

Section Three

CREATE AN OUTWARDLY FOCUSED CULTURE

Are you ready for guests in your congregation? In Section One, we learned how to find our story and how to share our story in safe places, and we got ready to share our story with unconnected people. In Section Two, we learned how to put ourselves in places where we could meet new people, unconnected people. We learned how to start conversations with unconnected people. We learned how to build authentic relationships with unconnected people. We learned to share our faith with unconnected people and to invite them to participate in the faith community. But all of that work does no good if the congregation is not ready for guests when they arrive. Remember, the number one road block for connected people inviting unconnected people to worship is that they are not confident in the experience guests will have when they do arrive. To get ready, we must have a willingness to change.

Are we willing to change our likes and preferences to reach our grandchildren? We find time after time that people in our dying congregations like the way things are. That is, they like the building, the worship service, the music, the fellowship, the ministries. At the same time, they are quick to add, "We just need some young people to come." They truly want to have young people in their churches. Everybody wants young people in their churches, but most are unwilling to make the changes necessary to reach those young people. We are happy to have young people come as long as it doesn't change anything

other than the number of folks sitting in the pews for worship. So let us ask, "How's that working for you?"

To reach the unconnected new people, we must develop a new culture. This new culture will be one of adapting and change. The church will need to adapt its culture to be more hospitable to guests. For the most part, churches are friendly. We truly enjoy our relationships with our friends in the congregation. We are friendly with one another. This is fellowship. Most churches have great fellowship. We enjoy engaging and investing time with those we already know authentically. Many times, however, guests feel differently when they come into a congregation for the first time. A guest would not necessarily feel the friendliness. If guests walked into your church on Sunday morning, would they feel as though they just walked into your family's Thanksgiving dinner? Would they feel awkward and out of place? Would they feel like they were intruding? Would they know the insider stories and language? Would they feel as though they were a fifth wheel at this gathering?

We must transition ourselves from being solely focused on friendliness and fellowship to centering on hospitality, RADICAL hospitality. Hospitality is something we offer or extend to make others feel welcome, part of the group, and comfortable: a greeting, a cup of coffee, and directions to the sanctuary. These are all things that one might expect as a guest, whether it be at your home or at church. But radical hospitality takes it to another dimension. Radical hospitality is going above and beyond. Radical hospitality is exceeding expectations. To learn more about radical hospitality, see *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Bishop Robert Schnase.

Radical hospitality is exceeding expectations.

To provide radical hospitality, churches will most likely need to create an intentional process to make sure it is accomplished each and every time the door opens. We need a culture of radical hospitality that is ingrained and practiced everywhere all the time and not just for the worship experience. It will take training and time for radical hospitality to be fully developed. People in the congregation will be challenged to move past fellowship with those they already know so that they are available to serve in hospitality roles, allowing the church to extend radical hospitality to all guests.

One thing we have all had to learn is that the worship experience is not just about us (those of us who are already Christian or connected). We have learned from watching places such as Saddleback Church in Anaheim, California, that church is the main instrument God uses to reach people who are not already followers of Christ, or the unconnected. We Christians who attend worship are not just there to feed ourselves. Rather we, the connected, are missionaries to those arriving who do not yet know Jesus Christ—the unconnected. This is a hard shift for mainline Christians because we were taught that Sunday morning *was* indeed about us. So much so that we absorb most of our good leaders into adult Sunday school classes rather than making them available to assist those arriving who do not know Jesus Christ. We might even have to consider having our Sunday school meet at a time other than Sunday so that we can make ourselves available to serve in ministry on Sunday for guests. These ministries include not only radical hospitality but also music ministry and children's ministry. These are the three "Wow's" every congregation needs to have during the worship experience. Again, this is a hard shift for us mainliners. If Methodists were to rediscover our roots in John and Charles Wesley and Francis Asbury, we would find that adult learning occurred during the week in classes, bands, and what we might call small groups today. It is imperative for us to rediscover our roots so that we might receive new people in the twenty-first century.

The greatest gift the church has to give away is relationships. These include relationships with God, our relationships with each other, and our availability for relationships with people we do not know. People have an average of eight close relationships in the church. We tend to gravitate toward those people when we are in church or attending a church function. We could think of those eight relationships as the eight knobs on a Lego building block. Once those eight are full, we tend to spend time mostly with those eight people. What if this culture change challenged you to open up some of the knobs on your building block for new unconnected people—people who are looking for a faith community where they can find not just friendly people, but friends? Would you be willing to do this if it meant you might just be the pathway through which a guest finds a relationship with Christ?

Relationship Trinity: God, Others, Availability

It is not enough simply to make connections in worship. The fact is, we want people to have a deeper relationship with God. Once guests become

regular attenders, we must provide an intentional discipleship pathway for them to grow closer in their relationship with Christ. How do people go about growing their faith in your church? Is there a pathway to help them along this journey? New people do best with other new people. So we need to make sure to have new connection points on a regular basis that allow new people to connect with other new people in their faith journey.

This next section explores ways to create a culture of hospitality, a process to make it happen, and an intentional discipleship pathway aimed at moving people deeper into a relationship with Christ.

8

Chapter

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Before a congregation can be open to a new perspective or culture, that openness must first be modeled by the church's leaders. To make a cultural shift, we must gather a group of passionate, enthusiastic people who want their church to be more missional and outwardly focused. Without this group of leaders and the pastor, it will be difficult to shift the perspective, culture, attitude, and ultimately the behavior of the congregation.

MISSION

The shift begins with a new understanding of the mission of the church. For the United Methodist Church, the Book of Discipline in Paragraph 122 describes the mission of the church as making new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Jesus taught the disciples the mission.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 NIV)

So how is the ministry of your church ordered to accomplish that one true purpose? We must be convicted that bringing unconnected people into a relationship with Jesus Christ is our true purpose, our mission. We must shift from an inwardly focused culture to an outwardly focused culture. The church must move from being about meeting the needs of those already

attending (the connected) to an emphasis on those not yet attending (the unconnected). This outward focus stems from our sincere concern for the hearts and souls of those who do not yet have a relationship with Christ. We must not be happy and content solely with our existing friendships. We must also create availability in our lives, deep compassion for the unconnected—those who do not yet know Christ. We must have the desire to connect others to a gathered community of faith so that they, too, experience the love of God and each other. This is our purpose, our mission as the church. To accomplish it, our leaders must be willing to change.

