it means by making the guest feel like an outsider—the opposite of hospitality. For example, the LWML Cookie Walk. To the outsider, this means nothing, unless they have had some prior experience. Who is LWML? Why do they take cookies for a walk? Only the insider knows that on the first Sunday of December, the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League sells cookies to raise funds for mission efforts. We so quickly speak with an insider language which can betray a club mindset. The church fights against this as we “Remember to celebrate [our] guests not just tolerate them.”⁴⁷ Fighting against the club mindset, the congregation cannot be inward-focused, but seeks to develop an outward focus mindset.

Although some may claim that hospitality is common sense, in his book, Brinton explains,

Christian hospitality requires practice, because none of us can immediately master the art of embracing all people with God’s love and grace. If we could, welcoming congregations would be common Christian communities instead of uncommon ... Practicing God’s welcome is the key to helping people to belong, to believe, and to behave as Christians.⁴⁸

Brinton sounds two guidelines (anticipation and mindset) to our growing understanding of hospitality best practices. To build an environment of hospitality, we anticipate the guests’ needs, protect the guests’ privacy, and create a church culture of outreach instead of the club mindset.

⁴⁶ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 44.

⁴⁷ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 44.

⁴⁸ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 120.

Greg Atkinson

Greg Atkinson is an author, speaker, pastor, coach, and consultant who has worked with churches of all sizes. He turned his business of shopping and investigating the friendliness of a congregation into a book. He pointedly asks in his introduction:

As we begin to see the loving of strangers as fundamental to the life and heart of the church, my prayer is that our churches would gain a greater vision of hospitality and that by practicing the loving of strangers we would become churches where true transformation happens and eternities are altered.⁴⁹

Pursuing hospitality is the linchpin to transformation, and Atkinson believes it is necessary to experience your congregation with the eyes of someone who has never been there before. That fresh outsider view is precious. Hence, the secret shopping service that is his business. Atkinson realizes the critical importance of the local congregation being hospitable.

Therefore, Atkinson tells all local congregations to be prepared. As a local congregation, we need to lead and serve with excellence. Many times, there is no second chance, and it is the first impression that lasts. “Remember you’ve got ten minutes before a first impression settles into someone’s mind. From the moment they drive into your lot, until they enter your building, everything they see, hear, smell, and experience matters.”⁵⁰ You’ve won 80 percent of the battle if there is a second visit. Searcy and Henson say it best:

When your guests return for a second look, you’ve won 80 percent of the battle of gaining new regular attenders and have increased the chances they’ll begin a journey with Christ... When your guests hit the door for the second time, they are saying, “Okay, I’m interested. I want to find out more about this place. I want to find out more about God. Here I am again.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Greg Atkinson, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper: Reaching and Keeping Church Guests* (n.p.: Rainer, 2016), 20–21.

⁵⁰ Atkinson, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper*, 54.

⁵¹ Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Fusion: Turning First-time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 110–11.

Therefore, the local congregation needs to be prepared for the visitor. Efforts should be made to create an approachable, friendly, and hospitable environment. Atkinson encourages and blesses the local congregation that strives to turn the “first-time guests into second-time guests, and your second-time guests into fully devoted followers of Christ.”⁵² Atkinson encourages us to see ourselves with fresh eyes and ears, and he instructs us to do things right every time. By preparing, welcoming, and inviting back, this is one tangible way that local congregations participates in the *Missio Dei* for when the guest is in the worship service they hear the gospel message proclaimed.

Conclusion

Recent research affirms there is a great need for hospitality. The research demonstrates that the *Missio Dei* and compassion motivate Christians to respond to those needs by pursuing hospitality. A lack of readiness is an obstacle to Christian hospitality. Therefore, we should explore resources for best practices in offering hospitality. We have examined five resources, some secular and some sacred, to give us some best practices. In the secular realm, Disney and Chick-fil-A offered some insights on Courtesy and connecting to the guest as well as the importance of the Show aspect of the environment. We heard from Thom Rainer, Henry Brinton, and Greg Atkinson from the sacred realm where they insist that churches need to focus on giving hospitality. Measuring best practices is vital to improve our hospitality. We have seen many similarities, but each resource has given us new insight. The repetition emphasizes the importance, and the uniqueness expands our practices. Best practices force us to say what we are doing that works or to admit we have room for improvement. To offer hospitality means

⁵² Atkinson, *Secrets of a Secret Shopper*, 137.

preparation on our part. Are we ready to offer hospitality? As creatures made in the image of God, who journey with God on the *Missio Dei*, we have a Spirit led capacity for hospitality. We possess the potential to make room for others and to create a friendly, inviting space.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

Every Sunday, when our church doors open for worship, members will promptly arrive, but they are not the only ones who come. We regularly have two to three dozen visitors come to our congregation each week. During the holidays, visitors increase to over one hundred people. The church I serve, Our Redeemer in Iowa City, is known as a welcoming congregation. Visitors who become members often report this sentiment when joining the membership of the congregation. But what about those who do not join? What about those who visit who have never attended Our Redeemer before? What is their authentic experience? These unanswered questions and the broad understanding of the importance of hospitality lead to this project. This chapter will describe the process of seeking answers to these questions while evaluating the congregation's efforts in providing hospitality. The purpose of the Major Applied Project is to discover the areas of hospitality that will better or best connect visitors to Our Redeemer.

Design and Implementation of the Project

The main thrust of this MAP is to discover the areas of hospitality that are more or less effective at connecting visitors to the congregation. Hospitality is loving the stranger and providing for them. First, God offers hospitality to the stranger. Through His Word, God invites the stranger into His kingdom. Second, when we offer hospitality, we are feeding, clothing, visiting, welcoming, and providing for our neighbor. So, for this MAP we are focusing on the welcome and specifically the welcome to the worship services offered at Our Redeemer. Therefore, it would be essential to understand the mindset of someone who had never attended Our Redeemer before. What impacted their experience positively, and, conversely, negatively

affected their experience? We would need to understand their opinions and points of view, so I asked a pool of secret visitors through a double-blind process to visit the congregation and provide information about their experiences. Every participant completed a written survey, and select participants conducted a personal interview. From the surveys and interviews, quantitative data was tabulated, and qualitative data was sorted to provide Our Redeemer with feedback on their ability to be hospitable to strangers. Presuppositions and criteria for the process had to be determined to accomplish the MAP's objective.

Presuppositions

I assembled a list of assumptions before beginning this MAP. Starting with a more general understanding to clarifying specifics for this MAP at Our Redeemer, here is the list of assumptions:

1. It is assumed that the Word of God is inerrant and foundational to everything (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16 and Ps. 119:89,105).
2. It is assumed that we, as Christians, are called to be missionaries and witnesses (cf. Matt. 28:16-20 and Acts 1:6-11).
3. It is assumed that we have received hospitality (love of the stranger) from God and therefore give hospitality (love of the stranger) (cf. 1 John 4:19 and Rom. 15:7).
4. It is assumed that Our Redeemer is both missional and family-oriented.
5. It is assumed that this innate friendly nature of the congregation arises from the transient nature of this community. With both the University of Iowa and The University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, there is an annual ebb and flow of community members (i.e., students, residents, fellows, and professors). Each

spring, you can count on reducing community members as students, professors, and medical residents move on to their next stage of life. Each summer the rhythm and hum of the downtown community slows to a relaxing lullaby of the summer. Each fall, the rhythm resumes and culminates in the whole community focusing on the Saturday afternoon gridiron (Go Hawks!).

6. It is assumed that Chick-fil-A and Walt Disney World are world renown leaders in hospitality. Furthermore, it is assumed that some of their hospitality practices are applicable and helpful in the church community.
7. It is assumed that hospitality is something that can be taught and caught. Some people have a more innate ability to be hospitable than others. This is true, but all can increase their skills and abilities to be hospitable; some need to work at it harder.
8. It is assumed that the current level of friendliness of the congregation is built upon the missional character of the congregation. As a byproduct of a missional focus, the congregation is missional and friendly to visitors and newcomers.

Therefore, the scope of this MAP is to determine what currently makes Our Redeemer friendly and hospitable. The goal is to capture a snapshot and measure the current status of the hospitality at Our Redeemer. As a result of this MAP, the congregation will endeavor to improve their hospitality, and the conclusions from this MAP will be shared with the assimilation committee.

Criteria for the Process

It is a standard practice in the hospitality industry to have secret visitors, usually called

“secret shoppers” or “mystery shoppers”¹ in the hospitality industry. According to Zippia.com, “6,949 Mystery Shoppers are currently employed in the United States.”² Furthermore, Thom Rainer and Greg Atkinson, in their respective books, legitimize a growing industry of church hospitality and the value of mystery visits in these books.

I reached out to pastors in my district, Iowa District East, to find the secret visitors in a double-blind method. By contacting the pastors and having them find members of their congregation to be the secret visitors, I was sure that neither I nor anyone else at Our Redeemer would be aware of their “Secret Visitor” status. Therefore, the double-blind method would ensure members of Our Redeemer would treat them like any other guest, and no special favors or attention would be given to the person in this study.³ Criterion to guide the pastors in selecting the secret visitors was given.

1. The secret visitor needs to be above the age of 21.
2. The secret visitor needs to be a Christian and preferably LCMS.
3. The secret visitor needs to be willing to worship at Our Redeemer in Iowa City, IA. Worship at any service (Saturday at 5:30 pm or Sunday at 8:00 am or 10:30 am) would be sufficient.

¹ It might be of interest to the reader to know that I served as a professional mystery shopper in the hospitality industry. Specifically, I was trained to shop Disney partner hotels called a “Disney Good Neighbor” hotel. I did not do this as a cast member or employee of Walt Disney World, but as an employee of a company contracted by Disney. The goal of the shop was to determine if the hotel upheld the Disney partner standards.

² “Using a database of 30 million profiles, Zippia estimates demographics and statistics for Mystery Shoppers in the United States. Our estimates are verified against BLS, Census, and current job openings data for accuracy. After extensive research and analysis, Zippia's data science team found...” Zippia, “Mystery Shopper Demographics and Statistics in The Us,” <https://www.zippia.com/mystery-shopper-jobs/demographics/>.

³ While working for Walt Disney World at a Resort Guest Services desk, we would be shopped. I vividly recall fellow cast members trying to ascertain if the guest they were serving was indeed a true guest or a secret shopper. Extra attention and attentiveness to good guest service was given. While this should be the behavior with every guest, attentiveness to good guest service would falter and average attention would be paid to the needs of the guest. The more blind the secret visitor could be in the study, the better the results of the study.

4. The secret visitor needs to be willing to complete a written survey.
5. The secret visitor needs to be hyper-attentive and make mental notes of their visit to record details on the written survey.
6. The secret visitor needs to have never visited Our Redeemer before.
7. The secret visitor needs to have no relatives or friends who regularly worship at Our Redeemer.
8. The secret visitor needs to be willing to participate in an additional one-hour in-person interview.

This criterion ensured that the participants were not influenced by previous visits or personal connections to the congregation. The secret visitor needed to mimic someone who would be coming to worship within our tradition. I did not want this study to include Christians from other denominations because their worship practices would impact their view of our worship practices, affecting their view of hospitality. The secret visitors had to be free from bias as much as possible.

Once the participant agreed to be in this study, their local pastor arranged a meeting with them. The pastor read the Informed Consent Questionnaire (Appendix Two) form aloud to the participant. The pastor would ensure the participant read all the fine print and completely understood their role in the study by reading aloud. It was important that the participant participated of their own free volition and understood that their participation was not for monetary gain. They only gained the intrinsic value of attending worship and hearing the Word of God. There was also the value of helping another congregation understand their strengths and weaknesses in hospitality. There was no inherent risk for the participant. After the participant signed the Informed Consent Questionnaire form, the local pastor mailed it to the researcher, and

the form was kept with all the research.

Since they completed the Informed Consent Questionnaire form, it was time to prepare the participant for their secret visit. So, the participant was given a letter and survey questionnaire (Appendix Three) form that explained their role in this field research. The letter thanked the secret visitor for participating and guided them in their participatory role. I assured them, “Please be as detailed as your time allows, and please know that no comment or feeling you’ve had is trivial. It’s the little things that can really make a difference!” Ultimately, the letter assured the secret visitor that their input would help our congregation. The letter also informed the participant that they should not reveal to anyone that they were evaluating the church. Only one time did an usher ask me about the person at worship who was there “to evaluate.” If they revealed what they were doing at Our Redeemer, this study’s results would be tainted. Fortunately, I told the usher I would take care of it, and he quickly forgot about it, as if he was relieved he did not have to do anything with the whole situation.

The goal was to have twenty secret visitors attend worship at Our Redeemer, but this proved too ambitious. After nine months of recruiting through the double-blind method, ten secret visitors completed their survey. After consulting with Dr. Rockenbach, it was determined this would be sufficient. The originally desired timeframe for the secret visits was from September 8 until the end of the month. Each secret visitor decided which weekend and which service they attended. Reality proved that it took nine months to have ten secret visitors attend worship.

The survey had nineteen questions plus some general demographic information that was not linked with the survey results. The intention of the questionnaire survey sought to understand the secret visitors’ experience. A string of “yes” or “no” responses asked about the fellow

worshipper's behavior. "Did someone greet you at the door?" and "Was the 'Congregation' welcoming and friendly?" were such questions. Some open-ended questions like "What made it inviting and welcoming?" and "Why would you or would you not return to this church to worship?" were included. Two questions required the secret visitor to give a numerical response like "How many people spoke to you without prompting?" and "How many people invited you to come back to coffee hour or Bible study?" A range of six questions had a five-point Likert scale using two opposing terms to represent the continuum extremes. These questions tried to evaluate the worship experience, including the physical environment. Ultimately, the survey required the secret visitor to give a definitive answer as to whether they would return to this church to worship.

