– MEET, GREET, INTEGRATE –

(or – 'Hospitality, Connection & Engagement')

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATION OF ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS

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- A Brief Note On the Following Research Material –

The following research paper is the result of a broad literature review of more than 30 books, articles and websites, and the incorporation of many of my own ideas in the area of welcoming and integrating newcomers. Much of the material is not only supported by anecdotal evidence, but the findings of the paper were also confirmed and complemented by both statistical research data, as well as a field study questionnaire specifically devised to correlate with the research framework used in the literature review.

The paper is by no means designed to be an exhaustive analysis but has been kept concise for the purposes of the project.

The following material has been an attempt to integrate *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* in the area of *'hospitality, connection and engagement'* ministry.

Developing A Ministry Of 'Hospitality, Connection & Engagement' Towards an integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxis

"This ministry is not about greeting people, it's about churches and congregation members practicing a ministry of hospitality and inclusion to believers and unbelievers alike, it's about connecting them in relationship with other believers, and engaging them fully in the life, growth and ministry of a congregation"
- Sarie King –

(A) Identifying the problem:

Based on statistical research, field research, literature review and anecdotal evidence, 6 key factors were identified as common weaknesses or problem areas that must be attended to in order to build an effective '*hospitality, connection* and *engagement*' ministry.[1]

These 6 were:

- Lack of warmth, friendliness and belonging
- Lack of church wide ownership and hospitality culture
- Lack of clear process and intentionality
- Lack of training
- Unrecognised 'exclusion barriers'
- Under-utilized lay engagement

(B) Towards a solution:

If we believe that our primary ministry focus needs to be developing and maintaining the growth of each person in the body of Christ as a '*disciple-making disciple*' and, that every *ministry area* and *relationship* will afford some opportunity to forward that growth and development then, logically speaking, we must ask ourselves these questions:

a. What implications might this *disciple-making* **focus** have for resolving the problems and weaknesses currently experienced in our 'hospitality, connection and engagement ministry'?

b. How might a *disciple-making* **intention** shape the way in which we build, execute and follow through our hospitality, connection and engagement ministry?

Our aim in the particular arena of '*hospitality, connection and engagement*' is to grow 'disciple-making disciples' by…

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[1] Meet, greet and integrate' are the traditionally used phrases, catchy, but in many ways probably not the most helpful. The chosen language for this paper will be

1. Building a DNA culture of hospitality and inclusion:

2. Creating clear and intentional pathways of 'entry, connection and engagement':

    2.1. Deciding on a system and strategy of hospitality, connection and engagement with set 'hospitality, connection and disciple-making' goals for each step of the process. Taking into account…

        * *Timing and intentionality*
        * *Connection and engagement*
        * *Triage*
        * *Multi- door strategy*
        * *The place of 'participation'*

    2.2. Gather, train and coach a team in the philosophy, process and goal of hospitality ministry.

3. Gathering and training a team:

    A: Gather, train and coach a team in the philosophy, process and disciple-making goals of hospitality ministry:

    B: It will also mean actively fostering the practice of *'one-another'* ministry amongst congregation members, and ensuring church members are encouraged, coached and equipped to achieve that aim:

4. Evaluate and modify:

It would be necessary to build in appropriate systems of evaluation and modification, not only of the hospitality, connection and engagement *process* itself, but also to assess and review the *teaching programs* aimed at educating and nurturing congregation members in the philosophy and practice of biblical hospitality.

- RESEARCH PAPER –

Developing A Ministry Of 'Hospitality, Connection & Engagement' Towards an integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxis

"Next Sunday the Spirit of God will prompt hundreds of thousands of people in the United States, and millions around the world to visit a church for the first time. Each visitor is 'God's gift to you'…first-time guests are extraordinary gifts full of unparalleled potential. As God brings them through our doors… our responsibility is to show our gratitude and commitment by doing our part to turn those new faces into new fully developing members"
- Searcy & Henson- [2]

"…it is un-Christian for a congregation to seek new members unless it is also willing and able to accept them into that called-out community. This is not always easy and rarely is it automatic"
- Schaller - [3]

"This ministry is not about greeting people, it's about churches and congregation members practicing a ministry of hospitality and inclusion to believers and unbelievers alike, it's about connecting them in relationship with other believers, and engaging them fully in the life, growth and ministry of a congregation"
- Sarie King –

A Note on terminology:

'Meet, greet and integrate' are the traditionally used phrases, catchy, but in many ways probably not the most helpful. The chosen language for this paper will be the preferred terms - '*hospitality, connection and engagement*', terminology that I think more helpfully reflects the true nature and intention of this ministry.

In using the word '*hospitality*' it is important not to associate the meaning simply with entertaining guests over a meal. Though it may indeed at times include fellowship over a meal, the actual intent within this context is one in which members exercise love and 'hospitality' by the active and intentional 'inclusion and embracing' of newcomers into their church social/relational network (Jn 13: 34-35, Lk 14:12-14, Mtt 25:41-46, 1Pet 4:8-9, Rom 12:9-13, 16:23, Heb 13:1-2) Walker defines this ministry of hospitality as *"taking the initiative to welcome others and inviting others to share in our community life".* [4]

The aim in this hospitality ministry is to '*connect*' newcomers into relationship with other believers as well as to '*engage*' them fully in the life, growth and ministry of a congregation.

(A) IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM:

Based on statistical research, field research, literature review and anecdotal evidence, 6 key factors were identified as common weaknesses or problem areas that must be attended to in order to build an effective hospitality, welcome and engagement ministry.

Important to note is that these 6 areas largely originate from a lack of clear understanding of the disciple-making *purpose* and *process* and therefore result in a lack of intentionality in growing *disciple-making disciples.*

The 6 areas were:

- Lack of warmth, friendliness and belonging
- Lack of church wide ownership and hospitality culture
- Lack of clear process and intentionality

[2] N. Searcy and J.D Henson: *Fusion: Turning First Time Guests Into Fully Engaged Members Of Your Church* (Ventura: Regal, 2007) p. 20, 27.

[3] L. Schaller: *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville: Creative Leadership Series, 1978) p. 128.

[4] Chris Walker: 'How To Welcome Church Visitors': (www.EvangelismCoach.org, 2008-2010) p. 11.

- Lack of training
- Unrecognised 'exclusion barriers'
- Under-utilized lay engagement

1. Lack of warmth, friendliness and belonging:

"When both un-churched and churched people are asked what they look for in a church…all of them agree about one factor – the climate of the congregation.
They are looking for a church in which they feel at home, where the people are friendly, and where there is a warm and comfortable atmosphere." [5]

"One of the barriers is that people often can't break into the social network, the congregation doesn't let new people into their life." [6]

Much of the literature, research and anecdotal evidence spoke of the challenge to build churches that didn't just 'perceive' themselves as friendly but were in fact 'actively warm & friendly'. But more than that, the need for congregations to be '*intentionally inclusive'* of newcomers, and to take initiatives beyond the first greeting to actually help people '*connect'* and '*belong'*. [7]

Meeting the challenge to create genuinely friendly, welcoming and inclusive congregations can have a significant impact on visitor contact and retention.

The '*Barna Group'* examined issues relating to congregation 'friendliness and accessibility' for newcomer contact and retention. In surveys of those '*looking'* for a church, research indicated that '*friendliness to visitors'* was listed as: [8]

Extremely important – 71%
Somewhat important – 21%

'*Francis and Richter's' 2007* study also underlined the significance of the 'friendliness' and 'belonging' factor in newcomer retention. In examining reasons why people drop out of church, the study revealed: [9]

45% did so because they did not feel part of the church
25% left because they felt excluded by 'cliques' and 'in' groups

A further study conducted by *Charles Arn* revealed that for newcomers the significance of friendliness and engagement 'beyond the front door' was actually the true 'litmus test' of the real friendliness of a church.