VISION

We must also figure out how our individual churches live out the mission in their unique way. This living out of the mission is what we call the vision of a church. The vision of a church is the intersection of the passions of the leaders, the strengths of the congregation, and the needs of the community, according to Thom S. Rainer in his book *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005, p. 114). A good vision tells us how an individual church is going to live out the mission of the church. We must intentionally cast our vision for the unique way in which God is calling our church to live out the mission of making new disciples (see *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Vision* by Andy Stanley for more on creating a vision [Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 1999]). We recommend your local church leadership spend a third of its meetings on visioning. Leaders must also hold the church—and themselves—accountable for accomplishing the mission of the church by living into your church's vision. We have never seen a church grow because of a good mission and vision statement hanging on the wall. On the other hand, we have never seen a church grow that wasn't focused on its mission and vision.

GOALS

After we have accepted the mission and cast the vision, the church must focus itself toward living out the vision to accomplish the mission. What are the three or four goals for our church this year that will lead us into living out our vision and thus succeeding at our mission? We must determine the objectives to accomplish our annual goals. The objectives are the activities/ministries of our congregation that will help us accomplish our goals. By

accomplishing our goals, we will be living out the vision and accomplishing the mission. So we must structure ourselves to be missional. We do this primarily through strategic planning.

Strategic ministry planning must become part of the DNA of the church. The strategic ministry planning process includes five elements: mission, vision, core values, goals, and objectives. A great resource is *Strategic Ministry Planning*, a workbook by Kay Kotan, Ken Willard, and David Hyatt (found at www.Leadership4Transformation.com). Strategic planning conversations are centered on how decisions meet the mission, vision, and goals of the church while honoring the core values. Decision making becomes easier as it becomes aligned with a purpose, rather than based on tradition, church politics, or the calendar. The strategic plan is used every day to stay on track. Annually, the pastor and leaders must participate in a strategic planning process to evaluate the current year plan and create new goals and strategies for the upcoming year. Every three to five years, the vision should be re-evaluated and most likely recast.

EQUIPPING

It doesn't do any good to have a foundation if we don't have a plan to raise up new leaders from this foundation. What is your system for raising up leaders? Your church is only going to grow as fast as you raise up good leaders. It is vitally important for the pastor to move into a role of equipping people for ministry. Of course, this starts with equipping leaders to equip others. First, the pastor becomes the role model for becoming an outwardly thinking, outwardly focused congregation. Then, the pastor gathers a small group of current leaders (and most likely the next generation of leaders). The pastor will spend time getting to know this group, what gifts they have, what passions they possess, what life and vocational experience they bring, where they are in their spiritual journey, and how they interact with others. You might have them take a personality test such as DiSC, Myers-Briggs, or StrengthsFinder. The group should study church culture change and other relevant topics. Obviously, this will allow the pastor to get to know people. But more importantly, this will be a place where seeds can be planted to start the shift of cultural change.

Your church is only going to grow as fast as you raise up good leaders.

MODELING

Once we have created a missional attitude with our leaders, the leaders can start modeling this with the congregation. New behaviors will be created that lead to the beginning of a shift to an outward focus of the congregation. Slowly, these leaders will begin to influence others in the congregation about the need of focusing on our mission field. As more and more in our congregation begin to understand our missional focus, a shift will begin in the culture of our congregation.

PREACHING

To create a culture of hospitality, teach and preach to it over and over (and over and over and over) again. Preach it until you are almost sick of it! We (Bob and Kay) live in Missouri in the land of the “Five Practices” (by Bishop Schnase), and we have shared and heard these practices seemingly ten million times. But as we work with individual congregations in Missouri, we find they are just now beginning to practice it—somewhat. Got to preach it ‘til you see it!

Got to preach it ‘til you see it!

Building this foundation is a slow process. While you’re building the foundation, you also need to practice some other congregation-wide strategies to help the congregation move to a missional attitude. Following are ten strategies that you could begin to practice. These strategies will help create early momentum as you are building this foundation. There are unlimited other possible strategies. Each congregation will need to discern which strategy will be most effective in their culture. Remember, the most effective way to connect new people to Jesus Christ is by becoming friends with people you

do not know and then inviting them to the faith community. Personal invitation remains the number one way people connect to Christ.

FRIENDSHIP SUNDAYS

A couple of times a year, have a "Friendship Sunday" theme. Every regular attender should be encouraged to bring an unconnected friend. The sermon could have a friendship theme. You could include a special fellowship time before or after worship. Special gifts could be given to "friends." You could even hold a "friendly" contest to see who brings the most friends to worship.

F.R.A.N. PLAN

The F.R.A.N. Plan refers to Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances/Associates, and Neighbors and was developed by the Church Growth Institute. This process is intended to raise awareness of those unconnected people who are closest to us whom we sometimes forget to invite to worship. This program generally spans four different Sundays. Each Sunday, members of the church are challenged to bring unconnected guests to worship from one of the four categories listed. This process can be quite fun. You are limited only by your creativity.

Give people plenty of time to prepare for this challenge. Ask them to consider how many people they might be able to list in each category. Ask them to identify the people and to think about how they might extend the invitation. Ask the congregation and prayer team to pray over these unconnected guests coming for the next four weeks. Make sure the congregation is prepared to receive unconnected guests and extend radical hospitality.

While the first three categories are fairly straightforward, the category of neighbors might be quite narrow. Redefine the definition of neighborhood. Extend the thought of neighbors from being only those who live directly beside you to a more global vision of a neighborhood. It might also include places where you walk, places you shop, where the kids play kickball in the neighborhood, the neighborhood gym, Facebook, Starbucks, Panera, people you run with, the neighborhood convenience store, and the gas station.

We need constantly to evaluate how we develop those "acquaintance" relationships to a place where we can have the opportunity to talk about our faith. We might want to create opportunities to bring unconnected people as guests into our faith community that are less intimidating than a first step

5-10-10 RULE

This “rule” challenges us to move out of our comfort zones and routines. For every five minutes you spend with someone you already know at church, spend ten minutes with someone you don’t. Personally greet anyone within ten feet of you. Another way to work this process might be related to the number of people you have a relationship with. For every five people you know and talk to, spend time talking to ten people you don’t know.

This process gives us goals and reminders to push us outside our comfort zone and see every opportunity to start a conversation with someone we don’t know. Your church might create and hand out the rules on a card as a reminder. Not only will this be a reminder of the rules, but it will also remind us that we are missionaries. Sunday morning is about hospitality, not simply fellowship!