Once the secret visitor completed their worship experience, they completed the paper survey and mailed it to me at Our Redeemer. Once received, the survey results were scanned into an electronic file, and the original paper copy was shredded. The electronic file was password protected on a computer behind a locked door. The data from the collected surveys were tabulated and sorted to determine the results. These results will ultimately let Our Redeemer know what they are doing right and what areas need improvement. These results will prove to be a baseline for Our Redeemer as they evaluate and improve their hospitality in the future.

Five secret visitors were selected at random to complete a personal interview, which was not done until the secret visits were conducted. Again, the goal was to gain a deeper understanding and more significant insights. The personal interview was guided to discover more information about the secret visitor's experience at Our Redeemer. If the secret visitor randomly selected was part of a family unit, the corresponding adult was also invited to complete an interview. Following the same pattern as the secret visits, each participant completed an

Informed Consent (Appendix Four) form first. I read the Informed Consent aloud to the interviewee, and once I finished, the participant signed the form. Each completed form was kept with the research. In the Informed Consent, the participant agreed that the interview could be recorded. They also understood that they would be interviewed by me, the researcher, and the Pastor of Our Redeemer. After the fact, I thought it could have been intimidating to have the Pastor complete this interview, and the participant might have held back in their comments, but that did not prove accurate. The interviewees were frank and direct with their comments. They did not just say nice things but were critical about their worship experience and the hospitality of Our Redeemer.

To ensure consistency, a set of five standard questions were determined, and each interviewee was only asked these five questions. Each participant answered these questions independently:

1. What do you most enjoy about attending services here?
2. What, if anything, would you change about attending services here?
3. Would you recommend this church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?
4. What are some ways that you think we could make our church more welcoming for new visitors?
5. Have you attended a different church in the last year? If so, what—if anything—did you enjoy about that church that is different from our church?

As they responded, the conversation was recorded. The recordings were then turned into a transcript, and the transcript was analyzed to look for trends and similarities. These in-person interviews were helpful but not as beneficial as hoped.

Conclusion

From the first time I visited Our Redeemer as a seminarian anticipating a deferred vicarage assignment to this most recent Spring, members have boasted of the friendliness of this congregation, and it is not surprising. Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager, the authors of *Deep & Wide*, reveal that “85.4% of those in the average congregation say their church is friendly to strangers and newcomers.”⁴ The question remains: How well do we truly measure up? The purpose of the MAP is to discover the areas of hospitality that will more or less connect visitors to Our Redeemer. Through secret visits by individuals that fit the prescribed criteria and follow-up personal interviews, an image of Our Redeemer’s friendliness and expression of hospitality has been formed. Let’s examine the results!

⁴ Clapp, Bernhard, and Bontrager, *Deep & Wide*, 220.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION

Hospitality can often seem menial or superficial, categorized with Martha Stewart's fluff or Emily Post's Etiquette for today. Others view hospitality as not for themselves and reserved for those who are good at hospitality or professionally extend it. Still, others view hospitality as not theological and unimportant to the life of the church. Steve Clapp, Fred Bernhard, and Ed Bontrager, the authors of *Deep & Wide*,

have increasingly been feeling that the level of hospitality in our congregations just doesn't go deep enough to connect with people at a level that will keep them coming and isn't wide enough to help newer members really feel that they are in as much a part of the community of faith as longer-term members.¹

The members of Our Redeemer genuinely believe their hospitality is deep and wide. The purpose of the MAP is to discover the areas of hospitality that will more or less connect visitors to Our Redeemer. This chapter answers that question, as this chapter will report the results of the secret visitors and the congregation's efforts in providing hospitality.

Findings of the Questionnaire Survey Form

Evaluating the congregation's level of hospitality was completed in two phases. First, the secret visits happened. Ten secret visits occurred in the span of nine months, where through a double-blind method, LCMS members who had never visited Our Redeemer before attended a single worship service. After their experience, they completed a written survey. Then I conducted follow-up interviews with select individuals who completed the secret visits.

¹ Clapp, Bernhard, Bontrager, *Deep & Wide*, 12.

Secret Visits

The questionnaire survey intends to understand the secret visitors' experience of the hospitality Our Redeemer offers. The participants provided some general demographic information. Since the selection of the participants was through a double-blind methodology, there was no way to guide the selection of the secret visitors regarding the demographic makeup. Yet, the split between male and female participants was even, with fifty percent of the participants representing each sex, and the secret visitors were not all couples. The average age of the participants was sixty, while the youngest person was forty-three and the oldest person was seventy-one. It is interesting to note that the average age of the membership of Our Redeemer is forty-one. Therefore, the average age of the participants was sixty, which is older than the congregation's average age. Furthermore, “the average age of an LCMS baptized member in 2015 was 47.”² The secret visitors were older than the national average of LCMS members.

Geographically the participants came from Cedar Rapids, DeWitt, Newhall, and Williamsburg, Iowa. Only Iowa District East congregations participated in the study, and participation rested solely upon the pastor of the secret visitor's congregation. So, if the pastor sought people to participate in the study, someone from that congregation would be included. If the pastor became busy with other projects, it would be easy to overlook finding participants for this study. It should not be surprising that the researcher has a good relationship with the pastors of the churches that participated in the study. The personal relationship with the pastor of Our

² Paula Schlueter Ross, “Annual Statistical Reporting: Beyond the Numbers,” *Reporter* (November 2016), [https://reporter.lcms.org/2016/annual-statistical-reporting/#:~:text=The%20average%20age%20of%20an,%E2%80%9334%20\(15%20percent\)](https://reporter.lcms.org/2016/annual-statistical-reporting/#:~:text=The%20average%20age%20of%20an,%E2%80%9334%20(15%20percent).).

Redeemer drove the pastor to find participants. The participants traveled an average of forty-five miles to attend worship at Our Redeemer; the longest distance was sixty-seven miles, and the shortest was thirty miles. The secret visitors invested time in traveling to Our Redeemer for worship.

Our Redeemer has three worship services each weekend – Saturday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 8:00 am and 10:30 am. Liturgically, the worship services are all the same but differ musically. The Saturday night service is subdued, and the instrumentation is from the piano. There are typically sixty people who attend this service, and it is the smallest of the worship services. There are no ushers at this service, unlike the Sunday morning services. Sunday morning services have ushers and greeters, and the worship services are more attended. On Sunday, the early service has approximately eighty to one hundred people attending, while the late service has one hundred twenty to one hundred forty worshippers. These services are musically fuller with choirs, bell choir, praise team, special music, and the organ. Forty percent of the secret visitors attended the Saturday night service, while sixty percent attended the Sunday late service. No secret visitors worshipped at the early Sunday morning service.

Each participant selected the service they wanted to attend. From the results, the lack of ushers and greeters on Saturday night significantly impacted the hospitality extended to our visitors. Logistically, finding volunteers to usher and greet for the Saturday night service isn't easy. Finding volunteers for the projection, sound, and video boards is difficult, but they cannot operate themselves, so we need to find volunteers. We need to consider adding ushers and greeters to our Saturday night service because the four individuals who attended Saturday night had significantly lower hospitality scores. Yet, it did not deter the secret visitors from saying they would return to worship at Our Redeemer. One hundred percent of the secret visitors said

they “would return to this church to worship.” This simple fact tells me that overall Our Redeemer does provide a positive environment, and the members exhibit a desired baseline level of hospitality.

The survey had nineteen questions over four sections: entering, engaging, experiencing, and returning to the environment. Each section asked multiple questions to understand better the secret visitor's reaction to the hospitality displayed at Our Redeemer.

Entering the Environment

Entering the environment focuses on the arrival of the guest. Colloquially we know that first impressions are essential, which is also true for the congregation. What are the first impressions?

Table 1. Entering the Environment

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Did someone greet you at the door?	4	6
2. Did they make eye contact and smile?	4	4
3. Did you find the environment inviting and welcoming?	6	3

Our Redeemer is not doing well when engaging guests when entering the building by looking at the aggregate numbers, as the percentages are unacceptable by any standard. It is important to note that some secret visitors skipped some of these questions, giving no response. It is also important to realize that forty percent of the participants attended the Saturday night service and that zero percent responded positively to the first two questions. They reported that they were not greeted at the door and had no eye contact or smile. It should not be surprising since no ushers or greeters are scheduled for Saturday night services.

Question four allowed the secret visitors to comment on their entering experience by asking, “What made it inviting and welcoming?” One Sunday morning attendee responded

negatively to the first and second questions, but then he said, “Elder smiled and handed a bulletin and then Reflections.” It seems he erroneously reported that someone greeted him, made eye contact, and smiled. Overall, the secret visitors responded positively to the environment. Several said the open layout was excellent, the bathrooms were easy to locate, and the overall vibe was pleasant. One secret visitor reported they were invited to snack and coffee, precisely the behavior we would like all members to exhibit. One summarized the entering the environment to say you have a lovely church. Overall, the secret visitors emphasized the importance of having trained and outgoing ushers and greeters. The numerical score would be higher if the Saturday night service attendees did not, with good reason, bring the score down.

Engaging the Environment

The second section of the survey questionnaire focuses on engagement in the environment. In other words, does the worship experience engage the secret visitor?

Table 2. Engaging the Environment

QUESTION	YES	NO
5. Did you find the greeting of congregational members at the beginning of the service to be enjoyable?	8	0
6. Did you find people wearing name tags?	6	4
7. Is it <u>helpful</u> if members wear name tags?	8	0
10. Was the “Congregation” welcoming and friendly?	5	5
11. Was the “Pastor” welcoming and friendly?	10	0

In this section, there are three questions to where the secret visitors agreed unanimously, and the first such question comes as a surprise set against current hospitality research. Thom S. Rainer, in his recently written book *Becoming a Welcoming Church*, talks explicitly about the greeting that happens before worship begins. He categorically declares this action to be unhospitable based on his research. He writes, “The guests addressed this issue in near unanimity. The stand-

and-greet time is a tradition or ritual for the members, they told us. Members tend to greet other members they know. Relationship patterns were obvious, and guests were on the outside looking in.”³ At best, visitors felt the greeting was forced and artificial. Rainer insists, “Friendliness, for [the guest], cannot be limited to two minutes of handshakes, smiles, and contrived exuberance.”⁴ Rainer questions the impact of greeting at the beginning of the service, and yet, against Rainer, our secret visitors unanimously felt hospitality from the pre-service greeting. The secret shoppers of Our Redeemer found the greeting enjoyable, which gives us insight into how the greeting is done. Against the research found by Rainer, the greeting is a good tradition at Our Redeemer. Maybe the members of Our Redeemer engage in the greeting in a unique way with a genuine desire to greet those they know and those unknown to themselves. From my observations, I would say this is true!

The second question with unanimous agreement was asking, “Is it helpful if members wear name tags?” One hundred percent of the secret visitors agreed that nametags were helpful, yet only sixty percent of the secret shoppers saw people wearing name tags. If tallied, a much smaller percentage of the congregation wears nametags, as members outright refuse to wear them. I have heard people say, “I have to wear them at work, and I don’t have to wear them here!” The reality is that they do not have to wear them, but for Our Redeemer to extend the best hospitality and love the stranger, wearing name tags is valuable. In his book *The Welcoming Congregation*, Brinton points to the Washington National Cathedral as an example of excellent hospitality and, specifically, the practice of wearing name tags. He says, “Have church members, not guests, identify themselves by wearing name tags.”⁵ Understanding that “invisibility is a

³ Rainer, *Becoming*, 21.

⁴ Rainer, *Becoming*, 22.

⁵ Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 35.

major detriment to the practice of hospitality,” theologian Arthur Sutherland explains, “Because we encounter dozens or hundreds of people each day, everyone becomes a stranger to us.”⁶

Therefore, nametags⁷ make for more effective hospitality!

The third question with unanimous agreement asked, “Was the ‘Pastor’ welcoming and friendly?” One hundred percent of the secret visitors agreed the Pastor exuded hospitality. From the warm greeting before worship to the jovial bantering about upcoming congregational events at the end of the service, from reading the scriptures and liturgy with passion to explaining the value and purpose of the liturgy and how the liturgy connects with our daily life, I believe that hospitality begins with worship. Hearing the Word of God in scripture and sermon, receiving God’s gift of grace, mercy, and peace, and responding with thankful words, praise, and song, this fellowship is the foundation of our Christian lives and hospitality. I have role modeled this and taught this to the congregation over almost the last decade and a half, and some have caught on or intrinsically understood it themselves. When asking, “Was the ‘Congregation’ welcoming and friendly?” the secret visitors responded with fifty percent “Yes” and fifty percent “No.” These results mean some work is needed to help the congregation understand the Biblical command to show hospitality.

To quantify and calculate the congregational actions reported as half friendly and half numb, I asked two questions requiring the secret visitor to write a number. When asked how many people spoke to you without prompting, the average number was 1.8 people. The highest number was four people, while the lowest number was zero. The median response of the secret

⁶ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 60.

⁷ Brinton clarifies, “The purple buttons (name tags) that members wear are not status symbols, but signs of hospitality, since the buttons identify people who are available to answer questions.” Brinton, *Welcoming Congregation*, 36.

visitors was 2.5 interactions with church members unprompted. The second question looks to see if the interactions were just friendly or if the congregational member brought a call-to-action message to the secret visitor. Specifically, the call to action asked the secret visitor to come back to coffee or Bible study. This time the average dropped to 0.8 people. The highest number was five people, while the lowest number was zero. The median response of the secret visitors was zero calls to action. Anecdotally, we know there is great value in personal interaction, and a personal invitation opens many doors!