"We asked the focus groups when they decided that the church was friendly or not…
there's a ten-minute window that's pregnant with opportunities for a church to make a good impression. And it wasn't the ten minutes I expected.
I thought they would say it was right after they got out of the car and walked into the building, but more than any other time folks said, 'I decided this was a friendly church in the ten minutes following the conclusion of the service". [10]

[5] H. Miller: *'How to Build A Magnetic Church'* (Nashville: Creative Leadership Series, Abingdon Press, 1987) p. 64.

[6] C. Walker: *How To Welcome Church Visitors* (www.EvangelismCoach.org, 2008-2010) p.31.

[7] What Walker refers to as '*the 'friendliness factor,'* is critical to church welcoming and retention rates. Walker states that every church believes it is 'friendly' but experience and anecdotal evidence seems to suggest otherwise. Churches need to differentiate 'reality' from their 'perception' in order to address and ensure a greater likelihood of visitor return and establishment. p.5-6.

[8] Barna Group: *'Most Churches Did Not Answer The Phone':* Cross Denominational study conducted in USA, Jan 2004.
http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/134-most-churches-did-not-answer-the-phone

[9] L. Francis & P. Richter: '*Gone For Good? Church Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century'* (Epworth, Peterborough, 2007).

[10] C. Walker: *'Church Greeters 101: Putting The Pieces Together For An Effective Greeting Team And Ministry* (www.EvangelismCoach.org, 2009) p. 73.

2. Lack of church wide ownership and culture of hospitality:

*"Regardless of the right welcoming systems, if there is no relational warmth in
the congregation beyond the volunteers, the experience of the visitor will mismatch"* [11]

*"...it is un-Christian for a congregation to seek new members
unless it is also willing and able to accept them into that called-out community.
This is not always easy and rarely is it automatic."* [12]

The capacity of a congregation to *receive*, *welcome* and *assimilate* new members takes effort and thought. It is far easier to 'join' a church than it is to be accepted and assimilated into the fellowship of a congregation, these are two very different activities that can produce very different results, and often with negative consequences.

In this regard, much of the literature highlighted the difficulty that new members face in making real relationship 'connection' within a church congregation. That 'welcome warmth' and 'friendliness' did not necessarily translate to relationship connection within a congregational fellowship.

The literature therefore highlighted the urgent and necessary role of congregation members, *beyond those in the welcoming team,* to enable effective and successful welcoming, connection and integration to take place.

One major study conducted by *Chris Walker*, researched the common factors that create '*connection barriers'* in generating and executing an effective welcome/hospitality and engagement ministry. In asking ministers about the biggest challenges they faced in conducting their hospitality ministry the research produced 5 common factors: [13]

1. *Cliques:* members either...
   - don't notice visitors
   - are friendly only with each other
   - don't care about welcoming outsiders
   - are too busy fellowshipping with one another

2. No personal *ownership* for the welcome and integration ministry within the congregation

3. Not enough *volunteers*

4. Lack of adequate *training* for volunteers

5. Lack of '*social connection'* by congregation members with returning visitors, resulting in the inability of newcomers to be accepted and integrated into the social network of a congregation

The results of these studies underline the necessity of teaching, training and educating the '*whole congregation'* in the area of welcoming and hospitality.

Regardless of the right welcoming systems, if there's *no* relational warmth or engagement in the congregation beyond the volunteers, the experience of the visitor will ultimately mismatch.

Therefore, church leaders must begin to help *shape* and *nurture* a congregation's hospitality DNA, so that all members are willing to take on the joy and responsibility of welcoming and demonstrating hospitality to visitors and newcomers. It's vital that *every* member come to understand that it's their individual responsibility to offer hospitality and to deliver welcome.

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[11] C. Walker: How To Welcome Church Visitors. P. 30.

[12] L. Schaller, p. 128.

[13] Walker, How To Welcome Church Visitors: A study undertaken on the '*EvangelismCoach*.com' webinar with ministers and church leaders on '*Improving Church Hospitality*', 2009. p.30.

3. Lack of clear process and intentionality:

What was clear from much of the literature review (*and underlined in both Sterland, Escott and Castle and the Sims research*) was that churches that were 'intentional', not only about drawing in spiritual window-shoppers, but specifically and purposefully focussed on *growing members to maturity,* that churches with this *disciple-making intentionality* became more 'organically attractional', were more likely to invite others to church, and therefore also grow numerically.[14]

It's important to note here, that a '*sense of purpose'* and a church's '*culture of intentionality*' has also been identified as a strong 'attractional' and 'retention' factor for newcomers.

Sterland, Escott & Castle, in exploring factors that *attracted newcomers* to church, identified the following, many of which demonstrate a high level of 'intentionality' as part of the culture in which the ministry is conducted:[15]

New members tended to be attracted to churches that exhibited:

- A strong and growing sense of *belonging* among church members
- A *culture of inviting* people to church
- A perception that the church is *moving* in new directions
- Leadership that encourages church members to *use their gifts*
- Members committed to a *clear vision*
- Members feeling that the church has helped them *grow* in their faith
- Members informally *helping one another*

In reflecting on how this issue relates to the current state of church life, in much of the literature it became clear that there is often a lack of clear *process* and *intentionality* in **3** critical areas of the disciple-making process. A factor that not only impacts upon the spiritual health and vitality of a congregation but also has a significant impact on visitor *attraction, retention and growth*.

The 3 areas lacking in clear process and intentionality were:

1. Lack of intentional inviting
2. Lack of intentional follow-up
3. Lack of intentional discipleship

3.1. Lack of intentional inviting:

The *Sims research* of the Sydney Diocese indicated that:

> *16% of infrequent visitors or non-attendees would be *willing to accept* an invitation to church if invited. [16]

> *Sydney Anglicans were *no more likely* to invite people to church than other Protestants or Anglicans. [17]

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[14] S. Sterland, P. Escott & K. Castle: '*Attracting And Integrating Newcomers: An Analysis Across Four Countries'*: (NCLS: *http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=5143*, June 2004). Attenders who reported to have experienced 'grown in their faith', were in greater numbers in churches with higher newcomer levels. There was a strong correlation between the percentage that report strong growth in faith through church, and the percentages that strongly agree that spiritual needs were being met. Tim Sims: '*Current Observations And Possible Implications For Parish Management'*. Back up papers: version 3.1, p. 52. Indicated a 90% correlation of 'invitation' with 'personal growth in faith'. Interesting to note, is that the 'highest personal growth' statistics for Sydney were amongst the young (15-29) or older (60-80+) with a significant drop for those 30-59. Back up material, p. 45 -47.

[15] Sterland, Escott & Castle.

[16] Sims: p. 52.

[17] Sims: p. 52.

Further research by *ICLS & NCLS* indicated that a strong predictor of newcomer levels was attenders frequency of 'inviting' newcomers to church: [18]

> * One of the characteristics that attracted higher levels of newcomers to a church was more inviting of others to church - 12%

> * Close to half of all newcomers indicated that they in turn invited someone to church.

> * Newcomers were in fact more likely than regular attenders to invite people to church.

3.2. Lack of intentional follow-up:

Marshall and Payne's incidental 'diagnostic survey' found that although many churches had well organised welcome desks and information packs for newcomers, only a small minority ever *intentionally, purposefully* or *persistently* followed up newcomers or visited them in their homes.