CHURCH-WIDE SUNDAY HOSPITALITY TRAINING

Rev. Jim Ozier from the North Texas Conference of the UMC teaches about the need to create church-wide hospitality training. He suggests one of the ways you create a new culture of hospitality is to train the entire congregation in hospitality at least twice a year. Keep the congregation mindful of the fact that hospitality is not extended by our greeters, ushers, and hospitality team only. A hospitality culture is not a “job” responsibility of only a few. Rather, radical hospitality becomes part of the DNA of a church. It is adopted as a value of the congregation. Rev. Jim Ozier is available to help your congregation with developing a culture of hospitality; contact him at ozier@ntcumc.org.

Remember, most guests arrive early or late. If they arrive late, the door is closed and everyone is engaged in worship. This includes the greeters! What happens to the guests? They are left to fend for themselves. Everyone is responsible for hospitality! We can’t run hospitality training for a team once and think we have it covered. To create this culture, we must talk about it constantly and consistently. We must also train and equip our entire congregation on a regular basis. The training must provide the appropriate method to get a guest’s name. We want the names for our record keeping, but we also want to create a culture in which the one greeting the guest might also personally follow up. This creates personal touches and opportunities for relationships and connections. Think of Southwest Airlines. It has created a culture of hospitality. The responsibility for hospitality does not lie only in the

hands of the flight attendants. Hospitality extends from reservations, to the ticket counter, to baggage handlers, to pilots, to mechanics. It is the culture of the company. It is just the way they have decided to do business. It has become their niche in the airline industry.

Everyone is responsible for hospitality!

If you don't have a hospitality team, start one today! That's the first step. This team can help begin to model the culture of hospitality throughout the congregation.

SKITS/DRAMA

During worship, conduct a skit or drama about how NOT to do hospitality. Make it funny! People learn through humor. The skit could include someone wandering around not able to find something. It could also include one person being ignored by everyone else, as "church insiders" are involved in conversations with each other. Include something about the insider language we use that could be misinterpreted or confusing to a guest. Another scenario could show the guest sitting in someone else's seat for worship.

MOVE FELLOWSHIP TO THE FRONT DOOR

How do you create a lobby experience at the front door? We need a place where people will want to "hang out." It could offer Wi-Fi, soft conversational seating, high-top tables, and something other than "church" coffee and donuts. Think of the Starbucks experience. The Starbucks mission statement is "to inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time." That mission, much like the mission of the church, is about nurturing the human spirit. How does your church begin to create this nurturing culture at the front door?

Many times, we serve coffee in our fellowship halls, which are traditionally in the basement. As regular attenders, we know where to find the coffee. But it might be a stretch for guests to figure this out. Another thing to consider is the possibility that if most of the congregation is in the basement having coffee after Sunday school or before worship, who is greeting our guests at the entrances? Moving fellowship to the front door not only allows guests

to find the coffee, but it also provides the opportunity for guests to meet and connect with people in the congregation. Even if a greeter is at the door, there is not an inviting atmosphere when no one else is around.

What does it look like to move our fellowship to the front door? Does your current entrance feel like 1950, or does it create a new atmosphere for a new generation of people? Does it say "old church"? If the regulars are looking for their own friends and not paying attention to new people, it makes a new person feel left out or maybe even ignored. If we have the fellowship at the front door, it looks and feels like it is okay for everyone to hang out there. The problem is that most churches are not built to handle this at the front door. So you may have to remodel to make people feel comfortable hanging out here. Again, think Starbucks or Panera! The building footprint affects hospitality. We understand that the front entrances to most churches were created in a different era and for a different culture. It may take some time to reconfigure a more appropriate entrance for creating a culture of hospitality. This is worthy of a capital fundraising effort. In the meantime, you may need to resort to some creative ideas to overcome the shortcomings of your lobby, perhaps a pop-up tent outside as weather permits. This would alert people from the streets and create a new hospitality space just as an expansion of the lobby would. Everybody likes to be greeted. Every time you make people trek down the hall, you make them feel unwelcome, giving them a sense of not belonging. It's a mistake to assume that we are off the hook simply by placing greeters at our doorways.

HOSPITALITY DESK OR KIOSK (WELCOME CENTER)

Create a hospitality desk or kiosk inside the main entrance. Make sure someone is working the desk before, during, and after all church events. The desk should be supplied with extra bulletins and information on all the church ministries. The staff working the hospitality desk should be easily identifiable, with something like an "ask me" vest or name tag. The staff should also be well informed and knowledgeable about the building and all ministries. You could even consider installing a neon sign above the hospitality desk that says, "Start Here." Make sure the hospitality desk does not become covered up by flowers, food, or coffee. It should be easily identified and accessed by guests.

GO DIGITAL

Instead of bulletin boards hanging throughout the hallways of your church, consider going digital. Replace the bulletin boards with flat screen

televisions near all entrances. Information can then be scrolled on these screens. No more messy tape, unprofessional flyers, or out-of-date information. Make sure the hallways are clutter-free with a nice coat of fresh paint on the walls. Please choose a color other than white! It is incredible what a gallon of paint can do to create momentum in your church.

THREE TOUCHES

From the time guests enter the parking lot until they sit down in the sanctuary, we want to provide a minimum of three touch points. What are three different interactions that a guest could have in your church? These could include the church entrance, the hospitality area, and the sanctuary. Other possibilities might include the parking lot, a person charged with the responsibility of connecting with guests, introduction to the pastor, introduction of other key staff, a children or youth ministry representative escorting the guest's children to the children's area, or someone presenting a gift to the guest. These personal touches are extremely important. We are striving for the guest to feel welcome but not overwhelmed. These touches should be sincere with good eye contact. The three touches are just the minimum. Keep asking yourself what happens next for the guest who visits your church.

At Saddleback Church, you are likely to find someone in the parking lot waving at you as you enter. At Church of the Resurrection, not only will you find someone in the parking lot guiding you to a parking spot but you will also find a greeter at every door (inside and out) as well as at every level of steps. Each greeter will extend a warm welcome, handshake, smile, assistance, bulletin, and help with finding a seat.

What happens at your church when a guest gets out of the car? What is the experience? Remember, three touches are the bare minimum.

SUMMARY

Of course, you can't implement all these suggestions at once. Choose a couple and try them out. If they work, that's great. Do them with excellence. If they don't work, try something else. Once you have one element up and working well, weave in another strategy. This doesn't happen overnight. But, with diligence and persistence, you can build a culture of hospitality starting with leadership.