Experiencing in the Environment

Understanding entering the environment and the engagement of the secret visitors, the questionnaire survey turns to understand the worshippers' experience. Six continuums with opposing terms at the extreme of the Likert scale provided a way for the secret visitor to evaluate the worship experience. Here are the results:

Table 3. Experiencing the Environment

EXTREME (1)	RANKING	EXTREME (5)
12. Void of Gospel	4.9	Clear gospel
13. Confusing order of worship	4.2	Clear and enriching order of worship
14. Poor acoustics	4.7	Excellent acoustics
15. Poor screen quality	3.2	Excellent screen quality
16. Cold, intimidating space	4.3	Warm, friendly space
17. Unfriendly	3.5	Friendly

These Likert scales range from one to five, with opposing terms on each continuum. The number one would be the furthest left value with a negative descriptor, while the number five would be the most distant right value with a positive descriptor. The value of a Likert scale is the ability to measure attitudes, knowledge, perceptions, and values. The higher the number, the better the score. A number on the continuum would demonstrate the level experienced by the secret visitor.

The first two Likert scales address the content of worship (gospel and order of worship), while the remaining four Likert scales address the worship environment (acoustics, screens, warmth, and friendliness). An average of the raw data created a Likert score for each category. To understand the scores, it may be helpful to know that any score between 3.01 and 4.00 agrees with the positive statement, and any score from 4.01 to 5.00 strongly agrees with the positive statement.

Understanding this scoring system, we see that there is strong agreement to the positive statements among the secret visitors. Yet, there are two areas where there is only agreement. The first area is the screen quality. At the time of the secret visits, we knew there was an issue with the screen quality. The projectors used were aged, and the committee to replace the technology reached an impasse. I included this question to inform the committee since the quality was an issue that needed to be resolved. Some members of the committee felt that maybe the expense outweighed the need. Since then, a new committee has formed, and the congregation installed a new audio-visual package with projectors, screens, cameras, soundboard, and projection software in August 2019.

The second area is the term “friendly.” In retrospect, this term was not definitive enough. A 3.5 score is not bad, yet what are the secret visitors commenting about? Is this a repeat of question ten asking about the congregation being welcoming and friendly? This question should be thrown out or further defined in future evaluations. Overall, the experience at Our Redeemer during the worship service is considered excellent by the secret visitors.

Returning to the Environment

Emphatically, all ten secret shoppers expressed they would return to Our Redeemer. Several commented on the solid gospel message, the friendliness of the pastor, and the excellent

music. Specifically, there was an appreciation for various music offerings from organ, choir, praise team, and bells. The secret visitors made some random comments. For example, the placement of the pulpit was criticized. Another shopper told of a lady with a yellow purse who offered gum. These comments did not help me understand the hospitality extended by the congregation, but they were interesting anecdotes that proved the secret visitors were engaged and reporting their opinions. It was encouraging that despite some disappointments, such as not being greeted by numerous members, the secret visitors unanimously agreed they would return to Our Redeemer for worship.

Findings of the Personal Interviews

Evaluating the congregation's level of hospitality was done through quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data has already been presented through the survey results above. Unlike quantitative data, qualitative research adds color to the study and offers a unique perspective by adding context. Qualitative research is obtained through interviews, which is crucial to getting less measurable data from direct sources.

Five standard questions were asked of the interviewees:

1. What do you most enjoy about attending services here?
2. What, if anything, would you change about attending services here?
3. Would you recommend this church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?
4. What are some ways that you think we could make our church more welcoming for new visitors?
5. Have you attended a different church in the last year? If so, what—if anything—did you enjoy about that church that is different from our church?

The interviews were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. Five interviews were

conducted, and the transcripts can be found in Appendices Five through Nine. Transcripts allow the researcher to capture original, nuanced responses from the respondents. Responses are received naturally through the interviews using the respondents' own words—not a summarized version in the researcher's notes. The transcripts are analyzed. Rather than approaching the data with a predetermined framework, I identified common hospitality themes as I searched the transcripts organically. The goal was to find common patterns and themes of hospitality across the data set. Three themes emerged: entering the environment, engaging the environment, and experiencing the environment.

Entering the Environment

We learned from research that the physical building adds or detracts from the receptiveness or the experience of being welcomed into the environment. One visitor commented that the church was pretty and comfortable, and another commented on the clean and excellent facilities. Yet a couple of suggestions were given to improve the facilities.

Three visitors mentioned confusion about where to enter the building. They felt outside signage would help the visitor know which door to enter nearest the sanctuary. Two doors face west toward the street. One door enters a hallway, and the other enters the Narthex of the Sanctuary. One couple said they watched others and followed, while the other said she made a guess. Outside signage could be helpful. The mother also mentioned that the signage inside needed to be improved. She did not know where to take her children to Sunday School. Another visitor said she was searching for the restrooms.

We are thankful for the many renovations to our property over the years. Not only was maintenance not deferred, but renovations were done over the decades, including updating and improvements. The new and fresh environment adds to the feeling of hospitality. Yet, we see an

opportunity to improve our property with new external and internal signage.

Engaging the Environment

When engaging the environment, we are specifically looking at human interaction, and this is the area where the interviewees were the most vocal. They were looking for, to summarize with one word, intentionality. One person said, “Nobody initiated a conversation.”⁸ Another said, albeit incorrectly, they came “to see how friendly and how welcoming the – the church was.”⁹ It seems he thought he was coming to learn from the congregation instead of measuring the current level of hospitality.

Unfortunately, four interviewees attended worship on a Saturday night with no greeters and often no ushers. The other interviewee came on a day when people did not show up for the volunteer role of greeting and ushering because she reported only one person in the narthex with a name tag flipped over. “He had a big name tag, and he was handing out bulletins, so I guessed he was probably an usher.”¹⁰ A congregation needs a dedicated and trained group of greeters and ushers for every worship service. Furthermore, the members need to understand the importance of reaching out.

As for the interviewee that thought he came to learn from Our Redeemer how to be better at offering hospitality, the reality is that he did learn. He said, “Because of this study, it made me aware of it (hospitality), and – and now I go up to ‘em and say (laughs), ‘Who are you?’”¹¹ This example is the intentional behavior that the secret visitors were looking for and why the second

⁸ Transcript 1, Appendix Five, time marking 2:38.

⁹ Transcript 3, Appendix Seven, time marking 1:36.

¹⁰ Transcript 1, Appendix Five, time marking 2:26.

¹¹ Transcript 3, Appendix Seven, time marking 2:54.

interviewee wanted the congregation to be “a little more welcoming”¹² and “welcoming in general to everybody.”¹³ Interviewee number five said,

Um, just gotta be more intentional about making sure if you don't recognize somebody, to say hello, and the problem is that, I think at your church, it's probably similar to ours, you have more than one service, so you don't know who the visitors are and who the people are that just might be coming from a different service, and so you feel awkward saying, "Who are you?" and they've been going to church there for 20 years, just haven't been to the same (laughs) service or ... Um, just- just can't be afraid of that mistake and just have to be more- more aggressive at, uh, saying hello to people.¹⁴

Five times in one interview, the first interviewee emphasized her need for members to reach out to her. She made it clear how the lack of initiation made her feel:

And without having anybody to... that said, “Hey, I'm glad to see you. I'm glad you're here,” that made me say, "Okay." Well, we came. We left. Nobody noticed, so let's keep looking until we find somebody where we can make a friend or my kids see somebody that they might know from... from school or from, um, from somewhere they've... from activities that they might know.¹⁵

She was emphatic in her interview that she felt ignored by the members of Our Redeemer. She even mentioned she visited on Mother's Day with kids, and no one told her “Happy Mother's Day.”

All of the interviewees mentioned intentionality in some form or fashion. Some people are natural about intentionally reaching out to strangers as if curiosity compels them. Others understand the importance of creating a welcoming environment and showing hospitality. The interviewees were critical but also compassionate. One interviewee acquiesced about reaching out. He said,

¹² Transcript 2, Appendix Six, time marking 2:41.

¹³ Transcript 2, Appendix Six, time marking 3:44.

¹⁴ Transcript 4, Appendix Eight, time marking 5:36.

¹⁵ Transcript 1, Appendix Five, time marking 3:50.

Which is difficult to do, y- you know, in a chur- sometimes, you just ... You get comfortable and, you know, but I guess from the point where we actually put our names down, and we said we were visitors, that the people we were next to would've said, "Oh, they're visitors. Nice to have you here."¹⁶

He understood the difficulty yet longed for interaction, a welcoming, and inclusion.

Two interviewees commented on the attendance pew pads. In the middle of the service, people are invited to complete the attendance pew pads. On the form, there is a column to mark that you are visiting. This couple marked they were visiting and were disappointed that the other people in their row did not react. "And I- and so, we- we were first. We signed it, visitors, sent it down. There was a couple of the people in our pew, they signed it, sent it back. So, they should've known we were visitors."¹⁷ This couple wanted the members to welcome them, but they did not. The members overlooked they were visitors.

Experiencing in the Environment

In talking about their trip to Our Redeemer, the secret visitors spoke about their experience in the environment. Some of the comments they made were positive. Four of the five interviewees commented on the music during the worship service. They appreciated the variety of musical groups, from the organ, adult choir, praise team, and bells. One visitor emphasized how professional or well-done the music was. Almost equally favored was the liturgy of the worship service, as several said it was familiar. One visitor said that the liturgy "seemed very, very, very progressive but yet steeped in tradition."¹⁸ I am unsure what made the service progressive yet steeped in tradition, but it was an interesting comment. Another visitor said that

¹⁶ Transcript 4, Appendix Eight, time marking 5:36.

¹⁷ Transcript 5, Appendix Nine, time marking 3:48.

¹⁸ Transcript 3, Appendix Seven, page 4 of transcript.

the liturgy “was a very good presentation.”¹⁹ The music and the liturgy added to the positive experience in the environment.

Detracting from the experience was the screen quality. Two of five interviewees specifically mentioned the poor quality of the screens, and they were right. The projection was very faded, and the ambient light in the sanctuary made the screens hard to see. A large skylight is in the center of the sanctuary with a prism dome on top, providing immeasurable ambient light. Light is refracted and bounced throughout the sanctuary, including onto the screens. Since this study, the projection and screens have been replaced with higher-quality technology, and the ambient light is no longer an issue. In fact, the screens are still visible, albeit faintly, even in direct sunlight.

The interviewees felt that the environment's experience, that is, the worship experience, was enriching and fulfilling. The positive presentation of the music and the familiar worship proved comforting. Overall, the experience in the environment was positive and contributed to the interviewees unanimously agreeing they would recommend Our Redeemer for worship.

Conclusion

The congregation's level of hospitality was evaluated through ten secret visitor surveys and follow-up interviews with five secret visitors. The written surveys and oral interviews provided the researcher with quantitative and qualitative data. Through the data, we discovered the areas of hospitality where Our Redeemer performed well and those where Our Redeemer underperformed. Experience in the environment was unanimously praised, from the music to the liturgy to the pastor. Entering the environment had mixed reviews. Overall, the facilities were

¹⁹ Transcript 3, Appendix Seven, page 6 of transcript.

considered warm and inviting. Yet there was confusion caused by the lack of signage outside and even in the building. Finally, engaging the environment is the area where Our Redeemer fell short. From stories and my eyewitness, Our Redeemer often intentionally reaches out to the visitor. Yet, from our secret visitors, we learned that we are inconsistent in reaching out. It can be said that, at times, Our Redeemer's hospitality is deep and wide, but because of this MAP, we will be able to improve and be more effective at offering hospitality.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Every congregation needs to practice hospitality from the country church surrounded by amber waves of grain to the downtown city church on the busy street corner of Court Street and First Avenue. Simply put, many in Christian circles reduce hospitality to something unnecessary and unimportant about which they need to be concerned or participate. Even more, some claim they do not have the gift of hospitality. But scripture calls us to be hospitable and to practice it. Hospitality cannot be delegated but should be a part of our culture as individuals and as the church. We receive and provide hospitality with regularity; we host and are hosted. Even when welcomed warmly and the marks of hospitality (food, drink, and comfort) are present, we can feel left out. Therefore, the emphasis is not on providing hospitality. We need to offer and extend hospitality and improve the hospitality we share through practice.

What is hospitality? The Greek word for hospitality means “loving the stranger,” yet this simple definition masks the complex and multidirectional reality of practicing hospitality. God is the origin of hospitality. While we were yet strangers, God loved us the stranger. That is the mission of God, the *Missio Dei*. As the mission of God extends from the Father to the Son to the Apostles and ultimately to the church, hospitality expands endlessly. Understanding this unity of *Missio Dei* and hospitality, the doctrine of the Two Kinds of Righteousness will ensure we do not confuse humanity’s role with God’s role in the *Missio Dei*. The hospitality of God intends to invite the stranger into his kingdom. Our role in extending hospitality is *coram mundo*, and our role is to be the instruments through which God provides daily bread for his people. As Nouwen points out, “In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a

painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found.”¹ Our role in extending hospitality is to provide a safe place where the stranger is expected and welcomed, and the stranger becomes a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is an embodiment of the hospitable *Missio Dei*.

Furthermore, hospitality is the mission of the church. Scripture commands that we “show hospitality” (1 Pet. 4:9, 3 John 1:8), and the same ambition is intensified by calling Christians to “practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13). The Bible explicitly commands and implicitly demonstrates the pursuit and practice of hospitality. Where scripture is the formative and normative text for the Christian community, scripture forms and norms the Christian community’s hospitality. Scripture calls us to love one another and to love one another shows hospitality. Therefore, Christian communities demonstrate hospitality, and the testimony of the church leaders throughout the centuries parallel in clarity for how Christians are to show hospitality. For centuries Christian communities have found ways to put hospitality into practice. Uniformly, the church has proclaimed the importance of offering hospitality throughout the centuries.

