

Radical, Biblical Hospitality



This past year our Board of Directors has put a laser focused effort on preparing our church to implement an intentional and organized church growth program in this new year. Preparation is still underway through the Board's efforts and through input from the congregation at two Chapel Cafe's where responses to two questions flowed freely and constructively..."What is a church growth program and why would the Chapel choose to participate in one?" The third Chapel Cafe will be held on Thursday, January 19th, at 4:00 where we will continue to explore the "what" and the "why" and begin to discuss the next major question which is "how" to design and implement a particular church growth program appropriate for our Chapel.

With this in mind I would like to share with all of you a number of concepts that our prayers, studies, and discussions have become to identify as critical to the future growth of our Chapel

Every church - and every Christian - is called to practice radical hospitality. This call is rooted in scripture, where in both the Old and the New Testaments we discover God's desire to use us as conduits of God's love to others. When a community of believers truly shares radical, biblical hospitality...loving and welcoming others as God does...it gives people a taste of the kingdom of God.

Biblical hospitality is centered on the love of others and particularly the love of those who make a choice to visit our faith community. This type of hospitality is focused on servanthood. It demands something from us and requires us to see things from the perspective of someone else. Radical, biblical hospitality means we are willing to be uncomfortable, taking on the position of a servant so that others can become more comfortable and feel welcomed, included, and loved. This kind of hospitality surprises the visitor in our midst and invites them to take the first or next step on their journey of faith...because they begin to feel that they belong.

As church communities we recognize the value of radical, biblical hospitality, but the truth is, we don't show hospitality nearly as well as we could. (Thus the need for an intentional, congregation-wide church growth program.) Often strangers find it hard to find a comfortable place within our church home. We have unintentionally built barriers that make it difficult for those on the outside to find their way in...and far too often, we have become blind to those barriers. Recognizing those barriers and eliminating them requires us to have fresh eyes and do the hard work of looking through the lens of a first-time guest to our church.

All this begins by developing a heart to reach people for Christ and an attitude that embraces change. It will mean that we will have to give up things that make us comfortable to help guests feel more comfortable. We will have to not just accept and adapt to change but we will need to be active advocates for change among our family and friends here at the Chapel. In fact it will mean that we will need to covenant together as members of the body of Christ to assist and encourage and love each other through the changes ahead.

(All of the above is found in *The Art of Hospitality; A Practical Guide for a Ministry of Radical Welcome* by Debbie Dixon, Executive Director of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection and the author of *Catch; A Churchwide Program for Invitational Evangelism*.)

You know, change is a frightening thing to some people in some instances. In an effort to identify and eliminate possible barriers to radical hospitality in worship I suggested three changes.

That we all make an intentional effort to sit in a different place each Sunday in worship. This would allow us to greet and get to know different people each Sunday, visitors and members.

That we make an intentional effort to pass the peace to everyone within ten feet and take three minutes to greet someone we don't know at the end of worship.

That we pass out the Welcome Pads later in the service so as to not miss the registration of guests and members who happen to arrive after the announcements. (And, there are many each Sunday.)

These are but the tip of the iceberg of the changes called for in an intentional, organized, and congregation-wide church growth program and I must admit that these few and simple changes were not roundly and enthusiastically received by everyone...in fact some met stiff and rather wholehearted resistance. As I said, changes like this can be frightening.

So, Thursday, August 19th at 4:00 is your chance to express all your fears and concerns at the third Chapel Cafe. Board members will be there to listen to your ideas and take them in consideration as the planning moves forward.

As always, my door is always open to everyone to discuss these issues as we make plans to share the good news of the gospel and the love of God with more and more people in our community.

Peace,
Pastor Paul