> "…*no-one admitted to having a culture of intentionally following up each newcomer personally through on-going visits and phone calls*
> *- either by a member of staff or a trained lay person.*" [19]

3.3. Lack of intentional discipleship:

As mentioned already, it was clear from much of the literature review that churches that were intentional (not only about drawing in spiritual window-shoppers, but specifically and purposefully focussed on *growing members to maturity),* that churches with this *disciple-making* intentionality become more '*organically attractional'*, were more likely to invite others to church, and therefore also grow numerically.

> "*Front-door churches that fail to structure for spiritual growth*
> *risk becoming merely a birthing center,*
> *the tell-tale mark of which is a back door fuelled by maturity migration –*
> *a steady flow of people who complain,*
> *"I got started here, but I can't grow here."*

> "*Back door churches that fail to structure for spiritual growth*
> *will end up with programs and ministries that keep people from leaving*
> *but do not help them grow or reach out to those who need Jesus.*" [20]

4. Lack of training:

> "*We need to pray that God would enlarge our hearts with love for people,*
> *and that the growth in Christ of each one would mean more to us than any other success.*
> *And we need to train and mobilize an army of personal ministers or disciple-makers.*" [21]

There's often a lack of adequate or ongoing training of either staff or volunteers in this particular ministry area, leading to a weakness in the ministry itself. Without a 'vision of ownership' and 'clarity of direction' for this particular ministry within a congregation, then

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[18] Sterland, Escott & Castle.
Miller suggested the churches that have the edge over other churches are churches that 'aggressively seek new members'. And the difference between churches that grow and those that don't is that growing churches 'invite', p. 16.

[19] T. Payne: '*What The Guru Learned'* (The Briefing: Feb 2011#389) p. 17.

[20] L. Osborne: *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 46.

[21] Payne: Guru, p. 17.

recruiting and retaining volunteer teams able to achieve the sort of vision outlined in the quote above will continue to remain a constant challenge.

A well-executed hospitality, connection and engagement ministry is by nature, labour intensive. It requires *structured* and well thought out *oversight,* as well as engaging a *volunteer pool* relative to the size of the church. Meeting this need will require a commitment to ongoing *recruiting, training, coaching* and *follow-up* of a large team of volunteers.

But a ministry that focuses on *people* rather than *programmes* will embrace that commitment to equip, coach and train congregation members to work alongside ministry staff, in order to minister to, and disciple *as many as possible.*

5. Unrecognised 'exclusion barriers':

> *"(Congregations) can…confuse apparent 'friendliness' or 'openness to all people' with the actual experience or activity of 'including' or 'engaging' them in the life of a congregation"* [22]

During the process of *Schaller's* research, he discovered that churches might unconsciously neglect important *'inclusionary'* and *'exclusionary'* factors that can become barriers in reaching and assimilating new members. [23]

Schaller noted that established congregations traditionally tend to operate around certain *'inclusory glue'* that identifies, unites and holds them together (e.g. service style, age, social or ethnic demography). [24]

This same 'inclusory factor' can *conversely* also work to make newcomers that do not fit the designated 'target' audience feel less included, or even 'excluded'.

For example: common groups outside the 'traditional' mix can be those who are: [25]

- Non-English speaking
- Widows (currently **over represented** in our churches at 32%)
- Separated (currently **under represented** in our churches at 11%)
- Divorced (currently **under represented** in our churches at 18%)
- Remarried (currently **under represented** in our churches at 15%)
- De facto (currently **under represented** in our churches at 4%)
- Never married (currently **under represented** in our churches at 15%)
- Childless couples
- Less educated
- Older or younger demographic
- Workers versus uni student demographic…etc…

Newcomers outside the designated congregational 'target' audience, rather than feeling/or being included in a congregation's *'self portrait,'* can potentially feel self conscious, irrelevant or even excluded.

This demands that these particular individuals therefore may be required work harder than other newcomers to *'write themselves'* into the life of a particular congregation.

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[22] Schaller: p. 80.

[23] Schaller: p. 22.

[24] Walker believes it's also important to examine each particular congregation's 'spiritual and relational' health for potential barriers. Eg. is there a culture of sarcasm, complaining, coldness, indifference? How might that impact a visitor? How might that need addressing as a spiritual issue?

[25] Sims: p. 32-33. Statistics on widowed, separated, divorced, de facto, remarried & singles. It's important to note here that the number of singles in our society is growing rapidly. One-person households are the fastest growing of all demographic groups in Sydney. Childlessness has also increased, and the trend in Australia indicates there is a larger group of single women aged 40-54 than single men in the same age bracket.

Interestingly, findings from the '*2001 ICLS Survey'* indicated that one of the characteristics that were common to congregations that tended to attract *higher levels* of newcomers were congregations that had a greater '*breadth of social profile'*, particularly those congregations with higher levels of members beyond their first marriage (i.e. divorced/re- married). [26]

For newcomers (and particularly unbelievers) this 'broad demographic' factor reflected more the typical social profile of the general society, thus reducing potential 'exclusion' barriers and making church '*entry and integration'* much more *socially* and r*elationally* acceptable and accessible.

In determining the potential 'exclusion' factors impacting the assimilation, participation and involvement of a newcomer within a particular congregation, churches must therefore ask themselves:

* 'Who are the people who may not feel welcome, comfortable or at ease in this particular congregation'?

 * 'Who are the people who may be called upon to work harder to enter/assimilate/fit in, where much more may be demanded in order to accommodate to this congregation's particular profile/focus/emphasis?

An important NOTE:

It is worth noting here that the categories of '*widowed, separated, divorced, remarried, de-facto and never married'* listed above are the predominantly growing groups within our society in which their life circumstances are generally perceived more as the 'norm'.[27]

But when they enter the church, they often do not feel part of the 'norm', and therefore may not always perceive an immediate 'fit' within our demographically designated 'family' church, or evening 'youth' church categories. For many, the way they perceive the notion of 'family' today may indeed also look very different to our 'nuclear' family norm.

In helping newcomers in these categories 'connect' and 'engage' in church, the temptation can be to syphon or separate them off by linking them with others in their 'life category' to be specially cared for. But what these individuals are more often yearning for, is just to feel 'accepted', to feel '*normal not different'.* To feel that despite any particular 'life circumstance' they still fit within the accepted 'norms' and regularities of a particular congregation. That they are not perceived, or designated, as the 'ab-norm' to be treated, integrated or socialised differently.

The difficulty in our current church setting is that we tend to work towards narrow demographics rather than broad ones, unintentionally creating 'exclusion barriers' for some.

Therefore, as the numbers of people in these categories continue to increase in general society we need to ensure that they do not find their experience or acceptance within our church communities an 'exclusionary barrier' to coming to know Christ or to growth in Him. [28]

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[26] Sterland, Escott & Castle.

[27] Miller has proposed that one of the biggest factors in growing churches is their ability to attract and hold on to this demographic.

[28] For more on this topic see the blog piece '*Singularly Interesting'*: http://www.complementarityandculture.com/2010/11/singularly-interesting.html

6. Under-utilized lay engagement:

"Even more effective is a lay member making the call.
A non-staff member of the church calling makes greater impact upon the newcomer
because it indirectly tells them how much the 'ordinary' members
(in other words, unpaid members) of the church value them and love their church." [29]

Recent research indicates the *significant* and *necessary* role that lay members play in improving newcomer integration and retention.

The *Sims research* data indicated, that the most effective way for visitors to be welcomed and connected into church life and community was not primarily by the ministry staff or Senior Minister, but by church members themselves.[30]

Further research conducted by *E J Kolb* indicated that when lay members are highly involved in welcoming and integrating newcomers the impact is doubled.