What is hospitality? Hospitality is God’s welcome reaching across to family and friends, fellow citizens, and foreigners, as if Christ were in our very midst. Hospitality is “the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but offer them space where change can take place.”² Our Redeemer’s goal is to offer God’s hospitality through us to the stranger. It is ultimately about loving the stranger as an outgrowth of the hospitality God showed us when we were strangers. If the goal is to offer this hospitality, the question becomes, how are we doing?

¹ Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 65.

² Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.

The members of Our Redeemer genuinely believe their hospitality is warm and welcoming, and this perception is vindicated and supported by new congregational members and community members in general. Where this might or might not be true, we are uncertain what leads to these general perceptions and how to improve the perception through explicit and clear hospitality. Therefore, this research aimed to discover what areas effectively create a desire for visitors to connect further to the congregation. Furthermore, we would evaluate ways to improve the hospitality exhibited by the congregation.

Through ten secret visitor surveys (quantitative data) and follow-up interviews with five secret visitors (qualitative data), the research demonstrates where Our Redeemer performed well and where Our Redeemer underperformed. Experience in the environment was unanimously praised, from the music to the liturgy to the pastor. Entering the environment had mixed reviews. Overall the facilities were considered warm and inviting. Yet there was confusion caused by the lack of signage outside and even in the building. Finally, engaging the environment is the area where Our Redeemer fell short. From stories and my eyewitness, there are times that Our Redeemer is intentional and reaches out to the visitor. Yet, from our secret visitors, we learned that we are inconsistent in reaching out.

Contributions to Ministry

It is irrational to think that Our Redeemer could always meet the standards of hospitality. Still, it is equally troubling if we do not strive to improve our consistency and quality of hospitality. Scripture commands us to practice hospitality, and anyone involved with a basketball team, a dance troupe, a production cast, or a wrestling team knows that the practices directly impact performance on the field before the game or event. Practice allows us to maximize our efforts at being hospitable, and the desire for continuous improvement is built into this

congregation's DNA. Amongst the leadership (called staff, contracted staff, Board of Directors, and committee chairpersons), it is expected that improvements are made over prior years when it comes to the many and various events and programs employed. The culture of Our Redeemer does not accept mediocrity, and always expects a striving to do things better. While the congregation is naturally caring toward outsiders, this research project allows them to use their continuous improvement skill set to enhance their hospitality. Therefore, efforts should be made to augment the culture and address entering the environment.

Augment the Culture

Through new members and community members, Our Redeemer has held the impression that we are hospitable, yet the research has shown we can improve our practice of it. Making these improvements requires focus, clear goal setting, and commitment as we inculcate the culture with a hospitality mindset. In the hospitality industry, Disney and Chick-fil-A were given as examples of businesses that have set their hospitality philosophy and were able to provide clear and concrete ways for their cast members or employees to perform. Still, first, they set the culture, and second, they set the expectation. Setting the expectation, the culture will be of the utmost importance to our congregation.

There are four stages of inculcating a culture—create the culture, say the culture, believe the culture, and live the culture. This process of teaching culture has been used at Our Redeemer during my ministry. Two examples come to mind. First, we used the tagline previously mentioned—“Equipping Disciples to Make Disciples for Jesus”—to teach the mission of Our Redeemer. Everything we do at Our Redeemer is about equipping the disciples, the members of Our Redeemer, to make disciples. Every Bible study, every sermon series, and every event is about training the disciple to make a disciple. To make it something the congregation

tangentially knew, we started saying it after announcements at the end of the Divine worship service, demonstrating the “say it” concept. We have done this for over a decade; without a doubt, members can tell what we are about at Our Redeemer! This example also follows the Chick-fil-A concept of ensuring everyone knows and lives out the organization's purpose.

Another example of the “say it” setting the culture is forgiveness. I have taught and preached the importance of extending forgiveness, and I have demonstrated verbally forgiving people, saying, “You are forgiven!” After telling the culture repeatedly, it is believed and ultimately lived. The set culture becomes the norm.

In order to set the hospitality culture that needs to be established at Our Redeemer, three presentations will be helpful; and because of the urgency, the first two have already been done (been “said”). Frankly, they could be redone again because repetition is the mother of all learning, and now there would be less resistance to the overall concept of hospitality as a Biblical theme.

First, we introduced a year-long theme on hospitality called “Show Hospitality.” This effort included sermons and sermon series emphasizing the importance of hospitality and a “hospitality” emphasis in the liturgy. For example, a thematic call and response began the service. The Pastor would say, “Christ commands: Contribute to the needs of the saints. Therefore...,” and the people would reply, “we show hospitality.” Another example would be the call to action at the end of each sermon. Pastors use a variety of verses, such as “Now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” We intentionally chose this thematic verse—As followers of Christ, “Keep loving one another earnestly and show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (1 Pet. 4:8-9) These gentle thematic touches kept the focus on showing hospitality. Perhaps, the most impactful thing we did

was a year-long Bible study. Following a pericope schedule based on “People of the Bible,” we reviewed up to four individuals and the events around their lives each week. In each study, we asked ourselves if the rules of hospitality were observed and if the hospitality was successful. On the one hand, we repeatedly saw that there was life when hospitality was engaged. On the other hand, when the rules of hospitality were ignored, there was death. At the beginning of the year, many members questioned the validity of this theme, but, by the end of the year, they were convinced. Many members were surprised and shocked at how many times hospitality was demonstrated or commanded in scripture. Hospitality is a solid Biblical theme.

Second, I have presented my lecture, “Hospitality: Disney, the Church, and You,” numerous times. The focus of this presentation is to explain strictly the four keys used by Disney so that the audience can apply them to their organization. Several times, I have presented at both “Best Practices” LCMS Conferences (Arizona and Heartland). I have presented at the Iowa School Principal’s conference, the Iowa Teacher’s conference, and for every school in Iowa District East. After presenting at so many places, I felt it would be beneficial to present it at Our Redeemer. I gave the lecture during one of the early pandemic Bible study hours in May 2020. It was well received, and some congregational leaders shared with me that the presentation gave them a lot of insight as to why I do some of the things I do— something they asserted no other pastor has done. This presentation demonstrated that these “unique” concerns were directly related to a hospitality emphasis.

Third, with the excitement of completing my doctorate, I will present my dissertation over several Sundays during the Bible study hour in the summer of 2023. I will reveal to the congregation that they were secretly shopped and share the shopping experience results. There will be much interest because the congregation has supported me during the decade-long process

of earning my doctorate. After each doctrinal class was completed, they enjoyed the subsequent Bible class or sermon series resulting from the course. Likewise, I believe they will eagerly desire to hear about my dissertation. Several have already told me they want to read it! So, by presenting my dissertation chapter by chapter, we will be able to build upon the year-long theme and the Disney presentation that have already been done. I will deepen their understanding of hospitality by showing the importance that the church leaders, through the millennium, have given to hospitality. I will be able to introduce the doctrinal themes of *Missio Dei* and *Two Kinds of Righteousness* to deepen the congregation's understanding of hospitality.

Through this multi-year, multi-phased approach to discussing hospitality, we are as a congregation, improving at practicing hospitality, which is the purpose of the MAP. We are taking time out to practice it, which requires focus. Because of the practice, we have noticed improvement which will motivate us to stay firm on our path. We are creating, saying, believing, and living a hospitality culture.

Address Entering the Environment

Concurrently with this multi-year, multi-phased approach to creating a culture of hospitality at Our Redeemer, some obvious "Entering the Environment" issues will need to be addressed and resolved. The Board of Directors will create an Ad Hoc Committee for one issue, and the standing Assimilation Committee will address the second.

First, the physical building of the church is in good condition. With our "Vision 2020" facilities enhancement program, the entire building, from infrastructure (roof, electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems), was updated from the building expansion in 1969, including removing all asbestos. The building's audio-visual equipment was modernized too. The interior design was refreshed throughout the building, and the floor plan was updated to meet ministry

needs. We created a new adult education room out of two smaller classrooms. The chapel was moved, putting the altar back where the altar was from 1958–1969 and opening up the library and coffee area, creating a new environment, now called the Gathering Place. What was not done? It was the main entrance area, and the same project was cut from the 1998 facility update. Specifically, a Porte-cochere was discussed in the last two facility updates, but both times the project was deleted as a cost saving. It seems members desire to have a convenient way to drop people off for worship. Several secret shoppers mentioned that the entrance was confusing. There are three doors to get into the building. Signage was also mentioned as lacking, specifically outside the building. This Ad Hoc Committee will need to address the physical entrances, the primary and secondary doors. This need has been identified and known about for the last three decades. The time has come to address this issue.

Second, the Assimilation Committee is responsible for the congregational greeters. During the COVID pandemic, we eliminated the greeter position. Those who came to church, especially early during the pandemic, were greeted personally by the Pastor. We did not need extra people standing around, and no additional people were volunteering. Historically, we had greeters for the Sunday services, but not on Saturday. As the Assimilation Committee re-ignites this volunteer opportunity, we need to staff all three services. The people volunteering should complete basic greeter training that will emphasize hospitality courtesy traits. Both Chick-fil-A and Disney have their core traits. The Assimilation Committee will determine the courtesy traits and teach them to those serving as greeters for our Divine worship services.

Addressing the building entrance flaws and augmenting the hospitality culture will improve the hospitality offered at Our Redeemer. Since Scripture commands hospitality explicitly and implicitly, we need to implicitly and explicitly provide hospitality. Hospitality cannot be

delegated but should be initiated, and every Christian is called to deliver hospitality.

Contributions to My Personal and Professional Growth

A class I took in the doctorate program was “Christ in Film” with Professor David Lewis. I presented the Disney movie “Tomorrowland” as a Christ film during the course. In addition to the Christological features of the film, I explained Disney lore throughout the film. In a casual conversation, Professor Lewis asked about my intended dissertation topic, and he casually added that I should do something with Disney and hospitality. After thinking about it for a while, I asked if he would sponsor an independent study class where I explored the Biblical topic of hospitality. That independent study course became the genesis of this dissertation.

I expected my research to reveal that a congregation's hospitality was more critical than most churches would say. Still, I found that hospitality for a congregation and an individual Christian is far more critical than I ever imagined. In that initial independent study, I discovered the general themes of hospitality in the Bible. I also realized that my hospitality knowledge from the hospitality industry and specifically from my career at Walt Disney World gave me a unique voice on this Biblical topic. Therefore, I started giving a presentation, "Hospitality: Disney, the Church, and You," where I explained the Disney keys to hospitality. Over the years that I have shown that presentation, I have seen others begin to present about hospitality. I attended a conference this past month where two other presentations focused on hospitality, in addition to mine.

From this dissertation, my understanding of Biblical hospitality has deepened even further. Struggling through chapters two and three produced a deep appreciation for the connection between Hospitality and the *Missio Dei*. Hospitality is not an option; It is not a nicety. Hospitality is core to the Gospel message. Before, I would have said hospitality was essential for

welcoming the stranger at church. I understood it was vital for a church to be welcoming, just as it is crucial for a restaurant, a school, or a hospital to be hospitable and welcoming; however, it is so much more than that. Hospitality is not about the secular understanding of increasing comfort. Hospitality is an aspect of the embodiment of the hospitable *Missio Dei*. Hospitality is not about conversion but giving a space for the transformation to manifest. Hospitality is about making the stranger an amigo instead of an adversary. At Our Redeemer, we are about “Equipping Disciples to Make Disciples for Jesus!”³ Since that is true, it can be said that at Our Redeemer, we are about hospitality! As Christians, we all need to practice hospitality!

³ At the end of every worship service, following the general announcements, the congregation says this tag line. This tagline represents who we are and what we stand for as a congregation. It is drawn from our Mission Statement and expresses how we want to be remembered or what we are about. If we are about making disciples for Jesus then by extension, we are about hospitality!

APPENDIX ONE

Doctrine of Hospitality

Alexander Strauch tries to summarize what is communicated and demonstrated in the Bible about hospitality in his list of the “Doctrine of Hospitality.” His list is as follows:

3. Christian hospitality is one of the birthmarks of early Christianity.
4. Christian hospitality is a virtue.
5. God requires every Christian to pursue Christian hospitality. Hospitality is His command, not an option (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1–2).
6. Christian hospitality is a biblical requirement for church shepherds (1 Tim. 3:2).
7. Christian hospitality is a biblical requirement for church-supported widows (1 Tim. 5:10).
8. Christian hospitality is a practical expression of brotherly and sisterly Christian love (Heb. 13:1–2).
9. Christian hospitality fans the flames of Christian love in extraordinarily powerful ways.
10. Every Christian should eagerly pursue Christian hospitality (Rom. 12:13).
11. Christians are to practice hospitality with a glad heart (1 Pet. 4:9).
12. Christian hospitality is an effective medium for sharing the gospel message with relatives, friends, and neighbors (Acts 5:42; 20:20; Luke 5:29).
13. Christian hospitality helps to advance the gospel by providing an indispensable service for the Lord’s messengers (Luke 10:7–8; 3 John 5–8).
14. Christian hospitality seeks to minister to the poor, the uninvited, and the needy of society (Luke 14:12–14).
15. Christian hospitality is a practical vehicle for exercising one’s spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:9–10).
16. Christian hospitality leads to unexpected rewards and blessings (Heb. 13:2).¹

¹ Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth), 47–48.

APPENDIX TWO

Informed Consent Questionnaire

On the next page you will see the Informed Consent Questionnaire used with this study.