9

Chapter

YOUR BUILDING MATTERS

We find that hospitality is lacking in almost all of the churches we work with. To gain the perspective of a guest's perception of churches, in 2007 we contracted with an organization called Faith Perceptions. Together, we created twenty-one first impression questions for guests to answer after they experienced worship at one of our churches. Twelve unconnected people were asked to visit the church and then to complete the survey of questions. We learned a great deal from the survey about churches and hospitality. We think we are friendly, but the surveys show that we are not. These surveys have also raised our awareness of other issues, such as the fact that signage is key, the front door is not always the front door, and there are times when guests are simply ignored. It is important to have a hospitality process to recruit, train, and deploy for at least the worship experience, if not all week long. This mystery worshiper process has now been used in more than eighty churches in Missouri. Much of this chapter is based on our learning from those mystery worshiper reports. (For more information on guest hospitality and connections, refer to *Beyond the First Visit* by Gary McIntosh or www.FaithPerceptions.com.)

Once we have implemented the ideas and strategies from Chapter Eight and have people trained and ready to receive guests, we must turn our attention to the facility. We should first be aware that it is highly unlikely for someone to just show up for church. Some come because they have been invited by someone directly or because they are visiting someone who is connected to the church—maybe they are on vacation or visiting for a holiday or family event. Most often, something really big is happening in the life of the guest.

Ninety-seven percent of all newcomers to a church have had a major life transition in the last two months, according to *The Race to Reach Out* by Douglas T. Anderson and Michael J. Coyner (p. 13). They are going through some sort of significant change or challenge. This could be a move, a new baby, the death of a loved one, an illness, entering a ten-step program, a new job, a near-death experience, an accident, or a job loss. The more we are in tune with finding what brings new people to the church, the easier it will be to connect with them. We can build relationships with unconnected people and we can provide ministry that is relevant to them *if* we know what's going on in their lives. There needs to be an intentional process for connecting newcomers with the appropriate people and with the appropriate ministry. We know that new people connect best with other new people. We want guests to feel comfortable and to sense that, if they returned for a second visit, they would be included in the church family. Don't leave the connection process to chance! The intentional process should provide opportunities for members to get to know the guest as well as connect the guest with other newer attenders. In this chapter, we will learn strategies to have a more intentional connection process.

Don't leave the connection process to chance!

Our building footprint matters. So how do you prepare your facility to be inviting to guests? Look at your building through the eyes of a guest. Better yet, invite unconnected guests into your building, walk along with them, and ask them to give you their first impressions of what they see. An outsider perspective is very important. Sometimes the issues are large, but many times, they are a series of small issues that can be resolved easily.

It all starts in the parking lot! Curb appeal matters. Start at the street and work your way into the building. What do you see? What is missing? What needs attention? From the time guests are nearing the arrival at your facility until they leave the grounds, you have multiple opportunities to show hospitality and care toward them, and connection with them. Your building can act as an evangelist or a deterrent. What could you do to freshen up the outside of your building? Let's meander through your facility and worship experience with a checklist of items to consider in preparation for guests. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but it is sure to help you improve your facility as you build a culture of hospitality.

Remember, we are building a culture of hospitality!

HOSPITALITY CHECKLIST

1. Exterior Signage and Accessibility

How easy is it to identify your building from the road? Is the time of worship clearly displayed and easily read while driving at the speed limit? How easy or difficult is it to find your building from the closest main thoroughfare? Once the building is identified, how easy is it to find where to enter the parking lot? Do you have parking spots designated for guests? Are those spots easily found and near the main entrance? Once parked, how easy is it to find the entrance? If you have multiple entrances, how is the guest to know which entrance to use? Is there an easily accessible spot for people with special needs, such as those with walkers, wheelchairs, babies, and small children, to be dropped off at a door protected from the elements?

2. First Impression of Human Hospitality

Are parking lot attendants helping people to find parking spots? Are those attendants directing guests to the designated guest parking spots? In inclement weather, is there a parking lot attendant available with an umbrella? Is there a greeter at every entrance, inside and outside? Are the greeters trained? Is each greeter extending a friendly, genuine handshake with a pleasant greeting and good eye contact? Is the greeter being distracted into conversations with regular attenders? Is the greeter familiar with the regular attenders so that guests can be identified easily?

3. How to Get Their Names

You need to have multiple methods to acquire guests' names: collecting the names on the guest attendance pads during worship, guest sign-in sheets, a tear-off from the bulletin, parents who sign in their children at the nursery, greeters who are trained to have pen and paper to write names down and turn them in to the office, or congregants getting the names of guests sitting next to them and following up personally on Facebook or with e-mail. This is why it is important to have routine, congregational-wide training on the process of receiving and connecting guests. We make mistakes in our attempts to

receive guests. Sometimes we smother them, and other times we unintentionally ignore them. We must create a system in which our guests feel welcome but not overwhelmed. Good, welcoming, authentic conversation is critical, and it can be tricky. What are the best ways to engage a guest in conversation? What conversation starters actually do more harm than good? Following are some conversation starters to engage in, as well as some to steer clear of:

Do's

1. "Hi, I'm (name)." If the guests respond with their names, either you write them down or have the guests write them down on your bulletin. Turn in the names. Follow up with them personally.
2. "Good to see you."
3. "I don't believe I have had the pleasure of meeting you. I'm (name)."

Don'ts

1. "You must be new here."
2. "How long have you been coming here? I've never seen you before."
3. "My name is (first and last name), and what is yours?"

4. Think Guest, Not Visitor

How do you prepare for visitors in your home? We think of visitors as people who drop by without an invitation. They just show up. We are not prepared for them. We might just stand with them in the entrance to visit. We don't want them to see the dirty dishes in the sink, the unmade beds, and the towels on the bathroom floor. The visit is usually short. You may have been disrupted by it.

In contrast, how might you prepare for guests in your home? How does this differ from a visitor? Guests have been invited to your home. You are expecting their arrival. You are most likely looking forward to their time with you. You make special arrangements and preparations for them. You have likely done some extra cleaning. You might have prepared their favorite meal or dessert. You will likely offer them something to drink. You may allow them to sit in your favorite chair. You might even share the remote control with them. (Okay, now you think I am meddling!) If they are spending the night, you have placed fresh linens on the bed and your best towels on the vanity for

their use. You are happy to see them and have them in your home, and the stay is usually longer in duration than that of a visitor.