"The basic finding is summed up in the '36 hour principle'.
*When **lay- persons** visit the home of a first- time worshipper within 36 hours, 85% of them*
will return to worship next Sunday. When the visit is delayed for 72 hours, only 60% return;
when delayed five to seven days, 15% return." [31]

According to Miller in *'How To Build A Magnetic Church'*, if the minister makes the first visit percentages were then cut in half. [32]

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[29] Z. Veron: *Leadership On The Front Foot:* (Anglican Press Australia, 2009) p. 73.

[30] Sims: p, 57. Note: the only exception was in having the Senior Minister involved in some aspect of the follow up process.

[31] Miller, p. 72.

[32] Miller, p.73.

(B) TOWARDS A SOLUTION:

"There's a vast difference between viewing a visitor as a 'meet and greet' exercise
and envisioning that newcomer as a disciple – making contact and opportunity."
- Sarie King -

What's important as we search for appropriate solutions to these problems is the need to have very clear *biblical goals* in place, followed by the formulation and execution of *principles* and *practices* that work towards achieving that end. In other words, what is needed is a greater integration of *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* in the important area of 'hospitality, connection and engagement'.

If we believe that our primary ministry focus needs to be developing and maintaining the growth of each person in the body of Christ as a 'disciple-making disciple' and, that every ministry *area* and *relationship* will afford some opportunity to forward that growth and development, then logically speaking we must ask ourselves the following questions: [33]

a. What implications might this *disciple-making focus* have for resolving the problems and weaknesses currently experienced in our 'hospitality, connection and engagement ministry'?

b. How might a *disciple-making intention* shape the way we build, execute and follow through our hospitality, connection and engagement ministry?

Our aim in the particular area of '*hospitality, connection and engagement'* - will be to grow 'disciple-making disciples' by...

1. Building a DNA culture of hospitality and inclusion:

"There's a difference between opening your doors
and opening your hearts" [34]

"Nothing convinces a newcomer to return more than a genuine welcome from
someone who naturally loves newcomers because it's part of their church's DNA" [35]

"Welcoming the guests who visit our churches is to practice the art of hospitality." [36]

All believers are called to be involved in *building Christ's Church* (1Cor 12-14, Eph 4:11-16, 1Thess 5:11).

Part of 'building Christ's Church' involves the call for Christians to *'be hospitable',* to *'practice hospitality'* as an act and expression of 'inclusive love' without distinction or grumbling (Jn 13: 34-35, Lk 14:12-14, Mtt 25:41-46, 1Pet 4:8-9, Rom 12:9-13, 16:23, Heb 13:1-2) *'showing' hospitality* is marked out as one of the *character traits* of godly leadership (1Tim 3:2, Tit 1:7-9) and listed as one of the *'good deeds'* that Christians are called upon to exemplify (1Tim 5:10, Tit 1:8). [37]

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[33] If we understand the 'disciple-making process' as one which starts with introducing an unbeliever to Christ and ends with growth to full maturity in Him (Eph 4:11-16, Col 1:28, Heb 6:1, Jas 1:4) then we need to understand the ministry of 'hospitality, connection and engagement' as a significant and necessary part of that disciple making process. Within the scope of this particular ministry we're engaged in the following 'disciple-making' activities: making contact and connection with believers and unbelievers alike, forwarding appropriate pathways to their growth in Christ, engaging congregation members in the ministry of hospitality and inclusion, exercising 'pew discipling' through 'one-another' ministry, as well as engaging and training the saints in the activity of 'every member ministry' (see fig 1: p 20). What we are in fact doing at this point with the visitor is - making 'disciples.' What we are in fact doing with every congregation member who participates in this ministry is - making disciples who make disciples.

[34] Miller, p. 64.

[35] G. Kearney: Integrating Newcomers Into The Life Of Your Church (The Briefing: Sept 2010 #384) p. 28.

[36] Walker: How To Welcome Church Visitors. p. 9.

[37] The original Greek word for 'hospitality' is *philoxenia*' (φιλοξενία). The word can be broken down into two parts - 1.'*philo*' - meaning 'love' 2. '*xenia*' - meaning 'stranger' (with 'xenophobia' meaning 'fear of strangers') or it can simply mean 'guest' or 'host' (cf. Rom 16:23). Biblically speaking, 'hospitality' and

*"Welcoming the guests who visit our churches is to practice the art of hospitality…
Hospitality is a vehicle to help the local church body demonstrate a caring Christian
community…(it) helps prepare the way for hearing the joyful proclamation of the good news
of the sovereign love of God."* [38]

Part of 'building Christ's Church' also lies in obeying the spiritual obligations and responsibilities all believers carry to exercise the '*one–another' commands*. [39]

To this end, all believers are instructed:

* To *offer hospitality* to one another without grumbling (1Pet 4:9)
* To *greet* one another (1Cor 16:20)
* To *accept* one another (Rom 15:7)
* To be *kind* to each other and everyone else (1Thess 5:15)
* To *encourage* one another and *build* one another up in Christ (Heb 3:13, 1Thess 5:11)
* To *honour* another above self (Rom 12:10)
* To be *kind* to one another and *compassionate* (Eph 4:32)
* To *serve* one another in love (Gal 5:13)
* To *spur* one another on to *love and good deeds* (Heb 10:24)

Therefore in aiming to build Christ's Church there needs to be an active encouragement of all believers in regard to these important *spiritual* and *practical* responsibilities both *within* the body of Christ, and *to* the body of Christ.

In order for this to happen, leaders will need to cast a '*hospitality vision,'* and begin to shape their church's '*hospitality DNA'* by developing teaching programs aimed at intentionally fostering and nurturing a culture of 'hospitality and inclusion' across the church family, as well as actively encouraging and training all believers in the exercise of the *'one-another'* commands.

This hospitality '*education*' and '*culture transformation'* would need to encompass the whole church community, from the children's ministry through to the various age contexts and gatherings (e.g. including children's ministry, teenage ministry, small groups, congregational meetings, church events and social gatherings).[40]

The aim would be to educate, mould and transform the 'culture' of a church in the way its members perceive, include and engage with newcomers/'outsiders'.[41]

The goal would be for every member to gain a clear understandings of their *place* and *responsibility* within the family of God in welcoming, caring for, including and offering hospitality to those who are new to, or outside, the church family.

Culture information and transformation would be achieved by:

- Teaching and educating

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its related words can sometimes be used in reference to 'strangers' (as in Heb 13:1-2) other times it is clearly used in reference to those who are members of the church family (e.g. 1Pet 4:9, Rom 16:23).

[38] Walker, p. 9.

[39] We need to note here, that when Christ calls individuals to follow him they are also called into 'common discipleship'. In other words, Christ calls each believer to share their lives both with him and with one another in love (Jn 15:16-17). The 'one another' commands make it every Christians obligation and responsibility to practice such things as - love (Jn 13:34), instruction (Rom 15:14, 1Cor 12:25) speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), teaching and admonishing (Col 3:16), encouraging and building up (1Thess 5:11), spurring each other on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), confessing sins (Jas 5:16), praying (Jas 5:16, Eph 6:18), using their gifts to serve (1Pet 3:7-10), carrying each others burdens (Gal 6:2), forgiving (Eph 4:32), submitting out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21), devotion (Rom 12:10), acceptance (Rom 15:7), patience, kindness and compassion (Eph 4:2, 32), as an act of spiritual obedience and to build up the body of Christ.

[40] As mentioned already, language plays a significant role in shaping and forming attitudes and culture. McIntosh proposes that part of getting ready to welcome and offer hospitality to newcomers is by deleting the term 'visitor' from the church vocabulary. Language evokes certain attitudes and expectations; therefore McIntosh believes that using the hospitality term 'guest' is far more helpful. McIntosh, p. 14.