This form was read aloud to each participant by their local pastor. He read the document aloud to assure all of the information was reviewed by the participant. This document assures the participant they will not be harmed nor compensated financially from their participation.



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Fax: 319-338-9171
Email: redeemer@ourredeemer.org

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Questionnaire

Study Title: Hospitality: Areas that are Effective in Creating a Desire for a Visitor to Connect to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Researcher: Rev. Brent Hartwig, Pastor, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA

Email Address and Telephone Number: Hartwigb@csl.edu (319)338-5626

Research Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Mark Rockenbach

Email Address: rockenbachm@csl.edu

[This Informed Consent Form will be read by the participant's pastor after they agree to be in the study.]

You are invited to be part of a research study. The researcher is a student at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri as part of the Doctor of Ministry program (D,Min.). The information in this form is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. This form describes what you will have to do during the study and the risks and benefits of the study.

If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the researcher. Do not sign this form unless the researcher has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The purpose of the research is to identify from a visitor's point-of-view what makes Our Redeemer Lutheran Church hospitable.

Informed Consent 1

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THE STUDY?

You were selected by your local Pastor to participate in this research study. You are invited to be in the study because you are:

1. Above the age of 21.
2. A LC-MS Christian.
3. Able to worship at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Iowa City, IA at any one service (Saturday at 5:30 pm or Sunday at 8:00 am or 10:30 am).
4. Willing to complete written survey.
5. Hyper attentive and able to make mental notes of your visit to record on the written survey.

In addition, the participant of this study

6. Must have never visit Our Redeemer Lutheran Church before.
7. Must have no relatives or friends who regularly worship at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church.
8. Must be willing to participate in an additional one hour, in-person interview if selected.

If you do not meet the description above, you are not able to be in the study.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?

About 20 participants will be in this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher is a pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA.

WILL IT COST ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to pay to be in the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study, your participation will last about 1.5 – 2.5 hours plus travel time. You will have to come to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, 2301 E. Court Street, Iowa City, IA one or maybe two times during the study. The first visit will be your secret shop of the worship service. You will participate in the worship service taking note of your experience.

The second possible time would be an in-person interview about your experience. Only five participants will be asked to complete the in-person interview.

Informed Consent 2

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study and if you sign this form, you will do the following things:

- give personal information about yourself, such as your age, gender.
- answer questions on a written questionnaire about your visit to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church.

While you are in the study, you will be expected to:

- Follow the instructions you are given.
- Tell the researcher if you want to stop being in the study at any time.

WILL I BE RECORDED?

There will be no recording. The Questionnaire will be written on paper, scanned and stored electronically.

WILL BEING IN THIS STUDY HELP ME?

Being in this study will not help you. Information from this study might help researchers help others in the future.

ARE THERE RISKS TO ME IF I AM IN THIS STUDY?

No study is completely risk-free. However, we don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

WILL I GET PAID?

You will not receive anything for being in the study.

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to be in the study and you can change your mind about being in the study at any time. There will be no penalty to you. If you want to stop being in the study, tell the researcher.

The researcher can remove you from the study at any time. This could happen if:

- The researcher believes it is best for you to stop being in the study.
- You do not follow directions about the study.
- You no longer meet the inclusion criteria to participate.

Informed Consent 3

WHO WILL USE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT MY BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Any information you provide in this study that could identify you such as your name, age, or other personal information will be kept confidential. All documents will be kept electronically, under password protection. Original written documents will be shredded and disposed of with confidentiality. In any written reports or publications, no one will be able to identify you.

The researcher will keep the information you provide in a password protected computer in his locked office at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA and only the researcher and research supervisor will be able to review this information.

Even if you leave the study early and have already completed the written questionnaire, the researcher will be able to use that data for this research project.

Limits of Privacy (Confidentiality)

Generally speaking, the researcher can assure you that he will keep everything you tell him or do for the study private. Yet there are times where the researcher cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person might harm themselves or another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to hurt themselves or another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS STUDY?

You can ask questions about the study at any time. You can call the researcher if you have any concerns or complaints. You should call the researcher at the phone number listed on page 1 of this form if you have questions about anything related to this study.

Informed Consent 4

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read this form, and I have been able to ask questions about this study. My local pastor has talked to me about the study. The researcher has answered all my questions. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I agree to allow the use and sharing of my study-related records as described above.

By signing this form, I have not given up any of my legal rights as a research participant. I will get a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Printed Name of Participant

Phone number

Email address

Signature of Participant

Date

I attest that the participant named above had enough time to consider this information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Printed Name of Pastor

Printed Name of Congregation

Signature of Pastor

Date

I attest that the local pastor was informed of the research project and that my contact information was available for an additional questions.

Brent Hartwig
Printed Name of Researcher



Signature of Researcher

June 21, 2018
Date

APPENDIX THREE

Letter and Survey

After signing the Informed Consent Questionnaire, each participant was given a letter and survey. The letter would provide guidance to their role as secret visitor, while the survey would share the results of their visit. Here is a sample of the letter and a blank survey:



2301 E. Court Street
Iowa City, IA 52245
www.ourredeemer.org

Phone: 319-338-5626
Fax: 319-338-9171
Email: redeemer@ourredeemer.org

Thank you for being a part of this survey. Your feedback about how you experienced Our Redeemer Lutheran Church is extremely valuable to us and we thank you for your time and willingness to take this survey. Please be as detailed as your time allows and please know that no comment or feeling you've had is trivial. It's the little things that can really make a difference!

At Our Redeemer, we strive to make every interaction we have with others an example of Christ's love. We hold up the values of grace, excellence, and hospitality in all that we do. Your input helps us identify areas of improvement we might not have seen in ourselves.

Please attend any worship service between:
September 8, 2018 and September 30, 2018.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
2301 E. Court Street
Iowa City, IA 52245

Services are held on:
Saturday at 5:30 PM
Sunday at 8:00 AM and 10:30 AM

Please review and study this questionnaire before your visit to Our Redeemer. This way you will know what to be looking for during your visit.

While attending services, participate and be present in the worship life of the church. Please do not reveal to anyone that you are evaluating the church. This is part of a secret shopping program for a doctrinal study. Go ahead and sign the worship pad like all other visitors.

Thank you again!

► *Next Page*

Page 1

What date did you attend worship?

What time did you attend worship?

1. Did someone greet you at the door? yes no
2. Did they make eye contact and smile? yes no
3. Did you find the environment inviting and welcoming? yes no
4. What made it inviting and welcoming?

5. Did you find the greeting of congregational members at the beginning of the service to be enjoyable? yes no
6. Did you find people wearing name tags? yes no
7. Is it helpful if members wear name tags? yes no
8. How many people spoke to you without prompting?
9. How many people invited you to come back, to coffee hour, or to Bible study?
10. Was the "Congregation" welcoming and friendly yes no
11. Was the "Pastor" welcoming and friendly yes no

► *Next Page*

Page 2

Rate the worship space and experience on the following characteristics:

12. Void of Gospel	1	2	3	4	5	Clear Gospel
13. Confusing order of worship	1	2	3	4	5	Clear and enriching order of worship
14. Poor acoustics	1	2	3	4	5	Excellent acoustics
15. Poor screen quality	1	2	3	4	5	Excellent screen quality
16. Cold, intimidating space	1	2	3	4	5	Warm, friendly space
17. Unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	Friendly

18. Would you return to this church to worship? yes no

19. Why?

► *Next Page*

Page 3

Remember: the above information will be held confidential and disassociated with your personal contact information.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

What year were you born? 19_____

What is your gender? male female

APPENDIX FOUR

Informed Consent Interview

On the next page you will see the Informed Consent Interview used with this study. This form was read aloud to each participant by the researcher. He read the document aloud to assure all the information was reviewed by the participant. This document assures the participant they will not be harmed nor compensated financially from their participation.



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INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Interview

Study Title: Hospitality: Areas that are Effective in Creating a Desire for a Visitor to Connect to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Researcher: Rev. Brent Hartwig, Pastor, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA

Email Address and Telephone Number: Hartwigb@csl.edu (319)338-5626

Research Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Mark Rockenbach

Email Address: rockenbachm@csl.edu

[This Informed Consent Form will be read by the researcher prior to the recorded interview.]

You are invited to be part of a research study. The researcher is a student at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri as part of the Doctor of Ministry program (D.Min.). The information in this form is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. This form describes what you will have to do during the study and the risks and benefits of the study.

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4. Willing to complete written survey.
5. Hyper attentive and able to make mental notes of your visit to record on the written survey.

In addition, the participant of this study

6. Must have never visit Our Redeemer Lutheran Church before.
7. Must have no relatives or friends who regularly worship at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church.
8. Must be willing to participate in an additional one hour, in-person interview if selected.

Finally, the participant would have previously completed a visit to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church for worship and submitted a completed questionnaire.

If you do not meet the description above, you are not able to be in the study.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?

About 20 participants will be in this study. 5 will be invited for in-person interviews.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher is a pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA.

WILL IT COST ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to pay to be in the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

You have already completed the secret shopping portion of this study which lasted 1.5 – 2.5 hours plus travel time. You worshipped at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, 2301 E. Court Street, Iowa City, IA and you completed the written questionnaire.

This second visit is an in-person interview about your experience. Only five participants will be asked to complete the in-person interview. The interview will be limited to one-hour in length.

Informed Consent 2

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you decide to be in this second part of the study and if you sign this form, you will do the following things:

- give personal information about yourself, such as your age, gender.
- answer questions during an in-person interview about your visit to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church.

While you are in the study, you will be expected to:

- Follow the instructions you are given.
- Tell the researcher if you want to stop being in the study at any time.

WILL I BE RECORDED?

If you complete the in-person interview, the researcher will audiotape your interview about your visit to Our Redeemer. There are five standard questions that will be asked.

The researcher will use the audiotape in order to create a written transcript for data interpretation.

The researcher will only use the recordings of you for the purposes you read about in this form. They will not use the recordings for any other reasons without your permission unless you sign another consent form. The recordings will be kept for seven years and they will be kept confidential. The recordings will be destroyed after seven years.

WILL BEING IN THIS STUDY HELP ME?

Being in this study will not help you. Information from this study might help researchers help others in the future.

ARE THERE RISKS TO ME IF I AM IN THIS STUDY?

No study is completely risk-free. However, we don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

WILL I GET PAID?

You will not receive anything for being in the study.

Informed Consent 3

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to be in the study and you can change your mind about being in the study at any time. There will be no penalty to you. If you want to stop being in the study, tell the researcher.

The researcher can remove you from the study at any time. This could happen if:

- The researcher believes it is best for you to stop being in the study.
- You do not follow directions about the study.
- You no longer meet the inclusion criteria to participate.

WHO WILL USE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT MY BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Any information you provide in this study that could identify you such as your name, age, or other personal information will be kept confidential. All documents will be kept electronically, under password protection. Original written documents will be shredded and disposed of with confidentiality. In any written reports or publications, no one will be able to identify you.

The researcher will keep the information you provide in a [PASSWORD PROTECTED COMPUTER] in his locked office at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA and only the researcher and research supervisor will be able to review this information.

Tape recordings are only made for the in-person interviews. These tape recordings will be kept confidential. They will be password protected and stored in my locked office at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Iowa City, IA. Only the researcher will have access to the electronic recordings.

Even if you leave the study early and have already completed the written questionnaire, the researcher will be able to use that data for this research project.

Limits of Privacy (Confidentiality)

Generally speaking, the researcher can assure you that he will keep everything you tell him or do for the study private. Yet there are times where the researcher cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person might harm themselves or another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to hurt themselves or another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Informed Consent 4

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS STUDY?

You can ask questions about the study at any time. You can call the researcher if you have any concerns or complaints. You should call the researcher at the phone number listed on page 1 of this form if you have questions about anything related to this study.

Informed Consent 5

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read this form, and I have been able to ask questions about this study. My local pastor has talked to me about the study. The researcher has answered all my questions. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I agree to allow the use and sharing of my study-related records as described above.

By signing this form, I have not given up any of my legal rights as a research participant. I will get a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

If I am selected for an in-person interview, I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I attest that the participant named above had enough time to consider this information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

Informed Consent 6

APPENDIX FIVE

Visitor One Interview Transcript

Brent Hartwig: (00:03)

Okay, we're recording. This is an interview on September 19th at 10:43 A.M. I'm interviewing-

Visitor One: (00:14)

-[Visitor One 00:00:14] Doty.

Brent Hartwig: (00:15)

And we're going through the five questions that are pre-set for this interview. Visitor One, uh, secret shopped Our Redeemer back in June... May, late May. And, uh, so, she's recalling her experiences with Our Redeemer. And my first question is, what do you most enjoy about attending services here? And specifically, I mean Our Redeemer. What did you most enjoy?

Visitor One: (00:47)

The professionally done... Or the well done music. Um, and the familiarity... familiarity of the worship as a familiar liturgy, familiar... mostly familiar songs. There were a couple that were new. Um, so those... I liked those pieces.

Brent Hartwig: (01:09)

Great. Oh, what, if anything, would you change about attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor One: (01:18)

Uh, more intentional greeting. When I walked in the door, nobody said, "hi." I literally went the entire morning, and didn't have one person talk to me or initiate a conversation, and that was a little disheartening.

Visitor One: (01:30)

Um, it said in the bulletin there were supposed to be greeters. I don't know if they were at a different door than I used. They were not, um... I didn't see 'em. And the people who I did try to engage a conversation with, a little "Hi" was maybe all that I got.

Visitor One: (01:47)

Um, the signage to know where is children's ministry. That was something I was looking for, and I didn't know where to go with my kids, um, had we been trying to attend Sunday school. That... The timing that day didn't work, but I saw people going down a hallway, but I didn't know what was down that hallway.

