

Befriending the Stranger

A BULLETIN ON CHURCH HOSPITALITY & REVITALIZATION

By Rev. Dr. Randy Hammer

The Importance of Caring

In a speech delivered at the University of Connecticut Health Center's 2007 graduation exercises, one of the two graduates shared a quotation worth remembering and passing along. Speaking to those who had just received degrees in dentistry and medicine, the graduate observed, "People are much more interested in knowing how much you care before they care how much you know." When it comes to healing, feeling listened to and cared for is an important part of the equation. How incisive! And how true it is, not only for doctors and dentists ready to go forth and practice their healing arts, but for ministers as well.

But could not the same thing also be said of churches? When newcomers enter our doors in search of a new church home, they may be much more interested in knowing how much we care before they care about how much we know about a particular creed or doctrine. Doctrinal differences and arguments over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, or whether or not predestination is a biblical doctrine, or the precise nature of the Trinity, and so on may have mattered in bygone centuries. Battles were waged and people were burned at the stake over such questions. But by and large such issues are no longer as important as they once were.

What many people are looking for today in a church home is a sense of community: a place of caring and belonging. A place where people actually live out Jesus' example and teachings on true love and compassion. In spite of—perhaps because of—technological advances such as the Internet, e-mail, instant messaging and the like people feel isolated and long for a place where they can experience genuine community. Technology, instant messaging, Internet religion, or television church via satellite will never take the place of the local church and the sense of community and personal caring that it can provide.

So, as we relate to one another and as we welcome the newcomers that regularly pass through our doors, it behooves us to determine to let each other as well as newcomers know how much we really care.