NEIGHBORS AND GREETERS

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This article was written after a request was posed to Daniel to write for readers of a National Magazine.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO REACH OUT TO CHURCH NEIGHBORS

Our society doesn't have a parish mentality, and that means most church neighbors have little disposition to attend the church closest to their home. Church-goers drive by many closer churches in order to attend the church that best, suits them—whether because of denominational affiliation, style of worship, available ministry programs (like a dynamic youth group), etc. Such facts shouldn't discourage us from reaching out to our nearest neighbors, but they should inform us how we relate to them.

First of all, most people don't think it much of a blessing to have a church nearby! We're a bit of a mystery to them; they have little idea about (or interest in) what goes on inside our building. The weekend traffic, noise, and commotion on the outside may puzzle or perturb them. Due to our proximity to a freeway, railroad tracks and a main street, we had few neighbors to deal with when I pastored. So, my first priority was to remove some of the stigma of church by communicating our desire to minimize traffic concerns, and I'd publish a short cliché-free, non-religious answer to the question, *"What do you do in there each week?"*

Secondly, put yourself in their shoes. Find out their needs or worries—and offer something to answer them! If they have kids or a spouse, they have family problems. They have money problems. They struggle with guilt, depression, anger, and addiction. *What* can you offer as you reach out to your neighbors? That is the real question.

Providing Helpful Training for Greeters that will Help Set a Welcoming Tone on Sunday Mornings

Besides the usual reminders to be warm and helpful, *"May I escort you to the 3ʳᵈ grade classroom so you can see where your son will be having fun this morning,"* we trained in camouflage! By that, I

mean we didn't really have identifiable *greeters*. Our ushers—the ones who politely insisted on filling in all empty seats and who arranged people so that everyone (even newcomers) sat next to someone else—had name badges, but not our *greeters*.

A greeting by an official *greeter* doesn't register as a genuine greeting to most guests. Greet is what *greeters* are supposed to do; it's their job. Research tells us that unless a newcomer has several meaningful interactions with people in the church within the first few weeks that they attend, they won't continue to attend. An interchange with someone wearing a badge doesn't figure in that count. If, on the other hand, the *greeter* knows that she is a *greeter,* but the guest does not, that chatty welcome offered when the family first arrives really means something.

I realize it sounds a bit clichéd, but I focused my training on the entire congregation. We were blessed with a healthy cell group emphasis, and each cell group leader/apprentice was a guerilla *greeter.* Though I can't claim 100% success, we tried to live by a simple rule: if you walk into a room and spot someone whose name you do not know, head straight for that person and introduce yourself.

How to Resolving Conflict: Traditional Style of Music and Liturgy, or a Contemporary, Modern One?

As with most conflicts in church between groups of people—as opposed to interpersonal issues involving individuals—the question of worship style is merely the surface issue. Of course, a pastor can resolve the obvious conflict by: 1) having two services (each with its distinct style of music); 2) offering a blend of *not-too-stodgy* and *not-too-hip* songs in every service (creating a balance of sound recognizable by both groups); or, 3) fading drums into the organ mainstream (drums are usually the main instrument of contention).

The true issue, however, is about ministry philosophy and the purpose for a church service. It takes much longer for a pastor to resolve this conflict, but by doing so the leader sets up an intentional future. Both groups want music they can recognize as contributing to the church's purpose. Those who see church services primarily as places of (liturgical) continuity and refuge for the saints, prefer songs/sounds from the past; those who view the role of church as reaching the world around it, tend to prefer songs/sounds from today.

Thus, the real question isn't one of music, but of focus. Pastors who believe their church has been positioned/called by God primarily to provide comfort for the saints ought to stick mostly with traditional music, and not fight an unnecessary war. But pastors who want to reach their surrounding culture—must change more than the music. Problems like this one (between music preferences) give pastors a perfect opportunity to clarify their primary values.