Visitor One: (02:07)

Um, the also... The bulletin also talked about there being a nursery. I didn't see any signage or direction as to finding that. Um, the bulletin said there should have been four ushers. There may have been on the other side. That was a little bit confusing as to just the way the facility is set up.

Visitor One: (02:26)

I saw one, and happened to be his name was turned... his name tag was turned around, so I really didn't know who he was. He had a big name tag, and he was handing out bulletins, so I guessed he was probably an usher.

Visitor One: (02:38)

Um, and then I was looking for people who looked like me. So, I'm a mom with middle school- I was there a mom with a middle school, and a elementary aged child. And before worship, I didn't see anybody that looked like me. Um, and I had a hard time seeing with... in the worship. There were... there were some families in worship, but I didn't see anybody or have anybody connect with me that's like, "Hey, you look like me. I should talk to you." Um, nobody initiated a conversation.

Brent Hartwig: (03:15)

So, why would you recommend this church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?

Visitor One: (03:25)

As a LCS mem- LCMS member, I, um, felt comfortable in- in the liturgy and the content. Um, so that would be a reason I would return. But if I were church shopping, I would keep going because there was nobody there for me. I'm... Yes, I'm making it personal, but...

Brent Hartwig: (03:48)

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Visitor One: (03:49)

... faith is personal.

Brent Hartwig: (03:50)

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Visitor One: (03:50)

And without having anybody to... that said, "Hey, I'm glad to see you. I'm glad you're here," that made me say, "Okay." Well, we came. We left. Nobody noticed, so let's keep looking until we find somebody where we can make a friend or my kids see somebody that they might know from... from school or from, um, from somewhere they've... from activities that they might know.

Visitor One: (04:20)

Um, the church seemed to have a lot of young people in it. Um, in a college town, and I would consider this to be. I mean, in my brain, I was in a college town. It was Iowa City. Um, there were young people, which was a good thing to see. I felt the musicians... I don't know. I- I... We'll hit pause for a second.

Visitor One: (04:42)

Um, as a college community, my brain decided that the musicians were all university people. I could be totally skewed on that or not. Um, but it was good to see young people there, and then sitting together in- in community. Young people being college age type students.

Visitor One: (05:01)

Um, so that was a... a good thing. Um, but it being that there might be more to... more pieces to be aware of, um, in making sure that you're welcoming those that are visiting the college or reaching to college students.

Brent Hartwig: (05:21)

So, what are some ways you think that we could make our church more welcoming for new visitors?

Visitor One: (05:27)

Encouraging people to say, "Hi," and encouraging them if there's somebody you don't recognize, to go up and say, "Haven't seen you before. Who are you?" Or "Who am I?" Um, "Did you..." Um, "Did you find what you needed? Did you find the restroom? Did you find the Sunday school? Are you interested in Sunday school? Happy Mother's Day. Happy to be..."

Visitor One: (05:48)

I was there on Mother's Day. Nobody told me, "Happy Mother's Day," and that was just kind of one of those things I would have liked to hear. Um, to have the... the greeters, none of these happen, but to have greeters at the door greeting and welcoming with bright attitudes and, "We're glad you're here." Um.

Brent Hartwig: (06:16)

Have you attended a different church in the last year? If so, what, if anything, did you enjoy about that church that is different from our church?

Visitor One: (06:30)

The church I currently attend is, um... I like that I know people. Um, I like that I see people and families with kids my age, and that gives me an opportunity to connect to those, um, others.

Visitor One: (06:44)

Um, just thinking about how things are visible, and- and what it looks like when you come in. Um, one of the things that jumped out at me was there were... It said there were kids' bags somewhere in the bulletin. That was something I didn't... wasn't able to find, so I didn't know what that... you know. So, are- are they visible as you're entering from either side of the... the doors? Um, and does that make sense?

Visitor One: (07:22)

Um, another thing, back to number four is the, um, the screens at the front of worship were very hard to read. And something like that could make a difference for... if you don't know what's going on. There were a few other things that, um...

Visitor One: (07:45)

Local church culture made it difference. There was a prayer thing and, uh... that... that I went, "What is this? Where is this coming from?" All of a sudden, everybody's talking through something, and it wasn't in the liturgy, it wasn't... And I... It took me a little while to figure out

where that came from.

Visitor One: (08:01)

So, it just, you know... Saying, "Okay. We're gonna do the prayer. Look here on this page." Um, something like that would've been helpful as a person who isn't used to that local, um, culture.

Brent Hartwig: (08:17)

Are there any other thoughts or ideas that you wanna share with me?

Visitor One: (08:27)

Just encouraging people to... You know, if they see somebody they don't recognize, to say, "Hi," to say, "Good morning." Um, and just try to engage in a little... a little bit of conversation even if it's as simple as, "How's the weather today?" Um, and, "We're glad you're here." Um, just... just acknowledging that there's somebody new visiting.

Visitor One: (08:49)

Get... Try to figure out who they are, and get to know them a little bit better, and help them find, maybe one more step toward getting connected to your congregation.

Brent Hartwig: (08:59)

Well, thank you for answering these questions, and thank you for visiting.

APPENDIX SIX

Visitor Two Interview Transcript

Brent Hartwig: (00:02)

This is Brent Hartwig.

Visitor Two: (00:10)

Visitor Two. Um, I'm 69 years old, and we visited July 27th, 2019.

Brent Hartwig: (00:19)

So, I have five questions as they're laid out before you and then any comments you want to make at the end, you can certainly add in. Uh, question number one, what did you most enjoy or do you most enjoy about attending services at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Two: (00:37)

Um, it was a very pretty setting, and, um, comfortable. The screens were ... Well, the screens were a little hard to see. (laughs) I remember that now.

Brent Hartwig: (00:48)

(laughs) Yes, they were.

Visitor Two: (00:50)

But it was, it was, um, we could hear the minister. Um, I guess that's basically it.

Brent Hartwig: (00:58)

Great, uh, question number two, what, if anything, would you change about attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Two: (01:07)

Probably the screens (laughs).

Brent Hartwig: (01:08)

(laughs)

Visitor Two: (01:08)

I don't know whether it was lighting, maybe.

Brent Hartwig: (01:08)

Yes.

Visitor Two: (01:13)

I don't know. They were light. You couldn't-

Brent Hartwig: (01:15)

Well, I- I can share with you. We have all new projectors and all new screens now.

Visitor Two: (01:19)

That's it. Yeah.

Brent Hartwig: (01:20)

(laughs)

Visitor Two: (01:21)

I had to look in the book. That's ... and that didn't kill me. It was fine.

Brent Hartwig: (01:25)

Yeah. The- the- the screens were very hard to see. They were very faded. The- the ambient light, the projectors, over time, um ... We spent a long time researching and trying to figure out what to do. I'm gonna pause for a moment because of that garbage truck out front.

Visitor Two: (01:42)

Really? Now should I have said something about the welcoming. No ...

Brent Hartwig: (01:50)

Whatever you want to say, yeah. Yeah.

Visitor Two: (01:52)

I didn't know if there was a question about that or not.

Brent Hartwig: (01:59)

Okay, we're going to continue now. Um, so we were talking about the- the- the screens, and they- they- they were very hard to see. You are absolutely right. And that was off-putting. Uh, fortunately we have already, uh, corrected that, rectified that and have new screens and new projectors. Um, so we were on question number two. What, if anything, would you change about attending services? You said the screens. Anything else come to mind with that question?

Brent Hartwig: (02:32)

Okay, we'll go to question number three. Would you recommend this church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?

Visitor Two: (02:41)

Um, I believe so, if they were in the area and they needed a LCMS church to attend. Um, it could have been a little more welcoming. Um, when we got there it was ... We were probably 45 minutes ahead of service-

Brent Hartwig: (02:59)

Oh.

Visitor Two: (02:59)

... And so ... But there were people there that were handing out, um, bulletins, and I was waiting

for somebody to say, "Hi are you new here?"

Brent Hartwig: (03:12)

Hi. Welcome.

Visitor Two: (03:12)

It didn't- it didn't happen-

Brent Hartwig: (03:12)

Ye.

Visitor Two: (03:12)

... But um, when we were in the pews, they were okay with, um, greeting us.

Brent Hartwig: (03:17)

Okay.

Visitor Two: (03:17)

I would say.

Brent Hartwig: (03:19)

Uh, number four, what are some ways you think we could make our church more welcoming to new visitors?

Visitor Two: (03:27)

Um, our church has the same problem. You just need to-

Brent Hartwig: (03:32)

(laughs)

Visitor Two: (03:33)

... Identify-

Brent Hartwig: (03:34)

Yeah, this is not-

Visitor Two: (03:35)

... Who these people-

Brent Hartwig: (03:35)

... A unique problem, is it?

Visitor Two: (03:36)

... Who the new people are. Sometimes it depends on the service. If you're at a different service, you don't know who the new people are, but-

Brent Hartwig: (03:44)
Right.

Visitor Two: (03:44)
... Just be more welcome- welcoming in general to everybody.

Brent Hartwig: (03:48)
Yeah.

Visitor Two: (03:48)
You know, that way, you'll cover it all.

Brent Hartwig: (03:50)
I know.

Visitor Two: (03:50)
Easier said than done, but, um, that's how I would do it. Maybe somehow. I don't know if that answered it, but ...

Brent Hartwig: (03:59)
Question number five, have you attended a different church in the last year? If ... S-so, not yours and not ours, if so, what, if anything did you enjoy about that church that is different from our Redeemer Lutheran church?

Visitor Two: (04:14)
Yes. As a matter of fact, I attended, um, Andover Lutheran church in Andover, Iowa. It's, um, different centered but very welcoming. Small church. They identify new people very easily, and they hand out a welcome bag-

Brent Hartwig: (04:32)
Okay.

Visitor Two: (04:33)
... Which includes, um, pads of paper, uh, service times and, uh, oh, and just different things that introduce you to their church.

Brent Hartwig: (04:45)
So, how do they- how do they identify you that you are new to give you that bag? Do they ask you to identify yourself, or did they approach you?

Visitor Two: (04:54)
They approached us.

Brent Hartwig: (04:56)
Okay.

Visitor Two: (04:56)

I was with two other ladies. Um, we were invited to speak there for a reason. So, they knew we were new.

Brent Hartwig: (05:02)

Okay.

Visitor Two: (05:02)

Um-

Brent Hartwig: (05:02)

Okay.

Visitor Two: (05:04)

But the welcome bag was a great idea. I thought that was a nice touch-

Brent Hartwig: (05:11)

Yeah.

Visitor Two: (05:11)

... To make you feel welcome.

Brent Hartwig: (05:12)

Um, did- do you see them give those bags to other people?

Visitor Two: (05:16)

Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (05:16)

Okay.

Visitor Two: (05:16)

Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (05:17)

Okay.

Visitor Two: (05:17)

Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (05:18)

Great. All right, question number five, have you ... Oh, uh, I already asked that one. Have you attended a different-

Visitor Two: (05:23)

Right.

Brent Hartwig: (05:24)

... Church, the Lutheran Church in Andover. I guess that's all five questions. Uh, I thank you, uh, for being a part of this study.

Visitor Two: (05:31)

Easy.

APPENDIX SEVEN

Visitor Three Interview Transcript

Brent Hartwig: (00:02)

This is Brent Hartwig doing interview number three. Um, and today's date is September 24th, 2019. And I'm interviewing ...

Visitor Three: (00:16)

Visitor Three of, uh, 71 years old.

Brent Hartwig: (00:23)

And what date did you visit?

Visitor Three: (00:24)

Uh, July 27th.

Brent Hartwig: (00:27)

So, my first question is, uh, what did you most enjoy about the- the services, attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Three: (00:39)

Personally, I like to visit other churches to see how other people do their services.

Brent Hartwig: (00:46)

Yeah, yeah, did- were- did you find things that were in common with what you, uh, participate here and things that were different?

Visitor Three: (00:54)

Well, obviously, the gospel and the, and the service, the- the heart of the service, the meat of it ...

Brent Hartwig: (01:00)

Praise the Lord for that, right?

Visitor Three: (01:01)

... Is- is the same.

Brent Hartwig: (01:02)

(laughs) Praise the Lord for that.

Visitor Three: (01:03)

Yes. But to see how different choirs and different things interact with the- the service-

Brent Hartwig: (01:12)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (01:12)
... Is- is, to me, a good thing.

Brent Hartwig: (01:13)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (01:14)
I mean ...

Brent Hartwig: (01:16)
Yeah. What, if anything, would you change about attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Three: (01:25)
Uh, uh, I-I-I guess, because of, uh, I'm going with the- the thought that wh-why I thought we were coming to see-

Brent Hartwig: (01:36)
Uh-huh.

Visitor Three: (01:36)
... The- the service was to see how friendly and how welcoming the- the church was.

Brent Hartwig: (01:43)
Yes. And did- what did you find?

Visitor Three: (01:44)
We-well, not quite what I expected.

Brent Hartwig: (01:50)
(laughs)

Visitor Three: (01:50)
But it also was- is good reflection into the fact ... I-w-w-w- it wasn't not unfriendly. It's just that there were ushers, uh, the usher and- and people there that, within the own- their own church group were very friendly to each other. We, as strangers, kinda sit around and looked at each other.

Brent Hartwig: (02:15)
(laughs)

Visitor Three: (02:16)
Uh, b- but it was a good reflection in that we can take home to our own church because my wife happens to be a part of the- the lining up the greeters and stuff in the morning.

Brent Hartwig: (02:31)

Okay.

Visitor Three: (02:32)

That- that we need to do a better job of welcoming, uh, whomever, you know. I mean we have people- we have people now with our new minister that I have not seen in church, and I don't know who they are.