[41] The New Testament uses the term 'outsider' to describe the unbeliever we meet or who may enter our gathering e.g. Col 4:5, Mk 4:11,1 Cor 5:12-13, 1Thess 4:12, 1 Tim 3:7.

- Modelling, training and coaching
- Organised and spontaneous practice of hospitality
- Identifying and challenging potential 'exclusion' barriers
- Creating clear avenues and opportunities for hospitality, connection and engagement
- Freeing up church calendars/programs to deliberately create space and opportunity for social interaction and connection

2. Creating clear and intentional pathways of 'entry, connection and engagement':

"They (newcomers) need to be encouraged, nurtured, directed and sometimes pursued so that they are purposefully moved into the life of your church. It's not enough to tick a box that says your newcomer was greeted at the door." [42]

Unless churches identify, connect and actively engage newcomers in the 'life, growth and ministry' of the church then newcomers never return, stay on the fringe, or drift away feeling disconnected, unwelcomed and uninvolved.

Therefore there need to be well thought out, clear and appropriate '*disciple-making' pathways* and *processes* in place that seamlessly enable first time visitors to translate into second time visitors and ultimately fully engaged members of the church family. Fully engaged members who will in turn become *disciple-making disciples*.

Where:

"…each newcomer was seen as 'gold'; where newcomers were followed up personally so they had every opportunity to hear the gospel, to read the Bible with someone, to become part of the congregation." [43]

In this regard we must understand that the ministry of 'hospitality, connection and engagement' is actually a key part of the '*disciple-making journey',* it is not a destination in itself. Newcomers need to keep moving forward into the life of the church, and in their growth *in* and *towards* Christ, and we need to show them the way.

Our spiritual responsibility lies in helping each newcomer to see and embrace the next step ahead towards 'connecting and engaging', and towards growth in *grace, knowledge and obedience* to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether that newcomer is a committed believer, or one who doesn't yet know Christ (2Pet 1:1-12, 3:18). This is what it means for a church to use every ministry task as an opportunity to 'make-disciples.'

This intentional disciple-making will mean:

2.1. Intentional disciple-making will mean: *deciding on a system and strategy of hospitality, connection and engagement with set 'hospitality, connection and disciple-making' goals at every step of the process.*

Keeping in mind that hospitality, connection and engagement is a 'process not an event', and that every stage of the process should have clear goals on *what*'s to be done, *how* it's to be done, and *by whom*.

(See fig. 2 – over)

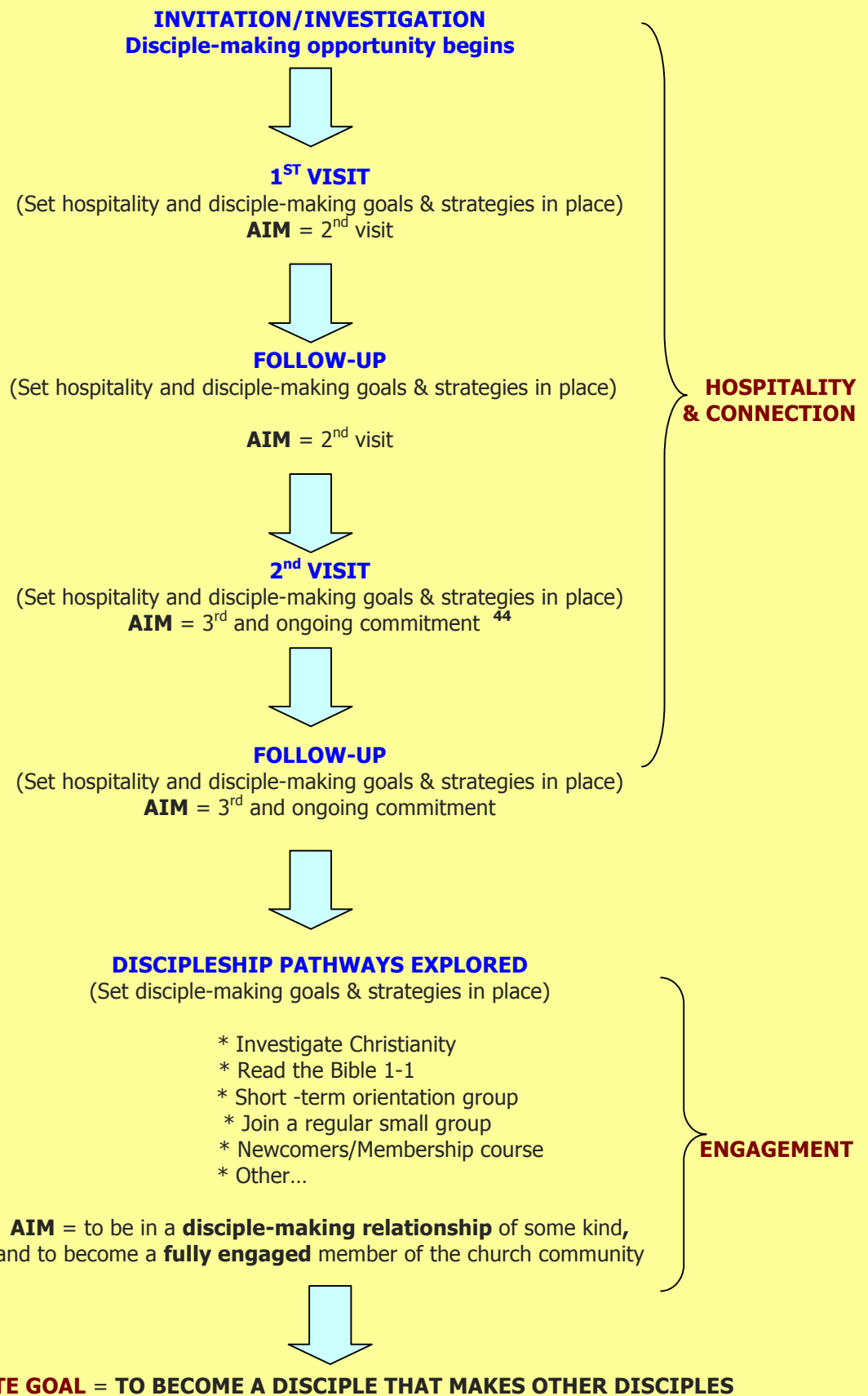**'Hospitality, connection and engagement is a process not an event'**

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[42] Kearney, p. 25.

[43] Payne: Guru, p. 17.

FIG. 2.   **DISCIPLE-MAKING**
              Through 'Hospitality, Connection and Engagement'

INVITATION/INVESTIGATION
Disciple-making opportunity begins

⬇

1ST VISIT
(Set hospitality and disciple-making goals & strategies in place)
AIM = 2nd visit

⬇

FOLLOW-UP
(Set hospitality and disciple-making goals & strategies in place)

AIM = 2nd visit

⬇

2nd VISIT
(Set hospitality and disciple-making goals & strategies in place)
AIM = 3rd and ongoing commitment [44]

⬇

FOLLOW-UP
(Set hospitality and disciple-making goals & strategies in place)
AIM = 3rd and ongoing commitment

HOSPITALITY & CONNECTION

⬇

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS EXPLORED
(Set disciple-making goals & strategies in place)

* Investigate Christianity
* Read the Bible 1-1
* Short -term orientation group
* Join a regular small group
* Newcomers/Membership course
* Other…

AIM = to be in a **disciple-making relationship** of some kind**,**
and to become a **fully engaged** member of the church community

ENGAGEMENT

⬇

ULTIMATE GOAL = **TO BECOME A DISCIPLE THAT MAKES OTHER DISCIPLES**

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[44] Searcy refers to the second visit as 'the magic moment of momentum,' here visitors are indicating they're interested in exploring church further. This magic moment is critical to capitalize upon p.105. Miller also notes that there's a vast difference between factors that attract a first 'visit' to a church may not be factors that attract a second visit and eventually 'join'. They are both different tasks and activities. p. 45.