How does this translate to church? Does your church have visitors drop by for worship? Does this take you by surprise, making you wish you had been more ready? Or do you prepare for guests each Sunday? Do you try to make them feel welcome and comfortable? When unconnected guests visit a church, they have a fear that it will be awkward. They are not sure what to expect. We want to ease those concerns as much as possible. We do that with a process and culture of radical hospitality. Remember, radical hospitality is going above and beyond the expectations of hospitality.

5. Connector

Every church needs a connector. What is a connector? A connector is a person or group of people who invest in building relationships with guests and help them “connect” into a ministry where the guests will get their needs met. The connector will keep in contact with and track the guest until the guest becomes a regular attender, gets involved in ministry, and fosters a relationship with Christ through your church’s intentional faith development pathway.

Once a greeter has identified a guest, is there a connector available for the guest? Is that connector trained? Is that connector gifted for this responsibility? Does the connector introduce him or herself and escort guests to the hospitality area for a drink or refreshment? Is the connector equipped with questions that are friendly and un-intimidating, while still obtaining necessary information for a follow-up and ultimately a good connection point? Is the connector introducing the guests to others? Does the connector invite the guest to sit with him or her during service? Is the connector assisting the guest in feeling comfortable during the worship experience? Is the connector introducing the guest to the pastor at the conclusion of worship? Does the connector invite the guest to lunch? Does the connector walk away with at least a name, address, and phone number and the reason the guest decided to attend worship? Is the connector aware of the next step in the connection process, and is he or she committed to take that step with this guest?

6. Welcome Center

Does your church have an area where guests can find information about your church and its ministries? Is this welcome center staffed throughout

all the Sunday morning activities? Are the people who staff the center well trained in the ministries of the church? Do they understand the importance of connecting with guests? Do they understand the importance of escorting guests to points of interest rather than pointing them in the direction? Do they know who the connectors are in the church and how to “connect” the guest with the connector? Is the welcome center well equipped with updated information about current and ongoing ministries? Is printed information available for guests to take with them?

7. Lobby

Is the area right inside your main entrance warm and inviting? Is the area congested? Does it radiate the welcome feeling of “come on in”? Does it allow for fellowship? Is it up to date in its décor and furnishings? Is there a digital screen easily viewable with information? Is the lobby area free of clutter? What era are the pictures from that are hanging in the lobby? Is there a fresh coat of paint in a modern (non-white) color on the walls? Are there refreshments and coffee available and easily found? Are the furnishings modern and comfortable?

8. Nursery

For guests with young children, this is a critical area. How easy is it to find the nursery? Is it conveniently located in relationship to the sanctuary? Is it clean? Is the furniture updated and safe? Is it child-friendly? Is the décor appealing to the entire family? Is there staff trained with appropriate child-to-caregiver ratios? Has the staff been given a background check? Is the staff trained? Is there a check-in and check-out process? Is there a system to reach parents during worship if they are needed? If so, is that process explained to the parents? Is this a place where you would feel comfortable and safe in leaving your loved one (child, grandchild, niece, or nephew)? If children are first attending service and later taken from the worship area into another area, do the parents know where their children are going and where and when to find them? Are parents prepped for this to occur before it actually happens in order to make an informed and comfortable decision?

9. Pre-Worship Atmosphere

The ten minutes before worship begins and after worship ends are the most critical times for guests. If guests are brave enough to be a few minutes

early, this can be an awkward time. What is going on in the sanctuary? Is there soft music playing in the background? Are there videos or other messages displayed on the screen? Are people talking among themselves, or are they inviting guests into conversation? Are guests sitting in an area where no one else is around? Do guests feel like they are in a spotlight? Is the room deathly silent? Is there laughter all around, excluding the guests? Do the guests feel as though they crashed someone else's party? For those who arrive ten minutes after worship begins, is the greeting process still in place? If not, you are going to miss people. Guests arrive early or late, but rarely on time. Be prepared.

10. Meet and Greet

If there is a meet and greet time during worship, how comfortable is it for guests? Does it go longer than two minutes? Do people gravitate to those they already know? Are guests overwhelmed? Are guests ignored? Is this the only time regular attenders pay attention to guests? Are the greetings authentic for guests?

During a consultation weekend, I (Kay) was asked to sit in the front row. I did so by myself. When the meet and greet time came, I turned and greeted the two people behind me. There was no one else closer than three rows away. As I watched the scene unfold alone from the front row, I was simply amazed at what I witnessed. People were actually crisscrossing the sanctuary to greet one another. While it was an incredible scene to observe, I couldn't help but feel awkward standing alone in the front pew for seven minutes! While these folks were being incredibly friendly (to one another), they were blind to the fact that they had left a guest feeling isolated and uncomfortable. If I felt that way, can you imagine how an unconnected "seeker" as a first-time guest might have felt? Do you think he or she would return? Each person in our congregation must be trained to become a personal missionary in the pew.

11. Announcements

If you insist on having announcements, you need to limit them to three minutes or less and thirty seconds or less per announcement. Announcements should pertain to the entire congregation, not just one particular segment or ministry. Otherwise, do not announce it. The larger the congregation, the less effective announcements are from the pulpit. The bullhorn announcements of "you all come" are becoming less and less effective. Are you using insider language that would be intimidating or confusing to an unconnected

guest? Are invitations for events clearly defined with who is invited to attend, where the location of the event is (not just "Susie's house"), the cost (if any) to participate, and whether this is a one-time or recurring event? Are you using acronyms that would confuse guests? For example, one church's bulletin noted "Children-KFC" at 4:00 on Sundays. It could be interpreted by a guest that the children met at Kentucky Fried Chicken on Sundays at 4:00. Instead, the children's ministry was named "Kids for Christ."

12. Worship Participation

For an unconnected guest, does your bulletin, multimedia, or worship leadership provide clear directions and understanding? (Remember the use of the word *bulletin* is old language. In other venues, our bulletin would be called a program.) Is it easy for guests to follow along? Are happenings (baptisms, communion, responsive readings) in the service fully explained? Is insider language either not used or fully explained? Do guests know what their expected participation level is? Is the guest ever called out, brought attention to, or made to feel inadequately prepared to participate fully in worship? Is a connector sitting with a guest to help with knowing what to expect and what to do? Is the worship leader introduced?