Brent Hartwig: (02:51)

Right.

Visitor Three: (02:51)

They may well be members.

Brent Hartwig: (02:53)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (02:54)

And- and this- this ... But I- I've ... Because of this study, it made me aware of it, and- and now I go up to 'em and say (laughs) "Who are you?"

Brent Hartwig: (03:05)

Ye.

Visitor Three: (03:06)

I mean ...

Brent Hartwig: (03:06)

"M-my bad, I don't know who you are."

Visitor Three: (03:09)

Yes, yes.

Brent Hartwig: (03:10)

(laughs)

Visitor Three: (03:10)

"I- I am this person."

Brent Hartwig: (03:12)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (03:12)

"And I am nothing here-

Brent Hartwig: (03:13)

(laughs)

Visitor Three: (03:13)

... But I'd like to know who are you." You know, and- and that- that ... So, I think that's a good thing.

Brent Hartwig: (03:19)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (03:20)

That- that- is-

Brent Hartwig: (03:20)

Right.

Visitor Three: (03:20)

... That is a good thing.

Brent Hartwig: (03:21)

Absolutely. Absolutely. So, question number three-

Visitor Three: (03:25)

Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (03:25)

Would you recommend this church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?

Visitor Three: (03:31)

Well, absolutely. Seemed very, very, very progressive but yet steeped in tradition.

Brent Hartwig: (03:39)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (03:40)

And I- I, you know, be- being a college town, if you will, it gives us a different view of how things are presented.

Brent Hartwig: (03:52)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (03:52)

And I like that.

Brent Hartwig: (03:54)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (03:54)

I mean I like- I like- uh, I- I ... I'm old, and I don't like change-

Brent Hartwig: (04:00)
(laughs)

Visitor Three: (04:01)
... But yet, I do like change-

Brent Hartwig: (04:02)
Right.

Visitor Three: (04:02)
... If that makes any sense at all.

Brent Hartwig: (04:04)
(laughs) Okay.

Visitor Three: (04:04)
I mean- I mean, uh, well, a-at least, at least differences.

Brent Hartwig: (04:10)
Yeah, you don't want the heart of the gospel-

Visitor Three: (04:12)
No.

Brent Hartwig: (04:14)
... And the heart-

Visitor Three: (04:14)
I want that to be all the same.

Brent Hartwig: (04:14)
... Of the liturgy to be the same, but you have the understanding or the knowledge that it needs to be nuanced to the culture of the area.

Visitor Three: (04:23)
The presentation-

Brent Hartwig: (04:24)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:24)
... Is- is- is- is- is a lot.

Brent Hartwig: (04:26)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:26)

And- and it was a very good presentation.

Brent Hartwig: (04:29)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:29)

I mean your vicar was there-

Brent Hartwig: (04:30)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:31)

... And- and we had him before and ...

Brent Hartwig: (04:33)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:33)

Y- you know, there- there again, what a treat.

Brent Hartwig: (04:36)

Yeah. Yeah.

Visitor Three: (04:37)

Yeah.

Brent Hartwig: (04:38)

Uh, question number four, excuse me, what are some ways that you think that we could make our church more welcoming to new visitors?

Visitor Three: (04:49)

Well, there again, the- uh- I'll go back to what we use greeters.

Brent Hartwig: (04:55)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Visitor Three: (04:57)

And obviously, I believe our ushers and stuff are supposedly instructed that, if you see someone new, to ... But I'm not sure this is always done.

Brent Hartwig: (05:06)

(laughs) Right.

Visitor Three: (05:07)

Now with our new minister, he seems to be patrolling in the morning and greeting ... Doing his own greeting.

Brent Hartwig: (05:14)

Right.

Visitor Three: (05:15)

Also, we have a DCE who has been very good about in- in- especially in the interim and the vacancy that, that, you know, he- he- he's there very early in the morning on Sunday morning, and I think he's there to see the kids-

Brent Hartwig: (05:32)

Right.

Visitor Three: (05:32)

... And their families-

Brent Hartwig: (05:33)

Right.

Visitor Three: (05:34)

... But it- it serves a- a- a- a larger purpose in that. So, to answer that question, I would think, uh, if you don't have, uh, uh, and I didn't see any. If there was, then-

Brent Hartwig: (05:50)

Uh, you guys came on a Saturday night-

Visitor Three: (05:51)

Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (05:52)

... So, there are no greeters on a Saturday night. There is an usher most of the time.

Visitor Three: (05:57)

Yeah.

Brent Hartwig: (05:57)

But there are no greeters.

Visitor Three: (05:59)

Mm-kay.

Brent Hartwig: (05:59)

Uh, and so, adding greeters to a Saturday night service might be a great thing for us to do.

Visitor Three: (06:05)

Well, uh, the- for an outsider coming in-

Brent Hartwig: (06:10)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (06:10)

... Yes, I mean-

Brent Hartwig: (06:11)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (06:11)

... We- we- we- we- we- we came together, but we did not come in together.

Brent Hartwig: (06:15)

Okay. Okay.

Visitor Three: (06:18)

I don't know if this is (laughs) what we were supposed to do or not.

Brent Hartwig: (06:20)

No, that's great. Yeah.

Visitor Three: (06:21)

That's what we chose to do.

Brent Hartwig: (06:22)

Okay.

Visitor Three: (06:22)

I mean so that we would-

Brent Hartwig: (06:23)

You get two different experiences.

Visitor Three: (06:24)

Two different experiences.

Brent Hartwig: (06:25)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (06:25)

Right. And ...

Brent Hartwig: (06:28)

Did somebody direct you over to the one side to sit, or were you just kinda at a loss of where to go?

Visitor Three: (06:35)

We kinda just stood there and watched.

Brent Hartwig: (06:37)

Okay.

Visitor Three: (06:38)

And then where there was an opening, we went.

Brent Hartwig: (06:41)

Okay.

Visitor Three: (06:41)

So, no. So, I- I-

Brent Hartwig: (06:42)

So, nobody approached you.

Visitor Three: (06:44)

N-no.

Brent Hartwig: (06:44)

Nobody ... Okay.

Visitor Three: (06:45)

No. I mean that, I think would've been a great service, you know?

Brent Hartwig: (06:49)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (06:50)

To- to have that.

Brent Hartwig: (06:54)

Yeah. Absolutely. Uh, question number five, have you attended a different in the church in the last year? If so, what, if anything, did you enjoy about that church that is different from our church? Is there any other best practices out there that we should incorporate?

Visitor Three: (07:13)

Uh, and [inaudible 00:07:16] ... We, well, we go with Kim and Scott, and we spend a couple of weeks in Florida in the winter time, and we go there. Uh, best practices, I, you know, I'm a choir guy. I like music.

Brent Hartwig: (07:30)
Okay.

Visitor Three: (07:31)
I like ... O-or- or- or any type of, uh, well, I'm gonna call it "entertainment."

Brent Hartwig: (07:38)
Right.

Visitor Three: (07:40)
But it's entertaining in God's way.

Brent Hartwig: (07:42)
Right.

Visitor Three: (07:42)
You know?

Brent Hartwig: (07:42)
Right, right, right.

Visitor Three: (07:43)
And so ...

Brent Hartwig: (07:43)
Right.

Visitor Three: (07:44)
Uh, I'm also part of our own church choir-

Brent Hartwig: (07:48)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (07:49)
... Who our, bless her soul, our director is very into southern gospel music.

Brent Hartwig: (07:57)
Oh.

Visitor Three: (07:58)
And so, therefore, when it pertains, and that's always ...

Brent Hartwig: (08:01)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (08:03)

... But usually, it's gospel oriented.

Brent Hartwig: (08:06)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (08:06)

Uh, you know, we have not lost a choir member except by death-

Brent Hartwig: (08:12)

(laughs)

Visitor Three: (08:13)

.. And ... For many years now. And we keep growing, and that says something.

Brent Hartwig: (08:23)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (08:24)

You know? And- and- and a lot of comments and do a cantata in the wintertime and do ... And so, i-it- I d- I lean towards those type of things. I mean, uh, uh ... Well, you- you said it. Uh, to be into the times of which we are-

Brent Hartwig: (08:43)

Right.

Visitor Three: (08:44)

You know? I mean that- that's ... I don't- I don't want the church, the gospel, nothing to change-

Brent Hartwig: (08:50)

Right.

Visitor Three: (08:52)

... But the presentation of it needs to keep as current as possible-

Brent Hartwig: (08:58)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (08:58)

... If, if, there again, that makes any sense. It does to me, but-

Brent Hartwig: (09:02)

Yeah.

Visitor Three: (09:02)

... It does, uh ...

Brent Hartwig: (09:03)
Well, and what makes that statement ...

Visitor Three: (09:05)
Because- because there's- there's an attack coming from the outside world-

Brent Hartwig: (09:10)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (09:10)
... And- and- in other, in other congregations and other, whatever, now, I'm not saying do whatever you wanna do.

Brent Hartwig: (09:16)
Right.

Visitor Three: (09:16)
I- I'm saying the presentation, but if it's peppy, and if it's, i-in my case, if you have good music, yeah, Amen. You know?

Brent Hartwig: (09:26)
(laughs)

Visitor Three: (09:27)
I mean because that's what I like, you know?

Brent Hartwig: (09:28)
Right.

Visitor Three: (09:29)
Uh, I'm sure other people have other things that- that intrigue them.

Brent Hartwig: (09:33)
Right.

Visitor Three: (09:34)
So ... Tha- one church that we have found in Florida, it-

Brent Hartwig: (09:39)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (09:39)
... Has a- has a- has a music director-

Brent Hartwig: (09:42)
Okay.

Visitor Three: (09:43)
... Who plays the organ-

Brent Hartwig: (09:44)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (09:44)
... And probably could be on TV.

Brent Hartwig: (09:47)
And where is that?

Visitor Three: (09:48)
Uh, Davenport, Florida.

Brent Hartwig: (09:51)
Okay.

Visitor Three: (09:51)
I mean and ... They have a good choir.

Brent Hartwig: (09:56)
Yeah.

Visitor Three: (09:57)
They've had, uh, they had a bell choir one time when we went.

Brent Hartwig: (10:00)
Okay.

Visitor Three: (10:02)
And- and- and really, uh, is mostly ... Well, there are some young people but mostly retired people. I mean that- that's-

Brent Hartwig: (10:09)
Right.

Visitor Three: (10:09)
... Who- that's who ends up in Florida in the wintertime ...

Brent Hartwig: (10:12)
Right.

Visitor Three: (10:12)
... Is people that are retired, of which I am one.

Brent Hartwig: (10:15)
(laughs)

Visitor Three: (10:15)
And so, yeah.

Brent Hartwig: (10:18)
Well, very good. Thank you for the interview. I'm gonna turn the recorder off now.

Visitor Three: (10:21)
Okay.

APPENDIX EIGHT

Visitor Four Interview Transcript

Visitor Four: (00:00)
Name, age. 'Kay.

Brent Hartwig: (00:04)
This is Brent Hartwig, pastor at Our Redeemer, and today's date is September 24th. The interview subject is?

Visitor Four: (00:16)
Visitor Four, s-s-sixty years old.

Brent Hartwig: (00:21)
And the date that you visited Our Redeemer was?

Visitor Four: (00:24)
July 27th.

Brent Hartwig: (00:26)
Okay, I have five questions for you. Uh, the first one, and they're- they're written out in front of you. The first one is, what did or do you most enjoy about attending services at Our Redeemer? What did you most enjoy about attending the service at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Four: (00:47)
Probably the music. Uh, there was special music, a piano player, and we enjoyed that.

Brent Hartwig: (00:57)
Very good. Question number two, what, if anything, would you change about attending services here at Our Redeemer? Anything is fair game. What would you change?

Visitor Four: (01:12)
Mm, a service ...

Brent Hartwig: (01:18)
Well, attending services.

Visitor Four: (01:18)
Attending services.

Brent Hartwig: (01:20)
So, not necessarily the service itself, but if there's something about the service that you'd like to change, that's fair game, but anything about your experience in coming and visiting Our Redeemer.

Visitor Four: (01:37)

It doesn't really have to do with the service. I guess I was just thinking when we first came ...

Brent Hartwig: (01:42)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (01:42)

... And we didn't know which door to enter-

Brent Hartwig: (01:45)

Ah.

Visitor Four: (01:47)

... 'Cause-

Brent Hartwig: (01:47)

Okay.

Visitor Four: (01:47)

... There were several doors, and so, since we had never been there before, we kinda ... And then we said, well, we'll just stand out, and we'll watch and see where somebody goes in.

Brent Hartwig: (01:55)

Okay, so by doors, you meant not outside from the parking lot ...

Visitor Four: (01:59)

Yes, I do.

Brent Hartwig: (02:00)

... But once you got inside.

Visitor Four: (02:00)

No, I mean outside.

Brent Hartwig: (02:01)

Outside.

Visitor Four: (02:02)

From the parking lot.

Brent Hartwig: (02:03)

Okay. Okay.

Visitor Four: (02:03)

We didn't know which ... It's a long building.

Brent Hartwig: (02:05)
It is a long building.

Visitor Four: (02:06)
And we hadn't been there.

Brent Hartwig: (02:07)
And you saw two different doors.

Visitor Four: (02:09)
Yep, and so, we just kinda waited until we saw somebody go in, and then once we were in the church-

Brent Hartwig: (02:16)
Yeah.

Visitor Four: (02:17)
... Then we didn't know which entrance to go in.

Brent Hartwig: (02:19)
Right.

Visitor Four: (02:20)
And there wasn't really anybody there to ask, or we just kinda walked around ourselves and figured it out.

Brent Hartwig: (02:28)
Okay. Okay. Very good.