This will mean designing the best hospitality/connection/engagement system that works for the particular church or each particular congregation, as well as developing the oversight, organization, training and management needed to execute it.

Developing a clear system and strategy would incorporate these areas of consideration:

- What is our ultimate aim?
- What will the stages of the process be, and what will they encompass?
  (i.e. will it be an 'inside' process only, or will the program encompass visiting and inviting
  any newcomers to the local area)
- What is the specific disciple-making goal for each stage of the process?
- What discipleship 'engagement' pathways need to be put in place?
- What methodology will be adopted to achieve each goal?
- Who will be responsible?
- Who will you gather, recruit, select for the ministry, with what criteria?
- What training, coaching and team follow-up may be necessary?
- What ministry review/evaluation systems may need to be put in place?
- What physical or practical needs may need to be addressed in executing the ministry effectively?
  (Finances, equipment, auxiliary or administration needs etc.)

NOTE: Some critical reflections on systems and strategies are outlined at the end of this paper.

2.2. Intentional disciple-making will also mean: *gathering, training and coaching a team in the philosophy, process and disciple-making goal of hospitality ministry:*

3. Gathering and training a team:

" *We need to pray that God would enlarge our hearts with love for people,
and that the growth in Christ of each one would mean more to us than any other success.
And we need to train and mobilize an army of personal ministers or disciple-makers.*" [45]

Once a 'hospitality, connection and engagement' strategy is in place and appropriate processes decided, the aim would be to:

A: **Gather, train and coach a ministry team in the '*philosophy, goal and process'* of this ministry:**

This is a labour intensive ministry requiring a volunteer pool relative to the size of the church. It requires the recruiting, training, coaching and follow-up of large teams of volunteers. But without a vision of *ownership* of this ministry within a given congregation then recruiting and retaining these kinds of volunteer teams will remain a constant challenge.

It may also mean developing, allocating and equipping a team (or multiple sub-teams) to take specific *oversight and ownership* of various aspects of the hospitality, connection and engagement process (i.e. greeting, ushering, welcome desk, pew discipling, post-service engagement, social invitation, follow-up details, post- Sunday follow-up etc).

The critical thing is that each ministry participant has a clear understanding of the hospitality nature of this ministry, as well as a clear perception of its disciple-making goals and intention.

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[45] Payne, Guru, p. 17.

B: **It will also mean actively fostering *'one-another'* ministry amongst congregation members, and ensuring church members are encouraged and equipped to achieve that aim:**

A ministry that focuses on '*people*' rather than '*programmes*' will mean equipping the saints for 'one another' ministry and 'every member ministry'. It will mean equipping, encouraging and training all congregation members to work alongside staff to minister to as many as possible.

Important to note here: is that this training and mobilizing of personal ministers and disciple-makers is in itself and act of 'disciple-making' on our part. We are 'making disciples' of them as we teach and train them, and they in turn are learning how to then make disciples of others.

4. Evaluate and modify:

It would be necessary to build in appropriate systems of evaluation and modification, not only of the hospitality, connection and engagement *process* itself, but also to take opportunity to assess and review the *teaching programs* aimed at educating and nurturing congregation members in the philosophy and practice of biblical hospitality.

3 strategic areas to evaluate regularly would be:

1. Evaluating processes and strategies:

There is a need to evaluate all systems, goals and strategies as well as evaluating the training, teaching and coaching of ministry participants and congregation members. Including getting the right kind of feedback.

One 'feedback strategy' that might assist ministry teams in this process (suggested by *Searcy & Henson* in the book ***Fusion: Turning first-time guests into fully engaged members of your church)*** is to survey newcomers.

The survey could be sent out in the days following their first visit, or completed on-line. The survey form could be located on the church website where first time visitors may then rate/comment on their experience.[46]

The belief is that feedback of a guest's experience at the church can have the following benefits:

1. Show people that you care about the experience that they have had.
2. See how church is perceived through the eyes of someone who is new.
3. Learn what your church is doing well.
4. Discover what obstacles exist to new people feeling welcomed.
5. Understand (over time) whether your church is welcoming or not (not just rely on gut feel).

Both newcomer 'first visit' surveys, and 'second visit' surveys, have been used by churches to garner feedback about their facilities, the efficacy of their ministries, as well as what worship looks and feels like to new people. Some churches have chosen to break survey questions into categories of hospitality, worship, teaching, music, etc., to better identify what did or didn't resonate with guests.

Searcy has suggested the following basic newcomer survey questions: [47]

* What did you notice first?
* What did you like best?

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[46] Note: in order to not reinforce any negative experience they may have had the 'first-time visitor survey' does not include a critique of the church. More critical feedback is asked for in the 'second-visit survey'.

[47] Examples of newcomer surveys from our own context can be found at 'The Village Church': *http://fm.thevillagechurch.net/visitors/first-impression*.
And 'Church By The Bridge': *https://churchbythebridge.wufoo.eu/forms/what-was-your-first-impression/*.

* What was your overall impression?
* How can we pray with you?
* Name
* Email Address

Another feedback method is to initiate a 6-month 'reflection' point with every newcomer to review how they are settling in; troubleshoot issues of concern and to encourage them in helpful pathways forward. From these 'reflection and review' points a great deal can be gleaned about the way newcomers settle into church, the obstacles they encounter and how to improve on hospitality, connection and newcomer engagement. [48]
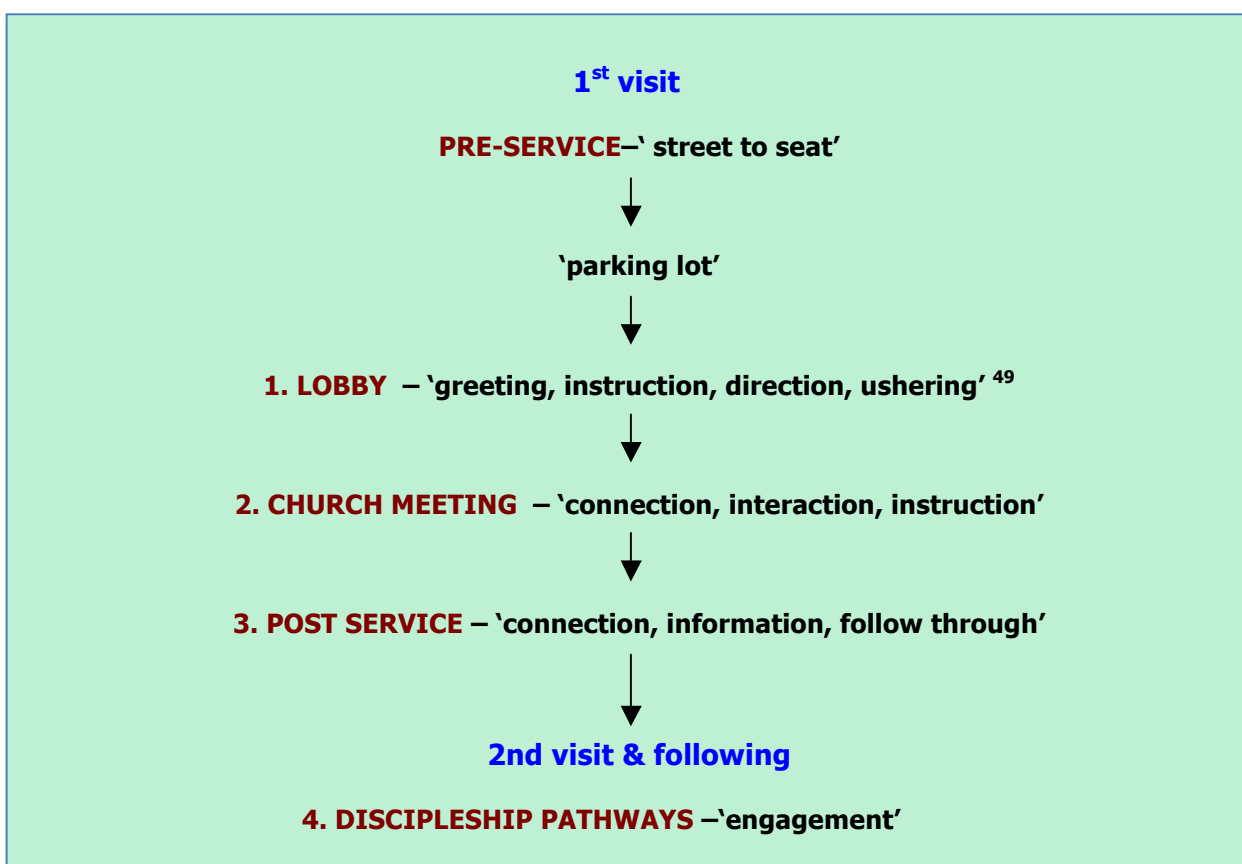
2: Evaluating and reducing friction points:

As churches examine and evaluate their systems it's helpful to review ways of reducing any 'friction' points for newcomers.

A 'friction point' is an unmatched expectation of the visitor, a potential source of embarrassment, or an untrained or nervous volunteer. (For example: some visitors feel embarrassed to ask for directions, or the volunteer who doesn't know how to greet visitors who walk in the door) Other friction points may include –being asked to stand, offertory plate circulation).

Assess potential 'friction' points in newcomer movements:

Fig 4. Potential friction points for newcomers and the 'hospitality, connection and engagement' activities listed with each point.

1st visit

PRE-SERVICE—' street to seat'

↓

'parking lot'

↓

1. LOBBY — 'greeting, instruction, direction, ushering' [49]

↓

2. CHURCH MEETING — 'connection, interaction, instruction'

↓

3. POST SERVICE — 'connection, information, follow through'

↓

2nd visit & following

4. DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS —'engagement'

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[48] A significant number of people leave churches within the first 6 months. The reflection and review can be carried out by a welcome team member, their small group leader or discipler, or by a staff member. This reflection may encompass how the newcomer is going personally, spiritually, relationally, their experience of church and their engagement in making a community contribution.

[49] Walker would want to make a clear distinction between the role of an usher and that of a greeter. Walker views the 'usher' role as primarily responsible for activities beyond the front door and within the 'main meeting area'. 'Greeters' by contrast, are primarily responsible for activity at the foyer, entrance and lobby and management of the designated 'hospitality' center. P. 73.

3. Planning for the future before it arrives:

Lastly, taking time to envision what your church may look like ahead of time and beginning to put strategies in place to prepare for that possibility. **50** The aim would be to keep developing and reviewing hospitality, connection and engagement systems to meet those growing/changing needs.

FINAL COMMENTS:
Some critical reflections on systems & strategies:

There were varying opinions across the literature on what specific *system* or *strategy* should be used, and how this particular ministry might best be conducted and executed. But regardless of the individual system adopted, most of the literature tended to highlight the necessity of addressing the following issues in whatever particular hospitality, connection and engagement system a church settled upon.

* Timing and intentionality of follow-up is critical:

Both the research data and the literature review indicate that the more *removed/impersonal* the follow-up mechanism, and the *longer* it takes to make follow-up contact, the more *diminished* the impact.

McIntosh, in his book 'Beyond The First Visit: *The Complete Guide To Connecting Guests To Your Church'* has suggested 5 core principles that should operate in any follow-up strategy: [51]

Any contact follow up of newcomers needs to be…

1. A friendly contact
2. A personal contact – focus on their needs/interests
3. A prompt contact – within 24-48hrs (1st visit)
4. A non-threatening contact – guests are naturally uneasy in new situations
5. A continual contact – follow-up is 'a process not an event'

In other words, any follow up system should be fast, friendly and functional.[52]

Part of effective follow-up would also need to take into account the particular *clientele culture*, *generational preferences*, *social needs*, as well as any *ethnic cultural* differences of there may be.

Note:

There are varying opinions on what might be the best 'mode' of follow-up contact (whether it should be phone, letter, email, SMS, FB message etc) but all would agree that the *timing* of contact needs to be done quickly after the 1st visit as well as the need for some form of ongoing follow up. It is also agreed that the *tenor* of the chosen mode of contact needs to be 'unpressured or un-coerced', but warm, casual and relaxed.

In this regard, often what visitors place on the comment card can be an indicator of what 'mode' of contact an individual may be most comfortable with.

⟹ What is important is that, although the appropriate *mode* of follow up may vary, the critical *time frames* for making contact shouldn't.

* Connection and engagement need to happen early and intentionally:

The capacity of a congregation to receive, welcome and assimilate new members takes effort and thought. It is far easier to 'join' a church than it is to be 'accepted' and 'assimilated' into the fellowship of a congregation.

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50 The concept of planning for the future before it arrives, is taken from Kearney p.28.

51 Gary L. McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006) p. 14.

52 Searcy, p. 84.

We've also stated that warmth and friendliness alone are not enough to retain newcomers and that people drop out for lack of enough 'congregational connections' or 'significant friendships'. [53] In fact, It's believed that the more *'significant relationships'* a person has within a congregation the *less likely* they are to become inactive or to leave the church. [54]

Therefore it's critical for newcomers that *intentional social/relational connections* are made within the congregation from the beginning, and are deliberately built upon. Any assimilation strategy must incorporate helping new members to make 'real connections' into an existing congregation.

In order to do this we need to think through what a particular newcomer might need from our church to help them feel *socially/relationally* and *spiritually* connected and engaged. (In this regard there may be slightly different connection and engagement approaches and strategies for each congregation).

Osborne notes that the *common* connection point for all new people is that they lack any *established relationships*. He describes church relationships as '*lego'* pieces with a *limited* number of 'connection' points. Once a regular member's '*connectors'* are full, they tend to be friendly to newcomers but often not willing or able to build connection. This can create confusion for newcomers, with acts of friendship sending one message but lack of connection sending another.[55]

To counter this, Osborne suggests that creating '*new groups for new people'* can capitalize upon already established common ground i.e. the mutual need newcomers have for greater connectedness, not just friendliness. The common ground is their common 'lack' of existing relationships.

Yet all new members also need connections with *established* members who then help orient newcomers to the life and ethos of a congregation. So other possible strategies may include - asking each person in the congregation to make connection with and 'include and embrace' into their social network at least *one* newcomer across the year, or for each bible study to '*adopt a newcomer'* as a group, thereby connecting a newcomer with multiple social/relational connection points.

Similarly, Searcy suggested 3 simple methods (or 'engagement opportunities') for getting new members to make connections:

1. Participation in a small group
2. Creating lots of casual 'low pressure' social activities as easy entry points for new visitors
3. Encouraging newcomer participation in simple service teams. [56]

⇨ Therefore, we need to ask- "*Who* are we trying to reach, *what* do they need from us to connect and engage, and *how* will we meet that need?" [57]

* *There needs to be some 'triage' strategy in place:*

Churches need to have some form of newcomer 'triage strategy' in place i.e. a system that sensitively and effectively enables them to assess where a newcomer is at, and what their follow up needs may be. And churches need to train all hospitality ministry participants in this.