13. After-Worship Experience

One of the teachings from our mystery worshiper reports is the importance of the guest's experience upon leaving worship. It is just as important as their experience upon arrival. But we rarely pay attention to the guest's departure experience. Remember, any time people have a positive experience, they want to share it with others. This is true of a positive worship experience, too. Once the worship ends, many times the regular attenders go about their business of making lunch plans with their church friends. The unconnected guests are left to fend for themselves. This is a crucial time for guests. Greeters need to be at their stations after worship as well as before. The ten-minute period after service has concluded is a critical time to connect with the guest. Has the guest been introduced to the pastor yet? Invited to lunch? What is the next step? Are you offering tours of the building as an opportunity to show hospitality and engage in more conversation with the guest? Is a gift delivered to the guest's door within the same day as the visit or at least within twenty-four hours? Depending on the needs of the guest, who is the right person or

ministry to connect with the guest? Who is responsible for tracking all the guests? What can the church do to be helpful to this person?

It is absolutely critical to follow up within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Otherwise it feels like "I was a guest but am now not invited back." Let's return to our analogy of hospitality as hosting a guest in our home. After you have invited people to your home, made special arrangements for their visit, enjoyed the time you spent together, and sent them on their way, imagine not ever speaking to them again. No note, no e-mail, no visit. Nothing! When your guests receive no second invitation, it makes them feel that the first visit didn't go well. The guests will likely feel as though they did or said something wrong during their visit, or maybe that it was a one-time-only invitation. Now relate this to the follow-up process in your church. Do guests simply get a form letter? Do they get anything at all? What is the personal touch that gives them a sense of connection and makes them want to return after their first visit? Second visit? Third visit? Remember, everyone is a missionary. Everybody has responsibility for following up with new people, turning the names into the office as well as making a personal connection.

14. Hire Mystery Worshipers

Another great tool to use to prepare the congregation for guests is to contract with a company that sends mystery worshipers to your church. The company will hire unconnected people to attend your church. The mystery worshiper will answer questions and report on the experience. A report of six to twelve mystery worshipers will be compiled. This is a great way to capture guests' complete worship experience through the eyes of the unconnected. We try to evaluate ourselves with our own eyes and ears, but it is much more effective to evaluate through the eyes and ears of those we are trying to reach. The mystery worshiper process is best conducted without the congregation knowing about it. Otherwise, the congregation is on their best behavior and the mystery worshiper's experience is not the same as the typical guest's experience. Your results will be much more authentic and useful if the congregation is unaware of the process.

15. Improve Your Social Media Presence and Impression

In today's world, many people "shop" your church without ever leaving their home, especially the "Three T's": those in their teens, twenties, and thirties. They surf the internet for churches in the area and make decisions on

where to “try” based on websites and Facebook alone. So websites are often the first impression for unconnected guests. Decisions are made whether to even try out your church based on the website. Is your website giving the message you want guests to receive? Are your location and worship times clearly indicated on the home page? What is your signature ministry? Is the mission and vision of your church clearly indicated? Are there pictures of your ministries? Is the information up to date? Is there contact information for questions? Can you easily find the staff with pictures and contact information? Your website shouldn't be a bulletin board in a cloud.

Are you using social media to promote your church and attract the unconnected to your ministries? Does your church have a Facebook page? Is it regularly updated? Are you uploading pictures from ministry events to Facebook? Do you use Twitter to update followers? If you don't currently use social media, find a youth or young adult in your church to get this started for you.

Your website should not be a bulletin board in the cloud.

16. Critical Mass

During a recent experience I (Bob) was attending worship in a church where I had never attended before. The sanctuary was only a third full when everyone was seated. This felt empty and did not create an atmosphere where you felt comfortable singing. In your church, how does it feel? If the room is at 80 percent capacity, it will feel full. Is the room comfortably full or awkwardly empty? Do all the insiders sit in the back and nobody up front? Do they all sit on one side? Are they strung all over, where you could shoot off a cannon and hit no one? Are you at or over 80 percent capacity and considering adding another service?

If the room you worship in doesn't create the feeling of critical mass, here are a few strategies you might consider: Take out a few pews in the back to create some lobby or hospitality space. Take out a few pews in front to create more of a stage area. Do some pews need to be removed or shortened to create some special access space? Consider removing pews in the back and replacing them with rocking chairs for new parents. Are there too many worship

services for the number attending? If so, consider consolidating worship services to create critical mass. Spread the pews out. The pews are traditionally spaced 18 inches apart. People were smaller when the church was built, so consider removing some pews to allow instead for 24 inches of spacing between pews. You can also use large banners or fabric streamers in the pews to move folks forward and sit nearer to the front and together, especially if the size of the worshiping congregations varies dramatically between services in the same space.

Critical mass is extremely important. Too many or too few may hamper unconnected guests from returning.

Remember, relationships are what we have to offer: our relationship with God and our relationships with one another, as well as our availability to people we do not know. Our relationships are often confirmed through the worship experience. How worship goes is often how the rest of church goes. If our worship is not very engaging, it is doubtful the church will be very engaging. In the next chapter, we will learn how to move beyond friendliness to friendships and into discipleship.

10

Chapter

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Every church we have consulted with is convinced that it is the friendliest church in town. We often tease church leaders by saying we have yet to meet the un-friendliest church in town! Many times we pride ourselves in just how friendly we are. But unconnected guests in our churches are looking for friendships, not just friendly people. They are looking for relationships. This is a vital distinction. It is one thing to put on our Christian smile each Sunday and be polite. But it is quite another thing to be genuinely interested in people and have a desire to help them know and love Jesus Christ. Interestingly enough, a mystery worshiper once reported that the church he had visited was indeed friendly, but it was quite apparent in the handshakes and small talk that these folks were not looking to invest in new friendships. To become missionaries of Jesus Christ, it may be necessary from time to time to move away from our current relationships with our Christian friends and invest in new relationships with unconnected people so that we may help others begin to walk with Christ. Although this is obviously difficult, as mature Christians, we are called to spread the Good News. One of the disciplines of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to create margins in one's life in order to establish relationships with people we do not know, the unconnected, therefore becoming missionaries.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.—2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV

While we have been talking mostly up to this point about how to create a culture of hospitality, we must also have a formal process of hospitality and connection. There are four distinct steps in the process of moving an unconnected guest from a relationship-building event or conversation to life as a follower of Christ:

- Step One: From Outsider to Guest
 - Phase One: Prayer
 - Phase Two: Bridge Events
 - Phase Three: Follow Up
- Step Two: From Guest to Connected
- Step Three: From Connected to Disciple
- Step Four: From Disciple to Ambassador or Missionary

STEP ONE: FROM OUTSIDER TO GUEST

Phase One: Prayer

Phase One of the first step is to establish a prayer ministry. Now, this prayer team is most likely very different from the prayer teams you currently have or have had in your church. This prayer team is outwardly focused. They are praying for the leaders in the community: the police, the fire personnel, principals, teachers, and superintendents, as well as those unconnected who are lost and searching for a better life. We many times have a prayer chain or prayer group in our churches, but they typically focus on the joys and concerns of those already connected with the church. This new ministry will have a new focus—the mission field! This team will pray unconnected people into church. They will pray that the congregation will be the pathway for the unconnected to find a relationship with Christ. They will pray that the ministries of the church allow for the unconnected to become a part of the faith community. They will pray for the church bridge events in Phase Two (before, during, and after). This prayer team will pray for the event and even walk around the event silently praying for the attendees and workers. This team will pray with and for the pastor before each worship service. Who are the prayer warriors in your church? How might you invite them to be a part of the life of the church?