Visitor Four: (02:31)
I guess that's it.

Brent Hartwig: (02:31)
Would- would you like to see more signage in the parking lot? I've done some research that-

Visitor Four: (02:39)
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brent Hartwig: (02:40)
... Talks about the importance of parking lot signage.

Visitor Four: (02:42)
Signage, right.

Brent Hartwig: (02:43)

We don't have any signage in our parking lot other than to say "Our Redeemer Lutheran Church."

Visitor Four: (02:48)

Right.

Brent Hartwig: (02:49)

Do you think ...

Visitor Four: (02:51)

I mean it might ...

Brent Hartwig: (02:51)

... An arrow pointing to where wor- this door for worship or ...

Visitor Four: (02:55)

It might be helpful. I mean we had the same discussion at our church years ago.

Brent Hartwig: (02:59)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (02:59)

We have a parking lot, same thing. We have a hi- upper door and a lower door. Well, which one are they supposed to- so, finally they put a sign by the door you are to enter with the name of your church and the lights turned on there so that people-

Brent Hartwig: (03:18)

You can see-

Visitor Four: (03:18)

... Knew.

Brent Hartwig: (03:18)

... Which, clearly which door to go in.

Visitor Four: (03:20)

Right. So ...

Brent Hartwig: (03:21)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (03:21)

... Something of some nature-

Brent Hartwig: (03:22)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (03:22)
... Probably would be helpful.

Brent Hartwig: (03:24)
Very good. Yeah, anything else with your- your experience?

Visitor Four: (03:28)
Um ...

Brent Hartwig: (03:32)
If not, that's okay.

Visitor Four: (03:34)
No, I don't think so.

Brent Hartwig: (03:34)
Okay. Question number three, would you recommend this church to a friend or family member?
Why or why not?

Visitor Four: (03:48)
Um, yes, if someone was looking for a church in the area, I would.

Brent Hartwig: (03:53)
(laughs) Obviously, you're not gonna tell your friends to drive to Iowa City-

Visitor Four: (03:56)
(laughs)

Brent Hartwig: (03:56)
... To go to worship.

Visitor Four: (03:57)
Well, no, but I do have ... Yeah, people that I know in Iowa City, so if they were looking for a church, LCMS, then that would be one. Yes.

Brent Hartwig: (04:07)
All right, question number four, what are some ways that you think that we could make our church more welcoming to new visitors?

Visitor Four: (04:20)
Well, I guess maybe just having someone out there in the entryway to greet you, tell you which direction to go. Um, I needed to use the restroom after traveling out there, and I didn't know where that was, so I just ventured on my own.

Brent Hartwig: (04:42)

(laughs)

Visitor Four: (04:43)

Got there.

Brent Hartwig: (04:44)

Did you eventually see the sign for the restrooms, or ...

Visitor Four: (04:46)

I-I-

Brent Hartwig: (04:46)

... Did the door appear before you saw the sign?

Visitor Four: (04:48)

That I can't remember.

Brent Hartwig: (04:50)

Okay.

Visitor Four: (04:50)

I can't remember, but I found it anyway, got back in there fine. Um, I guess just, besides the actual time where you say hello to one another in your pew or what-

Brent Hartwig: (05:06)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (05:06)

... I don't even know what we did.

Brent Hartwig: (05:07)

That's-

Visitor Four: (05:07)

Oh, we signed a book.

Brent Hartwig: (05:08)

You signed a book, right.

Visitor Four: (05:10)

And-

Brent Hartwig: (05:10)

So-

Visitor Four: (05:10)

... Then, but then, nobody said anything to us after we signed the book.

Brent Hartwig: (05:16)

Okay.

Visitor Four: (05:16)

And really, nobody talked to us period-

Brent Hartwig: (05:20)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (05:20)

... When we came in or when we left, so I guess, from that aspect, it could be a little bit more welcoming.

Brent Hartwig: (05:29)

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, uh, number-

Visitor Four: (05:35)

We-

Brent Hartwig: (05:35)

... Fo-

Visitor Four: (05:35)

Yeah.

Brent Hartwig: (05:35)

Yeah, go ahead.

Visitor Four: (05:36)

Which is difficult to do, y- you know, in a chur- sometimes, you just ... You get comfortable and, you know, but I guess from the point where we actually put our names down, and we said we were visitors, that the people we were next to would've said, "Oh, they're visitors. Nice to have you here."

Brent Hartwig: (05:56)

Right. Right.

Visitor Four: (05:57)

So ...

Brent Hartwig: (05:58)

That was a open door opportunity-

Visitor Four: (06:01)

Right.

Brent Hartwig: (06:01)
... That they didn't walk through.

Visitor Four: (06:03)
Right.

Brent Hartwig: (06:03)
'Cause you identified yourself as visitors-

Visitor Four: (06:05)
Right.

Brent Hartwig: (06:06)
... And they didn't say, "Well, thank you for stopping and be with us tonight."

Visitor Four: (06:09)
Right.

Brent Hartwig: (06:09)
They didn't know if you were driving through town, they didn't know if you were new to the area-

Visitor Four: (06:17)
Right.

Brent Hartwig: (06:18)
... Um ...

Visitor Four: (06:18)
So, I guess from that point, you know.

Brent Hartwig: (06:18)
A-and, um, did you sit with your friends?

Visitor Four: (06:20)
No.

Brent Hartwig: (06:20)
'Cause I know two couples came together.

Visitor Four: (06:22)
No.

Brent Hartwig: (06:22)

But you two sat separately from-

Visitor Four: (06:24)
Separately.

Brent Hartwig: (06:25)
... Each other.

Visitor Four: (06:25)
We didn't go in together.

Brent Hartwig: (06:25)
You didn't go in together. And you didn't sit-

Visitor Four: (06:25)
We went in first-

Brent Hartwig: (06:26)
... Together.

Visitor Four: (06:28)
We didn't sit together. We didn't do anything together. We just ...

Brent Hartwig: (06:33)
Yeah.

Visitor Four: (06:33)
... Sat by ourselves, so anyway.

Brent Hartwig: (06:37)
All right, question number five, have you attended a different church in the last year? Other than yours and Our Redeemer. If so, what if anything, did you enjoy about that church that is different than what you experienced at our church at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Four: (06:56)
Uh, yes, we go to visit our children, and we go to their churches, and uh, their format, they're not LCMS, so their format of their service is definitely different than ours, but they start with, uh, fellowship time, I guess, right when you get in the door. You just go and talk to everybody, and there's music playing and say hello, and everybody greets everyone, and- and then they start with their singing as the first part of their cur- first part of their service. Then the sermon is at the end of the singing, so it's a little different set-up-

Brent Hartwig: (07:39)
Right.

Visitor Four: (07:39)

... But, um, they always have somebody greet you at the door. Uh, the pastor greets you afterwards, of course, like we do and you do at your church, and um, other than that, I can't think of anything different. I mean just a little more ... I don't know what to say.

Brent Hartwig: (08:10)

Okay.

Visitor Four: (08:10)

They reach out. They re-

Brent Hartwig: (08:11)

Yeah.

Visitor Four: (08:11)

They reach out to you.

Brent Hartwig: (08:13)

More intentional.

Visitor Four: (08:14)

More intentional. There you go. That's a good word.

Brent Hartwig: (08:16)

Great. Well, thank you for the interview. I will turn the recorder off at this time.

APPENDIX NINE

Visitor Five Interview Transcript

Brent Hartwig: (00:03)

Okay, this is interview number two. This is Brent Hartwig, pastor at Our Redeemer, and I'm interviewing ...

Visitor Five: (00:10)

Visitor Five, age 59. We visited Our Redeemer on July 27th, 2019.

Brent Hartwig: (00:17)

Thank you very much for visiting and filling out the survey form. I have five interview questions as I'm trying to understand what your experience was like visiting Our Redeemer. So, my first question is what do you most ... Or what did you most enjoy about attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Five: (00:36)

The service in general was good, but I'd say if I was gonna pick something that stood out, I would say the music was very good.

Brent Hartwig: (00:46)

Great, question number two, what, if anything, would you change about attending services here at Our Redeemer?

Visitor Five: (00:56)

Hmm ... I- I can't think of anything that I'd change. It was- it was fine.

Brent Hartwig: (01:04)

Question number three, would you recommend this church to a friend or a family member? Why or why not?

Visitor Five: (01:16)

Yeah, I mean I would say I would if I had a- say, if I had a- uh, friend's child going to school at University of Iowa, it'd be a place I would recommend their- their child to go. It seemed they had a lot of activities goin' on and different programs, so I think they'd be able to find a place to fit in and get connected.

Brent Hartwig: (01:33)

Question number four, what are some ways that you think we could make our church more welcoming to new visitors?

Visitor Five: (01:44)

That's a tough question. I mean our church battles with the same problem (laughs), so if-

Brent Hartwig: (01:51)
(laughs)

Visitor Five: (01:51)
... I had to answer that, I'd impl- implement it in my church. (laughs)

Brent Hartwig: (01:54)
(laughs)

Visitor Five: (01:54)
Um, just gotta be more intentional about making sure if you don't recognize somebody, to say hello, and the problem is that, I think at your church, it's probably similar to ours, you have more than one service, so you don't know who the visitors are and who the people are that just might be coming from a different service, and so you feel awkward saying, "Who are you?" and they've been going to church there for 20 years, just haven't been to the same (laughs) service or ... Um, just- just can't be afraid of that mistake and just have to be more- more aggressive at, uh, saying hello to people.

Brent Hartwig: (02:22)
Have you attended a different church in the last year, and if so, what if anything, did you enjoy about that church that is different from our church?

Visitor Five: (02:34)
Yes, I have de- attended different churches and different denominations. Um, I can't remember the songs we sang at Our Redeemer. I- I don't remember the- anything specific about it but other churches sing- maybe sing a little more, I don't know, modern or progressive sometimes, and I enjoy those more than some of the ... Not that I don't enjoy hymns, but a change of pace is kinda nice, I enjoy that part of it. Um ... That'd probably be the one thing I'd mention.

Brent Hartwig: (03:01)
Yeah, at our 10:30 service, we have blended music.

Visitor Five: (03:04)
Okay.

Brent Hartwig: (03:04)
We have a praise team. Uh, been getting them to come Saturday night as well. We used to have them come one Saturday night a month, and that has fallen ... That- that's a large commitment on people's time.

Visitor Five: (03:16)
We have a praise group at our ... They do it- it used to be twice month. It's kinda gone to once a month. It's the same thing. It's getting hard to commit to it, you know, o-on-on-

Brent Hartwig: (03:23)
Yeah.

Visitor Five: (03:23)

... Sundays and ...

Brent Hartwig: (03:25)

Ye.

Visitor Five: (03:25)

You lose one pers- like a piano player, then it's hard to find somebody to replace 'em, and you're kind of stuck.

Brent Hartwig: (03:32)

Now you were there on a Saturday night. Did other people approach you? Did other people greet you or ...

Visitor Five: (03:37)

No.

Brent Hartwig: (03:38)

Everybody was very silent, and everybody was very stoic?

Visitor Five: (03:41)

And the thing that- the thing that, uh, struck me after we got done. Yeah, we fill- we filled out that- the booklet thing.

Brent Hartwig: (03:48)

Right.

Visitor Five: (03:48)

And I- and so, we- we were first. We signed it, visitors, sent it down. There was a couple of the people in our pew, they signed it, sent it back. So, they should've known we were visitors-

Brent Hartwig: (03:59)

Yeah.

Visitor Five: (03:59)

... And afterwards, still, nobody said anything.

Brent Hartwig: (04:01)

Right.

Visitor Five: (04:01)

So, that was- to me, that would've been ...

Brent Hartwig: (04:03)

The [crosstalk 00:04:04].

Visitor Five: (04:03)

They- they knew-

Brent Hartwig: (04:05)

Yeah.

Visitor Five: (04:05)

... We were visitors 'cause we signed the book "visitors-"

Brent Hartwig: (04:07)

Right.

Visitor Five: (04:08)

... But otherwise, out in the foyer before church or whatever, nobody said- but that would be the same way in our church. It made us more aware that we just gotta be more intentional-

Brent Hartwig: (04:16)

(laughs)

Visitor Five: (04:16)

... Ourselves, and our excuse is the same thing, "Well, maybe they go to church at, you know, eight, and we go to 10:30, just don't ..." You know- you don't-

Brent Hartwig: (04:21)

Yeah.

Visitor Five: (04:21)

... You miss 'em, and-

Brent Hartwig: (04:22)

Yeah.

Visitor Five: (04:23)

... But that's- that's not a very good excuse really. (laughs)

Brent Hartwig: (04:26)

Yeah, it- it is an eternal problem for the, uh, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. We're- we're very stoic. We're very set back and just kinda, 'It'll work itself out.'

Visitor Five: (04:36)

Right.

Brent Hartwig: (04:37)

And theologically, that's very good 'cause God is in control, but when it comes to greeting people and making 'em feel welcome-

Visitor Five: (04:45)

Right.

Brent Hartwig: (04:45)

... It can be an issue.

Visitor Five: (04:46)

Right. And it's been an issue at our church too for a long time. Same, so, I know, I understand the problem and ... Exactly, I think, but ...

Brent Hartwig: (04:52)

Yeah.

Visitor Five: (04:54)

But I don't have an answer for ya. (laughs)

Brent Hartwig: (04:56)

(laughs) Well, that's what we're exploring here.

Visitor Five: (04:58)

Right, yeah, so you can figure it out and let us know what you figure out.

Brent Hartwig: (05:00)

(laughs) Yeah, I think it's ... Yeah, well ... We'll end the interview here. Uh, thank you very much for your time. I'll go ahead and I'll stop the recorder.

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