Learning how to appropriately triage a newcomer can be a very effective opportunity for exercising the '*one-another'* commands, and also to engage in what I would call - '*pew discipling'*. [58]

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[53] *Francis & Richter's* research indicated that while many assume that people leave the church due to personal choice and changing beliefs, the study indicates many of the 'exit' factors can be mitigated by good pastoral care and a more thoughtful integration ministry.

[54] Schaller notes the role 'significant relationships' play in retaining attenders. Schaller's research suggests the more friends a person has in a congregation, the less likely they are to become inactive or leave the church. P.75. The video by Birmingham Cathedral suggests that developing **3** relationships will see a person stay for 6 months; another **7** significant relationships are needed to stay a long time. See also Searcy, p. 123.

[55] Osborne, p. 79.

[56] Searcy's belief is that by offering new visitors opportunity to engage in service moves them further along the continuum of the assimilation process. P. 101.

[57] Kearney suggests that it's important for churches to know their clientele culture, their generation issues & concerns, social class issues, cultural differences and needs. We need to know what they might need to help them feel welcomed and to connect. P.25.

[58] I have chosen to use the word 'discipling' over that of pew 'ministry' in this context because I believe that every point of contact with a believer is an opportunity to exercise the 'one-another' commends and thereby exercise the encouragement and nurture of a *fellow believer* as a ''disciple'' of Christ. If the

As one example of a newcomer 'triage construct', *Walker* suggests there are generally **4 types** of church visitors, each with entirely different 'hospitality needs' and therefore different expectations that will shape their experience.

Fig 3. Walker's proposed triage construct: [59]

Churched Non-Christian	Churched Christian
Un-Churched Non-Christian	De-churched Christian
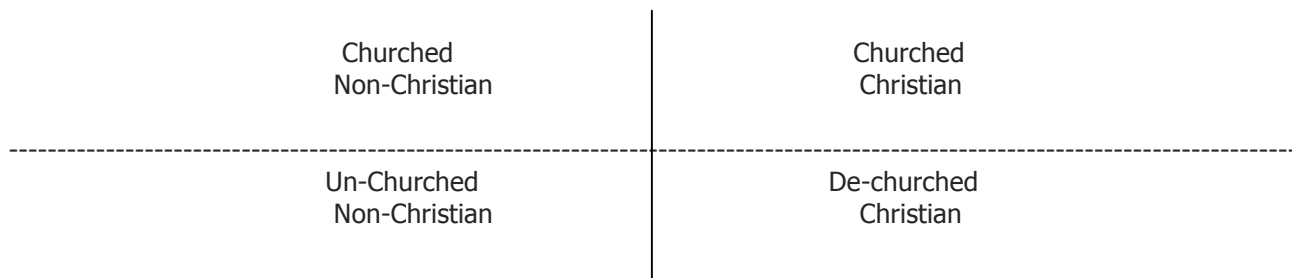
- **Churched/non-christian:** - has Christian 'memory'/church experiences, therefore some familiarity
- **Churched/Christian:** - familiar with church visiting and aware of hospitality beyond the 'professional'
- **Un-churched/non-christian:** - unfamiliar with church, its practices or vocabulary. Value 'anonymity'
- **De-churched/Christian:** - burned out from prior church ministry or hurt by previous experience of church

Churches need to recognize these kinds of variables in the way they go about welcoming, connecting and following-up each individual visitor, as well as helping them decide upon the most appropriate disciple-making pathway forward for them.

* *The value of widening the front door, closing the back door and utilizing the side door:*

Churches need to utilize every opportunity; to do this they need a 'multi door' strategy.

Churches need to open their '**front door'** as wide as possible - making church an inviting, friendly and comfortable place to visit, they also need to keep people from sliding out the '**back door'** through lack of disciple growth, as well as utilizing '**side doors'** as easy access points for non-believers or wary newcomers.

"Front-door churches that fail to structure for spiritual growth
risk becoming merely a birthing center,
the tell-tale mark of which is a back door fuelled by maturity migration –
a steady flow of people who complain, "I got started here, but I can't grow here"

Back door churches that fail to structure for spiritual growth
will end up with programs and ministries that keep people from leaving
but do not help them grow or reach out to those who need Jesus." [60]

It's important to recognise that not everyone will enter our churches via the 'front' door. Newcomers also come through the 'side door', through youth groups, mums groups, mens and women's groups, social events etc.

These kinds of events and 'specialist' groups that meet outside the Sunday services can be important connection points. They are invaluable '*side door ease of entry'* points into church life, and an opportunity for Christian outreach to those who can't, or won't initially accept an invitation to church.

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contact point is with a *non-believer*, then this is also a God given opportunity to encourage them towards relationship with Christ and therefore also becomes an opportunity in disciple-making.

[59] Walker: p. 20.

[60] Osborne, p. 36.

It's important to recognize that for some, these 'specialist groups' may be their only engagement in church life *long term* (e.g. Christian wives/husbands whose unbelieving spouse refuse to attend church or allow them to; or youth, whose parents may be happy for them to attend youth group but not church). [61]

In addition to providing meaningful supportive fellowship for Christian individuals and supplying a comfort point of entry for the assimilation of unbelieving new members, these groups also offer a variety of significant opportunities for the personal and spiritual growth of their members.

⟹ It's important that congregation members involved in these '*specialist groups*' also perceive *themselves* as important '*doors of entry*' for newcomers and unbelievers into the church, and therefore the enormous opportunity for both discipling and disciple-making that those relationships afford.

In this regard it is also invaluable to have trained congregation members available at '*captive market times*' at such times as funerals, weddings and special events as yet another strategic 'side door' opportunity to be capitalized upon.

* The place of 'participation' in the 'engagement' process:

Much of the literature also suggests that newcomers need not only to 'feel' involved, but they also need to 'be involved' in order to truly engage in church life.[62] The belief is that people need to 'participate', not only by membership in a *small group,* but they also need to participate in '*serving*' in some way to feel they truly 'belong' and to feel genuine 'ownership' and 'engagement' within a church or congregation.

In other words, newcomers need to have a '*group to join*' and a '*job to do*'. [63]

It can be a difficult call of discernment to engage newcomers in certain serving ministries without first assessing their spiritual stand, maturity, gifts or social/relational capacities. However by finding appropriate ways to engage newcomers in simple 'low risk' serving teams it enables them to more easily and accessibly form relationships with established members and to engage in church life. It also teaches newcomers the importance of serving others and exercising 'one another' activities within a community from the beginning.

Peter Corney, in his book - 'The Welcoming Church: *How to Welcome Newcomers In The Local Church*', suggests that newcomers begin to feel like it's 'their' church when: [64]

1. They have 2 or more significant relationships in the church
2. A role through which they feel they are contributing
3. Involvement in a ministry
4. They have acquired a sense of ownership and membership of the congregation

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[61] In this respect Schaller believes that 'specialized groups' such as men's and women's groups that meet outside of Sundays continue to play an important function and meet a significant assimilation need in many churches.

[62] Both Miller and Searcy believe that by offering new visitors opportunity to engage in service moves them further along the continuum of the assimilation process. He also believes that responsibility and ownership go together. Miller, p. 45, Searcy, p.101.

[63] Miller, p. 64.

[64] Peter Corney: The Welcoming Church: How To Welcome Newcomers In The Local Church (Sydney South: Aquila Press, 1992) p.29.

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