Phase Two: Bridge Events

Bridge events are conducted outside the church walls and preferably off church property. We suggest hosting three bridge events a year, two off church property and one on the church property. If you are just starting, do one. Do it right, do it big, and do it well. Make sure you pray the event in. Make sure you follow up. We want to remove all potential barriers for unconnected people to experience church in a whole new way. Therefore, the event should be a "P-Free Zone." No Preaching. No Prayers. No Pressure. No Pocketbooks. This bridge event should be something that is needed by the community or something unconnected people in the community will enjoy. Three essential elements for a bridge event are radical hospitality, a means to collect names, and fun! Just as we have hospitality teams trained and ready to go for worship, we must deploy these same teams at bridge events. It is their job to mingle to make sure people are enjoying themselves, feeling welcome, engaged in light conversation, and receiving a true sense of appreciation for their attendance. We have learned to share our story in safe places and with people we don't know. Bridge events are an excellent place to extend an invitation to these same people we have been working to engage in the community.

Here is a possible list of bridge events for your consideration:

1. Community trick or treat
2. Concert in the park
3. Bike (motorcycle) night/show
4. Auto show
5. Craft show
6. Bike safety clinic
7. Child seat safety checks
8. Community egg hunt
9. Carnival
10. Community play day
11. Free community swim at local pool
12. Sponsor booth at community fair with diaper changing or nursing station
13. Free lunch in a park for kids during the summer

14. School supply giveaway
15. Clothing giveaway for school children
16. Free coat giveaway
17. Free parenting classes
18. Free financial classes

Remember, have some fun!

Phase Three: Follow Up

It is essential to find ways to get unconnected people's names unobtrusively and to follow up. It does not do us any good to have a big bridge event and get no names. Getting names is tricky and will require some brainstorming. You need to brainstorm a variety of ways to do it. You won't get all the names, but you will get some. Note: you must have a follow-up team. This follow-up team is critical to the process. If we don't follow up with the people who attended, all our work was most likely done in vain. If there is no connection with people, they are unlikely to show up at worship or any other church ministry. Remember, the purpose of a bridge-building event is to create opportunities to build relationships with unconnected people we do not know in our mission field, so that we might have the opportunity to build an authentic relationship that may lead to a faith conversation, which may lead them back to our faith community.

One name-collecting method involves giving away a gift that really appeals to the people attending the event. This could be a gift certificate to an event, a local store, a grocery store, or something in alignment with the event. For example, you could give away a bike at a children's bike safety check event. You could give away an iPad at the community financial seminar. Collect people's names and contact information, put them in one box or hat (or whatever is fun and makes sense for the event), and then draw the prize winners from the collected names. Be creative!

Another way to collect names is to have connector people wandering through the event. Connectors write down the names of those people they meet and turn the names in to the event organizer, church office, and prayer team. They personally follow up with guests they met during the event. Hold connectors accountable for this follow-up. The prayer team should pray for the unconnected guests who attend the bridge event.

Usually, the real time and energy go into the planning of the bridge event. Once the event is over, we put the names in a spreadsheet and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. The end. Let us challenge you a bit on this. When the bridge event is over, the work really begins. We must be very careful in how we are using the resources (time, talents, energy, dollars, passion, and so on) of our church. We spend our resources on the event itself and then have nothing to invest in the follow-up. Or we spend our time fellowshiping with one another at the bridge event instead of being focused on the purpose of the event, which is the opportunity to start building relationships with unconnected people.

When the bridge event is over, the work really begins.

The follow-up team will kick into high gear after a bridge event. This is when the real work begins. The names collected at the event are divided among the team. The team sends handwritten notes to each guest, thanking them for attending the event. The person writing the note should also introduce himself or herself as the guest's prayer partner. The team member should consistently pray for the event attendee and, over the course of a few weeks, handwrite two or three more notes to the guest, offering assistance and kind words. Note: the first correspondence should be sent out within twenty-four to forty-eight hours of the event. After a few handwritten notes are sent, the team members should phone the guests. The purpose is to introduce themselves and to see if there is anything the team members or church can do to be of assistance. Exchange kind words and ask questions to show authentic concern and desire to know the person. After a few phone calls, send e-mails or connect on Facebook. Inquire whether the guests have a church family and attend regularly. If they do not, invite them to be "guests" at church on Sunday and offer a ride or to meet them. This process invests in people and authentic relationships. This follow-up process must be intentional, and team members must be held accountable for the follow-up process.

People don't often give us their names. They don't want to give us their names because they don't want us to sell them something. We are but a stranger to them if we do not invest in connecting with them on any level. For people to be willing to give us their contact information, we must first begin to build authentic relationships.

STEP TWO: FROM GUEST TO CONNECTED

We all need and desire fellowship with our friends. It is a great part of being a faith community. Where fellowship becomes a problem is when it is the only type of relationship occurring at our church. Fellowship is about engaging with people we already know—the connected. When we begin to turn our hearts outward, we begin to see that fellowship is very inwardly focused. Hospitality occurs when we turn those conversations and connections to our unconnected guests. Radical hospitality is fellowship turned outward toward those who are unconnected. Hospitality is the opportunity for people to see Christ through our actions and deeds. Does your church engage in only fellowship, or do you have a culture of radical hospitality, too?

Once unconnected guests have entered our church doors, we must have an intentional process of connecting them into the life of the congregation. To do this, we must get to know them and their needs. The connector (described earlier) will be responsible for the follow-up process and for tracking how the guests might grow in their faith. Every church should know the three easiest ways to connect new people into the life of the congregation. If the guests have had a prayer partner, the prayer partner should be updating the connector with information about the guest and their needs. Every congregation needs to have a process in place in which the pastor, staff, and leaders meet together to ensure that all new people have prayer partners and connectors assigned. One way to do this is to have a short meeting with key leaders on Monday morning to make sure guests are assigned a prayer partner and connector and to double check on the previous week's guests. Every board meeting should include a time of ensuring that every new guest we have received since the last meeting has received a prayer partner and connector. Make new people the priority.

Make new people a priority.

The connectors in the church should have some sort of tracking system that saves all the guest information, including who their connector is, dates of visits, guests' needs, and people/groups/information that the guest has been connected with. The connector will want to spend some one-on-one time getting to know the unconnected guest. Key questions should be identified to get to the real needs of the guest. Many times, those first one-on-one visits

are designed to share all about the church with the guest, to “sell the church” effectively. We want to turn that model upside down and be intentional about concentrating those visits on finding out more about the unconnected guests and their needs. The connector should introduce the unconnected guests to leaders of small groups or ministries where the guests might connect based on their needs, desires, or interests. This could be a small (covenant) group, choir, mission trip, or short-term class. The connector should check in with the leaders to make sure the guests continue to engage and attend the connection points. If they are not attending, the connector should visit with the unconnected guests again to see if there is a better fit (connection point) for the guests in a different ministry of the church.

The goal of the connector is to take a person from being an unconnected guest to a regular attender. The timeline for this process will vary from person to person. The length of the process depends in part on how quickly the person finds a suitable group or ministry to be involved in. This may happen on the first “connection,” or it may take multiple connection tries to find a good fit. Remember, most people decide if our church will become their church within three months of first attending, so connecting them quickly and effectively is extremely important.

Within those first twenty-four to forty-eight hours after an unconnected guest’s first visit to worship, consider a screen door visit and a call from the pastor. The visit may occur on Sunday and the call on Monday. The visit should be conducted by trained laity. It is a quick visit at the person’s front door. It is not intended to be a visit inside the home. It is a quick thank you for coming and extending a gift as a token of appreciation for their attendance. Don’t be pushy. Don’t stay more than a minute or two. Don’t push the church. Just let them know it was a pleasure to have them as guests today and express hope that they will return next week. Ask them if there is anything you could do to be helpful. Other connections should include Facebook, e-mail, or Twitter.

New people connect best with other new people!

STEP THREE: FROM CONNECTED TO DISCIPLE

Once an unconnected person becomes a regular attender and is well connected in a ministry, it is time to move that person onto a discipleship

pathway. The ministry hopefully has a means of connecting people to that pathway. If not, the connector, pastor or another process will need to make sure this happens. This is a critical step. We must make sure we engage people in an intentional process to develop their faith continuously. The connection process is not completed until the person has successfully moved from being an unconnected guest to becoming a disciple.

Now that we have moved unconnected people into a desire to grow their faith on a continuous basis, we must offer the opportunity for them to grow their faith. Faith development does not happen by osmosis. Just because someone has sat in the pews for decades does not automatically make that person a disciple. The church must provide a pathway for all to grow in their faith. We are never finished growing in our relationship with Christ. It must be an intentional process that offers opportunities for us to grow, be challenged, and become more Christ-like. We are continually growing and maturing in our faith in Jesus Christ and one another.

We must have an intentional pathway to grow our faith.

Many times we get caught up in throwing out studies or curricula for groups in our church to study without knowing what the goal is. For instance, how would you describe an authentic follower of Jesus Christ? We should know the desired end before we begin. We must understand that a discipleship pathway is NOT a curriculum. An intentional faith development process or pathway is a clear picture of the characteristics, knowledge, actions, behaviors, and attributes that make up a mature disciple. It is not only a step-by-step process. It is knowing what the steps are but also knowing that not everybody takes the same steps. People need to move freely within the process, depending on their needs and their relationship with Christ. The process likely will not change, but the opportunities available to help disciples move along in their faith development will change from time to time. Small groups are an important part of this discipleship process.

There are many different models of intentional faith development processes. There is no one right way or perfect pathway. The idea is to have an intentional process that allows and creates an expectation of continual growth.

A faith development pathway could be based on the character traits of Jesus and include opportunities to grow closer to Jesus' example. It could be described as an intentional process of daily living out our membership vows. Another option is to use the *Five Practices of Fruitful Living* by Bishop Robert Schnase, engaging people in those practices. *Simple Church* by Eric Geiger offers a discipleship pathway that is simple and easy to follow. Another model worth considering is the one developed by the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, called "The Journey." This model has three main sections: Knowing God, Loving God, and Serving God. Visit COR.org for more information.

You might develop your own step-by-step process of some kind, using one of the other excellent resources available. The intentional discipleship pathway creates a means for people to practice authentic discipleship, so that they become more like Christ and so that they go out into the world as agents of kingdom change. The discipleship pathway also ensures that these practices define us corporately, as the collected body of Christ.

There are many options, but the important thing is for your church to develop and follow an intentional process to grow disciples. What would happen if we expected no specific outcomes from our children's education? Would we send our kids to school, assuming something might happen, without any sort of plan for what *should* happen? Without any sort of plan for *how* it would happen? In that case, we could have no expectations for our children to learn anything in particular at all. In our consulting work, we have yet to walk into a church that had a discipleship pathway in place. We must do better by our congregations if we are to develop authentic, mature disciples of Christ.

STEP FOUR: FROM DISCIPLE TO AMBASSADOR OR MISSIONARY

While we are never finished with our faith development here on Earth, we do hopefully move into a matured disciple phase. That phase is becoming a missionary. As we continue to move toward being more Christ-like, we also take on the task, or better yet the lifestyle, of being Christ's ambassador. As ambassadors, we see it as our responsibility and privilege to be the conduit for others to discover a relationship with Christ. As missionaries for Christ, we are honored to be evangelists in our congregations and in the mission field to which Christ has called us. We are practicing graduate evangelism on a regular basis, while continuing to deepen our own faith, as we continue

throughout our lives on our intentional discipleship pathway. We are modeling a missionary lifestyle and mentoring the next generation of missionaries.

In this section, we have learned how important it is to build the church's corporate foundation to create a culture of radical hospitality and to equip leaders. We learned how to prepare our facilities for hospitality and for unconnected guests every week and every day. We discovered how to train teams and our entire congregation with intentional processes to prepare for guests, to create a culture of radical hospitality. We learned how to implement strategies and events to connect with the unconnected. This section concluded with understanding why an intentional faith development process is important and the elements we must include in creating that pathway to take someone from an unconnected stranger to Christ's ambassador.